

# FRANS POELSTRA, HIS DRAMATURGE, AND BACH

A text by  
Frans Poelstra & Robert Steijn

We had only one simple idea for the text in this performance: how to explain everything we do, so there will be no mystifying veil anymore between the dance and its spectators. We did not want to make a cryptic performance this time, on the contrary, we wanted to explain so much that at the end the public would say to us, yes, yes, leave us alone, and go and do your thing, let us listen to the music of Bach, we understand you both now, Frans Poelstra and his dramaturge are already an open book for us".

We wanted to make an extreme communicative performance. The things which we thought we had to explain can be resumed in the following points. In #1: Why does Frans dance the way he dances? Could his biography give a meaningful insight into this question? #2: How does a dance-dramaturge create meaningful connections between the performers and their audience and other love-affairs. In essence: How do we communicate with the other? Are we always sure that the other does understand us, or at least wants to understand us in the way we want to be understood? #3: Why is Bach what it is, and why does the beauty of his music need no further explanation? So, how to be silent when you want

to talk about the invisible magic of music? All the texts are improvised, and by performing it more and more, a fixed narrative line slowly appeared. The printed text is the skeleton of this slowly crystallised narrative line of the performance.

In the performance the dramaturge improvises around these lines, he makes variations every evening by changing the order of sentences, adding small details, etc.

So what is printed now is just the basic structure, a first attempt of fixing things which hopefully will not remain fixed at all. Reactions of the public are often added to the text. So feel free to react ([arran@xs4all.nl](mailto:arran@xs4all.nl)), the dramaturge needs still more input, for the coming performances.

“Hello Aubervilliers, hello Paris, welcome to the world of Frans Poelstra, his dramaturge and Bach. Frans Poelstra has allowed his dramaturge to appear on stage, because he thinks his work needs some explanation, so you can understand it more deeply.

First some background information. As you know, God created the world in six days, and he was so happy that he could relax the seventh day. Bach created the *Goldberg Variations*, the music you hear now at this very moment—in eleven days, and afterward millions of people have been listening to it, and have been enjoying it, some women even give birth with this music in the background, because they think it is very relaxing.

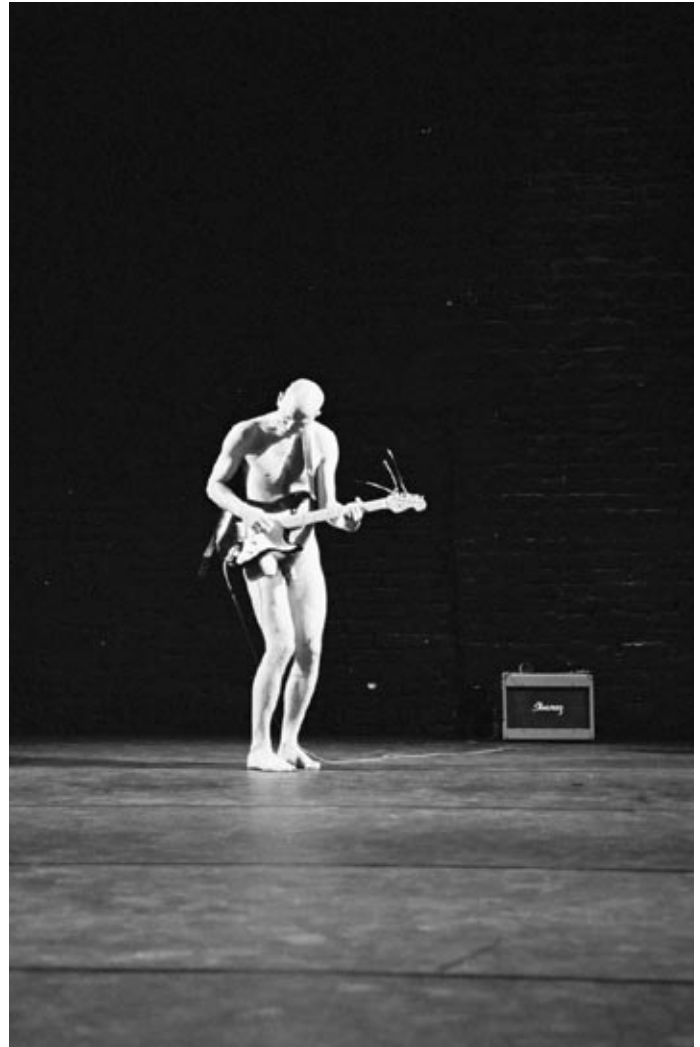
And Frans Poelstra and his dramaturge have already been working on this performance for two and half months, and they are still working on it, even now, it is still not finished. Why is this? They think, it is because they allowed doubt to come into the working-process, God did not doubt when he created the world, Bach did not doubt when he made his music, but Frans Poelstra always doubts and is never satisfied by what he is doing. He thinks it always can be better, much better.

