

Droomtheater Rotterdam

Preface

In the rapidly changing nowadays society everything is in motion. Ancient forms of theatre like storytelling and traditional puppetry move along the path of spiritual life, dreams and art education. Cultural heritage is in transition and crossing border projects are blossoming all over the globe: from China to Europe and from Teheran to Rotterdam. In this turmoil of global processes Droomtheater moves along as well. In this context Droomtheater wants to play a serious role and work on intercultural, interdisciplinary and interactive projects, concerning community art, dealing with storytelling and puppetry.

Mission

Droomtheater is an organization interested in cooperation. We care for mutual reflexivity, space for projections from two sides and for dialogue. We want to stimulate emancipating tendencies within subject/object relations, of individuals and groups. Dreams and theatre serve these processes as catalysts.

Developing reflexivity and playful fun are relevant aspects of our practice. Becoming conscious of who is 'me' and who is 'you', who is 'the other' and what is important for 'the group' are valuable issues. Besides this, the notion of environment and being aware of language development are relevant.

We do this by programming and producing :

- Performances in storytelling and puppetry
- Costumes
- Props
- Stage design
- Graphical design
- Education for volunteers
- Meetings of relevant partners, stockholders and co-investors
- Workshops and rehearsals

Tools

In 2009 for programming and producing we have chosen several tools to work with :

- A. Installations,
- B. Films
- C. Community art projects.

In the following text you will read more about how we since then used our tools and how we have been programming and producing.

Installation I, II and III



A. Installations

Droomtheater works with three installations as main tools to perform. All of them are not very large, not too heavy in weight and easily transportable. They can be used in different settings, for indoor as well as for outdoor activities, like story telling, puppetry, video/film projections and shadowplay. Installations I and III are mobile. All three can be used inside as well as outside.

All installations are designed for well qualified intermediate performances. The advantage of puppetry played outdoors around a bike and a wagon is, that it can bring theatre towards an audience. We wanted to be mobile, to go where the people are. These mobile installations stimulate direct contact. And we did not want to wait until people would come to the theatre. Because other children activities rarely took place during summer holidays in this neighborhood of Rotterdam, these performances often meant an important encounter with theatre for many children.

These installations were constructed for using in the South part of Rotterdam for several reasons. In this area it is an enormous challenge to raise peoples' interest in culture. We thought puppet theatre and storytelling would be the best things to do because of their binding factors and communicative values. Droomtheater wanted to produce a renewed style of puppetry, fit for the multicultural nowadays society and especially for the population in the South of Rotterdam. We wanted to be mobile to be supportive in creating possibilities for cultural moments of exchange. We wanted to invest in sustainable designed tools so that we could work with them for a longer time, not for just one production, or for one year or for one season. Because of the economical crises and severe cuts in art budgets we considered 'long term investments' were necessary to continue our work.

B. Films

Droomtheater has developed a special way to deal with its audience and its environment. Since the beginning of our practice in 1990 video/films are being made to show this valuable process of work in progress. In stead of working in the local theatre, our ambition was to work in city neighborhoods at ordinary spots. We want to bring our small scale productions into the world of our spectators. A list of produced Droomtheater video/films is enclosed at the end of this article.

C. Community art projects

Community Art can be described as a form of art which is made, processed and presented by artists in cooperation with members of a community.

At this moment we have two projects we want to focus on in this article: the first is 'Funny Fransi' and the second is 'Shadowplay'.

1. Funny Fransi

The production 'Funny Fransi' is an interactive performance in which several types of glove puppets are used. The puppeteer wears puppets on hand and feet, a unique performance for small children.

Funny Fransi will stay with Aunt Corry with a very large suitcase. What's in the suitcase? A narrative performance about staying, sleeping and dreaming, with songs and puppets on the hands and feet. Full of imagination and interaction with the

audience, under the guidance of an accordion. For 2.5 - 6 years.



Funni Fransi is a young child, not older than four years old, not knowing how to separate its inside from its outside world. Living like this means the child is constantly switching from inward to outward and the other way round. There is no separation between the inner imaginative thoughts and desires and the outer do's and don'ts.

