

# “Involve Me and I Will Understand”

*An Exploration and Analysis of Pre- and Post-Performance Discussions of  
Subsidised Dutch Theatre Companies*

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*Tell me and I will forget.  
Show me and I may remember.  
Involve me and I will understand.  
(Chinese Proverb)*

*A person cannot teach another person directly;  
a person can only facilitate another's learning.  
(Carl Rogers, 1951)*

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## Introduction

In 2011 Dutch theatre companies received a heavy financial blow. The Dutch government announced a reduction of the national cultural budget by 200 million euro per year (OCW, 2011, p.2). The nearby future does not look much brighter for cultural institutions. The media recently proclaimed that Dutch municipalities too are expected to reduce their cultural budgets by 250 million euro in 2015 (Kammer, 2014; ANP, 2014). In doing so, the government expressed their ambition to make cultural organisations more financially independent. In order to achieve this independence, the organisations have to become more entrepreneurial and innovative (OCW, 2011). The cultural sector has to be “as creative in reaching and binding new audiences as it is in providing culture of high quality” (OCW, 2011, p.3). Attracting and retaining audiences is essential to attain a form of financial independence and stability. McCarthy and Jinnnet (2001) have identified three basic ways to increase the audience of cultural organisations:

(1) by broadening it—i.e., capturing a larger share of the existing market by attracting individuals who constitute a natural audience for the arts but are not currently participants; (2) by deepening it—i.e., intensifying its current participants’ level of involvement; and (3) by diversifying it—i.e., attracting new markets comprising those individuals who typically would not entertain the idea of participating in the arts. An institution could decide to pursue all three of these paths, but ... each of these markets requires a different engagement strategy (p.3).

In my view, however, there is little use in broadening and diversifying audiences if cultural organisations are not able to retain them. These organisations first need to develop strategies to deepen current participants’ involvement with their organisation, hereby creating a loyal audience. In this way, when organisations attract new audiences, they will already have the strategies in place to retain them.

The key to deepening an organisation’s relationship with its audience is to provide extra activities that enhance the artistic experience. These activities aim to increase the audience’s knowledge of the arts and of the cultural organisation, and/or to include a social dimension to the experience (McCarthy & Jinnnet, 2001). This encourages audience members to develop a loyal attachment to the organisation. For theatre companies, pre- and post-

performance discussions exemplify a type of extra activity through which companies attempt to create a loyal audience. These discussions are directed at increasing the audience's knowledge about a specific performance and theatre company. Additionally, they have the potential to enhance the social dimension of the experience. However, merely organising pre- and post-performance discussions, henceforth referred to as performance discussions<sup>1</sup>, is not enough. The content and form of the discussions have to successfully engage the participants in learning in order to increase their knowledge of and appreciation for the arts. Only then do they have the potential to enhance and deepen the theatre experience, resulting in a larger loyal audience base and therefore more financial stability. Bored and disengaged audience members are not likely to become loyal audience members.

This brings me to the main research question of this thesis: *Are performance discussions in the Netherlands designed in such a way that they, from a theoretical perspective, successfully engage the audience in learning, thereby resulting in a positive learning outcome that enriches the theatre experience?* By 'a positive learning outcome' I do not mean to say that the audience learns exactly that which the theatre company intends to convey. Instead, I focus on the perspective of the audience: do they believe that they learned or experienced something valuable? In order to answer my research question, I first need to examine the status of performance discussions in the Netherlands. To date, performance discussions are largely neglected in research, with the exception of the work of Caroline Heim (2009). Similarly, hardly any research exists describing the state of affairs of performance discussions in the Netherlands, although many theatregoers are familiar with the phenomenon. Therefore, the secondary objective of this master's thesis is to contribute to the research field of performance discussions by exploring the current condition of these discussions in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands has a broad variety of professional and amateur theatre companies for both adults and youth. Providing an overview of all the performance discussions in the entire Dutch theatre scene would reach beyond the scope of this thesis. My research shall therefore focus on the most prominent professional theatre companies in the Netherlands. This seems a reasonable place to start, since the mapping of performance discussions in the

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<sup>1</sup> Different countries and theatre companies use different terms to denote performance discussions, like symposia, platforms and talkbacks. In the Netherlands the terms *inleiding* (introduction) and *nagesprek* (post-discussion) are generally used. Since these terms all denote discussions related to a performance, either to or with the audience, I shall refer to this phenomenon as performance discussions.

Netherlands is unprecedented. This criterion leads us to the companies that belong to the basic cultural infrastructure of the Netherlands. In other words, companies directly subsidised by the Dutch government. Incidentally, the government demands an increased emphasis on the educational activities that they provide (OCW, 2011). This leaves us with nine general theatre companies and eight youth theatre companies. However, although youth and adults do not necessarily learn in different ways, the differences in developmental stages, interests and educational levels do influence the learning content and form of the performance discussions (Illeris, 2009). Due to these discrepancies, performance discussions for both groups are relatively incomparable. Theatre companies often offer a variety of activities for youth, of which performance discussions form a minority. In contrast, performance discussions are one of the main activities for the adult audience. Therefore, it is essential that these activities lead to a positive learning outcome. Consequently, I shall focus exclusively on performance discussions for adults, thus excluding the youth theatre companies from my research.

My thesis is divided into two parts. In part one, I shall present the research context and the theoretical framework for the analysis. In order to contribute to the research field of Western performance discussions, I shall first present a general overview of the existing research. In chapter one, a brief history of the development of performance discussions in relation to the role of the audience will be presented. This will be followed by a description of the existing forms of performance discussions, as mentioned in the available research. Heim's research (2009) forms an important basis for this chapter. In the second chapter, I shall construct a theoretical framework of learning by focussing on those elements that are necessary in engaging audience members in such a way that they obtain a positive learning outcome. This will serve as the basis for my analysis of performance discussions in the Netherlands, and thus for the answer to my research question.

Learning is a very complex matter. Theories of learning have focused on neurological functions, behavioural modifications, cognitive structures, constructivist approaches and social interactions, to name only a few (Wenger, 2009). It lies beyond the scope of this thesis to present a comprehensive overview of all the theories. Therefore, I shall merely focus on those elements and theories of learning that I consider to be relevant for analysing and

designing performance discussions<sup>2</sup>. I shall build my framework on the definitions of learning provided by Illeris (2009) and Jarvis (2009). Additionally, I shall draw inspiration from Kolb's different learning styles (1984), Bloom's three domains for learning (1956) and Baker, Jensen and Kolb's framework for conversational learning (2002).

The second part of this thesis will focus on my exploratory qualitative research and analysis of performance discussions in the Netherlands. In order to gather the data, I have conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with the theatre companies that are directly subsidised by the Dutch government. In the first chapter of the second part, I shall elaborate on my research methodology, followed by a description of the state of affairs concerning performance discussions in the Netherlands in chapter two. In chapter three, a more detailed descriptive account of the learning content and forms of performance discussions will be provided. These shall be analysed in chapter four, using the theoretical framework constructed in chapter two of part one. In the conclusion to and discussion of my master's thesis, I shall provide an answer to my main research question.

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<sup>2</sup> It is my belief that this framework will also be relevant for designing and analysing other activities that intend to stimulate learning, i.e. educational activities. This is, however, outside the focus of this thesis.

# **PART I**

## **THEORETICAL CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK**

# Chapter 1 – The Research Field of Performance Discussions

## 1.1 A Brief History and Context of the Demand for Performance Discussions

Performance discussions first took place in the Western world around the beginning of the twentieth century and grew in popularity in the twenty-first century (Heim, 2009). This rise in popularity and, more importantly, the value of performance discussions in our contemporary society can be related to the changing role of the audience. The theatre once used to be a place where the audience could actively contribute to the performance. In the sixteenth century a playhouse was mainly a social environment where it was entirely acceptable to interact with the onstage actors and other audience members during a performance (Bennett, 2001; Heim, 2009). Opinions and responses were readily voiced throughout the performance. Bennett (2001) even equates the role of the audience to that of actors partaking in the drama. Gradually, however, throughout the seventeenth to twentieth century, the theatre changed into a passive environment “where audiences sit quietly in the dark, applaud, purchase some theatre merchandise and exit the theatre” (Heim, 2012, p. 189). This change has been attributed to a combination of factors. With the emergence of private theatres and higher admission prices, the theatre audience became more elitist (Bennett, 2001). The demands of this wealthy and bourgeois audience, in combination with the rise in authority of art professionals, led to a new theatre etiquette that suppressed the expressive behaviour in audiences (Kershaw, 2004). Additionally, the motivation to attend the theatre changed. Where audience members first sought interactive entertainment, they now wished to reinforce their social status and identity (Heim, 2009). Besides these socio-political forces, technological developments and changes in theatre architecture contributed to the silencing of the audience. The invention of electrical light made it possible to place the audience in darkness while lighting the stage. Furthermore, the change from pits to stalls and the introduction of the proscenium arch added to the separation of performers and audience (Bennet, 2001; Blackadder, 2003; Heim, 2009). This “manoeuvred the audience into a position from which they could only look at, but not contribute to the theatrical event” (Blackadder, 2003, p.15). The introduction of comfort seating made the audience even more passive and further removed from the stage and each other (Mackintosh, 1993).

Although this tendency towards passiveness generally continued in the twentieth century, several changes started taking place. Theatre practitioners like Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal emerged who attempted to arouse the audience from their passive roles and engage them respectively in criticism of and active participation in performances (Bennett, 2001). In addition, theatres began to offer activities around the performances, intended to extend the theatre experience or educate the audience. This probably originated in reaction to declining audience numbers, perhaps partly due to the increasing popularity of television and film (Auslander, 2008). These developments contributed somewhat to increased audience participation in the theatrical event, but the receptive role of the audience prevailed.

The beginning of the twenty-first century, however, has seen a surge in the audience's desire of a more participatory role in the theatre event (Gardner, 2007; Freshwater, 2011). Furthermore, the popularity of post-performance discussions significantly increased (Heim, 2009). This is possibly induced by the so-called experience economy that emerged around the turn of the millennium (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Consumers are no longer satisfied with merely the product or service, but demand memorable, meaningful and extraordinary experiences, for example through additional services (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). They wish to participate, co-create and be engaged in a personal way. When audience members "perceive that they feel, learn, and become immersed by just being there, or do something actively...all the senses become involved and the experience feels meaningful or extraordinary" (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011, p.243). This could be driven by the desire to form and express one's identity. For theatres this implies that merely providing a performance is no longer enough. Audience members require additional services through which they learn and become immersed in the experience, like performance discussions.

## **1.2 Prevalent Models of Performance Discussions: A Receptive Audience**

Little research has been done into performance discussions, as mentioned in the introduction. Heim (2009) has attempted to bridge the gap by conducting research into the occurrence of the phenomenon, particularly into post-performance discussions. She mainly focused on mainstream theatres in the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany; more specifically in the cities of London, New York and Stuttgart. One prevalent model of

pre-performance discussions is identified, as well as two prevalent models of post-performance discussions.

### ***1.2.1 Pre-Performance Discussions: Expert-Driven***

Only a few sentences in Heim's (2009) research are dedicated to pre-performance discussions, leaving the phenomenon greatly underrepresented, not only in her study but in the available literature. She states that pre-performance discussions are necessarily educational events that are expert-driven. In other words, an expert provides an introductory explanation of the play that will be performed. Hereby a teacher-student relationship is established. The expert is usually an employee of the theatre company or a theatre scholar. Heim seems displeased that theatres offer pre-performance discussions at all, since she sees it as a way to construct "an intellectual hierarchy that works to marginalise audience authority and subvert audience equality" (p.54).

This representation of pre-performance discussions is rather uninformed and biased. As we shall see in chapter two, Heim harbours a common misconception of the nature of an educational activity. In addition, the content and forms of pre-performance discussions are more varied than her research implicates. Part two of this thesis shall demonstrate this, as pre-performance discussions are exceedingly popular in the Netherlands.

### ***1.2.2 Post-Performance Discussions: Question-and-Answer and Expert-Driven***

Two models of post-performance discussions seem to be prevalent within the studied mainstream theatres. Heim (2009) has labelled them the question-and-answer model and the expert-driven model. During the question-and-answer model the audience is invited to ask the director, the cast, the playwright or other members of the production team questions about the performance. This model is often facilitated by the director, who opens the discussion with a short introduction. This discussion can turn into an extra performance as the actors recount stories, often accompanied by physical gestures, and react to each other. Not all actors welcome this form of post-performance discussion (Goodwin, 2004; Heim, 2009).

After the demands of performing, most actors would much prefer to retire to the bar for a drink rather than to answer a set of predictable questions. And actors are often hesitant to

interact with the audience and prefer to preserve the relationship of character-audience rather than to create a new relationship of actor-audience. Another rarely discussed reason ... is insecurity. Added demands are placed on the actors in post-performance discussions that are often outside of their expertise. These discussions require actors not only to be experts in the field of performing, but also to have detailed knowledge of the play and/or issues the play explores (Heim, 2012, p.190).

In the expert-driven model the discussion is led by an expert on a subject related to the play, such as its historical context or legal issues that arise in the play. The expert in question can also be a professional directly related to the production, like the director or the playwright. The expert-driven model usually consists of a lecture followed by a question round in which the audience can ask the expert questions. The length of both these elements can vary substantially. As is the case with the expert driven pre-performance discussion, Heim (2009) sees this model as a way to further marginalize the audience. Besides the creation of an intellectual hierarchy, the audience members often refrain from asking questions due to the intimidating expert environment.

Both the question-and-answer model and the expert-driven model appear to be a platform for the art professionals and experts rather than for the audience. The audience listens, once again passive, as the professionals further discuss the production and their vision on it. The main task of the audience is to be receptive and their contribution is primarily restricted to asking questions and offering compliments. As we shall see in chapter two, these models do not offer all audience members enough stimuli to enrich the theatre experience. However, alternative models exist, apart from the prevalent receptive models, that promote more active audience participation.

### **1.3 Other Models of Post-Performance Discussions: Greater Participation**

#### ***1.3.1 The Schauspiel Stuttgart Model***

The *Schauspiel Stuttgart* in southern Germany has introduced a model which gives the audience the opportunity to communicate their responses to the performance. These post-performance discussions were fuelled by the apparent need of the audience to protest against elements in the performance.