Before Frans Poelstra makes a movement on stage, he has to know where this movement comes from, and where it leads to, otherwise he can not do it, so be aware tonight, Frans Poelstra is very slow in finding material.

And don't be mistaken, don't do these things you see at home. It looks perhaps very simple, but it is not. You only can do these movements after years of training, in the case of Frans Poelstra, yoga training and severe meditation training. Frans Poelstra does a lot of power yoga, every morning, he thinks he has to offer the audience a nice and tight body, although he is already 50 years old, and also every morning he does some meditation, because he has to learn how to be very concentrated on stage, and twice a year he goes to a meditation retreat, where he sits still for ten days, ten hours a day.

**Frans:** “14 hours.”

He always says 14, but I do not believe this, I think he is showing off, with his skill, a lot of performers have this tendency, it is a habit of their profession, I think.



Frans Poelstra & Robert Stein, *Frans Poelstra, his dramaturge and Bach*, 2004. Photo by Andrea Salzmann

Let's start with some of the private background of Frans Poelstra. He was never born as a dancer, on the contrary, he was born as a policeman, since he was a young kind, he wanted to become a policeman, when he was four, and he was playing on the streets, he was playing that he was a policeman, conducting the traffic, catching criminals, and so on. His mother made a nice small blue uniform for him, and he had a toy-weapon. This toy-weapon was really his friend, he even took it to bed with him, and he told the weapon a lot of his hidden dreams, and he imagined that the weapon talked back to him, but he never told anyone, he thought it was childish.

When he was eighteen, no one was surprised that he entered the police academy, he was an excellent student, very good in sports, and very ambitious in the theory courses, and he graduated with an A, and when you graduate in Holland as a policeman, they give you a weapon, and a bike, and you have to check the neighbourhood, nothing else. They sent him to Amsterdam West, a tense neighbourhood, with a lot of people from different cultures and nationalities. He really liked the work, he was not a violent policeman, he always wanted to talk, to solve the problems, and he trusted that his uniform and his appearance itself would bring some rest in a hectic situation, a lot of women fancied him and tried to make a date with him, but he always said no, because he thought: “First I have to make a career, and can’t bike here my whole life”.

But life always goes differently than you expect. In the night he always had the same dream, a dream that he was dancing on stage, to classical music of Bach, in front of all these admiring eyes of the audience, he really liked to dance for all these eyes, he felt so happy, every time he woke up afterwards he felt great, but also ashamed, and he tried to forget this dream as soon as possible, he thought it was too silly.

Sometimes at the weekend, Frans partied, went to clubs with friends, and one night, after all the clubs were closed, no one wanted to go home, and they decided to go to the home of one friend and have more drinks there. They gathered around the table, had some wine, cigarettes, and joints—because this is Amsterdam—and they started to speak about their hidden dreams. Frans did not say a word, he only listened, and when everyone had told his dream, it was already ten o’clock in the morning, everyone looked at Frans and said: “Well Frans, what is your dream?”, and he said: “Well I already realised my dream, I always wanted to become a cop, and now I am one.” But they said: “No no, you are blushing and stuttering, come out with your dream”, and then he told them his dream of dancing on stage, to the classical music of Bach, for all these admiring eyes, and they really liked it, they said things like: “Well, this is a call to

dance, Bach is calling you to become a dancer”, and another said: “There is a workshop for African dancing here around the corner, go and check it out”, and Frans promised to do this, but the next day, with a huge hang-over, he was so ashamed, and he never wanted to talk with his friends about this anymore.

But you can not escape your destiny, when you listen carefully to it, so one day, when Frans was biking, checking the neighbourhood, he heard the *Goldberg variations* of Bach, from an open window, and suddenly he found himself dancing on the pavement to this music, unconsciously he had got off his bike and had started dancing, and all the people in the street stopped, the cars stopped, the people on their bikes stopped, the people who were walking stopped, they all looked to this man in his blue uniform, dancing to this music of Bach. And when he stopped, they gave him money, and they said: “Wow, what a great street performance, and what a great idea to dance in a police uniform.” Frans was flabbergasted, and he had to tell his friends about what had happened. And they told him: “Frans this is your second call to become a dancer, do listen to it.” And he thought they were right, so he had to change his life.

