

KAAI THEATER

EMKE IDEMA FRASCATI PRODUCTIES THIS CAN'T HAPPEN

29/03/2018 | 20:30 | KAAISTUDIO'S
THEATER | 80 MIN. | IN HET NEDERLANDS



EMKE IDEMA

THIS CAN'T HAPPEN

Hoe ontwikkel je een rijke fantasie? Op welke plekken in de samenleving is ongegeneerd gezamenlijk fantaseren überhaupt nog mogelijk? Wat gebeurt er wanneer je alles wat men normaal beschouwt, links mag laten liggen? In een prikkelend theateraal spel zoek je als publiek de grenzen op van het voorstelbare, voorbij wat waar, goed, of politiek correct is. Ons collectief geheugen met al zijn beelden en waarheden blijkt een grabbelton vol mogelijke verhalen. Kunnen de meest vrolijke, vreemde, onwaarschijnlijke, onaangepaste en wilde fantasieën een invloed hebben op de wereld die we samen delen? De inzet van het spel: tijd en ruimte maken voor onze eigen verbeelding.

- Het werk van de Nederlandse theatermaker Emke Idema bevindt zich in een soort maatschappelijk laboratorium, op het kruispunt van theater, beeldende kunst, sociale wetenschappen en gaming. Ze scheerde hoge toppen bij pers en publiek met *STRANGER* – dezelfde week te zien in de Kaaistudio's – en *RULE TM*.

CREDITS

CONCEPT, REGIE Emke Idema | DRAMATURGIE Nienke Scholts | SPEL Sjoerd Meijer | LICHTONTWERP Sjaak Zegwaard | GELUIDSCOMPOSITIE Genevieve Murphy | PRODUCTIE Frascati

UNDECIDABILITY

SILVIA BOTTOROLI

FROM THE PUBLICATION SERIES *WORDS FOR THE FUTURE* BY NIENKE SCHOLTS, IN COLLABORATION WITH VEEM HOUSE FOR PERFORMANCE AND PRINT THE FUTURE (PUBLISHING).

MULTIPLYING THE VISIBLE

The word undecidable appears in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* written by Italo Calvino in 1985 for his Charles Eliot Norton poetry lectures at Harvard University. In the last months of his life Calvino worked feverishly on these lectures, but died in the process. In the five memos he left behind, he did not only open up on values for a future millennium to come but also seemed to envision future as a darkness that withholds many forms of visibility within.

Calvino's fourth memo,¹ *Visibility*, revolves around the capacity of literature to generate images and to create a kind of 'mental cinema' where fantasies can flow continuously. Calvino focuses on the imagination as: 'The repertory of what is potential; what is hypothetical; what does not exist and has never existed; and perhaps will never exist but might have existed.'² The main concern that he brings forth lies within the relation between contemporary culture and imagination: the risk to definitely lose, in the overproduction of images, the power of bringing visions into focus with our eyes shut and in fact of 'thinking in terms of images.'³

In the last pages of the lecture, he proposes a shift from understanding the fantastic world of the artist, not as indefinable, but as undecidable. With this word, Calvino means to define the coexistence and the relation, within any literary work, between three different dimensions. The first dimension is the artist's imagination – a world of potentialities that no work will succeed in realizing. The second is the reality as we experience it by living. Finally, the third is the world of the actual work, made by the layers of signs that accumulate in it. Compared to the first two worlds it is 'also infinite, but more easily controlled, less refractory to formulation.'⁴ He calls the link between these three worlds 'the undecidable, the paradox of an infinite whole that contains other infinite wholes.'⁵

