

# EXCITEMENT BY DISCONTINUATION

## IMAGETANZ 2011: THEORY PATTERNS IN ANAT EISENBERG'S "A PROVOCATION PURE AND SIMPLE"

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The work *A provocation pure and simple* of the Berlin based choreographer Anat Eisenberg can be summed up simply like that: two performers - Saga Sigurdardóttir, dressed in a red jumpsuit, as the "main role", and Dani Brown, as the assistant, performing (in front of a suggested "Green Box") a sequence of numbers consisting of clips and scenes from popular culture.

At first we see a sequence that is conducted by the music. The song *Haunting & Heartbreaking*, by Angelo Badalamenti from David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997), accompanies the performer while she is slowly standing up. She seems disorientated and frightened; the music reaches its climax during the further course and "throws" the performer back on the floor. This procedure is repeated several times. Then follows a photo shooting number, in which the performer poses on a white cube in a flurry of flashbulbs, with her hair beautifully blowing in the wind that comes from the studio fan operated by the assistant. Among other things this is followed by a cinematic escape scene in a black outfit as worn by **Irma Vep**, as well as a playback performance of the song *You only live twice* from the eponymous James Bond film and thereafter a shower scene as in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Between these scenes, there are also moments in which the performer leaves the ephemeral illusion of the spectacle to take snacks and drinks standing on a table next to a green screen, or ostentatiously going to her assistant to "cry like Pinocchio" <sup>[1]</sup>, who conveys her comfort or helps her changing her clothes.

### Exposing the depths

Perhaps the performance is an entrance card for the audience into the own world (of the Society of the Spectacle), but without them having the awareness and knowledge of being there already. <sup>[2]</sup> In other

words, in these scenes the doors or thresholds of the everyday media that are no longer perceived in the daily digital media. These invisibles can be experienced by the viewer in the performance. Initially, the viewers will possibly be confronted with boredom, and might ask themselves, what the meaning might be or what is the point in re-enacting main-stream episodes. Until the performer remarks: "I'm afraid because if I walk out of this room I won't feel anything". This gives an indication and shocks at the same time: it touches a sore point - a frozen zero point of presentation - and it touches us by revealing how ever-present the invisible is in our everyday digital media (of the spectacle). Thereby may also appear some questions in the scenically presented intersection between digital media realities and performance / live art. "Where a living body just submerged, a virtual body image emerges, and only in the repeated fragmentation and cross-fading of this procedure the live performance emancipates itself from the virtual one, the real body from (its) video image." <sup>[3]</sup>

We remember Jérôme Bel's provocative performance *The Show Must Go On* (2000) and find certain links to Anat Eisenberg. <sup>[4]</sup> At that time, the audience was also provoked by musical performances on stage, Bel had caused a little scandal - the angry spectators expected a dance performance and have been confronted with the emptiness of the presented (e-)motionless music performance, with the *vanitas-like speculum* of the spectacle. At the first glance this might be a weak point in *A provocation pure and simple*, because if a provocation is announced in the title it cannot be a successful provocation. On the other hand this failure, however, could instead be read as a further level of Eisenberg's work, because actually the provocation does not take place per se, it is even deprived of the audience and thus it becomes provocative through its *conditio sine qua non*: provoking by non-provoking. The void-as-provocation addresses maybe those brisk and directly- actionist performances that we were allowed to say goodbye (to?) in the meantime. Jean-Luc Nancy writes: "And the art itself is always the art of *not to say*, the art of bringing what is inexpressible in the process of performance to *ex-positio*" <sup>[5]</sup> So not to perform or to represent a provocation, but the sheer excitement by omitting the excitement, makes the work of Eisenberg so fragile, *present-ing* a widened room (here as "present" (*er-geben*) not in the sense of a presentation result, but the Heideggerian sense

giving a “present” (*Gabe*) - a kind of *Khôra* with Derrida), and then - with Nietzsche - "to harm the stupidity, by making something out of it, something of which one could be ashamed." [6] Thus, the society of the spectacle is harmed, by Eisenberg presenting a spectacle in her performance. It is a spectacle in which one really could blush by embarrassment, about the flatness and banality of our media mainstream and the conditioned modes of the viewer's perception - with Gilles Deleuze : "to expose the depths in all its forms". [7]

### **The discontinuing the use of emotion and the initiation of lust**

Eisenberg finishes her work with a dance and karaoke-singing of the performer to the song *Single Ladies* by American singer Beyoncé. Once the music stops and the light is gone, an atmosphere of indecision and uncertainty prevails in the audience, some can not resist the temptation and break in gently with applause and want to pay tribute to the impressive performance. The lights go on immediately and the performer bows grateful for this recognition (we recall Jérôme Bel's performance Véronique Doisneau) and leaves the stage. Suddenly, the "assistant" returns with a fog machine, to diffuse at once a lot of theatrical smoke. The (staged) reality is thereby removed again - it dissolves into smoke; the already occurred applause and the consequent attempt to assimilate the scenic reality is transformed into an "afformance" [8] (a discontinuation of movement and emotion: "no laughter, no tears ", no applause in this place). Only after the fog scene is over and the applause is repeated the performance actually ends.

Another dimension of the piece is perhaps the peculiar pleasure in the mode of fragmentation - think of Dionysus chopped into pieces (in the non-dialectical contrast to Apollo, the sun god, God of spectacle, God of illusion and shine), the chopped Osiris, Kleist's Achilles chopped out of love and the anagrammatical re-composition, which is given to us by Roland Barthes (or the reader *in actu*) in a performative and exemplarily way with his text *The pleasure of the text*. The lustful and "penthesileatic" Anat Eisenberg chops the media mainstream into pieces and simultaneously re-assembling them like a Deleuzain "Quote of Love". **By Klaus Weiß**

#### **Footnotes:**

[1] A reference to the psychoanalytic "Pinocchio Syndrome".

[2] A "emancipated spectator" as Jacques Rancière would disagree on this point, perhaps.

[3] Kruschkova, Krassimira: *On the scene of the anagram in contemporary dance and performance*

[4] Here we must also Forced Entertainment - the performance group of Tim Etchells - think of, for example, of their performance "Bloody Mess".

[5] Nancy, Jean-Luc: „Die Kunst - Ein Fragment“. In: Dubost, Jean-Pierre [Hg.]: *Bildstörung. Gedanken zu einer Ethik der Wahrnehmung*. 1. Aufl., Leipzig: Reclam, 1994, S. 170-184, hier: S. 177.

[6] Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, „Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben“, 10 und 8.

[7] Deleuze, Gilles: *Nietzsche und die Philosophie*. Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1991, S. 116.

[8] Vgl. Hamacher, Werner: „Afformativ, Streik“. In: Hart Nibbrig, Christiaan L. [Hg.]: *Was heißt „Darstellen“?*. 1. Aufl., Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1994, S. 346-360.