SHE SHE POP & THEIR FATHERS
TESTAMENT

Belated Preparations for a New Generation based on Lear

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ON THE BOARDS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Credits......................................2
Curator’s Note...........................3
Artists’ Note................................4
Bio............................................6
Beginner’s guide.......................7
Essay.........................................8
“Reconstructing King Lear’s Tragic Condition” by Michael Lupu, Senior Dramaturge, Guthrie Theater
She She Pop Portrait...............10
A more in-depth look at the company courtesy of the Goethe Institute
Interview................................12
Sheila Daniels and Sebastian Bark

ON THE BOARDS

photos by Doro Tuch
CREDITS

**Cast:** Sebastian & Joachim Bark, Lisa Lucassen, Theo Papatheodorou, Johanna Freiburg, Mieke & Manfred Matzke

**Concept:** She She Pop

**By and with:** Sebastian & Joachim Bark, Johanna Freiburg, Fanni & Peter Halmburger, Mieke & Manfred Matzke, Lisa Lucassen, Ilia & Theo Papatheodorou, Berit Stumpf

**Stage:** SSP & Sandra Fox

**Costumes:** Lea Søvsø

**Music:** Christopher Uhe

**Light Design:** Sven Nichterlein

**Light:** Michael Lentner

**Sound:** Florian Fischer

**Coordination/Dramaturgical Advice:** Kaja Jakstat

**Tour Organization:** Xenia Leydel

**Production/PR:** Ehrliche Arbeit

**Management:** Elke Weber

A She She Pop production.

In Co-Production with the Hebbel am Ufer Berlin, Kampnagel Hamburg and FFT Düsseldorf.

Funded by the City of Berlin, the City of Hamburg and the Fonds Darstellende Künste e.V.

**CURATOR’S NOTE**

She She Pop and Their Fathers: a performance ensemble from Berlin performing with their actual fathers. When I first heard about this project, my first thought was how could this possibly work? I mean, will the fathers get the whole art/theater/performance thing? And even if they do will they go along with it?

I was pondering these questions as I sat down to write this note when an artist contacted me about meeting my father. She’s producing a play in my hometown of Kansas City and wants to meet people who will provide local color and context. Ok, I’ll set you up with George Czaplinski, I replied, but also told her to remember that she asked for the opportunity and that I am not responsible for anything that happens. Local color? Yeah, George will give you some local color and then some.

I remember feeling embarrassed growing up when my dad went outside in his underwear to get the paper or when he put lawn sprinklers on the roof around the fourth of July to keep the house from burning down from fireworks or when he purchased mega quantities of poison to kill the squirrels in his yard and ended up eradicating many species of woodland creatures in the greater Kansas City metro area. The thought of my dad on stage in a highfalutin Lear terrifies me. What would he say and do? And what would that mean for me?

From King Lear to Willy Loman to Archie Bunker to Bill Cosby to Homer Simpson, the depiction of intense – if not maniacal – fathers is a constant in art and culture. They are a perfect device for drama. In most cases, we love dads, and if not, then that’s all the better for the sake of generating conflict. Plus, they’re generally portrayed as older, and as such, closer to death, which is the ultimate in tension making. Mothers have all of these same characteristics but as women are generally more elegant and smarter than men, making them somehow less tragic.

The fathers of She She Pop aren’t dramatic devices, though. Here they are with their own offspring considering the minutia of everyday as they portray the differences that exist between generations and life stages. The ensemble doesn’t propose to provide answers to such large ideas, but rather, they ask the questions and depict on stage the struggle to answer them.

This ensemble of performers feels like old friends even though this is their first visit to North America and we’re proud to welcome them to Seattle – one of only two stops in the US. Welcome.

