

GERALD SIEGMUND

What's in a Word? Ion Munduate's piece, *Astra Tour*

What's in a word? Ever since ancient Greek tragedy, the theatre frames the catastrophe that is the subject's dependence on the Other. This conflict is highlighted by the dissociation of the actor's body from dramatic dialogue or meaningful linguistic exchange between the characters of a play. Like the body of Polyneikes in Sophocles' play *Antigone* that is not allowed to be buried to take its rightful place in the cultural and social order of things, the body is dissociated from language. Aias's cries of pain that no language can express or hold is another case in point. As a surplus body it exceeds the rules and regulations of language including its function as a means of communication. The body gains a life of its own. Although it is framed by language and its intersubjective laws, the body in theatre has fallen from grace. It refuses smooth integration and gains its dramatic potential from precisely this rift. Think of the myriad of bodies in the genre of farce that run across stage not knowing whether to turn left or right, losing their identity in the dizzy speed of a relentless choreography. The theatre has always been the place for framing the catastrophe that stems from the dissociation of the subject's body and the language that it is subject to.

What's in a word? A whole space that is the subject's stage. In his piece, *Astra Tour*, choreographer, dancer and performer Ion Munduate presents a world that is entirely made up of language. Within this linguistic universe he places his body to make it interact with its master. On stage we see a white open tent usually used for festive celebrations. A simple chair is placed left, whereas the backdrop serves as a screen for slide projections. Ion Munduate changes the slides himself. While the stage remains completely dark, the first slide appears reading "Espera"- "Wait". Ion Munduate sits on the chair and waits. When "Luz" –"Light" appears, the stage lights are turned on. Similar to Jérôme Bel's *The Show Must Go On*, Munduate conceives of the stage as the creation of a world. In the following fifty minutes various road signs with the names of towns appear. The topographical place names, names of real Spanish villages that Munduate has driven to with his Astra car, serve as stage directions guiding Munduates actions. Whenever he leaves the town and the action, the name on the sign is barred by a red line.

Thus the stage is immediately turned into a place for cultural exchange that is shown to be dependent on language. *Astra Tour* is a journey about the journey across Spain in a car which becomes a metaphor for the journey that is life. A word appears – a physical representation that is connected to it is performed. More than ten times "Ser"- Being" shows up on the back of the tent. The first time Munduate simply stands still only to fall down when the word is crossed out. He gets up again when the slide for "Being" reappears. This time he falls down with his hand clutched to his heart. He shoulders a heavy stone that buries him. Like working, speaking and singing belong to life, too, just as the search for the "Real" which he performs by leaving the stage thus running away from it as a place for fiction. Munduate finds a whole range of small gestures and actions that represent ways of being.

For *La Compañía*, another performer, Amaia Urra, enters from behind the tent. She joins Ion Munduate on the see-saw he has built from a plank. She reads aloud from a fashion magazine. Contact ads mix with beauty tips and the story of a Russian cosmonaut who once explored space floating above planet earth. The word that is a space encompassing a body on stage all of a sudden becomes the whole wide universe. Life on earth also includes "Amor" - they embrace – La "Alegría" – they dance to jolly music and finally "Adios" and "Salir" – "Exit"

after the lights has been switched off. The world, that was this performance, has literally come to an end.

In *AstraTour* the theatre becomes a meeting place not only for performers and audiences but also for language, the body and actions. The stage thus turns into an intermediate area where subjectivity in a cultural context is explored. He presents the body as framed by language and culture.

In the video installation that accompanies the piece, we see Munduate driving through the towns changing sunglasses according to the theme suggested by the signs. But the screen is split. Inside the image taken by a camera behind the windscreen, which shows the road ahead, another frame appears. The small picture is filmed from the back seat showing the back of Mundate's head. His face can only be seen inside the rear mirror which thus produces a third frame for yet another image. This set up of images mirroring themselves draws attention to that what is included in the image and what is left outside its frame. It draws attention the fact, that what we see as life is a construction of framing devices. Such as the theatre. Such as images. Such as words. What's in a word? A body and a whole life.

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