

Diversity in dialogue

A study day about dance dramaturgy

According to Chairwoman Liesbeth Wildschut it was already ten years ago that the Vereniging voor Dansonderzoek (VDO) devoted her annual study day to dance dramaturgy. It was therefore time for an update. VDO chose to give the floor to a new generation of dance dramaturges. These 'BITters' arranged a dynamic afternoon.

In November 2009 Danswerkplaats Amsterdam (DWA) already organised an extensive day of study on dance dramaturgy. This much frequented day showed that this theme is very much alive in the dance field at the moment. It also became clear that no one was finished talking about it after just one day. In consultation with DWA the VDO therefore decided to present a follow-up.

Thereupon the Vereniging voor Dansonderzoek invited the members of BIT to present themselves as a collective to their colleague's for the very first time. BIT is a platform for beginning dance dramaturges based in Utrecht. This group, existing of five women and one man, thus became responsible for working out the content of the afternoon. They managed to do so within a fresh format.

BIT came up with a division of the afternoon that challenged all the attending audience members to actively participate in the discussion. The one to chair this discussion was Bart van Rosmalen. In a relaxed and enjoyable way he took the lead in the two-hour-dialogue that developed between choreographers, (dance) dramaturges, students and other people attendant.

The afternoon, consisting of four parts, began with a warming-up. The audience members were being challenged to give their verdicts on eight theses. By standing up or sitting down those present could vote in favour of or make a stand against the presented statements.

It turned out to be difficult for the audience members to comply with simple terms like right or wrong. This became clear when they, in explaining their attitudes, were immediately reflecting on the - rather rigid - phrasing of the theses.

It turned out that BIT did not mean to define or simplify dance dramaturgy. Instead, the objective of the entire afternoon was to give those present an idea of the

diversity of ways in which dance dramaturgy is currently being looked upon and practiced.

During the second part of the afternoon the BIT-members all had one minute to put their personal visions on dance dramaturgy to the fore. These short individual presentations showed that their opinions on the tasks of a dance dramaturge differ greatly on certain points. The BIT-members all had a different perspective when it came to the question of regarding the dance dramaturge as a co-maker, as on the use of theoretical and scientific knowledge in the making process.

In part three the audience got the chance to participate in conversations on a smaller scale. The BIT members had formulated three questions in advance that became the points of departure for three different discussions. The theatre floor was panelled and each question was being discussed in a different panel. Everyone was then invited to get on stage and choose the panel belonging to the question they were interested in most.

The questions of the BIT members addressed the role of the dramaturge in different stages of the making process, the way in which a dance dramaturge can contribute to a making process of a choreographer in a creative way and, last but not least, questioned the importance of a theoretical perspective within a making process.

When time was up, the 'results' of every group were shortly shared with everyone by Chairman Bart. The most important result coming from this feedback session was the fact that the group discussions did not necessarily lead to answers, but had provided a space in which differing thoughts and perspectives could be exchanged.

This feedback session then also brought to the fore what the audience members had missed during the study day so far. Several people stood up to make clear that the role of the dramaturge can be taken up by many, and that besides dramaturges with a theoretical background, there are also a lot of people who have learned to fulfil the role of dramaturge in practice, such as dancers, composers or set designers who are involved in the making process.

All and all this seemed to be one of the few aspects of dance dramaturgy on which the 'BITters' could have shed more light within their programme. They could have been more explicit in presenting themselves as a collective with the same theoretical background. It would then also

have been very interesting to see their way of positioning themselves as dramaturges explicitly compared to the perspective of dramaturges that developed themselves in practice, or the perspective of other players in the making process taking up the role of the dramaturge. A deepening of this side of the subject could have enriched the discussion even more.

It was therefore extra lovely to see all thoughts and considerations that came about that afternoon come together in the last part of the program. In this part two examples of dance dramaturges and choreographers working together in practice were presented.

The first duo that came to talk about their experiences existed of the Israelian choreographer Mor Shani and his dance dramaturge Anne Marije van den Bersselaar. Together they shared with the audience the steps they each make during a making process and the responsibilities each one of them takes on during this process.

A second working method was presented by choreographer Jack Gallagher and his dramaturges Diane Elshout and Jochem Naafs. They were the example of an entirely different dramaturgical dialogue, since the three of them were more focussed on doing research and presenting this research, than making a performance based on choreography.

Date: Tuesday, January 19

Time: 16.00 hours till 18.00 hours

Location: University theatre Studio T in Utrecht