

W.A.R. Final Assignment  
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## **TAAT:**

theatre as architecture, architecture as theatre

*A critical response to working methods, performances, documentation and  
dramaturgical approaches.*

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**Who's Afraid of Representation?**

**MCMV 0700**

## **Collaboration, Subversivity and Striving to Fail**

TAAT is a multidisciplinary architecture performance company making performative experiences which challenge where performance ends and architecture begins. Their performances do not use any actors but instead, the makers create structures and situations where *experiencers* can exist and interact together. Rather than rehearsing a finished work for the stage, TAAT works to create performative situations building structures that experiencers move through together. To them, the performance is a combination of both the structure and the people who occupy those spaces. The rehearsal process only involves Gert-Jan Stam (the theatre-maker) and Breg Horemans (the architect). It may be more fitting to describe their 'rehearsal' process as the research phase of the project. Within the work, the makers are interested in creating performance which exists as a challenge to how theatre and architecture can or should be defined. In doing so, they challenge the meaning and essence of both these terms. TAAT's central project, which comes to define most of their performance catalogue, is a thirty-three part performance which aims to create a perfect work which exists as both architecture and theatre simultaneously. HALL33 operates as a test allowing the two markers a set amount of opportunities to fulfill their companies central aim – to create the perfect example of a building which is also a performance. To date, there have been three HALL installments which have taken a similar shape. The typical structure that TAAT adopts involves two strangers entering a wooden structure in which they move together silently. TAAT describes their work as taking the shape of a 'make it yourself play'. This D.I.Y. approach to making allows for unity between the architecture and the performance in order to discover what may be the common ground between these two disciplines .

TAAT's performances allow for the symbolic and physical aspects of theatre to be explored simultaneously. Every structure they build is made specifically for the space they have been commissioned to perform in. It cannot be moved from the space it is built within and so remains only for the short time in which their performances take place. This also means that any of the HALL projects cannot be repeated, they develop the next of the HALL projects rather than repeat previous work. The company adopts a linear structure in how they perform their work, always moving in a clear forward direction. This is also reflected in how their projects develop; each HALL is a continuation of what came previously. The structures remain aesthetically similar, altering and developing depending on what they learned in previous projects. By giving themselves thirty-three performance opportunities, every performance acts as an individual section of a larger performance; they do not stand alone but work in collaboration of other works which all exist under the one title of HALL33. The content of each individual

HALL performance consists entirely of the interaction between two strangers who walk through the structure together. Arguably, engagement -in this type of collaborative creation method- means there is no objective authoritative account of any of the individual HALL performance. Due to each experiencer's subjective response to the performance, they cannot produce scripts or even document content. This gives reason to why TAAT are more focused on a long term fixed project. In its entirety, HALL33 exists as an individual performance and also as a long term research project of whether a theatre building can be a theatre performance. Due to this methodology, it seems impossible to apply the same type of theatrical analysis or thinking that you would with a staged production in a typical theatre. Instead, it seems more fitting to look upon TAAT's performances as a long term performative research project. I will be focusing directly on TAAT's central performance HALL33 in its entirety, and individual works as elements of that overall performance. Through this approach it is interesting to critically analyze how this structure of creation seems like a process which is doomed to fail. It is safe to assume that HALL33 will never be completed however their struggle for perfection opens a conversation to how this performance project functions within a larger discussion surrounding the ways contemporary performance can begin to interact within other disciplines.

Due to the huge research element of TAAT's work, the majority of their leaflets, information and written descriptions is documented on their website. This, in many ways, acts as the contextualization of their practice. On the website, you can start to understand the maker's larger thinking process around their creation process. On this platform they also outline their plans for future projects and they present their reasoning for previous work. In the upcoming HALL04/05/06 they describe what their central focus is:

Real encounters in times of hyper connectivity. Encounter between different worlds and ideas but foremost between people - due to social media looks like we are not connected anymore.

We keep our relationships going through emotions and 'like buttons' but what is in this time the value of looking at one another as a real people in physical space. (Horemans and Stam)

Presently, TAAT are focusing on creating their performance experiments as 'real life encounters' which they see as something missing within social relationships of digital age. They argue that, in the modern and digitalized era, our cities become more homogeneous; our interests and lives become more internalized. TAAT wants to create spaces where people can interact in a space designed to exist entirely

outside our normative modes of interaction. As they mention, they position interaction within physical space as the ultimate and best mode of 'real' connection in a world which is becoming increasingly separated. In Lavery's "The Pepys of London E11: Graeme Miller and the Politics of Linked" he explores the performativity of the experiencer and the performativity of walking which provides a way to look into TAAT's focus of 'real' connection to space and people. HALL33 asks the experiencer to explicitly interact with a stranger by walking together. Lavery highlights how an ethnographic approach can offer an attempt to "interpret ways of life and cultural trends through direct observation" (Lavery 1999, 150). When applied to the work of TAAT we can begin to see how interaction in the spaces that TAAT create lead to larger questions concerning how we interact with strangers in public. HALL33 can be seen as a project which aims to reflect what should be happening in our everyday lives. Lavery is interested in whether taking part in a performance -as an experiencer- does have the power to affect how you behave afterwards. Arguably, TAAT asks its participants to look upon this experience and reflect how we interact with space in the mediatized world. They explicitly call for wider social change in their online descriptions of the HALL project. They call for an open source process in which different European organizations, theatres and architecture schools, professionals and talents come together and work together (Horemans and Stam). In their collaborative approach to making they attempt to address larger issues of separation and subscription through how they design the HALL33 project. HALL33 can be seen as an exemplary, unraveling and exposing performance project which adopts the structure which they wish to see applied further than just theatre.