But Frans is also a very practical man, and he does not want to give up a secure future. So he came up with a very practical solution, he asked his chief permission to be off for two months, July and August, and in these two months he would go to Avignon, to dance there in the streets. He took with him his blue uniform and a ghetto blaster with the cd of the *Goldberg variations* and he started to dance on the streets in Avignon, first he was shy, but whenever he heard the music, he forgot everything and he was dancing and dancing, and the people really liked it, his street performance became a hit, and when you are a hit in Avignon, you are allowed to perform on the square in front of the palace of the popes, people were already waiting for him there, and there was a big hype around this man, dancing in his blue police uniform to the classical music of Bach. And in Avignon there is also a big professional dance and theatre



Frans Poelstra & Robert Stein, *Frans Poelstra, his dramaturge and Bach*, 2004. Photo by Andrea Salzmann

festival, and a lot of dancers from the big companies heard about this man, and wanted to see it, and when they saw it, they were amazed, and afterwards they asked him where he had learned this, and what kind of technique he used, and he said: "I have no technique, I learned it in a dream." They thought that was wonderful, and they said they also wanted to learn this, so they asked him if he could give a workshop for them and he said yes, so on the Monday and Tuesday afternoon he organised a workshop for them, but very soon, after five minutes, already he was totally annoyed by them, especially by the questions they asked him, like how he prepared, how his alignment was, and what bodysystem he uses, while moving. And he decided never to work with professional dancers anymore, because it would kill his instinctive way of moving. And he made another major decision in his life, he called his chief in Amsterdam and he said: "Although to be police man really fits my character, and I really liked doing it, I have decided to stay in Avignon, to become a street dancer."

And then the difficult time started for Frans Poelstra. It became September, October and all the tourists left

Avignon, and the people who lived there, although they really liked what he did, and they saw it a lot of times, they had to work, so sometimes, Frans was dancing totally alone on the streets without someone watching, and out of pure boredom, he discovered that he liked to dance with an object, with a forgotten umbrella, or just an iron stick. And he discovered that with this object he could expand his body, and he could celebrate the music of Bach even more...

And then something really romantic happened, a woman came to him, looked him into the eyes and said: "I can make you a hit. I am an agent of a lot of dance companies, and I have been watching you now for a month, and man you really have it, I can make you a hit, you can travel to all the big theatres, believe me, I know the right addresses." And Frans looked back into her eyes, said yes and for the first time in his life fell in love, they immediately had a relationship together, he danced for her, she videotaped it, and made a nice compilation fifteen, sixteen minutes long, and sent it to all the big festivals in Europe and one festival replied: Julidans from Amsterdam. They asked him to do the opening act for

the festival. You have to know, Julidans is the most prestigious dance festival of the Netherlands, it is in the summer, mainly concentrated in the Stadsschouwburg, the classical theatre in the middle of the centre of Amsterdam. Frans felt honoured, it would be his second performance in the Netherlands, the first one on the street, and the second immediately on the main stage of Amsterdam.

They gave him some money, he trained in the studio, to make his dance better, although his girlfriend, his agent, said his dance was already good enough, but he had also some problems now he would perform on the stage, and not anymore on the streets. For example, his costume, he thought he could not dance anymore in the blue uniform, not only that, he wanted his former colleagues to see him, but if they saw he still was using his uniform, on stage a police uniform has a totally different meaning than on the streets, and he was thinking about what kind of uniform he could use, and he could not think about anything, and this is how his mind works: because he could not find any costume, he decided to dance naked. His girlfriend said: 'It is perfect to dance how God created you, like Adam in paradise.' She said it really fitted his way of dancing. And then he had to think about the music, he always danced to the interpretation of Rosalyn Turek, she is very slow, she is the only one who needs two cds for the *Goldberg variations*, but he thought: "Now in the theatre, I really need the interpretation of Glenn Gould, people adore him, and something of his glamour will also shine upon me", and then the problem of the lights, he really did not know anything about the lights, and when the technician from the theatre called him up for the light design, he only could say: "I need just one spotlight, which is following me."

And then it was almost happening. Frans was standing backstage, his heart was beating, he knew that now was the moment that he could realise his dream, dancing to the music of Bach, on stage, for all these admiring eyes, and he was thinking of his parents, who were in the

audience, his friends, the critics, the public, and he decided to do his utmost best, to give it all, he heard his name, the lights went down...