*Lane Czaplinski*
In the first scene of Shakespeare’s King Lear, the old man makes an attempt to leave his kingdom to his three daughters and thereby to agree on his retirement arrangement - a plan that fails violently. Small wonder, as out of all the barter deals we have ever been involved in, the one between the generations is the most complicated and obscure one. Value and countervalue (i.e. money and love) are always veiled, nobody ever officially agreed on terms of this exchange. This is the case for almost all agreements between generations: they are foul. They never happened. They do not exist. The space that is to be cleared out is brimful with dates and details, jewellery and family trees, legal successions, hereditary diseases, loving vows, home care plans, gas receipts, and a sense of guilt – all of them subjects of public negotiations between daughters and their fathers.

In Testament She She Pop ask their fathers to join them on stage. The theater becomes a hearing room for a utopian process: equilibrium between generations.

I: You really doubt that this could turn into a normal conversation, don’t you?
T: Of course. It’s isn’t one.
I: Can’t you just ignore the fact that there’s a camera?
T: Not really. (Pause) This is a staged conversation. I have to quote Aristoteles: “Estin un tragodia mimesis praxos...”.
Mimesis means the imitation of an action and not the action itself. What we’re doing is an imitation and not having a normal conversation.
I: (Pause) I don’t understand. There’s no script.

Interview Ilia with Theo, recorded on camera in July 2009, Stuttgart

My father is old and frail and hardly leaves the house any more. But to be honest, even if he was 20 years younger, I still wouldn’t have asked him on to the stage.
Lisa at the rehearsal on February 23, 2010

- Sister, it is not a little I have to say of what most nearly appertains to us both. I think our father will hence tonight.
- That’s most certain and with you. Next month with us.
- You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been little. (…)
- ’Tis the infirmity of his age. Yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.
- (...) We must look from his age to receive not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.
. ...Pray you, let’s sit together.
- We shall further think on it.
Daughters Goneril and Regan about their father, King Lear

Daddy’s working boots have served as his foundation
Oh, just like him they’re tired and worn
For years they’ve kept him standing
Daddy’s working boots have filled their obligation.
Dolly Parton on her father’s shoes
I’d like it if things that affect us both weren’t left in the dark.
In an email from Jochen to Sebastian, September 2009

...Rehearsals have been a lot of fun with you so far – both during work and afterwards. I’m open and curious how things will continue between us, what else we’ll come up against. Tell me if you feel uncomfortable. There’s no reason to feel uncomfortable as far as I’m concerned. Even with all the old stories, this is much more a journey into the future for me than one into the past. Love, Sebastian. The car’s working perfectly again.
In an email from Sebastian to Jochen, September 2009

Nursing care insurance is a partial coverage insurance. You pay in money so that your nursing care is partly covered later. But it’s not enough. You either need money or relatives, usually children, to nurse you. And that’s the reason why childless people pay in more. Because they don’t have children who can take care of them. Logical, isn’t it? And what do you do if you don’t have money OR children? Then you’ve got nothing. The money from the nursing care insurance is never enough. Either you need relatives or a great big wad of cash for the future.
Rehearsal from October 15, 2009, Fanni tells her colleagues about nursing care insurance

Better thou/ Hadst not been born than not to have pleas’d me better.
King Lear to his daughter

I have to first find my role in Lear, Lear without arguing is not Lear and I can’t live with arguing.
Shame! Manfred
In an email from Manfred to Mieke, September 2009

And then I go and spoil it all by saying somethin’ stupid like I love you.
Frank and Nancy Sinatra

The weight of this sad time we must obey, / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
In the final passage from Shakespeare’s King Lear
ABOUT SHE SHE POP
by She She Pop

She She Pop is a performance collective founded in the late 1990’s by graduates of the Applied Theater Studies program in Gießen. Members are Sebastian Bark, Johanna Freiburg, Fanni Halmburger, Lisa Lucassen, Mieke Matzke, Ilia Papatheodorou and Berit Stumpf. Elke Weber manages the company office at Mariannenplatz in Berlin.

