EXTRACTS FROM JAN LAUWERS' LANGUAGE UNION LECTURE ON THEATRE, GIVEN IN ANTWERP ON 30 NOVEMBER 2009

Art is tough. Hard to break. According to Gilbert & George, the big mistake made in the last century was that artists forgot their public. They said that in the twentieth century art was not only made by artists but also only for artists. The visual arts have also been taken over by a very wealthy elite that degrades works of art to the same status as conflict diamonds, so that for the more naïve spectator all that remains is its significance as an event. As a result, Duchamp's urinal has once again become no more than a urinal, not only because the showbiz society has forbidden independent thought, but also because too many people keep their head in the sand.

However, there is one art form that avoids much of this manipulation, and that is theatre. This medium, probably considered one of the most old-fashioned, gamely withstands the attacks of the showbiz society. It is on too small a scale and at the same time involves too many people, which makes it too expensive, yet it is also too fleeting to have any investment value. The beauty of this medium is the idea of collaboration. Not that theatre is the peak of collectivity. Collectivity is a very hazy notion in the arts world. I would rather call it cooperation on a positive conflict.

So why is it that no writers are ever employed full-time by the official theatres, let alone employed to head the theatres? At the very most, a writer is occasionally given a commission, is paid a pittance for it and then hopes to get some royalties. What's more, a theatre-maker who writes his own plays remains just that: a theatre-maker who writes his own plays; he is hardly ever considered to be ... a writer.

Yet it is only normal that a playwright stages his plays himself. Shakespeare, Chekhov, Müller, Molière, Brecht and Claus were not only great authors but also great theatre-makers. Perhaps this is what is not understood. That, as a consequence of the formatting of our society, and the principle of everyone in their compartment, a distinction is preferred between writing for theatre and making theatre.

We are on the verge of a new era. A time when major choices will have to be made; we can all sense this. It makes our era hugely interesting. Whatever choice is made, some things will disappear and be replaced by others. In the near future a great many languages will vanish, and

believe me, history has no regrets. No one laments the fact that we no longer speak Ancient Greek, and that is a language we still recall. A great many languages have vanished unnoticed into the margins of history. Because a language is nothing more than an accident. A writer nevertheless writes in his native language. But is this a necessity? What choices do writers have in a globalised society? Stefan Zweig committed suicide because he couldn't write in any other language but his own. Nabokov didn't write his best works in his native language. Beckett wrote perfectly in two languages. That holy of holies, one's descent – what are called roots – is perhaps still an essential, but also romantic, notion on which too much emphasis has been put at certain moments in history. It is said that we would have to suffer an attack from another galaxy before there could be any global solidarity or common language. That's as far as we have reached in interculturalism.

I see the theatre of the Low Countries evolving very positively. Amidst the possibly unintended elitist attitude held by theatremakers in the late seventies and early eighties, the most interesting of them, Jan Joris Lamers and Jan Decorte, opted for very small theatres and they were very happy with an audience of ten. I remember the lively conversations led by Hugo De Greef in the mid-eighties, when he asked a significant number of theatre-makers to venture into the larger theatres. (Even an expensive company like The Wooster Group refused to perform for more than two hundred people). There was a passionate dislike of the large official theatres and the official repertory theatre. In Flanders, this sort of theatre was entirely eliminated and a new generation of theatre-makers arose who considered larger theatres definitely worth using. People such as lan Fabre, Johan Simons, Ivo Van Hove and Guy Cassiers gave the large theatres back their added value. In this way they breathed new life into the moribund theatres, but without losing sight of the 'garage circuit' of their past, increasing their audiences tenfold and expanding the opportunities to give work to playwrights. It must be said that this was an evolution that was not repeated in any other country. We are still living in the aftermath of postmodernism and the anything-is-possible mentality that often led to nothing-is-possible-anymore. And that at a time when art liked being under a cloud. But art is tough and the greatest illusion art has ever come up with is that it is not essential. I know for sure that without

art life in an affluent society would not be worth living. And a life has to be made, not just lived.

