

Dramaturgy and contemporary theatre dance

A response to a congress of Dansmakers Amsterdam

Theo van Loon

On December 4th 2009 Dansmakers Amsterdam has organized a high quality congress titled 'Perspectives on potential dance dramaturgies.' The word 'potential' is revealing. All participants and contributors emphasized that they had no pretence to possess an all-covering model to analyse the dramaturgical aspects of dance. What they did was presenting various ways to approach the term 'dramaturgy' in order to enhance the probabilities of high quality dance productions. The level of this one day congress was high, and the same can be said about the report edited by Suzy Blok, Barbara Krulik and Elien van Riet. A fine impression of the day is to be found in the summary by Bregtje Schudel at the end of the booklet.

In this contribution to the discussion I'll examine the theory-aimed lectures held by Mrs. Professor Maaïke Bleeker, holder of the chair of Theatre Studies at Utrecht University, and by Bojana Cvejić, an active theorist in this field and, in theatre practice, as a dramaturge and a performing artist.

Massumi and Wittgenstein

Maaïke Bleeker opposes to the idea that dramaturgy can be isolated from a dance piece, or that it would be a discipline to which dance should be subjected. Dramaturgy rather is a way of approaching dance, a form of reflection that makes us aware of the ways we look at a dance piece and interpret it. This is done via the rules and conventions that prevail in our culture. By elucidating them we can obtain a grip on the ways the elements of a dance piece get meaning, both within that piece and via its relations with contemporary and historical dance. This way of observing dance is not the privilege of the person who is assigned as the dramaturge of the company; a good choreographer has such moments of reflection as well.

For her presentation Maaïke Bleeker has given herself the assignment to deepen our insight in these processes. She has done so via two comparisons. In the first place she has analysed the concept of watching via an anecdote that was included in the book *Parables for the virtual* (2002) by Brian Massumi. Watching consciously is just one of the manners to perceive the world around us. This becomes clear by the way he was for a long time mistaken in the orientation of his office. Its windows turned out to be not oriented to the north, but to the east. Unconsciously he ignored the visual signals he got on a daily basis on his way to his office, or interpreted them in a wrong way. He did so because of the signals his body got unconsciously about the different directions it went. So, the visual signals turn out to be only a part of the sensory impressions we get continuously.

However, the visual impressions seem to me the most important for the spectators, with the auditory signals on second place, being text and music. A body orientation you are not conscious of, which is the point of Massumi's anecdote, is of no relevance for dance audiences. Furthermore it is, to say the least, somewhat awkward in this comparison that the orientation of an office in a building can be

found out unambiguously by pictures¹. The question whether a perception of an art work is correct or not is much harder to settle.

A comparison with Wittgenstein's language games is the second point in Maaïke Bleekers address, with which she clarified that dance can only be understood within a context. In this statement she made use of an article by Alva Noë, titled 'Making worlds available', to be found in *Knowledge in motion; perspectives of artistic and scientific research in dance*. Noë is a professor in Berkeley, California, and specialized in the relations between perception and consciousness. In the article mentioned he connects a method invented by Lisa Nelson to introduce dancers to improvisation with Wittgenstein's language games. In a 'Tuning score', which is the term used by Nelson, the dancers enter the stage with their eyes closed. They seek contact with each other via a limited number of words like 'repeat', 'undo', 'enhance' and 'end'. Simple as they are, a space is required for these assignments, and at least one dancer and at least one clue, 'end' for example. Herewith basic demands are met for language acts as analysed by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical investigations [P.I.]*. Together the four assignments mentioned ('repeat' etc.) are a mini-language as discussed in *PI*, part 1, par. 2. In later paragraphs Wittgenstein deals with the matter that the language acts in our daily lives can only be understood within a context, because they are part of common language acts like giving an order or describing an object. These are two of the fifteen examples Wittgenstein mentions in *PI* deel 1, par. 23, all of them referring to language acts we can perform in our daily existence. So, Noë stretches the notion of language game considerably, when he applies it to Nelson's Tuning scores. What we can say is that countless Tuning scores have been played, and that all these games together can be called, with a less austere use of the term, a language game. However, Maaïke Bleeker does not mention the connection in Noë's article between these language games and the games invented by Lisa Nelson. Herewith she breaks down the connection between the performance and a general practice. She actually connects the concept of language game with one dance piece, being *Artifact* by William Forsythe. The concept of language game is overstretched here, because it is fundamentally in conflict with Wittgenstein's argument to consider an isolated dance piece or text as a language game that provides a meaning to an act or a word. As said, he analyses general language phenomena, and not a singular event like Forsythe's piece.