For She She Pop, the stage is a space, in which decisions are made, various forms of dialog and social systems tested, and grand gestures and social rituals learnt or discarded. She She Pop see it as their mission to explore the social boundaries of communication – and transgress them in a purposeful and artistic way in the protected theatrical space.

She She Pop have a specific aesthetic and ideological profile. Our shows are developed as a collective. There is no director – but also no author and no actors. Texts and concepts are developed together. Our understanding of performance simultaneously emphasizes the artistic responsibility of every individual performer. For us, authorship is therefore less an individual achievement and more of an answer to the question: who is responsible for this text, this action taking place at this moment on stage. We hope that individual decisions made on stage, as well as the glory and failure of performance, are thereby, against this backdrop, more comprehensible and relevant for the audience. Aside from the individual shows – but also in the best parts of every performance – we define the artistic work as a collective to be our most fatal and greatest challenge.

We are not actors. Instead, we give ourselves and others interesting tasks to fulfill and solve them in public on stage. Every performer develops her own perspective on the material based on her personal horizon of experience. This interpreted by some as autobiographical theater. However, references made by us to our own lives are actually a method and not content of our work. We condense our personal material into a recognizable artistic strategy and stylized exemplary positions. What is familiar becomes foreign, monstrous. Lately, this also works the other way around: in some of our recent shows, we have adapted well-known monstrous texts from the literary canon using this same autobiographical method.

She She Pop is a female collective. The existence of male members and collaborators has but little influence on this fact. This may also be the reason why issues such as the capacity and incapacity to act, constellations of the gaze and structures of power are inseparably linked to our work. The act of presenting ourselves to an audience as a group of (mainly) women – of all things – is for us time and again something that we reflect on and observe both on and behind the stage.

Our form of theater is experimental. In other words, it explores the basic principles of theatrical communication. In every show, we make new agreements between the performers and the audience – and it is precisely this, which we consider to be our art. To achieve this, She She Pop often reconstruct familiar, everyday scenarios in which entertainment and enlightenment often alarmingly lie side by side. Our audiences encounter us e.g. in the brightly lit circle of an encounter group, in the ballroom, around a bonfire, at a candle-lit blind date, on the catwalk or in an improvised sports arena. The ping-pong between participation and withdrawal, control and escalation, non-compliance and devotion often shapes the dramaturgy of an evening with She She Pop. However, individualized interactions with members of the audience no longer play a role in recent She She Pop pieces, but this does not mean that the audience doesn’t take on a concrete role in the show and is given a specific function. All She She Pop pieces are in their own way experimental set-ups or a line of argumentation, which would be null and void without witnesses.

More info on She She Pop at: goethe.de/sheshepop.de
BEGINNER’S GUIDE TO SHE SHE POP

1. She She Pop is an experimental, female and often feminist German performance art collective started in 1998 by graduates of the Giessen Institute for Applied Theatre Studies. They belong to the same era of European performance art collectives as Gob Squad, who you hopefully saw perform Gob Squad’s Kitchen earlier this season. The two groups even share a few common members: Johanna Freiburg and Berit Stumpf (who was featured in Kitchen).

2. As a performance art collective, She She Pop builds their work together, maintaining that each member has equal responsibility for the piece presented and is of equal importance when writing their material. They don’t consider themselves actors; instead, they give themselves tasks to fulfill on stage. In past pieces, though not Testament, they have also used audience participation.

3. Testament is an exploration of Shakespeare’s King Lear. The piece is derived by She She Pop but uses the text and story of King Lear as a starting point for exploring father/daughter/generational relationships—especially as aging causes the role of caregiver and cared-for to reverse. In a unique and brave gesture, She She Pop invited their fathers to take the stage alongside them as performers in Testament. Throughout the piece, they take King Lear and dissect it, exposing the implications it holds for them. (See my uber brief overview of King Lear and his daughter-drama in the bonus section below!)