It is a special experience to watch the 'Funny Fransi' performance. It is meant to inspire little children and their fosterers to play with each other and to make fun. We want to learn our audience to use glove puppets to stimulate language development and language capacity. Droomtheater wants to show in an easy, playful way how teaching and learning new words can be a joyful experience for both.

Directing process

When I decided to work as director in a theatre project, in my own neighborhood at the Southbank of the river Maas, I started to look around and visit kindergartens. Because there were many young families in my area I wanted to do some research on what would be the best way to approach them. I wanted to find out how to invite them to participate in my Droomtheater practice. I found out that there were many young children entering kindergarten who did not speak any Dutch at all. They were brought up in another language because their parents were immigrants. When I met puppeteer Frans Hakkemars who had a collection of puppets and scenes for very young children, I invited him to come to Rotterdam and to show me his work. The most important questions that rose during this period of research were: What would change in the Funny Fransi performance if he would grow older and develop his own inner world? What would change in his inner and outer perception? The formulated answer was that there probably would be more language, more fantasies and more dreams. Funny Fransi would gain a better conception of himself, of his presence in the world and he would become more aware of his fantasies and dreams.

This finding delivered us a plan to construct a theatre performance for Rotterdam and restyle the puppets, props and costumes that Frans Hakkemars was used to work with. I as director wanted to deepen the work, transform it and bring it into society. I was convinced this

“restyling” process would work to make an inspiring experience fit for the audience of kids from two and a half till six years, their parents and their kindergarten teachers.

I wrote a new text based on what was delivered by Frans Hakkemars, we reformed the character of Funny Fransi and became more aware of his inner and outer communication. After three directing sessions it had clearly turned out how we wanted ‘Funny Fransi’ to become and what we wanted him to dream and perform. About these ideas we wrote to the city council and in dialogue with them we invited other artists to join the production process. We asked them to design a costume, puppets and props.

All our research and findings we wrote down. We spoke about our process and plans with the city council and to the housing corporation. We worked in an interdisciplinary team with specialists who were conscious of what was going on in modern city life and what was relevant to develop for this new population coping with Dutch culture and art. We talked over what would be realizable and what would be possible to organize for a small scale community art practice like Droomtheater. In this process constant reflective action was practiced and the exchange of ideas on the materials that could be used to enlarge the eloquence of the performance, was intensive.

To communicate in the best way, a modern style of design was developed. Costumes should be light, in bright colors with a wink to uniforms of street workers (policemen, street cleaners, car parking controllers etc.). The installations had to be made of natural materials like cotton and wood. We wanted a direct style of speech; texts had to be short and simple. The performance should be tender and engaging. The props were characterized energetic and funny. They could be ‘ordinary’, as if they could be used by anyone else on this globe: by any citizen of any country in the world and from any social class.

During the process of making and experimenting we constantly invited groups of children and their fosterers. We talked with them and incorporated their opinions and our experiences within the process of making. We have been continuing this new approach and delivered a new vision on producing a puppetry performance, in a nowadays practice, in a modern multicultural city. We realized a new concept for puppet -, and object theater combined with storytelling: direct contact, on a stage but in the public space.



During the process of making and experimenting we constantly invited groups of children and their fosterers. We talked with them and incorporated their opinions and our experiences within the process of making. We have been continuing this new approach and delivered a new vision on producing a puppetry performance, in a nowadays practice, in a modern multicultural city. We realized a new concept for puppet -, and object theater combined with storytelling: direct contact, on a stage but in the public space.

Tough issue

The tough subject the project addressed and explored was the alternation of the image of an area. The media eventually gave a very negative image of the situation here : gruesome, true statistics about disadvantaged residents. Artists work can cause a climate change and offer a total different image. An artist working with inhabitants from within this environment shows more potentials and opportunities for development.

The image immediately changes in a more positive way. So our work opened up to the area and made it ready for more educative community art projects.

