

Forced Entertainment // 12AM: AWAKE AND LOOKING DOWN (Sheffield)

12AM: AWAKE AND LOOKING DOWN entstand 1996 und war *Forced Entertainments* erste Durational Performance, ein Dauer-Stück von damals zwölf Stunden. Es untersucht das Verhältnis von Persönlichkeiten und den Labels, mit denen sie versehen werden. Während eine Gruppe von Performer*innen sich über Stunden hinweg mit Second-Hand-Kleidung und Pappschildern kostümiert dem Publikum präsentiert, entsteht ein Kaleidoskop an Rollenbildern. 12AM macht die körperliche Anstrengung der Darsteller*innen sichtbar, während sie mit wachsendem Erfindungsgeist zu Figuren werden, die wir alle kennen und unzählige Male gesehen haben: in Filmen, trashigen Fernsehsendungen, im Supermarkt, auf der Straße und natürlich auch beim Blick in den Spiegel. Durch die Länge – bei SPIELART werden es sechs Stunden sein – liegt unter allen Vorgängen eine Ahnung von Verfall und Vergänglichkeit, die dem Stück eine spezielle Energie einhaucht.

Forced Entertainment ist eine 1984 gegründete Theatergruppe mit Sitz in Sheffield. Die Gruppe präsentiert ihre provokativen Performances auf Tour in Großbritannien, Europa und dem Rest der Welt. Seit mehr als dreißig Jahren arbeitet *Forced Entertainment* in einer einzigartigen kollaborativen Praxis und produziert Arbeiten, die die Konventionen von Genre, Erzählung und Theater erforschen und oft sprengen, wobei sie nicht nur vom klassischen Drama, sondern auch vom Tanz, Performancekunst, Musikkultur und populären Formen wie Kabarett und Stand-up beeinflusst wird.

Forced Entertainment sind bereits seit 1997 mit SPIELART verbunden und zeigten hier im Laufe der letzten Jahre neun Theaterarbeiten. Bei der diesjährigen Festivalausgabe sind nun drei ihrer mehrstündigen Stücke zu sehen, die man schon jetzt als Klassiker des experimentellen Theaters bezeichnen kann. SPEAK BITTERNESS wird am 31.10. gezeigt, AND ON THE THOUSANDTH NIGHT am 8.11.2019.

2.11. 17 – 23 Uhr

Einlass jederzeit möglich

HochX

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kind of narrative kaleidoscope, an optical toy where you turn the wheel and the pattern changes. It's almost a machine for making stories, or throwing up the possibilities for stories. And we didn't like them to interact too much because at the point where they did so the machinery stopped. The sense of endless possibility stopped. You thought, "well now we're deep in some silly nonsense between Elvis and A Bloke Who's Just Been Shot," and that's just not very interesting. It's much more interesting to let the machine continue to operate, to let the combinations keep moving, and let all the story-making stuff go on in the minds of the viewer. That's where all of the work is happening.

JK: How does the piece move from sequence to sequence?

TE: Basically everybody's kind of on their own track, constantly finding clothing, finding a cardboard sign, presenting themselves for as long or as short a time as they like, and then when they're finished they go and get another one. Meanwhile, the other performers in the space are doing the same thing. It's fluid, organic, interwoven.

JK: Is it always the same in each performance?

TE: No it's totally different. Improvised in real time. They don't know each other's tracks. That's the case with all of the long pieces we've done. With one exception, *Marathon Lexicon*, they're never fixed. The long works are basically rule structures inside which the performers are free to operate, making real decisions about what they do next in reaction to what the others are doing, what the audience is doing, and what they feel like.

JK: So there's no way to talk about development in them, because it would be a different development in each performance?

TE: Yeah, that's interesting. The durationals find a new shape each time they are presented, within the parameters that are possible. We're not really interested in them as ways to create outrageous narrative or developmental arcs though! They tend to be quite flat in that sense -- to travel is better than to arrive kind of thing. You might best think of them as landscapes of endless variation... but in which no change is permanent. It's flux.

One aspect of shape that is predictable or recurrent though are physiological or other rhythms. For instance, if a performance like *Speak Bitterness* or *And On The Thousandth Night...* is six hours long, the performers get tired and there is usually a certain hysteria by hour five. You are generally trying too hard in hour one. So you can say certain things about the shape and rhythm of those pieces, but it's not written or dramatically forced. What's allowed to happen in all of the durationals is that the performers step into the space, begin, and then play, and then at the end it's finished. In a way it's like football, or any sport: you know what the rules are, you know who the players are, but you don't know what will transpire inside the set of rules. Anyway, we found these durational works tremendously liberating because they confirmed for us that you don't have to give something new every ten minutes in a theater piece -- simple structures can go a long way. In the 1980s, when we started making work, we had this rather pop-video-driven idea that everything should change all the time. New things needed to happen every minute.

JK: You once said that channel-surfing was the model for your work up to a certain point, and then you got tired of it and discarded it.