For Calvino, artistic operations involve, by the means of the infinity of linguistic possibilities, the infinity of the artist's imagination, and the infinity of contingencies. Therefore, '[the] attempts to escape the vortex of multiplicity are useless.'⁶ In his fifth memo, he subsequently focuses on multiplicity as away for literature to comprehend the complex nature of the world that for the author is a whole of wholes, where the acts of watching and knowing also intervene in the observed reality and alter it. Calvino is particularly fascinated by literary works that are built upon a combinatory logic or that are readable as different narratives. The lecture revolves around some novels that contain multiple worlds and make space for the reader's imaginations, The common source to all these experiments seems to rely in the understanding of the contemporary novel 'as an

encyclopaedia, as a method of knowledge, and, above all, as a network of connections between the events, the people, and the things of the world.⁷

Therefore, let's think visibility and multiplicity together, as: a multiplication of visibilities. They are traits specific to artistic production and define a context for the undecidable, or rather for undecidability, as the quality of being undecidable. Calvino seems to suggest that literature⁸ can be particularly productive of futures, if it makes itself visible and multiple. Which is to say, if it doesn't give up on involving radically different realities into its operation modes and doesn't fade out from the scene of the 'real' world. We might stretch this line of thought a bit further and propose that art's potentiality is that of multiplying the visible as an actual counterstrategy to the proliferation of images that surrounds us. A strategy that is capable of producing different conditions of visibility. Embracing what we are capable to see but also think and imagine, to fantasise and conceptualise; and bringing into existence different configurations of public spaces, collective subjectivities, and social gatherings.

ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL WORLDS

In fact, undecidability is a specific force at work that consciously articulates, redefines, or alters the complex system of links, bounds, and resonances between different potential and actual worlds. In this sense, undecidability is a quality specific to some artworks within which the three worlds that Calvino describes meet and yet remain untouched, autonomous, and recognizable.

An artwork can indeed create a magnetic field where different actual worlds coexist and, by living next to each other yet not sharing a common horizon, generate a potential world. Then 'potential' does not mean 'possible.' In fact, something is possible when it contains and under certain terms performs the possibility of its actualisation, a world is potential when it can maintain its potentiality and never actualize itself into one actual form. In particular, the potentiality generated by undecidable artworks is grounded in a logic of addition and contradiction that is specific of art. A logic of 'and...and... and...' as opposite to the logic of 'either... or...' that seems to rule reality.

Artworks are places where contradictory realities can coexist without withdrawing or cancelling each other out. They can be sites of existence and of experience where images let go of their representational nature and just exist as such. None of the images of an artwork are being more or less real than the others, no matter whether they come as pieces of reality or as products of individual or collective fantasies. It is the art(work) as such that creates a ground where all the images that come into visibility share the same gradient of reality, no matter whether they harmoniously coexist or are radically conflicting.

If every work builds up complete systems that are offered to its visitors or spectators to enter into – if the invitation of art is often that of losing the contact with known worlds in order to slip into others – something radically different happens within an art that practices its undecidability. Here, spectators are invited to enter the work's fictional world carrying with themselves the so-called real world and all their other fictional worlds; a space is created where all these worlds are equally welcomed. The artwork may then be navigated either by

only choosing one layer of reality, or by continuously stepping from one world to another – different dimensions are made available without any form of hierarchy or predicted relations.

Such dynamics seems to occur in performative works in particular, as the contemporaneity of production, consumption, and experience that is typical of performance intensifies the possibility of undecidable links between different realities. Moreover; in the live arts the curatorial context is normally visible as well and provides one more layer to the work by framing or mediating it.