When we started in 2010 by restyling 'Funni Fransi' this was organized by Droomtheater in dialogue with educative organizations in the area and inhabitants. It was part of an area wide approach to the district by the city council and national gouvernement. Everybody knew the problems and had ideas about how to solve them. The city council selected our artistic plan and we got subsidized. At the time this restyling project turned out to be successful, the following year the local cultural organization paid for a tour throughout the area. We performed at different lawns, parks, playgrounds, fields and street corners in the area of Feijenoord.

Not finished yet

Although we have been doing many performances since 2011, 2012 and 2013 in Rotterdam, in other cities and villages in The Netherlands, abroad in Hong Kong and Chengdu in China, and in Iran at 20^{ste} International Theatre Festival for Children en Youth in Hamedan, 2013), the process is not finished yet.

We would like to make a leaflet for parents and fosterers to show how the work is done so that everybody could apply these basic elements of educative puppetry in their own practice and have fun while learning and playing with kids. We are looking for producers and want to publish it in different languages.

The outcome of the project

The outcome of the project was an educative art project stimulating language development and language activity. During eight weeks of summer holidays the Wednesday afternoons were reserved for puppetry in different parks of the area. Sometimes there was a combination with other organized activities in the neighborhood and sometimes it was the only thing to do. Many performances were organized by different organizations in the area. The strong binding factors of the medium puppetry were clear when we worked with many different groups of low educated immigrants. Inhabitants coming from many different countries and cultures

were attracted and participated in our community. When children who are dealing with another native tongue grow up in an environment of immigrants, it is truly recommended to bring them in touch with educative (puppet) theater. It offers fun and happiness to the audience and it has an inspiring effect. The organizations were content and together with them we managed to assemble money to make a film. The film 'Public Familiarity' shows how a puppeteer can cause a climate change within an area. By interaction of Droomtheater: the depressed atmosphere was alternated in healthily smiling kids, playing around, watching shows, doing sports and learning with great fun.

During 2009 and 2010 our team generated elementary basic knowledge on producing a modern puppet show. A range of graphical design was published: a logo, and a multifunctional, re-usable poster and cards; a flag was printed, a website and web animation were made, a weblog was opened, information on language development was obtained, a list of words to learn for kids was illustrated and published on the web.

This is the way an innovative co-producing process with several specialists from Rotterdam was raised. All the names and website of our participants are added at the end of this article.

2. Shadowplay

Modern application

Our second community art project is called 'Shadowplay'. It started in China, 2012, while performing 'Funny Fransi' and showing our film 'Public Familiarity' at the Minifestival Puppetry for purpose in Hong Kong and the World Puppetry Festival in Chengdu. We were fascinated by the centuries and millennia old traditional Chinese Shadow Play. We met Annie Rollins, she is a specialist in the field of shadow play. She has been studying and working in China. Her subject is the traditional form like it was performed in the old Chinese farmer communities in history. She is very interested in applying the traditional form in modern society in a new way. She traveled and worked in China where she cycled through the megacities to work with children in the streets on performing, making stories and shadow



puppets.

Annie Rollins and I exchanged ideas and our practice in Rotterdam was appealing to her. She decided to pay us a visit in our community in Rotterdam and she showed us how to make simple forms of shadow play with children, using modern, non complicated materials and tools. We found national funding for this project and decided to continue working with several groups of children on a music theatre performance to combine Chinese Shadow play with classical European music and story telling. Workshops for children of 6 till 8 years old were organized and for a final performance we invited the musical ensemble 'A Piacere'. For this show we choose 'Le Carnaval des Animaux', composed by Camille Saint Saëns from

France in 1886. We had chosen this repertoire because for people without any experience in listening to European classical music it would be easy to join in. The final performance done by children, a puppeteer and musicians would be located in a home for elderly people in our own neighborhood Feijenoord.

Participation in culture

By spreading our knowledge concerning puppetry and Chinese Shadow play combined with classical music, it would be attractive and easy for people to participate. We thought if the making process would take place in the neighborhood of the audience and participants, the project would gain the ultimate result: people would raise a higher interest in cultural heritage and art education.

