

Reflecting Light is a fanzine about light and lighting design in the arts. The research project Reflecting Light is financed by the HOGENT Arts Research Fund and co-financed by BUDA arts centre.

printing instructions

print on white paper (90g), black-and-white, recto-verso on the short side, then fold into a booklet. the dimensions of the printed fanzine are 11x21cm. cut the margins on the dotted line to reproduce the original dimensions.

reflecting light
darkness

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Issue nr 4 -
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Darkness

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V.u. Geert Belpaeme



DARKNESS

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Getting on to darkness

Emese Csornai

Having a background in visual arts, theatre always reminds me of a photographer's darkroom, where images and sequences can be called upon. These images emerge from the darkness and entice us to follow them. In this sense, the artistic process that drives theatre is the opposite of fine arts. Instead of curating the surroundings to make our subject take its potent position, in theatre we create out of darkness. This is of course a crude abstraction (especially taking into consideration how security engineering increasingly steals us away from the beauty of darkness in theatre) but a helpful abstraction altogether.

What impresses me most about darkness in theatre is its underlying quality, which touches upon the pulse of performing arts. The language, as well as the politics, of a performance can be understood by its use of darkness.

In a space facilitating the perfect darkness as a starting point, creating darkness can easily be interpreted as a power move, for instance in performances where the agency of light is used to conceal events that are not for the audience to witness. Or in classical theatre, where darkness is often used for time travel. Darkness enables storytelling by densifying time.

This all eats into a tradition in which the staged events are imposed on an audience. It expresses a relational system between audience and performance known from classical formats like ballet and traditional opera. It is a popular and confident system, but it stays rather formal. It is easily read but the joy of exploration, the different densities of darkness, and depth within darkness are rare joys in that paradigm.

Darkness is not secretive.

It is very revealing how willing an audience is to accept the rhythm of a piece, on the basis of the quality of the interplay among multiple media.

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We as an audience are conditioned to wait for the lights being turned off on us at least twice in a performance. On both occasions the awareness comes back to one's own body, surrounded with smells, noises, entangled in anticipation and what not. How we get into and out of darkness defines the experience of darkness itself. The sounds and senses we feel in darkness gives it a density.

Observed from the corporal reaction, I would argue that the opposite of darkness is not a lot of light, but very low light, as we experience in a not fully lit stage. Prolonged use of strongly dimmed lights create a hunger to catch what may be happening, the same lucid state that accompanies childhood. This state of receptivity is the opposite of the gaze meeting the traditionally enforced formats. The viewer will be in a pro-active state. Sight is strongly provoked, but the events are not catered, and this brings a feeling of autonomy to the viewer.

Once we carefully observe our senses and thoughts through a dim sequence and a blackout, we will see how deceptive it is to imagine darkness (or light) of the theatre belonging solely to the visual domain. Light, taking the sight and the rest of the senses of the viewers by the hand accompanies us to the world of physical and emotional impressions. For that reason in the last years, I have been concentrating on the sensual aspect of lights. It astonishes me how dynamics of fades create a world of difference in experiencing a performance. Simply put, to blow out a candle, and to hide it with open fingers and slowly pinch a candlewick is leaving one's body with two complete different intentions.

Darkness is not depth.

Some years ago I started collecting how different artists differentiate darkness and depth, two phenomena I couldn't see further from each other. To my astonishment there is a big number of artists who use the two as interchangeable phenomena. The only artwork where I have seen the point of commonness was the sound piece Falling from Deliah Derbyshire.



The Dark Project ©Tomi Humalisto

I have to remember here Piet Devos, who describes the most common misconceptions of sighted people, first of which the one imagining visually impaired live in darkness. It couldn't be further from the truth. It is approaching not seeing from an idea conceived in a space where sighted do not see. It is trying to catch a phenomenon from what it is not, that is a thought more belonging to thought processes than the physical world.

Darkness is an idea.

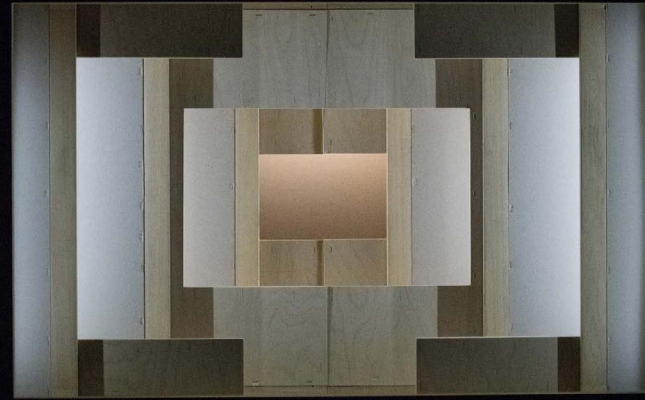
To give the closest representation to it in the realm of the senses (that is what a theatre can become) carries a lot of potentiality, strongly related to the duration of it.