Playwrights are undervalued in the Low Countries. Thomas Bernhard was still a hero, albeit much maligned. Even Brecht's most right-wing enemies said they were sorry such a talent had opted for the left. In Chile there are as many literary programmes on television as cookery programmes. Every self-respecting festival in France devotes a lot of attention to the authors themselves. In Mexico the best-known poets read their poems to thousands of people in the national parks. In Austria first readings are regularly given in packed theatres. Alright, it's true we are not the same as them, but we do have a lot of pretension and international festivals are swamped by Flemish productions, and to a slightly lesser extent Dutch productions too, so there is huge appreciation for plays and productions that don't look for their raison d'être only around the parish pump.

This is in fact precisely the strength of small countries. That by being small we can think faster and sometimes more clearly. At the moment we are the world leaders in the performing arts because we have independent artists who know that one's place of birth is incidental, not a place to die for, only to live for. If we can be proud of our Dutch language it's because we don't have any trouble learning three other languages. Because we know that what can be read between the lines is more important than the lines themselves. This is why they have no problem understanding us all over the world and have a lot of respect for us.

would like to add one more thing, especially for the new Flemish Minister of Culture: Mrs Schauvliege, here in Flanders we have what is possibly the most efficient subsidy system for the performing arts in the world. In this too we lead the way. To look at another example, the Anglo-Saxon model has no international presence and has made England a more culturally impoverished country. You have gold at your disposal, Mrs Schauvliege, work hard for it, and don't forget the writers: they are the conscience of our affluent society. You could make a start by reading them. Because, Mrs Schauvliege, prosperity means that a lot of people have the opportunity to reflect. And that is one of the most important functions of art. After all, anyone can entertain us, can't they?

NEEDCOMPANY

The next few months at NEEDCOMPANY

Needcompany is getting the very oration with the artist Lot Lemm year off to a vigorous start with resulted in the Lemm&Barkey two premieres in February.

In **This door is too small (for a bear)**, Grace Ellen Barkey has created her own formal idiom, a part of her quest for 'how to free the mind', for that part of the mind that remains unfathomed. Frank Zappa's motto 'to me, absurdity is the only reality' provides the thread that runs through her new production, which balances midway between the surreal and the psychedelic.

Her increasingly intensive collab-

resulted in the Lemm&Barkey label. For this new production they have sought out radical poetic images in a grotesque world

The journalist Sarah Vankersschaever's view of the performance in De Standaard (2 January 2010):

'I'm betting on the powerful fragility of doubt, eroticism that gets stuck in absurd sensuality and, let's not forget, a world that's so funny it hurts. Lemm&Barkey in any case promise 'beautiful failure, the

tragedy of a clown, the clumsy cruelty of sexuality'. An exciting prospect!'

This door is too small (for a bear) will open at the Kaaitheater in Brussels on 25 February and will then tour to Essen (D), Marseille, Frankfurt and Gijón.

In addition, Lemm&Barkey's video of **The Porcelain Project** / **Installation** has been selected for the 7th International Film Festival on Earthenware and Glass (Festival International du Film sur l'Argile et le Verre) in Montpellier.

Agenda

THIS DOOR IS TOO **SMALL (FOR A BEAR)**

Grace Ellen Barkey

Concept: Lemm&Barkey

Created with /performed by: Misha Downey, Julien Faure, Yumiko Funaya, Benoît Gob, Sung-Im Her, Maarten Seghers

A Needcompany production. Coproducers: ImPulsTanz (Vienna), PACT Zollverein (Essen), künstlerhaus mousonturm (Frankfurt). Kaaitheater In association with

25, 26, 27 February 2010 Kaaitheater Brussels Tickets: +32 2 201 59 59

(Brussels).

11, 12 March 2010 PACT Zollverein, Essen (D) Tickets: +49 20 18 12 22 00

28, 29 April 2010 Le Merlan, scène nationale à Marseille

Tickets: +33 4 91 11 19 20

20, 21, 22 May 2010 künstlerhaus mousonturm, Frankfurt

Tickets: +49 69 40 58 95 20

11. 12 lune 2010 Teatro de la Laboral, Gijón Tickets: +34 902 106 601

RICKY AND RONNY AND HUNDRED STARS - A SADO COUNTRY **OPERA**

MaisonDahlBonnema

With: Anna Sophia Bonnema, Hans Petter Dahl and Louise Peterhoff.

AMaisonDahlBonnema/Needcompany production.

