

MA Thesis Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy

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TIME TO LOSE:

The political potential of duration in postdramatic performance

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*End, Kris Verdonck
photo taken from www.atwodogscompany.org, photo credit: Catherine Antoine*



*Schwalbe speelt een tijd, Schwalbe collective
photo taken from www.de-oosterpoort.nl, photo credit: Stephan van Hesteren*

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the problem of time and duration in contemporary performance and specifically the political potential that time as a dramaturgical tool holds in order to manage the audience's attention and offer experiences which cultivate alternative viewing habits. The exploration of that potency is conducted through the examination of two case studies, *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* by the Schwalbe collective and *End* by Kris Verdonck. The focus of the research concerns the formal characteristics of the two performances, which also position them in the postdramatic paradigm, namely repetition / durational temporality (Bergson, Lehmann), visual dramaturgy (Fuchs, Stein) and the lack of dramatic narrative. I argue that the combination of these elements in the case studies enables a substantially different inhabitation of time (not oriented towards effectiveness and productivity), which opposes the normalized perception of time in western (late) capitalism (as described by Marx's theory and B. Kunst and J. Crary's conceptualizations of time in the twenty-first century). From the opposition between the habitualized perception of time and the experience of contradictory temporalities which confuse, disorient and irritate him/her, the viewer ultimately becomes *dispossessed* (B. Kunst) of his/her subjective feeling of time and duration acquires a political potency, since it constitutes a rupture in the normalized perception of the passing of time. The radical potency of that function is further discussed in the context of the politicality of postdramatic theatre (Lehmann) and under T.W.Adorno's theoretical framework (*Aesthetic Theory*) about the politicality of art and the limitations/ potentials it holds as a tool for social change.

Preliminary Statement

In this thesis I am going to engage into a discussion about the political potential I detect into the dramaturgies and audience reception of two specific postdramatic performances.

Regarding the artists' intentions towards the creation of the performances, these are known to be relevant to the matters discussed in the thesis, but they do not completely align with the analysis I make or the implications I attribute to them. However, it is my understanding that when discussing a work of art, it is appropriate and fruitful to consider, but also go beyond the maker's initial intentions and examine it through various perspectives and touch upon matters that the work itself may open up for the spectator. Especially in contemporary theatre, in which, as Hans - Thies Lehmann himself argues, the deconstruction of unity and the multiplication of frames has opened up new possibilities in the ways performances are received and valued, I believe it is both productive and essential to engage into debates about the diverse ways by which they can be understood and make sense. In the ways they can provide new means for understanding and engaging with theatre, new approaches and even new forms; in other words, new ways to refer to reality and everyday life and therefore matter as products of human creation.

Stavrogin: . . . in the Apocalypse the angel swears that there'll
be no more time.

Kirillov: I know. It's quite true, it's said very clearly and
exactly. When the whole of man has achieved
happiness, there won't be any time, because it won't
be needed. It's perfectly true.

Stavrogin: Where will they put it then?

Kirillov. They won't put it anywhere. Time isn't a thing, it's
an idea. It'll die out in the mind.

— F. Dostoyevsky, *The Possessed*¹

¹ Cited in: Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting In Time: Reflections On the Cinema*, translated from the Russian by KittyHunter-Blair, University of Texas Press, 1989, p. 57.

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the research topics and theoretical framework/methodology

The relationship between time and performance has been a matter of great interest to me, an interest which grows more and more intense every time I experience a performance that plays with duration, repetition and the audience's perception of time. What I find intriguing in the encounters between spectators and time during a performance is that, for me, they always constitute a unique experience of time. Depending on the performance and its specific characteristics (namely how it is structured and how it uses time), I either go back and forth, constantly switching between temporalities, I abandon my own feeling of time and dive into another one proposed by the performance, or I engage into a shared temporality that binds together the 'fictional' time of the performance with the 'real' time of the auditorium. The diverse results such dramaturgical strategies cause in my attention as a spectator, either by guiding it or manipulating it, or rendering me an observer of my own time, make me realize the strong effect that time can have in the construction or deconstruction of certain modes of spectatorial engagement, precisely because it intertwines with the subjective perception of time.

The basic questions upon which this thesis is based is how can duration and time (in the postdramatic performances under examination) be considered as functioning politically, under which conditions and to what extent. I intend to look into the (potentially subversive) political potency of durational aesthetics as applied in two case studies, *End* by Kris Verdonck² and *Schwalbe speelt een tijd*³ by the Schwalbe collective. I will argue that the combination of certain (postdramatic) characteristics in these performances (duration/repetition, visual dramaturgy and the lack of dramatic narrative) results in the irritation, confusion and ultimately the *dispossession* of the spectator's subjective feeling of time, effect which is

² Even though I have not seen the performance, I will base my analysis on audiovisual material of the performance and the book *Listen to the Bloody Machine* by Marianne van Kerkhoven and Aniek Nuyens, which maps the whole creation process of the work and includes invaluable dramaturgical material.

³ as attended at Theater Kikker, Utrecht on 17th September 2016 (duration: from 6 p.m. until 12 a.m.)

capable of attaining a political significance, by functioning as a rupture in the perception of time in western (late) capitalism. The argument is further based on Adorno's view on the politicality of art and the postdramatic *politics of perception*⁴. I selected these two case studies for various reasons. First of all, they both constitute experiences of abnormal temporalities: *End* by its repetitive structure and the cyclical time it (re)presents and *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* by its actual duration (6 hours) which in most cases unfolds during the course of night (from 12.00 a.m till 6.00 a.m) and its similarly circular structure. Apart from that, what I considered an important common element in their dramaturgies is the fact that they both shift the focus of the audience's attention from the stage to the auditorium, making spectators aware of their own place and time in the theatre. I will further analyze their specific structures in the first part of my thesis and elaborate on how such an attention is created and what the effects caused in spectatorship by their circular/repetitive and durational forms are.

I will argue that duration, as experienced in the theatrical context, holds the key to provoke diverse effects as far as the viewer's inner feeling of time is concerned. "Duration in theatre does not portray duration" (Kunst 2010,5). This argument by performance theorist Bojana Kunst, reflects the role of duration in breaking the theatrical convention of the unity of time, which was dominant in dramatic theatre, and its capacity to disrupt the fictional time by drawing attention to the actual lived duration of the spectator sitting in the auditorium. The effect of that function is ultimately to *dispossess* the spectators of their subjective feeling of time, making them realize they are being robbed out of their time. (Kunst 2010, 5).

Dispossession is a concept of utter significance here, since it connects the arguments I put together in this thesis and concerns the political implications concealed in the aesthetic aspects of the performances. Bojana Kunst's conceptualization of time in performance sheds light to the politicality of the experience and sensorial engagement with (meaningless) duration, especially when duration does not deliver, when it has no reason or meaning and no goal to fulfill apart from the experience of the passing of time itself. Dispossession, in Kunst's

⁴ See thesis p.56

view, corresponds to the disruption of subjectivity and the result of being thrown off one's temporality by means which cause the viewer's distraction, irritation and confusion, making him/her unable or unwilling to concentrate and follow the course of a performance. The reasons for that disturbance can be found in the ruptures between the habitual modes of engagement viewers are used to, and the introduction of competitive/contradictory ones (characterized by stillness, slowness, inaction or silence). (Kunst 2010, 2-3).

The structure of the thesis is designed in such a way as to engulf diverse but interrelated topics, which together constitute the train of my thought and argumentation. I will engage into an analysis which will be partly based on political and aesthetic theory as well as on dramaturgical insights concerning the two case studies I have chosen to discuss. To begin with, it is essential to present and clarify the key elements which together construct the argument I intend to build in this thesis and also the ways they interrelate and complement one another.

First of all, I suggest to understand and examine the politicality of duration from the perspective of aesthetics and as a characteristic of the case studies' form and structure. As it will be demonstrated, duration, in these two case studies, enables the shaping of a spectatorial experience typical of the postdramatic *politics of perception*⁵ (Lehmann 2006, 185, italics in the original). Since the management and manipulation of time lie at the core of the performances' dramaturgies, duration becomes a fundamental formal characteristic and its politicality (and therefore its radical potency) needs to be examined through the prism of aesthetics and how they relate to the political. Disregarding possible political traits which concern the (political) modes of production and presentation of the performances, as well as various discussions about other forms the politicality of an artwork may take, I will focus my argumentation on the political aspects concealed in the aesthetic characteristics of the performances and in the effects they are capable of producing to the perception of the viewer.

⁵ By *politics of perception* Lehmann refers to postdramatic theatre's primacy of the mode of representation, the experience and the shaping of the audience's perception instead of the object of representation, manifested by the dramatic plot and narration. (also see p. 56 of the thesis)

For that reason, I will base my examination (**Part II**) of the political implications of aesthetics on the theoretical framework provided by Theodor W. Adorno's aesthetic theory (examined through his *Aesthetic Theory*) and draw relations to the more specific field of theatre and performance through Hans – Thies Lehmann's notion of the politicality of the postdramatic theatre. Lehmann's observations concern the political aspects found in contemporary performance today and the ways these can be evaluated and examined in a distinct manner from the one dramatic tradition dictated⁶. Adorno's theory, precisely because it is not reduced to the discourse of aesthetics but encloses all aspects of philosophical and sociological thought, offers a solid ground on which we can move away from the potentially subversive characteristics of the specific performances and discuss their politicality in relation to the broader question about the position of art as a mechanism for (social) change. Adorno's theory provides a fruitful ground upon which we can acknowledge both the political potency as well as the limitations of an artwork to express *from within* (see thesis p. 51-55) a radical and undermining role that may resist to the established system. Since the focus of this whole research concerns the politicality hidden in the aesthetic aspects of the performances, the theory used to support it also needs to give priority to the *formal autonomy* (see thesis p. 51-55) or at least acknowledge the dialectical relationship between form and content. Adorno's aesthetic theory reveals the idiosyncratic relation between the two and moreover, incorporates the incapacities of art to compete on its own against the forces of late capitalism.

In **Part I** of the thesis I analyze my two case studies, by placing them into the general context of performance and theatre theory (and history) and more specifically in the 'category' of postdramatic theatre. I look into time as an element of their (internal) dramaturgical structure and also as a tool to (externally) shape the audience's perception of the passing of time. In order to conduct such an analysis, I use Hans – Thies Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre as introduced in his seminal work *Postdramatic Theatre*. I look into how the two case studies constitute examples of postdramatic performances and examine the key elements of

⁶ About the distinction between the postdramatic *politics of perception* as opposed to the political content of dramatic theatre, see p.56-58 of the thesis.

their dramaturgy that can be defined as postdramatic and will also be useful for my argumentation later on. These include their durational aesthetics/ repetition, their visual dramaturgies and the lack of explicit narrative/ dramatic plot. As far as durational aesthetics and repetition are concerned, I argue that they shape a temporality which corresponds to the audience's actual time and cultivates a spectatorial attention that favors self-awareness and emphasizes on the spectator's own time, which is exactly what Lehmann also makes reference to, namely that the postdramatic aesthetic of real time aims at the merging of scenic and audience time. (Lehmann 2006, 156). Regarding the visual aspects of the performances, I propose to examine them in relation to the durational and repetitive temporalities and as contradictory to the need for meaning-making and narrative structure. By shifting the spectator's attention from the search for meaning and from deciphering signifiers to the visual landscapes they produce, the performances draw attention to the feeling of the passing of time. Since there is no plot in the narrow sense (only what the spectator can make of it), the visual dominance of the stage - either due to the constant spatial transformations (*Schwalbe speelt een tijd*), or due to the carousel-like repetitive entrances/exits of the figures in *End* - produces always different and to a large degree random spatial transfigurations onstage which function as sights for contemplation, replacing the search for a thread of meaning. I briefly connect the specific visual dramaturgies of the case studies with the concept of the *landscape* as discussed by both Elinor Fuchs and Gertrude Stein, which, as Lehmann argues, is a characteristic of postdramatic theatre. For Lehmann, visual dramaturgy refers to a dramaturgy which is not subordinated to the text and develops its own logic, while meaning is constituted by optical data (Lehmann 2006, 93). The overall result of that, and also what places the performances into the postdramatic paradigm, is their construction as experiences, during which the process and the communication "between theatre and audience" (Lehmann, 1997, 58) is more important than their plot, meaning or narrative. Lehmann mentions that in such cases where the process matters more than the result, the audience "finds itself interwoven in ritual-like processes, it experiences its own presence sharply because it is confronted with extreme length of performances or unusual places, [and] has to deal with provocations of

many kinds". (Lehmann 1997, 58). These two main elements I discussed, durational temporality and the construction of images/landscapes, together create the effect of disengagement and prevention of absorption of the viewer into the world onstage and the distance between auditorium and stage comes to the fore. Bojana Kunst's argument that only when time dispossess the subject of his/her subjective temporality can it truly be considered as functioning politically (Kunst 2010, 8) is here the basic argument that enables the connection between the distancing and distracting effects the performances produce through their long duration and the visual engagement of the viewer, with their political function to offer a reconsideration of time in western late capitalism. This reconsideration is conducted through aesthetic means and through the sensorial engagement of the viewer into alternative temporalities different from the ones he/she has become accustomed to experience in everyday life.