Darkness however is not telling about itself. Other senses are giving information about Darkness.

Darkness is ephemeral.

When the initial state of perceptual shift is reached in darkness, the automatism of usual perceptual hierarchy cannot establish. That scanning is a heightened readiness with a heightened body sensation. This creates a level of attentive intimacy seldom called upon in public spaces. I like to look at darkness as a space of rest and reconsideration, of vulnerability, where the externalized and stowed away comes back close to the skin.

I would like to send a heartfelt thanks to Zwoisy Maers-Clarke and Samara Hersch among others who shared their visions on and in darkness with me.



The magic lantern, an early type of image projector, was used for entertainment purposes. The Phantasmagoria. From *Œuvres Écrites, scientifiques et anecdotiques*, 1831-33.

Waldeinsamkeit Benjamin Verdonck & Lucas Van Haesbroeck
©KurtvanderElst

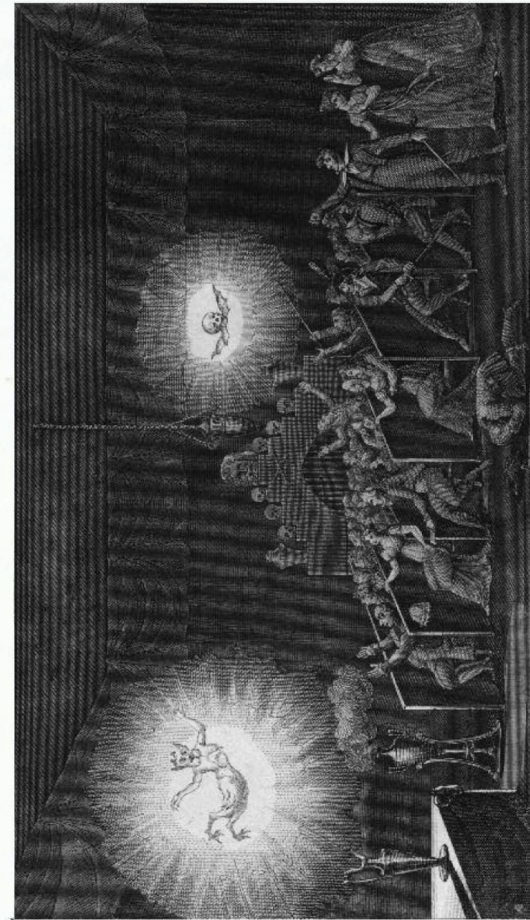
this experience. He answered with a story. A local myth of sorts. Some time ago heavy rains had flooded the basement of the theatre. Once the water had gone, they discovered a squirrel among the debris that had drowned in the darkness with no one around. Now every night once the living would turn off the lights, the ghost of that squirrel could finally roam free, bound only to the darkness as it jumped from lamp to lamp through the lightgrid.

Ezra Veldhuis

I really love darkness in the theatre and have had many meaningful experiences while working and watching performances with darkness. I was for example amazed by *Waldeinsamkeit* by Benjamin Verdonck and Lucas Van Haesbroeck. In this performance, you look at a sort of viewing cabinet, in which various shutters open and close in dim shining grey light. Shadows, sliding panels and shutters change the dimly shining light in an inexplicable way. It is a magical, minimalist light show that remains elusive and wondrous even after they explained their technique to me and I was allowed to look inside the cabinet.

Personally, I really enjoy working at night in an almost deserted dark theatre where only the light you are working with is still on. Time sometimes seems to almost stand still in these evening hours and you often find yourself in a kind of mental and physical in-between space in which another reality can sprout. From working in this zone usually arise the light-scenes of my performances.

Waldeinsamkeit by Benjamin Verdonck & Luc Van Haesbroeck
(c) Kurt VanderElst



was mostly developed in the 17th century and commonly used
ntispiece to volume 1 of ...tienne-Gaspard Robertson, mÈmoires

Darkness: back to a future of a quality approach to lighting

Jan Maertens

To a lighting designer, darkness could be seen as the equivalent of a white canvas to a painter or simply silence to a composer, conductor or musician. Darkness is the absence of lighting content that is yet to be created. Darkness is the necessary condition to effectively make that lighting content receptive (as intended).

