

## Conversation

Suchan Kinoshita & Igor Dobricic

The following text is a transcript of the conversation between Suchan Kinoshita and Igor Dobricic that took place on June 18 at If I Can't Dance Tonight in Frascati Theatre in Amsterdam. Suchan Kinoshita, one of the artists that will develop a new project over time within the upcoming, third edition of If I Can't Dance..., was invited to introduce her work at If I Can't Dance Tonight and to share with the audience some initial thoughts on the direction this new project might take. Igor Dobricic, dramaturge and coordinator at the European Cultural Foundation was invited to be her conversation partner. They didn't know each other beforehand, but were brought together by the organisers on the basis of the expectation of having affinity with each other's fields of interest. Suchan Kinoshita's departure point for the new work is her interest in the 'roles' of spectator, performer and director. The direct source for investigating these positions and their relations, is her personal biography, offering a fruitful scenery for articulating these 'plays of selves'. In the conversation printed here, she makes a start, mainly focusing on the role of the spectator.

S: First I want to turn this thing. It's a clock and it's going to accompany us. I call them 'clocks'; they run for a certain time. I wonder whether it will be finished before we leave. Maybe we will be finished first...

I: You never measured the time that it actually takes?

S: The time of this clock always changes because of the temperature.

I: Ah.

S: You never know, with so many people in the space it might go very fast!

So let me start with a thought I had about my life as a spectator.

When I was a child and I couldn't fall to sleep, I invented a game. I stared at the metal piece of a lamp hanging in my bedroom and when I got accustomed to the darkness, I could see the reflection of things happening in this metal piece.

I had no expectations about a certain image that would appear; it was about concentrating on this object, allowing me to enter the role of a spectator. Suddenly it would just open up. I always had the feeling it was not me, creating the image. I really thought that what I saw was happening in the reflection. But of course it was also part of the role [of the spectator] that I had created at that moment, that's what gave me this so-called performance. Thinking back I vividly remember this pleasure, the pleasure of the creation of the spectator, which stimulated me to perceive my surrounding as a performance.

And this could happen anywhere. Anywhere. Later on, when I started working in theatre, when I started doing performance with a beginning, middle and an end, this became actually a sort of a reduction for me. What I would like to work on for *If I Can't Dance...*, is a frame which is not in the first place meant for performance but can become one.

I: I have this interest lately in this notion of attention; in where you put your attention. You create the possibility of something to happen. If we would get very silent and start listening to what is happening...

...there, then all of a sudden something opens up in that space, which could take us, who knows where?

S: But it's also this strange combination between concentration and not concentrating. Here is another example: I had this ritual of going for walks to escape the situation at home. Everybody knows this probably, it's a very classical image, but it was absolutely important for me to get out of the house and to just start walking. To start walking and walking and actually I didn't know what I was looking for. I was looking for some sort of ...

sound of metro

S: I think it probably had more to do with the clock; spending time, in another space. Probably I didn't know what I was looking for. It was more about going away from a certain place, than actually knowing where to go. So the walking itself became a space so to speak, of performance, or not. That's a question of time maybe. There were times that I found myself back in a telephone box, learning by heart recorded announcements, telling me that I was not connected. And for me it was really an important thing to do you know. The telephone box was just there. I wasn't going to the telephone box. I came across it. I found in these announcements a means for rehearsal, a stimulant to learn something by heart. I still know them. Suddenly, I think, I was really happy to do it, because it gave me pleasure in spending time.

Now I want to make a little link to a work. I constructed a travel agency in the train station of Maastricht. The visitors to the exhibition could sign up for a journey with me for twenty-four hours, without knowing what the destination would be. We created a kind of a plan, a score, to figure out where to go before we moved. We decided, for instance, that we would take the first train out of Holland, get out of the train at the first stop, take the first bus, get out at the first stop, go into the first pub we would come across and have a beer. By deciding this beforehand, it was very nice to walk, I mean, we didn't have to decide where to go. We were directing our movements.