Furthermore, body movements are the fundamental material for dance, and you can bring up arguments in any number you want, body movements are no language.² This is even true for a meaningful act as laying a hand on somebody else's shoulder. This act has a meaning like offering a friend consolation, or to show him your pleasure during a party. The same act, on the street vis-à-vis a stranger who asks you to show him the way to e.g. the railway station, is, in our culture, strange

¹ One has to mark the office's windows with e.g. a brightly coloured light produced with a spotlight with a red filter, placed in that office. Then pictures should be made from outside the building wherein the marked office window is visible plus the buildings around it. Street signs in the picture, showing the name of the streets, are helpful in this. The division of light and shadow over the building is, combined with the time the picture has been taken, is decisive.

² This critical remark holds for Bleeker's lecture, but for Noë's article as well.

and obtrusive. Most dance movements don't have such culturally fixed meanings, and a full-fledged grammar for them is blatantly missing. It's wise to let yourself be inspired by a philosopher of the status of Wittgenstein, but one should keep aware of the elements of dance where the comparison loses ground.

However, the main tenor of Maaïke Bleeker's presentation is undeniably correct: what we perceive consciously is a far-reaching interpretation of everything that reaches our senses, and it is determined by conventions.

A friend of a problem

In the beginning of her presentation Bojana Cvejić asked a few questions: dance-dramaturgy? Yes, but who by, for and with? Where and when? How, in which case and how much?" About the position of the dramaturge in a dance company she said: "I will contest dance dramaturgy in a specific condition of project-based freelance work – something we used to refer to as 'independent'. If there should be a dramaturg, she isn't a staff member of a company or a repertoire theatre – someone who occupies a position of know-how, craft, or *métier dramaturg*." So, not attached to a company. Then the dramaturge, in Cvejić' view, is by nature an independent and free-lance functionary. But such a position she said she would **contest**. Based on the rest of her presentation, I can only draw the conclusion that here the text should be: 'defend'. Please pay attention to the particle 'she' in: "she isn't a staff member". It's irritating that, in her text, referring to a dramaturge, she uses the female particle constantly. The theme of man versus woman is important to Cvejić obviously, seeing the fact that she pays attention to the question whether the English word is 'dramaturg' or 'dramaturge'³ "Adding 'e' appears as a feminine ending – a playful warning against the feminization of work." A warning? One can call it a plea for feminization as well. Furthermore Cvejić mentions the result of research here that feminization "presupposes a transformation of labour from manufacturing objects to producing services." Nowhere in the rest of her presentation she gives proof of such a shift, and her own proposals don't imply it either.

In four points she indicates in what ways she wants to give the function of dramaturge a more balanced content than usual so far. In the first place she objects to a role division between choreographer and dramaturge as mute doers versus bodiless thinkers and writers.

Next she opposes herself against the cliché that the dramaturge is by definition an outsider in the creative process. A competent choreographer has the capability as well to step back sometimes, and to imagine himself in someone else's way of seeing.

In fierce terms Cvejić opposes herself against the role of the dramaturge to make the dance piece as understandable as possible. This makes him a pedagogue who places himself "in the priestly or masterly position of the one who knows bet-

³ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary only mentions: dramaturge.

ter, who can predict what the audience /will/ see, think, feel, like or dislike.” /.../ “My position would be to fiercely object to the stultification of this kind – the patronizing preposition that the audience won’t understand if they aren’t properly – *dramaturgically* – guided.”