AZDORA

A good example of an undecidable artwork is Markus Öhrn's *Azdora*, a long-term project that was initiated and coproduced by Santarcangelo Festival in 2015. As the festival artistic director at that time I had the chance to follow and support the project. The work was triggered by the encounter between the artist, in Santarcangelo for a research residency, and the feminine condition present in traditional family structures in this region of Italy. In particular, what struck him was the figure of the 'azdora,' a dialect word that means the 'holder' of the house and of the family – the woman who is in charge of the domestic life and of the labours of care. This figure is at the same time powerful, subordinate, and even repressed: through her devotion, she is sacrificed to the family and to the care of the relationships that keep it together. Interested in investigating this feminine figure and the possibility that it suggests of a matriarchal societal structure, the artist made a call for 'azdoras' to work together with him on the creation of a series of rituals and later on a concert. Both the rituals and the concert revolve around the possibility of emancipation and the exploration of the wild, even destructive side of the figure of the *Azdora*. Twenty-eight women committed to a long-term project together with Markus Öhrn and dived into his imagery and artistic world made of diverse ingredients among which were the tattoo culture, the cult of bodybuilding, and the noise music practice. At the same time, the 'azdoras' were asked to bring in their own ingredients: imageries, concerns, and desires. Together with the artist and the female musician Alos and with the mediation of the festival, they embarked into the adventure of entering a place that did not exist yet. Creating a new set of rules and behaviours for themselves and for the spectators who would eventually join their rituals, attend their noise concert, or bump into their interventions in the public space during the festival period.

Similar to other artistic projects that one could trace back to the practice of undecidability, *Azdora* mingles different realities and fantastic worlds and also activates a participatory dynamic, yet preserving 'the grey artistic work of participatory art.'⁹ In other words, it creates and protects a space of indeterminacy. In fact, *Azdora* is at the same time a performative picture, an artistic fantasy, a community theatre work, an emancipatory process, an ongoing workshop, a social ritual, and a concert. Furthermore, from the project a documentary movie and a sociological survey have been produced,¹⁰ multiplying the possibility to access the work from different angles and via different formats. If the coexistence of different media already implies different angles, durations, discourses, and forms of spectatorship, the performance itself keeps an undecidable bound between its real and fictional ontologies. The performative work of *Azdora* is then intrinsically 'political' according to Rancière's definition of 'metapolitics': a destabilising action that produces a conflict vis à vis what is thinkable and

speakable. *Azdora* allows different interpretations and produces conflicting discourses, yet remaining untouched. This does not necessarily mean complete though as, on the contrary, it is generating a multiplicity of different gazes that are all legitimate and complete but yet do not exhaust the work, This is what makes the performance itself unfulfilled and thus incomplete and open.

A MULTIPUCITY OF GAZES

An undecidable artwork is, in other words, a site where different and even contradictory individual experiences unfold and coexist, with no hierarchical structure and no orchestration. It is a site where spectators' gazes are not composed into a common horizon but are let free to wildly engage with all the realities involved, connecting or not connecting them, and in the end to experience part of the complex 'whole of wholes' that is the artwork (while being aware or unaware of the existence of other wholes and of other gazes).

What is peculiar to this kind of artworks then, and what within them can produce an understanding of the place of art end of its politics today, is that they generate a multiplicity of gazes and of forms of spectatorship that also coexist one next to the other without mediating between their own positions and points of view. The multiplicity of gazes produced and gathered by undecidable artworks does not compose itself into a community, as there is no 'common' present. Rather, it generates a radical collectivity based on multiplicity and on conflicting positions that are not called to any form of negotiation, but just to a cohabitation of the space of the work. Spectators and their views and imaginations are acknowledged as equal parts of a collective body that exist next to each other. They don't fuse in one common thought and don't see or reflect one common image, yet effect each other by their sheer presence and existence, operating as a prism that multiplies the reality it reflects. A space of communication is opened here that is not meant for unilateral or bilateral exchanges, but rather for a circulation of information and interpretations – both of fictions and projections. A circulation over which no one - not even the artist - exercises a full control. The place of the author is then challenged and responsibility is shared with the audience not as a participant,¹¹ but rather as an unknowable and undecidable collective body that receives, reverberates, and twists it.