What is considered to be the 'habitualized' and 'normalized' perception of time is a complicated issue. However, I propose to examine (**Interlude**) the contemporary temporalities as they have been shaped by the capitalist commands of effectiveness and efficiency, which as Karl Marx observed⁷, have also constituted time an economic value, due to the inextricable relation between the time spent in the production process and the capitalist objective for increasing profit. Consequently, the conceptualization of time in the capitalist context has rendered time as equivalent to value and has ultimately fetishized it to such a degree that time is regarded as commodity, something we can buy and sell. As a result, time is indeed 'money', which means that the investment of one's time in activities which are not profitable is not considered beneficial. It is not peculiar, therefore, that the viewing habits of spectators have been shaped so as to conform to short attention, fast rhythms, flexible perception (which needs to change immediately when the interest of the viewer has been lost) and, lastly, to the search for the (quick) message, for the meaning of the image/text/sound

⁷ My choice to examine Karl Marx's description of capitalism's dependence on the enslavement of time as a necessary condition for profit-making, is dictated by my belief that it still stands correct in its principles and analysis, and the significant economic and technological changes of the past century have not rendered his analysis obsolete.

without any waste of time spent in the process of observation or contemplation. Time, after all, is too valuable to be wasted on anything that does not promise successful results. Discussing the idea of projective temporalities as the new way of organizing one's work (especially artists' work) through a 'horizon of projects', B. Kunst argues that subjectivity and its rhythms need to be flexible, but at the same time move towards an implementation of what has been projected/promised. (Kunst 2012, 114). Apart from constantly projecting into the future, our subjective feeling of time is also turned towards completion, actualization and finalization via the successful management of our time (as spectators/consumers/workers). This relation between time and profit has been expanded today (with the aid of technological advancements) to what Jonathan Crary describes as the 24/7, a system of continuous functioning, which cultivates a temporality of always being productive and working toward successful accomplishment and which attempts to reduce anything that still resists the never-ending process of profit-making, such as sleep. Crary uses the term 'cyclical temporality' to describe the shaping of a temporality in which the uninterrupted functioning and availability are the ultimate principles of everyday life and the refusal or incapacity to conform to them results in failure and economic loss. Time becomes inextricable to the attempt of always and unceasingly striving for actualization and implementation of pursuits and it ends up being perceived as without (or with few) breaks, as an endless cycle of constant functionality which ultimately appears as the norm in the subjectivity and the perception of time of the individual. The cycle of a day/week/ month/year is perceived as an uninterrupted unity, a cyclical structure which promises the constant actualization of our endeavors as well as the actualization of ourselves as subjects⁸. From the capitalist ideological perspective, being in time means always being productive and implementing our goals. In the neoliberal paradigm, as Crary observes, "sleeping is for losers" (Crary 2013, 14).

⁸ Circular temporalities may also be cultivated through the performances' structure and experience, but, in their case, the significance of the process over the final result/effect and the rejection of the objectives of completion and implementation of goals, are to be considered essential elements that distinguish them from Crary's 24/7 model. The refusal of delivery constitutes a qualitatively different perception of repetition, one that does not comply with the capitalist objective of endless striving towards economic effectiveness.

Therefore, the political significance of the performances under study lies in the introduction of repetitive and durational temporalities which deny capitalism's normalized perception of time based on fast rhythms, the primacy of effectiveness and the fear of economic failure due to the wasting of time that is not invested into activities that promise accomplishment and productivity, in other words, into activities which constantly actualize the subjects and produce successful results. The performances under study, then, hold the capacity to function as ruptures⁹ in the normalized perception of time, since they constitute embodied experiences of alternative ways to inhabit time and they impel spectators to re-conceptualize their constructed perception of time and question its origins and nature, by first questioning their own disposition towards the inhabitation of an empty and unpromising duration. Rupture, from that perspective, is not to be considered as an actual (political) action which aims at the disruption of (oppressive) reality, but rather as a potential political function which resides in the aesthetic properties of the performances and in the ways these are perceived by the audience. Since time is regarded as an economic value, the loss of time must be understood as both an economic failure, as well as a personal loss of something important that we cannot retake for ourselves. The action of *losing* time, from that angle, becomes a negation of the commands of capitalism, a disregard for its principles of constant actualization and unceasing effectiveness in all aspects of contemporary life. However, the true radical potency of that negation in terms of its capacity towards (social) change is a far more complicated matter, which will be addressed in the last part of this thesis.

⁹ 'Rupture' as a term, particularly in the specific discourse of politics and aesthetics, is charged with many connotations and the imperatives of certain artistic movements such as the Situationists' commands for the *transcendence of art*, the rejection of its separation from life and the *realization in life* of what has been *promised in art*, all of which would be actualized through artistic ruptures in the everyday life that could provoke revolutionary disturbances in normality (Jappe 1999, 103-104). However, the perspective from which I argue about the political potential of these ruptures is quite different and is based on Adorno's view about art's radical potency which originates from its position against/ in opposition to the rest of life (Adorno 1997, 8). From that angle, these ruptures in normality as the ones I suggest, are to be considered as basically aesthetic and as aspects originating from the performances' formal characteristics and not as (revolutionary) artistic actions operating from the outside of the performances and imposed by the artists' definite radical intentions.

1.2. Limitations and relevance of the thesis - Propositions for further research

My focus on the postdramatic elements which can be found in the performances' dramaturgies is an important part of this research and one which makes it relevant to the academic discussions on the politicality of postdramatic theatre. I intend to argue not only about the significance of the specific performances in terms of their capacity to introduce alternative viewing habits or manage the audience's attention in particular ways, but also about the significance they hold in the field of theatre itself and the developments it manifests as an art form and as a means of artistic expression.

With regard to the social significance of both the case studies and, hence, my occupation with their analysis, I argue that the performances hold the potential to make viewers realize the constructed character of the perception of time and the possibilities to experience it differently, to understand that their perception of time is culturally and historically conditioned, as well as economically determined, and more than that, to become aware of that concealed truth through an embodied experience (resulting either in confusion, dispossession or discomfort). The form and structures of the performances make that possible. Additionally, the lack of dramatic plot and the visual domination of the stage, as well as the engagement of the viewer through optical data and the abandonment of the search for linear meanings, dramatic interpretations and narrative logic, draw attention to the waiting as a condition by itself and the confrontation of the viewer with (his own) time.

The performances are analyzed through a specific, rather limited perspective, in terms of the political potentiality the interrelation between their content and form generates in the experience they offer to the spectator to inhabit time and duration. The evaluation of their political role is made on the basis of the argument that they conform to Adorno's model of a political work of art, with the limitations and possibilities this model comes along. To argue on that basis and in relation to these proclamations automatically means to disregard other aspects of the performances, as well as diverse ways by which they can (or cannot) function

politically. However, the scope of this thesis is not broad enough to incorporate extra debates or alternatives perspectives.

A thorough research on the matters discussed, would incorporate more case-studies and further debates on the idea of the politicality of art, apart from, or rather complementary to its aesthetic manifestations and would problematize the (political) modes of production, creation and distribution as well as art's role inside or against the established economic system and art market. What is more, it would question in more detail the contradictions and the academic debates around the politicality of form as opposed to the politicality of content in the field of theatre as well as in art in general (incorporating contradictory theories and practices such as the Situationists' ideas or Brecht's distinguished theory and practice). Additionally, the role of time and repetition in performance would be better introduced, looking into opposing ideas about its functionality (for example Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty). What is more, if the scope of this research was broader, it would be my intention to further problematize the matter of (free) time and incorporate debates around the conceptualization of free time, such as Paul Lafargue's (*The right to be lazy*) opposition to the Marxist ideal of 'the right to work' and various diverse theories on the subject. Finally, the oppositions between the western conceptualization and perception of time and the eastern (which aligns more with the ideals of slowness, non-efficiency and duration for its own sake) would also be a matter of interest.

2. Part I: Analyzing the case studies

2.1. *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* (Schwalbe Collective, 2016)¹⁰

Schwalbe speelt een tijd ('Schwalbe performs a time') is the latest work made by the theatre collective Schwalbe, a group of (six) performers and creators, coming from the mime studies programme of Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten. Their work is extremely physical and in each one of their performances they experiment with stamina, exhaustion, the borders of theatre, the search for the real, as well as play with the expectations of the audience and the hidden side of everyday life.¹¹ "[W]e search for new frameworks and shine a light on the other side of man. Just like an onion, we peel his layers back. This is a recurrent ritual in our performances" [...] "We like to take something apparently simple, and explore it to its ultimate depths, until it becomes a metaphor for something bigger".¹²

Schwalbe speelt een tijd is a performance that plays with time and spatial transformations. For six hours the audience stands witness to the continuous rearrangement of the stage: eleven set designs, previously used in other performances from Dutch theatre companies, are assembled on the stage and as soon as they are completed, they are immediately torn down as part of a process that progressively becomes the end goal of the performance itself. The first assemblage/ deconstruction lasts only for a few minutes and after a while the audience understands that this is all that will happen for the next hours. "After 20 minutes you understand the code: we're not going to do anything else but lug sets around the whole night. Only then do you start watching really carefully."¹³ Repetitive constructions and deconstructions create the performance's circular structure in which each gradual composition of a set design has a moment of completion and then it is immediately destroyed. The settings

¹⁰For a trailer/video depicting each one of the set designs see <https://vimeo.com/167265859>

¹¹ Information on the Schwalbe collective taken from <http://www.schwalbe.nu/over-schwalbe>

¹² <http://www.schwalbe.nu/over-schwalbe>

¹³ performer Van Leeuwen cited in Joke Beeckmans's article in NRC Next, March 31st 2016, source: <http://www.schwalbe.nu/voorstellingen/12> (last access on 12/08/2017).

that are created are quite different from one another in terms of both the time of construction they demand, as well as of their materiality. A real-size building with doors and windows that is built in a whole hour, the inside of a 50's bar, a field full of lamp-flowers, a huge inflatable embryo-doll and even an enormous garbage dump of tin cans, are some of the set designs that create remarkable landscapes on stage, but do not remain there for the viewer's eye to enjoy, since they are torn down the minute they are completed.

Furthermore, the performance offers the spectator the possibility to break-free from the traditional stage – audience relationship and be free to eat, drink, sleep, leave the room or go backstage. *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* lets the spectator experience the passing of time through the constant motion of his/her surroundings. The transformation of space becomes a visual materialization of the passing of time. Meanwhile, what is being emphasized through the spatial transfigurations is the ephemerality and transitory character of theatre itself, as well as its past and ability to preserve and bring back memory (through the revival of past theatrical spaces). What is more, what Schwalbe's performance points out is the potentiality that does not deliver, since the functionality of each theatrical setting is not revealed and every décor piece remains onstage but does not fulfill its supposed role as a set design. It also shows the construction of the décor pieces in a realistic way, as they would be put up by technicians, revealing the backstage process, highlighting the functional use and the materiality of the set pieces, showing them for what they are (pieces of wood, a door, fake plastic flowers, nylon, apples) and extracted from the context of the performance they were part of. By doing that, the performance demystifies the theatrical process, as well as the world onstage.