What is it that she wants? “/.../ dramaturges could be concerned about how the performance is made public. /.../ It’s an effort to articulate, find new appropriate formats, in order to make public, indeed, the specific ideas, processes and practices – the immaterial envelope of labour and knowledge sustaining the very work. /.../ It’s more a challenge to combat hermiticism – to think how to make knowledge about performance-making available – and perhaps interesting – *outside* its own discipline.” For sure, these are respectable targets, but I only can, reading the words ‘to make public’ connect these activities with the job of a publicity manager of a dance company or another organization in this field, or with an in-depth reportage of a dance journalist. But this part of Cvejić’s argument was about a specific dance piece that, by the activities of a dramaturge, is made more accessible for the public, which is another subject fundamentally. Furthermore, the rhetorical violence she uses here is annoying: “in the priestly or masterly position of the one who knows better ...” and “the patronizing preposition that the audience won’t understand if they aren’t properly – *dramaturgically* – guided.” Any educative work can be ridiculed this way, also the ones based on the indicated targets. And concerning the support a dramaturge can give to the work on a specific piece: what is priestly or patronizing about critical remarks such as: “To understand this symbol you need knowledge almost nobody in this country possesses.” Or: “This heavy emotional outburst (e.g. yelling or crying) must be prepared in a better way. Now it comes in too unexpectedly.” People who are capable to criticise a piece in a sensitive and competent way are dearly needed in the dance world.

Strikingly bitter are the words by which Cvejić denounces the role of the dramaturge as the psycho-therapist of the dance company. “This dark and shameful side of dramaturgy is worth mentioning only to make crystal clear that the moment that [the] dramaturg is relegated to the role of ‘caretaker’ of the moods and tensions in a working process /.../ she has lost the power of creation, and perhaps, even joy.”

The moment that creativity and joy in the work are lost is earlier in the process, in case conflicts had taken the upper hand. It’s not easy to intervene in such a situation, but when you succeed in this, in a way based on your personal authority and wisdom, you are a blessing for the company. This has nothing to do with the function of a dramaturge; sometimes the company’s secretary can play this role as well.

The dramaturge is, according to Cvejić, the choreographer’s collaborator and the co-thinker, but in a special way: he cooperates in the creation of a problem. He is “the choreographer’s closest friend in producing a problem. A friend in advocating an experiment, and an enemy of complacency. The dramaturg is there to make sure that the process doesn’t compromise in experiment.” Then Cvejić examined the concept of ‘friend’ via a recent publication of Giorgio Agamben. “Calling someone ‘friend’ is not the same as calling him ‘white’, ‘Italian’ or ‘hot’, since friendship is neither a property nor a quality of a subject ... To recognize someone as a friend not

being able to recognize him as something.” This is a rather puzzling passage. A game is played with the concrete word ‘friend’ and the abstract word ‘friendship’. It’s obvious that the meaning of a word like ‘friendship’ can’t contain a concrete aspect like ‘white’.⁴ Thinking about the concepts of ‘friend’ and ‘friendship’ notions like ‘loyal’ and ‘reliable’ are hard to avoid, so these concepts are not vague at all. But it’s only in a metaphorical way that a connection can be made with the quotations about ‘producing a problem’ and ‘advocating an experiment’. The remark about ‘not being able to recognize him as something’ I can only understand as the notion that, when a real friend is concerned, one doesn’t realize that friendship, because it is so self-evident. But by definition this is not the case with a ‘friendship’ to an experiment. The moment you think about it, you are aware of that thinking.

After these introductory characterizations, Cvejić comes to the central concepts of her thinking about dramaturgy. A kindred soul with the choreographer obviously is required, otherwise you’ll not start a cooperation. Concerning the dance piece, the two of them should start from a position of ignorance. The one has no higher position than the other, so they resemble two ignorant people who start reading a book they don’t know how to read. In this case the book is the theatre piece, and as a matter of fact they don’t read it, but they write it. Concerning the concept of ignorance, Cvejić refers to a parable by Jacques Rancière, ‘The Ignorant Schoolmaster, Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation’, a plea for emancipation in pedagogy.⁵ “/Rancière opposes this kind of pedagogy/ to instruction, because it’s a situation of learning something about which both master and student are ignorant. Learning then rests on the assumption of equality of intelligence /.../” This sounds very sympathetic, but I wonder when a teacher can show off an ignorance in a believable way. You should try to imagine how to teach a child this way to make a long division. It will simply not work, and this will be by far more so in a class of, say, twenty children. Only in a class about the political and economic institutions in a country such a pedagogy is conceivable, because the outcome of the discussions might be different each time, and the opinions of the teachers don’t have to prevail necessarily. The only teaching situation wherein a equality between teacher and pupil is possible is when a student writes a PhD thesis, under custody of a professor, and even in this case the latter person normally has the advantage of being more experienced in doing research. Furthermore, you have to expand largely the notion of pedagogy to use it for a situation wherein the age of the pupil rarely is under 25.