Coproducers: Theater aan

Vrijthof, Euregionaal Opera- en Muziektheaterfestival (Maastricht), BIT Teatergarasjen (Bergen) and Noorderzon Grand Théâtre (Groningen)

In association with Kaaitheater (Brussels) and Könstnärsnämden (Stockholm).

With the support of the Norsk kulturråd.

25, 26 February 2010 AINSI / Euregionaal Operaen Muziektheaterfestival, Maastricht

Tickets: +31 43 350 55 55 5, 6 March 2010 BIT Teatergarasjen, Bergen

Tickets: +47 55 23 22 35 12. 13 March 2010 Kaaistudios, Brussels Tickets: +32 2 201 59 59

5, 6 June 2010 Operadagen Rotterdam Tickets: +31 10 411 81 10

SAD FACE | HAPPY FACE

Three stories on Human Nature

A TRILOGY

Part 1: Isabella's room (the past)

Part 2: The Lobster Shop (the future)

Part 3: The Deer House (the present)

Jan Lauwers

With: Grace Ellen Barkey, Anneke Bonnema, Hans Petter Dahl, Viviane De Muynck, Misha Downey, Julien Faure, Yumiko Funaya, Benoît Gob, Sung-Im Her, Maarten Seghers, Eléonore Valère, Inge Van Bruystegem

20 March 2010 Maison de la culture de Grenoble MC2, Grenoble Tickets: +33 4 76 00 79 00

27, 29 June 2010 MALTA Festival, Poznan Tickets: +48 61 646 52 43

THE DEER HOUSE

Jan Lauwers

With: Grace Ellen Barkey, Anneke Bonnema, Hans Petter Dahl, Viviane De Muynck, Misha Downey, Julien Faure, Yumiko Funaya, Benoît Gob, Maarten Seghers, Eléonore Valère, Inge Van Bruystegem

Produced by Needcompany and Salzburger Festspiele. Coproducers: Schauspielhaus Zürich and PACT Zollverein (Essen). With assistance from deSingel (Antwerp) and Kaaitheater (Brussels).

18 March 2010 Maison de la culture de Grenoble MC2, Grenoble Tickets: +33 4 76 00 79 00

31 March, 1, 2, 3, 4 April 2010 XII Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogotá

10, 11 April 2010 Teatro Central, Seville Tickets: +34 955 037 200

15. 16 April 2010 Teatro Alhambra, Granada Tickets: +34 958 028 000

22, 23, 24 April 2010 Le Merlan, scène nationale à Marseille Tickets: +33 4 91 11 19 20

7, 8, 10, 11, 12 May 2010 Théâtre de la Ville, Paris Tickets: +33 1 42 74 22 77

18, 19, 20 June 2010 Akademietheater, Vienna Tickets: +43 1 514 44 41 45

THE LOBSTER SHOP

Jan Lauwers

With: Hans Petter Dahl, Grace Ellen Barkey, Anneke Bonnema, Yumiko Funaya, Benoît Gob, Inge Van Bruystegem, Julien Faure, Maarten Seghers

Needcompany production. coproduced by Festival d'Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Théâtre Garonne (Toulouse), PACT Zollverein (Essen), Cankarjev Dom (Ljubljana), La Rose des Vents (Scène Nationale de Villeneuve d'Asca). Automne en Normandie (Le Havre). La Filature (Scène Nationale de Mulhouse). Kaaitheater (Brussels) and deSingel (Antwerp).

With the support of the European Union Culture 2000 programme.

17 March 2010 Maison de la culture de Grenoble MC2, Grenoble Tickets: +33 4 76 00 79 00

ISABELLA'S ROOM

Ian Lauwers

With: Viviane De Muynck, Hans Petter Dahl, Anneke Bonnema, Benoît Gob, Misha Downey, Julien Faure, Yumiko Funava, Sung-Im Her, Maarten Seghers / Ludde Hagberg, Jan Lauwers, Elke Janssens, Lemm&Barkey

A Needcompany production, coproduced by Festival d'Avignon, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), Théâtre Garonne (Toulouse), La Rose des Vents (Scène Nationale de Villeneuve d'Ascq), Brooklyn Academy of Music (New York) and welt in basel theaterfestival. In association with Kaaitheater, Brussels.