In theatre venues, however, the absence of light has increasingly become a complicated condition to achieve. So it is, that creative lighting content more than often ends up in a state of being already contaminated almost by default by other, non-creative lighting agents while weakening both content and agency of the creative lighting. We can enlist here plenty of wrongdoers situated in the executive, efficiency and safety protocol of today's venues: Emergency exit lights together with thoughtlessly installed door- or step lights starring in a lead role. From functional standby LEDs, over remote control, surveillance and protection systems to genuine LED screens of all sorts of technical equipment and announcements. Or light simply leaking from under doorways or roof tops. Today's efficient theatre architecture is often as inadequate in darkness control as it is in creating a compliant acoustic space... while keeping up appearances with black moleton... (yep, the old Greek didn't have wireless microphones to stand in for their ignorance:-) But also, often audience members themselves, exactly while looking out to be addressed by creative content, seem to more and more become as much a responsible in spoiling the conditions for creative lighting content to fully become. If not to their ignorant selves, then in a vulgar way towards the involuntary subjected fellow audience members. Interestingly, a lit mobile phone screen in a theatre is somehow thought to be less harmful than a ringtone in the middle of a concert.

Light pollution is all over. Not only in the theatre. And not only towards creative content making. Also in

An actor was live performing the text (in a light isolated booth). Darkness changed its quality due to the shifts in the text, its spatial rendering and one's anticipations. I don't want to kill the fun and I hope plenty of people will go and witness this work, but in the very end of the piece in very dim lighting perception and sense of distance were summoned after we have long given up on seeing anything at all. In this performance there was a great dramaturgy of darkness where I felt the piece was sliding directly in my nervous system and I was potentially in another person's head.

Jan Fedinger

the noise of darkness

One of my first memories of working in the theatre has to do with the moment of turning off the lights after a day at work with the multitude of fixtures. Back then this theatre felt as such an immense space as I had not experienced on a daily basis before. Especially often being alone in this large volume felt as being in a silent void. With all the lights on, I could see every corner and every part of the room but often would not hear a single sound. At the end of the day I had to go up the tribune, arriving somewhat in the middle of the space, between the floor and the ceiling to the light desk. Here, after some simple commands, sudden darkness would fall onto the space as I turned off the fixtures that had been shining through the day. A darkness so absolute and immersive as I had not experienced before. Every time again I was struck with a moment of uncertainty, of slight unease but mostly great awe. Time and again it felt like I had entered into a void. However this void of darkness was far from silent as the day working with the lights had been. Instead there was a cacophony of sounds that suddenly erupted. Of clicks and cracks. Of high pitched banging. The lamps that had been heating for hours, expending the metal would now cool down rapidly creating a multitude of sounds as the material retracted. All the light fixtures turned into musical instruments of an overwhelming composition moving through the dark void. In this darkness as the boundaries of space had disappeared around me, I was immersed in the middle of that orchestra of noise. No less frightened at first but even more with a feeling of astonishment and excitement. Even bigger was my surprise when I told my supervisor of

The performance consisted of four sequentially repeating lighting scenes, dawn, day, dusk, and night. The durations of these lighting scenes followed the durations of daylight, twilight, and darkness per year, shortened and related to the three-hour duration of the performance.

For me, the significance of the performance was largely built on the rhythm of the various shifts in darkness, but also on experiencing almost total darkness and navigating the performance space, bumping into other audience members, naked performers, indulging in improvised play with strangers or sensing air currents, sounds, textures of materials and cold ice under your feet. Underlying all this imagined anonymity was an awareness of total visibility, made possible by infrared lights and surveillance cameras. I liked the sheer beauty of this idea: I was able to implement a lighting design and lighting scene that did not destroy the darkness, the two could live simultaneously at the same time and place.

TheDarkProject-(c)TomiHumalisto

Bruno Pocheron

One of the most meaningful experiences of darkness in a theatre is for me an often recurring one: the classical final blackout that marks the end of many stage works. A timeless suspension, a respiration, shared by audience and performers alike, a transitional event where all involved in the ephemeral theatrical contract come back to themselves, find back their bodies in the dark, deprived of visual input for long enough to acknowledge the end of the shared, real time experience: the suspension of the suspension of disbelief. I project myself back from the stage to wherever I am physically in the theatre, while the shared experience reforms itself into individual memories, and the magically activated theatrical apparatus resumes the shape of an architectural space occupied by people.

Emese Csornai

Darkness really got me in Juan Dominguez' My only memory. The audience was first facing a frame of lights very similar to a filmscreen, blinding us. After, it was pitch black.

today's society, the absence of artificial lighting is an ever-scarcer condition to start perceiving reality from. Of course, we need functional lighting but there is an abundant number of "would-be" functional or self-imposing light(ing) out there: light that pretends to be functional - or for the worse, artistic - but actually doesn't really expect any receptivity, light that is not there to light but merely to impose itself to an involuntary public address, light simply to be consumed. The often dynamic "signage" lighting as a vulgar tool to impress with today's architectural new developments in the city. The new standards of brutally penetrating moving image for announcement and advertisement in the public space. The new trendy "light festivals", replacing more traditional city marketing events... And all visual pollution that is so monotonous and impersonal that it seems to be able to pass as neutral... wanting to become a contemporary state of natural light or darkness.