The notion of ignorance obtains a follow up in Cvejić’s remarks about the terminology in dramaturgy: “‘theme’, or what the work claims to be about, ‘language’ or expression means, signature or aesthetic preferences” etc. She’s convinced that the use of these terms forms a blockade to a deviation from existing dance forms, because they seem to imply a stability in the total of possibilities: “We know what works, and what doesn’t.” Her text continues with: “The production of a problem doesn’t begin with possibilities – they are a matter of knowledge that we

⁴ ‘White’ is taken here as ‘with a light coloured skin.

⁵ Stanford California Press 1991. Translated by K. Ross.

account for as the limits to be pushed – but with ideas that diverge and differentiate the conditions of the new. Gilles Deleuze qualifies creation as virtual. To explain the notion of the virtual, he often cites Proust’s description of his states of experience: ‘real without being actual, ideal without being abstract.’⁶ The content of an idea is virtual, because it is differentiation, a differential relation between elements drawn by a problem, a question.” Please, imagine, a term like ‘virtual’ is introduced here via a philosopher who quotes a French novelist whose use of language is so complicated that only a few of his compatriots understand it. One has to be a student of literature (my field) to understand Proust’s words. So, this explanation of the term ‘virtual’ will help only a few readers. This is one of the cases in the text that Cvejić evokes the suspicion that she doesn’t want to be understood at all; the only thing she wants is to impress her audience. What is meant by: “ideas that diverge and differentiate the conditions of the new”? And what with: “The content of an idea is virtual, because it is differentiation, a differential relation between elements drawn by a problem, a question” ? The terminology resembles the one Derrida has used in *L’Écriture et la différence*.⁷ There Derrida goes into the problem of the interpretation of texts as the difference between an interpretation of the text itself and the various interpretations by its readers. The connection between this matter and the notion of problem as used by Cvejić I don’t understand. NB: the oracle language as quoted here was written as a text for a lecture, so for oral communication. Let us, the audience, take this as a compliment. However, in this lecture ‘problem’ is a key term. Such a problem cannot be phrased in the traditional terminology. “Stating a problem isn’t about uncovering an already existing question or concern, something that was certain to emerge sooner or later. A problem is neither a rhetorical question that can’t be answered. On the contrary, to raise a problem implies constructing terms in which it will be stated, and conditions it will be solved in.”

Cvejić strongly believes in the idea that a knowledge of existing notions about dance, and therewith of the existing terminology, is a hindrance for creativity. This is apparent in her remarks that follow a description of a dance piece that has been made according to the principles described here. The makers were assisted by a professional film maker, but the choreographer and the dramaturge were dilettantes in this field. “Constructing such a hybrid between theatre and cinema meant questioning choreography as well – and when I say that it could have been done only by dilettantes, I’m rhetorically distinguishing a dilettante approach that contests and strives to expand its discipline and medium from an essentialist view on professional craftsmanship. Dilettantes are those who ask questions beyond the specialist truth about the medium.” She doesn’t want a ‘professional craftsmanship’, but rather ‘a methodology of problem.’ “What does the methodology of prob-

⁶ My (TvL’s) interpretation of these words is something like: the world the novelist invents is real for him, though it is not tangible; it is highly structured, but not abstract. Of course, Proust’s phrasing is much more compact and intriguing.

⁷ Paris (Seuil) 1967. English translation: *Writing and difference*, University of Chicago Press 1978.

A clear explanation of the term ‘différence’ in the work of Derrida is to be found in Jonathan Culler’s, *On deconstruction; theory and criticism after structuralism*, London (Routledge & Kegan Paul) 1983.

lem generate? Questions that will clear the ground and slowly eliminate the known possibilities to enable producing a qualitatively new problem /.../. I would say letting go of habits that make the mind lazy and hands routine. /.../ “The result is a new dispositif – not an architectural arrangement but a reconfiguration of attention, meaning that spectators will also have to experience how differently they see, think, feel, instead of leaning back into recognition. The problem will also have the consequence of problematizing or unsettling views and opinions about either what’s being represented or how dance, choreography or performance is treated.”