4. As you are watching Testament, you might note that, although they call themselves a female company, one of She She Pop’s performers is decidedly male; his name is Sebastian Bark. Regardless, they remain a female collective. Knowing that She She Pop has a history of performances that often reflect on how women act, are observed, or judged, this male inclusion seems to subtly expand the boundaries of feminism and pleasantly blur gender divisions.

5. Lucky us, this is She She Pop’s first trip to North America! They’ve made a solid reputation for themselves in Europe, where Testament was awarded the Goethe Institute prize at the 2011 Impulse Festival, The ‘Wild-Card’ at the Favoriten Festival in 2010, and one of the ten best theater pieces of the year by Berliner Theatertreffen. They are only visiting three cities on their tour: Seattle, Minneapolis and Vancouver!

BONUS

For those unfamiliar with or a little rusty on the story of King Lear, it begins with Lear set to divide his land amongst his three daughters based on how convincingly each of them tell him they love him. Two of his daughters, who are selfish and manipulative, lie and expound on their love emphatically, while the third daughter (who truly loves her father) simply says, “I love you as much as a daughter should love a father, no more no less.” This answer enrages King Lear and he splits his land between his two deceitful daughters. Things devolve rapidly from there—check out the cliff notes or, for an extra bonus, pick up a copy and get to reading!
ESSAY
Reconstructing *King Lear*'s Tragic Condition
by Michael Lupu

Suffice it to say, nearly everyone has read, heard about, or seen a staging of *King Lear*. But over time, the sanctity of an urtext of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*—a prompter’s book, a quarto or a folio edition—has been questioned, tested, and challenged. Shakespeare is the foundation—hard as a rock and fluid as a river—that informs all creative endeavors; since the Bard’s days, it has proven futile if not impossible to seek a “pure” Lear.

One notorious case in point, called *The Tragedy of King Lear*, dates from 1681. The story was “revived with alterations” by Nahum Tate and Thomas Betterton, a leading London actor of the time, played the title role. In that version, the character of the Fool no longer existed and the performance ended with a happy ending, a celebration of the wedding of Cordelia and Edgar. Countless other treatments contribute to the enticing and contradictory aura of such shifting theatrical perspectives and contexts. They “construct” the dramatic material differently, boast perpetual distinctions between one show and another, and foster mixed results (including stunning revelations). The world of experimental and unconventional theater, clearly, has been around for a long time.

“Deconstruction” assumes a “reconstruction,” or perhaps even a “rediscovery.” As the text undergoes the deconstruction, it reshapes the play for performance. Think of it as a journey whereby a play is scrutinized, (re-)interpreted, and freshly revealed on stage by a company of artists. In Germany, such undertakings have been openly embraced, albeit with mixed results. Many shows take pride in being experimental and daring theatrical explorations. An eloquent proof comes from the theatrical collective She She Pop, whose version of *King Lear* is billed as *Testament*, a deconstruction of the tragic play with a twist.

Hailing from Berlin, the group has garnered many accolades, along with an inescapable cortege of controversies. Given its stated mission, She She Pop examines the way the canon of classics (Shakespeare being preeminent here) meets our present view of the world. This outlook has always brought novel choices to the way the classics of the past inform the present.

One example is from the early 1960s, when Paul Scofield played the aging Lear in Peter Brook’s acclaimed production, which was seen and admired everywhere in the world. When it was performed in Bucharest, Romania was under the spell of the Cold War. Everyone was overwhelmed by the show because it made so grippingly immediate and topical a legendary distant past. But more importantly, it was Brook’s stark rendering of the politics of power that hit us then with poignant relevance. The old monarch ended up dispossessed and forced to pay dearly for his arbitrary choice of trusting flattery as he passed his scepter to his two older daughters and rejected in anger Cordelia’s frankness.