TAAT makes works in response to, what they feel is, an ever decreasing sense of real life connection in our modern time. Their latest HALL installments have been structured so the experiencers are encountered with a focused moment of contact in a space specifically designed for this purpose. TAAT seems to be looking to bring the *live* of interaction into the center of their practice. As Auslander argues liveness' "own ontology is created in response to recorded or mediatized performance" (Auslander 1999, 56). The strive for real liveness and presence in the performative experience is a concept which comes into being in reaction to the digital. Without the digital questioning our understanding of the live or the real it cannot be altered. That is, a strive for liveness only comes in existence once we offered an alternative through technological advances. TAAT interact with the 'real' in reaction to how it is threatened. They thematize the live and the real because they see it as something to be protected. However, is it really possible to pinpoint exactly what is and is not real about interaction between people in physical or virtual space? The line separating these types of interaction

are becoming increasingly blurred as digital technology continues. It may be possible to influence behavior through experiential theatre but it seems that TAAT may not consider how technology and the digital are firmly rooted in how we conduct our everyday life. And so, it may be more interesting to see how these modes of communication intersect rather than oppose one another.

HALL33 can be seen as a long term protest to digital interaction in favor of creating spaces for real interaction. It could be argued that TAAT's creation process is reactionary. And so, if their project begins with protest and resistance, does HALL33 offer a solution to this 'problem'? Is architecture as theatre the solution to our increasingly disconnected society or does it offer a moment of resistance or subversivity. As De Cauter argues subversivity is not in itself revolutionary thinking but creates space for small moments of disruption (De Cauter 2011, 9). The work of TAAT works as both a reactionary protest and a process of attempting to transform concepts of theatre and architecture. There seems to be two very separate aspects of their research project, the attempt to create the perfect building performance and an ongoing protest against modern habits of communication which calls for experience in real space and time, in an era where our lives are becoming increasingly homogenous. It is possible for both these trajectories of thinking to intersect through practice? In beginning to understand these two lines of focus it is useful to look into how TAAT operates as a collective.

Both makers do not live in the same city and so they work together digitally through skype or other services. Ironically, this type of communicative method is what they are attempting to offer an alternative to in their performances. Due to the nature of the work they are making, much of their work is routed in cataloguing and researching how their work functions within theories and wider discussions surrounding contemporary theatre and performance. As makers of experiential theatre their role lies more in the facilitation of situation rather than the creation of the performance itself. They achieve a distance from the content, they create a space for a performance to happen without being fully in control of the content. However, TAAT are explicit in how they structure the performance. Due to the openness they allow within the performances, each HALL project so far has taken place within very presence parameters. Firstly, experiencers are given either a written or oral set of clear rules. TAAT argues this is included in all the performances in order to build trust with the participants. They want experiencers to feel like they can interact openly in the space and this required a clear set of guidelines. Arguably, rule based tasks offer more space for spectators to interact rather than a more open structure which might actually have the opposite effect. Rules are intended to be broken. Due to TAAT's belief that performativity comes into being in the bodily interaction in the space, they want to make sure each

experiencer is given enough information and confidence to interact. Having looked at the performativity and methods of the specific performative situations of the latest HALL33 installments, I would like to focus on the structure of HALL33 in its totality.

In the creation of HALL33, TAAT have explicitly established when their creation process will end. They are working within a clear and limited time frame. It is a unique approach to a creation process to actively limit yourself to only thirty-three opportunities. It seems then, that in establishing this tight structure that they thematize the very idea of a successful performance project. They wish to end the HALL33 project with the perfect architecture as theatre performance. However, in the very act of stating this they are setting themselves up to fail at their task. As Lisa le Feuvre argues "If perfection and idealism are satisfying, failure and doubt are engaging, driving us into the unknown" (Le Feuvre 2010, 17). It is by setting themselves up for such a spectacular failure, that their experimentation takes the most interesting shape. They ironically design their own theatre project around an objective which cannot be achieved. "Irony asks questions, not to receive an answer but to draw out of content and form yet more questions" (Le Feuvre 2010, 15). What specific questions could TAAT be asking with this structure? They seem to be challenging the very idea of the perfect performance, this is explored in all the ways in which their performances are constructed. As a performance company, TAAT seems to be rooted very firmly in not creating theatre projects. They exist entirely outside of a theatre building, they do not work with actors or performers. They are attempting to reshape what we consider theatre and what we consider architecture. They have given themselves a task which cannot be achieved, the perfect performance, and in doing so they fail and make work which may be more interesting than perfection.

TAAT is a theatre collective which seems unique. In the sense that their own creation process is based in one central goal. This central aim is explored through performances which challenge the very idea of performance itself, and how we as spectators interact within these situations. Overall, the company seems to be fully rooted in the idea of experimentation, in both how they function as a collective and how they present their performances.

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