

Brussels, June 2004

Dear Friends,

Theatre is an industry that operates on capitalist principles, said the Futurist Marinetti in the early twentieth century, in which one finds a manager, an actor-manager (capocornici), in which money plays a leading part, and which puts an emphasis on the personal success of the actor as a star. His virtuosity is employed as an enticement. I wonder what Marinetti would say about today's subsidised theatre.

This has prompted a few odd thoughts about money just before we head for the heat of Southern France to continue work on Isabella's room, NC's twentieth stage production, whose first official performance will be during the Avignon Festival on 9th July.

There is currently intense discussion in Flanders on the redistribution of arts subsidies. A very useful debate and an extremely complicated one, if only because the support required by a painter working in solitude in his studio is completely different from that needed by a subsidised stage director who provides work for a whole lot of people. Because subsidies are in the first place about employment. Which is why no one finds it extraordinary that a Minister of Culture knows nothing about art. But let's go back to the solitary painter in his studio. Ninety-nine percent of such people are poor. One percent are rich. Solidarity among artists is nonexistent. The figures soon add up. I myself earn as much as a minister in Lithuania and a little less than a pipe-fitter in Flanders. When it comes to money, the new Europe is still pretty shaky.

As a subsidised stage director, one will never be rich. One can never increase in value and one's heirs get nothing out of it. And since in our social system money is the one thing that never lies, subsidised theatre is on the bottom rung of society's art ladder and can therefore comfortably wallow in a sincere naivety that is unable to generate one atom of market value.

The panic felt at attempts to justify arts subsidies by pointing to the social importance of art as a political weapon, and the fact that just about every festival or temple of art burns American flags or puts refugees onstage (not because they can create good theatre, but because they are poor wretches) is nothing less than a disaster. Good art is always political. Good art is always bound to society. But what is good art? The notion of art is hollow, and rolls down Sysiphus' slope like an empty barrel. Fortunately there is always a Zorba ready to roll it, singing and dancing, back up again, but the time needed to push it to the top is getting longer, and the slope steeper. It's time a good new manifesto was written. But then, every time an artist gets involved in politics, it's unbearable to hear. After all, Marinetti became a fascist and Schwarzenegger... or isn't he an artiste?

See you later,  
Jan L.

**Isabella's room: new creation by Jan Lauwers & Needcompany**

Avignon Festival, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15 July 2004

'I was abandoned as a baby in the side porch of the Carmelite convent, and my first real memory is of the nuns in the cellar washing their hair in ice-cold water with a bar of hard soap, while shots rang out from the soldiers practising in the convent courtyard. I was sitting behind one of the marble washtubs and they were naked from the waist up and their skin looked transparent and silly. When the shots startled them everything wobbled. As a young girl I was brought up by Anna and Arthur. We lived in a lighthouse on an island just off the coast. Arthur was the lighthouse keeper and was drunk from five every evening, and so was Anna, my stepmother. It was a pleasant time because when they were drunk they felt free and happy and never said a cross word to me. They told me that my real father was the Desert Prince who had disappeared on an expedition. I called myself Isabella the Desert Princess and resolved one day to clear up the mystery of my father. They taught me to play the piano, write poems and above all to laugh a lot.'  
(Isabella's room – Jan Lauwers)

We brought **Images of Affection** to a close with a tour of three of the new EU member states, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It wasn't always easy. Try translating 'blow-job' into Lithuanian. But it was an experience neither we nor the audience will easily forget. Or as the director of the New Drama Action Festival in Vilnius put it, 'Not every member of the audience in Vilnius was particularly pleased by the performance, but it did give them a jolt, since it challenged some of their attitudes to theatre, and that is quite significant.'

**No Comment** will be on at the Impulstanz and the Festival de Marseille summer festivals and in 2005 will also be performed for our northern neighbours for the first time. In these performances Carlotta Sagna will be replaced by Anneke Bonnema. Carlotta is taking a sabbatical during which she will be working on a new piece called **Tourlourou** with Jone San Martin. She will show about twenty minutes of it in the setting of SACD France in Avignon.

### **Chunking: New creation by Grace Ellen Barkey & Needcompany**

Definition:

The meaningful packaging of information into chunks for storage in short term memory. Power of the Strategy: Organize an infinite amount of information in many different ways. Rhythmic chunking: Typically, recall is improved by inserting a brief pause between successive groupings. Chunking limit: Research suggests that human beings can understand and remember no more than seven plus or minus two items of information at a time. Further, as the complexity of the information increases the chunking limit decreases. Note: choose the right type of chunking for the specific purpose.

Chunking is being made in collaboration with Lot Lemm, Tijen Lawton, Maarten Seghers, Julien Faure, Louise Peterhoff and Benoît Gob.

Ten performances of Grace Ellen Barkey's last piece (**AND**) sold out at the Théâtre de la Bastille in Paris. The reactions speak for themselves: '(AND) takes its cardboard fishes out for a walk, but doesn't forget to leap into the wild waters of dance. This is where the best of the performance lies, while the dramaturgical sequence of the story is conventional and linear.' (Fabienne Arvers, *Les Inrockuptibles* 31/3/04) and 'Grace Ellen Barkey not only likes telling stories, she also succeeds in bringing them to life in all their facets. Digressions, flashbacks and changes of rhythm and perspective guarantee sparkling action that heads off in every direction without ever losing grip on the logical unfolding of the tale.' (Rosita Boisseau – *Le Monde* 1/4/04)