Lear’s decision, at once foolish and arrogant, played fully in the hands of a ruthless opportunism that seized power with sycophant promises. For the Romanian audience, it suggested an unmistakable link with the so-called socialist regime—the dictatorship that prevailed on that side of the Iron Curtain. In Bucharest, the public applauded Brook’s approach enthusiastically because it appeared to expose the shame of a ruler blatantly vulnerable to flattery who relied on empty slogans and false promises. This interpretation gave the play the resonance of a sharp political manifesto rather than offering just a depiction of the terrible demise of old age.

In this version, Lear’s deteriorating condition was the consequence of his own undoing, an amalgam of hubris and foolishness. His blind spots transcended everything else. Brook’s staging seemed to downplay the issues of family ties in favor of the blunt and scary game of power manipulation that captured the very nature of a totalitarian political regime.

Several decades prior to Brook’s interpretation of the play, Harley Granville-Barker directed *King Lear* for the Old Vic in London. The cultural and theatrical circumstances were different and informed the production. John Gielgud remembered well the occasion. For him,
the director’s main focus was on the actors getting the lines right. They were his key to reveal the beauty and rich meaning of the play. As Gielgud commented, Granville Barker encouraged the company to “think of Lear as an oak among ash trees,” and “under his subtle hand” all “theatrical devices became classic, tragic, noble, not merely histrionic or melodramatic, because of the unerring taste and simplicity with which he ordered them.”

In an extremely different vein, reputed German stage director Peter Zadek reportedly turned the tragedy into a sarcastic and demeaning vaudeville. The performance mocked the mishaps of the senile king just as his two older daughters were doing it. Evidently, the spectrum of interpretations never seems to end. Quite compelling and disturbing was the approach of the great Russian filmmaker Grigori Kozintzev, who adapted Shakespeare’s play as a dark cinematic metaphor. Strikingly visual images commented on the adversity of a desolate wintry landscape, where rash political decisions fostered misery and the tragic demise of humanity.

This brings us back full circle to the visit of the Berlin troupe to the Twin Cities with Testament. It is a provocative, engaging, fascinating and highly unorthodox exploration of immediate topics made apparent by their idiosyncratic “reading” (i.e., deconstructed and reconstructed) of Shakespeare’s King Lear. She She Pop’s deconstructed King Lear is, at its core, audacious and relevant (though perhaps questionable for some). It relies on an innovative and imaginative reading of the classic play, bringing a fresh treatment to the familiar story of the old king and his three daughters. I’ll disclose only one fact for your consideration: the show multiplies the Lear figure by three and includes actual fathers to play side by side with their daughters.

Michael Lupu is Senior Dramaturg at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

This piece was originally published in the Walker Magazine January 14th 2013.
Encounter groups, family celebrations, blind dates and nights of ballroom dancing, preferably with a bit of audience participation.

Johanna Freiburg, Fanni Halmburger, Lisa Lucassen, Mieke Matzke, Ilia Papatheodorou and Berit Stumpf formed She She Pop in 1998, to be joined somewhat later by the only man in the group, Sebastian Bark. It was a time when the independent scene was going through a euphoric phase of radical innovation. At the Gießen Institute for Applied Theatre Studies, in particular, the second half of the 1990s – when people were still talking of Germany as a society dedicated to pleasure – saw the establishment of directing collectives with names that sounded cool and mysterious like those of pop bands, such as Gob Squad, Showcase Beat Le Mot and Madonna Hiphop Massaker, which was actually a band as well. Like She She Pop, they were untrammelled by the hierarchies prevalent in the municipal theatre sector, with its divisions of labour and compulsory professionalisation, and looked to pop culture, their own everyday lives and social rituals everyone could recognise for their artistic material.

She She Pop’s early productions sometimes seemed like children’s birthday parties that had degenerated into the later stages of Spin the Bottle, with hosts who appeared strikingly well versed in critical approaches to capitalism and gender theory. In ‘Trust!’ (1998), for example, they staged a table dance show and called upon the audience to take part in a detailed discussion of the performances’ merits and the prizes they deserved; in ‘Live!,’ the women in the group vied against each other in a game show situation, while the spectators had to vote on the results of this interfemale competition. The group therapy session on a circle of chairs in ‘Bad’ (2002), in which She She Pop sought to reformulate the sadomasochistic pact, proved above all to be a dogged exercise in coping with embarrassment. But does theatre not always involve a little bit of vicarious shame?