Regarding the temporal element of *Schwalbe speelt een tijd*, the collective is clear in their intentions: they seek to search into the idea of duration and what it means for both performers and audience¹⁴ by inviting the spectators in the theatre “at a time when the theatre is normally closed to the public, the lights are out, the hall is deserted. We want to take you with us into the night, into the nonworking hours. This period of time intrigues us because it takes place

¹⁴ <http://www.schwalbe.nu/voorstellingen/12>

outside the rhythm of the day, outside the time in which we normally work, eat or watch something”¹⁵. It is not, therefore, only the long duration and unconventional temporality of *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* as a performance piece that contrasts our ideas of how (and how long) performances usually are, but also the fact that it takes place during a period of time that is by habit related to sleep, relaxation and un-productivity in order to prepare for the next day. The aim of the collective to “separate day and night, the ‘industriousness’ of the day and the quiet of the night”¹⁶ is of crucial importance here, because it concerns the potentiality the performance holds to alter viewing habits and shape an alternative temporality which does not conform to the 24/7. For Schwalbe, theatre is the best place to experiment with the notion of time, since, in it, time becomes independent from the outside world and clock time loses its omnipotence to guide and shape our present. With *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* Schwalbe invites spectators to “temporarily let go of time”.¹⁷



photo taken from www.de-oosterpoort.nl, photo credit: Stephan van Hesteren

¹⁵ From Schwalbe’s letter to future late-night spectators of *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* (source: <http://www.schwalbe.nu/voorstellingen/12>)

¹⁶ <http://www.schwalbe.nu/voorstellingen/12>

¹⁷ <http://www.schwalbe.nu/voorstellingen/12>

2.2. *End* (Kris Verdonck, 2008)¹⁸

The performance *End* by Belgian artist Kris Verdonck is constituted by the repetitive movement of a carousel featuring different figures, both humans and machines which ceaselessly move crossing the stage, from stage right to stage left. These figures are: Stakhanov (a man wired dragging something - 'the whole set' - with obvious effort) , the Messenger (an old man inside a booth who walks while speaking words of catastrophe, disaster and death; his role is that of the messenger in ancient Greek tragedies; he brings the news of the imminent end), the Birdman (a man wired from the ceiling making movements like flying or swimming, trying to cross the stage), the Musel- woman (also wired, dressed in white, with a white wig and high heels), the Woman with the Body Bag (a woman dragging a real-size body bag across the stage), the Engine (a piece of machinery), the Choir (an engine playing music through speakers), the Fire (spreading flame and smoke onstage) and the Ludd (a man who keeps falling from 'the sky' on a mattress on the left side of the stage). Clouds on a screen moving slowly, and black snow falling from the ceiling, complete the image of the world of *End*, a world that presents the moments before the end, the final catastrophe, which, however, never comes, since all the spectator sees is the perpetual circular appearance and disappearance of the figures, all of which follow the same route each time they enter the stage. The entrances and exits of all the figures are not fixed or choreographed, but to a certain degree unpredictable and random. However, no more than four figures are usually onstage simultaneously. The figures follow different paths onstage from one another, never interacting or even acknowledging the presence of each other or of the audience. Their repetitive crossings end after an hour or so with a blackout.

Apart from the questions raised by the performance about the relationship between human/machine and the post-anthropocentric stage, *End* addresses the notion of time in theatre and the potential opened by a duration which is not linked to any formation of

¹⁸A short documentation of *End* (15min.) can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/168650954#at=1>

narrative, meaning or storyline. ‘End is the undefined spot without narrative, where you are confronted with the reality as it is before you can interpret or understand it at all. Before you make a story. (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012, 300). The dramaturgy of *End* deliberately does not allow the construction of any kind of narrative or development towards an end, but instead draws attention to the becoming, to the process rather than the result and to the ‘state of being’, leaving aside the necessity for a meaning (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012). “End” acquires an ironic meaning since no end ever comes to anything happening onstage, but instead, the viewer watches scenes *before* the imminent end, which is anticipated and even announced (by the Messenger). The state of being before the expected end, the condition of (perpetually) waiting for something that is not coming: this is the content that fills *End’s* meaningless duration.¹⁹

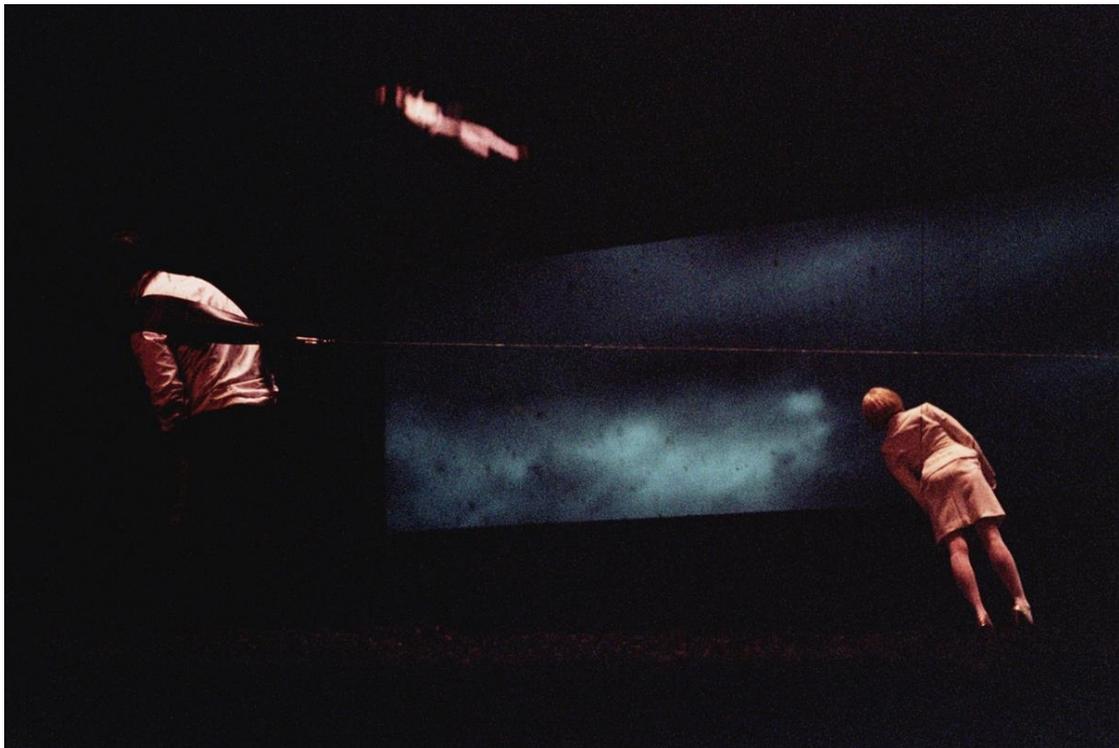
For the spectator such an unfulfilling experience may result in total disengagement and indifference, or it can gradually become meaningful or even transformative. *End’s* dramaturg Marianne van Kerkhoven argues that “[t]o a greater or lesser extent, each sequence of events inevitably leads to a form of narrative. The spectator has, after all, been trained to do his/her own work, i.e., to look for connections between the events, to interpret each sign presented on stage”.²⁰ In a way, regardless of the degree of engagement, the lack of narrative inevitably draws the viewer’s attention to duration itself, which crystallizes this ‘state of being’ where all actions onstage exist for their own sake, with no extra goal: “the act of doing it: that’s what it’s all about. [...] An honest circular movement without histrionics. It is what it is. The plain enjoyment of watching something spinning [...] without it becoming a meaningful movement”. (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012, 40)

In *End* as well as in *Schwalbe speelt een tijd*, all actions and movements are ultimately for nothing; they do not offer a result, they are, in economic terms, unproductive and futile. They

¹⁹ *End’s* circular movement, is “a fatal system, something never-ending, a perpetual motion” (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012, 39).

²⁰ Excerpt from the description of the performance, link/ last access on 12th August 2017: <http://www.atwodogscompany.org/en/projects/item/160-end?bckp=1>

do not build up to anything, but remain independent, preventing synthesis and justification. The spectator of the two performances realizes in time that this is all there is. The outcome of that realization can either result in heightened attention (since after the initial discomfort, the viewer enjoys the 'meaningless' spectacle) or in complete distraction and indifference. However, a clear-cut distinction between the two is not the only possibility and both spectatorial behaviors may co-exist. Whatever the case, either by (temporarily) dragging the viewer into the world onstage or by always remaining distant and by producing distraction and indifference, the two performances deny the (dramatic) absorption of the viewer into the world they present onstage and they constantly remind the audience of its position in the auditorium, highlighting the passing of the time which takes place as they experience the events onstage.



Stakhanov, the Ludd and the Musel-woman

Photo taken from www.kaaitheater.be, photo credit: Catherine Antoine

2.3. Visual dramaturgies²¹: experiencing timeless landscapes

The term ‘visual dramaturgies’ is used by Lehmann to describe performances whose dramaturgy is not primarily regulated by the text but in which meaning is generated through optical data and whose visual properties outweigh all the other theatrical elements. (Lehmann 2006, 93). In these cases, instead of following a storyline, the words in the text or any kind of narrative, the spectator is invited to activate his/her capacity to gaze, observe and make associations on his/her own (Lehmann 2006, 157). As a fundamental aspect of postdramatic theatre, the primacy of the visual aspects of a performance follows the collapse of hierarchy between the various elements that constitute a theatrical piece and the engagement of the viewer through the performance’s *opsis* is as important as the construction of narrative and the production of meaning²². The primacy of the visual element encourages the engagement of the spectator not only through rational thinking and logic, but by activating his/her imagination, by making subjective associations and by personally experiencing the events onstage. As a consequence, the embodied and sensorial engagement with the events onstage proceeds the logocentric approach towards the performance.

Landscape is a concept used in close relation and as inextricable to visual dramaturgy. The notion of the landscape in the theories and works of various inspirational theatre theorists and makers [G. Stein, M. Maeterlinck, T. Wilder, S. Beckett, R. Wilson, H. Muller, R. Foreman and many others] promotes and evokes a certain way of seeing that resembles a ‘scanning’ of the stage, where either multiple simultaneous actions prevent a total overview and the production of a meaningful synthesis of elements, or the ‘story’ of the play is sacrificed to

²¹ The reason for addressing the concept of visual dramaturgy in an already multi-directional analysis is that I consider it to be inextricable to the notion of time and duration as far as the effects of their combination in the case studies I examine are concerned. In other words, I believe it is essential to discuss the one in relation to the other, since duration on its own (and not linked to the dominance of the landscape stage in the two performances and the absence of dramatic narrative) would not produce the same results and therefore would demand a different analysis. It is the combination of durational temporalities and the collapse of narrative logic/ meaningful structure that makes the case studies fruitful examples of the argument I am constructing in this thesis.

²² “the spectator of postdramatic theatre is not prompted to process the perceived instantaneously but to postpone the production of meaning (semiosis) and to store the sensory impressions with ‘evenly hovering attention’ ”. (Lehmann 2006, 87).

promote the audience's contemplation and reflection on the transitory transformations happening onstage. In a way, landscape extends the world onstage, it opens it up to the world, in contrast to the limited setting designs which tie the world onstage to a specific place and time and frame it as if it is a closed structure. (Fuchs 1996, 106). Landscape has no particular time and therefore does not trap the viewer to a specific space and time (Fuchs 1996, 106-107), but sets the imagination free to make associations²³. This freedom that the viewer is given, characteristic of postdramatic theatre, is described by Erika Fischer - Lichte as the capacity for spectators to be "absolute masters of possible semiosis without, at the same time, pursuing any other ultimate goal. They become free to associate everything with anything [...] or refuse to attribute any meaning at all and simply experience the objects presented to them in their concrete being". (Fischer-Lichte 1997, 57-58). This capacity is an essential factor which renders the performance a completely subjective experience and the spectator is left to experience it in his/her own time, not forced to follow the time of the drama: "not telling a story but forming a landscape. In that way, the audience is allowed to 'rest untroubled' in space, rather than being compelled forward in time". (Fuchs and Chaudhuri 2002, 125).

As it will be demonstrated below, the notion of freedom to attribute meaning that Fischer – Lichte introduces can be justified to a certain extent by both performances under study.

However, I also suggest to challenge the idea that the case studies leave the viewers absolutely free to associate and make sense of what they see and problematize the matter of the construction of meaning a bit further. In *Visuality in the Theatre: the Locus of Looking*, Maaïke Bleeker discusses strategies of managing attention and manipulating the spectator towards *absorption* or *theatricalization*²⁴, and argues that vision, especially in postdramatic theatre, can no longer be associated with objectivity and truth and that every performance to a

²³ "We are interested in the entire *field*, the whole *terrain*, the total *environment* of the performance, as performance, and as imaginative construct. We are no more transported to another world than we banish all other worlds". (Fuchs 1996, 106, italics in the original).

