

hearing monkeys

a theatrical human genome project

Why does cheating and deception prevail between the genders; why are we humans animals; and why are we beautiful? Why do human females—in contrast to gibbons—keep the exact time of their ovulation a secret, even from themselves? Wouldn't it be possible to alter all this through genetic engineering, and couldn't we in the theater conduct experiments to this end—dance in the wind tunnel, for instance, crash test on the video master multi-duplicator, ballroom chat in the Internet ...

A hearing to look into these and other issues on the threshold of the Biotech Age.

Framework Circumstances/Theatrical Concept

hearing monkeys combines a procedure used for scholarly investigation—the hearing—and new improvisational structures in the theater. Theater is conceived as a living implement to attain an understanding of the world and to communicate this insight to others, a device perfectly suited to that unique primate species, homo sapiens. Stories serve to playfully test what may someday come to be.

hearing monkeys is a flexible array that, in a series of experiments conducted by its participants upon themselves, probes the biological and social construction of sex.

The sandbox that is the theater ought to serve to help us find out how we win and how we lose at this complex game of lies, sex, cravings, and fraud, and how almost all of what we do and feel is determined by this—and this alone!

Sperm Warfare

Here, improvisational theater becomes a suitable device to make the scientific hypotheses of evolutionary biology come alive and to raise new questions. Robin Baker has already made use of this method in his highly successful book *Sperm Wars*¹. *hearing monkeys* dramatizes it and takes it to its limits. The improvised personal stories of the performing scientists become evidence.

All of our lives have changed radically as a result of working on this material. The truth is deceptive/disappointing. Sex is the all-encompassing algorithm according to which the world functions, and its sole meaning. Humans, animals, plants, machines and thoughts all reproduce in accordance with the same logical principle. The principle of the world is the copy. We are all-encompassing outcomes of such copying processes. All of us are the winners on this endless multi-duplicator production line.

Now, the point of this hearing is to find out how we can prudently intervene in this sexual mode of reproduction in order to eliminate obviously undesirable manifestations like infanticide, rape, genocide and the battle of the sexes.

As a first step, we tested the tests themselves. Last fall, the hearing was initiated by five performers/experts, several computers, and a sample batch of Internet addresses in a theatrical process that, in contrast to staged dramatic events which proceed in linear fashion, was designed to exhibit a networked structure; a complex, social and chaotic suite of protocols brought the piece together in a sustained, joint process of creation.

The Experimental Set-up

A parallel array of test sequences—the cascading series of switches activating the video master multi-duplicator, the wind tunnel, the automobile crash test, the Bill Viola train of thought, the battery of space heaters, the line-up of high-pressure inflatable coveralls and the negotiating table play biosphere. Thoughts too are just copies.

The Measuring Instruments

The minutely graduated perceptive faculties of the onlookers and the protagonists, medical monitors to keep pulse and respiration rate under observation, lie detector, X-ray C-arm equipment, the return flow from the Internet ...

The Stage

Workbench: scanner attachment to process photo slides, g3 online video editing studio, Powerbook with Internet hook-up, mobile plate of safety glass, Lancia Volumex, crash test foam rubber barrier, Walther PPK gmm gas pistol, two standard processors and a Nordlead as musical instruments, projection screen, blue carpet, gynecologist's examining table, snow making equipment, medical monitor, light sources like a copy machine, scanner, space heater, auto headlight, neon tubing, airport runway lighting, sodium vapor street lights, flashlights, and a horizontal, suspended battery of 100 light bulbs. That's certainly a lot of equipment, but the point is by no means to simply trot out the technology like at a trade show; rather, it plays an integral role in the dramatic process, and each piece is used in a way that is simply taken for granted.

Theater online

For a long time, the art of drama was geared to the absolute control of a linear process—until Keith Johnstone invented theatersport. That was long before Kevin Kelly let network society get “out of control.” The essence of network art is perhaps not even so much the gripping fascination with simultaneity and dislocation, or the possibility of apparently democratic participation (which as a rule only contributes to burgeoning nonsense), but rather the practical use of the Internet itself. We can carry out social experiments on countless participants behind their backs—they proceed on their own, voluntarily entering the experimental set-up of the chat room, where they become our improvisational associates.

Cast

Performers: Claudia Heu/Kerstin Klinz/Christoph Eichinger/Stefan Kreiss
New Media: Axel Swoboda/Tom Halwa, Lumen: Frank Lischka, Producer: Klaudia Gründl de Keijzer, Co-producers: Szene Salzburg/WUK Theater Wien, Artistic Director: Hubert Lepka

1 See the essay by Robin Baker on page 30 of this volume.

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