At least the nakedness of the She She Pop women always represents a frontal attack on the standardisation of female bodies – as well as pushing the relationship between spectators and actors to its logical conclusion. There are not many ensembles one can grow old with as satisfyingly as...
She She Pop. Its members live in Berlin and Hamburg, most of them are still working in other jobs, and the shows they produce always reflect what is happening in their personal lives. In Lagerfeuer (CampFire, 2005), they attempted to cast aside the attitudes of metropolitan creative types who know all the ironic tricks in order to search for a shared utopia. During a period when grants for the arts were particularly hard to come by, they came up with Die Relevanz-Show (The Relevance Show, 2007), in which the female combo dressed as chorus girls from a variety revue in order to meditate on whether their artistic activities were justified and clamour for attention using tactics that ranged from the self-ironic to the despairing. With which they enjoyed considerable success, given that the production made it to the Impulse Festival. And in their most recent works (Familienalbum (Family Album), Testament), which no longer challenge the audience’s attitudes quite so aggressively now they are in their early 40s, they engage consistently with the locus where the seeds of all emotional chaos are sown: the family. After all, their own parents are growing old in real life, and some of the members have had children, while others have decided against parenthood.

Testament makes the watcher feel She She Pop’s long journey through so many entertainment formats and all their soul-baring have been well worth while. Their strongest and most touching work to date skilfully and entertainingly analyses the emotional ambivalences inherent in generational conflicts – without being judgemental or making a fool of anyone. It is evident from every second of this highly imaginative, intense evening that it is rooted in the performers’ own experiences – and yet the show allows others to identify 100 percent with what it depicts. In view of the kinds of topic She She Pop are likely to deal with in the future, it is finally possible to look forward to the ageing process with real relish: We are going to get a whole lot of fun out of midlife crises and menopause!
**INTERVIEW**

**with Sheila Daniels and Sebastian Bark**

**SD:** I’m really excited to see *Testament*. I’ve been doing research all morning and it looks really wonderful!

**SB:** Thank you, we are very excited to come over to Seattle.

**SD:** This is the first time She She Pop has been in the US, is that correct?

**SB:** That’s right.

**SD:** How would you describe your company to an American audience who’s never seen your work before?

**SB:** We make devised theater, so normally we produce our text through improvisation and we give ourselves a task or a question more than like, a play, or we think of a situation that everybody knows, for example: a ballroom—and we think of what could happen there. So it’s a mix between a situation and a play. It’s performance and theater, it’s both.

**SD:** I loved this quote on your website, you say, “Performers do not merge with a role, rather they attempt to articulate examples of an unprepared self.” I just thought that was beautiful and fascinating and I’m wondering if you can articulate that any further in terms of the unprepared self and what that means.

**SB:** We are fascinated by the fact that you form yourself through decisions. It’s not necessarily something that you are given or that cannot change, but something that happens in the moment through decisions and through what other people think of you... and all these elements we try to combine and form an identity on stage that is not necessarily ours but is a possibility. It has something to do with, of course, the audience or the other performers and the situation. It’s something utopian; it’s something that has to do with the moment or the situation that you share.

**SD:** Yeah, to me it sounded like it’s the essence of... we talk so much in the theater about being ‘in the moment’ on stage and I just love how that ties into it because I think it’s something that’s given a lot of lip service sometimes and it’s exciting to think about really being in that moment of that, sort of, precipice of ‘no answers’.

**SB:** Exactly, we have been looking for questions or for situations that kind of give you this, ‘here and now’ and one of the aspects that we always find interesting is feeling ashamed. Because this is when you are so much ‘there’ because you don’t want to be ‘there’ and ‘now’ and ‘here’, and it makes you so visible because you don’t want to be visible! And that’s why we are so interested in coming up with questions that nobody can answer really by themselves, but needs someone else, or needs to struggle and needs to take a risk.