This sounds ambitious and full of self-confidence. But what is it based on? Concerning the concept of ‘ignorance’: someone who rarely or never had contact with the contemporary theatre dance will almost never have any motivation to make a dance piece him- or herself. And how can such a person obtain the confidence of dance professionals, e.g. the persons who are responsible for the programs in the theatres, even the smallest ones? Which names can Cvejić mention of famous choreographers who brought important innovations, mentioned in any history of the theatre dance, who could be called ‘dilettantes’ in dance in the beginning of the most fertile period of their careers?

Of course she is entitled to propagate with zeal a new way of making dance, but she’s overstating her case in a statement that this is the only possible one in this field.

As said, I can hardly imagine how a cooperation between a choreographer and a dramaturge, as it is described by Cvejić, can come into existence. Of course, people who at first sight are far apart in knowledge and opinions can unexpectedly feel an affinity with each other. I take her words that the pieces *And Then* and *Six Months One Location*, both mentioned by her as examples, are originated in a totally untraditional way. But how was the contact with the dancers? These performers have a keen eye in telling apart the persons with and the ones without knowledge of dance. In any rehearsal scenes that have been danced are referred to with small movements. Someone educated in dance is capable to do so, even when this scene has been visible only once. When you’re not capable to do this, you’re no dancer, and at the most a well-willing outsider. Cvejić seems to have hardly attention for the contributions the dancers can have to a production. It’s a telling detail that in her text the words ‘dancer’ and ‘performer’ hardly occur. I have not come across the word dancer, and performer only twice.

How I imagine a sound cooperation between a choreographer and a dramaturge is perfectly phrased by Liesbeth Wildschut in her article ‘Reinforcement for the choreographer; the dance dramaturge as ally’. “A dance dramaturge who knows to analyze dance material and to define the various aspects, can underpin his interpretation with specific and perceptible observations, and, as a result, can act with more conviction. His arguments are based on his accurate observations, making his feedback more detailed and his remarks more profound. This enhances the communication between the dramaturge and the choreographer (and the dancers) [p. 392].” The down-to-earth language of Wildschut is a relief after reading the oracle text by Cvejić.

In what ways did the ideas mentioned have their consequences in the dance piece *And Then*, which is her main example? The starting point was the fact that dozens, or even hundreds of women, from all over the world, had the name of Eszter Salamon. Interviews with more than a dozen of these namesakes have been the source of an equal number of life stories of ordinary women. However, all this turned out not to be enough as a basis for a dance piece. “It meant stating the obvious knowledge about identity construction and performative self-determination.” “/Then/ the question shifted to challenging the concept of self-determination” /.../ “What’s in a name” became a matter of arbitrariness and coincidence that condition the performance, while the name ‘Eszter Salamon’ functioned metonymically – not as a sign of the congruence of the Salamons, but exactly as a sign for individuation among singular homonyms.” The interviews were registered on video “in a particular studio setting, a *mise-en-cadre*, in which they moved in a space the audience sees in total, while the camera shoots the figures off center in provisional shots, simulating the gaze of the theatre viewer.

Thus the screen could extend into the stage, and vice versa, blurring their boundaries. Performers –Eszter Salamons the homonyms by name and their doubles as a kind of visual homonyms- circulated between the screen and the stage as in one continuous space, split between past and present, documentary and fiction, original statement and self-reflexive comment, non-theatrical imaginary space and bare theatre stage.”

It’s clear that, according to this description, the possibilities of combining video and dance were exploited well, but for a person who has followed in recent years the developments of theatre dance and video reasonably well, this is not very striking. Yet Cvejić maintains that what has happened in *And Then* could only have been done by dilettantes. See above, in the paragraph that starts with “Cvejić strongly believes in the idea ...”, and specifically the quotation “Constructing such a hybrid ...” which in her text follows directly the description of a combination of video and dance.

