THE EXTRA PEOPLE

ANT HAMPTON

THU / SEP 10, 7:00 PM
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Ant Hampton

Starting with Rotozaza’s Etiquette (2007), Ant Hampton has created nine “autoteatro” works, including his recent Bessie-award-winning collaboration with Tim Etchells for library reading rooms (The Quiet Volume). The “protocol” behind autoteatro—automated processes (often audio) where instructions are given to audience members who find themselves experiencing the work from the inside—is now taken back to the theater building to operate on a larger scale.

The Extra People is a site-specific, immersive theater performance where 15 audience members sit and watch another 15 onstage. After half an hour, they find themselves replacing those onstage, only to discover that another 15 have appeared in the seats they’ve left behind. And so it continues, through the hours... The theater building—dormant, empty, and unlit save for your flashlight—seems unable to be deactivated. And within this strange process, wearing headphones and a “hi-viz” vest, you’re cast along with everyone else as some kind of extra. But an extra for what?

The overall picture is out of your reach: too big, beyond your comprehension, or simply not your job to know. With hints of today’s fast-developing “voice-directed” warehouse management systems, the computer voices seem to be navigating you through the cracked dreams of today’s temporary, “flexible,” and debt-ridden worker. Highly realistic binaural recordings lend this stark zone—somewhere between Beckett and Ballard—a hallucinatory edge: an audio landscape so real and complete that you start to mistrust your eyes. The voice giving instructions reverberates off the walls of the auditorium—and yet no one else can hear it:

“Avoid eye contact.”

In a challenge to the assumption (often taken for granted) that collectivity is what you find in the theater, the building here reflects society rather differently. Its audience of atomized individuals is adrift, or even asleep, between both seating and stage, plugged into their own audio streams, patiently awaiting their call, and eventually acting upon it. All the while the fabric of their realities disintegrates until the proceedings on stage resemble, from within, a looping, dementia-ridden process, where the roles of operator and dependent switch as easily as flashlights changing hands. The initial sense of exposure is slowly overcome by one of oblivion until the memory of what it was like to sit quietly with critical distance seems as far away as the seats, somewhere out there in the dark.
Ant Hampton (British, b. 1975 Fribourg, Switzerland) made his first show as Rotozaza in 1998, a project which ended up spanning performance, theater, installation, intervention, and writing-based works, and often focusing on the use of instructions given to unrehearsed “guest” performers, both on stage and in public settings. Solo projects include ongoing experimentation around “live portraiture”: structured encounters with people from non-theatrical milieu.

About / Artist’s Statement

The Extra People was probably first sparked by an actual dream, many years ago, of being in a large theater. I’ve always struggled to remember much in the way of detail, but what does remain is a powerful sense, hard to describe, that the enormous space was somehow active and dormant at the same time. And that even if I was moved by what was unfolding on stage, something else was happening inside me, which I was supposed to pay equal if not more attention to. I remember in that dream having to close my eyes and miss the most important moments, keeping them closed even while thunderous applause rose all around me.

Your role here, to begin with, is of an audience, which is pretending to be an audience, without knowing why. You’re cast as an Extra, or “figurant,” defined as “a supernumerary actor who has little or nothing to say.” I developed a fascination with this role, and began to see it being both assigned and assumed in many different instances within the various games of power and powerlessness that humanity seems to be playing out.

I’m no expert in games of any kind, but I think that in video-gaming a “walk-through” is a kind of narrative or explanation which helps prepare for being inside that world: what to watch out for, what to be aware of. Maybe The Extra People is best thought of as a “sleep-walk-through”—similar to how our dreams rehearse the various traumas and predicaments of our waking lives.

—ANT HAMPTON, SEPTEMBER 2015

Credits:

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ANTHAMPTON

SOUND DESIGN AND COMPOSITION: SAM BRITTON
ARTISTIC ADVICE: KATE MCINTOSH
EDITING AND SYSTEM DESIGN/TECH DIRECTOR: HUGH ROCHELKEELY

EARLY DEVELOPMENT/BRAINSTORMING: GEOFF SOBELLE AND TROY LYOORD
ASSISTANCE AT EMPAC: JULIA ASHARAF

CREATIVE PRODUCER: KATJA TIMMERBERG

COMMISSIONED BY EMPAC

CURATED BY ASH BULAYEV

COPRODUCTION PARTNERS: EMPAC, KAAITHEATER (BRUSSELS), MALTA FESTIVAL (POZNAN), FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANCAISE (NYC).

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The Curtis R Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) is where the arts, sciences, and technology interact with and influence each other by using the same facilities and technologies, and by breathing the same air.

EMPAC hosts artists and researchers to produce and present new work in a building designed with a sophisticated architectural and technical infrastructure. Four exceptional venues and studios enable audiences, artists, and researchers to inquire, experiment, develop, and experience the ever-changing relationship between ourselves, technology, and the worlds we create around us.
Upcoming Events
An updated schedule for the 2015 Spring season is available online at empac.rpi.edu. Check back often for more information.

PERFORMANCE

**dotQuantum**
Platform

Thursday, September 17 / 8:00 PM
FREE

FILM / VIDEO

**On Screen/Sound: No. 3**
*Beach Boys/Geto Boys*
Cory Arcangel
*All Magic Sands (Chappaqua)*
Andrew Lampert

Wednesday, September 23 / 7:00 PM / $6

TALK, PERFORMANCE

**WITHIN 2**
Tarek Atoui

Thursday, September 24 / 7:00 PM
$18 / $13 / RPI STUDENTS $6