

Crash! Boom! Bau! Conversation 02

Sodja Z. Lotker: dramaturge, artistic director PQ11

(Oren Sagiv: architect, artist, Intersection Project PQ)

Jan H. Brüggemeier: artist, artistic co-director bauhaus lab (EU project 2009)

Adam N. Furman: architect, artist, member of AA_IS 2009

Intro note: The Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space 2011

The PQ takes place every four years in Prague, Czech Republic, since 1967. The PQ11 is taking place June 16-26, 2011. It showcases expositions and exhibiting artists from more than 76 countries and five continents; more than 5,000 registered theatre professionals and students + 30,000 other visitors .

PQ presents an exhibition as well as performances, workshops, lectures, discussions and presentations - contemporary work in a variety of performance design disciplines and genres including costume, stage, lighting, sound design, and theatre architecture for dance, opera, drama, site-specific, multi-media performances, and performance art... - the largest event of its kind in the world.

PQ intends to explore performance and performance design as an interdisciplinary phenomenon - exploring performance design in context of contemporary trends in the theatre, as well as other art and cultural disciplines - creating dialogue between visual arts and theatre.

Jan H. Brüggemeier: Has there been a programmatic shift from the last Prague quadrennials to the next one coming up?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Yes, we are looking into scenography as something appearing in different fields and disciplines and to show projects that are initiated by scenographers

Jan: How does that differ from the former PQs?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Previous PQs were more concentrated on drama theatre, and scenographers working for directors and playwrights. Now we want to stronger involve more disciplines that are in essence visual arts like performance art, installation, fashion. Projects that scenographers work on, but that are not drama theatre. This is not completely new for the PQ. In previous editions there were projects from these other fields as well, but it was never made the main thing. Now, we have changed the name of the PQ to Prague quadrennial of performance design and space. We are working with the idea that theatre is an interdisciplinary art in itself and we want to strengthen this aspect. As we think that some of the best post dramatic theatre today is done by visual artists and have strong visual elements.

Jan: In your current preparation work you initiated a sort of a spatial research collaboration with Oren Sagiv, an architect and artist from Israel

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Yes, we are preparing the Intersection project. It's a curated project of the PQ. The rest of the PQ exhibition is curated by the national curators.

Jan: Could you explain the reasons behind your collaboration and how the collaboration is progressing and out what kind of situation it was born?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: We are creating an interactive installation/performance that will go on for 10 days. We will create these spaces for performance of different kinds, both theatre and visual arts video art, performance, installation, scenography. We are designing these white cubes / black boxes that can be used both for theatre and visual arts. The Intersection project will present about 30 projects in them. Dealing with scenography - these spaces / architectures are the main element

almost the main theme. Coming from the theatre world, we would like to create something like one world in which these 30 projects can live and that creates one united experience for the visitor like a sort of a labyrinth. On one hand it is quite hard to explain visual artists, what we want them to do, because they are so used to being alone and totally independent. On the other hand it's very hard to explain it to the theatre people, because they will probably only have about 3m x 3m x 3m to perform and they will have to continuously perform from mornings till nights.

Jan: Is the Intersection project a collaboration between you, an theatre professional, and Oren, an architect, or where do you meet professionally?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: I think we have more of a exhibition curator and exhibition architect relationship as this is what our titles are. In reality we are brainstorming about everything together. We are still looking for the essence of what this "thing" should be and what the experience for the visitor should be. Once we know, we will invite the artists to fill in the boxes and to take them a step further.

Adam Nathaniel Furman: It seems that "black boxes" and "white cubes" as synonyms either for the typical theatre or the typical gallery are pretty important for the collaboration. May I ask you to explain a little what you mean by those terms?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: First I did want to provoke this question of the void to see what these "ideal" spaces are. To look at theatres and galleries and the parallels between them and to provoke this question of space as a creator of the relationship between the visitor and art. I really like that it's so black and white. It sounds so simple and then we all know that it is not simple at all...

Jan: To get back to the more general relationship between performance and architecture, and the conventional venues, which usually host them. It seems characteristic of these venues that it is more about an architectural "emptiness" or a "placeless void". A kind of vacuum that only exists to have art and performances presented in total isolation. In your understanding, can architecture perform in the frame of a performance?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: I don't really believe in void. Only death is void. All architecture performs. Walls, stairs, canvas, everything. This is why I do work site specific. I think all is context and dramaturgy and curatorship is the art of context.

Jan: Could it be approached as an active participant or a kind of autonomous player within the dialogue that happens between director/actor/scenography during the production of an event?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: FOR SURE. I think we HAVE to be aware of the space we are performing in. The spaces carry a lot of signs, information for the audience. ...

Jan: ... To me this sounds already quite abstract...

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: The way you enter a space is not abstract. The place where you sit is not abstract. the colours of walls...

Jan: ... indeed and it makes sense to me together with terms like "spatial memory".

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Memory is something that was. It's more like spatial life. It's a partner and

creator of this "live" relationship between the audience and art. Except for the space in our brains, which i guess is the only real thing in the end, i guess

Jan: Did this lead you to question e. g. the intimacy of spaces?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Yes. The impossible "live relationship" in art.

Jan: In this regard, you have both been researching and working on the theme of a kind of spatial intimacy, a concern that seems very rich and intriguing: What in your view does intimacy mean for space?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Intimacy does not necessarily mean intimacy. Intimacy for me stands for something that is impossible to be achieved in the theatre and still there is a big wave of intimate theatre performances in flats, galleries etc taking place. Intersection is both about intimacy and spectacle. A person's being is both a psychological individual and social individual. Intersection will hopefully be about this responsibility of our double selves. Intimacy stands also for this responsibility towards others ... and maybe authenticity... but it's not a fashionable word nowadays. You do have to be authentic to create intimacy and performance is never authentic. I like this paradox. We do only our performative identities these days
There is one more thing I am thinking of ... but it's just an idea... I like creating this 4th wall to close the art and the visitor in one box without anybody third seeing them. Very often in the arts the object to be watched is the viewer himself, right? I would like to give the opportunity to the viewer to have this intimate moment more with his own self without others watching him watch. Then you could think and feel only what you think and feel for yourself without you performing your watching for the others ... it might be just solving my personal problem with contemplating art. Everybody wants my judgement right away and I want to enjoy the art.

Adam Nathaniel Furman: Is that what drew you to the layout of a labyrinth? The "personal" journey aspect?

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Yes. I never thought of that, but it is very much about this journey of the visitor from the entrance till the exit. yes, thanks!

Adam Nathaniel Furman: It's "fourth wall" situation but in a more complex form...

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: ... more fun form, almost erotic

Adam Nathaniel Furman: I was thinking of "the voyeur" the whole time. Is that a preoccupation at all? It's an often attacked way of appreciating intimacy,...

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Hopefully it will be more interactive...

Adam Nathaniel Furman: Another possible intersection: interactive/voyeuristic

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Yes, but that's always an issue with theatre. Theatre in itself is voyeuristic. That's why I am looking for ways how to provoke audience responsibility and involvement.

Adam Nathaniel Furman: But by taking it into an art/ real architectural environment you are bringing that question of watched/watching into a social space of discovery.

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Richard Senet in his book death of the public man says that our lives are very intimate today and that there is no public aspects responsibility ... but I think our lives are neither intimate nor social nowadays

Jan: Agree.

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Facebook is neither social nor intimate. I think we have to look into these extremes once again, before we leave them forever

Jan: The public/private relationship is a corrupted concept.

Sodja Zupanc Lotker: Yes, watching watched is a big issue here.