Quite self-confident (having been involved with the production herself) Cvejić continues to use *And Then* as the example, dealing with the question what the difference is between a choreographer and a dramaturge, even in a good cooperation. “What is it that dramaturg doesn’t share with choreographer? What motivates *her* apart from interest in the specific problematic of the work? To observe how thought arises in expression, and is its material act. This is quite different from the common assumption that dramaturgs come with their concepts and then seek ways to smuggle them in a material form. The problems I’m talking about here do not *represent* pre-formed concepts – they create concepts in expression, which cannot be separated from the situation in which it occurs. Concepts born in expression do not pre-exist and transcend their objects. /.../ One such expressive concept that developed in the making of *And Then* was [a] ‘third space’, a space which doesn’t exist actually, but virtually between screen and stage.

Marked by various cuts between memory and present, and by voices whose bodies disappear or sounds that come outside of the field (*hors-champ*) where what can be heard exceeds what can be seen either on stage or screen-image, the third space became a black zone manoeuvring between a missing context and the reality of the theatre.” This is the most specific description of a part of a piece that’s typical for

the contribution of a dramaturge. “A choreographer can’t invent this” is the conclusion I draw from the previous quotation, beginning as it is with “What is it that dramaturg doesn’t share with choreographer?”

Reading this, I can imagine a kind of radio play, a voice over that has a life of its own, with the space and time that belongs to it. Something like a conversation of a couple in a car driving in a town or in the countryside, which is perceptible by the background sounds. One can dispense of words too, for example with sounds, coming from all directions, of a wood in springtime with lots of birdsongs. On stage there might be a dance that shows, covered with lots of beauty, a harsh struggle for a high place in the hierarchy and a large territory. This way the birdsongs are unmasked as a weapon in the struggle for life. Who knows this is an idea for a dance piece, but of course it’s much too simple for what Cvejić has in mind, because this piece can be described in traditional terms like theme and dance vocabulary. From this terminology Cvejić has clearly taken distance. For sure, I would like to see the way she has realized the ‘third space’ mentioned, or only to read a description of it. It’s clear that these simple questions bring her in an awkward position. When the realization of a third space can be described in clear terms, they can be summarized and paraphrased. If that’s not possible, she has to resort to poetical suggestions, or to keep silent. Both solutions are cumbersome for someone with theoretical ambitions.

In the rest of the text there is a term that has not been dealt with yet: the term ‘mediator’. It came into existence in a cooperation of Cvejić with Xavier le Roy at the project *Six Months One Location*. The idea was that a number of choreographers and dramaturges would cooperate under circumstances that were quite different from the usual in their nomadic existence. Each participant had a (sub)-project of his own, but he had to be involved in two projects by other participants. There was also made an appointment that, doing so, everyone could choose a function, be it a performer, a dramaturge or a light designer. “The rotation in function reflected the sense of flexibility, readiness to ‘stand in’ other roles that for most artists is the everyday reality of independent, self-organized work.” A term had to be invented for the people involved in this rotation of functions. For them Xavier le Roy launched in an interview with Deleuze the term ‘mediators’. Later on, Deleuze elaborated this term⁸, and he wrote: “Mediators are fundamental. Creation’s all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people – for a philosopher, artists or scientists; for a scientist, philosophers or artists – but things too, even plants or animals, as in Castaneda. Whether they’re real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. It’s a series. If you’re not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you’re lost. I need my mediators to express myself, and they’d never express themselves without me: you’re always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own ... There’s no truth that doesn’t ‘falsify’ established ideas. To say that ‘truth is created’ implies that the production of truth involves a series of operations that amount to working on a material – strictly speaking, a series of falsifications.” This sounds visionary. However, the problem with this passage is that it gets more and more puzzling,

⁸ In *Negotiations*, 1990. Translation M. Joughin, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 125.

when one thinks about it. The starting point was the exchange of functions in a project. The people involved in this were called 'mediators'. Lovely, creative and open minded people they seem to me. But Deleuze went much further. Without mediators no creativity, and then you even get lost. Everything you do has no meaning without the people around you. It's hard to disagree with this statement, but are all these people mediators, people capable of taking up someone else's function? Neither do I understand the connection with the very broad statements about 'truth' that ensue. They are un-understandable, if not totally mistaken. The statement that a male blackbird is black with a yellow bill is correct. We can make countless correct statements like this about the world around us. But do they "falsify" established ideas? And what material is worked upon with this statement, and which 'series of falsifications' is produced? Maybe one can reasonably speak about a construction of truth when vastly complicated matters are involved, e.g. the French Revolution⁹, but again my question is: what is the connection between Deleuze's statements about truth with mediators, specifically in the theatre world? It's unclear what the meaning is of the three full-stop-dots behind the words 'your own'. They can be an invitation to think about the previous sentence more deeply, or a sign that non-relevant parts of the quotation are discarded. But anyhow, in this context the meaning of the quotation of Deleuze's words is totally unclear.