When we were drinking the beer, having ended up somewhere in a pub in Brussels, we thought up a fictive space in Brussels. A completely fictive space, and I think after three or four beers, we knew: OK, now we know what the space is... a square. So, after having created the square for ourselves to convince ourselves what the square really is like, we left the pub. We walked into the taxi. It was just waiting in the street, by chance. We went into the taxi and asked the taxi driver to take us to the square.

I: How did you explain to him what it looks like, what did you say?

S: We said: "it's a place... we have been there before, we know the place, the square, but we don't know exactly where it is. We don't know where it is. But it is here somewhere. It is here. We know it is existing. It exists." So the taxi driver, the person that is supposed to know all the squares in Brussels, had to translate our descriptions into a real place. But the taxi driver didn't know where it was. So what happened was that the trip was going everywhere else. He started to show us all the other places that resembled to him the one we had described and started to propose to us different other places that we might be happy with. But of course our job was to postpone the solving of the problem. We didn't want to go to that place. We really wanted to extend the situation in the taxi. And that was so amazing about the situation, I find afterwards, because in the beginning you start laughing and thinking: this is crazy. Is it just a joke, or is it this cruelty of fiction not becoming reality, or not wanting to become reality, or yes, proposing reality? In this trip we were all part of the same performance, we created this new reality. The new reality that was created, I think that is performance.

Let me get back to spectatorship.

I have a fascination for people that are working, people that are actually not considered to be performing. The 'handlung', the act of doing something, of working, in whatever job, is very fascinating for me.

There again I remember becoming a spectator. I just wanted to be near people that work. It is actually not a very spectacular thing when somebody works. Somebody is just doing his or her job, a carpenter for instance. I had this ritual to go to a little shop where this one man was working, every day. I was really fascinated by the way he worked in his shop. His shop was his universe. He had to sell things; he had to invent things for his shop, to survive with the shop. The shop was actually a very, very small space. And every day he changed the order of things in the shop, recreated its economy, to have a reason for work or for the shop to exist. These were not really spectacular things he did, but for me they were spectacular, I think probably more because of this unspectacular way he invented these new things for his shop.

I was very fascinated with it. There is something about acting or performing that is a sort of economy in movement or in behaviour.

I: This is again because to work does not mean to perform for somebody else. To work means to be engaged in the material, with something in the world, for reasons that have nothing to do with being observed by somebody. It gives the observer the possibility to

create a performance, because it's not in the action. It's not meant to be, it's not meant for me. So I can make it into something by looking at it.

S: I like people performing for me, though. I consider performing also as work in fact. You work with dancers for instance. With dancers, work has to do with the way the movement is actually created; whether it has a sort of economy or an interest in itself or in its movement.

Here is an example.

I didn't make this one by accident. I made this with a glassblower. I always have this one lying down and in a way it's sort of handicapped, because it doesn't have a beautiful flow, like this beautiful other clock. But then I thought, it's nice, it's actually so complicated how the liquid moves. It needs a certain movement to flow.

You have to go along....

With this kind of tube... in order to... I'm not so concentrated now...

But if you know the instrument, if you get involved with the instrument, you can really get it going, perhaps you can try it... [hands the instrument to Igor Dobricic. See note on page 13]

sound of metro

S: Bring it from this side to the other, try going very, very rigidly from one side to the other. You have to turn it in a certain way... .

I: Probably with time you could become very skilful.

S: [Laughs] This is what I mean. There is a logic in the instrument: when you go forward with one liquid, the other one goes backward. It's not very easy. But it's also a nice thing, maybe it's tuned for a dancer. A dancer would be able to relate to it.

The work is the economy of the thing. And that's what I also like about performing. I think I sometimes don't like theatre, because there is so much sort of a wish to tell...

I: To tell something to somebody?

