

# Danswetenschap in Nederland

## *Deel 8*

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## **Inhoud**

<b>Redactioneel</b>	7
<b>I Redactioneel thema</b>	9
Invitation to the Dance Performance as Proposition by <i>Hanneke Koolen</i>	11
<b>II Stand van zaken in de Nederlandse dans</b>	17
Over verschuivende posities, perspectieven en relaties Terugblik op de dansseizoenen 2012-2013 en 2013-2014 door <i>Marcelle Schots</i>	19
<b>III Recent onderzoek</b>	27
Small Stories, Unfulfilled Narrative Scripts 'Making Sense' of the Experimental Theatre Performance <i>the fault lines</i> by <i>Bram van Leuveren and Thom van Duuren</i>	29
Dance Medicine in The Netherlands An Update from Dance Related Research in the Medical Centre for Dancers and Musicians by <i>Anandi van Loon-Felter</i>	40
Associative Writing and the Lecture Performance by <i>Jochem Naafs</i>	51
<b>IV Proefschrift / Proefschrift in wording</b>	59
Rewriting Distance On Improvisation as a Research Practice by <i>Guy Cools</i>	61
All of the Person Kinaesthetic Explorations of the Dancer's Gaze by <i>Jeroen Fabius</i>	69
Dance for Solidarity Uniting Dancers and Audience Through Movement by <i>Aafke van Mourik Broekman, Tom Postmes,     Ernestine Gordijn, Namkje Koudenburg and Kirsten Krans</i>	79

Improvise or Else? by <i>João da Silva</i>	89
<b>V Masterscripties</b>	99
Thoughts of Suspension Boris Charmatz's <i>Levée des Conflits</i> and Walter Benjamin's Angel of History by <i>Jessie Eggers</i>	101
Het is een jongen Hoe inversie toegepast kan worden op beweging en interactie in dans door <i>Maarten van Grootel</i>	105
Dance Technique in Higher Education Teaching Dance for Understanding by <i>Jacqueline de Kuijper</i>	109
Eerst kijken, dan zien Onderzoek naar de mogelijke waarden van een kinderdansvoorstelling voor de basisschoolleerling door <i>Josephine Voets</i>	115
<b>VI Professional masterscripties</b>	121
Activism in Motion The Political in the Israeli Dance World by <i>Orly Almi</i>	123
A Shift of Scale by <i>Christina Ciupke</i>	128
Choreographic Writing and the Reading-Movement by <i>Emilie Gallier</i>	132
Audience Participation in Dance Performances: Why Bother? by <i>Leah Jacob</i>	138
Improfecation A Closer Look at the Common Denominators of Interdisciplinary Improvisation by <i>Athalie de Koning</i>	143
Dans en sport Een onderzoek naar de overeenkomsten en verschillen vanuit het perspectief van kinderen door <i>Laura Kool</i>	148

Only for You Eventually Becoming Subject of Performance by <i>Ayşe Orhon</i>	152
(Not) Knowing A Research on 'Some Thing' in Choreography by <i>Annika Pannitto</i>	158
Disorganized Bodies and the Act of Choreographing for the Screen by <i>Artémise Ploegaerts</i>	162
The <i>Figure</i> A Leap of Sensation by <i>Tomaž Simatović</i>	166
Flow in Ballet An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Flow Experiences in Ballet by <i>Argyro Tsampazi</i>	170
De ervaring van kinesthetische empathie door dansvakstudenten door <i>Sanne Wichman</i>	173
<b>Selecte bibliografie</b>	177
<b>Personalia</b>	182
<b>Colofon</b>	191

## Associative Writing and the Lecture Performance

By Jochem Naafs

Ever since Xavier Le Roy presented *Product of Circumstances* in 1999, the dance scene has found a form in which it is able to communicate dance through words without losing some of its key elements: the lecture performance. However, the lecture performance has a longer history and tradition, which could be traced back to Joshua Reynolds' public lectures in 1769, as Gabrielle de Vietri points out in her thesis (2013).

I was educated as a theatre scholar. I was educated to watch theatre, dance, performance and write about it: a thesis, an article or an essay. After I graduated I realized I could not only express my thoughts through the written word. I created a performance based on my first thesis, and a lecture performance based on my second one. The latter gave me the opportunity to combine a scientific and an artistic approach. I was intrigued by the possibilities and during my following research I decided to create another one. I combine teaching, dramaturgy, research and making theatre in my everyday life. Or, I should say, I do all these things, but I do not often actually combine or merge them.