So, for example with *King Lear* or with *Testament*, with this piece, the idea was being together with our fathers on stage, or asking them questions was very exciting and full of risk in the rehearsal process and even on stage.

**SD:** Yeah, it made me wonder too, what was the moment of asking your fathers to share the stage with you... what was that moment like for members of your company? And was that, in and of itself, a fearful question or a moment of not knowing?

**SB:** I guess for some it was and some didn’t even try. They said from the beginning, ‘No, I’m not in this because I’m not ready to ask my father on stage’—so not all of us were ready to do it. One of the performers, Lisa Lucasson, she is part of it because she really wanted to be, although she said from the very beginning, ‘No way I will ask my father, we’re not in the kind of relationship where I would ask him to work with me.’ So it was very different for everyone.

I struggled because I thought about asking my mother—because I’m the only man in this women’s theater collective—and when we thought about doing *King Lear*, or using *King Lear* as a starting point/as inspiration I thought maybe I should—because everybody else is a daughter asking their father—maybe I should ask my mother. But then, my father had already heard about it and he started to be really keen on trying and then I was really happy because he was so up for it. Then I asked him.

**SD:** That’s wonderful! You know, also, *King Lear* is my favorite play, so I am familiar with it.

**SB:** Oh really?

**SD:** Yeah I’m actually going to be directing it in about a year and a half, so I was excited to talk to you...

**SB:** So you as a director, you direct Shakespeare plays? I think I read you did *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.
SD: I did, I did. But... So I'm reading *King Lear* so much right now, and I think the play is so much, too, about Gloucester and his sons as much as it is about Lear and his daughters, so I think that's great that there's this father son element too. It seems to me, very true to the play.

SB: In the beginning, we weren't so fixated on the father/daughter thing, although we always thought the questions of *King Lear*: 'who loves me the most?' and 'how will I divide my realm?' were most inspiring for us because it's such a brutal or honest question, one of those questions that we would like to come up with in our shows, this very clear and challenging question. But apart from that, in the beginning, we were very inspired by Gloucester and Edmond and Edgar and, especially, when I've approached my father with the idea of dealing with this question of, 'do you love your kids equally?' you know what I mean? Because, of course, Edmond always thinks that he is not really loved. I was very interested in this question, but my father refused to go there, he was very clear: Me having this recognition problem, or wanting more than he gave to me... he didn't want to go there and answer that question. So, we asked other questions. Slowly, we moved away from this Gloucester episode. Now it's much clearer that I am one of the daughters, so it's all about Lear and the daughters.

SD: Which came first, in terms of the genesis of the piece: was it reading *King Lear* or knowing *King Lear* and saying, 'this is an interesting question in this play,' or were you interested in the parent/child relationship and chose to use Lear as a jumping off point?

SB: I think first came the idea of working around the struggle or conflict between the generations, actually, about power and tradition, or the coming into power—our generation taking over—this idea really interested us. We're getting older... some of us have kids ourselves now, and not being the young upcoming theater group ourselves, slowly belonging to the establishment, we thought ok, lets do something about this, this taking over and power. Actually, for the first time we looked through literature and plays—because normally we don't do plays. So first was the topic, and then there was *King Lear*, and then there was, of course, the question of, 'what do we do with *King Lear*?' Because we are no actors, we are no directors; we don't want to use a play like this, normally, so we were looking for our task, or our mission in this. Then we came up with this idea to do it with our own fathers and I think if we hadn't had this idea, we wouldn't have worked with *King Lear*, so I think it was essential that we found our way to deal with it.

SD: Right. Do you feel like your process was changed by having your fathers in the room with you, creating with you?