Because behind the artistic layers there were some sociological needs which had to be full filled, we were successful in finding financial partners. We shared the idea this project could serve several goals: besides art education it would mean intense moments of interaction for children and elderly people. But it would also work very well in bringing groups of immigrants together. It would make people meet who had never been in touch with each other before. The project would offer developing possibilities for volunteers as well.

Unfamiliarity

This all got shape within the purpose of transforming the unfamiliarity with each others culture into a collective renewed identity. Because these different groups of inhabitants hardly knew each other and often were not aware of their different cultures and traditions, we thought it was important to organize this performance within the area where the audience and participants lived. In the area lives only a small group of original Dutch citizens that has not left to another part of town, compared to the big groups of new inhabitants, that came in. For them especially and for the idea of sharing culture we thought it would be attractive to enclose in the show as well, the Dutch traditional puppet family Jan Klaassen and Katrijn, family of the European tradition of Pulcinella and Petroucka. Only the elderly people know them from long time ago but most of the spectators would be unfamiliar with them as well as with European classical music and Chinese shadow puppetry.

Professional performers

For this project professional artist were hired. The emphasis is on a nowadays application of traditional Chinese shadow play in a community art project with an intercultural, interactive and interdisciplinary style. By means of education and participation of citizens we wanted their children and organizations based in this area, to take part. Without any doubt input by well educated artists always has an increasingly effect on the quality of the project. The professional level of the musicians, their repertoire and the resulting concert formed an important inspiring bases for all participants. Without any doubt cooperating with 'real' musicians who are playing on 'real' instruments with a 'real' director has made deep impression on many kids. And last but not least the professional puppeteers Frans Hakkemars and Annie Rollins who were workshop leaders inspired the kids incredibly. The music ensemble 'A Piacere' played the 'Le Carnaval des Animeaux' by Saint Saëns' in an adaption of director Ghislain Bellefroid. Puppeteer Frans Hakkemars was already known by

kids and active citizens in the neighborhood , so he had a good entrance to show how puppetry can become a lively thing in the local culture.

Outcome

We can say that the old technique of shadow play which was used in former days, only was transferred by word in an oral tradition. In our project it has been actively transferred to young people in The Netherlands. Participants got besides knowledge on light, darkness, shadow and color, lessons in puppetry; they learned to listen to classical music and to move along with it accompanied by the objects that were made by themselves. They gained knowledge on cultural history from China and Europe. By working together on a performance their imagination was stimulated. This had its result in dreaming and writing stories. There was plenty space for mixing cultural heritage with the personal experiences of participants. Important things that had happened in their private lives and environments were implied. Children would write about those experiences. A teacher from kindergarten, - she originally was educated as an imaginary artist – assisted us during the workshops and learned the technique of modern shadow play. She will continue using it and proceed in her daily practice with the kids in storytelling.

Cultural heritage in transition

At the same time Chinese light was popular in Rotterdam: in the local park in the city center, enormous Chinese light images were exhibited.

During the dark months in wintertime colorful enlightened Chinese images were shown, like dragons, swans and lilies, floating in the water of canals and water in pond in the park. The figures were made by a group of forty Chinese artists that were invited by the Rotterdam city council. They worked during a couple of weeks to construct a collection of images and placed them in the park. These ‘puppets’ enchanted the whole area in a fairy tale because they carried light from within. A truly surprise it was to see that the shadow puppets that were produced by Droomtheater children showed a clearly recognizable resemblance with these enormous light sculptures. Both had expressions of and were inspired by, traditional Chinese shadow play, dealing with colorful painted leather puppets. Droomtheater is proud that children from the South bank, who usually are hardly stimulated by their parents to visit any culture-, or art program, had been able to interact and connect with Droomtheater light and shadowplay, a form of cultural heritage from five thousand years ago.

