

Les Déplacements du Problème (Displacements of the Problem) - review

Théâtre de la Cité internationale, Paris

Fabienne Darge

Guardian Weekly, Tuesday 9 November 2010 13:59 GMT



Medium is not the message ... Grand Magasin humorous work examines whether modern communication technology has driven us apart. Photograph: Grand Magasin

"Hello? Yes? I can't hear you." "Beep, beep, beep." "Hello?" "You have reached the voice mail of [...] Please leave a message." If, like many of us, you often get the impression all this communications technology has done little to improve actual communication, if the noise of the world has grown too insistent for your ears, then the funny, refreshing performance at the Théâtre de la Cité Internationale in Paris, could be just the thing.

With the aptly named *Displacements of the Problem*, Grand Magasin makes good use of all the burlesque potential of modern technology. Above all the troupe, formed in 1982 by two militant proponents of "infra-theatre", François Hiffler and Pascale Murtiny, revel in their exploration of the gulf between the glossy promise of such gadgets and the difficulty we humans have just talking properly or achieving a genuine exchange of views.

In a neat twist the show is based on work originally commissioned by France's Acoustic and Musical Research Institute (Ircam), which provided its tools and one of its IT wizards, Christophe Mazzella, to give substance to the Grand Magasin's fantasies.

So here we are, confronted with three "lecturers", played by the three current members of the troupe, Hiffler and Murtin, and Bettina Atala, on a large stage littered with brightly coloured objects. Both experimenters and guinea pigs, they present the audience with various "sonic scramblers" that muddle what they are saying, to great comic effect.

They start with a doubt-transmitting mic that enhances the simplest statements with various verbal tics such as "well, at least I think so" or "subject to confirmation". Then there is the variable-coherence mic, which re-arranges the words of a sentence in random order, systematically contradicting what was first said. Our favourite was the inverted-echo, an irresistibly absurd device.

Under these conditions, it is quite a challenge to communicate. But despite the perfect composure of the three speakers, further disturbances upset the proceedings, in particular a pneumatic drill, unleashed at regular intervals by the sound engineer, and the whine of a vacuum cleaner.

Fortunately there is also a sound absorbing rug and an isolation bubble, inside which you can drown in decibels without upsetting your neighbours. The only drawback is that any form of exchange becomes impossible.

After a while I lost all sense of what this might mean, discourse being fragmented, deformed and mangled in a marvellous satire of today's infra-language. Grand Magasin even voices our disarray in a questionnaire: "1. Did you hear it clearly?; 2. Did you understand it all?; 3. Did you find it interesting?" The three actors then act out the many possible permutations on the audience's answers, with an amazing series of short films involving people of all ages.

I certainly cannot claim to have understood the whole of the show, but I definitely heard it all, found it very interesting and above all laughed a lot: still much the best way to put our despair at modern communications into perspective.

This article originally appeared in [Le Monde](#)

Ads by Google

[Download Google Analytics](#)

Gain traffic and optimize your site with Google Analytics. Free!

www.google.com/analytics

[Rolex Arts Initiative](#)

Many Disciplines, Talented Artists and Their Mentors, Watch the Videos

Rolexmentorprotege.com

[Things To Do In New York](#)

Find Out What's Happening This Weekend. Sign Up For Free Today!

www.DailyCandy.com/NYC