In this article I wish to contextualize the lecture performance by looking into two specific examples. The first being the previously mentioned *Product of Circumstances* and the second being *Projecting on Der (kommende) Aufstand nach andcompany&Co.* that I created in 2011. The next section is the script of the first scene from this lecture performance.<sup>1</sup>

### An example

*Jochem Naafs enters the stage in everyday clothing. He puts one chair on stage, and another, he puts a lectern on stage and a printed text on the lectern. A glass bell with underneath it an egg box follows this. He takes a look at the stage. He moves a chair. Looks again. Removes the chair. He reads a disclaimer out loud:*

Disclaimer for Our Enemies

Authorities take note: No members of the [andcompany&Co. workshop] endorse or engage in any of the dumb and dangerous activities described herein. As middle-class beneficiaries of capitalist iniquity, we have no incentive to contest the structures that guarantee our special privileges, nor do we ever do so – just ask our colleagues. The 'we' utilized in [this presentation] is the [artistic] we: it refers to all those whose actions proceed from the social continuum of antiauthoritarian resistance, and does not necessarily denote any of the editors of, contributors to, or hangers-on associated with this work. We're so busy cashing in on others' insurgency that we wouldn't have time to participate even if we wanted to – honest [...]!

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<sup>1</sup> In this script the text in italics are stage directions.

Your potential inconvenience, [andcompany&Co.]<sup>2</sup>

In July 2011 I joined a workshop by andcompany&Co. in Amsterdam. The workshop addressed various issues related to both art and politics. After a week of working we presented some outcomes in a kind of pop up presentation. I, as I did during our presentation in July 2011 start with a disclaimer for our enemies: a disclaimer for all those who do not see the benefits of the arts for our current and future society; for all those who fear to invest in something they do not understand, something that they cannot express in figures, in currency; for all those who are afraid of the unknown, the strange, the stranger, the other. I use *we* because this is the form we used in our presentation, not because I assume to talk for others than myself.

*Thinks again*

I use *we* because I can use *we*. I use *we* because I silenced you and I can talk for you. I use *we* because I think *we* think this is important. Direct action is something that still seems to be missing. We have ideas, but do not defend them, we do not associate, we do not gather. Maybe we are still not threatened enough to set up camp on the city square, or maybe we do not care.

### **An analysis**

This was the first scene of the lecture performance *Projecting on Der (kommende) Aufstand nach andcompany&Co.* which I performed eight times in various settings varying from an academic symposium to an underground festival. I would like to elaborate a little on what is written.

Before I start the actual *lecture*, I am creating a stage image, consciously not speaking. By doing this I am communicating that this will not be your average lecture, without actually having to explain this. (Most of the time I present this lecture performance in a lecture setting.) Furthermore this functions as a visual translation of an outline of the lecture: these are the things I will speak about.

This initial action is followed by a quote from the book *Recipes for Disaster, an Anarchist Cookbook* (2004), which I have adjusted and recited myself during the workshop that I took with the performance group in July 2011. It could be seen as starting point for both my own creation process and the process of andcompany&Co. At the same time it is the point where these two processes started to live separate lives. Because of the type of language used in the quote it also seems to disturb the audience and creates a certain distance between the audience and myself.

The quote is succeeded by the actual description of the start of the research project (although I did not start officially until a few months later). At the same time it functions as an introduction to the theatre group andcompany&Co., which is discussed in the lecture performance. The last paragraph of the first scene described above, stresses the power of theatre and of the lecture. It is also the first time you hear me talking as myself, as a

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<sup>2</sup> This part of the script is a partially rewritten quote from CrimthInc. Workers Collective. (2004). *Recipes for Disaster. An Anarchist Cookbook*. Olympia: CrimthInc. Workers Collective. p. 6

citizen instead of as a theatre scholar or dramaturg. I am using the theatre to speak about the things I think are important. I am using my authority as a scholar to address social issues.

All in all I use already a variety of voices and strategies in this initial scene, switching between a more academic, objective perspective, a more artistic perspective and a more personal, subjective perspective. Doing this not only reflects my position in both the process of andcompany&Co. and the research process, but also reflects some of the strategies the theatre group uses itself: associative jumps, quoting, playing with the relation between actor and character et cetera. Later on I also use actual quotes from the performance as well as other sources that where of influence to the group, and I combine the English language with both Dutch and German like they do.

### **Teaching as art and artistic research**

1999 formed the start of a revival and new interpretation of the lecture performance, which might have set off with Xavier Le Roy's *Product of Circumstances*. As Patricia Milder points out in her article *Teaching as Art. The Contemporary Lecture-Performance: 'a part of the inner workings of a traditional form is explored through the language of the emancipated—talking—dancer'* (2011, p.19) in this performance.