Informal learning

Droomtheater wants to continue working on shadowplay with kids in an after school program. An ‘informal learning’ traject, creating intercultural, educatieve learning moments after school, we think is important to do. We will make a Spring 2014 performance. Children, between six and eight years of age, in a group of twelve till fifteen participants at maximum, will again work with music and storytelling, they will make puppets and play with them, write texts and rehearse. This time again stories about animals will be included. During our visit to Iran last October 2013, we discovered the ‘teken’, a historical animal which is the national symbol of Iran. Mrs Poupak Azimpoor, Iranian theatre researcher has introduced us to this

almost disappeared tradition. The goat like animal is connected with light and springtime. It announces the new season. We will tell the children the story of the 'teken', show them pictures and make them design this figure as shadowpuppets. We will discuss comparisons with the festivities of the 'teken' and the Easter eggs, our traditional ritual which originally also is dedicated to the light of spring..!

And that's how we like to get cultural heritage in transition, all over the globe: from China to Europe and from Teheran to Rotterdam!



©Author Joanne Oussoren
Droomtheater, 9 november 2013
Rotterdam, The Netherlands
droomtheater@online.nl
www.droomtheater.com
telephone 0031 (0)6 481 577 51

Resumé Droomtheater Rotterdam

Since Droomtheater started in 1990 as an atelier for culture the audience has actively been taking part in programs. The first location was a rebuilt showroom for kitchens in Rotterdam . Inhabitants that lived next to this place took part in restoring the garden, local organizations helped producing and schools got involved. We have been programming short plays for adults and for children: puppets and stories. The first puppeteer we invited to make a production, appeared in 1993, Marco Kalkman. He was a musician and wanted to make a shadow play adeption of the book: Don Quichot, written by Miquel de Cervantes.

In 1995 we organized our first international productions with actors from University college Boston, USA : ' A retelling of the Iliad' and 'Dreaming with an aids patient' both plays were written and directed by Jon Lipsky.

In 1996 a long lasting co-production with the Amsterdam Children Film Festival Cinekid started : " The digital playground", a video-animation–installation inspired on puppetry. This bodily active form for kids, in combination with new media like a beamer, camera's and computers was an especially designed, interactive game, in a mega kids program during school holidays.

De city council of Rotterdam hired this installation during a festival and decided a year later to spend its money on programs for immigrants. In those days the city was being overflown by them. Our digital play was quite expensive and we had to fall back on working with costless materials. That is how Jan Klaassen en Katrijn, our Dutch traditional puppet family made its come back into Rotterdam! They started their new lives in the scene of the new multicultural population.

In 1997 the film 'Water puppets' was recorded in Vietnam. This film is about Theu, a famous friend of Jan Klaassen who used to tell his stories in the rice fields of Asia. This play was situated in an outdoor swimming pool for kids in a sports park, in Hué, a small provincial town. Visitors, mainly mothers with their children, could watch a free show, talk with the puppeteer and look at his wood carved puppets in his atelier.

During 'Euro 2000', the city of Rotterdam transformed into a huge football event.

Droomtheater presented 'The Pythiade', a sports and game program combined with theatre and story-telling, inspired on stories and plays of our ancient European Greeks. The audiences were watching shows and took actively part in games and story telling. The following year 2001, our programs were repeated when Rotterdam was Cultural Capitol of Europe. Here the emphasis was on cultural activities for inhabitants of areas surrounding the city center.

In 2003 in the area Delfshaven a film has been recorded, called "Shakespeare in Delfshaven". This film was made about a group of children who all lived in the same street. They came once a week into our Droomtheater studio to rehearse and learn to work as puppeteers. Professional artists, living in the neighborhood made new puppets to perform with. We produced two European families: Jan Klaassen and Katrijn, from the Netherlands and the Guignol, from France.

In 2005 we organized in the same street a remembrance event for victims of World War II. Children interviewed survivors and took part in the yearly ritual. We made a video/film on this: 'Monuments and Remembrance'.