²⁴ By absorption/theatricality Bleeker refers to the two extremes of strategies which are used to guide the audience's attention: in the case of *absorption*, the viewers are immersed into the world onstage and the construction of the theatrical illusion prevents them from acknowledging their position as spectators. On the other hand, *theatricality* refers to strategies which aim to constitute the spectator an aware observer of the theatrical event. (Bleeker 2008, 21-22,33).

certain degree manipulates the viewer's act of seeing, so that such a thing as 'just looking' does not exist. (Bleeker 2008, 4-5).

In *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* there is nothing to understand in the sense of meaning-making, deciphering codes, messages or following a narrative. In that sense, the performance, as soon as the first setting is completed and torn down, (a process which lasts only a few minutes since the first set design is minimal and quite simple), does not have to make acquaintance.²⁵ The cycle of repetitions is already set into motion and what will unravel onstage for the next six hours follows an unspoken contract between the audience and the performers, both of which already know what to expect. That notion of predictability only regards the structure of the performance, whereas the ways by which every next spatial composition will be formed, as well as the final outcome of this process, remain unknown. These two unknown factors (the 'how' of the process – which is also a 'how long' - and the 'what' – how the final result will look like) are the moving forces of the whole performance, the reasons spectators keep looking at the stage, anticipating and at the same time experiencing the transformations of the stage. From that perspective, the audience is free to make associations and construct a subjective narrative of what they see or even refuse to do any of that. However, the performance strategically guides the viewer to make connections about the theatrical process itself through the exposition of the theatrical world represented by the set designs, while it also undermines the illusion of theatre and draws attention to the making of theatre from a backstage point of view. There is clearly no drama or plot in the performance, but that does not mean that there is also no guidance of the spectator's imagination or thought. The 'multiplication of frames' that Bleeker discusses drawing from Lehmann's theory corresponds to the rejection of one single frame through which a performance can make sense and be understood, but it does not also imply the rejection of frames altogether (Bleeker 2008, 8,11). On the contrary, it results in the increased perceptibility of the thing in itself. (p. 8,12). Postdramatic dramaturgies do not position the viewer clearly towards what he/she sees, they

²⁵ 'Making acquaintance' is a term used in relation to the functionality of the landscapes (Fuchs and Chaudhuri 2002, 124).

do not offer a definite focus, but open up the stage to multiple possible processes of semiosis. (Bleeker 2008, 36).

Subjective view is marked by the desires, past experiences, preconceived notions, familiarity with attending experimental performances e.t.c. of the spectator, but the ways of looking are also culturally determined²⁶. For Bleeker, this explains the diverse and often contradictory effects performances have on viewers, making some of them willing to follow what is shown to them or alienating and confusing them or both at the same time (Bleeker 2008, 10).

However, this realization does not limit our capacities as viewers, but as Bleeker suggests, provides the chance to ‘open our eyes to difference’ (Bleeker 2008, 18).

In the case of *End*, it can be argued that the story or the fragmentary narratives each of the performers brings onstage via their own character is introduced during their first crossing on the stage, while in each repetition that follows we, as spectators, are liberated from the task of making acquaintance anew or put the pieces of the characters’ stories together because such a unified, linear story does not exist. The figures onstage are completely independent of one another, there is no logic or narrative to connect them or to lead to a synthesis. However, all performers and other agents (machines/clouds/music) that inhabit the stage contribute to a visual composition which turns the stage into a landscape for observation. The constant repetitions and the repetitive - yet not fixed or strictly choreographed- appearances of the characters onstage function as a tool to draw attention to the whole stage in general, to the landscape/ environment produced by each element, with no necessity of connecting them together. Abstract associations and personal connections based on each viewer’s subjective looking at the spectacle are of course always present and encouraged, but the reading of the performance is not based on logic and narratological indications, but is rather guided through

²⁶ “the viewer is the product of the history of Western Modernity and its various regimes of subjection” (Bleeker 2008, 10).

sensorial and subjective processes of constructing meaning.²⁷ Wandering around the landscape stage, then, gives the viewer the opportunity to see things and if he/she misses to see something, the chances are that it will be repeated again so that the viewer does not miss it the next time. Repeated vision in the case of *End* provides the opportunity for seeing the space of the stage being emptied out and filled with certain figures appearing and disappearing at undefined periods of time while they occupy the same spaces upon the stage and the landscapes created are transforming the space onstage in such ways that the viewers' vision balances between what they see, what they remember seeing before and what they expect to see afterwards. From that perspective, the balance between expectation and surprise is a guided (by the dramaturgy of the performance) mode of engaging with the events onstage. What is more, the absolute freedom of possible semiosis is undermined by the associations the performance deliberately makes about an imminent end (of the world) and the imagery of catastrophe (fire, black snow, smoke). Additionally, the text of the Messenger, even though it is not meant to be heard clearly by the audience, refers to themes of disaster and death. Abstract ideas and images are shaped in the audience's imagination, even if the performance strongly resists narrative logic and the interrelation between elements. "We are always 'seeing things'. But, although we are much less free in what we see than we may think, we are also much freer than we think, because the subjectivity of vision opens up the possibility of change and transformation" (Bleeker 2008, 18).

The idiosyncratic nature of the viewer's freedom to attribute meaning (always determined to a certain degree, but also opening up new possibilities) results in postdramatic theatre's increased capacity to function in a political manner. As it will be furthered analyzed in the last part of the thesis, the political implications of the multiplication of frames and the deconstruction of one single focus holds the potency of problematizing the conditions, form and ways of representation, (which is without a doubt a political matter), instead of

²⁷ In his article "From Logos to Landscape: Text in Contemporary Dramaturgy" Lehmann makes extensive reference to the dominance of landscape in postdramatic theatre and the replacement of the logocentric tradition dramatic theatre held in the past.

articulating political statements through the performances' content and theme, as dramatic theatre did in the past. As Bleeker explains, the ambiguity and confusion produced by the deconstruction of one dramatic frame must be considered as political. "Political not because of what is represented on stage, but because of the ways in which the strategies implied in the artistic logic underlying the post- dramatic theatre, draw attention to the problem of representation, of representational forms and of how these are perceived, or not." (Bleeker 2008, 43-44).

2.4. Time aesthetics: experiencing duration and repetition

In *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans – Thies Lehmann makes extensive reference to the elements of postdramatic theatre that distinguish it from and even contradict the (Aristotelian) dramatic theatre. One of the most significant elements is the new dramaturgies of time which Lehmann considers have replaced the unified time of the drama with its linear teleological structure and have instead introduced the use of simultaneity, long duration, repetition, non natural rhythms and slow-motion²⁸²⁹. These techniques of time management create a theatrical event that is not characterized by illusion and does not aim at fiction, but instead allows the intrusion of the Real in the theatre (Lehmann 1997, 58) and the constitution of a shared dialogue between stage and audience. The result is the creation of one time, the time of the theatre experience. (Lehmann 2006, 153-157).

What we can argue for in relation to both *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* and *End* is that they both constitute unusual experiences of time as well as extraordinary theatrical experiences. Instead of representing (fictional) time on the stage, they both present the passing of time, by drawing attention to it and making time the leading agent of their dramaturgies. What marks the difference between the use of time in order to create a theatrical illusion (in dramatic theatre) and the use of time as a major theatrical element by itself (in postdramatic theatre) is that, in the second case, the attention of the spectator is drawn to time and its passage not in relation to the actions onstage but in relation to the dimension of time itself. Time, in that sense, becomes an object of reflection, and at the same time enables (the audience's) self-reflection. This state of audience awareness enables the spectator's constant relation to the present moment. Concerning the effect of the unity of audience time and stage time into one time (the time of the performance) (Lehmann 2006, 153-157) Lehmann remarks that it provides the

²⁸ German theorist Peter Szondi introduced the concept of the *absolute drama* which describes precisely the notion of a self-contained dramatic world that seems to exist on its own. As far as time in such a world is concerned, Szondi insists that: "Because the Drama is always primary, its internal time is always present [...] In the Drama, time unfolds as an absolute, linear sequence in the present". (Szondi 1987, 9).

²⁹ Aristotelian drama pursued "to prevent the appearance of time as time. Time as such is meant to disappear, to be reduced to an unnoticeable condition of being of the action [...] Nothing was to release the spectator from the spell of the dramatic action. The true meaning of the Aristotelian aesthetics of time is not aesthetic". (Lehmann 2006, 161, italics in the original).

solution to what Gertrude Stein defined as the ‘nervousness’ of the spectator in theatre: the feeling of confusion coming from the division between the two times (time of the spectator and time of the drama). For Stein, the spectator in dramatic theatre is never synchronized with the events onstage because theatre “refer[s] to a *different* time (future or past) and demand[s] a constant effort on the side of the viewer contemplating it”. (Lehmann 2006, 63, italics in the original). However, the abandonment of the unified dramatic time as well as of the obligation to follow a narrative onstage, enables, for Stein, the effect of *defocalization* of the spectator and the ‘renunciation of teleological time’ leading to the inhabitation of a *continuous present*. (Lehmann 2006, 63). What Stein means, is that the viewer, freed from the obligation to construct meaning by following the narrative form of the performance and by synchronizing his/her internal time with the fictional time of the drama, relates to the world onstage in a different manner, perceiving it as a whole or else as a sight for contemplation and reflection and his/her attention is not divided between the various theatrical elements. As mentioned before, visual dramaturgies provide that opportunity, since landscape has no time and does not call for the viewers’ effort to follow the time of the events onstage and focus on the linear (narrative) time, but instead, leaves them free to enjoy the *continuous present* of their experience, which might seem static, but in fact includes a dynamic field of variations, differentiations and loops (Lehmann 2006, 63).

The idea of the continuous present is discussed here as a concept which can be used to describe the time of the theatrical experience and the way time is lived in the course of a performance. Regarding the dramaturgy of *End* and the use of time and repetition, Marianne van Kerkhoven explains the struggle of the spectator to compromise between the two times mentioned above, which for Stein generates a ‘nervousness’ immanent in dramatic theatre: “The stage event is the infinitely repeated attempt to experience a paradox: to equal, in a prepared way, the spontaneity, the ‘thoughtlessness’ of experiencing, of playing as a child does, of being so absorbed in the situation that playing and thinking, living and reflecting, being and being aware find each other and coincide”. (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012, 23).

Taking as a precondition the difficulty or even impossibility of ‘simultaneously being and being aware’ Marianne van Kerkhoven explains that *End* is the manifestation through aesthetic means of that same negotiation which draws the attention to the lived moment of the theatrical experience, the ‘now’ of the performance. (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012, 27).

In order to further examine the way durational temporalities affect the perception of the spectator it is useful to turn to Henri Bergson’s theory of duration (*la durée*), which, despite its metaphysical ground, is a useful lens through which the spectator’s inner feeling of time gets (re)shaped or at least challenged. For Bergson, duration must be conceived as divided from space. (Deleuze 1991, 31-32). It belongs to the realm of the subjective time and cannot be measured by objective means, while it is often “accompanied by the spatial senses of expansion, suspension or collapse” (Heathfield 2008, 17,22-23). Durational aesthetics, as Adrian Heathfield regards them drawing from Bergson’s theory³⁰ hold the capacity to subvert orders of time, give access to alternative temporalities and reveal time as plenitude. (Heathfield 2008, 23). Since space and time lose their mutually depending relationship (as in dramatic theatre, where the unity of time and space was crucial for the narration and the progression of the plot, as well as for the total synthesis of the drama), time is left to be inhabited in the form of *pure duration*, outside of any causal relationships or demands for effectiveness. Duration, in Bergsonian terms, corresponds to the succession of the subject’s internal conscious states, independently from the external changes and alterations of the environment. Despite the (metaphysical) separation of space and time in the perception of (subjective) time, Bergsonian duration is a useful analytical tool for the purpose of understanding the way durational aesthetics in performance aim at shaping the inner feeling of the spectator’s passage of time. In *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* Henri Bergson defines pure duration as “the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its

³⁰ In his analysis of Tehching Hsieh’s works in *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh*, MIT Press, 2008.

present state from its former states.” (Bergson [1910] 2001,100). In both *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* and *End* the durational temporalities in combination with the lack of drama (dramatic plot) and the primacy of optical engagement, accentuate the spectator’s subjective feeling of the passing of time, since time is one (significant) means through which he/she can relate to the performances due to the absence of other regulatory elements such as text. By refusing to offer the experience of a linear time and by confusing one’s feeling of the passing of time by their repetitive structure and incalculable, uncontrolled³¹ duration (one that cannot be estimated by external narrative terms or in terms of a storyline), the performances invite the spectators to relate to them as events/situations, in other words to live them in their own time, instead of adapting their internal conscious states to the temporality of a fictional world onstage. Since there is no order in time regulated by a dramatic structure in the form of ‘beginning-middle-ending’, the inner separation of one’s subjective states of time (past-present-future) becomes more blurry and complicated and only by keeping track of (objective/mathematical) time on his/her watch would one be able to differentiate between quantifiable moments in time. The time of lived experience in these two performances becomes a flow of indivisible instants. In the course of each indivisible instant in the flow of time, the spectator experiences his/her own feeling of (inner) time and changes as the performance changes. In contrast to the precondition that dramatic theatre demanded from the spectators, namely to “leave their everyday time [...], abandoning their own sphere of time to enter into another” (Lehmann 2006, 155), postdramatic aesthetics of time demand quite the opposite, to put the emphasis on the spectator’s subjective experience of time, which is lived outside of the external succession of points of reference (measured for example in terms of before-after, thus demanding order and causality). It is under these circumstances that time is experienced in a personal, subjective and internal manner, not bound to the happenings onstage (in the sense that the time that passes does not refer to the represented passing of

³¹ As opposed to the dramatic fictional time. For Lehmann “[d]rama means a flow of time, controlled and surveyable” (Lehmann 2006, 40).

fictional time, but instead, time is turned “*as such* into an object of the aesthetic experience”) (Lehmann 2006, 156, italics in the original). This is an important observation concerning *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* and *End*, both of which by their form (repetitive and circular structure that has no definite goal/end) as well as their content (lack of narrative, meaning is subjectively constructed by each viewer), render time an object of aesthetic experience for the spectator.