During the opening night performance of Volker Losch's *Dogville* ... audience members shouted out 'Stop, Stop!' at the stage during an explicit rape scene. Other audience members protested against these comments and remarked 'No, it is necessary.' On the opening night of Ulrich Rasche's *Kirchenlieder* in 2006, audience members, enraged at elements of the play and production, started to smash down the doors of the theatre (Heim, 2009, p.191).

In order to encourage dialogue, the discussions take place in a casual environment near the bar. The company's dramaturge ignites the discussion with the audience by asking them questions. Heim (2009) claims that the *Schauspiel Stuttgart* model is still mostly expert driven due to the role of the dramaturge. I beg to differ, however, in that the questions in this model are directed at the audience, setting them on equal footing with the dramaturge. They become the experts of their personal views and responses. The audience participation goes beyond asking questions and leads to active and opinionated discussion.

### **1.3.2 The Community Conversation Model**

Other models of post-performance discussions exist in community, youth and fringe theatre. One such model is the community conversation model (Ellis, 2000; Goodwin, 2004). This often follows contemporary plays that explore community issues or personal narrative performances (Heim, 2009). A facilitator encourages the audience to converse about their personal experiences in relation to community issues that were raised by the play. This post-performance discussion can be seen as "a catalyst that creates dialogue contextualizing the performance within the audience's frame of reference" (Armstrong, 2013, p.121). The goal of community conversations is to deepen the engagement of the audience with a societal issue and to elucidate different perspectives thereon. Usually the discussion is concluded with suggestions for further action. The facilitator is merely present to commence and guide the discussion (Armstrong, 2013). The community conversation model is intended for active audience participation, albeit with clear objectives concerning the progress and results of the discussion.

### **1.3.3 Brooks' After-Play Interactive Forum**

Another model that stimulates active audience contribution has been developed by playwright Laurie Brooks (Brooks, 2005). In order to avoid the "clichéd queries from typical theatre talkbacks" (p.58) she developed the after-play interactive forum. This model

combines discussion with interactive drama techniques. The post-performance discussions are led by a neutral facilitator, often accompanied by the actors who remain in character (Brooks, 2006). The objective of this model is to encourage audiences to explore the values and ideas that are presented in the play.

The forums consist of three phases, namely statements, exploration and reflection. In the statement phase, audiences are asked to agree or disagree with various statements. Their response can be made visible by asking the audience to raise their hands, stand up or move across the room (Armstrong, 2013). In the exploration phase different techniques can be used to encourage debate about character choices and discuss solutions for problems. In the post-performance discussion of Brooks' play *The Tangled Web*, the facilitator is scripted to place all the actors in a visual box-of-blame onstage. The facilitator then asks the audience who was not to blame for a character's choice and why. This character can then be moved out of the box-of-blame (Brooks, 2006). Alternative techniques can be applied in the exploration phase. Audience members can be separated into smaller groups in order to share personal experiences. Alternatively, they can be asked to create a static tableau in order to explore an experience (Armstrong, 2013). The final phase of the model, namely reflection, focuses on the future of the characters. The facilitator asks the audience to describe in a single sentence or phrase what they think the future will hold for each of the characters (Brooks, 2006).

This model engages the audience in both verbal and physical participation. Furthermore, the audience is challenged to reflect on what they have seen.

#### **1.3.4 Heim's Conversational Model**

In addition to her research, Heim (2009) developed a new model for post-performance discussions, influenced by the *Schauspiel Stuttgart* model. Her objective was to create a form of audience contribution that would reinstate the authority of the audience as equal to that of the arts professional, hereby enhancing the theatre experience of the audience. The framework for her model is formed by Carl Rogers' model of group psychotherapy, the Person-Centred Approach. This model had already been adapted for various environments, including businesses and schools (Heim, 2009). Heim's post-performance discussions have a non-directive and unstructured approach. A facilitator, who is explicitly not an expert and can thus be seen as equal to the audience members, mediates the discussions. The

facilitator tries to create an open atmosphere in which the participants feel free to make personal, critical or even absurd contributions. This can be done through humorous remarks and asking the audience to share emotional responses to the play. The discussion gains more depth when the audience is encouraged to play the role of critic in order to stimulate not only compliments and comments but also critical remarks, evaluations and reflections. The facilitator has to value each person's contributions by showing positive regard for opinions and feelings. His or her main role is to serve the group and to use reflective listening to summarize or clarify remarks. The aim is to allow audiences to self-direct the discussion up to the point that the facilitator is barely necessary to mediate the conversation and is seen merely as another group member. Additionally, it is important to let the participants maintain their anonymity and to leave them the choice whether to contribute verbally to the conversation or not. Heim argues that each audience member is an active participant through their attendance. During these post-performance discussions "[t]he audience critic was preoccupied with making meaning, negotiating meaning and contributing meaning to broaden and enrich the experience of the theatrical event" (Heim, 2009, p.114).

As is the case with the *Schauspiel Stuttgart* model and the community conversation model, Heim's model stimulates active audience participation through discussion.

#### **1.4 The Perceived Dichotomy Between Education and Participation**

Prompted by the desire and necessity to attract and retain audiences, theatres organise performance discussions. These aim to enhance the theatre experience by increasing the audience's knowledge of theatre and their participation in the event. The prevalent models as Heim (2009) describes them, however, aim to increase knowledge through a one-dimensional method of knowledge transferral. That is to say, through the traditional model of education in which the art professionals or experts perform the role of teachers and the audience plays the part of receptive students. Audience participation is restricted to asking questions. Other models exist that provide the audience with a more active, often conversational, form of participation. These models, however, are rarely seen as educational due to the perceived dichotomy between education and participation. Many persons, like Heim (2009), harbour the misconception that education is necessarily receptive. It does not include participation beyond physical presence. In the next chapter I shall expand on this misconception and attempt to dismantle it. I posit that learning is not restricted to situations

in which participants take on the role of receptive and passive listeners. Such an environment might stimulate learning in a few, but is likely to exclude and demotivate a large group of participants. Performance discussions that promote diverse forms of participation and presentation are more likely to engage a larger segment of participants in learning.

## **Chapter 2 – Creating a Theoretical Framework for Analysis**

In this chapter, a framework shall be created to analyse whether performance discussions in the Netherlands are successful at engaging audience members in learning, from a theoretical perspective. In order to do so, it is necessary to define the concepts ‘education’ and ‘learning’, thereby dismantling the misconception and perceived dichotomy mentioned in the previous chapter. This involves the identification of the different elements that stimulate learning in order to create a positive learning outcome, i.e. that the audience believes they learned or experienced something worthwhile.

### **2.1 Education and Learning: A Common Misconception**

In our present society learning is often equated to education. Both are considered to take place within an institution whereby a teacher plants ideas into students’ minds (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002; Wenger, 2009). Learning is seen as an individual process with a clear beginning and ending, that occurs as a result of teaching and that can be assessed accordingly. Therefore, we place students in classrooms, away from outside distractions, where they can pay attention to the teacher and the learning material. Many people come out of this endeavour with the impression that learning is demanding and tedious (Wenger, 2009). This understanding of learning seems to have affected the prevalent forms in which performance discussions are provided, namely the expert-driven model and the question-and-answer model. Theatre companies organise events according to this definition of learning, encouraging audiences to take on the traditional role of student. It is remarkable, though, that this notion of learning still prevails, since theories concerning learning have been promoting different approaches for several decades (Dewey, 1916; Piaget, 1954; Gardner, 1983; Kolb, 1984).

### **2.2 Designing Performance Discussions: Dismantling the Misconception**

It is imperative to distinguish between education and learning. For the context of this thesis, education can be seen as an activity or an environment designed to instigate learning. Therefore, our understanding of the concept ‘learning’ defines the educational environments and activities we design. If we believe that a person can only learn through passive listening, then the traditional model described above makes sense. It falls short,

however, when we believe that the impulses that stimulate learning differ per person and per situation.

### ***2.2.1 Learning: A Summary of What It Is and How We Do It***

Learning is a basic ability and expression of human life (Illeris, 2009). From the moment we are born we start to learn and never cease to do so. We acquire languages, accumulate knowledge and develop a large range of skills. We learn how the everyday world works, how to assign values and shape a personal identity (Thomas, 1994; Illeris, 2009; Jarvis, 2009). As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, learning is also an extremely complex research topic for which no generally accepted definition exists. Jarvis (2009) comes closest to constructing a definition that encompasses its complex nature.

Human learning is the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person (p.25).

Our human lives consist of experiences that are both cognitive and non-cognitive, like physical and emotional experiences (Dewey, 1916; Kolb, 1984; Elkjaer, 2009). These do not automatically lead to learning. We first need to make the experience meaningful to ourselves by transforming it into mental structures (Kolb, 1984; Jarvis, 2009). We need to understand the experience or, in the case of skills or actions, understand how to do it. Once we achieve that understanding and can retain it for an extensive period of time, have we learnt something (Heron, 2009). It can then be communicated, reflected upon, applied and used to inform new experiences (Elkjaer, 2009).

To go into more detail, external and internal processes are combined in learning. The first is a process of interaction between an individual and his or her environment. This interaction usually starts as a bodily sensation, like perception, a physical action or something we feel or smell (Illeris, 2009; Jarvis, 2009). These impulses from the interaction process stimulate the internal psychological process of transformation, or acquisition. Two interchanging psychological functions are involved in the process of acquisition: the learning content and the incentive (Illeris, 2009). The former is a function controlling what is learned

and the latter provides and guides the mental energy that runs the acquisition process. The learning content can be anything that contributes to the development of the learner's understanding and capacity. It commonly refers to skills and knowledge, but can also denote "opinions, insight, meaning, attitudes, values, ways of behaviour, methods, strategies, etc." (Illeris, 2009, p.10). The incentive, a person's mental energy, is determined by aspects such as emotions, opinions and motivation. The incentive and the learning content continuously influence each other. Whether the learning is motivated by volition or coercion partly determines what is learned. Similarly, new information is capable of changing the incentive.

In traditional education the learning content is usually centralised and little attention is paid to the interaction process and the incentive. This could happen at the cost of what is actually learned. In other words, the intended learning outcome is not the achieved learning outcome.

The incentive function is also still crucial, i.e. how the situation is experienced, what sort of feelings and motivations are involved and thus the nature and the strength of the mental energy that is mobilized ... Further, both the content and the incentive are crucially dependent on the interaction process between the learner and the social, societal, cultural and material environment. If the interaction ... is not adequate and acceptable to the students, the learning will suffer, or something quite different might be learned, for instance a negative impression of the teacher, of some other students, of the subject or of the school situation in general (Illeris, 2009, p.12).

In the case of performance discussions, an initially positive incentive can be assumed. People attend the theatre and performance discussions out of personal interest and desire. They are willing to learn more about the performance they are about to see and the theatre company who produced it. This could partly be attributed to the fact that attending the theatre and participating in performance discussions is an expression of one's identity, which is a powerful incentive to learn (Heron, 2009). It is vital to keep this incentive positive in order to achieve that the audience believes they learned or experienced something worthwhile. This can be realised by directing both the interaction process and the learning content.

### **2.2.2 Determining the Elements That Engage Individual Learners**

The information we wish to bring across is presented through interaction processes. These provide impulses that commence the learning process (Illeris, 2009). In the traditional model of education, the learning content is often presented in a single way, namely by a teacher who lectures to receptive students. Along with many learning theorists, Gardner (2009) argues that we should depart from this norm for education in order to successfully engage individuals in learning.

Because of their biological backgrounds, personal histories, and idiosyncratic experiences, students do not arrive in school as blank slates, nor as individuals who can be aligned unidimensionally along a single axis of intellectual accomplishment. They possess different kinds of minds, with different strengths, interests, and modes of processing information ... [I]f the teacher is able to use different pedagogical approaches, there exists the possibility of reaching more students in more effective ways (p.107).

Due to these individual histories, strengths and interests, different impulses are needed to stimulate learning in different individuals. The influential 'experiential learning theory' of Kolb (1984) demonstrates this concept quite aptly. He identifies four different types of learners: the dreamer, thinker, decider and doer. The dreamer seeks personal meaning and contact, and likes to view concrete situations from multiple perspectives. In contrast, the thinker is the type on who traditional educational models are based. He or she prefers lectures in which abstract concepts, logic and facts are presented. The decider excels in finding efficient solutions and learns best when presented with practical applications of theories and ideas. The fourth learner type, the doer, is action-oriented and likes to physically participate in new experiences (Kolb & Boyatzis, 2000; Tonckens, 2005). An individual is often a combination of the four types, but generally only one of them dominates. A person's dominant learning type will be their entry point into learning. The dominance of a specific type can be influenced, however, by the situation, the people you are with and the space you are in (Kolb, 1984; Tonckens, 2005). This theory has become quite dominant in the Dutch cultural education scene, specifically in museums (Hoogstraat & Vels-Hein, 2006).

When designing performance discussions we have to take into account that individuals require different impulses to be successfully engaged in learning. An applicable

guideline is presented by the three learning domains of Bloom (1956): cognitive learning, affective learning and psychomotoric learning. These domains are initially intended as learning outcomes, namely the successful acquisition of intellectual, emotional and physical knowledge and skills. I believe, however, that these three concepts can also be used to shape educational activities, thereby engaging different learner types. In other words, performance discussions should consist of a combination of receptive and reflective cognitive and affective elements, as well as bodily elements. Furthermore, research has shown that the learning content is most effectively transferred to the audience by combining verbal representations of the learning content, like spoken and printed words, with non-verbal representations, like video and pictures. These verbal and non-verbal representations should appeal to both a person's visual and auditory track (Low & Sweller, 2005; Moreno & Mayer, 2007).

In addition to the elements mentioned so far, learners can benefit from social interaction in the learning environment. Many persons learn more effectively in conversation with another, or in a group setting. They can communicate their experiences and interpret them, hear other perspectives, negotiate meaning and reflect upon the implications of their experiences and conclusions (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002; Gardner, 2009; Heron, 2009; Jarvis, 2009). The social aspect of learning can be traced back to the beginning of our lives.