In 2008 Droomtheater moved to another part of town and to address its population there the media puppet theater and storytelling were chosen. In the following years forty shows per year were organized. Surrounding the performances events were organized on art education. 2010 Production : 'Funny Fransi'

Since 2010 we have worked with music ensemble "A Piacere" in combination with puppetry. 'The story of a soldier' by Strawinsky (1918) and in

2012 'The Carnaval des Animeaux'(1886) by the composer Saint Saëns with shadow puppetry was realized.

Droomtheater video/films produced 1990 – 2004

- Icons by Daylight, 1990 Rotterdam, Den Haag en New York.
- The story of Anna O. 1994 film/ animaties Universty Leiden, India, Tata management concern Bombay, New York , USA, IASD- congress (International Association for the Study of Dreams)
- Indian Elephants, 1995, 60 schoolperformances in Rotterdam
- Animatie Installations, Children Film Festival Cinekid, Amsterdam 1996 t/m 2000
- 3-D installatie 2000, Ahoy Rotterdam Kids Adventure
- Pythiade 2001 Rotterdam Cultural Capital of Europe
- Waterpuppets in Vietnam 2002 – Festival Theater Onze Lieve Vrouw, Amersfoort, The Netherlands, 2003 University College London

- De myth of housewives, 2004 Rotterdam Historical Museum
- Monumenten en Gedenken, 2005, Rotterdam

- **Video/film ‘Shakespeare in Delfshaven’ , 2003**

Delfshaven, Rotterdam, Droomtheater, 2004
 Kopenhagen Denemarken, IASD congres, 2004
 Meppel, The Netherlands, Poppentheaterfestival, 2004
 Dordrecht, Internatonal Micro Poppentheaterfestival, 2010

- **Video/film ‘Public Familiarity’**

Feijenoord, Rotterdam Droomtheater, februari 2012
 NVP/Unima, Weesp, The Netherlands, 11 March 2012
 Hong Kong, Mini Festival Puppetry for Purpose, 18 – 21 May 2012
 Chengdu, China World Puppetry Festival, 27 May – 4 June 2012
 Iasi, Romania, International Theatre Festival for Children and young audience
 7 – 12 October 2012
 London, Great Britain, Little Angel Theatre, CROPP (Centre for Research into
 Objects and Puppets in Performance and Central School of Speech and Drama,
 London, Great Britain, “Handson2! “ 19 – 20 april 2013
 Hamedan, Iran , 20st International Theatre Festival for children and youth, 16 – 22
 October 2013

Droomtheater participants:

Joanne Oussoren, producer, performer, director and programmer
www.droomtheater.com
 Frans Hakkemars, puppeteer; www.franshakkemars.nl
 Ghislain Bellefroid, director chamberensemble A Piacere www.apiacere.nl
 Annie Rollins, specialist Chinees shadowplay, www.annierollins.com ;
 Fenneke Hordijk www.fennekehordijk.nl , specialist in language development
 Grafical design Knalrood www.knalrood.nl ,
 Costume design Ine Keitz www.keizkostuums.nl ,
 Set design Frans van de Horst www.fransvanderhorst.nl
 Rick Messemaker camera and editing, www.Rickmessemaker.com ;
www.Rickantennetv.nl
 Simone van Maurik, puppets
 Eric van Ophem, puppets
 Abigail Djastro, fotografer,
 Rolf Versteegh, camera and photographer,
 Vera Rijnvos, grafical artist
 Leonard van Rijn webdesign;

Used literature:

Eco 3 Doendenken , Rotterdam/ Skillcity 2010 -2012, author Henk Oosterling

Splitsen of knopen, Over volkscultuur in Nederland 2009,. Author Jan Jaap Knol

Cultuur Nieuwe Stijl, Praktijkboek community arts en nieuwe cultuurfuncties 2012,
author Sicco Cleveringa

Cassandre/Horschamp, French revu

Publications Joanne Oussoren

The World of Puppetry, Dutch magazine for puppetry; since 2008, articles and editing

TMDFS, publication by a group of Dutch writers, nr 2,6,7,9,11 – since 2009, poetry

Cassandre/Horschamp, magazine on art, article ‘Our audiences are active
participants’, nr 94, 2013