TE: Yes. But the way it seems now is that there are -- to put it crudely -- two approaches to the problem of theater for us. One is to try to put more into it than is sensible: fill it, overload it, and see if we can blow it up. The other is to starve it, take as much out of it as we possibly can. So at the too-much end you get shows like *Club of No Regrets* or *Bloody Mess*, which is ten people, with everybody on a separate mission or track. It borders on incoherence, and has this simultaneous, multi-tasking, channel-hopping thing. On the other hand, you get something like *Dirty Work*, which was made a few years before that, or other pieces we've made more recently, where it's an hour and twenty minutes, two people, and they sit and talk, describing a theater show which doesn't happen. That's all it is. So there's a starvation diet on one hand and an excess diet on the other. Crudely, those are the bipolar attractions of our group. We seem to swing madly between the one and the other.

JK: You've spoken about your personal impulses. I wonder, whether the durational works were also responding to anything in the historical moment of the early 1990s.

TE: Well, I do think this work of long duration challenges patterns of consumption. If people are used to the idea that what they're going to watch will last an hour and half and in that time it will serve them up something nicely packaged with a bow on top, then making something that is sprawling in time makes out-of-the-ordinary and difficult demands. I mean, if you want to see the whole of a twelve-hour piece, that makes an unreasonable demand. Engaging with the time-frame knocks you into a different kind of relationship to the work. You can't go in with the attitude, "Okay, entertain me." It's a very different contract. And for some people that has not been possible. The work is not of interest to them. But for other people it has really opened a door. They could find that this work spoke to them more than other things.

I think a lot of what we do is look for ways to make intense connections to the audience. At the time we started making the durational works it seemed possible to make a different kind of connection that way than we could with the ninety-minute theater work. For sure, we tried different strategies in the theater work. But it seemed to me that stretching the time, making a different kind of social demand on the audience, a demand that wasn't necessarily sensible or comprehensible, was a leap forward. Perhaps it's too much to talk about these things being against commodification, because they're usually ticketed and people have to pay to go in, but they *are* against commodification in the sense that they are hard to grasp. I mean, you can't just pick the event up and say, "that's what that was," because it is different every time and you can't really even see it as a whole. The event slips through your fingers as you try to pick it up, and that seems really important. Politically, it's no accident that these pieces began on the back of the 80s and rolling into the 90s, which was an intensely commodified time. One of our responses to the culture of channel-hopping, the culture of packaging and presentation, the short, the sharp and the quick, quick, quick, was to slow down. Let's just take twelve hours over something, and see who stays.

http://hotreview.org/articles/timetchellsint_print.htm

12 AM: AWAKE & LOOKING DOWN

Forced Entertainment

The Long and the Short of It: An Interview with Tim Etchells

By Jonathan Kalb

Jonathan Kalb: Can you describe the rule structure for *12 a.m. Awake and Looking Down*?

Tim Etchells: Okay. There are two sets of clothes rails at the sides with a whole lot of second-hand clothing on them, and underneath those are a lot of cardboard signs. They're just cardboard packaging with names written of about 150 characters. There's a wide range. Some are made-up figures: "The Hypnotized Girl," "A Stewardess Forgetting Her Divorce," or "Frank, Drunk." These are the kind of figures you might see if you're walking in the city and say to yourself, "oh yeah, The Staggering Man." But alongside these there are also real figures: Jack Ruby is in there, and Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space. Likewise figures from fiction. Banquo's Ghost is in there, Lolita, Mad Max. So the catalogue we are working with presents an odd mix of real, fictitious, and urban mythological names.

What the performers do over the course of the piece is choose signs from the stacks of signs, then choose clothes from the clothes rails, dress themselves, and then present themselves as if to say, "I am now this person." Meanwhile, another performer – there are five of them – will take different clothes and a different sign and present himself or herself as another person. They don't speak. They present themselves either as static figures or include a little bit of motion. So maybe "The Hypnotized Girl" might sway slightly with her eyes raised to the heavens, or someone playing "Lost Lisa," might grab a coat and sunglasses and hold the sign, then wander round the space looking like she's lost. Some of the acting is very demonstrative, very cartoon-like and simple. Sometimes it looks a little bit more filmic, so you might get "Frank, Drunk" on a chair at the back of the space, with Richard staying there with the sign for five minutes, just swaying slightly. But the other performers contrast him by changing costumes very fast and grabbing signs and stuff. You can see in the background that Richard is still there, swaying with his "Frank, Drunk" thing, but at some point he will break that and go grab another sign and some different clothes.

This is the basic mechanism of the piece. I suppose the other rule in it is that you don't much interact with the other people. So you get these situations where "Elvis Presley, The Dead Singer" is standing at the front and "A Nine Year Old Shepherd Boy" comes to stand beside him; there might be a moment of eye contact or a little look between these two figures, but that will be it. They don't get into complicated improv where they join up together to make a story. And I suppose one of the things that fascinated us when we were making the piece was the way that these independent fragments of story and character kind of floated in the space. You had this feeling that there could be narrative involving "Valentina Tereshkova" and "Jack Ruby", even though they just glided past each other. As they're moving past each other your brain wonders, "what is that? What happened? What is that?" Then it dissolves again. So we've talked about this work as a