

Brussels September 2005

Dear reader,

In the summer just past we were guests at festivals in Avignon, Marseille and Vienna and after that we visited the Venice Biennale. I often had to think of what Michel Houellebecq wrote in *De koude revolutie*: 'that atmosphere of decomposition, of cheerless failure that hangs around contemporary art, in the end grabs you by the throat; at that moment you may magnanimously long for Joseph Beuys and his ideas. Which does not alter the fact that his art gives us a mercilessly precise picture of the age [...] Contemporary art depresses me but I realise there is no better comment on the present state of affairs.'

I believe that the depression aroused by contemporary art is not particularly interesting. I am convinced that these depressions only occur in overindulged western middle-class art. One ought not to forget that almost all the artists who in the late 60s and early 70s destroyed themselves with conviction by swallowing pills, cutting themselves with knives and drinking ammonia have either committed suicide or gone mad. Most of them worked in silence, almost underground and out of sight. Now Vandekeybus has a dancer cut himself in the biggest theatres and censors himself. Just as Fabre did not 'allow' any pissing in the Palais des Papes in Avignon. It's not the censor that alarms me but the outcry that follows. This outcry is an indication of short-sightedness. As if the subversiveness of art had now actually occupied a central position in our society. Nothing could be further from the truth. Radical art is dark and full of energy and takes place in the very smallest corners of our soul. Not in a packed theatre where convention is the standard. Shakespeare already understood this. When he decided to withdraw from the theatre it was not because of censorship or depression, but for socio-economic reasons: the queen had decreed that the theatre should no longer be free. Now we consider it normal that the price of tickets for a play about fourth-world issues should double because it costs too much (see *Wolf*, the super production by Mortier, the man with sixteen hundred staff).

I am convinced that the rapid changes in our moral codes have overtaken the artistic avant-garde. There is a great urge for security. The success of *Isabella's room* is mainly because of that: the accessible openness of the performers, the music and the linear story give the audience a 'false' sense of security. And yet I know that this play is necessary. I am more than ever aware that it is becoming increasingly difficult for art to find the right function or redefinition. For me the keyword is 'humanity'. And this humanity is too often confused with accessibility.

Regards,

Jan Lauwers

Chunking's Belgian first night will finally take place on 1st October, as part of Mechelen 2005, Stad in Vrouwenhanden (at 't Arsenaal). It will then be moving to the Kaaitheater in Brussels, where this piece by Grace Ellen Barkey can be seen on 14th and 15th October. **Chunking** opened first in Essen, and then toured to Amsterdam and Marseille. Here is a sample from the reviews:

'... a fresh and wilful piece, an anarchic punk polonaise, campily barbed. Particularly bracing. [...] The choreographer cleverly leads us quite organically from compelling lunacy to an inescapable sort of sombreness.'

Trouw, "Infectious copulating jumble of people as dressage", Sander Hiskemuller, 23/5/05.
'**Chunking** is a playful mixture of dance theatre, performance and art, in which the attractive design helps to define the appearance of the work. The combination of frivolous hedonism and decadent anarchism appears to be related to the work of artists such as Micha Klein and Joep

van Lieshout: amusing and wry at the same time. This is portrayed very well by the actors in this highly imaginative garden of delights.'

NRC Handelsblad, "A mimic copulation act", Isabella Lanz, 21/5/05.

Les Inrockuptibles, "Chunking Express", Fabienne Arvers, 20-26/7/05.

'What was created here was amusing, eccentric, erotic, lusty, full of humour, absurd and bizarre – and with marvellous colours too – and took one through the whole range of sensuality.'

WAZ, "Rallying call to the subconscious", DG, 18/5/05.

On Wednesday 15th June **Isabella's room** was awarded the prize for the best foreign piece in the dance category in France. This prize is given by the Syndicat professionnel de la critique de théâtre, de musique et de danse, or the combined French performing arts press, in other words. Viviane De Muynck went to receive the award. Meanwhile this show is still busily touring this autumn. In 2006 there is already one intercontinental tour date on the calendar, in Perth (UWA Perth International Arts Festival in Australia).

This summer we also presented **Needlapb 10** at this year's controversial Avignon Festival. Our limited presence did not go unnoticed.

'This is undoubtedly what Avignon needed: a shared moment. [...]

After *Isabella's room*, the cult performance at the 2004 festival, the same company of actors, dancers and musicians is back, still just as fine, still just as magnetic.'

Le Monde, "The exceedingly gentle violence of Needcompany", Fabienne Darge, 20/7/05.

On 12th October **Needlapb 11** will be presented at the Kaaitheater in Brussels.

We would also like to welcome Sigrid Bousset, who will be giving her assistance to Needcompany in the areas of publications and artistic strategy.

'We'll leave the concise and incisive closing words to Jan Lauwers: '*Chunking* is an intangible, slightly hysterical piece.' And that's exactly why we like to see it so much.'