

JAN LAUWERS

&

NEEDCOMPANY

# NO COMMENT

Produced by Needcompany and coproduced by Théâtre de la Ville, Paris

in association with the Kaaithheater, Brussels.

Needcompany is subsidized by the Flemish Community and supported by the National Lottery.

## NO COMMENT

a few comments

Erwin Jans

1.

'No comment' was the title of a programme on the Euronews news channel, on which pictures from all over the world were shown without any form of comment or interpretation. This programme comprised a surfeit of images, too many (and the same time too few) images to be converted into a symbol (a meaning) just like that. This excess, this confusion of pictures without comment, can no longer be tolerated: either we convert them into pictures whose meaning we do not have to find out (they are just a few of the thousands of pictures we see on the television screen every day: excess here gives way to oversaturation), or else we try to deliberately analyse the pictures until a more or less comprehensible story starts to appear. The violence of the image is twice avoided: by indifference and in its interpretation.

2.

As an artist, Jan Lauwers has developed his own way of drawing and painting. Or rather, his own way of depicting his drawings and paintings. After all, he makes pictures of his drawings and paintings: in other words, pictures of pictures. It is a simple process, technically: he first takes a Polaroid photo of his paintings and drawings, then has a blow-up of them made. In addition to being a technique, it is also a method that implies a reflection on the status of the image: a reflection on the relationship between handwork (painting & drawing) and technical processing (photographing, blowing up), on the relationship between original and reproduction (enlargement/ reduction), on the relationship between reality and representation, etc. These are questions which modern art has continued to ask since its genesis in the mid-nineteenth century: they are its existential questions.

3.

One of the paintings Lauwers did recently looks at first sight like a big dark-brown patch, from which the head of a bearded old man slowly appears. Lauwers has written the word 'God' underneath. Arrogance on the part of the artist? Cheap joke? Cry of despair? The collapse of representation? The ultimate emptying of meaning?

4.

Jan Lauwers is presenting three monologues and a dance solo under the title *No Comment*. Charles Mee, Josse De Pauw and Jan Lauwers have written pieces for Carlotta Sagna ('Salome'), Grace Ellen Barkey ('The tea drinker') and Viviane De Muynck ('Ulrike') respectively. Six composers – Rombout Willems, Doachim Mann, Walter Hus, Senjan Jansen, Hans Petter Dahl and Felix Seger – have

written a musical composition for the dance solo by Tijen Lawton. Broadly speaking the themes of this performance are those that Lauwers has reformulated and redefined ever since the start of his work with Needcompany: violence, love, eroticism and death. From within this configuration of themes arises the question of identity. It is not only the themes that sound familiar, but also the names of the actresses. Lauwers carries out his research into the existential issues of theatre on the basis of this tight network of themes, motifs and people.

5.

Pictures from a film Werner Herzog made after the first Gulf War. He flies in a hot air balloon over the kilometres of abandoned and shot-up Iraqi army columns, the burning oil wells of Kuwait, the pools of oil as big as lakes in which the sun and sky are reflected. A voice reads extracts from the Apocalypse of St John against the background of music from Wagner's *Die Walküre*. Baroque, almost mythical images of beauty and destruction. Then pictures of people: a mother whose son was tortured to death in her presence, so that she has lost the ability to speak (the only word she can speak understandably is 'Allah'); a four-year-old boy who has refused to speak since he saw his father humiliated by soldiers; with infinite slowness the camera moves along the table on which primitive instruments of torture have been neatly laid out, without comment. Images from which all words have been erased.

6.

*Ce qui est aujourd'hui sacré ne peut être proclamé, ce qui sacré est désormais muet* (George Bataille). In a monograph on the French painter Eduard Manet, Bataille writes that a fundamental change takes place in Manet's work which opens up the space for modern art. Until the nineteenth century the church and the monarchy provided society's foundations and values. As from the nineteenth century these foundations came under great pressure and collapsed in a slow process of decay: 'God is dead and the world stinks of his corpse', as Nietzsche cried out, with the image that left little to the imagination. Art bore its share of the consequences of this death. Until the nineteenth century 'the task of art was to communicate an overwhelming, undeniable glory that united people, but from now on nothing glorious remained ... for the artist to serve' according to Bataille. Manet understood this profound change and aided its completion in his work. In order to make this clear Bataille compared two paintings: *The Third of May 1808* by Francisco Goya (1814/15) and Manet's *L'exécution de Maximilien* (1867). The subject of both paintings is an execution. Goya's painting shows a dramatic scene in which the victims meet their death with elaborate gestures: arms thrown into the air, pressed over their eyes or folded in a final prayer. The spectators and the tense bodies of the firing squad share in the pathos of the scream. According to Bataille, in Manet's painting we see the silencing of the image. Manet's painting does not tell us any less than that by Goya, but is indifferent to what it tells. The victims accept the rain of bullets without any outcry. The spectators look on unconcerned as the firing

squad does its duty and carries out a technical task (one soldier is loading his rifle, completely indifferent to the deaths taking place in front of him). Bataille sees Manet's painting as 'the negation of what is expressive, it is the negation of a painting that expresses feeling.' The tragic dimension has vanished from his painting, but he exposes something else: 'when Manet smothers the speech that had arisen around this event, he let loose a violence that is inversely related to Goya's screaming man,' says Bataille. He also compares Manet's *Olympia* (1863) with Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538). In Manet's case, Venus has become the woman looking insolently at the viewer, not a goddess, but a prostitute. Just as in *L'exécution de Maximilien*, 'the words have been erased. And what the painting means is not the words but the erasure,' according to Bataille. And this erasure is a 'no comment'. From Manet onward, art is the domain of the permanent silence. Silence keeps things back, it impedes our normal grasp of them. What was familiar to us becomes alien and stares back at us.

(*cf.* Ineke van der Burg, *De woordeloze blik. Bataille over Manet*, in: Ineke van der Burg, Debora Meijers (eds.), *Bataille, Kunst, geweld en erotiek als grenservaring, SUA, Amsterdam, 1987*)

7.

