

[Home](#) » [forums](#) » [Discussing lecture performances](#) » [Petra Sabisch: Contaminated](#)

P.S.: Contaminated. Thoughts about the performance of a post-script

If one decides to interpret the lecture-performance Contaminated of Petra Sabisch (P.S.) as staged post-script to the lecture-performance Product of Circumstances (1999) of Xavier le Roy, one has to start with the latter. Le Roy, who formerly studied molecular biology and wrote his PhD on the “expression of oncogenes and hormonal regulation in breast cancer using quantitative in-situ hybridization”, reports his own professional orientation from molecular biology to dance. By the means of slide projection, he first explains the studied method of in-situ hybridization rendering breast cancer oncogenes visible, in a scientific dry manner. Starting from this chapter of his Curriculum Vita, he then describes the emerging doubts on objectivity as required by this science, his growing interest in dance and Yoga, the end of his scientific career in favour of dance, his problems as newcomer with a different background to the dance scene and the resulting decision to work alone, in order to “take the proper body apart and to recompose it”.

During his lecture, he inserts repetitively gestures and action in the narrative flow of his text. First he performs the typical gestures of the person presenting a paper, who is preoccupied with the audience, script, pointer and slide projection. He then quits the desk to present movement phrases, technical dance exercises and fragments of choreography as illustrative material. While telling and demonstrating his personal story in such a way, le Roy smudges different time levels as well as narrative time and narration time. Although his lecture is chronologically structured (beginning 1987 till the actual representation date of Product of Circumstances), but the movement and choreographic fragments do not always fit into the concrete context of the narration. During the exposition of the in-situ hybridization method, he inserts for example some extracts from the choreographies Things I hate to admit (1994) and Burke (1997), without any former acknowledgement or retrospection. It is just up to the spectator to produce the connection between different temporal levels, lecture and performance as well as between science and dance. Finally Le Roy ends up his lecture with a critique of the status quo of dance production and a resuming final remark, in which he formulates the premises of his choreographic work.

“This performance was about a contaminated body and its implications on a historical, social, cultural and biological level, a body, which is inside and outside and vice versa, as space and time to bridge different thoughts, a body, that is incapable to transform itself into abstraction or theory. And perhaps theory is biography, to

present it is a lecture, and to hold a lecture is to do a performance.”

The lecture is thus the performance and deals with the multiply determined body, the product of circumstances. Although this body, in the person of Le Roy, is really present on stage, it somehow dissolves successively in “many body-parts”. Instead of the individual body, it is primarily via the biography of the private person, that the attention is drawn to the cancer research in foreign bodies, the story of the proper body and the own work. The biography itself is then displaced by the thoughts on a contaminated body in science and dance. The final remark however, bundles up the different layers of the lecture-performance. The body is in this complexity the joint, which embraces lecture and performance, narration and biography, body history and body theory.

In *Contaminated*, Petra Sabisch had herself been infected by Xavier Le Roy on a formal and conceptual level, as well as regarding the content.

Her lecture-performance is thanks and homage to Xavier le Roy’s piece, which meanwhile has become a classic in many theatre circles and a model for a series of young directors and choreographers. Yet, at the same time, *Contaminated* is more than just a late comment on *Product of Circumstances*. It is a refined appropriation, which functions - even without knowing the original - as autonomous presentation of a lecture-script, but which gains enormously through the knowledge of Le Roy’s works, the transfer of a performance setting from one person to another, particularly from the masculine to the feminine body. Starting from the concept of contamination, (preceded by the title and borrowed from bio-medicine and computing science), Sabisch first describes a not precisely defined performance, that was shown in the year 2000 in Hamburg, from which she has been inspired for her own work. Therefore she reconstructs this performance situation by the means of slide-projection, in order to demonstrate possible (and rationally seen impossible) ways of contamination via a dissolving particle, which passes from the person giving a paper to the spectator. It is not by chance that these visualisations resemble amazingly to the microscopic cellular structures, as presented by Le Roy in *Product of Circumstances*. On the formal level, they are similarly composed as hybrid, oscillating between autobiographical narration, lecture and performance. Sabisch then reports her own professional orientation from literature to performance, demonstrating thereby the different chapters of the narrated story of her life with the respective projections and actions. She mentions her M.A, finished in 1998, on “The texture of the voice(s). A lecture of Christa Wolf’s *Medea...* ”, whose cover sheet she dubs in as slide (still quoting thereby Le

Roy) and the growing dissatisfaction with the possibilities of written language, to express a textual and corporeal materiality.