During the first few years of life children probably experience the richest learning environment they will ever encounter and the amount of knowledge they acquire is phenomenal. They learn language, they learn about the everyday world and how it works. They acquire the essential building blocks for science, mathematics and literacy. They learn how to deal with their emotions and accumulate a wide range of social skills. This prodigious amount of learning cannot be accomplished alone. The greater part can only be learned through interaction with people (Thomas, 1994, p.132).

Learning through social interaction remains just as effective during the rest of our lives (Thomas, 1994; Heron, 2009). Since the theatre is usually attended in the company of friends or family, this social interaction will to some degree already take place before, during and after the performance. Nevertheless, performance discussions can deepen the social interaction. One method is to create an opportunity for collective conversation. The

previously presented *Schauspiel Stuttgart* model, the community conversation model and Heim's conversational model are all examples of this. Baker, Jensen and Kolb (2012) have developed a theoretical framework for learning through conversation in order to achieve a positive and fulfilling learning outcome. They state that it is important to have a non-directive facilitator to commence the conversation and smooth its progress. Questions from the audience to the facilitator should be directed back to the audience. The environment should be unregulated, there are no set rules about the progress of the conversation, up to the point that participants self-regulate the conversation. Furthermore, an informal environment helps to stimulate participation. This framework for conversational learning bears a striking resemblance to Heim's conversational model, though they do not seem to be connected or based upon the same sources. The unintended correspondence might be seen as a confirmation of its effectiveness.

### **2.2.3 Designing Performance Discussions**

Before designing any form of educational activity it is important to formulate the objectives. Why is there a need for the activity and what is the intended outcome? Secondary objectives could focus on the type of learning content the company wishes to transfer to the audience to reach the primary objective. Only when the objectives are clear, can performance discussions be designed to fulfil them. It is also necessary to define the target group: who are you trying to reach with the activity? In the case of performance discussions, it is the adult audience. Once the objectives are formulated and the target group is defined, the content and form of the performance discussions can be designed. In order to determine which mode of execution best suits the company's objectives and vision on education, it is recommended to ground the discussions in one or more educational theories. Knowledge on how people learn and which environments best instigate learning can strengthen the learning potential of performance discussions and offer aid in designing the discussion. Following the theory in the previous paragraph, I propose that in order to reach different learner types, the learning content and form of performance discussions should contain cognitive, affective, bodily and social elements. Depending on the objectives and the situation, the social element can be centralised by creating a conversational environment. Additionally, the performance discussions should contain verbal and non-verbal information of both a visual and auditory nature. I posit that by combining and balancing these elements

more audience members will be engaged in learning, and thereby involved in the activity, which is likely to result in a positive learning outcome. Furthermore, I would like to stress the importance of good presentation skills, although I shall not be able to analyse them in this thesis. A speaker has to be well-prepared and must engage the audience by his or her use of voice, language, body and eye-contact (Leving & Topping, 2006; Osborn, Osborn & Osborn, 2012).

Finally, the design of educational activities is always dependent on a number of practical factors. For example, what is the available budget and manpower? What is the timeframe for the activity and which resources are required? Performance discussions, too, have to be designed within these practical limitations.

This theoretical framework for designing performance discussions shall serve as the basis for analysing performance discussions in the Netherlands. In the following section, part two, I shall contribute to the research field of performance discussions by presenting the state of affairs in the Netherlands. Subsequently, I shall apply the theoretical framework constructed in this chapter to the forms of performance discussions provided in the Netherlands.

## **PART II**

# **EXPLORATION AND ANALYSIS**

## Chapter 1 – Presenting the Research Methodology

To recapitulate, this master's thesis has two objectives. Firstly, I aim to contribute to the research field of performance discussions by painting a picture of this phenomenon in the Netherlands. Secondly, I shall analyse whether these performance discussions are designed in such a way that they successfully engage the audience in learning, thereby resulting in a positive learning outcome that enriches the audience's theatre experience. The research is restricted in two respects: I shall focus exclusively on performance discussions for adult audiences and only those Dutch theatre companies are included that form the basic infrastructure of the Netherlands.

### 1.1 Selecting the Theatre Companies

The national cultural basic infrastructure (BIS) of the Netherlands is formed by the 83 institutions and six funds that are directly subsidised by the Dutch government. These are generally the larger institutions that the government deems to be of (inter)national importance (Zijlstra, 2012, p.7). In 2011, institutions could apply for a position in the BIS of 2013-2016 (Cultuursubsidie, n.d.). The Dutch government determined the budget and the number of positions that were available per sector. In total, seventeen positions were available for theatre companies, nine for regular theatre companies and eight for youth theatre companies. As mentioned, the youth theatre companies have been excluded from my research. In order to finance culture on a representative national level, the subsidies were spread throughout the main cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Den Haag and the four regions North, East, Centre and South<sup>3</sup> (Raad voor Cultuur, 2012). Initially, eight Dutch theatre companies and one Frysian<sup>4</sup> theatre company were granted a position in the BIS (Zijlstra, 2012, p.8; Cultuursubsidie, n.d.). These are

- *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* in Amsterdam
- *Ro Theater* in Rotterdam
- *Het Nationale Toneel* in Den Haag
- *Noord Nederlands Toneel* in the North

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<sup>3</sup> The provinces Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe form the region North, the provinces Overijssel and Gelderland form the East, the provinces Flevoland and Utrecht the Centre and the provinces Zeeland, Brabant and Limburg form the region South.

<sup>4</sup> The first official language in the Netherlands is Dutch. Additionally, Frysian has been acknowledged as the second official language in the province Friesland (Rijksoverheid, n.d., *Talen in Nederland*).

- *Toneelgroep Oostpool* in the East
- *De Utrechtse Spelen* in the Centre
- *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* and *Toneelgroep Maastricht* in the South , and
- the Frysian theatre company *Tryater*.

However, *De Utrechtse Spelen* is omitted in the allocation documents. Around the time of the subsidy division, *De Utrechtse Spelen* fell into disgrace. Due to mismanagement the theatre company reached near-bankruptcy (Van Lent, 2012; Schaap, 2012; Van Heuven, 2013). The Minister of Education, Culture and Sciences has, however, declared that *De Utrechtse Spelen* will still receive the BIS subsidy when and if certain conditions are met (Bussemaker, 2012). This resulted in the inauguration of new management and a complete reorganisation. Due to its unconfirmed BIS status in official documents and the reorganisation of *De Utrechtse Spelen*, I have decided to exclude this theatre company from my research.

*Tryater* has been included in the BIS since it is the only professional theatre company representing the Frysian community. Their performances are restricted to the province of Friesland, where they achieve a high number of visitors and manage to reach audience members in the smallest of villages (Raad voor Cultuur, 2012). Despite the fact that several of their performances are now accompanied by Dutch surtitles, they have a limited visibility in the rest of the Netherlands (Tryater, n.d.; Raad voor Cultuur, 2012). The other theatre companies in the BIS are comparable in that they produce theatre for the entire Dutch population and Dutch is the official national language. In addition, each company also produces productions that travel throughout the Netherlands, thereby reaching and building audiences on a national level. As a result of *Tryater's* incomparability to the other Dutch theatre companies in the BIS, I have excluded it from my research as well. This entails that seven theatre companies remain that can be considered suitable for the objectives of this research. Unfortunately, *Toneelgroep Oostpool*, who represents the region East, was unable to participate.

## 1.2 Describing the Research Approach

Since little research has been done into performance discussions, my research required a qualitative approach and is in the first place exploratory. In order to explore this topic thoroughly I have conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with *Het Nationale Toneel*,

*Het Zuidelijk Toneel, Noord Nederlands Toneel, Ro Theater, Toneelgroep Amsterdam* and *Toneelgroep Maastricht*. Five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and fully recorded on an audio device. The interview with *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* took place telephonically and was recorded in writing. All interviews were conducted in Dutch, but I have translated specific segments into English for use in this thesis<sup>5</sup>. My respondents are the members of staff who are responsible for organising performance discussions and are involved in determining its content and form.

With my analysis of the performance discussions I attempt to disclose how engaging the performance discussions are from a theoretical perspective. Further research will have to be conducted to uncover how the audience evaluates these discussions. I shall, however, include a paragraph in the next chapter of how my respondents consider their performance discussions to be received by the audience. Naturally, this does not replace the necessity of evaluative visitor research. Furthermore, due to my focus on the BIS theatre companies, this research excludes performance discussions in the rest of the Dutch theatre scene, like theatre festivals. One of my respondents mentioned that performance discussions, specifically post-performance discussions, are perhaps more embedded and customary in theatre festivals than in regular theatres. This is, however, not represented in my research. Moreover, I focus on presenting performance discussions as they occur at this moment in time. This research, therefore, does not provide a historical overview of performance discussions in the Netherlands. Additionally, it does not provide insight into the variety of activities and events that theatre companies offer youth and adults in addition to performance discussions. To name two, many theatre companies organise open rehearsals and theatre workshops for adults. This, too, is not represented in my thesis.

The next chapter in this second part of my thesis shall describe the status of performance discussions of BIS theatre companies in the Netherlands. In chapter three I will provide a description of the content and form of these performance discussions. Chapter two and three will comply with my secondary objective, which is to contribute to the research field of performance discussions by exploring the situation in the Netherlands. Additionally, chapter three serves as the foundation for my comparative analysis in chapter

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<sup>5</sup> In my translations I have attempted to stay true to the literal transcription of the interviews, thereby staying close to the colloquial, phrasing and terminology. Sometimes the sentences are fragmented, as my respondents put their thoughts into words. Unusual references and phrases, and seemingly ungrammatical sentences, are simply a natural result of spontaneous speech and colloquial conversation.

four. This chapter aims to answer the main research question, namely whether performance discussions are designed in such a way that they successfully engage the audience in learning, thereby resulting in a positive learning outcome that enriches the theatre experience.

## Chapter 2 – An Overview of Dutch Performance Discussions

### 2.1 Theatre Companies versus Theatres

Characteristic for the Netherlands is a separation between the Dutch BIS theatre companies and the theatres. In other words, the theatre companies create and perform plays and therefore employ actors and theatre-makers, amongst others. These companies offer their performances to theatres throughout the Netherlands. The theatres decide which performances they wish to purchase for the next theatrical season. They provide theatre companies with the space in which their performances can be given to an audience. As a result, Dutch theatre companies actively tour the country with their productions. However, all theatre companies have a home base where their organisation resides and where they create their productions. There is often intensive collaboration between a theatre company and one or more theatres in the same city or region as the company's home base, especially with the main city theatres. These theatres are often considered as the home-theatres in which a large number of the theatre company's performances will premiere and take place. This is most prominent for *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* who has performances roughly every week in its official home-theatre *Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam*. For other theatre companies, like *Ro Theater* and *Het Zuidelijk Toneel*, touring is more prominent and performances take place less frequently in the theatres they consider home.

The same principle is valid for performance discussions. Theatre companies determine which of their performances will be accompanied by a pre- or post-discussion. Alongside the sale of their performances, they can offer theatres these performance discussions. The theatres<sup>6</sup> determine whether they wish to purchase them or not. Vice versa, theatres can request performance discussions if these have not been offered. Several theatre companies prefer to wait for these requests before determining which performances will be accompanied by performance discussions. This interplay between supply and demand is partly determined by the history between a theatre company and a theatre, since "every theatre basically knows which companies offer and which don't. Naturally, you have a history with a theatre" (*Toneelgroep Maastricht*, personal communication, May 19, 2014). Both pre- and post-performance discussions generally don't last longer than thirty minutes.

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<sup>6</sup> Occasionally theatres organise their own performance discussions, independent of the theatre company whose work they will be discussing. These, however, are outside the scope of this thesis.

For example, for *Leger* next season we received a concrete request, “we would like to do something with that”, whereas we had decided beforehand that we would not provide a pre-performance discussion with it. So then you make something to order for a theatre, so that happens as well. So that actually goes two ways. But it is essentially something that we provide and offer, and it then depends on the theatre whether they wish to acquire it or not. Also because they have to pay to acquire our pre-performance discussions, so we do not provide that free of charge. The only exception is our agreement with the *Rotterdamse Schouwburg*. Because we are obviously one of the principle players here in the *Schouwburg*, and also simply regularly collaborate on various different levels, we have a deal with them that we provide the pre-performance discussions free of charge. And that we actually, for example with *Vuurvrouwen*, that is the first large hall production of Alize next season, with every portion we perform here in the *Schouwburg* - we always return for a few days and then we tour and then we come back - in every portion a pre-performance discussion will take place at least once (Ro Theater R2<sup>7</sup>, personal communication, May 26, 2014).

As mentioned in the quote above, special arrangements have often been made with the home-theatres. According to *Het Nationale Toneel* these arrangements are not only restricted to their home-theatres, like the *Koninklijke Schouwburg* and *Theater aan het Spui*, “but actually also the *Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Groningen*. Those are our largest houses with whom we have fixed arrangements” (R1, personal communication, May 27, 2014).

## 2.2 A Preference for Pre-Performance Discussions

The interviews with the BIS companies revealed a clear preference for pre-performance discussions. Pre-performance discussions are frequently provided and are often a standard offer or request. In contrast, post-performance discussions are mainly organised at the request of audience groups or theatres. In the latter case, the organisation of the post-performance discussions usually lies with the theatre and not with the theatre company. Nonetheless, collaboration with the theatre companies is often required since theatres request the cooperation of the company’s actors or theatre-makers. However, two distinctions have to be made with regard to the preference of pre-performance discussions.

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<sup>7</sup> Two respondents were present at my interview with *Ro Theater* and three at my interview with *Het Nationale Toneel*. In the quotes I shall refer to the individual respondents as R1, R2 and R3, in other words Respondent 1 etc.

The first is a distinction between productions for large theatre halls and productions for middle to small theatre halls. The second is a distinction between performances on tour and performances in home cities and theatres.

### **2.2.1 Large Hall Productions versus Small Hall Productions**

Theatre companies create different kinds of productions. The most prominent distinction herein is between productions intended for large theatre halls and productions intended for middle to small theatre halls. More than half of all large hall productions are accompanied by a pre-performance discussion. Most theatre companies indicate that post-performance discussions for large productions rarely occur. Generally, the productions for middle to small halls are seldom accompanied by a performance discussion, simply because the smaller theatres do not have the budget for this. However, when they do occur they are most frequently post-performance discussions organised at the request of the theatre.