In about 1880 the body of a young woman was fished up out of the Seine in Paris. She was laid out in a mortuary, but no one came to claim her body. Paradoxically, she became known as *L'inconnu de la Seine* because her peacefully closed eyes and the serene smile on her lips made such an impression on an onlooker that he made a death-mask of her face. The significance of her smile is as enigmatic as the cause of her death. We do not know whether she committed suicide because of an adulterous relationship, or out of despair or because she was pregnant and unmarried. Was she the victim of a murderer or of an accident? Was her smile the expression of a certain ecstasy in death, or of a feeling of liberation and deliverance? Because we know nothing for sure, the imagination is given free rein. A real cult grew up round this 'unknown woman of the Seine' at the end of the nineteenth century: a plaster cast of her death-mask decorated the bedroom of countless young women. This mass reproduction of the face of a dead woman is an expression of the nineteenth-century fascination for the image in which art, woman, passion and death are linked together. Edgar Allan Poe famously wrote, 'the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.' These words led to a great deal of comment, but literary practice demonstrated their truth: Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Wilde's *Salomé*, Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen* (and Bizet's opera), Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* and so on. There are numerous paintings from that period showing sleeping or dead women: John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1851-2) floating in water enveloped in flowers is one of the best known. Woman has to be sacrificed in a particular way. The plentiful novels and paintings that portray dead women, murdered or driven to suicide, are sacrificial sites in which the woman appears as a patriarchal sacrifice. Destructive and self-destructive women also speak in the three monologues in *No Comment*. Women who have been the victims of moral, physical and sexual violence. The stories of the 'tea drinker', Salomé and Ulrike are tales of violence,

excess and transgression in which moral and physical identity are at stake. This excess is captured in an image: the 'tea drinker' describes herself as a picture, Salomé talks about herself as if about someone else and Ulrike is haunted by images she once saw. Are they too put on the sacrificial table by their male authors? Perhaps. Are they too emanations of a male fantasy of sex, violence and death? Men and patriarchal structures crop up behind the women in these stories too. But do these monologues only talk about it? Do they not give an answer too? Do they not respond to this violence with another sort of violence? The women on stage do not die (yet). They have more to do with Manet's *Olympia* than Poe's 'most poetical topic'. The women on stage look and talk back. It is not the women who are sacrificed, but, as in Manet's work, a particular way of seeing. They are the excess of looking and speaking. Is the woman not the purpose, the object of men's looking, desire and power? Is it not above all in the focus on her body that the male gaze takes shape (aestheticising, voyeuristic, pornographic)? But is she not at the same time the blind spot in man's view, the zero point to which all looking returns and has to return when it has unmasked its own desire? And is the possibility of another view, very temporary and fragile, not created in this return? Just like the shaky glass construction the actress Carlotta Sagna built in *Le désir*, after performing an extract from Wilde's *Salomé*, in which she orders the beheading of the man whose gaze refused to desire her?

8.

Jan Lauwers: 'I see the figure of the tea drinker as a metaphor for the plastic element in my work. It was done for a contribution to Documenta in Kassel. I initially wanted to make something visual. I added the text of *Caligula* to it. But it was actually intended as an independent image: a soft, sweet princess shouting 'Art' very loud. It was a sort of performance. I always wanted to keep that image very abstract. It also recurs in *Images of Affection*. That is why we had to delete several passages from Josse De Pauw's text: passages that told in very concrete terms about a woman's past and her relationship with her father. That was at odds with the abstract image I had in mind. The play starts with the tea drinker (Grace Ellen Barkey), who gives a description of herself. It is an image that talks back. You see something and the something reacts. This is in contrast to the end: in the piece on Ulrike (Viviane De Muynck) we do not use anything visual at all. What she tells is almost in passing. The performance is an evolution from the plastic, artificial and constructed nature of the tea drinker/Grace to the extremely human presence of Ulrike/Viviane. And between the two comes Charles Mee's piece for Carlotta Sagna. That is actually the most classical of the three monologues: very simple to follow, but a very sombre story.'

9.

Jan Lauwers: 'I see the body as both a rational and a sensual thing. With Needcompany I have always worked on these two aspects. Choosing one of the two is a form of fundamentalism. There has to be a dialectical relationship. If we in the theatre and art in general do not start from this sort of dialectical

relationship, we are involved in pure tautology. I see *No Comment* as a piece that moves from the one pole – extreme formalism in ‘the tea drinker’ – to the opposite pole – the social commitment of Ulrike – by way of Charles Mee’s dark tale. The solo by Tijen Lawton is based on music by six composers. It is the music that determines the dramaturgy of the solo. This dance solo is about a woman who only communicates with her body. Here we are examining what the rational and the sensual really are. The more I work with Tijen Lawton, the closer I come to some sort of *Bolero*. What I mainly want to do is create a portrait of Tijen Lawton herself: something that only she can do. Grace, Viviane and Carlotta can be heard on the soundtrack, speaking excerpts from the text that deal fundamentally with identity: ‘I can be what you want me to be / But what I am will never be what you are / And finally, when you are what you wanted to be there’s nothing to it / Nor shall it be me.’

## CREDITS

concept, director  
and set designer Jan Lauwers

### **The Tea-drinker**

performer Grace Ellen Barkey  
author Josse De Pauw  
music Maarten Seghers  
translation Gregory Ball

### **Salomé**

performer Anneke Bonnema (replaces Carlotta Sagna)  
author Charles L. Mee \*  
music Nicolo Paganini

### **No Comment**

performer Tijen Lawton  
choreography Tijen Lawton and Jan Lauwers  
music Rombout Willems, Doachim Mann, Walter Hus, Senjan Jansen,  
Hans Petter Dahl, Felix Seger

### **Ulrike**

performer Viviane De Muynck  
author Jan Lauwers  
translation Gregory Ball

costumes Lot Lemm  
lighting concept Joris De Bolle and Jan Lauwers  
sound concept Dré Schneider

dramaturgical notes	Erwin Jans
assistant director	Elke Janssens
stage technicians	Luc Galle, Maarten Seghers, Jeroen Wuyts
photography	Maarten Vanden Abeele
production manager	Luc Galle
producer	Needcompany
coproducer	Théâtre de la Ville (Paris) in association with Kaaitheater (Brussels)

The performance lasts 95 min. No interval.

Needcompany is subsidized by the Flemish Community and supported by the National Lottery.

\* For 'Salomé', Charles L. Mee drew inspiration from Cathérine Millet, Vanessa Duries, Camille Paglia and Colette.

Charles L. Mee's work was in part possible thanks to the support of Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.