Multiple forms of public spaces and collective subjectivities thus arise and start inhabiting a productive time that goes much beyond the artwork itself and is still loaded by the specific geography of infinities that it has produced. The kind of collective body that undecidability produces could of course be seen as an image of a possible or future societal structure, but it is rather an enigmatic subject: it is not there to actualize itself but to keep being a sheer, glimmering potentiality. Indeed, as a practice of undecidability, art produces a collectivity, a future time, and an elsewhere, but does not claim any agency over them. It rather operates in a regime of prefiguration,¹² which is to say it does not tend towards a pre-existing, visible image. On the contrary, it proceeds in the darkness in order to produce different forms of visibility within it.

Undecidability could then be detached from art and applied to curation, instituting processes or even to politics at large: the unfolding of its resonances and consequences already opens this

possibility and even beckons it. Nevertheless, acknowledging it as specific to art, and thus as a means without ends, seems to better protect the inner nature and the intact potentiality of a quality that does not make itself available for any use and does not serve any agenda, but stays autonomous and operates by creating its own conditions all over again.

Ultimately, a political dimension does spring from an art that practices its undecidability and from its encounter with a multiplicity of gazes. Preserving it is possible also by curating the relation between the artworks and their spectators and by setting the conditions for an intensity that can last in time and reverberate much wider and much longer than in the actual shared space and time of the performance. Through the combination of the encounter between undecidable art, multiplicity of gazes, and a curatorial dimension a condition of existence is produced that is intrinsically and utterly political. As it is, with Samuel Beckett words in *The Unnamable*, about being 'all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling'.

1. Out of five, the sixth lecture was never written, as the author died suddenly and the series remained unfinished, and yet published with its original, and now misleading, title.

2. Italo Calvino, *Visibility, in Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1988, p.91.

3. *ibid.*, p.92.

4. *ibid.*, p.97.

5. *ibid.*

6. *ibid.*, p. 98.

7. Italo Calvino, *Multiplicity, Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, *cit.*, p.105.

8. Or 'art' which is the term I will use below for the rest of this essay.

9. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, London-New York 2012, p. 33.

10. Respectively by the independent filmmaker Sarah Barberis and by the researcher Laura Gemini at the Urbino University.

11. An active group of spectators invited to exercise their agency over the artwork

12. See Valeria Graziano, *Prefigurative practices: Raw Materials for a Political Positioning of Art, Leaving the Avant-garde*, in Elke van Campenhout and Lilia Mestre (ed.), *Turn, Turtle! Reenacting the Institute*, Alexander Verlag, Berlin 2016, pp.158-122.

#NXTGEN

DE NIEUWE GENERATIE TOONT DE WEG

ANNELEEN KEPPENS

THE MOON IS THE MOON
IS THE MOON

In een prikkelend theateraal spel zoek je als publiek de grenzen op van het voorstelbare, voorbij wat waar, goed, of politiek correct is. Kunnen de meest vrolijke, vreemde, onwaarschijnlijke en wilde fantasieën een invloed hebben op de wereld die we samen delen? De inzet van het spel: tijd en ruimte maken voor onze eigen verbeelding.

27>28/04 | **DANS**

MICHIEL VANDEVELDE & fABULEUS

PARADISE NOW (1968-2018)

Juli 1968. Het legendarische *Paradise Now* van The Living Theatre gaat in première in Avignon. De spelers proberen een revolutie te ontketenen door het publiek in een staat van paraatheid te brengen. Een halve eeuw later gaat Michiel Vandevelde op zoek naar de restanten van de erfenis van mei '68, samen met een nieuwe generatie jongeren.

12>13/05 | **DANS/PERFORMANCE**

LUCINDA RA GRONDWERK

Met *Grondwerk* presenteert het geleghedenscollectief Lucinda Ra een doorlopende performance, lezing, concert, expo, atelier, keuken en fanfare. Gedurende drie dagen ontdek je meer over leven en dood in de verzorgingsstaat vanuit drie verschillende invalshoeken: het kind, de werkend mens, de oudere.

22>24/06 | **THEATER/PERFORMANCE**



Vlaanderen
verbeelding werkt