It was a huge success, everyone loved it, only his parents had some difficulties with his nakedness, but the others they loved it, the critics praised the stunning combination of his own voice, the music of Bach and the movements. And the next day a lot of directors from other festivals called his girlfriend to invite him for their festivals. His girlfriend, was so happy, yes, she cried: "Now we have a hit, we even can go to the United States", and then Frans made a second major decision in his life, he said no. He said he did not want to become an exotic animal touring to all these festivals, only to show an act of five minutes. Now he had been in the theatre, he really wanted to make a full evening piece and he knew he had to go beyond his instinctive way of moving. His girlfriend was not pleased, she was angry and said he was arrogant, because he did not want to give the audience what they wanted, they had some severe discussions and fights and after a while they split.

So Frans was double so lonely, no girlfriend anymore, but also working in the studio looking for movements he did not find immediately. He was trying and trying, but he did not know how to go on, he did a lot of floor work, and felt very, very sad, at a certain moment he thought this has to stop, "otherwise I'll go crazy, it is too lonely, I have to work with someone", but he did not want to work with another choreographer or dancer, because he was afraid that these people would influence his style, although he did not know what his style would be. So he start thinking about the function of a dramaturge, he called Robert Steijn, he knew him from some reviews in the newspaper, although he thought they were not brilliant, he thought they had some nice questions about why to dance and why to dance nowadays, Robert Steijn said yes, and so his dramaturge was looking at Frans Poelstra for hours and hours in the studio, and afterwards his dramaturge said what he thought about it, he gave some associations, made some references to other works and Frans afterwards gave his

associations, they really liked to talk, and sometimes it happened that Frans moved only for twenty minutes and then they talked for six, seven hours. And they discovered something very beautiful, they discovered that they were soul brothers, almost twins, in their quest for beauty. They had the same ideas of looking for beauty in the human body. How the human body functions, how it moves and so on. And suddenly Frans Poelstra said to his dramaturge: "But you also have a body, how do you move in your body, show me, I want to learn that also."

Now it really gets exciting for the dramaturge, because Frans Poelstra doesn't know how to go on anymore, he is not inspired anymore, he is fed up by dancing his biography and furthermore, a bigger problem, he still wants to make a solo, but he does not want to be in the centre of the attention the whole time anymore, he wants to break out of this autistic world of making a solo, he wants to connect with something or someone outside himself. They talked a lot about it, and the dramaturge decided that it would be too big a step to ask another dancer on stage and then they remembered how Frans Poelstra worked in Avignon with the objects and they thought it was a nice way to connect with something outside yourself, without getting too overwhelmed by it. And Frans made a promise, never to sexually abuse an object anymore like he did in Avignon with the iron stick. They thought, he had to connect with an object on an equal basis, from now on. So also by listening to the needs of the object itself. A real dialogue, no abusive situation anymore.

Perhaps you can consider this tree, as a tree of knowledge, but for sure, it is a tree of objects, so let's look what kind of objects this tree can give us.

Perhaps you only can connect with some objects, perhaps you have to accept that you can not connect with everything or everyone who comes on your path. Perhaps to connect is about falling in love. And the dramaturge is really curious then how you fall in love. Do you fall in love because of a beautiful outside, or a promis-

ing inside, or how an object moves, how it functions in its environment.

And then another problem, what to do, when you fall in love with more objects or persons at the same time, how to deal with that, how to manage to be in connection with different objects and persons at the same time, and do you feel for some objects a stronger connection than with other objects, and can you say something about how the relationship will develop in the future. Frans Poelstra discovered a good trick, to find out if the connection will really work in the future. By dancing with an object or a person, you discover how you can cope with each other, but Frans started to get jealous also when he danced with an object and he thought that the object was dancing more beautifully, more gracefully or more lightly to the music of Bach than him. His dramaturge was annoyed and said: "Hey Frans, being in love is not being in competition with the other."

And another thing, Frans found out, that a beautiful outside is not everything when there is no inside at all, when the object is just empty inside. And the dramaturge thought: "How to trust your senses in falling in love, when the senses are so easily seduced by the outside", and he discovered something very practical, "Only to connect with objects where there are letters outside, letters which refer to what is inside, like baking paper, so you can never be disappointed, you get what you read."

And they really liked this approach, and they thought: "When we take this approach to the theatre, and we find words for what our performance is about, the public will never be disappointed anymore", and Frans said: "We let the letters form the word, so we also will be surprised..."