## **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR NO COMMENT - SEASON 2002-2003**

world première 24, 25, 26 April 2003, Kaaitheater, Brussels

première version entirely in french 21, 22, 23 May 2003, Théâtre de la Ville, Paris

première version entirely in english 05, 06 July 2003, Sommerszene, Salzburg

## **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR NO COMMENT - SEASON 2003-2004**

Octobre en Normandie, Dieppe	17 October 2003
Kaaitheater, Brussel	23, 24, 25 October 2003
Stuk Kunstencentrum, Leuven	7 November 2003
Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg	12, 13 November 2003
Kunsterhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt	10, 11, 12 December 2003
Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse	17, 18, 19, 20 December 2003
Cultuurcentrum, Brugge	5 February 2004
Kunstencentrum Vooruit, Gent	13, 14 February 2004
La Rose des Vents, Villeneuve d'Ascq	6, 7 May 2004

## **PERFORMANCE CALENDAR NO COMMENT - SEASON 2004-2005**

Festival de Marseille	21, 22 July, 2004
ImPulsTanz, Vienna	28, 30 July 2004
Dublin Theatre Festival	28, 29, 30 September and 1, 2 October 2004
Tramway, Glasgow	29, 30 October 2004
La Rose des Vents, Villeneuve d'Ascq	9, 10 November 2004
deSingel, Antwerp	15, 16 March 2005
Stadsschouwburg Groningen	15 April 2005

## SELECTED EXTRACTS

**'The Tea-drinker'** by Josse De Pauw translated by Gregory Ball

“... ”

I would like the tea to pour upwards out of the spout for once. That everything was different all of a sudden. The tea upwards from the spout. Not in the cup. Upwards. Away. Possibly into a completely different cup somewhere else. That everything is suddenly completely different. I don't even need to know how. Different. That's all. That I look at something and think: different. At anything at all... Door: different. Cloth: different. Floor: different. Chair: different. Until I get dizzy. With happiness, I think. Spinning with happiness. Maybe it is like that. That things really are different... that we only look at and use things in one particular way... It's quite possible. That we see what we are told. So dull. It's possible. We have a great talent for 'always the same'. Like washing powder. New! And yet it's just washing powder again. One day there should be something else in the packet.

But when they come to see how different I really am, I give them what they ask. I am a dream. A dream of a smile. They never have that when they are asleep. That is what they want when they are awake. I pour tea, downwards from the spout, as it should be, because the dream must not be any different from how they would like to dream it. They have to receive what they ask for. Tea downwards from the spout. Sometimes I miss the cup. Like this... (pours the tea with a smile, without looking, outside the cup). I can't go any further than that. Then mama comes and she says, 'Oh my child, little one... (I am her child, her little one) what are you thinking of, and she bows low and apologises to the multitude. Mama is sweet. I caress and I kiss... ”

**'Salomé'** by Charles L. Mee

“... ”

You might say  
I'd never do such a thing  
how do you know?  
you say: because that's not the kind of person I am  
But you don't know.  
Because one day you will do something  
and then you will find out what sort of person you are.

You see a woman when she is grown up

you see how she has turned out  
and you think then you could say, oh, right  
this was inevitable  
the way she grew up  
you could tell how she would turn out  
this is the person she would be  
because Freud bla bla bla  
and the social dynamics

her background bla bla  
hindsight is so good  
all the theories of hindsight are foolproof  
but you don't know  
you never know  
she could be a hundred people  
before she's through with her life  
that's how it is these days

...

So Paul.

Paul was so wild in bed.

A person would do anything to keep his love.

Which is how a person might go along with it  
when he wanted to sleep with her sister.

And if that person, let us say, worked in a veterinary clinic

and had some knowledge of sedatives for animals

it would be really easy to figure out how to put my sister, her sister to sleep

for long enough that Paul could have sex with her

and so halothane

the drug was halothane

which animals inhale before surgery

and it wasn't anyone's fault that *her* sister just never woke up

because they felt they knew what they were doing

so it wasn't what anyone meant to do at all.

Although the step from that to picking up young girls

along the highway

and taking them home  
the woman luring them into the car  
and the two of them taking the girls home  
and Paul having sex with them  
it wasn't somehow such a big step  
because, as I was saying,  
the hard part is the first time  
usually  
but after the first time  
it's never quite as hard again...."

**'Ulrike'** by Jan Lauwers, translated by Gregory Ball

"I don't know why these images go through my mind, now in this department store, unconnected and almost simultaneously. And when I see these images I talk to someone and sometimes I don't know whether I am really talking of whether that is an image too. When I open my eyes, I see I am alone, with in front of me a crowd of people who do not notice me.

...

I see a wood of silver birches that's been shot to pieces and through it runs a mud-grey stream with holes in it. I didn't know a stream with holes existed. Each hole is encircled by dead fish that are covered with silver too. Just like the trees.

Why can't I just record the images. The images that always occur everywhere at the same time. Images without connection. Why do I always have to examine the cause and effect? Why can't I just record?

Why does it always have to be followed by judgements? Why do I always have an opinion? Why does everyone always have an opinion about everything? And why does it make no difference? Is having an opinion what distinguishes us from the animals? And are we any better off because of it?

I don't want an opinion.

I don't want a favourite colour.

I don't want any taste.

I don't want any preferences.

I don't want any power.

I don't want any desire.

I want to disappear.

I want to be less than nothing.

The years I was alone and people made a fool of me, I felt a lot. It is hard to feel when you are alone.

But it is only then that you feel the real things. Because you cannot express them. Because they can never be used. Because self-pity does not exist if one is alone. Because self-pity is useless, unusable for any purpose at all.

Usefulness is the only criterion.

The years I was alone were not the best years.

I didn't want to be alone. I hate being alone.

Being alone is pointless. I only wrote one word on the wall of my darkened cell: together.

And that was the last word: together..."

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY

Jan Lauwers (b. Antwerp, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1957), dramatist and artist, studied painting at the Academy of Art in Ghent. At the end of 1979 he gathered round him a number of people to form the *Epigonenensemble*. In 1981 this group was transformed into the *Epigonentheater zlv* collective which took the theatre world by surprise with its six stage productions. In this way Jan Lauwers took his place in the movement for radical change in Flanders in the early eighties, and also made his international breakthrough. *Epigonentheater zlv* presented direct, concrete, highly visual theatre that used music and language as structuring elements. Lauwers' impact within the group increased, and in 1985 this led to its break up and the formation of *Needcompany*. Both its operations and its company of actors are distinctly international. Every production is performed in several languages. *Needcompany* did not have to wait long for international success. Its first productions, *Need to Know* (1987) and *ça va* (1989) – which for *Needcompany* received the Mobiel Pegasus Preis – were still highly visual, but in subsequent productions the storyline and the main theme gained in importance, although the fragmentary composition remained. Lauwers' training as an artist is decisive in his handling of the theatre medium and leads to a highly individual and in many ways pioneering theatrical idiom that examines the theatre and its meaning.

One of its most important characteristics is a transparent, 'thinking' acting and the paradox between acting and non-acting. This specific approach is also to be found in the plays from the classical repertoire (all Shakespeare) that he has staged: *Julius Caesar* (1990), *Antonius und Kleopatra* (1992), *Needcompany's Macbeth* (1996), *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000) and, at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, *Ein Sturm* (2001). After directing *Invictos* (1996), the monologue *SCHADE/Schade* (1992) and the opera *Orfeo* (1993), in 1994 he started work on a large project called *The Snakesong Trilogy: Snakesong/Le Voyeur* (1994), *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir* (1995) and *Snakesong/Le Désir* (1996). In 1998 he staged the reworked version of the whole *Snakesong Trilogy*.