To a certain extent, we all start to suffer from the effects of not being embedded in or even not understanding darkness. And almost as the result of a negative feedback loop, it must be clear by now that today's light-efficiency fix greatly affects us in the way we all mass-consume light these days, often in total neglect of its necessity or its quality. On- and off-stage... Nor the intrinsic quality of the light being produced, nor the quality approach in our lighting purposes seem to be questioned anymore. As if quality becomes a redundant attribute when being technically efficient or abundantly available. As if darkness or absence of (artificial) light(ing) needs to be overruled just for the sake of it. Or let me approach things differently with a photographer's statement I recently came across: "watching carefully is a form of yoga with one's eyes." For the stage, watching carefully implements being guided carefully to watch carefully. Or in other words, being lit carefully! It is indeed in our approach to making an audience (and other stage media for that same matter) watch carefully that we valorise our agency as lighting designers for the stage: producing images of thought and making these visible. And it is exactly here that our obstinate technical approach to efficiency stops

being efficient, be it even contra-productive. It is here that contaminations of all sorts start to be more than a temporary nuisance. (Helping in) making/visualising/seeing/watching/understanding images of thought by (stage)lighting efficiently; demands not only a versatile toolbox but also the necessary conditions of darkness to start creating from.

Let us renounce the over-exposure to light(ing) while re-embracing darkness as the necessary condition for lighting carefully. For lighting quality-full and dynamically. Both on- and off-stage. Let's re-embrace darkness as a statement against today's mass-consumption of light. Not by being efficient - art never is - but by being quality-full. Then maybe not only the artistic content we generate as lighting designers, but also the way we guide and manipulate to watch carefully might help to add value to life in a broader way.

Because lighting design does not equal efficient light scenography.

Because lighting design, in the first place, wants to invite to carefully watch... and watch carefully!

Let there be darkness!

The impossibility of total darkness

Ezra Veldhuis

What is your most meaningful experience of darkness in a theater?

Henri Emmanuel Doublier

My best experience of darkness was the show MUA from Emmanuelle Huynh. It was a show in total darkness, a trio of Emmanuelle, composer and cello player Kasper T. Toeplitz, and Yves Godin, the lighting designer. In the beginning, the audience was immersed in total darkness for quite a long time (5 minutes or more), listening to the cello playing. Even after this long time in the dark, your eyes couldn't see anything. Then, as a very subtle light came slowly, I could perceive the softest, blurred, spectral body that I saw in my life. (Emmanuelle was naked or just dressed in a transparent fabric). I remember a lot of alternation of moments in total darkness and moments in little, little, light on the body of the dancer. I could feel some visual distortion tricks, when she moved, the body was decomposed like in a cubist painting of Picasso. She could even become double, because the eyes in such little light don't have time to adapt. I still have images in my mind more than 25 years later. I was assisting Yves at that time, and I do hope that he won't be upset if I give you his trick. He used very deep strong filters and a lot of grey neutral density into regular rkw halogen lamp. Thanks to that, he could have a wide amplitude on its faders and still have a low intensity of light, to get such incredible quality.

Tomi Humalisto

The most significant experience for me happened when I was working on The Dark Project (Pimeä Projekti), which was performed in 2006 and 2007. I was the initiator and facilitator of the work, for which I also created an infra-red lighting design. Originally conceived as an installation performance in the gallery space of the Museum of Contemporary Art KIASMA in Helsinki, it required a lot of experimentation on the part of me and the team, where we placed ourselves in the same position as the spectators of the work. Viewing is a broad concept in this context, as the performance made use of multiple senses, but also of real-time video camera footage. It was more about experiencing in a dark and dim environment.

The impossibility of total darkness

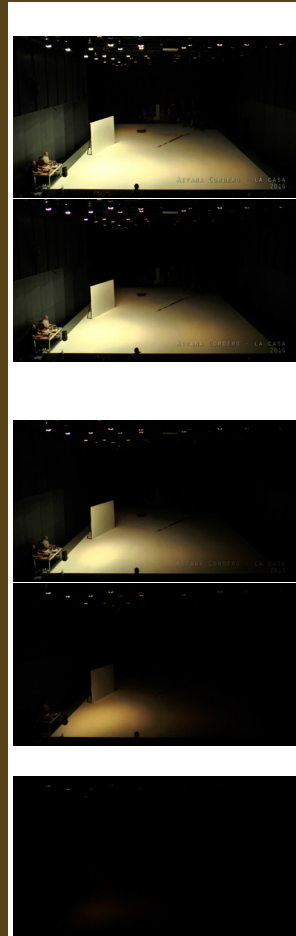
Ezra Veldhuis

Ezra Veldhuis

The American experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage stated that people mostly see the world in a 'prescribed' manner. The way in which we look (and act) is efficient because we assume a lot. We fill in images without dwelling on that lightning-quick process of signification and in that sense a 'rawer' visual experience, in which light plays a principal part, eludes us: a fierce play of reflections and hues that has not yet been reduced to a navigable world. We are trained to see light as something that deflects off objects. We rarely 'really' look at what light does.¹