What is also an essential point of interest in the notion of duration as proposed by Bergson is the difference he makes between the thought of time and its (lived) experience by the subject. (Heathfield, 2008, 17,22-23). This duality between phenomenological time (time as it is felt / lived) and the thought of time, is also reflected in the representation of time and its actual experience during the course of a performance, which in the case studies comes to the surface due to the durational temporalities experienced. “Duration breaks down the objective measure of time. Time arises in the experience of duration, in its indivisibility and its incapacity to become an object of thought, analysis or representation”. (Heathfield 2008, 22). What Heathfield means, is that when things last for so long, time cannot be accessed through thought or analysis and instead becomes an object of sensorial experience. In other words, when time cannot be filled with meaning or representations, it gets emptied out. It becomes an empty succession of indivisible instants; it becomes an object of reflection.³² This observation about the emptiness of time based on Bergson’s theory of duration is a point of significance, to which I will return later and connect it to the effects of durational temporalities and especially the concept of dispossession as introduced by Bojana Kunst.

As far as repetition is concerned, it is also a technique of postdramatic time aesthetics. Closely related to durational aesthetics and usually used in combination with long-lasting temporalities, repetition as a dramaturgical tool highlights the absurdity, meaninglessness and ineffectiveness of postdramatic performances by refusing the promise of progression, closure,

³² “Like distance, duration creates an opening that allows reflection to enter” (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012, 27).

achievement and causality in their structure. “As in duration, a crystallization of time occurs in repetition, a more or less subtle compression and negation of the course of time itself”. (Lehmann 2006, 156). Time becomes, again, as in duration, an object of aesthetic experience, at times boring, tiring, irritating and seemingly useless. Even more vividly and straightforwardly than duration, repetitive actions onstage hold the capacity to confuse the viewer’s inner feeling of the passage of time and, as said before about duration, to allow a subjective inhabitation of time independently from its objective measurement. Repetition in postdramatic theatre highlights the independent character of time, which is not bound to any teleological or causal laws:

“[Repetition] is now used for the destructuring and deconstructing of story, meaning and totality of form. If processes are repeated to such an extent that they can no longer be experienced as part of a scenic architecture and structure of organization, the overtaxed recipient experiences them as meaningless and redundant, as a seemingly unending, unsynthesizable, uncontrolled and uncontrollable course of events”. (Lehmann 2006, 156).

Lehmann’s observations are evident in the two case studies. The actions on stage in *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* even though they are never the same (different movements of the performers, different sceneries constructed and different configurations in space each time) are perceived as repetitive, since the structure of the performance is based on repetition itself in the form of: construction of a décor/deconstruction of a décor /construction of a new décor etc. It is the cyclical structure of the performance which accentuates the impression of repetition, even if repetition is never the same and every time different configurations in space produce different results. Lehmann also makes reference to the impossibility of repetition as an identical copy of what has been before, saying that “in theatre, there is no such thing as true repetition. The very position in time of the repeated is different from that of the original” (Lehmann 2006, 157). Therefore, even by disregarding the differences in the actions onstage in terms of content (what the performers do, which set design they build up etc) and by concentrating

only on the actions as actions (acts of construction – deconstruction), for Lehmann the dipole building up- tearing down is never truly repeated, since the time of each repeated build-up or deconstruction is always different from the time of the previous or the next one.

The same can be argued for *End*, but in this case, repetition is even more subtle and dominant to the extent that it becomes the foundation of the whole dramaturgy of the performance. The image of the carousel that keeps on moving unceasingly is the image of a circle with no beginning or end and therefore repetition is the regulatory force that binds all other elements together, in the absence of any storyline or narrative. The figures of the carousel are moving in loops and both their actions (dragging, falling, walking) as well as their paths on the stage are always the same, presenting minor variations. It is the meaninglessness of the actions, combined with the durational temporality that creates the atmosphere of the performance:

“[I]f anything ‘happens’ during the performance, then it is the analyzing of those actions that go nowhere. However spectacular they may be, the actions are void.” (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012, 53). Repetition in the case of *End* is what also gives the rhythm of the performance. It accentuates the unceasing duration and the feeling of continuity that never comes to a closure/end. What is being emphasized through it is “the continuum, the passing. That is something essentially different from starting over again and again” (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012, 280).

What is more, despite the fact that repetition (even in dramatic theatre) is also used for intensification and emphasis, in both case studies, repetition does not deliver, it does not build up to something, but instead, refuses to provide a dramatic peak. Repetition, in these cases, exists for its own sake. The effect it has on the viewer is a mixture of boredom and indifference, as well as momentary heightened attention, which however does not lead anywhere. The ‘fruitful’ effect of repetition is, for Lehmann, the generation of a new form of attention, (unlike the attention a spectator pays to during a performance of dramatic theatre), which is closely related to the self-awareness and contemplation we mentioned earlier regarding long duration. Just as duration functions as an end goal in itself, the same applies to

repetition: “Repetition [produces] a new attention [...] it is not about the significance of the repeated events but about the significance of repeated perception. [...] it is the spectators’ impatience or their indifference that becomes visible in the process of repetition, their paying attention or their reluctance to delve deeper into time” (Lehmann 2006, 157). It is not, therefore, the repeated actions (entrances, exits, build-ups and demolitions) that are the object of the spectator’s attention, but, the act of repetition in itself. Precisely because of the constantly repetitive actions and cyclical structure of the two pieces, the viewer is invited, almost forced, to perceive time in accordance with the proposed temporalities, as long-lasting and repetitive. The outcome of such an experience is the collapse of (objective) time and the inability to perceive it in terms of the habitualized ways that attribute order or causality to it and measure it by its effectiveness to produce meaning/ results. The effects of such an alternative perception of time and its passage can either generate what Lehmann calls ‘a new attention’, characterized by deep awareness and reflection on what the viewer sees onstage and experiences as time goes by, or can instead produce complete distraction, boredom and indifference to a viewer who feels he has been robbed out of his time and wastes time in a useless and unproductive activity of mere sitting and watching meaningless actions onstage.

For both the case studies, both spectatorial ways of engagement (may) apply. However, even in the first case that the viewers of *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* and *End* engage into the actions onstage and relate to them through the contemplation of the landscapes they create and the reflection on the passage of time, still the performances disengage them from what they see by their long lasting and repetitive temporalities, so that the feeling of exhaustion or indifference of the viewer is inevitable. Certainly in *Schwalbe speelt een tijd*, if one chooses to stay until the very end of the performance, it is impossible not to feel tired or bored, even if he/she chooses to sleep/ leave and come back. After all, the full experience of the six-hour duration is the ultimate aim of the performance itself, and exhaustion and the loss of attention are both expected and provoked feelings that the performance is based on in order to challenge the spectator and put an emphasis on the factor of time. As far as *End* is concerned,

the circular movement of the carousel by which every figure repeats entrances and exits is the element that sets everything into motion. However, after a few repetitions (the timing of which is never the same and most importantly not fixed or choreographed completely), the audience is fully aware of what will happen next. There are no surprises since all figures have appeared already and since it has been established that the performance is constituted by that repetitive movement of the carousel and nothing more than that. Therefore, due to the lack of surprise or anticipation for what (new) will happen next, the audience's attention is focused on the process, the situation that is being unfolded onstage and that can last forever (van Kerkhoven and Nuyens 2012, 43). As a result, the spectator is left only to observe, stuck in repetition that never goes anywhere. Instead of the feeling of tiredness or indifference that I attributed to duration and repetition in *Schwalbe speelt een tijd*, in the case of *End*, the effects of durational temporality on the spectator are more ambiguous. Even though *End* does not necessarily exhaust the viewers by its repetitive temporality, it still distances them and puts the attention on the process, leaving the spectator emptied out and unable to follow a meaningful process. By doing that it functions in a similar way as *Schwalbe speelt een tijd*.

2.5. *Dispossession*: experiencing the action of time

In her essay “How Time Can Dispossess: On Duration and Movement in Contemporary Performance”, philosopher and performance theorist Bojana Kunst argues that the politicality of durational performances lies in their function to *dispossess* the spectator, to disable his/her subjectivity. Dispossession refers to the disruption of the viewers’ subjectivity by means which cause distraction or irritation and prevent them from being absorbed into the actions onstage, but instead compel them to face the emptiness of the time they inhabit. (Kunst 2010).

This dispossession is caused by the slowing down which we are accustomed to connect with apparatuses that fail to function and have lost their effectiveness (Kunst 2010, 3). Slowing down, therefore, becomes an expression of economic failure, since the lack of effectiveness renders these slow/durational moments non-productive and consequently ‘useless’, or ‘a waste of time’ since they fail to respond to ‘a continuous functioning’ (Crary 2013, 8). “In moments like this, we say that we are stuck, with little else to do but hang in there and become powerless observers of our own chronological time, who can only ‘[feel] the time flying by without being left with any of it, and always miss [our]selves’” (Kunst 2010, 3). As passive witnesses of the passage of our own time, we come up against situations in which time fails to deliver, in which consumption does not have an effect. For Bojana Kunst, the experience of these moments of dispossession of our feeling of time reveals the economic and social construction of our perception of time and there lies their political significance (Kunst 2010, 8). What she acknowledges as a profound paradox is that even though the individual’s subjective experience of the flow of time is filled with moments of stillness and motionlessness, the socially and economically constructed perception of time pushes the individual towards experiences that contradict his inner feeling of time. These are the experiences of “accelerated time, organized through the precise time management of actions and movement; [where] everything (including our potentiality and emotions) is organized into a sequence that leads to a certain effect”. (Kunst 2010, 3). This opposition between the subjective feeling of inner time and the economically constructed perception of it, makes even

more obvious the artificiality of the latter and its socially conditioned character. By appropriating the temporality of the subject, durational temporalities in contemporary performance, throw us off our subjective inner feeling of time. They force us to experience the emptiness of a time that does not deliver or fulfill any goal, but a time that just *is* and does not enable actualization. Kunst argues that duration for duration's sake is not an apolitical principle, but, on the contrary, it is exactly when duration dispossesses the spectator of his subjectivity that it acquires a political and potentially subversive dimension:

“Time becomes independent when it does not allow us to fill the emptiness with meaning. [...] time is so redundant that it takes control over our perception. The consequence of such redundancy of time is the dispossession of our subjective inner feeling of time, where our attention is not empowering our subjective experience, but exactly the opposite: we are stuck, duration disables us, it takes over. When we are overwhelmed with a redundancy of time, duration does not stimulate our attention, making our awareness more intense. Attention becomes rather impersonal”. (Kunst 2010, 5).

As mentioned earlier, duration by definition cannot be attributed to the fictional representation, but is instead, as Kunst observes, an “immanent, ‘conscious’ element of the performance by means of which theatre refers to its own process” (Kunst 2010, 5). As an element of the performances’ structure and form, duration, along with visual dramaturgy and anti-dramatic narrative, compels the viewer to confront his/her own time in the theatre and experience the passage of time as disentangled from the events onstage.