In September 1997 he was a guest in the theatre section of Documenta X, for which he created *Caligula*, after Camus, the first part of a diptych called *No beauty for me there, where human life is rare*. With *Morning Song* (1999), the second part of the diptych *No beauty...*, Lauwers and *Needcompany* won an Obie- Award in New York. In May 2000, at the request of William Forsythe, Lauwers created, in co-production with the Ballett Frankfurt, the piece entitled *DeaDDogsDon'tDance/DjamesDjoyceDeaD*. In 2001, Jan Lauwers directed *Kind*, a co-production with *Needcompany* and Het Net.

*Images of Affection* (2002) the play created for the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Needcompany*, was selected for the Theatre Festival. Jan Lauwers is presenting three monologues and a dance solo under the title *No*

*Comment* (2003). Charles Mee, Josse De Pauw and Jan Lauwers have written pieces for Carlotta Sagna ('Salome'), Grace Ellen Barkey ('The tea drinker') and Viviane De Muynck ('Ulrike') respectively. Six composers – Rombout Willems, Doachim Mann, Walter Hus, Senjan Jansen, Hans Petter Dahl and Felix Seger – have written a musical composition for the dance solo by Tijen Lawton. Broadly speaking the themes of this performance are those that Lauwers has reformulated and redefined ever since the start of his work with Needcompany: violence, love, eroticism and death. A collection of several thousand ethnological and archaeological objects left by Jan Lauwers' father provides the impulse to tell the story of Isabella Morandi in *Isabella's room* (opens 9 July 2004 at the Avignon theatre festival). Nine performers together reveal the secret of Isabella's room with as central figure the monumental actress Viviane De Muynck.

Jan Lauwers also has a number of film and video projects to his name, including *From Alexandria* (1988), *Mangia* (1995), *Sampled Images* (2000) and *C-Song 01* (2003). During summer 2001 Lauwers shot his first full-length film with the working title *Goldfish Game*. At the request of the curator Luk Lambrecht, Jan Lauwers subsequently also took part in the *Grimbergen 2002* exhibition, for which nine artists created a work in situ (including Thomas Schütte, Lili Dujourie, Job Koelewijn, Atelier Van Lieshout and Ann Veronica Janssens).

## JAN LAUWERS & NEEDCOMPANY – WORK FOR THEATRE

- 1987** **Need to Know**  
Opening: 24 March, Mickery, Amsterdam
- 1989** **ça va**  
Opening: 18 March, Theater Am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1990** **Julius Caesar**  
Opening: 31 May, Rotterdamse Schouwburg
- 1991** **Invictos**  
Opening: 18 May, Centro Andaluz de Teatro, Seville
- 1992** **Antonius und Kleopatra**  
Opening: 14 February, Teater Am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1992** **SCHADE/schade**  
Opening: 21 October, Theater Am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1993** **Orfeo**, opera by Walter Hus  
Opening: 23 May, Bourlaschouwburg, Antwerp
- 1994** **The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Voyeur**  
Opening: 24 March, Theater Am Turm, Frankfurt
- 1995** **The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Pouvoir (Leda)**  
Opening: 11 May, Dance 95, Munich
- 1996** **The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Désir**  
Opening: 6 November, Kanonhallen, Copenhagen
- 1996** **Needcompany's Macbeth**  
Opening: 26 March, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 1997** **Caligula, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part one**  
Opening: 5 September, Documenta X, Kassel
- 1998** **The Snakesong Trilogy, reworked version with live music**  
Opening: 16 April, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 1999** **Morning Song, No beauty for me there, where human life is rare, part two**  
Opening: 13 January, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 2000** **Needcompany's King Lear**  
Opening: 11 January, Lunatheater, Brussels
- 2000** **DeaDDogsDon'tDance/ DJamesDjoyceDeaD**  
Opening: 12 May, Das TAT, Frankfurt
- 2001** **Ein Sturm**  
Opening: 22 March, Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg



**2002 Images of Affection**

Opening: 28 February, Stadsschouwburg, Bruges

**2003 No Comment**

Opening: 24 April, Kaaitheater, Brussels

**2004 Isabella's room**

Opening: 9 July, Cloître des Carmes, Avignon

## GRACE ELLEN BARKEY

Grace Ellen Barkey, born in Surabaya in Indonesia, studied dance expression and modern dance at the theatre school in Amsterdam and afterwards worked as an actress and dancer. She has choreographed several productions. In 1986 she joined Needcompany as a choreographer and actress. She did the choreography for *Need to Know* (1987), *ça va* (1989), *Julius Caesar* (1990), *Invictos* (1991), *Antonius und Kleopatra* (1992) and *Orfeo* (1993). She also acted in several of these productions, as well as in *The Snakesong Trilogy - Snakesong/Le Voyeur* (1994), *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000), *Images of Affection* (2002) and *No Comment* (2003). She was also a member of the cast of *Goldfish Game* (2002).

Since 1992 she has been steadily and successfully building an international career with her own stage creations. Her first pieces, *One* (1992), *Don Quijote* (1993) and *Tres* (1995) were coproduced by Theater AmTurm in Frankfurt. These were followed by the Needcompany productions *Stories (Histoires/Verhalen)* (1996), *Rood Red Rouge* (1998) and *Few Things* (2003). *Few Things* was received very enthusiastically both at home and abroad. *(AND)* (2002) is the sixth of her pieces to enjoy the infrastructural backing of Needcompany. In this piece she transcends all the boundaries of theatre, dance and music with an irresistible flair.

## ANNEKE BONNEMA

From 1982 to 1986 the Dutch Anneke Bonnema studied at the theatre school in Amsterdam. She staged several plays and also wrote a great many, including *De bomen het bos*, staged with the Nieuw West theatre company, and *Tegenmaat*. Since 1995 she has worked with Hans Petter Dahl in the L & O Amsterdam performance group. They have created several pieces including the love show *Tantra & Western*, the *Sing-Dance* series (1, 2 & 3), incorporating among other things the meditative happening entitled *Made in Heaven - Sing-Dance #2* and the multidisciplinary performance *Post coitum omne animal triste est*, with a different improvising dancer every night. On these projects they worked with people from several disciplines such as Liza May Post (artist), Oyvind Berg (writer), Tom Jansen (actor) and improvising dancers including David Zambrano, Laurie Booth, Eva Maria Keller and Michael Schumacher. In 1997 they did a coproduction with Bak-Truppen called *Good Good Very Good*. They made a duo performance from which *Nieuw Werk* and *Shoes and bags* (2003) developed. The occasion for *Shoes and Bags* was the opening of their virtual fashion, art and concept house, Maison Dahl Bonnema.

Needcompany's *King Lear* (2000) was Anneke Bonnema's first production with Jan Lauwers. Since then she has also appeared in *Images of Affection* (2002) and *Goldfish Game* (2002). In *No Comment* (2003) she replaces Carlotta Sagna. She has already written several things including pieces for *Needlapb* and *The Liar's Monologue for Isabella's Room* (2004).