Follows the resulting search for an approach to integrate bodies in the production of knowledge, what leads her from Hamburg to Paris, where she devotes herself to dance and performance work (among others Antonia Baehr, Jérôme Bel, Susanne Berggren, Nadia Lauro, Superamas and on her own, under the production label Veranda Productions). As Le Roy, Sabisch demonstrates short fragments of her own works *Laboratoire du Désœuvrement*, *Cartographics* and *Program*, as well as quotations from collaborations with other choreographers. Among other details, she once has been engaged for being an academic newcomer with a particular presence, but confronted later on problems with this particularity and was finally fired. These performed quotations of own and other references, are joined up by quotations of quotations, by which Sabisch successively approaches the real source of contamination. She quotes parts of *Product of Circumstances*, which already appeared in Le Roy's performance as his own self-quotations from the former piece *Things I Hate to Admit*. Thanks to her slim forearms, Sabisch has no difficulty to imitate Le Roy's circling of arms. Knowing the title of his piece, one simply can't help but think that the challenge for her is less to exhibit un-proportionally long arms, but rather to admit the discussed failure in the collaboration with other choreographers. When she combines subsequently the movements of an already shown part of her own *Laboratoire du Désœuvrement* with the arm-movements of Le Roy's *Things I Hate to Admit*, quoted right beforehand, a kind of temporary mutation is created between Petra Sabisch's body, present on stage, and Le Roy's body, absent as a real, but far more present on the level of the lecture since it is marked as the missing link.

This movement hermaphrodite Sabisch-Le Roy again reminds strongly of the four-legged, bisexual and trunk-mutated hermaphrodite of Le Roy's piece *Self-Unfinished* (1998). *Contaminated* thus do not only quote matters and parts of *Products of Circumstances*, it evokes as well body images from other pieces of Le Roy and reflects further body concepts that are known from his work as transformation and extension. Moreover, besides the corporeal contamination, there is contamination on the textual level. When Sabisch projects the little-printed multi-paged A 4 script of an article, that she has written about this so meaningful *Product of Circumstances*, when she inserts a slide, showing Le Roy's instruction-score for the presentation of his piece from a print version of the script, reading it simultaneously, - it is up to the spectators, according to their level of information and understanding, to produce the manifold contexts between the different texts

and scenes. Finally, Sabisch short-circuits her Contaminated entirely with Product of Circumstances, taking over le Roy’s final remark for her own approach:

“... To end, I would like to suggest, that this performance was about a contaminated body in his implications on a historical, social, cultural and biological level, which represents the space and the time for a way of different thoughts, unable to transform themselves into abstraction or theory. Contamination is then perhaps the moment of an im/material reversibility, the try to present it is to talk about biography, to talk about biography is to copy a lecture and to copy a lecture is to show a performance.”

Sabisch’s life-story ends up with a report of her recent attempt to transfer her practical experiences once more into scientific research. Searching a frame for her project on critical body practice between science and art, she met with no response from academic representatives and potential funding partners, when applying for a PhD bursary. In order to get a response from these representatives, her project of writing the corporeal materiality in theory and practice, should all the more urgently be presented in classical academic institutions and conventional theatre stages - and best together with Xavier le Roy’s source of contamination: in a dialogue of articulated bodies, that speak the language of flesh.

Sabisch leaves the consequences of her story as open as the question of her way out of this personal dilemma of ridge walking, by offering at the end of her performance two possible ends and a discussion à la Roy.

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