

# Karolina Spaic

## An Eye on the Future

*Dreams aren't crazy.  
It's the real world that's insane,  
If only in the stubbornness  
With which it sticks  
To the current of events.*  
Wisława Szymborska, *The Real World*

I am standing in front of an old school building located in one of Amsterdam's working class neighbourhoods. Today, its population is multicultural, coming from a great variety of countries. At the street corner is a high building, formerly an office building, now used as a refugee centre. The former school is the new location for our theatre space, which we have dubbed W.A.T. - Werkplaats voor Actueel Theater (Workspace for Contemporary Theatre). I think of the future and of the things we wish to accomplish here. At the same time I feel within me the need for a break, so I can put things into a larger perspective. I want to investigate what milestones I will find in the future.

I wish to have an opportunity to break away for a while from my daily routine of leading a theatre company, creating a laboratory situation for the actors, producing performances and organising work, in order to create a challenging, creative situation for myself. Now the moment has come for me to recapitulate my experience and research, and to open myself up to new artistic and creative impulses. I feel that this is the right choice, although it also scares me a little because as a theatre director, I have always needed a clear goal in front of me - a performance. But jumping into the unknown attracts me as well.

I believe that making and playing performances is still the best method to develop work. At the same time, this situation is also limiting when wishing to explore certain ideas more deeply. Creating and maintaining my own theatre group for more than ten years is an everyday job that has demanded as much energy as working in the studio. The

*In Zid Theatre's latest production Vincent & I, I have worked with an actor, with video and with a soundscape which I treated equally, as if all three were actors. This resulted in a surprising interplay of different disciplines, leading to an experience of immersion. Multidisciplinary theatre seems to fit the mood of the times we live in, as we are used to quickly absorbing a great variety of stimuli.*

increasing development of new media in the past few years urges me to re-think the place and role of theatre here and now.

I am searching for a possibility of unlimited exploration, to interact with other artists and the Dutch theatre scene, for a chance to take a step back from daily production in order to elaborate my own artistic views. I also hope that my international orientation will have an effect on Dutch theatre in developing ideas about what the theatre of the future may become. I need a time to contemplate the contemporary issues of social development in order to direct my own artistic interests towards them and to propose alternative visions and make a constructive contribution to the world through the art of theatre.

I run my own theatre group, or rather two: Zid Theatre and Dizz's Kids Theatre, which I founded in 1991. I usually create performances starting from an idea and a theme of my own which is developed with the actors and other artists, who contribute to the rehearsal process in a laboratory situation. The concept of the performance is crucial in how to establish a relationship with the audience. So far, I have produced several shows and performances that have been presented in both The Netherlands and abroad.

Touring abroad and being in contact with theatre people who live and work in different circumstances is essential to my work and to my thoughts on theatre. For me, theatre should be universal: I am in search of a spectator who is moved in spite of differences in language and culture. I feel that theatre should reach out to the audience. On tour the response to a performance can be so extremely varied that I am forced to see it again in a thousand different ways.

### **CROSSROADS**

I am originally from Yugoslavia, and as an artist who spent half of her life in a different

culture, I ask myself what it is that determines an artist's identity, both personally and professionally.

In the past I have worked as a theatre director, visual artist, as teacher of professional actors, as a coach for teachers working with children, as creator of concepts for various projects abroad and also as managing director of an artistic company. Now I feel the need to concentrate artistically on personal work while creating performances, to fully evaluate and understand all the stages of the creative process before



Zid Theatre, *Vincent & I*. Photo: Zan Photography

entering into a new phase.

Creatively, I rely upon my intuition, following instinctively the choices that feel right in certain circumstances. Yet, I often feel I can't spend enough time or pay enough attention to the creative process itself, that I can't free myself from all the other activities around. I strongly feel the need to turn the creative process upside down and inside out, and to follow consciously every step of it.

I would like to understand whether theatre still has a power of communication from person to person and how to establish contact with an audience through the actor

and a multidisciplinary approach. Is it possible to develop new training methods for the actor in order to maintain her or his focal role in the performance and at the same time have a link with other media such as video, architecture, music and light? In the future I would like to develop further the stress on the artistic language of multidisciplinary projects with actors and artists from other disciplines.

In Zid Theatre's latest production *Vincent & I*, I have worked with an actor, with video and with a soundscape which I treated equally, as if all three were actors. This resulted in a surprising interplay of different disciplines, leading to an experience of immersion. Multidisciplinary theatre seems to fit the mood of the times we live in, as we are used to quickly absorbing a great variety of stimuli. This way of working had a strong effect on the final form of a performance, resulting in a multi-layered structure tending towards a multidimensional or overall experience without a linear storyline.

Until recently my productions were based primarily on the dramaturgy of the image, demanding an open mind from the audience, as with dance. ("Dance is not something to understand, dance is something to feel", is often said.) In my future work, I want to emphasise this aspect even more. I believe that the theatre of the future can have a very different role from television, for example by freeing human emotions from isolation. I am looking for ways to move the present-day Dutch audience, and to explore the boundaries of how to do this. Audiences today are very different from what they were twenty years ago.

Today there is an audience that represents a multicultural society, made up of people whose roots often lie in more southern cultures which express themselves in more emotional and direct ways. Many native Dutch people also have partners from

these cultures and are becoming more aware of the manifestation of emotions. Salsa, tango and flamenco are rapidly gaining popularity.

Besides creating artistic productions and presenting them to an audience, I want to give myself the task of helping to create a theatre with an eye on the future, namely by promoting a process of awareness with the people of authority within Dutch theatre: theatre managers, programmers and critics, 99% of whom are native Dutch and who control what is being offered in the theatres. I am not yet sure how, but I feel I must find the way to create room for genuine exchange. After all my main question is whether or not an artistic identity is appreciated within the context of a multicultural society. I open the door of W.A.T.: the work can start again.

KAROLINA SPAIC (Serbia/The Netherlands) is founder, artistic leader and director of Zid Theatre and Dizz's Kids Theatre in Amsterdam. Since 1991, these companies have presented multimedia theatre productions, with an emphasis on the physical and visual aspects, exploring boundaries between theatre, dance and visual art, and touring frequently through The Netherlands and abroad. In January 2004, Karolina Spaic founded, with Sebo Bakker, W.A.T. - Werkplaats voor Actueel Theater, in the Bos-en-Lommer district of Amsterdam, to promote diverse, international multimedia theatre by initiating projects in collaboration with theatre people from abroad.