## JOSSE DE PAUW

Josse De Pauw was a cofounder of the Radeis theatre company (1977) and a founding member of the Schaamte artists' collective, the forerunner of what is now the Kaaitheater. The pivotal point in his later stage career was *Usurpation* (1985), for which he himself wrote the script, with music by Peter Vermeersch. In 1991 he received the three-yearly State Prize for Theatre Literature for his plays *Ward Comblez. He do the life in different voices* and *Het kind van de Smid*. His quest for authenticity as an actor and writer mean his position as a playwright is quite original. He employs the narration as an intimist, direct and highly personal form of theatre. De Pauw's poetry is more than a stylistic quality.

As an actor and play-maker he has collaborated with Peter Van Kraaij on *Exiles* (1993), *Ward Comblez. He do the life in different voices* (1989), *Het kind van de Smid* (1990) and *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* (1998), Jan Ritsema in *Trio in mi-bémol* (1991), Jan Decorte in *Het Stuk-Stuk* (1986), Chantal Ackerman (*De Verhuizing, De Verhuizing 2*) and Tom Jansen. With the last he set up Laagland after *De Meid slaan*, and its first production, *Trots Vlees*, was coproduced by Needcompany. In 1999 he was the artist in residence at Victoria in Ghent. For his stage performances *Weg* and *Larf*, with music by Peter Vermeersch, he received the 2000 Océ Podium Prize. He won the 2001 Theatre Festival Prize for *Übung*. Since July 2000 he has been the artistic director of Het Net in Bruges. In the piece called *Kind* he again worked with Tom Jansen and was directed by Jan Lauwers, in a Needcompany coproduction. This duo are currently touring with their new piece called *Herenleed*, a play by Armando and Cherry Duyns.

It would be unjust to limit an account of De Pauw's artistic versatility to his work on the boards: he is an actor, dramatist, film-maker and writer. Among the public at large he is known for his parts in feature films by Marc Didden (*Sailors Don't Cry*), Eric Pauwels (*Les Rives du Fleuves* and *Pour Toujours*), Guido Hendrickx (*Skin* and *S*) and Dominique Deruddere (*Crazy Love, Wait Until Spring Bandini, Hombres Complicados* and the Oscar-nominated *Iedereen beroemd*). Together with Peter Van Kraaij he wrote the scenario for the film *Vinaya* (1992). He has also written lyrics for songs (*De Onoplosbare Vis/Walpurgis; Momentum/Blindman*), children's plays (*Zetelkat* for Luxemburg; *Wortel van Glas* for Het Paleis), stories and highly individual articles for newspapers and magazines including *De Standaard*, *Humo* and *NWT*. 2000 saw the publication of his book entitled *Werk*, which collects his stories, notes and plays. It offers a unique survey of life and work and has won several prizes (2001 Seghers Literature Prize, 2002 Van der Hoogt Prize).

## CARLOTTA SAGNA

She took dance courses with the Italian Compagnie Sutki in Turin, at the Académie de Danse Classique de Monte-Carlo and at Mudra in Brussels. She danced in several creations by Micha Van Hoecke and Compagnie L'Ensemble, Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker and Rosas, and Caterina Sagna. She then joined Cesare Ronconi's La Valdoca theatre company in Italy, since she increasingly wanted to focus on theatre. She acted in several films by Jean-Claude Wouters before joining Needcompany in 1993. The first Jan Lauwers production she performed in was *Orfeo*, and this was followed by the three parts of *The Snakesong Trilogy* (*Le Voyeur*, *Le Pouvoir* and *Le Désir*), after which she also appeared in the combined version.

Carlotta Sagna did her first choreographic work for *Caligula* (1997), which was performed by Tijen Lawton. In *Morning Song* (1999) she worked on the dance passages together with Jan Lauwers and also appeared in the play. For *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000) she limited herself to the choreography. She appeared as an actress in *DeaDDogsDon'tDance/DJamesDJoyceDeaD* (2000), a joint venture by Ballett Frankfurt and Needcompany. She also acted in *Goldfish Game*, Jan Lauwers' first feature film, a sequel to *Morning Song*. In 1999, together with Caterina Sagna, she created *La Testimone*, a coproduction with Needcompany. She is currently touring with *Relazione Pubblica*, in which she once again created the choreography with Caterina. This season, with the backing of Needcompany, she has created her first play, "A". She is working with Lisa Gunstone and Antoine Effroy and is directing it herself.

## CHARLES L. MEE

"I like plays that are not too neat, too finished, too presentable. My plays are broken, jagged, filled with sharp edges, filled with things that take sudden turns, careen into each other, smash up, veer off in sickening turns. That feels good to me. It feels like my life. It feels like the world."

Highly impressed by what he saw in *Morning Song* at the BAM Harvey Theatre in New York in 1998, the American writer Charles L. Mee, 'Chuck' to his friends, sought contact with Jan Lauwers. Their e-mail correspondence led to the writing assignment for Carlotta Sagna's monologue in *No Comment*.

Charles L. Mee, who is regarded as one of the most original American playwrights of the day, has written a great many plays including several radical adaptations of Greek tragedies such as *Agamemnon*, *The Bacchae*, *Orestes*, *The Trojan Women*, *a love story*. His other plays include *Vienna Lusthaus*, *Big Love* and *Full Circle*.

"My own work begins with the belief that human beings are, as Aristotle said, social creatures—that

we are the product not just of psychology, but also of history and of culture, that we often express our histories and cultures in ways even we are not conscious of, that the culture speaks through us, grabs us and throws us to the ground, cries out, silences us.”

His work is frequently performed in the United States and especially in New York, where he lives and works (Brooklyn). In Europe his work is still unknown and is rarely performed. In 2001 Ivo Van Hove directed his *True Love* at the Holland Festival.

In addition to his plays, Mee is also well-known in the United States as the author of several books of cultural and political history, including *Rembrandt's portrait: a biography* and *Playing God: seven fateful moments when great men met to change the world*.

### VIVIANE DE MUYNCK

Viviane De Muynck studied drama at the Conservatory in Brussels, where she was a student of Jan Decorte. From 1980 she was a member of the Mannen van den Dam collective and acted in Strindberg's *De Pelikaan*, Feydeau's *Het laxeermiddel*, Bernhard's *De macht der gewoonte* and Strauss' *Het Park*. In 1987 she won the Theo d'Or Prize for her performance as Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, which Sam Bogaerts directed for the De Witte Kraai company. After that she joined Maatschappij Discordia and performed in Alfred Jarry's *UBU ROI*, Judith Herzberg's *Kras*, Handke's *Das Spiel vom Fragen*, and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *Twelfth Night*.