What we see is not a neutral registration, but an exchange between 'inside' in our brains and 'outside' in the world. For the biggest part this is not a question of conscious interpretation, instead it happens on a deeper neurological level. We do not see what the eye sees. A visual stimulus is instantly corrected by our brains, and luckily so! If that wouldn't happen, we would see a strange cloud of light and dark pixels, enlarged in the middle. Through that cloud we would see a network of blood vessels, and on the location of our blind spot an enormous black hole. Because our brain adjusts every image and because we learn from earlier experiences and observations, we forget that every sensory perception is a creative act. When we think of what we see as an objective registration, we eliminate the responsibility of our own imagination.

Starting from the enticing statement of Brakhage, I started getting the idea to make a performance about light, in which the act of looking (or 'spectating') in itself would be thematized and the lamps and the light they emit would be what we watch. This resulted in SUN-SET, an installation-performance that I created together with Bosse Provoost and Oshin Albrecht in 2020. SUN-SET is not only about theatre lamps and their light, it looks more generally at the entire apparatus and dispositive² of the blackbox.



©Jan Fedinger

Fig. 1.

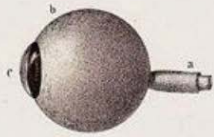


Fig. 2.

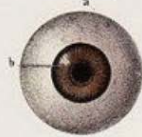


Fig. 4.



Fig. 3.

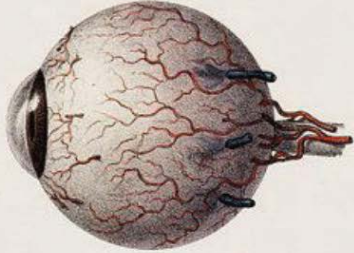


Fig. 5.

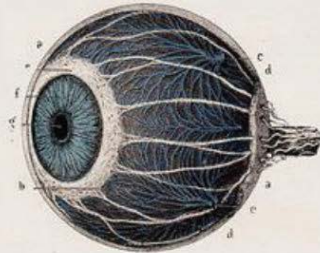


Fig. 6.

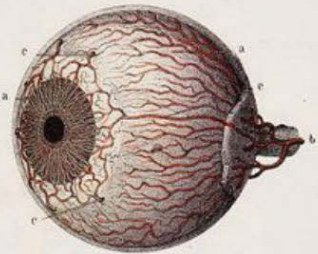
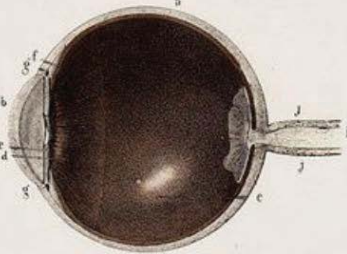


Fig. 7.



Desiné d'après nature par L. Cuvillier.

Préparé par Ludovic.

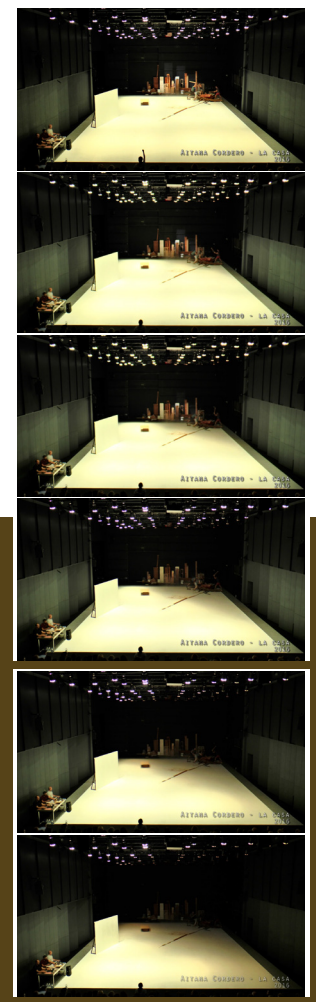
Imp. Lemercier, J. de Seine & Paris.

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I remember one time I asked a friend about this fade out. Like a deer in front of an approaching car she stared into the distance and recalled: "this is like the end of the world".



This darkness rolls over you. Swallows you like a wave. It is a corporal experience, immediate and physical. Almost as if this darkness moves through you. A phantom limb must feel this way. Subjectively real. For a moment your primitive instincts trump the rational awareness of your surroundings. Finally, you breathe out.