In *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin, while discussing the typical in Beckett’s plays use of silence, stillness and anti-dramatic management of time, he concludes that these techniques confuse the spectator and often result in complete disengagement and unwillingness to keep on watching. However, for Esslin, “it is in the act of waiting that we experience the flow of *time* in its purest, most evident form. If we are active, we tend to forget

the passage of time, we *pass* the time, but if we are merely passively waiting, we are confronted with the action of time itself” (Esslin 1961, 17, italics in the original).

Disregarding the differences originated from these two different forms of theatre, (meaningless) duration, in both cases, starts having an effect the moment that the spectator ceases to be immersed in what he sees and realizes his own place and time in the theatre. By using mechanisms that refuse the viewer’s attachment to a definite storyline and by taking away the active position of following narratives or making specific connections between images and their meaning, the time of the performances becomes excruciatingly magnified. The viewer is made aware of the time that passes by, time that is not connected anymore to the time of the drama, but is his actual (subjective) time. This effect results in an altered attention of the viewer, not oriented towards the goal of constructing a definite meaning or following a given narrative, but an attention that is “the emptiness of thought oriented by a gentle force and maintained in an accord with the empty intimacy of time.” (Kunst 2010, 7).

Why that altered attention towards the spectator’s time and its passage is significant and how it can matter politically will be further analyzed in the following chapters.

3. Interlude: The perception of time in western capitalism

3.1. The Marxist conceptualization of time in capitalism³³

In this chapter, I will leave aside my case studies for a while and dive into the examination of the relation between time and capitalism as the prevailing economic system since the eighteenth century (in the form of early industrial capitalism) till today (in the form of neoliberalism/late capitalism). I will base the focus of my research on Karl Marx's analysis of that relation and connect it to Jonathan Crary's theory of the 24/7 and its implications in the perception of time in everyday life as described in his book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. Concepts and analyses that will be introduced and developed here, such as the construction of time as economic time (Marx) and the hidden potential of resistance in activities such as sleep (Crary), will be useful for my argumentation further on concerning the politicality of the temporalities of my two case studies.

In his examination of the capitalist political economy, Marx uses the concept of time in its relation to the capitalist exploitation of labor, namely as embodied surplus labor time extracted from the workers by capitalists and primarily as the object of economic activity. (Booth 1991, 9). William Booth unfolds Marx's historical analysis of the concept of time in pre-capitalist economies, starting from ancient Greece, in which, as he points out, the Greek *polis* as a political and economic unit, depended on the labor of slaves, so that the masters would be left with the necessary leisure time to occupy themselves with the government of the city and other non-economic tasks. This division between free time and labor time was reflected in the social division between masters (free citizens) and slaves. More than that, the leisure of one group absolutely depended on the bound time of another (Booth 1991, 10) to

³³ Since Marx's thought and analysis of time in capitalism is immense and extremely detailed for the scope of this thesis, I will examine it through William J. Booth's essay "Economies of Time: On the Idea of Time in Marx's Political Economy", which summarizes and illustrates Marx's central analysis of the relation between time and early industrial capitalism. What is more, his theoretical framework, along with Crary's theory of the 24/7, are essential in order to gain a general perspective on the politicality of time and the position the concept of time held and still holds in the economic field of production during two distinct but interrelated periods of the capitalist economy.

such an extent that the entirety of the slaves' time was owned by their masters, or as Guy Debord described it: "[t]he only people who lived were those who did not work". (Debord 1995, thesis134).

Indeed, as Marx observed, no previous economic system in history has been so obsessed with time as capitalism, and this is no surprise since no other economic system had ever been so concerned with profit making³⁴. This explains capitalism's obsession with technological advancement, as a necessary way to intensify and extend labor time, and therefore surplus value. What is, however, interesting is the fact that, since the hunt for profit is unstoppable and competition forces capitalists to keep up, technological innovations and advancements, instead of offering a slowing down to the frantic rhythms of the production process, had the opposite effect: the intensification and expansion of working hours in order for production to keep on going, profits to be made and more surplus value to be extracted from workers.

(Booth 1991, 14-16). Instead of freeing man from the burden of labor, technology in capitalist economy enslaved him even more, making it possible to work more hours. Marx observes in that opposition a fundamental difference in the conception of free time between capitalism and the ancient Greek economies, in which the role of leisure time was central in society and essential for the organization of life in the ancient *polis*. Distribution of free time (or lack thereof) marked the division between classes. For the ancient Greeks, the role of technology was a liberating one: it would create leisure time and free man from labor (which was considered a degrading activity). (Booth 1991, 19). The ultimate goal was the creation of leisure time not bound to economic pursuits. That is why the ancient Greeks found in slavery the necessary social formation which enabled the masters' occupation with the nobler tasks of citizenship and philosophy. (Booth 1991, 18-19). The ability to have free time, in that sense,

³⁴ The special link between time and value can be outlined in the following excerpt: "[...] labor time is also the substance of value. Surplus value (the creation of which, in its "phenomenal" form, that is, profit, is the determining purpose of the capitalist) is nothing but the ratio of two sorts of time - necessary and surplus - which is to say of the time required for the reproduction of labor and that of the excess or surplus time expended in production. The "function specific to capital" is just the production of surplus value which means (embodied) surplus time". (Booth 1991, 13).

was a necessary condition for the overall development and fulfillment of each free man. A slave, then, was a man whose free time was taken away from him and therefore was incapable of fully developing his potential. As opposed to that conception of time, capitalism found in technology the key to subordinate time even more to the unstoppable process of production and creation of surplus value. (Booth 1991, 17). Time, in this case, is nothing more but a means to achieve and maximize profit. What follows that conception of time as an instrument for productivity and economic gain, is that the time workers spend “outside of the production process [would have to] be considered either as strictly unproductive and hence wasted and deplorable or as recreation, time spent renewing the person so as better to allow for a still more intensive expenditure of his or her productive hours”. (Booth 1991, 18). Time in capitalism, therefore, is always considered as economic time, time subordinated to the needs of production and profit-making. It is not only the necessary and surplus labor time, but even the workers’ free time (time outside of the production process) which is measured and valued in economic terms (as non-productive or barely efficient).

What can be deduced from Marx and Booth’s description is that at the very core of the two conceptions of time, the capitalist and the ancient, lies the exploitation of one class’s time to serve the needs of another. However, what must be considered as an essential difference between them is that the ultimate aim is, in one case, the profit for the profit’s sake, while in the other it is the ideal of free time as an end in itself.

As far as time in post-capitalist societies is concerned, Booth discusses the familiar (from *German Ideology*) image of a person hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon, rearing cattle in the evening and criticizing after dinner.³⁵ This idea of not being exclusively bound to any social activity but explore all as one wishes to do, reveals the liberation of time from the constraint of economic activity. “[H]aving lost its dictatorial voice in a world where it is no longer “everything,” time falls silent. Once it has been freed from its bonds, whether those of

³⁵ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, Part I, Section A: Idealism and Materialism, chapter: Private property and communism, source: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm#a4>, last access on 12th August 2017.

the master's whip or of the competitive demands for efficiency in production, time ceases to be a preoccupying object of concern. Free time, one might speculate, becomes freedom from (or better: in the silence of) time'' (Booth 1991, 20). In order for "time to fall silent", Marx saw that it was necessary for time to be disengaged from the market's needs for profit-making. Only when that condition would be actualized (in a post-capitalist, communist society) could people truly be liberated from the constraints of economic time and time as a measure of efficiency and productivity would die out³⁶. The liberation of personal time from the constraints of labor was seen by Marx as the necessary condition for the fulfillment of the ultimate aim of the communist society which was the subject's overall development, the release of human creativity and potential.

³⁶ This is the conception of leisure time in the communist society as portrayed by Marx in *German Ideology* and must be considered in relation to Marxism's overall philosophy of freedom. That means that it must be examined in the context of Marx's analysis of freedom as self-realization of the subject, which is conditioned, amongst others, by the abolishment of the division of labor and alienation in the work field, as well as the economic emancipation of the subject that shall follow the advent of communism.

3.2. J. Crary's and B. Kunst's conceptualizations of time in late capitalism

As far as the conceptualization of time in late capitalism is concerned, art historian and art critic Jonathan Crary conducts an analysis focused on the tremendous technological take-off of the past twenty years, the dominance of the digital era and the unrestrained growth of social networks, the (digital) mass media and their implications in the construction and perception of time. In his book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* Crary studies how time and its perception have been shaped into the current 24/7, a cyclical system which corresponds to the relentless, never-stopping temporality that we have now become accustomed to and which is supported and made possible by the various digital tools, networks and platforms, that literally keep us connected on a 24/7 basis, minimizing the gap between work and leisure, day and night. Crary describes it as “a generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning. It is a time that no longer passes, beyond clock time”.(Crary 2013, 8).

Regarding the time we spend as viewers, it is precisely the fear of its unproductive investment that shapes the consumers' attention in such a fashion, so that it better fits the commands of the market. As Crary observes: “The idea of long blocks of time spent exclusively as a spectator is outmoded”. (Crary 2013, 53).The difficulty of adjusting to the extended temporalities of durational works of art is a result of our (as spectators/ consumers) unfamiliarity with this mode of engagement and attention which cultivates reflection and self-awareness. The habitual ways of looking at art are governed by the same principles of the market: rashness and the search for the ready-made meaning which is offered easily into our hands so as not to waste any of our valuable time in the process. Information keeps circulating unceasingly to fit into our exhausting pace of contemporary lifestyle and any expression of long-lasting temporality is considered time-consuming and therefore non-profitable. Indeed, Crary indicates that the obsession with ephemerality as a characteristic of the late capitalist economies, is reflected in the “visual and auditory ‘content’ [which]is most often ephemeral, interchangeable material that, in addition to its commodity status, circulates to habituate and

validate one's immersion in the exigencies of twenty-first century capitalism" (Crary 2013, 52).

However, the performances under study draw attention to and, at the same time, stand up against that perception of time as commodity, measured by the objectives of effectiveness and productivity. *End* and *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* constitute first and foremost experiences of durational temporalities, which are also experiences of the viewer's inner feeling of duration³⁷. As I discussed in Part I, the effect of disengagement and dispossession, reveals the viewer's unfamiliarity and discomfort with any other temporality except from the habitualized temporality of his/her everyday routine, characterized by fast paces, flexibility and the objective of productivity. If we consider that today, in the twenty-first century, the various digital technologies tie us to a 24/7 system of always being online, available and (consequently) awake, we can argue that the opportunities for the experience of opposing temporalities are very few. For Jonathan Crary, sleep may be one form of alternative temporality that can function as a force of resistance. It is not strange that under the 24/7 regime even sleep, a basic human need which is absolutely essential for one's health and survival, is under attack as the last unproductive activity which needs to be minimized in order for higher rates of effectiveness and productivity to be achieved. Indeed, Crary mentions that several researches and studies are being carried out each year in the direction of reducing the need for sleep, so that workers will work even more hours, with the least possible pauses and interruptions and the highest possible rates of productivity and effectiveness. (Crary 2013, 2). Sleep, as well as any other manifestation of the deviation from the 24/7, must be limited to the minimum degree. Such deviations include all kinds of slowing down, stillness, unproductivity and ineffectiveness, be it in the economic field or expanding to the lifestyle of our contemporary societies.

³⁷ Especially in the case of *Schwalbe speelt een tijd* which in most cases takes place during a period of time (12 a.m. – 6 a.m) that is by habit meant to be dedicated to sleep, according to the normalized cyclical time and the division of the day between sleeping and working hours.