Collaboration with three theatres in the Netherlands resulted in *Count Your Blessings* with Toneelgroep Amsterdam, directed by Gerardjan Rijnders, *Iphigenia in Taurus* with the Nationaal Toneel in The Hague, directed by Ger Thijs and *Hamlet* with Het Zuidelijk Toneel, directed by Ivo Van Hove. She also acted in two Kaaitheater productions: in 1994 in *Pijl van de Tijd* (Martin Amis), directed by Guy Cassiers and in 1995 the part of Odysseus in *Philoktetes Variations* (Müller, Gide, Jesuren) by Jan Ritsema, alongside Dirk Roofthoof and Ron Vawter. She also made guest appearances with The Wooster Group in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* and other plays. She is currently touring in *Relazione Pubblica*, a choreographic piece by Caterina and Carlotta Sagna.

Viviane De Muynck also works with musicians, such as on *La Trahison Orale* (oratorio by Maurizio Kagel) with the Schönberg Ensemble (conductor Rembert De Leeuw), *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte* (Arnold Schönberg) with *Zeitklang* (conductor Alain Franco) and the Spectra Ensemble (conductor Philippe Raté), *Lohengrin* (Schiarrino) with Neue Musik Berlin (conductor Beat Furrer and director Ingrid von Wantoch Rekowski). She collaborated with Eric Sleichim and the Blindman Saxophone Quartet on *Men in Tribulation* (May 2004)

She makes regular appearances in film and TV productions. She acted in *Vinaya*, a film by Peter van

Kraaij and Josse De Pauw and in *De avonden*, directed by R. Van den Berg, after the book by Gerard Reve. Two other notable film parts have been in *Vincent and Theo* (directed by Robert Altman) and *The Crossing* (directed by Nora Hoppe). She was twice nominated for the 'Gouden Kalf' at the Utrecht film festival: for the film *De avonden* and for the TV-drama *Duister licht* by Martin Koolhoven.

Viviane De Muynck is much in demand internationally as a guest lecturer on theatre courses and workshops. In addition to this she has taken to stage directing in Germany. In 2000 she directed the first performances of *Die Vagina Monologe* at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, a coproduction with Needcompany, and *As I Lay Dying* (2003), an adaptation of William Faulkner.

Since the opera *Orfeo* she has acted regularly with Needcompany, in the productions by Jan Lauwers. Over the years she has appeared in *The Snakesong Trilogy* (*Le Pouvoir*, *Le Désir* and the full version), *Macbeth* (1996), *Caligula* (1997), *Morning Song* (1999), *DeaDDogsDon'tDance/DJamesDJoyceDeaD* (2000), *Goldfish Game* (2002), *No Comment* (2003) and *Isabella's room* (2004). For *DeaDDogsDon'tDance/ DJamesDJoyceDeaD* she joined Jan Lauwers in writing the script.

## **TIJEN LAWTON**

Tijen Lawton was born in Vienna to a British father and a Turkish mother. She was raised in Austria, Italy and Turkey, and finally ended up in Great Britain. In London she studied dance and music at the Arts Educational School from 1984 to 1988 and at the London Contemporary Dance School from 1988 to 1991. In 1989 she spent a year at the prestigious Juillard School in New York. She participated in various dance workshops in Paris and Istanbul.

In 1991 she co-founded Foco Loco, a company that concentrated on research and development in every area of dance. In 1992 she joined Emma Carlson & dancers and toured Great Britain and Germany with the performance *Inner Corner*. In 1996 she came to Brussels to work on several productions by Pierre Droulers: *Les Beaux Jours* (1996), *Lilas* (1997) and *Multum in Parvo* (1998), followed by international tours. In the meantime she worked on the first choreographic pieces of her own: *Les petites formes* (1997) which contained *Je n'ai jamais parlé*, *Les Beaux Jours* and *Plus fort que leurs voix aiguës* (1998).

Her collaboration with Jan Lauwers started with her work as an actress and dancer in the revival of *Caligula* (1997) and in *Morning Song* (1999). Since then she has been a constant presence in Needcompany productions. She has appeared in *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000), *Images of Affection* (2002), *Goldfish Game* (2002) and *No Comment* (2003). She also appears in *Few Things* (2000) and *(AND)* (2002) by Grace Ellen Barkey and Needcompany.

## THE COMPOSERS

For Tijen Lawton's solo, Jan Lauwers came up with the idea of creating a composition with all the composers with whom he has ever worked. The method was as follows: a basic track was composed by Jan Lauwers and Maarten Seghers, under the name Felix Seger. Maarten Seghers has played a musical role in, among other things, *Images of Affection* and *Needlapb* and also contributed to the music for *(AND)*, the new creation by Grace Ellen Barkey. To this basic track, the composer Rombout Willems, whose music was a vital element in *The Snakesong Trilogy*, added his own composition for piano. Willems also wrote the music for several pieces by Barkey, including *Tres* (for eight pianos) and her latest piece, *(AND)*. The next stage was the addition of a track by Hans Petter dahl, who has previously written and performed his own songs for *Needlapb*, *Goldfish Game* and *Images of Affection*. The pianist and composer Walter Hus, who composed the music for the opera *Orfeo* for Jan Lauwers in 1993, recorded a vocal work with the three actresses and added it to the whole. Then it was the turn of Doachim Mann (Dominique Pauwels), who wrote the music for the Needcompany and Ballett Frankfurt production *DeaDDogsDon'tDanceDjamesDjoyceDead* and *Goldfish Game*, Jan Lauwers' first feature film. All these layers, composed one over the other, were subjected to a compositional final mix by Senjan Jansen, who did the same for *Goldfish Game*.

## 1/ WITH THE DOOR HANDLE IN THE HAND

De Tijd, Pieter T'Jonck, 23/04/2003

Violence, eroticism, death: the words come so easily that we seldom pause and reflect on their existential implication. Theatre maker and visual artist Jan Lauwers has continually attempted to illuminate the actual significance of these words in his work, without lapsing into simplistic statements. 'No comment' is a new step in this search. This time with as point of departure the personality of four actresses who have played a major role in Lauwers' 'Needcompany'.

The four women: Grace Ellen Barkey, Carlotta Sagna, Tijen Lawton and Viviane De Muynck. For each of them a new text was written, or in the case of dancer Tijen Lawton, a new score. Felix Seger, alias Maarten Seghers, and Jan Lauwers wrote an 18-minute guitar work for Tijen Lawton to which five other composers (Rombout Willems, Hans Petter Dahl, Walter Hus, Doachim Mann and Senjan Jansen) added new sound layers. The extremely complex score allows Lawton to express the entire register of her refined, razor-sharp dancing. Josse de Pauw wrote 'The tea drinker' for Barkey. This text is based upon Barkey's past and the figure of the 'tea drinker'/Balinese dancer that she had already given form in a surrealist way in 'Images of Affection' and 'Caligula'.