There is one passage more in Cvejić's text I want to pay attention to. "One characteristic [about the practice of dramaturgy] seems to me never stressed enough: the importance of taking time. If something different or new is to happen, the working process has to be attended in its duration which then enables the perception of change. By contrast, our production time is driven by efficiency. Therefore, dramaturgs are often asked to act as consultants – to drop once or twice into the rehearsal and give their expert opinion." After acquiring knowledge of Cvejić's ideas about dramaturgy and her 'methodology of problem' this stance could be expected. Of course she has the right to decide in which circumstances she wants to work. She wants more than to 'fine-tune', a short time before the premiere, the composition, the attitude and performing style. "Hence /in the standard situation/, dramaturg is relegated to a mentor who comes to supervise the work according to a standard of success." But then she said: "In my own experience, I have struggled against the question I hear every so often: "Do you think it works?" I would answer: "What do you mean – works? My car works, for instance, yes, but could we, please, talk about the performance in other, non-normative terms?" "Hey, this was well said", Cvejić must have thought, otherwise she wouldn't have quoted it. To my opinion however the question "Do you think it works?" is totally legitimate, and the reaction, as quoted, unfriendly and arrogant. The question can be paraphrased as "Is our piece understandable?" and "Do our intentions come across?"

⁹ Ann Rigney, full professor in the theory of literature and comparative literature at Utrecht university, has proven in her PhD *The rhetoric of historical representation; three narrative histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge UP 1990) that a far fetching relativistic stance versus the truth in historical accounts can not be maintained. Even authors who are opponents of each other in every respect mention, e.g., the execution of king Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. So, these authors agree on the point which were the most important events during that revolution.

These are pertinent questions to be asked to anyone involved in the production, and the dramaturge in particular.

Cvejić's own text is full of norms and normative terms, as could be expected in a text about opinions about dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturge. It's a plea for some opinions, and other ones are rejected. This is fine, and this is what she has been invited to do. This implicates norms. This becomes even clearer when these norms are brought in practice in the production of a dance piece. This scene, or these movements, do they fit in the 'problem' that has been the basic structure of the piece? Again: norms, and more norms. So, Cvejić makes the same mistake she blames the others for. But on this point I don't blame her. Norm-loaded words are inevitable in language. This is even the case in science. In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders, fourth edition* [DSM IV], a very important reference book in psychiatry, I looked up the term 'narcism', and on p. 661 I found:

Diagnostic criteria for 301.81 Narcistic Personality Disorder¹⁰

A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

- 1) Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)
/.../
- 4) requires excessive admiration
/.../
- 7) lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others
/.../
- 9) shows arrogant, haughty behaviours or attitudes"

This text is rife with normative words: how can one decide objectively whether a person has a 'grandiose sense of self-importance' or shows 'haughty behaviours or attitudes'? Wearing design-fashion that for an expert obviously has been bought at a fancy boutique belongs to the forms of behaviour with which one evokes the verdict of narcissism. But is the verdict objective? When is the border passed between special and sickly-narcistic? A researcher can operate in methodologically the most correct manner, with mutually independent observers, but all their testimonies are based on norm-imbued observations.

The term 'narcistic' serves as an example here, because it is of paramount importance in the reception of a dance piece, being *Endless Song of Silence* by Nanine Linning. In the issue of January 29, 2010, of the *NRC*, a Dutch quality newspaper, the dance journalist Francine van der Wiel has published a striking

¹⁰ 301.81 is the number of this disease in the system of the DSM IV.