I have been experimenting extensively with fades of light that have a direction. Fades that move from left to right. Inwards or out of a centre. Bounce off somewhere and retrace. Of course, a fade out to black could also lead away from you. Separating you from an image you try to hold on to. Creating an ever-larger distance. Here I often experience a great sensation of loss as well as an awareness of my desire to hold on to the image. The experience that this kind of fade out provides, to me at least, usually happens more on a level of the conscious. Adding movement to fades, especially those leading into or out of darkness help directing the attention of the audience. Like the panning movement of a camera in a movie they make you look somewhere specific. The fade out towards the audience feels different, however. I experience it differently. Not with my conscience but with my emotions. These are moments where you feel the difference it makes that you are actually present in the theatre. Like the moments you are actually present on the beach.

An exploration in and of the blackbox

The name 'blackbox' carries a promise with it: that of a nothing-like space that can be completely darkened, in which you can start off making your own light. Most lighting designs are made from this assumed darkness, the assumption of a visual zero point. The creation of SUN-SET started from the search for a total absence of light in the blackbox.

The idea of complete darkness as a zero point is not an exclusive trait of the blackbox, on the contrary, a big part of the cosmogonies that we know to exist – often mythical explanations of how something emerges out of nothing, for instance the creation of the universe or the birth of God – start from this assumed visual zero point.

Take the Old Testament, in which light is created no less than two times, both on the first and on the fourth day. The fourth day God created the sun and the moon, and placed stars in the sky. This raised some questions with 14th century Jewish mystics: What are we then to understand light to have been on the first day, before the sun existed? How should we imagine this pre-stage of a world without sun? And what to think of the darkness that precedes the creation of the first light?

They came up with a poetic answer, written down in the Zohar: "In the beginning there was a spark of impenetrable darkness. A cluster of vapor forming in formlessness. The core: not white, not black, not red, not green, no color at all. Seen as a cord, it expelled radiant colors. Deep within the spark gushed a flow, splaying colors below. It split and did not split its aura, was not known at all, until, under the impact of splitting, one high and hidden point shone. Beyond that point, nothing is known."³

A similar motive is seen in Polynesian cosmogony. Many of these cosmogonies exist out of songs: long concatenations of the tens of different phases of darkness that precede Atea, the moment where the first light seeps in and the gods are born. In a publication of The Met in New York on an exhibition on these Polynesian cosmogonic stories, they describe this dark emptiness as "not static but, rather, creative and dynamic, in a constant

state of evolution"⁴. The dark was an ever-pulsing state of potentiality, an ever-changing, new dark version of itself. After this apparently endlessly long darkness, there is the Polynesian equivalent of the Big Bang: "as space finally began to hollow itself out from the darkness, light seeped in to fill the opening, marking the beginning of a new phase of creation."

The way to a really dark blackbox.

Back to the theatre. Simply turning off the light in the blackbox is not sufficient to make it dark. When you want to make a semi-dark light image in a theatre space, there are all kinds of unwanted distractions that impose themselves out of that so-called blackness: smoke detectors that glow and flicker, a small crack under a door, an improvised cover for a roof window that lights the space in a dim and weak grey ...

Because of this, the first days of our creation were taken up by a process of darkening. After a thorough first session it looked dark enough, so dark you could not see before your eyes. But as minutes passed and our eyes adjusted to the darkness, the space appeared again, until the point where we could see the entire space and we could walk around comfortably. The source of evil appeared to be minuscule lights (diodes) inside of TL-lighting, the lighting table or the speakers. Lights that burn permanently to show that the appliances work.

When you tape off the little light itself, it still reflects in the casing of the lamp, so that you start perceiving it again after some time, still more diffuse than before, but undeniable. There is no other way than to disassemble the appliances and apply three layers of black tape straight to the diode.

As frustrating and practical as this whole process might sound, there was also something special that started happening. In this semi-dark the visual noise became meaningful. Like stars that are always hidden behind the light of the sun, there lay hidden a world of little lights, static and curtains behind the burning spotlights,

back of the stage towards the proscenium. Towards you. A darkness that devours what was just visible a second ago. Suddenly a part of what you just saw has gone. And then another part and yet another. Coming ever closer. Shrinking the visible space. In a matter of split seconds. It is like a wall of darkness that is approaching. The movement materialises the otherwise intangible light. The wall coming at you feels solid and you expect it to hit you right in the face as you brace for impact. You feel sudden tension in your chest. Your respiration halts.

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exit lights that slowly transform from an ignorable presence into the main source of illuminating the stage with their pale, flat, green light. This darkness arrives comfortably. You had time to prepare for it. The space transformed but your awareness of being in that space stayed the same.

The light can also fade out abruptly. In a cut. One moment you could see everything in front of you while the next moment you are plunged into darkness. The last image that you saw, still imprinted on your retina, only inverted in its colours. It's like a flash. You are puzzled for a moment. How could you perceive a flash? Light, when actually darkness arrived? This image transforms, deforms, into ever less concrete shapes before your attention goes elsewhere and the image disappears. You realise that walls, ceilings and floors suddenly are no longer. Your body tries to understand its new distances to the boundaries of space. Finding none, as your senses reach out. You need to rely on your rationality to tell you that you are still in the same place. Everything around you is still in the same place. It is only the light that went off. And as you sit in this

darkness, understanding the situation, you slowly start seeing again. Little by little you realise that the darkness is actually not that dark and that there is a lot to be seen once the lights have gone out.