Jan Lauwers: 'In this text, Grace Ellen makes explicit the image she had to fulfil for the spectators as Balinese dancer. This is pure exoticism: the spectator wants to see a nice picture and also wants to feel something pleasant. But s/he does not want the image to talk back. However, here Grace briefly revolts, only to finally return to her original submissiveness. I have packaged this in a very baroque image. Balinese dancers are an innocent variant of the objectifying gaze of exoticism. I remember a documentary on people dying in the Sahel. Evidently a reporter had never before thought of letting the starving speak. A journalist addressed a dying woman and learned that she had studied philosophy. Understand me well: in other circumstances you would have had a normal discussion with her. However, here she was presented as a mute image. Equally disconcerting was her statement that dying of hunger causes terrible headaches. It is not simply a matter of fading away. These are images that make an impact. An image is only an image when, like this woman, it speaks back. When the recollection remains. Thus, what you see on MTV is not an image.'

Alarmingly recognisable



In the texts of Carlotta Sagna and Viviane De Muynck, no trace remains of exoticism, however illusory. Both stage a character that is nevertheless already alarmingly recognisable in its gruesomeness or incomprehensibility. Charles Mee, an American author, wrote 'Salome for Sagna. She earlier played Oscar Wilde's interpretation of this murderous 'femme fatale' in Lauwers' 'Le Désir'. Mee takes us with him into the depths of this character's soul. Sagna tells her life story as if it was about someone else, an accumulation of continually new perversions and transgressions that ends in the murder of her sister and other young girls. At first sight this seems to barely touch her. It could have ended differently, she asserts, but after each new perversion there appeared to be no path back. This casualness, however, is only an appearance: between the lines of the unrelenting enumeration of always-greater atrocities, you feel the growing desperation of the character speaking.

Jan Lauwers: 'Charles Mee is a respected leftist author in the USA. He found our 'Morning Song' one of the best that he ever saw, and wanted to do something with us around the figure of Salome. Carlotta then left for New York to speak and write with him. Mee writes in an unusual way: just as 'sampling' has become very commonplace in other forms of art, he often paraphrases existing texts. He finds this perfectly legitimate: you may also 'sample' his texts as much as you want. In this text he draws inspiration from texts by, among others, Cathérine Millet, Vanessa Duries, Camille Paglia and Colette. 'Salome' is a hard, morbid text. Salome is known as a predatory female, but she was brought up this way by her mother who saw it as a means to climb the social ladder. She is a woman educated in amorality. This has left its mark. The text says literally: you don't know who you are until you have accomplished something. This is not obvious. Salome can only speak of herself in the third person. It is only this distance that makes it bearable. Charles Mee has made Salome the wife of Dutroux, without even knowing the Dutroux story. But there are also parallels with the recent story of the judge who, out of love for his wife, gave in to her perverse desire to sew her vagina up. Salome also acts out of a strange love for her husband. This text demonstrates that something like this is not obvious or innocent. Perversion is not something that you just do, even though the media like to present it that way. In essence it always concerns a transgression of boundaries. Whether it concerns sex and violence or soldiers in Iraq. How can you, as a sixteen-year-old soldier, kill children? Either you are totally traumatised afterwards, or you enjoy it. With the present war, just the reading of this text automatically leads to these considerations.'

## Violence

Still more awkward is the performance of the last text. 'Ulrike', played by Viviane De Muynck, is a text written by Jan Lauwers himself. We run with Ulrike Meinhof through a store, on the way to the ultimate suicide attack. In poignant details De Muynck brings to life the unreal experience of this character resolutely heading towards her end.

Jan Lauwers: 'If you think about what happens now, you automatically become a walking time bomb. You cannot accept the fact that you are forced to resort to violence. But what can one do when faced with someone attacking you with a gun? It is an appeal to also become violent. We have transgressed a certain limit. The account of the Jews in the ghettos who allowed themselves to be slaughtered, has become almost incomprehensible for us. Extreme Jews like Sharon began their career as terrorists. At that moment they also transgressed a limit for which there was no way back. Terrorism today has nothing in common with the attacks that took place in the 1960s. The psychology then was easy to understand. Now it has become 'big business'. Salman Rushdie summarised it well when he said that after 11 September we must decide whether we are prepared to commit suicide for the right to wear a miniskirt in the face of others who are prepared to sacrifice their life to be able to bury their women in bhurkas.'

In the text of 'Ulrike', Lauwers' obsession with images as a mute witness to something that can no longer be expressed surfaces. The title of the show, 'No Comment', actually refers to a TV programme on Euronews that presented news images without commentary. The show is about this indifference and, at the same time, bewilderment. Like Lauwers' Ulrike Meinhof transforms everything to images, images that haunted her endlessly, it concerns a strategy to keep unbearable reality at a distance. Lauwers likes to refer to Andy Warhol's strategy of derealizing things, to emasculate things by making an image of them. However, in the meantime we are a good quarter of a century further. The digital revolution has made it possible for everyone to (re)produce images. 'Sampling' makes everyone an artist. Paradoxically for Lauwers, the theatre, more than the visual arts, becomes a place where essential things can be said.

Jan Lauwers: 'In the visual arts, virtuosity now has a bad name. In order to proceed, you must cultivate a form of naivete. In the same way, in music, sound is now more important than

composition. This strategy makes it appear that anyone can create art. This leads to a new cry for virtuosity. Even the destruction of virtuosity has been presented as a new form of virtuosity. But such virtuosity is of course a bourgeois form of bad taste. In the nineteenth century, Paganini was already an early example of this. The audience wanted to see the artist working and suffering, and even secretly hoped that he would not reach the highest note. But this is imitation art. In Carrara even young children are able to easily copy a Pieta in marble. Their familiarity with marble as material has allowed them to achieve a high level of virtuosity. However, this does not make them genuine sculptors. Just as Wolfgang Tillmans received a Turner prize for a photo of a pair of jeans on a radiator, it concerns here not the virtuosity of the activity but the vision that emanates from it. However, this 'other' type of virtuosity is undermined because anyone can make a photo. That is what makes theatre so exceptional. With theatre you cannot 'sample' or digitize. It concerns what is happening here and now. Previously, visual artists looked down upon theatre. It was a vulgar form of amusement that allowed no real artistic expression. In the theatre, people looked up to what took place in the visual arts. Now the situation has been reversed. People from the visual arts take energy and inspiration from the here-and-now notion of the theatre. Nevertheless, in the theatre you also have a vulgar and an interesting form of virtuosity. Many theatre makers display their abilities in the most explicit way, and thus follow the model of Paganini. However, acting only becomes really fascinating or authentically virtuoso when you no longer notice the acting itself. I want to create images about things that I myself no longer understand. How to achieve that? We have not figured that out ourselves. The play must evidence a sort of casualness, as if the actors are inventing it on the spot. The image must have something inevitable about it. You must believe that it could only be this way. The slightest perception of craftsmanship undermines such an image. It is working with daggers drawn. One system that we use is called 'the psychology of the door handle'. How often does it occur that someone departs and, with the door handle in hand, makes one last remark, which subsequently appears to be the most important of the entire discussion. Everyone's attention is already focused on something new, and precisely at that moment the essential occurs. This is the way it must also be in theatre.'

