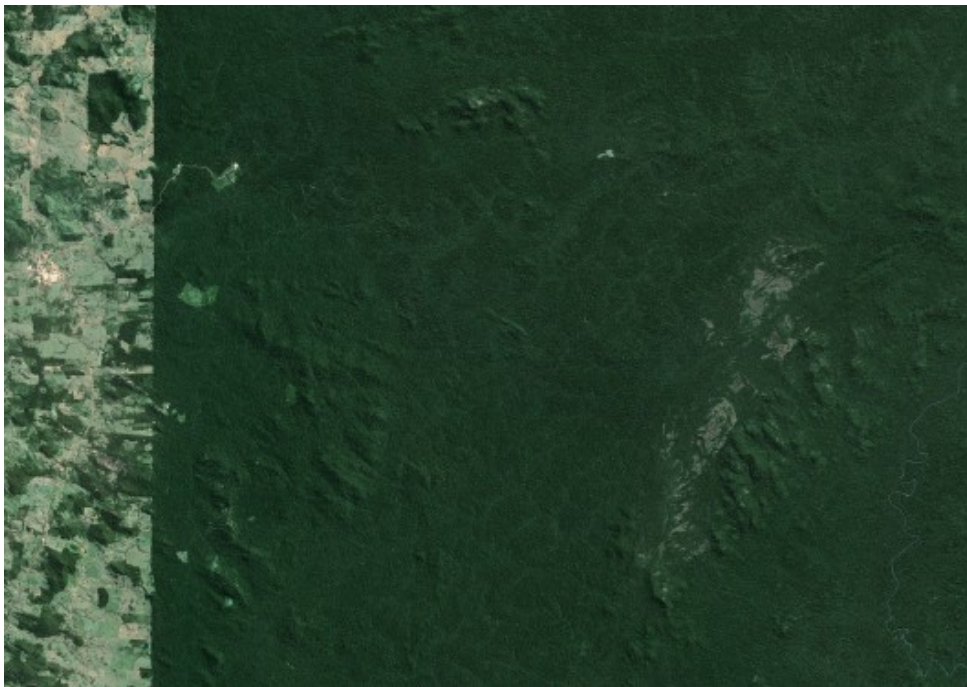


Saskia Monschouwer in [monschouwereditions.nl](http://monschouwereditions.nl)

## INTO THE BIG WORLD, a beautiful performance by David Weber-Krebs

In the night when the Maagdenhuis was occupied (Wednesday 25 February 2015, the building housing the central administration of the University of Amsterdam) I attended at the Brakke Grond to a fine performance dealing with things and descriptions, words and objects, knowledge and science: *Into the Big World* by David Weber-Krebs. I was delighted and think that every young museum employee should see this piece; so should maybe the senior ones. This might help them to become slightly more critical and give them more insight.



I carry my camera with me to discreetly take some shots. While awaiting the start of the performance I take pictures of works at the HiskShow, an exhibition by students of the Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten (Hisk) in Flanders. Like at Marres in Maastricht it is art by young people, nice but sketchy, sometimes rather inchoate. A spotlight on a black, gleaming shoe (*“prototype for secondary school”* by Liudivikas Buklys – 2014) forms a pleasant Dadaistic element in the gangway.

While works in the exhibition are sometimes patchy, the performance is fully elaborate. It is beyond all smart-aleckry and misunderstanding; it is as comfortingly meditative as disturbing and thrilling. Taking pictures is not necessary, as there is more to listen than to see, more to feel than to record. Katja Dreyer and Noha Ramadan, the two performers, are on an empty stage. At the beginning of the performance they appear out of the dark. The public was sitting for a while in an evenly dark room, looking at tiny light spots and listening to soft sounds. Towards the end, the performers would disappear while their voices resound over a completely white and sharply lit theatre floor.



### **A performance for the ears and a spectacle to be experienced.**

Dreyer and Ramadan enumerate. It begins with herbs, grass and plants, with fungi that are rose and white, brown and black, with or without stalks, with a granular and dry surface, with a viscous hat; appealing to the senses, the descriptions are specific and concrete. I remember a famous book over fishes in the Teylers Museum library where even the taste of the fishes is specified. The performers go on with amphibians and describe a small, greenish frog – I think of the shiny blue frogs in the butterfly gardens in Artis: they produce a high flute whistle that strikes you as soon as you enter the room – they then denominate, and underline with gestures, citrus fruits: oranges, lemons, tamarinds which you would also find in the Artis butterfly gardens. Then follow berries: small and larger ones, in dark purple, bright yellow, red colours. I see in my mind the small manual with prize winning illustrations which stands in our bookshelf at home, and where the plants are classified by their colour. Now the deserts of Australia, the Antartics, the continents, the reptiles, the various lizards, snakes, land mammals, the fishes and sea mammals. The performers sum up. Their voices are bright. Their movements are controlled and carefully chosen.