Some smaller theatres try to bind audiences by organising special programmes that include performance discussions. *Theater aan het Spui* in Den Haag, for instance, organises the *Toneelkijkers* series (trans. theatre viewers). Anyone interested in theatre can register for one of these series. The *Toneelkijkers* group consists of approximately 30 members who visit fifteen different performances per series at *Theater aan het Spui*. The theatre arranges all sorts of activities within these series, including pre- and post-performance discussions with every performance. These discussions are generally provided by the theatre companies. Usually these performance discussions are also open to the public, but this is often not marketed to audiences who are not part of the *Toneelkijkers*. Performance discussions are restricted to the performances that are included in the *Toneelkijkers* series. The high workload attached to organising the *Toneelkijkers* series leaves little time to arrange and market additional performance discussions (*Theater aan het Spui*, personal communication, May 27, 2014). *Toneelkijkers* is specific to *Theater aan het Spui*, but other smaller theatres purchase post-performance discussions within their own programmes for audience members.

R1: The *Compagnietheater* has such a programme, the *Grant Theater* has such a programme, the *Toneelschuur* has such a programme, *Het Spui* has such a programme. So that is actually

where the requests come from, because they simply offer post-performance discussions several times per season (Het Nationale Toneel, personal communication, May 27, 2014).

### 2.2.2 Performance Discussions on Large Production Tours

The second distinction that has to be made regarding performance discussions, is that between large productions on tour and productions of all sizes at home. *Toneelgroep Maastricht* estimated that about half of the theatres visited during a tour requested a pre-performance discussion. *Noord Nederlands Toneel* even estimated that 75 percent of the performances on tour are accompanied by a pre-performance discussion. Both mention that post-performance discussions on tour hardly ever occur. The preference of theatres and theatre companies for pre-performance discussions is primarily practically motivated. A company's larger productions last several hours, often ending around eleven o'clock at night. Theatre-companies have noticed that the audience is then eager to return home.

Actually, this creative director is much happier with a post-performance discussion than with a pre-performance discussion, because he prefers to discuss what people have seen, and not what they are going to see ... But he makes really long performances, often lasting three hours. Then people no longer wish to stay, they really don't feel like it. Then only three people are present and I travelled all the way to Drachten to facilitate a post-performance discussion and then no one is there [*sic*]. So we really stopped doing that. We do it here in the theatre, though (Toneelgroep Maastricht, personal communication, May 19, 2014).

Furthermore, after a long and possibly taxing performance, the actors still need to get onto the company's bus and return home. Depending on the location of the performance this trip can take up to several hours. Still having to do a post-performance discussion afterwards will cost the tired cast and crew another hour. In addition to the lengthy duration of the large productions there is also a problem of space. Theatre companies indicate that if you wish to accommodate most of the audience for a post-performance discussion, the best location would be the theatre hall itself. However, the technical crew is then working in the hall in order to break down the décor and load it into trailers so that it can be transported to the next location.

These practical aspects have contributed to the popularity of pre-performance discussions for performances on tour. However, when a performance is held for a longer

period of time in the same city, or at a theatre close to home, a slightly different picture emerges.

### **2.2.3 Home Based Performance Discussions**

Post-performance discussions occur at a more regular basis when a performance is held for a longer period of time at the same theatre. This is especially the case for home-theatres.

*Toneelgroep Maastricht* regularly schedules post-performance discussions in their home city.

This is also the case for *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* who, as mentioned, performs in their home-theatre *Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam* with an exceptionally high frequency for a BIS theatre company. This has enabled them to create a form of continuity in the occurrence of performance discussions. Every Wednesday pre-performance discussions are held with their performances in the *Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam* and every Friday post-performance discussions take place. Since Friday and Saturday are the most popular days for a night out, the theatrical evening can be extended with a somewhat longer post-performance discussion. The pre-performance discussions are held on Wednesday in order to attract the audience on another evening than during the weekend. *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* noticed that this continuity results in a still growing group of loyal audience members who purposely purchase tickets on the Wednesday or Friday, depending on their preference for pre- or post-performance discussions. This active practice of post-performance discussions is characteristic for the *Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam*, since they employ a person who can facilitate the post-performance discussions between the actors and the audience. Several other theatre companies also mentioned this during the interview.

But then again, Amsterdam is an example of a theatre who regularly does post-performance discussions, since they have a speaker who is then also present during the performance.

Usually we perform more regularly in Amsterdam, we have a sequence of performances, so then the actors spend the night in Amsterdam, so then they don't mind doing a post-performance discussion (Noord Nederlands Toneel, personal communication, May 22, 2014).

*Noord Nederlands Toneel* does not organise post-performance discussions on a regular basis. Occasionally it will occur in their home city at the request of a group. This is often a group of regularly returning students who are more interested in discussing the play with the actors than in listening to the information provided before a performance. *Het Nationale Toneel*,

too, is familiar with organising post-performance discussions at the request of specific audience groups or theatres. Interestingly, this is hardly ever the case at the *Koninklijke Schouwburg* in Den Haag, which is one of their home-theatres. They attribute this to the culture and the architecture of the building.

R1: It's simply the culture in the *Koninklijke Schouwburg* that when you exit the performance, you drink something in the *Posthoorn*; the café on the opposite side of the square. So everyone exits the hall and the social talk afterwards is somewhere else. It will take ten years R2: before we change that custom. R3: It is also the architecture of the theatre which guides you to the cloakroom in a sort of gutter...R1: I also did a lot with *Toneelgroep Amsterdam*, it goes really well there [*sic*]. But that is also because *Schouwburg Amsterdam*, that is such a place where, when you have seen the performance, you do not drink a beer on the *Leidse Plein*, you do that in the theatre...Therefore, I think it has a lot to do with the architecture and the culture of the building (Het Nationale Toneel, personal communication, May 27, 2014).

*Ro Theater* used to have frequent post-performance discussions in the *Rotterdamse Schouwburg*, called The Round Table (trans. *De Ronde Tafel*). These were mostly initiated by a dramaturge connected to the theatre company and ceased to exist with his departure. Instead, the actors of *Ro Theater* can now be found mingling with the audience after a performance, thereby giving the company a face and making it more personal. I shall elaborate on both The Round Table and this form of mingling as a variety of post-performance discussions in chapter three.

When a post-performance discussion is organised by a theatre company, the company defines the content and form in which it is provided. Post-performance discussions can, however, also be requested and organised by a theatre itself. The aforementioned case of *Noord Nederlands Toneel* in the *Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam* is an example of this. In this case, the theatre is responsible for the form of the post-performance discussion. The theatre then usually lets one of their own employees interview the theatre-makers or actors of the theatre company. The role of the theatre company is to 'lend' the theatre the requested cast and crew. This is a frequent practice for *Het Zuidelijk Toneel*, who never organises post-performance discussions themselves, but often responds to requests by lending a theatre their maker and cast.

### **2.3 Reception of Performance Discussions by the Audience**

Performance discussions are intended to deepen the audience's engagement with the performance and the theatre company. Their evaluation of the performance discussions is, therefore, important. However, none of the interviewed theatre companies have conducted structural research into its reception and evaluation. This does not imply that they are not interested in their audience's opinion. Theatre companies often simply do not have the manpower and the means to conduct structural research. They do not have access to the audience's personal information, which has been provided to the theatres during the ticket purchase. Legally, theatres are not allowed to pass this information on to the theatre companies without the personal consent of each audience member. Large scale audience research therefore requires cooperation between theatres and theatre companies. This does not yet exist to the required extent. Several theatres do, however, conduct their own research. After each performance they send the audience an e-mail to inquire how they experienced the performance and the performance discussions. This is then passed on to the theatre companies. Additionally, theatres and theatre companies communicate about the personal feedback the hosts and hostesses of the theatres received.

Besides the feedback from theatres, theatre companies occasionally receive phone calls and e-mails with feedback on performance discussions. Furthermore, the speaker at the performance discussions regularly receives feedback from individual audience members through personal contact. He or she also evaluates how the performance discussion was received based on the audience's responses and behaviour during the discussions. Generally, theatre companies state that the feedback is extremely positive. Audience members seem to greatly appreciate the provided performance discussions. However, some caution has to be taken into account with the interpretation of this form of feedback. Some degree of bias has to be assumed due to the subjectivity of the speaker and the possible restraint of audience members to provide negative feedback in person. Nonetheless, my respondents report that performance discussions are well attended and seem to be gaining in popularity.

### **2.4 A Summary of the Overview**

In summary, theatre companies offer performance discussions along with the sale of a performance. Alternatively, theatres can request these discussions if they have not been offered. The interviews revealed a clear preference for pre-performance discussions. It is

customary for theatre companies to organise pre-performance discussions, unless they feel that this does not suit the production. Post-performance discussions tend to be organised merely at the request of theatres. In general, the theatre then organises the discussion and the company lends the theatre their theatre-makers and cast for an interview. Some distinctions have to be made, however. Dutch theatre companies frequently tour with their productions. Pre-performance discussions accompany them on a regular basis. After these long performances the audience, cast and crew alike wish to return home and retire for the night. Post-performance discussions therefore hardly ever occur on tour. In contrast, performances for smaller halls are more frequently accompanied by post-performance discussions. In general, however, the productions for middle to small halls are seldom accompanied by a performance discussion, simply because the smaller theatres do not have the budget for this. At the home base pre-performance discussions still occur most frequently, but post-performance discussions take place on a more regular basis than on tour. This practice partly depends on the theatre company, the intensity of its connection to a home based theatre and the preference of both the theatre company and the theatre for pre- or post-performance discussions.

## Chapter 3 – The Objectives, Learning Content and Form

### 3.1 The Main Objectives and Different Focal Points

Performance discussions aim to fulfil certain objectives. The objectives largely determine the learning content and affect the form. As described in the introduction, the main objective of performance discussions is to encourage audience members to develop a loyal attachment to the theatre company. This form of audience retention can lead to financial stability, which in turn enables the theatre company to fulfil its mission within society and provide work opportunities for theatre professionals. Theatre companies hope to achieve this by increasing knowledge through performance discussions, thereby creating a greater understanding of their performances and of the company itself. This can enhance the theatre experience and the appreciation of the audience for the theatre company's mission and work. Besides this collective main objective, theatre companies have secondary objectives relating to the kind of knowledge they wish to convey and the relationship they wish to establish. Idiosyncratic focal points can be discerned that reflect the mission of each theatre company.

#### 3.1.1 The Objectives for Pre-Performance Discussions

The interviewed theatre companies had at least one objective in common for their pre-performance discussions: the wish to provide the audience with a direction for viewing the performance (trans. *kijkrichting*), without fully shaping the audience's perspective. In other words, the companies wish to keep their performances open for different interpretations, while at the same time providing a context so that the audience understands what they are looking at. This context is determined by the play itself, as will be discussed in paragraph 3.2, but also by the different focal points of the theatre groups. The focus of *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* is to illuminate the role and value of art in our contemporary society, more specifically, the relationship between their productions and the socio-political developments in our world and in their region. Why this play and why now? This is an objective that is shared by all theatre companies in varying gradations. *Noord Nederlands Toneel*, for example, combines this element with their focus on the complete production process. In their pre-performance discussions the choice of a play based on its relevance in society is the starting point for elaborating on the production process. They specifically wish to stress that nothing on stage

is coincidental; each detail is thought through and has meaning. In contrast, *Toneelgroep Maastricht* is more focused on the content and themes of the play, specifically on what is thought to be important by the creative director. Since the creative leadership will soon change, the focus of the performance discussions might be altered as well. The focus of *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* is a combination of several objectives presented so far. In addition to dramaturgical information, they wish to provide a glance into the rehearsal process and into the minds of their theatre-makers, i.e. how the performance portrays Amsterdam in the mind of the director at this moment in time. At the centre of the pre-performance discussions of *Het Nationale Toneel* lies the message that theatre is more than entertainment. It is a metaphor that tries to present and question our reality. Additionally, the company wishes to provide the audience with certain codes for viewing. For example, that the playwright intended the play to be amusing so laughter is welcomed<sup>8</sup>, or that the audience should not be concerned if they lose track of what is going on, since that is the playwright's intention. *Het Nationale Toneel* also has alternative pre-performance discussions with the objectives to connect the play to our society and world, and to stimulate the discussion culture of Den Haag. Finally, the main focal point of *Ro Theater* is the personal meeting between the audience and the theatre company. Through this personal moment of contact they wish to provide information that will bring the audience closer to the performance. They wish to create not only a loyal audience base, but an audience that is deeply involved and familiar with every aspect and employee of their company. Besides these differences in focal points, all theatre companies agree that the pre-performance discussions should ignite curiosity and enthusiasm for the performance.

### 3.1.2 The Objectives for Post-Performance Discussions

The objectives for post-performance discussions are less diverse and defined, since they occur less frequently and are often organised by theatres instead of theatre companies. The main difference is that “pre-performance discussions focus on how the audience enters the performance and post-performance discussions, then you need to do something with how the audience comes out of it [*sic*]” (Het Nationale Toneel R3, personal communication, May

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<sup>8</sup> *Het Nationale Toneel* mentions a scene in one of their plays that ought to have filled the theatre with laughter. However, audience members who recognised the humour and laughed, were shushed by other audience members. This can probably be attributed to the conventional theatre code of silence and to ignorance on the intention of the play. Pre-performance discussions can intercept these misunderstandings.

27, 2014). Three objectives can be discerned. The first, and most frequently mentioned, is to give the audience the opportunity to react to what they have seen; i.e. to give them the opportunity to share their feelings, experiences and any questions they might have after the performance. Secondary to this is the objective to provide the theatre companies with another opportunity to explain their work and place it in a specific context. A final objective is to let the audience become better acquainted with the actors and theatre-makers.

### 3.1.3 From Objectives to Theoretical Underpinning

As mentioned in my theoretical framework, it is advisable to ground the discussions in one or more educational theories. Knowledge on how people learn and which environments best instigate learning can strengthen the learning potential of the activity and offer aid for its design. Interestingly, none of the theatre companies have done so. *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* indicated that although their activities for youth are based on educational theories, the performance discussions are not. They are based on the company's experience with audience events and on knowledge of presentation skills. *Toneelgroep Amsterdam*, too, indicated that the performance discussions are based on their experience with different audience activities. The lack of theoretical grounding seems to be partly related to unfamiliarity with theories of learning, and partly to the misconception about education and learning.

