

Immersive theatrical installation
11 July 2020 - De Rietwijker, Amsterdam

Wondrous Panorama Without An Overview

By Fransien van der Putt - [Theaterkrant](#), published on 13 July 2020



Visitors to *Continuum* are first enveloped in a mid-length black ‘burka’ with a small widescreen window that reduces visual perception to a fixed frame. Then they are confronted with a disorientating world of texture, sound, colour and movement.

For some time now, Johannes Bellinkx has been working with Tamar Blom, Dennis van Tilburg, Jakob Proyer, Neal Groot, Grisha Rungen and Soultech on what could be called a ‘scenery’ installation. Using self-developed, integrated equipment along with a few manual actions, they create an amazing experience.

For the spectators in the ‘burka’, their own body, along with the rest of the audience and actually everything else in the world, is out of sight. This cocoon with windows is mounted sideways on a little train of carts that can transport twenty people. This arrangement – the side-by-side formation, the eyes and the body facing what you could call the flanks or the side – makes it possible to present a continuum of transforming images.

This extremely ingenious setup and/or mis-en-scène and/or device allows the superimposition of a variety of frameworks, from painting and film via peepshow or spyglass to a panorama. The restricted view, however, also means that you experience and feel more as a spectator, and in different ways.

Leaning slightly forward (something that was not yet the case at the try-out during [Winternights](#) in Maastricht last December), standing or sitting, the body of the spectator is persuaded to actively relax, a bit like what people were accustomed to during a Catholic mass when kneeling on foldout prayer benches or hanging over the railing in a high gallery seat in old 19th century theatres.

At first, the colossal apparatus rides along the walls of the space in which you just ‘came aboard’. In that sense, this installation is similar to a fairground attraction, although its movements are very different from that of the bungee jump or the caterpillar. Instead of a

screeching ride along a curving or straight vertical line, *Continuum* remains horizontal when it comes to actual movement. The tempo is also calm.

You get to see details of the theatre backstage. The shiny grey of the safety curtains fills the entire image, which then turns into a white wall with here and there a black smudge or dent. After the wall passes by, an OFF sign comes into view, then pulled-back theatre curtains or a handwritten notice saying 'Please place folding chairs here after the show'. But because the context for these details cannot be seen, they acquire an independent character; their materiality is magnified and the viewer has the sensation of a landscape passing by.

After the presentation in the community centre annex theatre De Rietwijker in Amsterdam-Noord last weekend, it turned out that this zoomed-in journey can also start outside, which will only make this hyper-experience of the ordinary more intense.

As sound (Dennis van Tilburg) and light (Grisha Rungen, Neal Groot) are then added to what is already going on, the game with different perceptual frameworks increasingly shifts toward illusion, estrangement and disorientation.

The details of ordinary objects are replaced by the details of a very fine synthetic white cloth, Tyvek, the kind that corona PPE is made of. The bodies of the spectators are now quite literally moved. Little jerks and tugs on the installation, heavy bass sounds from beneath their seats or crackling noises at their backs not only sensitize their bodies, but also create a new space in their perception.

Suggestion causes the material and the imaginary to merge. From abstract monochromes that momentarily took me back to visits to the Stedelijk Museum as a child, I move to much more recent biking holidays in the Alps and the Pyrenees, where rocks along the road during heavy uphill pedalling and the panoramic view of rock formations at the pass generate a very personal and specific aesthetic.

When the pace of the installation experience picks up and the lights, shadows and strobe effects loom larger and larger in my perception, I lose all contact with the real space. I tuck in my feet and disappear into what Bellinkx and co. call a 'poncho'.

Even though my eyes are crucial for what I am experiencing, it feels like I am immersed in a sea of time and space, without a built environment and also without nature, at least on a human scale. It has something of the sublime, of a liberation of the aesthetic experience, such as also can very well occur with experimental film or sound.

While my mind is still searching in vain for narrative or figurative clues, my body has already left. The disorienting abstraction has become a 'normal' situation, a place in which to stay. *Continuum* is a wondrous panorama without an overview, and a nightmare for those who readily become dizzy or are bothered by strobe light. Yet many visitors will gladly entrust themselves to this multisensory experience.

In Maastricht, I had visions of space and time, earth and pollution, remains and ruins, lunar and polar landscapes, which perhaps had something to do with a different arrangement of the sequences and the use of the curtain as an object toward the end of the performance at the time, so that my subjectivity as a human being weighed more heavily.

In Amsterdam-Noord, the installation was so flowing and so abstract, that at most I brushed past some rocky surroundings, caves in which there might have been some very old drawing here and there. As such, *Continuum* is a splendid answer to Plato and Descartes (Bellinkx himself refers to the latter). With Bellinkx, perception does not have to reach out and can relax. It is even nice that there is not an extensive dramaturgy of all those incoming frameworks, all that heritage. It is enough to be confronted with that desire, it turns out.

Whether this semi-automaton will be developed even further remains a good question. In any case, *Continuum* provides a welcome change from the many (although equally necessary) discussions about identity, exclusion and politics in relation to art. Naturally, this installation could be linked to posthumanism, Donna Haraway and more, but none of that is necessary foreknowledge. Here, theory and philosophy become material and essential at a very accessible level. And the idea of 'the attraction' takes on new meaning. Highly recommended at the Noorderzon Festival this summer.

Photo: Dennis van Tilburg