## **2/SILENCE IS GOLDEN**

**De Morgen, Liv Laveyne, 25/04/2003**

Theatre Jan Lauwers says, 'No Comment'

Words fall short. In extreme situations when mouths fall silent, the image screams. The TV programme No Comment on Euronews showed images from the war in Iraq without providing commentary. Do images say that much more, or just the opposite? This is one of the questions that occupy Needcompany director Jan Lauwers.

Brussels

From our correspondent Liv Laveyne

With the title No Comment, his latest production premiered at the Kaaithheater. Josse De Pauw, Charles Mee and Lauwers himself each wrote a monologue for Grace Ellen Barkley (The Tea Drinker), Carlotta Sagna (Salome) and Viviane De Muynck (Ulrike) respectively. Six composers wrote the music for Tijen Lawton's dance solo. The poster shows photos of Lauwers' four muses, without comment. "Explaining an image invariably runs the risk of emasculating it," says Lauwers. Yet still he gives an interview.

### **No comment?**

Jan Lauwers: "This year I intended to give no opinions in my work. It is currently almost impossible to find someone without an opinion. It is no longer acceptable. Yet it is a relief when you can. Because, in the end, giving an opinion, is invariably engaging in the well-known battle. You see that also with the war in Iraq: pacifists against patriots, it is a simplified battle, an opinion for the sake of an opinion."

### **If that is not an opinion?**

"I call this production No Comment because I simply want to create what I want to create. In the performing arts there is another tendency toward conceptualism and with this the child is thrown out with the bathwater. When the means become the goal, you are on the wrong track. A body is of course something rational, but it is also sensual. Artificially dividing this duality leads to a fundamentalism that I detest. Both aspects must be present naturally. I connected the four solos in No Comment in a dramaturgical line: I begin by dissecting the image and I end with only thought."

**The three monologues for three women were written by three men. Was it clear to you who would write for whom?**

"The figure of the tea drinker immediately appealed to Josse De Pauw because he is married to a Japanese and personally recognises this double culture. Grace Ellen Barkey, who plays the tea drinker, is from Indonesia. I did not know the American author Charles Mee personally. He had seen *Morning Song* in New York (where Lauwers won an Obie Award in 1999, *LiLa*) and via e-mail proposed working together. He made an adaptation of *Salome* for Carlotta Cagna because she had played this role in *Le Désir* (from the *Snakesong* Trilogy, *LiLa*). I myself wrote *Ulrike* for Viviane De Munck."

**In your work you always opt for a certain level of abstraction. Do anecdotes not distract us from what is really important?**

I search for a form of universality. The anecdote may never be the goal. The anecdote as realistic reflection or naturalism is abhorrent, because it has nothing more to do with the essence of theatre. On the other hand, however, there is the fact that an image is only an image when it stays in your imagination, as remembrance."

**You said about yourself: 'I don't direct, I create images'. The TV programme *No Comment* could also be seen as a critique of the gratuitous image. Are you not cross-examining yourself?**

There are always two foundations present in my work. There is the image and there is the theatrical given of a person on stage. The latter cannot be sampled or digitised. I have no critique to offer to the image. I want to analyse what it means. Theatre, image, art: they are not unambiguous concepts. There are actors who maintain that they are artists, others refer to themselves as 'mere' medium. Art is precisely about calling virtuosity into question.

"It is sometimes said that I make 'visual theatre'. I must admit that I do not understand what is meant by this. Perhaps the basis of the comparison is already wrong: they still compare my work with repertoire theatre. Yet we have long since agreed that theatre is more than this. In the new repertoire theatre, author and director are less separate. The artist becomes one, such that fleeting theatre, more so than before, consists only in the moment."

**Needcompany presents four solos in "No comment"**

**FOUR TIMES PURE LAUWERS**

**De Morgen, Tom Rummens, 29/04/2003**

"No Comment" is the new production by Jan Lauwers and Needcompany. It is in fact four productions. Four solos for four women, all performers who have been involved with Lauwers' company for a long time. "No Comment" is four times something different. But at the same time also four times unmistakably pure Lauwers.

Brussels / by our correspondent

Tom Rummens

The production begins with a monologue written by Josse de Pauw and performed by Grace Ellen Barkey. "The tea drinker" is a text for a Balinese dancer. Lauwers has already staged this dancer several times. The first time was in "Caligula", a production created on the occasion of Documenta X in 1997. Barkey also appeared as that prototypical example of exoticism in "Images of affection", Lauwers previous production. In "The tea drinker", she performs in an overwhelming setting. She sits on a box floating back and forth in the air, accompanied by as many as one hundred lights. These burn softly at first and then you are looking at a star-filled sky. At the end of "The tea drinker" it is as if burn very brightly and look at you. Solid as a rock and unavoidable.

The lighting in "No Comment" is a topic in itself. After the baroque lighting in "The tea drinker" comes the more sober but no less gripping lighting in "Salome", the solo by Carlotta Sagna, written by the American writer Charles L. Mee. At the very front of the stage she tells her story, wrapped in a dress that is as green as the flickering - stuttering? - background against which she stands. Much more sober, as we said, but the image is no less gripping. The dance solo for Tijen Lawton in "No Comment" is seemingly still more sober. She completely fills up a uniformly white-lit stage. Completely. In the razor-sharp, quick and encompassing dance language that is her own.

Looking at Viviane De Muynck's performance "Ulrike", you ask yourself how this simplicity

can in fact be reconciled with the excess that was so determinative in "The tea drinker". De Muynck requires no more than a spotlight. Lawton fills up the stage, De Muynck charms the audience. She presents her text face to face, a text written by Lauwers himself and based upon the life of Ulrike Meinhof. "Why can I not simply register the images," she asks herself. "Why must I always search for cause and effect?"

Precisely the same question haunts you as you run through Lauwers' oeuvre itself. The leitmotifs in his work are innumerable. Not only because they are numerous, but above all because they always repeat themselves in different combinations. Themes like death, love, violence and eroticism continuously return. The same applies to the performers, to the images, the attention to music and sound. Dramatist and theatre expert Erwins Jans, in a text written on the occasion of "No Comment", speaks of a network. This word seems somewhat vague, but is at the same also quite correct. A diversified network of themes, images and languages, behind which, nevertheless, is very clearly one single artist. "No Comment" is an absolute must for those who feel called to lose themselves in that network.

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