R2: With the word 'learning theory' my skin starts to crawl a little ... The only thing you want is that they take something with them about the performance and the form, and that they experience it themselves; that they experience what it's like to work in a specific style of acting. Or what it is to be creative, to open up and to *[sic]*. R1: Yes, so that experience is leading, more than the learning. R2: Yes, more so than saying "we want them to learn something about" *[sic]*. R1: And it is really about developing preference, that we at least, well, you need to learn to taste theatre or to experience that *[sic]*. But it is not so much a real learning method. It is really just experiencing (Ro Theater, personal communication, May 26, 2014).

Although this statement is mainly related to educational activities for the youth, it demonstrates the persistent misconception of learning, as described in chapter two of part one. Remarkably, *Ro Theater's* vision on educational activities is in fact very aligned with

experiential and hands-on approaches to learning, of which John Dewey (1916)<sup>9</sup> can be considered the forefather. By learning more about these theories, new insights can be gained for the creation of educational activities, in complete alignment with the company's vision and objectives. This is relevant for all theatre companies. Nonetheless, whether they are based on educational theories or not, different forms and content have emerged for performance discussions.

### 3.2 Pre-Performance Discussions: The Learning Content and Prevalent Forms

Roughly three dominant forms of pre-performance discussions can be distinguished in the theatre companies. The first is the more traditional form of a presentation or lecture. The speaker is usually a dramaturge, an employee of the education department or a person employed by the theatre company specifically for the delivery of performance discussions. The latter are often drama teachers, theatre scholars and occasionally journalists. Following the preferred terminology of the theatre groups, I shall refer to this type as the substantive story (trans. *inhoudelijk verhaal*). The second prevalent form of pre-performance discussions is a talk by one or more of the actors. The third form is an interview with one or more members of the creative cast or crew. The interviewer is then either one of the persons mentioned above as speaker in the substantive story, or a presenter employed by the theatre. In the latter case, the theatre is usually the organiser of the pre-performance discussion.

*Ro Theater* is the only theatre company that alternates between all three forms. *Noord Nederlands Toneel* uses the substantive story during tours and the interview in their home city Groningen. *Toneelgroep Maastricht* also most frequently uses the third form in which the creative director is interviewed by the education officer. This form is sometimes alternated with a substantive story by the dramaturge. The form they do not provide, the talk by an actor, is the established form in which *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* provides pre-performance discussions. For *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* and *Het Nationale Toneel* the substantive story is the most dominant form. The latter, however, also provides the talk by actors or makers, though only at request. Other forms for pre-performance discussions, however, do exist or are being explored. I shall first describe the three prevalent forms,

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<sup>9</sup> John Dewey's work and vision on learning through experience and learning by doing have received many followers. It is still being elaborated on today.

followed by a description of the alternative forms. In chapter four I shall compare and analyse these forms.

### 3.2.1 The Substantive Story

The content for the substantive story is quite similar across theatre companies. It usually focuses on the nature and vision of the theatre company, provides background information on the play, highlights the creative production process or supplies cues for watching. Depending on the individual objectives of the theatre companies, different elements are added, eliminated or highlighted. In addition, the nature of the production influences the content. With *Het Nationale Toneel's* production of *Medea*, for example, the story consisted of the history preceding *Medea*. This encompassed events that would not be seen on stage, but were useful to know while watching the performance. As mentioned, *Noord Nederlands Toneel* often focuses on the reasons for making a specific production and the creative production process. For their production of *Hamlet*, for example, the director noticed similarities between Hamlet and psychiatric patients in our time. The production therefore focused on whether Hamlet was insane or not. As part of her research the director locked herself up in a psychiatric hospital in order to communicate with and observe the patients. Part of her research then served as directions for the actors during the rehearsal process. This connection to society and the production process are then shared with the audience during the pre-performance discussion.

All theatre companies show a clear awareness of connecting the content of the discussion to the performance without giving too much away. They seem to consciously avoid merely providing a summary of the play, especially if the plot is clear and self-explanatory. The learning content instead wishes to provide new and different insights that contribute to a better understanding of the play and of the theatre company's objectives. *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* stressed that the pre-performance discussions are "definitely not trivia that can be found on wikipedia" (personal communication, May 30, 2014).

The speaker is typically also the person who writes the learning content for the pre-performance discussions. This is usually based on personal research and rehearsal visits, in combination with information provided by the theatre company or the play's dramaturge. For *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* and *Toneelgroep Maastricht* the dramaturge usually provides the substantive story. For *Ro Theater* this is either the dramaturge or one of the company's

education officers or drama teachers. *Het Nationale Toneel*, on the other hand, employs a team of freelancers specifically for the purpose of providing pre-performance discussions.

R1: They travel along to all theatres and have a conversation upfront, read the play, visit a rehearsal, visit the walk-through [*sic*]. So we really involve them with the whole making process, up until the premiere, so that when they set out they can report something from their own experience about how it was made, and they have heard the director discuss his own play several times, actually [*sic*]. R2: In general they are theatre scholars, right? R1: Yes, a journalist and a theatre scholar ... What we [dramaturges] do is, we brief them and we give them nearly everything that we give the actors and the director as well. So, as a rule, we always make a binder for every play filled with articles we found and thought were interesting, newspaper clippings, sometimes also short films and stuff. Well, we give that to them as well. They have look and we discuss the play with them, and on that basis they write their own story (Het Nationale Toneel, personal communication, May 27, 2014).

The substantive story is the form that is mainly used by *Noord Nederlands Toneel* on tour. Their speakers are usually freelancers, just like *Het Nationale Toneel*, but they make use of the drama teachers who also provide the company's educational workshops at schools and occasionally the assistant director. Most theatre companies are quite adamant in providing pre-performance discussions with their own speakers, rather than someone hired by the theatre and therefore detached from the company. *Noord Nederlands Toneel* also coaches their speakers and first lets them do trial runs. These speakers are considered as part of the theatre company and present their story as such. For example, instead of saying 'Theatre Company A believes that', they use the inclusive 'we believe that'. An important reason for this is to give the theatre company a personal face. The second reason is that the theatre company's speakers are much more involved with the company and the production than a speaker connected to a theatre. He or she is therefore more capable of providing a substantive story that is intimately connected to the theatre company and its objectives.

The emphasis of the substantive story is on the story, which is brought by the speaker to a receptive audience. In all cases, however, the audience members are free to ask questions throughout the discussion or at fixed moments, depending on the speaker's preference. In any case, each substantive story is concluded with the possibility for the audience to ask questions and react to the learning content. *Noord Nederlands Toneel* even

indicated that their pre-performance discussions are also intended for this kind of interaction. *Ro Theater*, in turn, stresses the importance of personal interaction with the audience, which can be directly related to their focus on personal meetings between the audience and their company. To stimulate interaction, speakers from the different theatre companies occasionally include direct questions to the audience. This, too, depends on the speaker and his or her preferred style of presenting and interacting. For example, for the performance *Waiting for Godot* by *Het Nationale Toneel*, the speaker introduced himself and then left the room for five minutes. When he returned, he asked the audience what they had been doing while they were waiting for him. After the responses he stated, “that is exactly what the performance is about. You are waiting and you chat” (R2, personal communication, May 27, 2014). Regularly, more individual interaction takes place after a pre-performance discussion when a participant approaches the speaker with a request to elaborate on the topic, or to ask more questions.

Several theatre companies also use computer-related interactivity. The dramaturge of *Toneelgroep Maastricht* always requests a projector and uses images alongside his substantive story. The speakers of *Het Nationale Toneel* also habitually use multimedia adjusted to their story.

And that depends on the tone [of the play]: or material from history, or of the playwright, sometimes photo’s of the performance or photo’s of rehearsals [*sic*]. I know that Saskia once talked about the music accompanying the performance and she had a short film of Harry de Wit working on the music. And I know that with *Het Stenen Bruidsbed ...* [Rich] showed a Youtube film about the attack of American soldiers on Iraqi civilians. And that is how he concluded [the discussion], by, say, comparing it to the bombing of Dresden and what happened there. So those possibilities exist (Het Nationale Toneel R2, personal communication, May 27, 2014).

They do add a little side-note, however, that the presence of an installed projector is not guaranteed. It can therefore be precarious to base one’s entire story on multimedia elements. I believe, however, that arrangements can be made and acknowledged beforehand so that the speaker can adapt his or her story to the means available, as is often done by *Het Zuidelijk Toneel*.

### 3.2.2 The Talk by an Actor

The pre-performance discussions provided by an actor, hereafter referred to as the talk by an actor, is in essence comparable to the substantive story. The learning content also focuses on background information, themes in the play, the vision of the theatre company and the creative production process. As is the case with the substantive story, the actor uses his or her own research, sometimes in combination with information supplied by the dramaturge. The talk by an actor also provides audiences with the opportunity to ask questions or to comment on the learning content. This can either take place throughout the talk or at the end of it. The actor-speaker, however, is the element that distinguishes this form from the substantive story. He or she has been personally involved in the rehearsal process, instead of observing it like the speakers of the substantive story. Furthermore, the audience will meet a person who will shortly afterwards be seen by them onstage as a character. *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* and *Ro Theater* both stress that this form of pre-performance discussions potentially increases the audience's engagement with the production. The actors, and therefore the theatre company, are interested in meeting the audience face-to-face, thereby bringing the theatre company closer to the audience. This creates a more personal face for the theatre company.

And then you have the pre-performance discussion by an actor, which is actually also a substantive story. This is regularly done by Fania Sorel in particular, or she does that with some regularity. She has [*sic*], for example with the performance *Oedipus*, she provided basically all the pre-performance discussions throughout the land. So before she acted in the performance she went to meet the audience. And that is really very nice, because you then get to look the actress in the eye. But she actually tells the story which a dramaturge or an education officer would tell as well. But that is not a story of "I am an actress and I rehearsed like this", that is not what it's about. It is also about the background, about the themes, but then she did the research ... If that works out we are overjoyed, also because the audience really indicates that they consider it of incredible value to meet Fania beforehand (Ro Theater R2, personal communication, May 26, 2014).

An additional benefit is derived from the fact that the actor is already on location. Therefore, there is no need to hire an extra person to provide the pre-performance discussions. Theatre groups are, however, presented with several difficulties if they wish to organise the talk by

an actor. In the first place, not all actors are willing to or capable of providing a pre-performance discussion. Theatre companies therefore only use the actors who enjoy providing pre-performance discussions and who are skilled at it. This can be partly ascribed to personal characteristics, but also to the fact that they have to be onstage a short while later. *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* also explicitly tries to avoid using the lead actors of the performance. At *Ro Theater*, however, one of the lead actresses is the only cast member who clearly indicates that she enjoys providing pre-performance discussions before going onstage. In this case her availability is determined by the makeup, soundcheck and costuming scheduling. *Het Nationale Toneel* names these scheduling difficulties as the main barrier to providing the talk by an actor. Several actors in their theatre company also enjoy providing a pre-performance discussion, partly due to the distraction from the oncoming performance. Nevertheless, at *Het National Toneel* the talk by an actor occurs mainly at request and the substantive story is preferred.

Despite these potential difficulties, *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* explicitly prefers the talk by an actor as their customary form of pre-performance discussions. In addition to the aforementioned reasons in favour of this form, they consider the talk by an actor as the more interactive alternative to the traditional substantive story, which dramaturges previously used to provide for them. The dramaturge still provides the information that the actors use to create their talk. The information is then enhanced by the actor's personal research and experience in preparation of the production. In order to increase the interactivity *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* uses two actors per pre-performance discussion. According to the company, this creates a more dynamic talk in which the actors react to and sometimes contradict each other. Usually more humour is added to the discussion because of the interactional dynamics between the actors. *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* also uses multimedia and small tasks, e.g. asking the audience to read a short text, in order to increase the interactivity of their discussions.

We also frequently use video material, like short films from Youtube. In the case of *Julius Caesar*, for example, it focuses greatly on the power of words and giving speeches and such, which of course is also very relevant in our time. Then you can use video's of Obama's speeches, or something, for the audience to place it in context ... We do try as much as possible, I think interactive is essential, that it isn't a static story, no lectures [*sic*] ... I think that time has passed. That is simply a boring form, I think, which doesn't really fit with [*sic*]. I

think that performance discussions and other activities should keep abreast with the time. But I do not immediately have the vision that, well, that we are all going to twitter together (Het Zuidelijk Toneel, personal communication, May 21, 2014).

*Het Zuidelijk Toneel* does, however, indicate that the substantive story is an element they wish to keep embedded in their talk by an actor. The audience members who participate in their discussions are often elderly, and a number of them seem to appreciate substantial information. They posit that the elements that have proven their worth and popularity should not be discarded due to the wish to innovate. It is a matter of finding balance and boundaries.

### **3.2.3 The Interview with a Maker or Actor**

The third prevalent form of pre-performance discussions is the interview with a maker and/or actor. The maker can be the director, the playwright, a costume designer or anyone else from the creative or technical crew. The interview, however, will take place most frequently with the director or an actor. The learning content in this form is usually more personal than in the substantive story and the talk by an actor. It focuses on the interviewee and what he or she can share about the production process.

Another form is the post-performance discussion, but then as pre-performance discussion, so a discussion leader plus an actor or maker who provide an idea of the performance in an interview. And that is much more focused on “how was the process”, “how did you work on it”, “what are your sources of inspiration”, “what do you hope the audience will think of it”, so that is more about the maker him- or herself and about the process of the performance (Ro Theater R2, personal communication, May 26, 2014).

This form of pre-performance discussions is comparable to the post-performance discussion that Heim (2009) named the question-and-answer model, discussed in part one of this thesis. The major difference is that in the pre-performance discussions, the questions are mostly asked by an interviewer and not by the audience. This is largely related to the fact that the audience has not yet seen the performance. Therefore, it is a more receptive form. The audience predominantly listens to the interviewer and maker. However, as is the case with the other two prevalent forms, the audience gets the opportunity to ask questions after and sometimes during the official interview. Eventhough multimedia can be and sporadically

is used with the interview, it is less common than with the other forms of pre-performance discussion.