In his previous, yet related book *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, discussing spectacle in the nineteenth century, Crary remarks that “spectacular culture is not founded on the necessity of making a subject *see*, but rather on strategies in which individuals are isolated, separated, and *inhabit time* as disempowered. Likewise, counter-forms of attention are neither exclusively nor essentially visual but rather constituted as other temporalities and cognitive states, such as those in trance or reverie”. (Crary 2001, 3, italics in the original). The ‘counter-forms’ of attention Crary mentions constitute alternative temporalities and manifest themselves during activities which go beyond the normal and the ordinary. However, I propose that they may also be actualized during experiences, such as durational performances, which shape a disengaged attention and disrupt the habitual ways of time perception. I argue that the politicality of these performances lies precisely in their function to make the spectators become aware of their own time as a time that belongs to them and therefore make it possible for them to acquire the experience of a time disengaged from economic efficiency and productivity. By slowing down, by allowing time to be experienced in a non-habitualized way and by realizing the difficulty of sustaining such an attitude and mental state of mere observation, the spectator may leave the theatre different than how he entered it. The importance of Crary’s observation lies in the fact that he locates these alternative temporalities and cognitive states in situations of exception, when both body and brain are not functioning in accordance with the ‘normal’ rules of behavior (dreams/trance states/reveries). To a certain degree, this also applies to the convention of theatre, during which both body and mind are exempted from the normal and everyday behavior and are subjected to certain ‘rules’ (spectators must remain seated or briefly leave the auditorium and then return to their seats, the use of devices such as cell phones is prohibited, and attention, even though it cannot really be forced, is required by the context of the theatrical convention). In moments of exception like the ones we find ourselves in when attending performances, different cognitive states usually prevail. It is because of that fact that in the cases of durational performances, when our attention is disrupted and we feel stuck or disabled, we suddenly find ourselves inhabiting a time which is not usable or organized

towards a projection of the future (Kunst 2010, 8). As Kunst observes, in contradiction to the contemporary life in which “the subject needs to be constantly actualized, [...] duration does not enable actualization. It throws us into pure potentiality, into what could happen. [...] [W]e are suddenly left with time, which means that being is potentially possible without self-actualization”. (Kunst 2010, 8). As I claimed before, the realization that existing in time is possible without constantly projecting the future and actualizing ourselves, is of fundamental political importance, since it rejects the capitalist ideological demand of continuous functioning and the conception of time as a commodity.

Another point I want to draw attention to is Crary’s description of the ‘spectacular culture’ as not founded on the necessity of making the subject *see*, but on strategies of isolation and separation between subjects and between subjects and their own time. The images created onstage in the two case studies are accompanied by a durational temporality which does not allow them to be perceived merely as images of representation and contemplation on the spectacle onstage (or what Crary calls ‘essentially visual’ (Crary 2001, 3)), but instead, by dispossessing the viewers’ subjective feeling of time (Kunst 2010), the performances operate towards making them inhabitants of their own time, which according to Jonathan Crary is the first step towards resisting to 24/7. It is due to the role of (ineffective, non-functional) duration that the difference between seeing and experiencing is made more explicit. The spectator is invited into a lived duration that does not (exclusively) revolve around the spectacle onstage, but is the duration of his/her own experience. By functioning as a counter-example, as an alternative to the spectacles we have become accustomed to consume, durational temporalities in contemporary performance enclose the potency of subverting the spectator’s established modes of perceiving and experiencing time. The aim here, is to reclaim one’s lost time back for one’s own self and to do that, one must first realize that his/her time is, in most cases, subordinated to (obvious or camouflaged) economic purposes. Such examples like the case studies under examination, invite an awareness of that fact, simply by engaging spectators into temporalities they find themselves uncomfortable with.

Through the dispossession that Bojana Kunst describes, the spectator experiences to the fullest the passing of time, as materialized before his/her eyes onstage and begins to realize his/her own place in the here and now. Awareness, in that case, does not have to do with heightened attention and contemplation on the spectacle, but rather with one's own position as a spectator, inhabiting a time that does not live up to the promise of consumption, achievement and constant projection into the future.

4. Part II: The politicality of duration in performance

4.1. Adorno's *formal autonomy* and the politicality of art

In his essay “Adorno, Brecht and Debord: Three Models for Resisting the Capitalist Art System” Critical Studies professor Gene Ray makes a distinction between three models of radical artistic practices that resist to capitalism and he connects each one with a certain thinker/ practitioner. His starting point is the acknowledgement that art is indeed a field of social activity that is shaped and regulated by the capitalist forces of production and effectiveness and therefore produces and reproduces the ideological and stabilizing principles that dominate everyday life in the western late capitalist world, while he also understands that the matter of social change is a matter of struggle outside the art field. However, Ray also recognizes the relative autonomy of artistic practices which hold the capacity to possibly contribute to social transformation: “Seen dialectically, what happens within this system does have its utopian and critical moments. [...] The question is what specific works or practices may be able to do within and against it”. (Ray 2013, 84) .Then he proceeds by describing his three alternative models, represented by Adorno, Brecht and Debord.³⁸ A second distinction (this time between the three of them) is that while Adorno and Brecht’s models remain incorporated in the economic system, the capitalist market and the institutionalized art system, Debord’s model rejects all the above and operates from the outside. While for the Situationists the work of art needed to be autonomous from both the economic and cultural system so as to truly function subversively, Adorno adopts the theory of the *autonomous art*, which refers to something completely different from what the Situationists had in mind. For Adorno it is the work’s *formal autonomy* which makes it a vehicle of social commentary and which allows it to present alternative social conditions. Adorno proclaims that “real denunciation is probably only a capacity of form, which is overlooked by a social aesthetic

³⁸ Gene Ray distinguishes between three models of radicality in art that oppose to capitalism: Adorno’s *dissonant modernism*, Brecht’s *functional transformation* and Debord’s *détournement* of art (Ray 2013, 83, italics in the original).

that believes in themes”(Adorno 1997, 230), and he continues by supporting that “[w]hat is socially decisive in artworks is the content [Inhalt] that becomes eloquent through the work's formal structures³⁹” (Adorno1997, 230). His aesthetic theory gives new meaning to the relation between form and content and his arguments abstain equally from the dogma of *l' art pour l' art* as well as from reducing the radicality of an artwork merely to its political content/theme.

Adorno's aesthetic theory incorporates Marx's view on the integration of art in society, but begins from the acknowledgement that art holds an idiosyncratic antithetical relation to society: “Art, which even in its opposition to society remains a part of it, must close its eyes and ears against it: it cannot escape the shadow of irrationality”.(Adorno 2006 , 12). Adorno also considers that “[a]rt is the social antithesis of society, not directly deducible from it”. (Adorno 1997, 8). It is, therefore, art's increased autonomy that allows for its capacity to commentate on and present both the negative view of current everyday life and the alternative, to-be pursued image of the future, without, however, changing the social conditions⁴⁰ and, by that, proving its relative ‘functionlessness’: “[w]hat is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions. [...]. Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness. [...] Their enchantment is disenchantment”.(Adorno 1997, 227). For Adorno, this combination of antithetical forces (autonomy/integration, illusion/disenchantment) is what gives art the tools to be genuinely radical, moving away from both aestheticism and the committed political art. By adopting a double character (in *and* out of society, of existing both for themselves *and* in relation to society), artworks reveal the contradictions hidden inside them (also expressed as contradictions between form/content). This explains Adorno's antithesis to the politically and ideologically committed works of art that attempt to raise consciousness by means of their (political) content. His criticism of such politically straightforward practices is that they

³⁹ Adorno's defense of the political potency hidden in form is also expressed in the special way by which he perceives form: “The campaign against formalism ignores the fact that form that befalls content [Inhalt] is itself sedimented content” (Adorno 1997, 144).

⁴⁰ which Adorno insisted was a matter of (class) struggle outside the realm of art.

“regularly enmesh themselves in false consciousness as the result of inevitable and vainly praised simplification. In the shortsighted praxis to which they blindly subscribe, their own blindness is prolonged”. (Adorno 1997, 228). Ultimately, such practices are doomed to neutralization, integration and reconciliation⁴¹ (with the established system). (Adorno 1997, 228-229). For Adorno, art exerts its true radical potency when it questions and problematizes the configuration of social relations and conditions under which it is produced and exists, neither by reproducing them nor by resisting to them. Adorno’s ultimate examples of such practices were Franz Kafka and most importantly Samuel Beckett and his works. He praised them because by “dismantling appearance, they explode from within the art which committed proclamation subjugates from without, and hence only in appearance. The inescapability of their work compels the change of attitude which committed works merely demand”. (Adorno 2006, 10). These examples, therefore, express their radical and undermining role (against the established system, the social conditions and the existing social relations) *from within*, out of their form and its dialectical relation to their content and it is not their politically radical articulations, applied to the artworks *from the outside*, that render them subversive. According to Adorno, the latter practice, which constitutes a characteristic of committed art, cannot function effectively, since it proves the incapacity of art by itself to articulate a firm radical stance and demands, instead, the aid of a political discourse and content in order to express its political potency. His theory of the relative autonomy of the artworks gives art back its role and potency to socially commentate, challenge perception and ultimately undermine the status quo. What is more, art, for Adorno, acquires an even more political character by representing what is missing in reality and thus competing (against) it: “ By their very existence artworks postulate the existence of what does not exist and thereby come into conflict with the latter’s actual nonexistence” (Adorno 1997, 59). This is also, for Adorno, the most that art can do, since he acknowledges its incapacity for practical social change, which he attributes to social

⁴¹“More often, reception wears away what constitutes the work's determinate negation of society. Works are usually critical in the era in which they appear; later they are neutralized, not least because of changed social relations. Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy” (Adorno 1997, 228).

struggle outside the field of aesthetics. (Adorno 1997, 227). At the same time, art continues to constitute a force of (relative) resistance to the oppressive reality in western capitalism, so that its function will only be complete when the liberation of man will be realized: “[o]nly in a society which [would have] achieved satisfaction would the death of art be possible” (Adorno 1992, 15). In other words, even though Adorno accepts the limited function that art holds in the radical resistance against the established system, he acknowledges its contribution by admitting that only in a society that will have fulfilled its purpose will art truly be useless. On any other circumstances, art still holds a role to play.

As opposed to committed art, *dissonant modernism* (the term Gene Ray gives to Adorno’s paradigm of radical art) corresponds to the artwork’s function to present its internal and external (towards society) contradictions and tensions and cancel the promise of reconciliation as posed by capitalism. This function constitutes a moment of resistance and radicality. (Ray 2013, 85).“ If an artwork of whatever medium produces effects of disturbance and anxiety through a negative presentation of social reality, then it aligns with this model [*dissonant modernism*]”. (Ray 2013, 86).

The analysis made above constitutes a short description of Adorno’s famous but also complex and easily misunderstood arguments on the relation between aesthetics and politics. I engaged into Adorno’s thought because I find that his aesthetic theory constitutes a suitable (if not the best-suited) theoretical framework through which the (potential) radicality of the case studies I analyzed can be considered and examined. I argue that duration and the challenge of time perception, since they constitute elements of the performances’ form (but also in the specific cases they are almost inextricable to content) can be better studied under Adorno’s proclamations about the (formal) autonomy of an artwork as a necessary condition for the acquirement of a radical role in society. Merely by looking at their content, and bearing in mind the points we already made about the effect of dispossession and distraction, the performances cannot function successfully as potentially subversive. We need to consider the relationship between the spectator and the performances in order to make any observations

about their radicality, and this relationship is primarily founded on the long duration and the result of discomfort and dispossession of the spectator's feeling of time, which are caused by the formal characteristics of the performances (structure/duration/repetition) and not due to their theme/content (which also has to do with time and duration, but which does not challenge the audience the way their lived experience of time does). Thus, it is because of their form, as durational and repetitive experiences which allow for a rethinking of time and its perception, that any sort of political potency may manifest itself. What is more, since the performances can hardly be considered as committed works of art that clearly reflect and support a political ideology, and at the same time, since they in no way constitute artistic practices that are excluded from and do not conform to capitalism and the institutions of the art market, they also fail to be categorized into other forms of radical art (which Adorno did not accept as essentially radical⁴²). Most importantly, if we consider the durational aesthetics of the two performances under the prism of what Ray calls *dissonant modernism*, we can perhaps argue that the feelings of discomfort, boredom and dispossession draw attention to a view of the negative side of everyday life in western capitalism and constitute negations of the capitalist construction of time and the rules of effectiveness, fast rhythms and productivity by which we live and organize our everyday lives.

⁴² Such as the Situationists' stance on the independence of art from the capitalist art market.