S: Yes. In that context I have to read you something I found the other day. I think this is a very beautiful excerpt of an interview with John Cage talking about music. He says:

When I hear what we call music, it seems to me that someone is talking; talking about his feelings or about his ideas of relationships. But when I hear traffic, the sound of traffic here on Sixth Avenue for instance, I don't have the feeling that anyone is talking. I have the feeling that a sound is acting and I love the activity of sound. What it does is: it gets louder and quieter, and it gets higher and lower and it gets longer and shorter. It does all those things which I'm completely satisfied with. I don't need sound to talk to me.

We don't see much difference in time and space. We don't know where one starts and the other stops. So most of the arts we think of as being in time. And most of the arts we think of as being in space. Marcel Duchamp for instance began thinking of time, I mean thinking of music as being not a time art but a space art, and he made a piece called 'sculpture musicale', which means different sounds coming from different places and lasting, producing a sculpture which is 'sonorous' and which remains.

Peoples expect listening to be more than listening, and so sometimes they speak of inner listening, or the meaning of sound. When I talk about music it finally comes to peoples minds that I'm talking about sound that doesn't mean anything, that is not inner, but that is just outer. And those people who understand that finally say: "you mean its just sounds?" Thinking that for something just to be a sound is to be useless. For as I love sounds just as they are and I have no need for them being anything more than what they are. I don't want hem to be psychological, I don't want a sound to pretend that it is a bucket, or that it is a President, or that it is in love with another sound. I just want it to be a sound. And I'm not so stupid either. There was a German philosopher, who is very well known, Immanuel Kant, and he said: "There are two things that don't have to mean anything, one is music and the other is laughter" that is in order to give us very deep pleasure.

S: To consider performance as work, as working, that is also what I was wondering about in the context of for instance the musician, the performer, and the visual artist. The notion of being an artist is so loaded with meaning; we're sort of pretentious in a way. I prefer this notion of the musician, the worker, or the dancer. Being perhaps the director or the creator of the piece, but also the player.

The public becomes also a material to play with - I mean the public as a presence - to be present as performers. You can move the role of the public into a player. This shift is a part of a performance I've been working with in a work called Detour (Umwege für Jogger). The thought is that you are dealing with your thing and that I'm dealing with my thing. Everybody is dealing with their work, or whatever they are doing. And the idea is to create a little detour, like an 'Umweg'.

With each person, or with each role, you could compose a new detour, a way out and a way back. The detour is just an in-between passage, in-between a very regular way of existing. It's a way out and it's a way back.

I: But how?

With the joggers for instance, that's maybe a very simple example: I asked the joggers for an exhibition to change their course and to jog through the museum, to integrate the museum into their path. I wanted to think about different roles. The jogger has a special role; it's very clear, the role of the jogger. What he's doing, what he's working on, is very clear.

sound of metro

There are a lot of thoughts on this actually, on how to create a detour. In the bathroom for instance. The detour could be related to objects or functions or persons or roles.

Let me get back to spectatorship and detours and describe another work that I did.

S: You can describe it...

I: It was just in a situation, in a gallery situation, which had by accident, or by possibility, an audience space as well...

S: It had a theatre space...

I: It had a theatre space inside the gallery. Suchan created the possibility for the theatre audience to come and sit, expecting something to happen. And the gallery audience, the other audience, was invited to come into a gallery situation, to enter onto the stage and look at the theatre audience as its object.

S: Both were actually invited to look at each other, because I was interested in the different movements of the audience: the theatre audience carefully orchestrated, sitting still and watching, and the gallery audience each present on an individual basis, creating their own time.

I: So there were different rules. The theatre people were sitting and watching, and the gallery people could come in and out of the gallery.

S: I organized them. I said: "Do you want to be the public, which is going to be looked at, but you can also look? You are going to be situated in the convention of an audience space and your task is to look at the stage". And there was also applause involved for instance, but the applause was not reacting to anything happening on stage. At certain moments I would introduce an applause, as a way to relax, to get out the tension, and after the applause the participants would be concentrated again on being a public. It was strange to see that it was difficult for the 'gallery' public to stay in their role. Because it is also a role, when you look at artwork. Some people crossed the border between the two audiences, and that was also something to solve the problem. But in a way it is not so interesting to solve problems, after all.