*Noord Nederlands Toneel* frequently provides the interview with a maker or actor, but only in their home city Groningen. Scheduling an actor for an interview is easier at home than on tour due to more flexibility with the scheduling. The interview commences with a short introduction and is hosted by a professional presenter, usually from the local television station *TV Noord*.

And that is possible because in Groningen, when we perform in Groningen, everyone is simply here all day, and then everyone has the time to eat at home and be present at the theatre a little earlier. Whereas on tour, you're always stuck to a rather rigid schedule that when the actors arrive, then they need to eat and then quite quickly they need to sound check, make-up if necessary, costumes on [*sic*]. So then an interview takes up too much of their time. But in Groningen it usually is possible, so we always do it. But it does not have to be an actor; it can be the lead actor, but also a designer or the director. So that is a form we frequently use (Noord Nederlands Toneel, personal communication, May 22, 2014).

The interview with a maker is the most common form of pre-performance discussions used by *Toneelgroep Maastricht*. Their creative director wishes to centralise the themes and content of the play during the pre-performance discussions. As a result, the education officer prefers interviewing him or a guest director, rather than providing a translated version of their vision as a substantive story. She considers this a more truthful and direct way of communicating the maker's intention and vision to the audience.

An additional benefit of the interview is that it requires less preparation than the substantive story and the talk by an actor. Even though the questions have to be formulated, less intensive research and writing is necessary than for the other two forms.

### **3.3 Pre-Performance Discussions: Alternative Forms**

Not all theatre companies are satisfied with the three prevalent forms. They are seeking to create new forms of pre-performance discussions in order to deepen the audience's engagement and familiarity with their work and company.

It is noticeable, that the form is more or less fixed ... I actually don't know why that is, but everyone does it in that way. That is also a good reason to break with it, or to try something different for once (Ro Theater R2, personal communication, May 26, 2014).

Some of these alternative forms have already been implemented. Others are still under consideration or in development. In this section I shall describe these forms, as mentioned by my respondents. In chapter four these will be included in the analysis.

### **3.3.1 *Babel, Het Nationale Toneel***

In the previous cultural season, a new programme was introduced surrounding the productions of *Het Nationale Toneel*, called *Babel*. In contrast to the more artistic and biographical approach of their regular pre-performance discussions, *Babel* is a journalistic programme. Its pre-performance discussions are usually formatted like a talk show or interview and focus on the relationship between the production, society and politics. Not all of *Babel's* events are related to a production, but it often organises a pre-performance, and occasionally a post-performance, discussion. *Babel* is intended for the city Den Haag in which approximately 95% of the discussions take place. The guests of the talk show or interview are not related to *Het Nationale Toneel* but are politicians, artists, philosophers, journalists, business professionals, et cetera.

R3: With *De Ideale Man* we discussed integrity and I spoke with an expert on reputation and with a journalist, and with the alderman of our city. R2: Politics as approach [*sic*]. R3: Yes. And with *De Storm* we had a journalist, Kysia Hekster, about its relationship with the Ukrainian situation, Rob de Wijk about international leadership, where naturally Putin was mentioned, and Paul Frissen, public administrator, about, well, the power and powerlessness of rulers ... New content emerges through these discussions (*Het Nationale Toneel*, personal communication, May 27, 2014).

The objectives of *Babel* are to connect the productions of *Het Nationale Toneel* to our contemporary society and to stimulate discussion in the culture of Den Haag. The creation of *Babel* did not specifically originate from a wish to innovate. In fact, *Het Nationale Toneel* expressed that new forms of performance discussions can be nice, but are not particularly relevant or advantageous. The performance discussions exist to open up the performance to

various interpretations, which is the main focus, and not to be more appealing than the actual performance.

### 3.3.2 A Call for Activism, *Ro Theater*

In contrast, *Ro Theater* is currently deliberately searching for new forms for their pre- and post-performance discussions. The starting point for the new forms is the identity of the theatre company at this point in time.

My personal struggle with pre-performance discussions, is that there is an audience for it – there is even a large audience for it - ... but the story itself, and I also try to look at performance discussions from other theatre companies, is always a bit stale. It is always a bit *[sic]*, it provides more information but often doesn't really go in-depth or doesn't really show me a different perspective, whereby I do not necessarily look at the performance through a different lens. Well, a little stale, I think that is the right word. So from that thought I am now searching for a new mold to pour the pre-performance discussion into (Ro Theater R2, personal communication, May 26, 2014).

One of *Ro Theater's* newest productions for the cultural season 2014-2015, *Vuurvrouwen*, lends itself to this purpose. The production focuses on women who were willing to go to great lengths to accomplish their ideals. An important message connected to this performance is whether we can still be stirred into action for our causes and ideals. *Ro Theater* is now searching for a way to centralise this theme in their pre-performance discussion.

And I'm not exactly sure yet what that will look like. We are playing with the idea: shouldn't we invite idealists from every city to tell their stories, or should we have a kind of manifesto with young people who call for action and in what fashion? Are you going to invoke small ideals: exchange systems or a greener society? Are you going to try to tell a story about it, or are you completely choosing the opposite direction and are you going to try to invoke people to change things through violence? So I'm not yet sure what it will look like (Ro Theater R2, personal communication, May 26, 2014).

This call for activism could be the first of many new forms of pre-performance discussions at *Ro Theater*. In all cases, the form will be derived from the essence of the production, based on the theatre company's vision and identity.

### **3.3.3 The Thematic Talk by an Expert, Toneelgroep Maastricht**

*Toneelgroep Maastricht* recently experimented with a new form of performance discussions that drew on the main theme of their production *How to Play Francesca Woodman*. The play focuses on the true story of a highly praised photographer who suddenly ended her life at the age of 22 by jumping of a building. One of the main themes in this production is the pressure on youth to perform. In order to highlight this topic, the theatre company experimented with a new form. They invited a psychiatrist who specialised in the topic to provide the pre-performance discussions. The content focused on the phenomenon of performance pressure and how it can be recognised in other people. In essence, this thematic talk intended to warn the audience of its existence and effects.

I sought contact with the Health Foundation Limburg. Coincidentally, they had the week of psychiatry in the period of our performance, and they had a psychiatrist available who knew everything about the topic. He liked nothing more than to discuss it with the youth and to warn them ... And it actually worked, because after the performance children really went up to their teacher and said, "it might be a bit uncomfortable to say, but Jantje is acting really weird lately" (Toneelgroep Maastricht, personal communication, May 19, 2014).

This thematic talk by an expert was initially intended for teenagers. However, since it was also open to the adult audience it qualifies for this thesis. Especially since the adult audience indicated how much the talk interested them. In essence this form is still a substantive story, but the thematically specialized speaker provided a different content than the original substantive story would have.

### **3.3.4 The Mini-Documentary, Noord Nederlands Toneel**

*Noord Nederlands Toneel* is considering experimenting with a digital pre-performance discussion that can be placed on the internet. The form they are contemplating is more comparable to a mini-documentary than a trailer. The intention is to provide some insight into the production and ignite interest for it, much in the same way as a pre-performance discussion does. The mini-documentary could be used for both educational and marketing purposes.

[For example] a Youtube film with a speaker narrating and in between you edit footage from the performance. And then you see to it that, what you just said, that you get excited to see

the performance. And you don't reveal everything, but you do create a certain anticipation ... But we didn't produce a trailer, we really created an introduction ... Purely to try it out, to see if it works and if the audience is enthusiastic about the concept ... It should also not be someone who relates the story like a news anchor, because that is not what theatre is. So if someone mentions a costume, well, then you need to see the character in costume, the designer working on the costume [sic] (Noord Nederlands Toneel, personal communication, May 22, 2014).

This form is explicitly intended as an addition to their regular pre-performance discussions, and not as a replacement. It provides the audience with the opportunity to view the pre-performance discussion in their own time. The mini-documentary can also simply form a part of the regular pre-performance discussion.

### **3.3.5 The Interactive Exhibition, Het Zuidelijk Toneel**

*Het Zuidelijk Toneel* is creating an entirely different form than the pre-performance discussions discussed so far. Marcel Osterop, one of their theatre makers, spent some time work shadowing at the municipality of Eindhoven. This resulted in the production *Waterdragers*. At the time of the interview, my respondent was developing an interactive exhibition for the foyer of *Parktheater Eindhoven* surrounding that production.

It is possible because we perform there for three weeks. We're considering compressing the exhibition into a travelworthy thing that we can take along to the other theatres we perform in. It is actually a completely different way to provide people with a context, but not with a live performance<sup>10</sup>. The exhibition will consist of diary excerpts of Marcel's time there, video portraits of politicians providing their opinion on the subject, perhaps and audio tour, ... perhaps accompanied by one of the makers who guides them through [sic] (*Het Zuidelijk Toneel*, personal communication, May 21, 2014).

The learning content and objectives are the same as their regular pre-performance discussion, namely illuminating the societal context and relevance of the production. The form, however, is notably different. The creation of different forms of pre-performance discussions arises from a personal wish of my respondent to do so. She believes that more interesting forms can be found than the prevalent forms. This interactive exhibition could

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<sup>10</sup> With 'a live performance' my respondent refers to live pre-performance discussions, and not to the theatrical performance.

therefore be a precursor to other new forms of performance discussions for *Het Zuidelijk Toneel*.

### 3.4 Post-Performance Discussions: The Learning Content and Prevalent Form

In contrast to the variety of forms used for pre-performance discussions, only one form dominates the post-performance discussions of the BIS theatre companies in the Netherlands. This is the form Heim (2009) named the question-and-answer model, as discussed in part one of this thesis. A facilitator or interviewer questions the director, maker or actors, or a combination thereof, and facilitates the questions of the audience. The facilitator is always someone from the theatre company, unless it is organised by the theatre. *Toneelgroep Amsterdam*, for example, always uses two actors and the same dramaturge to host the post-performance discussions in Amsterdam. In this way, he gets to know the audience and the audience him.

In Heim's (2009) description of the model, it seems quite straightforward and one-dimensional. In the Netherlands, however, the question-and-answer model exists in gradations of audience participation. On one end of the scale the audience participation is restricted largely to listening as the interviewer asks the questions and the maker or actors answer. Occasionally, the audience gets to ask the creative panel a question. On the other end of the scale we find active audience participation. Lively conversation ensues between the actors and the audience, and amongst the audience members themselves, much like Heim's (2009) conversational model of post-performance discussions.

R: I usually don't even have to ask a question. If it remains quiet, however, I have prepared around three questions, but usually I only have to ask one and discussion will ensue. Because we also challenge people, "what do you think about that?" I<sup>11</sup>: So it is a real discussion? R: Yes, that is definitely the intention. If that doesn't happen I don't like it at all! I: Does the audience also respond to each other, or only to the [sic] R: Yes, definitely, definitely! So you sometimes have really nice conversations, or you get to hear very personal stories (Toneelgroep Maastricht, personal communication, May 19, 2014).

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<sup>11</sup> The 'I' in this quote denotes the interviewer and 'R' the respondent.

*Toneelgroep Amsterdam*, too, states that conversation easily ensues amongst the actors and the audience. They add that audience members regularly react to each other. Based on the interviews it seems that this active form takes place frequently when the post-performance discussion is organised by the theatre company. The passive forms seem to take place more regularly when a theatre organises it. In general, however, the Dutch audience does not seem hesitant to voice their opinions and criticism. This can be derived from one of *Toneelgroep Maastricht's* experiences with a post-performance discussion.

We had a performance [once]...and it wasn't very successful, and people had a lot of criticism afterwards on both the play and the themes therein. On tour we had even organised standard post-performance discussions, and they thought it was terrible, the actors [*sic*]. Time and time again they received the full blast of everything people didn't like about the play. And then we stopped, because that is not the intention ... At a certain point it became too much for the actors because they had a rather challenging tour of forty performances close together. They said, "we just don't like this anymore! Every time you hear what is amiss, and we can't do anything about it". That was often the worst part, that [the audience] said "the acting is incredibly good, but it is about that and we think it is absolutely idiotic [*sic*]" (*Toneelgroep Maastricht*, personal communication, may 19, 2014).

Apart from the negative experience mentioned above, all theatre companies indicate that the actors enjoy participating in post-performance discussions. Initially they might be slightly desoriented and weary after their performance, but they swiftly take pleasure in the discussion. They consider it enriching to interact with the audience and to hear how the audience experienced the performance.

The content of the post-performance discussions is apparently in alignment with the objectives named in paragraph 1.2. The audience is provided with the opportunity to share their experience, reaction and questions. Additionally, they get to know the actors and makers in person. *Toneelgroep Maastricht* refers to this as an additional educational benefit, since the audience gets to see the actors as themselves instead of as their characters. Despite the discussions, however, this form still reveals traits of the classic question-and-answer model. The maker and actors get to elaborate on their vision, interpretation and preparation. Theatre companies do try to go beyond standard questions, like 'how did you

learn those lines'. The facilitator of *Toneelgroep Maastricht*, for example, commences the session with a question related to the matter of the performance.

Despite the enthusiastic reports to the extent of the conversation that ensues, some of my respondents indicated, from their perspective as audience members, that post-performance discussions can sometimes come across as rather forceful.

I have noticed sometimes when I've seen a performance that I then [*sic*], or I do not think the performance was very good, or I'm not so sure what to think, then I'm not inclined to join a post-performance discussion. Because then I think, "oh, what if I have to speak and have to say something sensible about the performance?" You have that with post-performance discussions, sometimes they ask "and, sir, what did you think?" There are people who execute a post-performance discussion like that (Noord Nederlands Toneel, personal communication, May 22, 2014).

This experience is connected to a post-performance discussion that was organised by the theatre. Nonetheless, it is a possible pitfall for anyone organising post-performance discussions and as such, it should be taken into account.

### **3.5 Post-Performance Discussions: Alternative Forms**

The presented question-and-answer model, with varying degrees of conversation, dominates the post-performance discussions. However, two alternative forms were named during the interviews.