Other choreographers and theatre makers also used this strategy, like Jérôme Bel in his performances *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* (2005) and *Véronique Doisneau* (2004). These performances emancipate not only the performer, but the audience as well, by sharing insights on the discipline of performance through that same discipline. This is what I intend to do in my work too. The lecture performance makes explicit use of intermediality in its hypermedial form. It absorbs all media into the performance.

*There is an intricacy in the form; the relevant question is (...) how the precise construction of the form serves to hold and disseminate the message, meaning, and direct impact of a work of this nature's true substance: progressive thought.* (Milder, 2011, pp.26-27)

Milder also points towards a longer tradition in which twentieth-century artists from various disciplines 'have used lecture-performance to blur the lines separating art from discourse about art. In contemporary performance, artists are continuing, in this tradition, to push past the boundaries of disciplines (...) as well as the boundaries between art and life' (2011, p.13). This interdisciplinary and even transdisciplinary approach is seen a lot in contemporary art. The lecture performance is specific in that sense that it blurs the boundary between teaching and performing, between education and art (Milder 2011, De Vietri 2013). The lecture performance could be understood as 'teaching-as-art' according to Milder (2011, p.13).

Gabrielle de Vietri writes in her thesis

*that teaching has long been a profession with which artists complement their practice (...); that artists have lectured publicly about their ideas since at least Joshua Reynolds's public lectures in 1769<sup>3</sup>; that artists are often also involved in activities which prioritise verbal delivery (...); and that the social aspects of*

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<sup>3</sup> Joshua Reynolds was an eighteenth-century painter from and founder of the Royal Academy where he held a series of lectures, *Discourses*, between 1769 and 1790.



*art have accompanied practices in official (...) and informal (...) ways. (2013, p.30)*

She argues that many artists have performed lectures in the past centuries, but that they are not perceived as performance. Could the lecture performance only originate as a deliberate form because of the technology of video that allowed the artist to document and share the lecture as an art form?

*The post-factum dissemination of the lectures was still based primarily in writing. It remained this way until the 1960s and 1970s, when artists began to have access to the equipment that allowed them to document such events as performances, happenings and lectures. (2013, p.32)*

De Vietri does point towards something else. The 'didactic tradition of the artist-writer' (2013, p.32) that is related to the artist-as-teacher in the sense that both traditions combine the artistic practice and the practice of sharing knowledge about this practice. De Vietri emphasizes that the lecture-performance was able to break its ties with the written word. Nevertheless, I think it is interesting to look at the distinction Jan Svenungsson has made in various categories of artists' texts in his paper *The Writing Artist* (2009). He distinguishes five categories that could be applied to lecture performances:

- *Expressive me-focused storytelling in the first person*
  - *Methodical revelation of (philosophical) truths*
  - *Systematic revelation of technical and pedagogical truths*
  - *Literary experimentation, with content in the open and in disguise*
  - *Well-referenced academic writing with further ambitions*
- (Svenungsson, 2009)

As often, it is hard to find one category that fits a specific example (as opposed to finding an example that illustrates a category). Le Roy's performance could be categorized within Svenungsson's first category of artist texts, but also holds strong elements of the third one. My own lecture performance could be seen as a combination of the third and fourth category in the sense that I combine an educational and an experimental approach.

The lecture performance expects the artist to put his thoughts in words and utter them while performing. It combines 'artistic activity and scientific and scholarly research' (Svenungsson, 2009). The communality of these two approaches is clear. 'The drive is curiosity, in both cases. The fundamental difference is that artistic activity's primary product is not knowledge, but the inspiration — to search for knowledge.' (Svenungsson, 2009) If you combine the two, the searching for knowledge is flanked by a certain reflective, investigative, analytical attitude. The examples that Svenungsson gives take various approaches in doing so. He also recognizes a similarity within all these approaches: 'My point is that all these writers (...) employ tricks and play games in order to achieve the rich, multi-layered and ambiguous goals they have set for their texts.' (Svenungsson, 2009) One of the strategies I use in creating the text for a lecture performance is a quite specific approach to writing. In the next section I would like to illustrate this.