Then there is another way for a blackout to arrive. One that keeps on having the most profound impact on me every time I find myself exposed to it. One that you see coming and there is nothing you can do about it. One that does not leave you unaffected. A fade out that is not global, all encompassing. Where all the lights above and around the stage fade or cut out at the same moment. This is a fade out with a direction. Directly aimed at you. Sitting in what just a moment ago seemed the safety of your audience seat. Like a high speed-train, this darkness is coming at you. Progressively the lights turn off one by one. From the furthest at the back of the stage towards the proscenium. Towards

scenography, soundscapes and performers in the theatre. Out of something practical, the visual noise transformed into something we wanted to use as a sign. The more we took away, the stronger what was left spoke, and the more we realized that we could turn this conscious game with these signs into a succession of 'cosmogenic moments'.

A dramaturgy of 'light waste' and imaginary light

Of course, we wanted to do more than simply watch at a poorly darkened space slowly become visible again. To build a performance with visual noise, we couldn't use the real noise of the space. It varies too much dependent on the space, but it's also too constant, too uncontrollable. Moreover, we still wanted to find that 'visual zero point' to start the performance with. We had to eliminate the 'real' noise and replace it by a lighting design inspired by all these subtle gleams and reflections.

'Light waste' became the guiding principle for our lighting design and the apparatus of the blackbox (what it is, but also how it generates meaning) became the main subject of the installation-performance.

That is how in the end, in SUN-SET we mainly watch darkness and short moments of light in which we experience a bastard world that hints to our universe while simultaneously referencing theatre technique or the technical apparatus of the blackbox itself.

That is how we made a lighting installation with a grid of programmable diodes that we start playing with (after an initial fifteen minutes of total darkness), first so subtle that you doubt whether you even see anything. Gradually we build up with several flashes and blinkers to jumping clusters of diodes that refer to the constellations of stars in our universe and linear or systematic images you encounter in the blackbox.

In the entire performance we keep on gliding from one dim lighting installation into the next and we build (in broad lines) from a real visual zero point (total darkness)

to a lighting installation that shines blindingly hard in the spectators' eyes and that becomes so hot the filters in the lamps melt.

In the performance, we play with the doubt whether the light you perceive, is really there, or whether it is a product of your imagination. Or something in between. This is most explicitly the case in the first fifteen minutes of the performance, in which spectators are invited to watch the darkness. But in that darkness, that visual zero point that we finally found, something very special seems to happen when you dwell there for a while. Contrary to what you might think, you don't see 'nothing', and, if you think it through, you also don't see 'black'. Instead, after a while dark-grey moving shapes appear. How they look or move exactly, varies from person to person. Some people also rather describe green or purple shapes.

This phenomenon is called Eigengrau⁵ or Eigenlicht, in English brain grey. The brains guess what is going on, and for lack of contradiction by external stimuli, we only see what is being guessed, and the difference between seeing and imagining disappears. Eigengrau is a subtle hallucination, a Kopfkino, but it is primarily the perception of a process that forms the basis of how the eye works: the brain guesses what is going on and adjusts its conclusions on the basis of what comes in.

Our lighting design consisted of creating the circumstances for Eigenlicht to emerge. That way a parallel appeared between those stories that describe the emergence of the world ("prior to God there was an older, hidden, God") and the emergence of grey, moving stains where there should be nothing. It appears to be impossible for a human being to apprehend 'nothing', not only on a conceptual level, but also on a sensory one.

That is how finally we ended up with two main dramaturgical lines for our lighting design: the 'light waste' of a theatre space and imaginary light. By taking away light in the first place, we wanted to focus attention to how our eyes and our imagination work. We wanted to show that perception is at every moment an interaction between inside and outside, that everything we perceive is the result of a creative act. The core of our lighting

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It must shape you very differently if you grew up to experiencing these moments on the beach at dusk with the sun behind your back, as shadows grow longer in front of you. First your own, then of the houses at the beach, slowly creeping up towards the horizon. Are you even looking? Your eyes easily adapt to the emerging darkness. A darkness that is just an extension of the day before. One blends into the other, although, eventually passing through some beautiful colours in an homogenic way. You could look everywhere or nowhere for that matter.