#### **3.5.1 The Round Table, Ro Theater**

A few years ago *Ro Theater* introduced The Round Table in their home city Rotterdam. After a performance the audience was invited to join in conversation at a large, if not round, table. Bottles of wine and some cocktail nuts were placed on the table to create an informal and intimate setting. A dramaturge commenced and facilitated the conversation. In order to maintain the intimate setting, he did not use a microphone. The objective of the Round Table was to provide the audience with the possibility to share how they experienced the performance. The dramaturge did not direct the conversation, but questioned the audience to create the freedom for them to converse with each other.

Look, with post-performance discussion, or the word post-performance discussion, I mainly think of a setting in which a maker enters into conversation with someone who questions him or her, and where room is created for the audience to ask questions, but always led by someone. While the nice thing about The Round Table was that it was the audience who spoke and who entered into conversation with each other. So that has an entirely different character than such an official post-performance discussion (Ro Theater R2, personal communication, May 26, 2014).

The Round Table was an initiative of the dramaturge who facilitated them. With his departure, it ceased to exist. Although The Round Table is no longer provided, I include this form in my thesis since its disappearance is recent. Additionally, it is one of two forms that provides an alternative to the prevalent form and is therefore worthy of our consideration. *Ro Theater* indicated that although The Round Table was greatly appreciated by the audience, it shall not return to their repertoire of performance discussions, since they are seeking to innovate.

We did it for a few years and you do notice that you simply need to *[sic]*, you are innovating, you are continuously renewing. And to return to that method, it is possible, but it doesn't feel very innovative and sparkling. So it was a really nice form, we greatly enjoyed it for many years, and you notice now that we are thinking more about the pre- and post-performance discussions *[sic]*, there is really a demand for it, but where do we feel - where the theatre company is at this point in time and with the form *[sic]*- what do we feel comfortable with? What really suits us (Ro Theater R1, personal communication, May 26, 2014)?

### **3.5.2 Actors in the Foyer**

The second alternative form is not a post-performance discussion in the traditional sense of the concept. It also does not require preparation and organisation by the theatre companies. After a performance the actors have something to drink in the foyer and mingle with the audience. This provides the audience with the opportunity to approach the actors in person and engage in face-to-face conversation. I am adding this to the alternative forms of post-performance discussions because it is a possibility to discuss the performance afterwards with each other and the actors, albeit on a more personal and intimate level. The theatre company thereby becomes approachable and more familiar to the audience. Additionally, theatre companies sometimes consciously choose to have the actors in the foyer, instead of

organising a traditional post-performance discussion. This gives us reason to consider it as a valid alternative to the prevalent post-performance discussion. 'Actors in the foyer' is frequently used by *Ro Theater*, but other theatre companies occasionally mention also using this form. For *Ro Theater* this visibility and approachability can even be considered as part of their policy. After all, their focal point is the personal meeting between the audience and the company.

### 3.6 Summarising the Objectives, Learning Content and Form

In this chapter, I have described the objectives of theatre companies for their performance discussions and the learning content and forms that can be found. Although I have already stated some analytical observations throughout, the full analysis of Dutch performance discussions will take place in the next chapter. Theatre companies have the same main objective, namely to encourage audience members to develop a loyal attachment to the theatre company. They hope to achieve this by increasing knowledge through performance discussions, thereby creating a greater understanding of their performances and of the company itself. Besides this collective main objective, theatre companies have idiosyncratic focal points about the kind of knowledge they wish to convey and the relationship they wish to establish.

These objectives have resulted in three prevalent forms of pre-performance discussions: the substantive story, the talk by an actor and the interview with a maker or actor. The content usually focuses on the nature and vision of the theatre company, background information on the play and playwright, the making process and on cues for watching the performance. These forms are generally quite receptive, although the audience does receive the opportunity to ask questions. Intermittently, questions are directed at the audience. Some theatre companies also include multimedia, like Youtube films, in their pre-performance discussions. Besides these prevalent forms, most theatre companies are looking to create new forms of pre-performance discussions, in order to deepen the audience's engagement and familiarity with their work and company. *Babel* and the thematic talk by an expert have already been implemented by respectively *Het Nationale Toneel* and *Toneelgroep Maastricht*. *Het Zuidelijk Toneel's* interactive exhibition and *Ro Theater's* call for activism were still in development at the time of the interviews. The mini-documentary of *Noord Nederlands Toneel* is still under consideration.

Where pre-performance discussions focus on how the audience perceives the performance, post-performance discussions attempt to do something with how the audience comes out of it. There is only one prevalent form of post-performance discussions: the question-and-answer model with varying gradations of conversation. The audience is provided with the opportunity to share their experience, reactions and questions. Despite the discussions that ensue, this form still reveals traits of the classic receptive question-and-answer model in which the audience asks a creative panel questions and listens to their responses. *Ro Theater* used to have an active conversational model, named The Round Table, but this has ceased to exist. An alternative form of post-performance discussions is the actors in the foyer, which is most frequently used by *Ro Theater*.

## Chapter 4 - Analysing Performance Discussions

The content and form of performance discussions have to successfully engage the participants in learning in order to increase knowledge of and appreciation for the arts. Only then do they involve the audience and have the potential to enhance and deepen the theatre experience, resulting in a larger loyal audience base. In this chapter, I shall analyse whether the presented performance discussions are designed in such a way that they successfully engage the audience in learning, thereby resulting in a positive learning outcome that enriches the theatre experience. By 'a positive learning outcome' I do not mean to say that the audience learns exactly that which the theatre company intends to convey. Instead, I focus on the perspective of the audience: do they believe that they learned or experienced something valuable? The analysis will be conducted based on the theoretical framework presented in chapter two of part one. To recapitulate, I shall analyse whether the learning content and form of the performance discussions contain cognitive and affective elements, as well as bodily and social elements. Depending on the objective and the situation, the social element can be centralised by creating a conversational environment. Additionally, I will analyse whether the performance discussions contain both verbal and non-verbal information of a visual and auditory nature. I posit that by combining and balancing these elements, more audience members will be engaged in learning, resulting in a positive learning outcome. I shall commence with an analysis of the pre-performance discussions, followed by the analysis of the post-performance discussions. I shall intertwine the analysis with recommendations.

### 4.1 Pre-Performance Discussions: Analysis and Recommendations

#### 4.1.1 *The Cognitive and Affective Elements*

The three prevalent forms of pre-performance discussions contain many cognitive elements: cues for watching, facts about the theatre company, the play and the playwright and information about the creative production process and the societal context. This information attempts to appeal to the audience's intellect. Further scrutiny reveals that the learning content also takes on a more affective character, specifically with the interview with a theatre-maker or actor. The interviewer prompts the maker or actor to not only divulge cognitive information, but also personal experiences, motives and sources of inspiration. The

substantive story and the talk by an actor do, however, contain affective elements, for example the playwright's personal struggles or how the actors explored the emotional state of their characters. This depends on the speaker's chosen approach and focal points. In addition, the societal context of a performance can appeal to the audience's more affective sensibilities by creating a personal and emotional relevance. Furthermore, we cannot sidestep the fact that theatrical performances often have a deeply affective layer, for example the destructive co-dependent love of a family. This layer will be reflected in the pre-performance discussions, especially when the themes of the play are centralised. Despite these occurrences of affective elements, the interviews indicate that the balance in the prevalent forms of pre-performance discussions is tilted towards the cognitive learning content. A consistent balance seems to be missing in all three prevalent forms. In order to engage more audience members in learning it is, however, important to create a balance. Some of the audience members will be engaged by the cognitive elements, where learning in others is more easily stimulated by the affective elements. In the case of *Hamlet by Noord Nederlands Toneel*, for instance, the cognitive learning content could contain the factual similarities between Hamlet and psychiatric patients and information on how the director conducted her research. Affective elements can be included by focusing on how the director experienced her time in the psychiatric hospital. Furthermore, information could be added on how the mental ailment affects the lives of the patients and their families.

In contrast, several of the alternative forms seem to provide a better balance between cognitive and affective learning content. The discussions of the journalistic programme *Babel* highlight a topic from a variety of angles. This enables them to move beyond the mere description of phenomena to their effects on a personal and social level. The topic of integrity and reputation, accompanying the performance *De Ideale Man*, is a good example of this. Besides describing the phenomena from a scientific perspective, the discussion focuses on opinions, value assignment and personal experiences. In addition, this specific topic forms an integral aspect of our personal and social lives; we all have to deal with issues of integrity and reputation at one time or another. Similarly, the thematic talk by an expert preceding *How To Play Francesca Woodman* exhibited a balance between the cognitive and affective sides of performance pressure. The talk provided both factual information about the phenomenon and information about its emotional effects and consequences based on real-life experiences. This balance is commendable since the

thematic talk by an expert has the capacity to become too cognitive. The interactive exhibition for *Waterdragers*, too, promises to balance both cognitive and affective elements, with its diary excerpts and video portraits of politicians' opinions. It will provide cognitive content on the 'political machine', balanced with affective content on the civil servants who keep the machine working. The theatre-maker's experience and observations at the municipality will include both forms of content. The mini-documentary and a call for activism are still hypothetical, but both show great potential for creating a balance between cognitive and affective information. The mini-documentary, however, could easily become too cognitive, whereas a call for activism could tilt the scale on the affective side, since it focuses on fighting for personal ideals.

In summary, pre-performance discussions already contain a variety of cognitive and affective learning content. The prevalent forms, however, have the tendency to centralise the cognitive elements. The alternative forms offer a better balance. The challenge for theatre companies is, therefore, to consciously combine and balance these elements per pre-performance discussion in order to reach more audience members.

#### **4.1.2 Verbal, Non-Verbal, Visual and Auditory Elements**

In the theoretical framework I assert that the learning content is most effectively transferred to the audience by combining verbal representations of the learning content, like spoken and printed words, with non-verbal representations, like video and pictures. These representations should appeal to both a person's visual and auditory track.

In the shape of speech, the verbal and auditory elements dominate in both the prevalent and alternative forms of pre-performance discussions. The interactive exhibition and the mini-documentary are notable exceptions. In addition to speech, several theatre companies have started to include non-verbal and visual elements, like photographs and video, to their pre-performance discussions on a more regular basis. This is, however, still a minority. Video's are an ideal tool to transfer learning content since it typically combines all elements: verbal auditory (speech), non-verbal auditory (music and sounds) and non-verbal visual (film footage). Visual verbal elements can also be present in video's in the form of written text. This presence of all four elements distinguishes the mini-documentary from the other forms. It is advisable, however, to use it in combination with a live speaker in order to include the social aspects discussed in the next paragraph. Despite its advantages, video is

not essential for a pre-performance discussion. An equally valid option would be to present a piece of music, some photographs or a costume alongside the speaker's story, to name only a few. Visual verbal information can be included by letting the audience read a short piece of text during the pre-performance discussion, as *Het Zuidelijk Toneel* occasionally does. The four elements are also combined in the interactive exhibition. The diary excerpts provide visual verbal elements and the video portraits combine verbal, visual and auditory elements. Photographs can present the non-verbal information, as well as possible non-verbal scenes edited into the video's.

In summary, verbal and non-verbal representations of the learning content for both the visual and auditory track should be consciously included and balanced. At present, verbal auditory elements dominate the prevalent and alternative forms of pre-performance discussions. My recommendation for theatre companies is, therefore, to add visual and non-verbal elements. This will, theoretically, increase the engagement of audience members with the pre-performance discussions.

#### **4.1.3 The Bodily and Social Elements: Including Participation**

The elements described thus far are fairly receptive. An activity that attempts to involve the audience and engage them in learning should also include bodily and social elements. For the purposes of this thesis, I adopt a broad interpretation of 'bodily elements'. I consider them to be any kind of task, embedded into the pre-performance discussion, that requires the audience to participate in another way than listening, i.e. talking, reading, writing, raising hands et cetera. In all cases, however, the bodily task has to contribute to the audience's involvement and engagement with the learning content.

The bodily and social elements in pre-performance discussions, however, are scarce and unvarying. Both the prevalent and the alternative forms are predominantly receptive, with the exception of the interactive exhibition and possibly a call for activism. The audience quietly listens to the learning content provided via persons or multimedia. Naturally, pre-performance discussions contain an inherent social element, since the entire theatrical event can be considered a social event. It is rarely attended alone, but usually in the company of friends, family or other social groups with whom the pre-performance discussions will be discussed. Additionally, the audience members meet the speaker and each other. However, few elements are added to enhance this social setting and stimulate

learning through social interaction. The only consistent social and bodily element is the possibility for the audience to ask questions. However, this is limited to the duration of the asking and it includes only those persons who have a question and are granted the opportunity to speak. Nevertheless, a question round has its advantages as a learning tool. The questions and answers provide the opportunity for the audience to learn content tailored to their personal interests. Furthermore, it can help to clear up misconceptions. On its own, however, the questions are not enough. Additional bodily tasks and social elements should be added to effectively engage and involve audience members. The aforementioned task of asking the audience to read a short text, is an example of a bodily element that is easily added to the pre-performance discussion. Although the bodily element is quite minimal, mainly the eyes and brain are involved, it is something each audience member can actively do him- or herself apart from listening. Small tasks like these are easily embedded in the pre-performance discussions and can contribute to the audience's involvement and their engagement with the learning content.

I shall put forward a few ideas for bodily and social tasks that can be embedded in a pre-performance discussion, since the lack of it is problematic. These ideas serve to instigate further thought about the diverse possibilities. *Het Zuidelijk Toneel's* production *Julius Caesar* lends itself well as a case study. In the previous chapter, I quoted that the focus in the accompanying pre-performance discussion was on delivering speeches. In addition to the talk by an actor, the audience could be asked to write a few lines of text for a political speech. Subsequently, the speaker can invite the participants to share their speeches with the rest of the audience. Besides an active task, this will add a social element to the performance discussion. Alternatively, the audience can be given assessment forms and asked to assess speeches that will be shown on video. This could be followed by an interactive discussion of the individual assessments, for instance on the successful and less successful aspects of the speeches. A third option might be to do vocal exercises with the audience, since the voice is essential for the delivery of speeches. This task can also be included in pre-performance discussions that focus on the rehearsal process. The use of one's voice is, after all, an inherent part of an actor's work. Additionally, I propose to use interactive drama techniques as inspiration for bodily and social elements. This not only stimulates learning through participation, but brings the audience closer to theatre. These tasks are particularly suitable for the substantive story and a talk by the actor, specifically

when the speaker is one of the actors, a drama teacher or the director. Several of the earlier mentioned tasks can also be implemented in the thematic talk by an expert.

