

De Morgen, 12/3/02

Tom Rummens

For Jan Ritsema (b. 1945), the difference between 'thinking about' and 'making' theatre has been reduced to an absolute minimum. Now too, the fundamental impossibility of keeping this distinction clear again forms the starting point for this latest production. In *TODAYulysses*, Ritsema, with an absolute minimum of theatrical means, once again presents a few of his radical and extremely consistently thought-out reflections on the theatre and its fragile boundaries.

Ritsema has always shown himself to be a dramatist who unceasingly and unashamedly dares to question his medium. Since *April S.A.I.D.* (1999) and *Verwantschappen* (2000) he has no longer shied away from simply putting these ideas on stage. In these productions he does not make much of an effort to make the morsels offered more palatable. But considering the invariably limited intentions of these experiments, he can hardly be blamed for this.

In *TODAYulysses*, Ritsema is once again working with Bojana Cvejić (b. 1975), the Yugoslavian musicologist who also appeared in *Verwantschappen*. When the audience enters this small performance space, Ritsema and Cvejić are each sitting at one end of the front row. The performance starts when they start speaking aloud to each other about when they should get started. Has the performance started? Even this thought implies too far-reaching a faith in the codes of performance practice as we know it. In Ritsema's case there is no performance, let alone a clear beginning.

*TODAYulysses* simply is not a performance. It is a subtle and highly vulnerable combat in words, with the boundaries between the fictional and the real, the planned and the unplanned, always unclear. Ritsema and Cvejić occupy the empty stage alternately and try to tell us about something. Stumbling, floundering, their thoughts are never sealed with conclusions. They are invariably interrupted by another thought of their own or the other's. This is all that happens. It is a sort of speech that does not draw conclusions but leaves everything open. No one meaning is able to dominate another for longer than a single moment.

Is this still theatre, or is it pure reflection, or pure theory? That is the question that has been in my mind for days. And the attempt to form an

answer to this question is repeatedly blocked by the fact that it is in fact totally irrelevant. Of course it is theatre. It is theatre that has reduced itself to the status of a logically asked question. And even the nerve to dare ask such questions in this honest way in itself demands respect.