*Wurst* is the German word for sausage, that's difficult, perhaps we need some more words... DNA, Eden, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God, St John, Holy Bible, chapter one, lets make a song. In the beginning was the word, and

the word was with God, and the word was God, Frans Poelstra and his dramaturge thought when this is really true, it means that the word created the world, and the words are creating the objects, it was like this when God created the world, and God is the word, then it means that the word created the world, and they thought that made a kind of sense, because by naming the objects, by finding words for their content, their sensibilities, even their hidden potential, you give them existence in the world, you make them part of your world, and they really liked this approach, so they took it to the theatre and they were naming everything they did, naming every movement they made, finding words for the content of these movements, their sensibilities, even their hidden potential, but they were hungry for more words, so they were reading books, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Slavoj Žižek, do not forget Peter Sloterdijk, and they brought all these words into the theatre, creating a labyrinth of meanings and interpretations. They only had to point to an object and their heads exploded with meanings. They felt so creative. But there was also a problem, sometimes they were looking at an object and they only could see what they knew about this object, and when they looked into each other's eyes they only saw, what they thought they were thinking about each other, and they thought it became time, for a more immediate connection, intimacy beyond words, first with the objects.

How to become intimate with an object, on a sensual basis, as an exchange of emotions, energies. Perhaps it could be to identify oneself with where this object comes from, to discover its background, so you can understand the object better.

And why exchange moods and emotions, Frans Poelstra asked his dramaturge. And his dramaturge quoted a proverb out of his favourite tarot book: "A sorrow shared is half the trouble. But a joy shared is a joy made double."

Sometimes Frans Poelstra gets stuck, and at that moment the dramaturge takes over, so Frans Poelstra can see how

it looks from the outside, and the dramaturge can investigate deeper from the inside.

It is dark inside the object, there is no life inside the object, I have to give it life by my movements and by my breathing. The object starts to speak to me and says it wants to die. So unfortunately I become an object which wants to die, which wants to die in a dance of dying movements, last breathings, the dance of the dying object. So my first movements in this object become its last objects, my first breathings into this object, become its last breathings.

Suddenly the dramaturge has a thought, he thinks Frans Poelstra and his dramaturge are doing too much, all the time they are doing something, and this music is not made for theatre, or to dance to, it is just music to listen to, clavier exercise, just listen that is enough, just listen...

When you really listen to this music, you understand why Bach is a religious man. With his music he wants to connect with his God, with the God, who created the world he admires. With his music he wants to be in harmony with the world God created. Frans Poelstra and his dramaturge are not so religious, but what they really like about religions, is this longing for paradise, this desire to connect with a state of being where everything is perfect, where there are no forbidden fruits anymore, and where everything falls in its right place, in its right timing, just like in the music of Bach. And what they especially like about being in paradise, is that they can show their dicks again, without any shame.

*Frans Poelstra is a dancer and choreographer. He lives in Vienna (Austria). Robert Steijn is a dramaturge. He lives in Amsterdam (Netherlands). Frans Poelstra, his dramaturge and Bach, created by Frans Poelstra and Robert Steijn, shown at the Laboratoires on April 13-14-15, 2005. Produced with the support of ImPulsTanz (Germany) and the AmateurKunst Podiumkunsten Fonds (Netherlands).*

We understand.  
We understand so many things.  
We understand that it's not easy  
to love someone.  
We understand also that it can  
be very easy to love someone.  
We understand that it's important  
to cut your nails before having  
sex with someone.  
We understand that jokes are  
sometimes unavoidable.  
We understand that when I say:  
Understand, it makes some  
people laugh, others angry, others  
again find it corny, and others  
again don't understand at all.  
We understand so many things.  
We understand that  
disappointment is part of life.  
We understand that 20 euros  
for a ticket is a lot of money.  
We understand that, to cover the  
costs, a ticket really ought to be  
150 euros.  
We understood that Bach always  
managed to get paid well.  
We understand that it's wonderful  
to feel the wind in one's hair.  
We understand that without any  
hair this is impossible, but that  
it's still a wonderful feeling.  
Just as we understand that  
the smell of your lover is the most  
delicious perfume there is.

We understand that older dancers  
need to lean on their charisma.  
But we understand too that  
charisma alone is not enough  
Perhaps that is something  
we don't understand, charisma.  
Yes, we understand there are  
things that are not  
understandable.  
For example, men in grey suits  
claiming that God is with them.  
Or, men with grey beards claiming  
that Allah is with them. ."  
We understand that recognition is  
an important part of human well-  
being.  
We understand that being an  
audience is not always simple.  
We understand that we're  
performers and you're  
an audience.  
We understand that there's lack  
of understanding.  
We understand that we're  
responsible for this night.  
We understand that it's high time  
for a bit of festivity.

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