The interview with a theatre-maker or actor and *Babel* present more difficulties for increasing audience participation than the other forms. After all, the interviewees are centralised and the audience is meant to merely listen and reflect. However, one possibility to increase active participation is provided by Laurie Brooks's after-play interactive forum. Throughout the interview, the audience can be asked to agree or disagree to statements by standing up or raising their hands. This can then be followed by directing the statement to the interviewees. This is especially applicable to the pre-performance discussions of *Babel*, which focuses on opinions, experiences and statements. In addition, interviews can be concluded with a moment of conversation with the audience. The interviewer can then take on the role of facilitator.

Another method to include bodily and social elements in all forms of pre-performance discussions is to direct questions to the audience that focus on reflection, opinions and experiences. This is already done on a minimal basis, as mentioned in the previous chapter, but could be implemented regularly. Alternatively, the speaker can design a quiz. And finally, the audience can be asked to take a few seconds to discuss a topic with their neighbour. The speaker can then invite participants to share their discussion. Herein, and in many other cases, it is essential to accept that not everyone will be willing to share their thoughts and discussions in public. Depending on their character and learning style, some audience members will prefer to observe, listen and reflect. Forcing them to say something out loud against their will is likely to result in a negative learning outcome.

The interactive exhibition and a call for activism have the potential<sup>12</sup> to be less receptive than the other forms of pre-performance discussions. The exhibition enhances the social learning potential, since audience members can walk through the exhibition together and immediately discuss what they read and see. However, the pitfall for the exhibition is that it, too, becomes too receptive. This can easily be avoided by adding game elements, mini-tasks and questions to the texts, video's and audio tour. Museums often have more experience with educational activities for exhibitions and could therefore provide inspiration for a more participatory approach. A call for activism also has great potential for bodily and

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<sup>12</sup> Since these forms had not yet been fully developed and implemented, my analysis is based on the ideas and plans at the time of the interviews.

social elements. In addition to receptive components, like a story by idealists, *Ro Theater* mentioned the possibility of creating a manifesto with the audience. Moreover, the audience can be invited to write their ideals on a post-it which can then be hung on a wall or column in the theatre. The conversational models presented in part one would also suit the purposes of a call for activism, particularly the community conversation model since it aims to deepen the engagement of the audience with a societal issue and conclude the discussion with suggestions for further action.

To summarise, pre-performance discussions are largely receptive. Bodily and social elements are restricted to occasionally asking the speaker a question. Intermittently, the speaker asks the audience a question or presents them with a small task. There are, however, many possibilities to increase the bodily and social elements. I have provided some suggestions to initiate the inclusion of these elements. Additionally, new forms are emerging that have the potential to break through the receptive trend, like the interactive exhibition and a call for activism.

#### **4.2 Post-Performance Discussions: Analysis and Recommendations**

The analysis above makes sense for pre-performance discussions, given that they aim to provide information. Post-performance discussions, however, require a different approach. The most important objective for post-performance discussions is to create an opportunity for the audience to react to what they have seen; to share their feelings, experience and any questions they might have after the performance. This implies an activity in which the attention is not focused on the speaker, but on the audience. Consequently, this rules out the question-and-answer model since the theatre-maker and/or actors are centralised therein. Even if lively conversation regularly ensues the model is still built around questioning the actors. Interestingly, this model is the prevalent form of post-performance discussions. The main objective, however, requires a conversational environment in which the audience is centralised. The Round Table, Heim's conversational model and Baker, Jensen and Kolb's framework (2002) for conversational learning are suitable to this purpose. Their format is more or less similar: the conversation requires a non-directive facilitator, an unregulated environment and an informal setting. The Round Table's setting is ideal for the latter: the audience takes place at a large table with bottles of wine and cocktail nuts on it. If the theatre hall is preferred for practical reasons, the informal setting can also be created by

adjusted lighting in the stalls and the facilitator's tone of conversation. Alternatively, the more regulated community conversation model can be used when a theatre company wishes to explore the audience's experience with a specific theme or issue presented in the play, rather than their responses to the performance.

Conversational models that centralise the audience include the bodily and social elements that are so frequently absent in pre-performance discussions. As stated in the theoretical framework presented in part one, learning through conversation is effective for many different types of learners. One can argue that conversation during a post-performance discussions includes cognitive and affective elements as the audience members put forward their knowledge, opinions and experiences. The learning content thus created will be mainly based on auditory verbal representations. I propose, however, that the audience can refer to mental visual images and non-verbal information of the performance during the post-performance discussion. Additionally, a substantial part of human communication is non-verbal. All elements from the theoretical framework will thus be present in conversation. It is, however, harder to create a balance between all elements, specifically between cognitive and affective content. Nonetheless, this might be seen as a necessary evil, since a flawless educational activity will never exist. We can merely attempt to design performance discussions with the highest probability of engaging all audience members in learning.

Conversational models are also recommended for productions that are met with a lot of criticism, i.e. the experience of *Toneelgroep Maastricht* described in paragraph 3.4. It provides audiences with the opportunity to air their frustration, without burdening the actors with it after every performance. Due to their intimate involvement with the play the maker or actor should not facilitate these conversations, as the audience might feel some restraint to criticise. This would defeat the purpose of the post-performance discussion. Even though the performance has a negative reception, the conversation that follows can still lead to a positive learning outcome by uniting the audience in their critical response to the production.

A theatre company may choose to combine the objective of letting the audience respond to what they have seen with the objective to let the audience get personally acquainted with the actors and theatre-maker. Instead of placing the actors and maker opposite the audience, as is the case with the question-and-answer model, I propose that

they take place amongst the audience members and participate in the discussion. This is comparable to the *Schauspiel Stuttgart* model presented in part one. It requires a skilled facilitator to prevent the conversation from turning into a question-and-answer session, since the audience might initially need to get used to the fact that they are centralised in the post-performance discussion. If the audience directs a question to the facilitator, director or actors, the question should be directed back to the audience if possible. For example, if a person asks what a specific line of text implied, the facilitator should ask how the audience interpreted it instead of letting the director explain how he intended it. Once the audience has had a chance to discuss their interpretations, the director can enter the discussion. This is also suitable for theatre companies with the additional objective to further explain their work during the post-performance discussion.

A different approach is required when the sole objective is to provide more information after the performance. The Dutch question-and-answer model in which lively discussions ensue then proves itself to be suitable. The model centralises the cognitive and affective information provided by the actors. Simultaneously, it contains the participatory elements that the traditional question-and-answer model described by Heim (2009) lacks. Once again, a skilled facilitator is essential to prevent the model from becoming purely receptive. Alternatively, I see possibilities for the interactive exhibition to obtain the objective, although the form is initially intended as an alternative pre-performance discussion. The analysis of the interactive exhibition in paragraph 4.1 is also valid when the exhibition is used as an alternative for post-performance discussions.

The form 'actors in the foyer' is suitable for theatre companies whose sole objective is to be approachable in order to let the audience become personally acquainted with the actors. However, it lacks an explicit educational element since the objective is mainly social. The application of my theoretical framework for learning is thus limited. The learning content merely entails that the actors are not only characters but approachable people. The form can, however, induce some form of learning when audience members enter into conversation with the actors about the performance and their work. Additionally, the presence of the actors might stimulate the audience to remain in the theatre once the performance has ended, which can stimulate personal conversations about the performance amongst the audience groups.

Before concluding this paragraph, I wish to recommend Laurie Brooks' after-play interactive forum, presented in paragraph 1.3.3 of part one. It includes all the elements from my theoretical framework, since it combines conversation with interactive drama techniques. Therefore, it has the potential to successfully involve the audience and engage them in learning. This model can be used when theatre companies wish to encourage audiences to explore the values and ideas that are presented in the play.

To summarise, post-performance discussions of Dutch theatre companies primarily aim to let the audience respond to the performance. Conversational models that centralise the audience are best suited to this objective. The prevalent question-and-answer model with lively discussion falls short since it focuses on the actors rather than the audience. It is, however, suitable for post-performance discussions that aim to further explain their work. Alternatively, the interactive exhibition can be used. Actors in the foyer is suitable for theatre companies who wish to be approachable. When combined with the objective to let the audience respond, the theatre-maker and actors can take place amongst the audience members and join in the conversation. The facilitator is responsible for keeping the audience centralised. Finally, I recommend Laurie Brooks' after-play interactive forum as an alternative form for post-performance discussion in the Netherlands.

## Conclusion

Performance discussions. They are a well-known phenomenon amongst theatregoers, but largely neglected in academic literature. This lack of research could imply that they are of little interest and importance, but nothing is less true. In fact, performance discussions can contribute to securing the financial stability of theatre companies. This will enable the companies to fulfil their mission within society and to provide work opportunities for theatre professionals. In a time where cultural budgets are rigorously downsized and the criteria for receiving subsidies are tightened, this security is more important than ever. Through performance discussions theatre companies can increase the knowledge and involvement of audience members with their work and mission. This can enhance the audience's appreciation for theatre and the theatre company, through which audiences are encouraged to develop a loyal attachment to the theatre company. However, merely organising performance discussions is not enough. The content and form of the discussions have to successfully engage the participants in learning in order to increase their knowledge of and appreciation for the arts. Only then do they have the potential to enhance and deepen the theatre experience, resulting in a larger loyal audience base and therefore more financial stability.

This brought me to the main question of my research: *Are performance discussions in the Netherlands designed in such a way that they, from a theoretical perspective, successfully engage the audience in learning, thereby resulting in a positive learning outcome that enriches the theatre experience?* In order to analyse this, I constructed a theoretical framework for learning in the first part of this thesis. I distance myself from the common misconception that learning is a purely receptive process that takes place within an institution whereby a teacher plants ideas into students' minds. Due to our individual histories, strengths and interests, different impulses are needed to stimulate learning in different individuals. Performance discussions should therefore consist of a combination of cognitive, affective, bodily and social elements. Depending on the objectives and the situation, the social element can be centralised by creating a conversational environment. Furthermore, the learning content is most effectively transferred to the audience by combining verbal representations, like spoken and printed words, with non-verbal

representations, like video and pictures, which appeals to both a person's visual and auditory track.

In addition to this theoretical framework, I needed to bridge the gap in the academic research by exploring the status of performance discussions in the Netherlands. The research is limited to performance discussions for adults and to those discussions that are organised by the theatre companies who are directly subsidised by the Dutch government. The necessary qualitative data was gathered by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with *Het Nationale Toneel*, *Het Zuidelijk Toneel*, *Noord Nederlands Toneel*, *Ro Theater*, *Toneelgroep Amsterdam* and *Toneelgroep Maastricht*.

The interviews revealed a clear preference for pre-performance discussions in the Netherlands. This can be related to the active touring practice of Dutch theatre companies and their lengthy productions for large halls. After such a performance the audience, cast and crew alike wish to return home and retire for the night. The pre-performance discussions attempt to provide a context within which the audience can view the performance and understand it. Three prevalent forms can be identified: the substantive story, the talk by an actor and the interview with a theatre-maker or actor. The content usually focuses on the nature and vision of the theatre company, background information on the play and playwright, the making process and on cues for watching the performance. The prevalent forms contain both cognitive and affective learning content, but have the tendency to centralise the cognitive elements. Besides these prevalent forms theatre companies have introduced, or are planning to introduce, alternative forms. *Babel* and the thematic talk by an expert have already been implemented. The interactive exhibition and 'a call for activism' were still in development and the mini-documentary was still merely an idea. These alternative forms offer a better balance of cognitive and receptive elements. The verbal auditory elements dominate both the prevalent and alternative forms of pre-performance discussions. In the majority of pre-performance discussions visual and non-verbal elements have to be added in order to increase the engagement of audience members with the learning content. The main problem with pre-performance discussions, however, is that they are largely receptive. Bodily and social elements are restricted to occasionally asking the speaker a question. Intermittently, the speaker asks the audience a question or presents them with a small task. There are, however, many possibilities to increase the bodily and social elements. In chapter four of part two, I have provided

suggestions to initiate the inclusion of these elements. In contrast, the interactive exhibition and 'a call for activism' have the potential to break through this receptive trend and include bodily and social elements.

Post-performance discussions in the Netherlands occur considerably less than pre-performance discussions. They are mainly organised at the theatre company's home base, or at the request of theatres or specific audience groups. There is only one prevalent form of post-performance discussions: the question-and-answer model with varying gradations of conversation. Although it does more or less include the elements within my theoretical framework, there is a mismatch between the discussion's objective and the form. Theatre companies indicate that they primarily wish to provide the audience with the opportunity to share their experience, reactions and questions. This objective requires a conversational environment in which the audience is centralised. In part one of this research I represent an overview of the post-performance models discussed in existing research. Several of these are conversational and can thus be applied to Dutch post-performance discussions. Additionally, an alternative form of post-performance discussions used to exist in the Netherlands: The Round Table. This too had a conversational approach in which the audience was centralised. As stated in the theoretical framework, learning through conversation is effective for many different types of learners. I also argue in paragraph 4.2 of part two, that conversational post-performance discussions include all the elements from my theoretical framework. The primary objective for post-performance discussions, however, rules out the prevalent question-and-answer model since the theatre-maker and/or actors are centralised therein. Even if lively conversation regularly ensues the model is still built around questioning the actors. It is, however, suitable for post-performance discussions whose objective is instead to further explain their work. Alternatively, the interactive exhibition can be used.

In conclusion, performance discussions in the Netherlands have the potential to successfully engage the audience in learning. However, this potential is not yet reached. The main flaw in the design of pre-performance discussions is the near-omission of bodily and social elements. In order to successfully engage the audience in learning these have to be included. At present, pre-performance discussions are too receptive. Additionally, cognitive and affective elements need to be consciously balanced, and non-verbal and visual information should be included to complement the verbal and auditory elements. This can,

however, easily be inserted into the existing forms. On the other hand, the question-and-answer model for the post-performance discussion does include and balance the elements in the theoretical framework. It is, however, not well-matched to the objective of letting the audience react to what they have seen. Conversational models are then suitable and will prove more successful in involving and engaging the audience in learning, in this case through active participation.

Involve the audience and they will understand and appreciate.

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