

metamorphozen (1997)

My point of departure, in making metamorphozen, was my desire to acoustically manipulate a performance space such, that the audience would undergo a journey through different spaces, not so much visually, but by perceiving the acoustics of the performance space as a desert or a church, or whatever other space, depending on the quality and the amount of reflections created artificially. In order to reach this, I investigated many different methods of spatialization in amplification, among others the wave front system developed at the Technical University of Delft. The technical equipment should be hidden from the audience as far as possible. Eventually, my sound engineer Matthijs Ruijter and I worked with a setup of 15 various loudspeakers of different qualities. We spread them out all over the stage and auditorium, letting them face different directions and filtering them differently. The 6 tracks of the soundtrack, and the signals of a directional microphone and countless contact microphones, and three different microphones for the voice were distributed among these 15 loudspeakers live during the performance by Matthijs Ruijter. A programmable equalizer allowed him to smoothly and easily change the filtering of the microphones, to enhance the spatiality of changes and movements.

Creating spaces was what I wanted. The spaces of women, women in science from many centuries. The acoustic spaces and contexts I chose for the different women were determined either by an image I had - in mind -, or by the text I chose. An image was e.g. Lise Meitner fleeing from the Nazis only when the trains full of jews were already continually rolling to Auschwitz and other concentration camps. Therefor the threatening sounds of trains in her scene. The trains are also part of the sounds of the space where metamorphozen was made: the Huis a/d Werf in Utrecht. Trains were passing by outside the buiding all the time, day and night. These sounds melted into the piece also during the performances at the Huis a/d Werf. I used sounds of the actual performance space to make metamorphozen, a piece about women in science and a piece about women and their spaces, to then be able to more easily change between the different realities. Every woman quoted in metamorphozen was a unique personality of her time. These women managed to break borders, enlargen their spaces, and use fully their creative potentials. In using their texts, which I found in libraries all over Europe, I caught a glimpse of their respective driving powers. The choice to leave these texts in their original languages (ancient greek, latin, german, french, english) was an attempt to show energies and spaces, rather than messages or stories. The texts are carefully chosen, and relevant, so the choice for abstraction, by leaving big parts of the texts incomprehensible to the audience, is problematic. But it was a necessary musical choice, given that each of these languages create associations of their own, by their respective sound and rhythm.

The piece is strictly choreographed by me, under the supervision and support of the director Nicolaj Cajazza. He also supervised the lighting design, which is done by Harrie van Gemert. The stage design is a result of the choreography, except for a big white ball of 20cm radius, that resembles a planet, or an atom, or the world, and a revox tape recorder that runs during the whole performance in the front of the audience, visualizing a continuous movement, turning and circling, and visualizing the soundtrack that is continuously playing. The costume was designed by visual artist Christiaan Bastiaans. Elements of all seven woman are worked into the robe. These elements might be a photographic plate from Marie Curie's laboratories, a 17th century print showing Anne Conway reading a letter, or a detail like the buttons on a blouse that Hannah Arendt wears on a photography. Unexpected materials like latex rubber, fake leather, and jute are used instead of silk, velvet or tweed. The resulting strangeness of the costume makes it appear like a gown from the middelages. The woman on stage is outside time, in the corsett of a weird, stiff dress. The costume is like an armory, decorated with symbols of wisdom, danger and seduction. It allows to give shape to the following seven contrasting characters:

Hypatia of Alexandria mathematician and astronomer	desert	crickets, whispering, from her comment on the Almagest by Ptolemy, ancient greek
Hildegard von Bingen nun, scientist, artist, composer	church, body	moving quints, song by H.v.Bingen, latin; spoken index of <i>causae et curae</i> , german
Anne Conway physicist	pond	dry ticks, spoken sentences from her only publication, salt falling to the ground, english
Marie Curie chemist and physicist on radio activity	laboratorium	salt falling, spoken sentences of articles from ± 1900 , the airconditioning of the Koepelzaal in the Huis a/d Werf, french
Lise Meitner physicist on radio activity	war, trains, mind	trains, voices, walking over a pathway with salt over contactmicrophones, the voice steadily being more deformed by a vocoder, a text from an article by her, german
Gertrude Stein writer	city	stones, spoken from behind the revox, reflection on the atomic bomb, english
Hannah Arendt philosopher	universe	very high and very low sintones, a sentence from her book 'on revolution', the taperecorder tries to sell it, imitates her, the piece ends with the testtone of a tv.