SB: Oh it changed a lot. We took a great step forward in working professionally. We've worked for many years professionally, but having someone around all the time, or for long weekends mostly, who questioned every single move—because they did, they didn't take anything for granted, they wanted to know the reason for everything and so we really needed to prepare and think about everything very thoroughly and we benefited a lot from that. So, it changed the process immensely, it brought us daughters very close together. We struggled much less because we had so many struggles with our fathers. For us, actually, it was a great process. We went through of course, many crises and stuff, but it was a great challenge.

SD: Yeah, it sounds like it would just be a different kind of crisis than you were used to.

SB: Exactly, yeah it's so good to have new crises.

SD: Right, or we would get bored, right?

SB: Exactly.

SD: I was really interested in, in the reading I've done of stuff where you all have talked about your process, of this idea of audience consultation and interaction because that can mean so many things and I was wondering, I guess it's two questions: how you came together as an ensemble and how you came to this being a major theme of your work, a major way in which you work.

SB: The first question, how we came together, actually, I stepped in a bit later, only like 1999 I think, the others, or most of them, they studied together in a very special university for applied theater studies where theory and doing stuff were both equally important. I guess it's very normal in the states isn't it?

SD: Yeah, yes.

SB: In Germany it's very special; it's only starting to get more common.

SD: But you've been together for much longer than many ensembles last in the United States.

SB: You mean She She Pop?
through this rehearsal process, we even share the process with the audience.  
. . we have some situations of the rehearsal process recorded because our 
assistant recorded everything so we can go into the conflicts that we had 
back when we rehearsed.  So, you’re right, even in the piece you see that 
our struggle with the fathers in the process had much to do with us trying 
to stage something, or trying to fulfill something, or trying to be or act like 
someone in order for them to approve and to join in and play their part. 
So of course, you’re right; from the beginning on it was a spectacle. 

SD: Well Sebastian, thank you so much! It’s really wonderful to talk to you 
and I can’t wait to see Testament, I’m so excited. 

SB: I hope to meet you!  So are you going to be there? Maybe we can talk 
after the show. 

SD: That would be great.

SD: Yeah yes, She She Pop. 

SB: Yeah, I think that it’s about 15 years now. It depends on what 
you count. With the interaction with the audience and the participation: 
I think, it has to do with what you said in the beginning, it’s this question 
of how you deal with the ‘here an now’ situation, and we, as performers are 
obessed with this question, with the reality or the situation of ‘here and 
ow’ We were looking for ways to amplify this together and to not go on a 
journey somewhere else, into another time telling them another story . . . 
but to involve [the audience] in this process of decision making or raising a 
question and answering it. There we thought was a way to, actually to prove 
even that this is not all a set, we are coming up with it right now, so if the 
audience is taking part then it’s a kind of technique to show that we are in 
this together. 

But there are other ways, we developed game structures and worked with 
rules that everybody could follow to bring us into this situation where we had 
to decide. We were very interested in these kinds of questions, as we had no 
story to tell really, rather, many stories. As we had not one story, actually you 
need to come up with something else . . . so involving the audience and 
inviting them to take part was one element.

SD: Right it seems like you give over the control of the performer to the 
audience in part and . . . what you’re talking about sounds like, sort of what 
we want to do in theater, always, which is that you create a new community 
every performance. The community actually changes in every performance.

SB: It’s true, although now with Testament, we don’t challenge the audience 
so much, they are supposed to just sit there and watch; they don’t have to 
take part. But still, the audience is playing a very important role because 
I would never talk to my father like this in private. So actually, the audience 
is not only a witness but is necessary for us to actually have this kind of 
communication. We found out more about the involvement of audiences 
that are normal in normal theater, but not normal for us. So for us it was a 
very new thing. Maybe you would find it normal, but for us it was very new 
to have an audience just sitting there and watching.

SD: Well, in some ways it seems that your first audience really was your 
fathers in the creation of the piece. They were the first people who told you 
about the question you were asking.

SB: Yeah, that’s interesting that you say that because, of course we went