

Three ways of looking at *The moon is the moon is the moon* Text by Anneleen Keppens

I would like to illuminate three important aspects of the work. Namely its practical, its conceptual and its poetic intentions. I will do this by expounding on the title of the piece, *The moon is the moon is the moon*, in these three distinct ways.

1. The first and most evident relationship of this piece to its title, lies in the concrete optical experience of the piece. The piece plays with perspectives and with cycles.

From our 'seat' here on earth, we observe how the face of the moon is lit in various ways depending on its position in its orbit around the earth. Sometimes we see the face of the moon completely, sometimes we only get to see a part of it, and at other times we hardly see the moon at all. We witness the moon waxing and waning.

I wanted to create a similar experience in the theatre. Instead of the moon, we worked with something more tangible: a dance trio of about 7 minutes. The whole performance revolves around this dance trio of 7 minutes. At first you get to see only very small parts of the dance. Slowly, the whole trio comes into being, to then gently disappear again. From your seat in the audience, you see the dance waxing and waning.

Just like the moon, the dance remains somewhat mysterious, and has a side that can never be 'lit'. But the part of the dance that can be revealed is generously exposed. The piece is an invitation not to be overwhelmed or entertained by beauty or virtuosity, but instead an invitation to really *look*, to sense the different layers of a dance, to form a relationship to the qualities and the images of the piece. The revealing of the dance comes with a transparency that invites you, as an audience member, to become a part of it.

As in any live performance, the work comes into being and disappears in the end. This piece underlines the distinctness of that experience. It is both formal and elusive. I wanted to give importance to both of those qualities.

2. A second approach to the title is more conceptual, or should I say, anti-conceptual...

Maybe the sentence 'The moon is the moon is the moon' reminds you of Gertrude Stein's 'A rose is a rose is a rose'. With this sentence, from her famous poem *Sacred Emily*, she wanted to say that "things are what they are". The rose is not romance. The rose is not love. No, it is a flower and that flower is red.

This brings me to an essay by Susan Sontag that has been my mantra during the creation of this piece. The essay is called "Against Interpretation". I would like to quote a few key sentences from this text:

None of us can retrieve that innocence before all theory when art knew no need to justify itself, when one did not ask of a work of art what it said, because one knew what it did.

In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art.

Interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work for granted, and proceeds from there.

Our culture is based on excess, on overproduction; the result is a steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience.

What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more.

I aimed to create a performance that is an experience. A sensory experience. An experience that doesn't require interpretation. People that have seen the show tell me that it is hard to put words on their experience. I think that is great. In this age of intellectualization and utilitarian art, I wanted to create a piece that invites sensations, emotions, imagination and experiences that cannot necessarily be easily verbalized.

3. This brings me to the last relationship of the work to its title, which is more poetic.

I could have called the work: The dance is the dance is the dance. I didn't. I wanted something more poetic. I stumbled upon the sentence 'The moon is the moon is the moon' in a book by Thich Nhat Hanh. The choice of the word *moon* in the title seemed accidental at first, but turned out to be crucial.

At one point in the process, I was struggling with the choreography. I wanted to make this dance trio transparent, but the dance itself seemed to be resisting. As if it didn't want to be completely revealed. Then, my sister came to see a work-in-progress showing. And she told me: "Of course the piece is not transparent. If you wanted complete transparency, maybe you could have called the piece *The sun is the sun is the sun*. But you didn't. Lunar energy is all over your piece. And lunar energy mystifies and obscures."

The moon has given a very strong identity to the work, and I am grateful for it. The duality between transparency and mystery, between readability and poetry is what creates the warm formalism of this piece.

I think there is a mystical element to the performance in the poetics of the movement and in the cyclical nature of the choreography. As if we could go on and on, the dance could die and re-emerge over and over again.

I would like to end with a quote by Haruki Murakami, sent to me by a friend after having seen the premiere of the piece:

All things pass. None of us can manage to hold on to anything.

In this way, we live our lives.

(Haruki Murakami, Hear the wind sing, 1979)

Anneleen Keppens, Brussels, November 2017