And then the performance shifts. Modern sciences are summarised: biology, zoology, astronomy. This constitutes the whole second part of the show. The performers disappear from the stage. A smooth and human semidarkness and a pleasant lamplight becomes harsher. The voices of the ladies come from microphones behind the scene. There occurs an “artificial” doubling. It is like an echo, the voices are audible. The earth is left behind. From the unmeasurable greatness of the universe to the infinite tininess of molecules, and to everything artificial such as plastic, plastic plants, machines. During the discussion with the public after the performance Weber-Krebs will underline that the first part pertained to the knowledge of space two hundred years earlier while part two concerned modern and today’s knowledge. The earlier knowledge was tangible – sensory, I would add. Today’s knowledge is more often a projection. You should better call it a reflection, a mirror of knowledge on the surface of reality. The voices still sound amazingly beautiful.



### The world as a museum

It is not difficult to grasp what exactly the performance is about: about words and things, descriptions and knowledge. A great many things can be said on that topic. This makes Weber-Krebs' show so clever. It could have easily gone wrong, since: where should you put the border? What is the message? Are you afraid of nature and technique, or are you proud of what it all became? More than anything Weber-Krebs's work is a record. No (semi)religious optimism in the first part which would easily benefit for it; no modern pessimism in the de second; but no dada-feeling neither, no [Marino Auriti](#), no encyclopaedic temple<sup>i</sup>. Rather a rhythmic musical elaboration with the museum as point of reference.

Weber-Krebs recalls the origins of the play. About five years ago, in 2010, he collaborated in the project *The Object Lag* by curator Emily Williams in De Nieuwe Vide in Haarlem. In order to do research he remained for two months as an artist in residence in [Teylers Museum](#). Impressed by the museum's library and by the splendid books with their rhythmical titles he conceived the performance *Through Teylers* where an actress enumerates these titles while walking through the museum, from the director's quarters to the library. This provided the basic idea of the present show.

Lists and summaries are not only sciences. They are music and literature as well. They are beautiful: Umberto Eco wrote a book on this subject which unfortunately is out of print<sup>ii</sup>. No wonder that the reference in the foreword of Foucault's *Les Mots et les Choses* to a summarising in a tale by Jorge Louis Borges was taken as a sign of grieve. But Weber-Krebs knows how to make a good play out of a theoretical topic. He has an infallible feeling for concepts. He tries, he grazes, he researches and works: for this work Marie Urban did the research, Weber-Krebs wrote and formulated, and the performers polished the text with him. In a certain way, even Weber-Krebs' contribution to the exhibition [Foreign Exchange \(2014\)](#) in the Weltkulturenmuseum in Frankfurt is connected to *Into the Big World*<sup>iii</sup>. The result is clear. The understanding that derive from it are multifaceted and diverse.

While listening to the first part I understand why I've read [Adalbert Stifter](#): because of the meditative, repetitive effects of elaborate descriptions: sorts of marble, plants, knowledge of trees and flowers, fruits, layers of earth, archaeology, middle ages, art. The young man in *Nachsommer* who wants to complete his education before marrying thinks that the world is a great museum of Natural History such as the one that was built later on in Vienna, but it is also a bit of a catechism. The latter is true thinking of Floris Martinets' Catechism of Nature, a manual from the eighteenth century which schools used until far into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The world of Adalbert Stifter is artificial and perfect, including the obvious respective threat.

### Whistling fire boxes in void buildings

During the talk afterwards, the many young people raise questions, about the dramaturgy and the movements for example. How did you fill the space? But most of them seem to understand the second part as a menace or an alert. In his answers, Weber-Krebs deviates. "Look: you can perceive the description of the world as a sort of colonisation. The reference of the tipping point of the performance is the year 1969 when a man took the first photograph of the world, seen from the moon. The earth looked like a "blue marble". This was an important moment since with the first flights to the moon the colonisation of the world was in a way brought to an end. Our gaze changes. We relativize and see something else".

I get aware that the new pictures also lead to films. The intro of the film *Contact* by Robert Zemeckis is a scene of three minutes that starts somewhere in a room, passes along various plants and ends up on the iris of Jodie Foster looking for extraterrestrial life. This opening became a classic, partly maybe due to the documentary movie it was based upon : [Powers of Ten \(1977\)](#) by Charles and Ray Eames with at that time the longest computer generated effect in a movie with filmed pictures. And so go on the many associations and the thinking in abstraction.

Now and again something concrete comes to the surface: where did you catch the sounds that we heard in the dark, somebody in the public asks. I think back of the beautiful introduction. The velvet-like darkness in the room which asked for surrender. The lights which appeared like shimmering stars. The sound: a subtle scraping and then a peeping. It appears they are the recordings of sounds from void buildings in some Chinese ghost town; they come from fireboxes that peep when the batteries are idle.

David Weber-Krebs

[Into the Big world](#)

25,26 February 2015 De Brakke Grond Amsterdam

Performers: Katja Dreyer, Noha Ramadan

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<sup>i</sup> For the Biennale of Venice 2013 the Curator Massimiliano Gioni took as a starting point the work of the

<sup>ii</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Charm of lists, the Art of Summarizing*, Bert Bakker ed. Louis Borges 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> The magazine *Tribal* worried a lot about the Exhibition „Foreign Exchange“