

... and then the little child laughs (:)

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Gabi dan Droste: In your production "Rawums (:)" you can see how the audience can't stop laughing. How do you as actors experience the sense of humor of very young children? How does the humor develop in your play?

Michael Döhnert: Maybe there is something like a technique for "making the little child laugh". I am not interested in that. Our humor arises from certain situations, from the playing itself. But you cannot predict this kind of humor; whether something is really funny for the children or not, will only be clear on our meeting with them.

Melanie Florschütz: The work at the production of "Rawums (:)" stretched over a couple of versions of the play and a process of reflection that lasted almost two years. At the beginning there was the subject of "falling" of bodies and things. Then, the "flying" was added, as a sort of anti-movement to the falling. And during the last stage we were mainly concerned with the question of how to make poetry out of scientific contemplations. The falling of a bag or the flying of a feather isn't really a theatrical act by itself. We tried all kinds of things to make this action more interesting.

MD: For example: I let a feather float in the air and accompanied its flight with music. We only got amazement in the sense of "what is this supposed to mean" by the kids. Also the bag that just falls by itself wasn't funny at all. Neither when I supported it musically or with sound effects. But both elements next to each other – the feather, dancing to the circus music while floating through the air, and shortly afterwards the bag that doesn't give me enough time to sing because it doesn't float pleasantly but quickly falls, as a bag happens to do – that does make the children laugh. And we are all not able to say for sure whether the bag is just being stubborn or whether it is really not able to float in the air. The feather,

in contrast, is a promise to the ability to fly. That is a conflict that creates a certain tension.

MF: Yes, and you don't know exactly what the kids are laughing about - about the man who doesn't want to believe that the bag cannot float as easily as the feather; or about the bag, that happens to be unable to do so; or about the easiness with which the feather simply does it?

MD: Sometimes we have no idea why the children are laughing.

MF: Do they laugh because they take pleasure in the difference? Or because they, philosophically speaking, recognize the being in the limits of its possibilities? The whole theater for little children has a lot to do with our preconceptions: how we as artists, as adults and as people see children and assess them. These viewers don't come towards us afterwards to verbalize their reception. And even neuroscientists recognize that their knowledge about development theories is also only a construction. An important factor in theater for very small children is marking the difference between "real" and "acted" incidents.

How is a child supposed to know that it doesn't stay dark forever when I switch off the light in the theater? Or when I fall down in the theater, whether I really hurt myself or not? Making theater we deal with transforming reality, abstracting it and hyperbolizing it. That is an essential gesture of art.

I communicate with children on a theatrical level, with theatrical signs. I don't tell them of the world exactly as it is. The children are able to read these signs when they are clearly set. This is where I as an artist come in. This search for theatrical means is enriching to me as an artist.

GD: In theater for adults we often laugh about existing conditions that are taken for granted and then turned upside down. Deconstruction is also seen as a function of art. This certainly works in theater for adults, but does it work in theater for children? How and what do you want to deconstruct when a lot of the experience is totally new for the children?

MF: In theater for children at the age of two we can only deconstruct what we have estab

lished before. In “Rawums (:)” we show for example what works and what doesn’t work, or better, what flies and what doesn’t fly – that becomes the angle for the playful dialogue between the man and the woman. We make a game out of insisting on natural laws and abolishing them. Doing that, overcoming gravity is always connected to the previously introduced logics. That is, it is right that a man and a woman can’t fly but a man and a woman made of paper can do so. And like this, physics suddenly becomes poetry. Both exist at the same time.