review of this piece¹¹, with the heading ‘Slick suffering with a glance into the mirror’. In the first column she condemns the use of the Henryk Górecki’s third symphony as background music in a piece about a private matter like the getting lost of a love affair. Górecki’s *Symfony of Lamentations* is known to be based on a message written to her mother by a girl on a wall in a Gestapo prison. The melancholic atmosphere is so characteristic that it can’t stand any addition. In the second column of the review there is a correct summary of *Endless Song of Silence*, that is a representation of the getting lost of a love in its different phases, and how, in a beautiful manner, live video images and a conveyor belt were used for this. Van der Wiel: “This is an effective way to demonstrate how hard it is to let go each other, while everything slips away inevitably.” But then, in the third column: “But all ingredients – movie, live video, conveyor belt – look familiar. The movements, showing little individuality and not striking though, have been constructed skilfully and were unabashedly photogenic. Actually, this is the case for each of Linning’s choreographies. Even when she allows herself to be inspired by the most crushing of human feelings, everything made by Linning is aesthetic. But not real, because these movements seem not to be originated from an emotion, but from an agreeable glance that is fixed on the mirror. *Endless Song of Silence* is a beautiful choreography for two beautiful people who move beautifully on beautiful, sad music. It is a slick suffering. Disgustingly vain.”

In this description, really mean as it is and aimed on the person of Nanine Linning, the piece almost is a demonstration of a product of a fundamentally narcissistic mind. Not only this piece, but the entire person of Linning is bashed by the words “Actually, this is the case for each of Linning’s choreographies.” Curious as I was about the piece and the reactions of the audience, two days later I visited a performance in the Haarlem theatre De Toneelschuur [The Stage Barn]. These response was completely unequivocal: all 260 seats in the auditorium were occupied, after the performance there was a standing ovation for many minutes, and the atmosphere in the aftertalk, with more than fifty participants, was fine as well. Not full of adoration, but marked by correct questions and answers. In any case nothing could be observed of the irritation a narcissic person evokes constantly. Who is right, the journalist Francine van der Wiel or the 260 anonymous visitors in Haarlem, the future will tell. Either Nanine Linning becomes a national celebrity, or the public will get bored of her. Anyhow, recently she won the price of being the best production at the Parade festival, this summer in various cities in the Netherlands, with her previous piece, *Dolby*. In case Van der Wiel turns out to be right, Peggy Ollislaegers, Linning’s dramaturge for years already, should have warned her, with words like: “Nanine, this piece gives me a bad feeling, it’s thoroughly narcissic.” She hasn’t done so, and in this the Haarlem audience’s response has given her support. But to be ‘right’ this way is only relative. A comment like the one of Van der Wiel she could not foresee, so she could not prevent it either. In any case, many years of cooperation offer no guarantee against a review like hers. Concerning *Endless Song of Silence*: in the Dutch Dance Festival [Nederlandse Dansdagen] in Maastricht, October 1-3, 2010, this production was part of the

¹¹ Quotations translated by TVL.

selection of the best pieces in the previous theatre season. The position of journalist Francine van der Wiel, with her devastating judgment, is getting pretty lonely.

To end up with I would like to say something general about Bleeker's and Cvejić's texts. Please, don't misunderstand my critical remarks. I'm the last person to reject a thorough study of what philosophers have written about the arts. With the appearance of anthologies like *Contemporary choreography /.../* and *Knowledge in motion /.../* important steps have been taken to diminish the arrears with established disciplines like art history, musicology and literary criticism and analysis. But the texts devoted to a methodological reflection should be as clear as possible. We have no need for texts that do not work.

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Note

After completing this text I discovered the profound influence of Gilles Deleuze on Cvejić's terminology and way of thinking. The difficulties I had with the terms differentiate and differential as pointed out on p.6 are caused by a lack of knowledge of the work of Deleuze. Deleuze's work is not well known in the Netherlands. In 2009 an overview of his work has been published in the Netherlands: *Deleuze compendium*, Ed Romein, Marc Schuilenburg and Sjoerd van Tuinen eds., Amsterdam (Boom) 2009. In Oktober 2008 a seminar on the philosophy of Deleuze has been organized at the faculty of humanities at the University of Utrecht.

Attention to Deleuze has been paid by, a.o., prof. Patricia Pisters, department of Flim studies at the University of Amsterdam, prof. Anneke Smelik, department of visual culture at the faculty of Humanities at the Radboud University, Nijmegen, and prof. Rosi Braidotti, department of women's studies at the faculty of humanities at the University of Utrecht.

Reading the compendium and the publications of the professors mentioned, I'm getting some ideas why Deleuze's philosophy is interesting for the world of contemporary dance. I hope to publish an article about this in a not too far future.