## **Associative writing**

I am not sure when I first realized I did it. Was it after I organized an after talk for the performance SHIROKURO (Beutler, Mukaiyama and Kalman 2012) at Theater Kikker in Utrecht? Or later, when I wrote a report based on a conversation. Or was it much earlier? When I was creating the lecture performance *Projecting on Der (kommende) Aufstand nach andcompany&Co.?* In any case I now know I have been doing it much longer: just writing. Writing to structure my thoughts, writing to gather material, writing to elaborate minutes, writing to report, writing to gain new insights. I open a booklet or an empty document (preferably in text editor) and I start. Often there is some kind of occasion; a title follows. But from there it could go into any direction. That does not mean that it is completely free. I associate and connect. I start writing and I always create complete sentences and complete paragraphs. But the paragraph that follows could contain something completely different, something that pops up in my thoughts when writing.

When I think too much about this method, I get stuck. I force myself to associate, instead of just write. Actually the writing is taking minutes of the event and the event itself at the same time. As I wrote in the script of the lecture performance previously mentioned:

*Ik ben verslaggever. Ik ben journalist. Ik geef een verslag van een gebeurtenis aan degene die alleen het resultaat van de gebeurtenis kennen.*

*Ik sta met mijn rug naar het publiek omdat ik ook publiek ben.*

*Ik beschrijf de revolutie aan degene die alleen de nieuwe machthebbers kennen.*

*Ik beschrijf een proces van een product. Een proces waarvan ik zelf maar momenten heb meegemaakt.* (Naafs, 2011)

This is part of this process: Insert quotes within my own text; quotes of others and myself. In the end it is not necessary interesting to know if something is a quote or not. Or indeed, it is important to know, but it is just as important to ignore. It becomes part of the method of writing. I normally rewrite or retype the quote instead of using copy-paste.

This method – when I start thinking about it – is maybe a method of making rather than a method of researching. It is a way of gathering and formulating research results and insights, but at the same time it does not lead to clear insights in my methodology, process or insights. In any case not in the way I was taught at university. Partially the form in which it cumulates obviates this. The written text itself, or the spoken version of it, offers new insights to the reader or listener. The form of the lecture performance – something that could be positioned somewhere halfway the lecture and the performance, stretches this even further. The form in which the content is communicated adds to, replaces, underlines, flanks, deflects the content itself. The form becomes content.

Partially this is also the problem: the form is created, the content investigated. The method decides for a great part the results and the insights gained by the research, without this being consciously thought over. But is this a problem? I do not know (yet). In any case I do not pretend to be an objective bystander when I research something. I have an influence and I underline this. The process that I have investigated had been different because of my presence. My research process has been different because of the presence of the process I have investigated.

This all accumulated in *Projecting on Der (kommende) Aufstand nach andcompany&Co.* (2011). This lecture performance addresses at the same time:

1. The creative process of the performance *Der (kommende) Aufstand nach Schiller* by the German performance collective andcompany&Co.;
2. The changes in attitude towards arts and culture in the Netherlands since 2010;
3. The way in which the process of andcompany&Co. had changed me as a citizen;
4. The making process of the lecture performance itself.

If I had tried to combine all these things consciously in one research project, I would have never succeeded. If I kept myself to my original research question, hypothesis and method of research, I would have gotten stuck. Indeed, I got stuck, and this is why I just started writing. Like I did now.

### **Performative research**

In his lecture performance Xavier Le Roy says the following: 'I realized that research in biology was a lot about power and "politics" and rarely about an understanding of the human body which was actually my interest.' (1999) Le Roy presented his thesis in 1990 and then decided to quit his career as a molecular biologist. He says: 'I escaped. I decided to do more dance'. And continues, 'Thinking became a corporeal experience. My body became simultaneously active and productive, object and subject, analyzer and analyzed, product and producer.' (Le Roy, 1999)

The lecture performance as a form provides both artist-as-teachers and artistic researcher with a performative mode of sharing ideas, insights, questions and the process of searching. It is devised for performative research as well as a means to publish through performing. The artist is allowed to take 'a fluid approach to the content of [his] delivery, with a view to 'educate' not through imparting skills and knowledge, but through provocation, suggestion and confusion' (De Vietri, 2013, p.52). Furthermore it allows the performer to merge the objective and subjective perspective. In the words of Le Roy, when referring to the challenge he was given when he was asked to present something about biology and performance: 'I could not write a "real" paper, lecture or discussion. So I decided to stay at a personal level and give some information about possibilities of exchange I experienced as a support for different thoughts.'

Finally the temporary character of the lecture performance in combination with the expected live presence of both artist and spectator allows it to combine both the artefact that is created and the process that created it. The lecture performance is able to speak about itself, when at the same time it is not completely there yet.

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