4.3. The political in postdramatic theatre

Lehmann makes similar observations regarding the politicality of postdramatic theatre in general. In the Epilogue of the *Postdramatic Theatre* he addresses the ways by which postdramatic performances attain a political dimension, which are quite distinct from the politicality of the content that applies to the traditional dramatic theatre. Lehmann states that “it is not through the direct thematization of the political that theatre becomes political but through the implicit substance and critical value of its *mode of representation*” (Lehmann 2006, 178, italics in the original). As opposed to the political concept that characterized drama, “[t]he politics of [postdramatic] theatre is a *politics of perception*” (Lehmann 2006, 185, italics in the original). What Lehmann argues for by referring to a *politics of perception* is that in postdramatic theatre, where the non-hierarchy of theatrical elements prevails, the experience and the shaping of the audience’s perception are the factors by which the effects (and hence the politicality) of performances are manifested. How the audience perceives a postdramatic performance, the way the performance is staged so that a certain perception is shaped, the energy, matters of atmosphere and the appeal to the senses, the affect on the spectator: all these are elements that define the audience-stage relationship and invite the spectator to engage into the performance by means other than (or more than) rational thought, observation and attention to a narrative. The appeal of postdramatic theatre, as Lehmann puts it, lies less into the *thing* that is represented (drama, myth, plot), and more in the *way* it is represented and perceived (often subjectively) by the spectator, by means that can “make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception”(Lehmann 2006, 186). For Lehmann, such an experience constitutes both the aesthetic and the ethico-political dimension of theatre. The *aesthetics of risk*, he argues, are characteristic of the postdramatic theatre and refer to aesthetics that express extremes of affect (taboos) by creating situations which cultivate the affect of the spectator and communicate in ways distinct from pure rationality or by making statements. (Lehmann 2006, 186-187). Lehmann concludes that postdramatic theatre does not attain its political character “by way of information, theses and

messages; in short by way of its content in the traditional sense” (Lehmann 2006, 187), but rather by disorienting, shocking, (in the specific cases we could even say dispossessing one of his/her temporality) and drawing attention to the spectators themselves. This thesis on the negative (re)presentation as a characteristic of postdramatic aesthetics is very close to Adorno’s model of *dissonant modernism*, where negativity becomes a vehicle for the presentation, revelation and even denunciation of (oppressive) reality. In a similar way, the postdramatic *aesthetics of risk* and the strategies of shock, discomfort, boredom or confusion, demand from the spectator a different engagement, an alternative way to relate and experience postdramatic theatre, while they also create situations and experiences instead of representations (of reality). In addition, Lehmann’s argumentation on the politics of perception can be connected to Adorno’s rejection of radicality (in art) that is applied from the outside of an artwork by means of rendering it a political instrument of committed art. As far as Lehmann’s view on the matter of politicality in postdramatic theatre is concerned, he states that “it is not the thesis (or antithesis) that counts, not the political statement or engagement (both of which belong to the domain of real politics and not represented politics), but rather a basic disrespect for tenability or positive affirmation”.

In his seminal work *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin makes a similar argument discussing Beckett’s view that “the form, structure, and mood of an artistic statement cannot be separated from its meaning, its conceptual content; simply because the work of art as a whole *is* its meaning, *what* is said in it is indissolubly linked with the *manner* in which it is said, and cannot be said in any other way”. (Esslin 1961, 12, italics in the original). As in this case, so in the postdramatic performances under discussion, the politics of perception become inextricable to the subject matter and the dramaturgy of the pieces, and therefore, cannot be regarded and examined separately. The meaning of the performances *is* the performances themselves and how they become perceived by viewers. I consider the significance of that function to be of the utmost importance since it not only distinguishes postdramatic politicality from the traditional political function of the dramatic content, but also links together different theatrical tendencies which aimed to break from that norm and to function

politically through other ways and, by doing so, paved the way to postdramatic theatre (the most famous of which are the theatre of the Absurd and epic theatre).

Duration, therefore, as part and effect of the experience created in both the case studies I examined, is capable of functioning as a destabilizing factor which draws attention to the theatrical process itself, while it also makes the spectator a conscious observer and evaluator of his/her own time, thus politicizing from within theatre and by doing so, constituting potentially subversive theatrical experiences.

5. Conclusion

Roy Andersson's⁴³ film *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000) begins with a line from César Vallejo's poem: "Beloved the one who sits down" ('Älskade vare de som sätter sig') and the dedication of the film to the Peruvian poet's memory. Vallejo's poem⁴⁴ is a tribute to the trivial and simple life of Man, and is charged with social and class characteristics. In Andersson's film, the absurdity and paranoia of western society and the socio-economical conditions that dominate it are magnified through surreal scenes and actions, which are put in direct opposition to the character of the Poet, who, secluded in the mental house, mourns alone for he is the only one who sees the decay and disaster of both Man and society. In the Poet's character, we see the role of art itself, being a part of society, but also separated/excluded from it. His power is to foresee, outline and anticipate the catastrophe⁴⁵. The Poet will eventually utter the words "Beloved be the ones who sit down" and in these words, the self-evident and omnipotent commands of capitalist logic will begin to shatter. The forces that keep people living in absolute accordance with a logic which has been (almost metaphysically) accepted as rational and axiomatic are put under question. Doubt is being generated while the failure of various endeavors compels the characters in the film to get a glimpse of the absurdity in their lives. The seed of doubt, in this case, is planted by the Poet's simple urge to 'sit down', which appears, under the dominant ideology, as a profound paradox, almost a voluntary failure. However, even if the viewer is confronted with the disastrous ramifications of what it means to comply with the capitalist commands for constant actualization and with the constructed nature of that 'self-evident' truth, the characters in the film seem unable to reach that point of awareness. This contradiction is also evident in what

⁴³ Swedish director Roy Andersson's distinctive style is also characterized by the use of landscapes in the composition of his cinematic frames, the big spatial depth of his shots, as well as the timelessness of his scenes, the ambiguity of how time passes and very slow rhythms. What is more, in his work, Adorno's proclamations find an exemplary application, since it is through the formal mannerisms of his films that a deep social commentary and awakening is set free, resulting from surreal and often tragicomic situations and fragmented narratives that appear to be meaningless or extremely trivial.

⁴⁴ Vallejo's poem *Stumble Between Two Stars* can be accessed through this link: <http://theshortwavemystery.tumblr.com/post/110651204413/stumble-between-two-stars-by-cesar-vallejo> (last access on 12th August 2017)

⁴⁵ *End's Messenger* is no less a depiction of the character of the intellectual, the poet, the one who knows the end is imminent and warns people.

B. Kunst points out as a major paradox in the perception of time, namely that even though projective temporalities have prevailed as the contemporary model of dealing with time, they absolutely exclude the image of a future substantially different from the one we inhabit. (Kunst 2012, 112). The realization in the future of something different from the current status quo, does not appear as an alternative, even though we have become trained into ceaselessly imagining the future, inventing new creative ideas and proposals, with our mind constantly pointed towards the future⁴⁶. “The problem is that the future is never truly imagined anew, but remains even more tightly bound to the constellations of power in the present. Only when we are able to simply be “alive” in the present will radical alternatives begin to bloom once again”. (Kunst 2012, 115).

Paraphrasing Vallejo we could as well say “Beloved the one who loses time”. In the absolute dominance of capitalist logic that commodifies everything and ties (even personal) time to value, the choice of letting time pass without actualizing oneself or without being productive in any profitable manner equals to failure. Losing time, from that perspective, means not only the actual activity of letting time fly, but is also charged with the negative stain of (economic) failure. Under these circumstances, what is the true potential of art to act essentially subversively and undermine the status quo? Where does that role end and how much can be expected from a form of expression of human creativity and intellect? Looking at the performances under analysis, they possess undermining characteristics, but many limitations, too. They can open one’s eyes to western culture’s perception of time and to the binding of time to economic value, while they also function as small ruptures in the normalized and established ways of perceiving our being in time, revealing that being in time can also be actualized under alternative conditions. Furthermore, that realization is conveyed not by

⁴⁶ “The main paradox here is that artists are constantly challenged to imagine and to form proposals for the future. To do this, they perpetually rehearse ways of imagining that which has yet to come or that which has yet to happen. Paradoxically, despite that so many creative people are preoccupied with imagining and creating proposals for the future, we are living in a time that is deeply characterized by the impotence and impossibility of imagining and creating modes of political and economic life different from the ones that we already know”. (Kunst, 2012, 112).

conceptual communication, but through an actual embodied experience, which holds the capacity to cause an alteration in consciousness in a far more subtle and effective manner than merely being told or shown as such through a story or didactic narration. It is my belief that this is also the limit, the furthest that the performances can go as far as their radical and subversive functions are concerned. Art's essential contribution, therefore, is the revelation of time's 'dictatorial voice' as a (first) step to make it 'fall silent'. Following Adorno's proclamations on aesthetics and politics, the political role of art resides in raising awareness, in presenting the negative side of reality and problematizing from within (the artworks) the social conditions, while remaining incorporated in the system and society, but also in direct antithesis to it. Within it but also against it. (see thesis, p.52-53).

The performances under study *have* something to say, they *do* possess a meaning, but not in terms of their content and theme or dramatic plot, but in the interrelation of both structure and content, in the ways by which they are experienced and also the ways by which their structures and formal characteristics enable an understanding of what they stand for. In other words, the inhabitation of time in the act of observing the transformations onstage (which hold little suspension and excitement in narrative terms) as well as the viewer's act of waiting either in discomfort or indifference, is what links together their form and the meaning which is contained in their dramaturgies. The meaning, from that perspective, is in the waiting, since "waiting is to experience the action of time" (Esslin 1961 ,18). Of course, we can never completely escape narrative. It is, after all, a viewer's immanent inclination to attempt to attribute meaning to everything he sees (least of all, so that he reassures himself that his time is not totally wasted). And it is in that function of postdramatic theatre to invite multiple readings and create diverse subjective experiences, that a new form of political theatre is made possible, one which draws attention to the mechanisms of perception and reception as much as the thing which is perceived by the spectator. In that way, new approaches, forms and ways to refer to reality are introduced and further develop the potential of theatre to present, commentate and question aspects of everyday life.



photo taken from www.de-oosterpoort.nl, photo credit: Stephan van Hesteren

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Songs from the Second floor. [Original title: Sångers från andra våningen]. 2000. Directed by Roy Andersson. Sweden, Norway, Denmark.

Appendix: Performances Information

I. Schwalbe speelt een tijd | Schwalbe collective, 2016

Concept and performance: Christina Flick, Marie Groothof, Floor van Leeuwen, Kimmy Ligtvoet, Ariadna Rubio Lleó.

Lightdesign: Joost Giesken and Jan Fedinger.

Advice (Image-wise): Wikke van Houwelingen

Advice (Building-wise): Willemijn Ottevanger and Kees van Leeuwen

Technique: Willemijn Ottevanger

Photography: Stephan van Hesteren

Registration: Fanny Hagmeier

Co-producers: Productiehuis Rotterdam, de Coproducers

Coordination PR/Communication: Karin van de Wiel - StudioKVDW

Bussines Manager: Anneke Tonen

Producer: Theatrecollectief Schwalbe

List of the sets that appear in the performance (in chronological order):

Cafe Lehmitz
Gerrit Timmers
Theatergroep Carver
1991

Snaren (inflatable)
Marc Warning
Toneelgroep Amsterdam
2002

Bambie 10
Hester Jolink
Mimetheatergroep Bambie
2005

Freetown
René Rood
Dood Paard
2010

Apera
Jetse Batelaan
Muziektheatercollectief WILco & Nieuw West
2013

A P N E A
Rodrigo Sobarzo
2013

Kill Your Character
Julian Maiwald
Moeremans&Sons
2013

De Avond
Marien Jongewaard
Nieuw West
2014

De Wet
Maarten van Otterdijk
Wunderbaum
2014

Mogelijkheden
Wikke van Houwelingen
Laura van Dolron
2015

Van Waveren: De ondergang van een Hollandse familie
Thomas Rupert
Ro Theater
2015

II. End | Kris Verdonck, 2008

Concept & direction: Kris Verdonck

Dramaturgy: Marianne Van Kerkhoven (Kaaitheter)

With: Johan Leysen, Carlos Pez González, Claire Croizé, Geert Vaes, Marc Iglesias, Eveline Van Bauwel

Text: based on recent documents found on the internet and texts by Alexander Kluge, W.G. Sebald, Curcio Malaparte, Lord Byron, a.o.

Video: Anouk De Clercq

Music: Stefaan Quix

Light design: Luc Schaltin (Kaaitheter)

Costumes: Dorothée Catry, Sofie Durnez

Technical direction: Herman Venderickx (Kaaitheter)

Technical assistant: Sylvain Spinoit

Construction: Hans Luyten (PlasmaMagma), Dirk Lauwers (dna), Espeel Constructies, Steven Blum

Production manager: Lotte Vaes

Production: Margarita Production for stilllab vzw