

## Matija Ferlin: Staging a Play: The Glass Menagerie

After works seeped in and responding to the language developed in *The Other at the Same Time*, *We Are Kings Not Humans*, and the provocative investigation of the poetry of Srečko Kosovel *Sad Sam Lucky*, with his new creation *Staging a Play: The Glass Menagerie* Matija Ferlin continues to mine the interzone between the abstracted dancing body and the conventions of the theatrical. For the first time Ferlin works from a source text, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, a play belonging to the theatrical cannon. Stripping the performers of their ability to create a stage statement using the voice and the talking apparatus, this research begins with bodies in motion creating physical memories of the play and the intentions written in it.

"Memory play" is a term coined by playwright Tennessee Williams, describing his work *The Glass Menagerie*. In his production notes Williams says, "Being a 'memory play,' *The Glass Menagerie* can be presented with unusual freedom of convention." In the script Williams describes the scene: "The scene is memory and is therefore non-realistic. Memory takes a lot of poetic license. It omits some details; others are exaggerated, according to the emotional value of the articles it touches, for memory is seated predominantly in the heart. The interior is therefore rather dim and poetic."

In Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* stage directions are essential to the understanding of the play. They intensify the unrealistic setting, foreshadow and emphasize events, and create character. By specifically stating action, the stage directions develop the characters more than their dialogue alone. It can be said that the body of the text in Williams' play is organized by the detailed stage instruction that can be read literally as the instructions for, in this case, the dancer's body.

The directing concept and dramaturgy of Ferlin's new creation emerge from an examination of the notion and procedure of *mise en scene*, conceptually establishing it as the basic formal task and as a departure point for working on the chosen text. In this performance, the idea of the staging procedure precedes that which is performed, thus determining all other conditions, the most important being the cancelling out of language.

When using a dramatic text as a source, the speech act is usually understood as the dominant signifier in the performing code. In this experiment, the performing body devoid of speech on stage is focused only on movement as the single possible and permitted signifier. Here, the body's task is to give form to what arises by searching for choreographic principles that are neither snatched away from or in conflict with speech, but instead find their signifying logic and register precisely where the speech act is conceptually abolished and directed toward the choreographic act.

The task is therefore clear: the seven-part structure of the play, conveyed through four dramaturgical functions, has to be constructed as a choreographic whole, while the stage

situations inscribed in movement touch only upon the edge of the dramatic narrative. The narrative no longer presents the material for choreographic deconstruction – it is relevant inasmuch as dance is able to cope with it, or in other words, to reconstitute it, without lapsing at any moment into one or another form of mimesis or illustration.

The only literalness in this choreographic translation of the text is retained in relation to stage directions that make up for nearly a fourth of Williams' text. The stage direction is treated as a concrete choreographic task, laid bare in its performing intention.

Dramatic plot inscribed in the situations, statements, and relations between dramatic figures in our process steps out of the frame of the play's synopsis as the bearer of its dramatic dynamic, and thus takes place in an unmarked and abstract space where the speech act is transposed into a choreographic gesture. The conflict is shifted from the space of the dramatic into the space of the *mise en scene*, into the wide field of negotiation between speech and movement.

Character, narrative, drama, expression are reinvented anew through a commitment and profound trust in the vastness of the body.