How different is this from staring into the sun directly as it makes his/her/its way towards the horizon. The closer the sun gets to the horizon the more an end becomes apparent. Our protagonist transforms. The inconceivable blue-ish white degrades into shades of yellows, then oranges and finally reds, deeper and deeper sinking from "an above us" into an "in front of us", as the sun melts into the ocean. And at some point,

it becomes less and less clear if the sun is still there or if it is only its refraction we see through the water? If the sun has already "gone under". Our protagonist has disappeared, exited "stage left", in front of our eyes.

In theatre, there are many ways to create darkness. A blackout, as it is commonly referred to. The light can fade out extremely slowly. In a way that you feel the darkness arrive. That you slowly accept what is to come. Where everything around you slowly transforms from something that you perceive through its reflection, into something that you understand through its shadow. Where you slowly become aware of all those little sources of light you did not see before. Small LEDs on machines, like speakers or aparata you don't know the function of. The space slowly transforms into a night sky. A galaxy of artificial stars. Slowly you lose the single focus on what is in front and instead widen your attention to all around you. Often, very slowly, a glow establishes. Most of the time coming from emergency

The arrival of darkness

Jan Fedinger

How does darkness arrive? Recently I realised that I have mostly been living close to coasts that were orientated westwards. Seeing the sun set into the ocean therefore was always a very immediate memory marking the end of a day and the arrival of darkness. A moment of seizure. Of course, the timing could be very different. When I was close to the equator the sun set in a matter of minutes and year-round around the same time, between 18:00 and 18:30. In the north, above the arctic circle I saw the sun never setting the same twice. If at all it would set or just dip into the horizon, before emerging defiantly again. Announcing the next day before the old one had come to a closure, basically omitting darkness all together. In any case the arrival of darkness has, to me at least, an eventful character. With the sun as a clear protagonist and the transition from day to night as its recurring situation. Sitting on the beach at this moment feels like how it must feel for a deer staring into the headlights of an approaching car. Unable to move. Unable to look elsewhere.

design is a paradox: the light that appears when you make it dark.

Finally, I would like to thank Oshin Albrecht and Bosse Provoost, this text draws from of our shared research for SUN-SET.

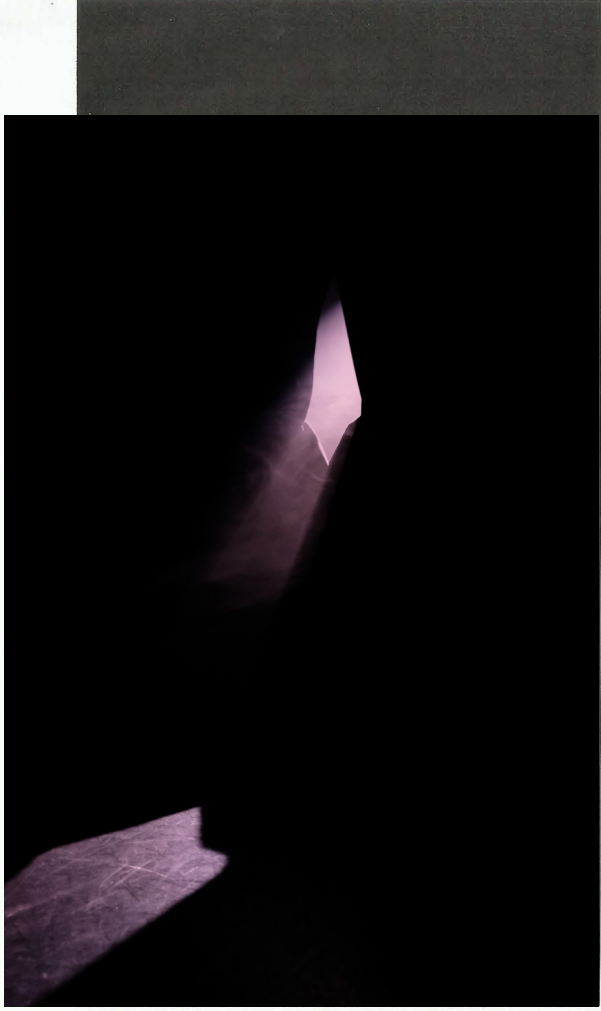
¹ Ganguly, S. (z.d.). Adventures in perception: Stan Brakhage in his own words. The Criterion Collection. <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/4956-adventures-in-perception-stan-brakhage-in-his-own-words>

² Giorgio Agamben summarized the meaning of a dispositive as "literally anything that in some way has the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions or discourse of living beings." Agamben, G. (2009). What is an apparatus? And other essays. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 14

³ Unknown author, The Zohar, vol. 1, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004)

⁴ Maia Nuku, Atea: Nature and Divinity in Polynesia (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2019). Copyright © 2019.

⁵ 'Real' black we know under color code #000000, however, what we perceive with the human eye in total darkness is a kind of dark gray with the color code: #16161d.



Atea (first light) moment in SUN-SET ©EzraVeldhuis



a night sky of diodes SUN-SET ©LynnVanOijstaerjen