16 March 2010 Maison de la culture de Grenoble MC2, Grenoble Tickets: +33 4 76 00 79 00

27, 28 May 2010 L'Arsenal, Metz

Tickets: +33 3 87 74 16 16

AN OHNO COOPERATION EVENING OHNO COOPERATION with

> and Jean-Marc Montera A Needcompany/OHNO COOPERATION production in collaboration with GR!M (groupe de recherche et d'improvisation musicales) and Montévidéo (Marseille).

special guests Nicolas Field

27 April 2010 GR!M, Marseille Tickets: +33 4 91 04 69 59

THE BALLAD OF **RICKY AND RONNY** - A POP OPERA

MaisonDahlBonnema

With: Hans Petter Dahl and Anna Sophia Bonnema

ANeedcompany/MaisonDahlBonnema production, with the assistance of Kaaitheater (Brussels) and ImPulsTanz (Vienna International Dance Festival).

23, 24 June 2010 Eurokaz, Zagreb Tickets: +385 1 48 47 856

THE PORCELAIN PROJECT / **INSTALLATION** (VIDEO)

Lemm&Barkey

With: Grace Ellen Barkey, Lot Lemm

A Needcompany production, coproduced by Théâtre Le Quai (Angers), La Rose des Vents (Scène Nationale de Villeneuve d'Ascq), PACT Zollverein (Essen) and Kaaitheater (Brussels).

19, 20, 21 March 2010 7th Festival International du Film sur l'Argile et le Verre, Montpellier Information + 33 1 44 01 08 30

WORKSHOP

17 March 2010

Bern

Viviane De Muynck

15 – 19 February 2010

Maison de la culture de

Grenoble MC2, Grenoble

+33 4 76 00 79 00

Haute école des arts de Bern,

www.hkb.bfh.ch/batheater.html

THE UNAUTHORIZED **PORTRAIT**

A film by Nico Leunen.

Cobblersson Incorporated association with Needcompany and Senstudio.

23 April 2010 Le Merlan, scène nationale à Marseille Tickets: +33 4 91 11 19 20

"THE ARCHIVES OF SAUL J. WANER"

Jan Lauwers' art work in Charim Ungar Contemporary Berlin

6 February until 12 March 2010 Markgrafenstrasse 68, 10969 Berlin +49 30 25 89 86 79 http://www.charimgalerie.at

GOLDFISH GAME

A film by Jan Lauwers

With: Grace Ellen Barkey, Anneke Bonnema, Timothy Couchman, Dick Crane, Gonzalo Cunill, Hans Petter Dahl, Viviane De Muynck. Misha Downey, Victor Lauwers, Tijen Lawton, Carlotta Sagna, Simon Versnel

Produced by Needcompany and De Filmfabriek. With support from the Fonds Film in Vlaanderen, Canvas, Canal+ and Brugge 2002.

24 April 2010 Le Merlan, scène nationale à Marseille Tickets: +33 4 91 11 19 20

MaisonDahlBonnema has now written Ricky and Ronny and Hundred Stars - a Sado Country Opera, a follow-up to their first opera, The Ballad of Ricky and Ronny - a pop opera (2007).

This new work tells the story of the contemporary experiences of a couple for whom there is no happy end. What initially resembles a soap is soon transformed into a metaphorical tangle, a psychedelic nirvana in which several realities intermingle. This sadistic underworld is coloured by melancholy landscape songs.

Ronny and Hundred Stars - a Sado Country Opera will take place at the Euregional Opera and Musical Theatre Festival in Maastricht and then tours to Bergen (NO), Brussels and Rotterdam.

We welcome Louise Peterhoff back to Needcompany, where she will join Anna Sophia Bonnema and Hans Petter Dahl in this new opera.

Apart from this, MaisonDahlBonnema have taken their first intercontinental step, receiving

The premiere of Ricky and a warm welcome for The Ballad of Ricky and Ronny - a pop opera at The Spiral Hall in Tokyo. In June this show will be on at Furokaz in Zagreb.

> Jan Lauwers' Sad Face | Happy **Face** trilogy brought the year to a close at deSingel in Antwerp. The audience braved snowstorms but was compensated with seven hours of theatre. This was preceded by the launch of **Kebang!**, the collected plays of Jan Lauwers, which also attracted a sizeable audience. March, **Isabella's room**, The Lobster Shop and The

Deer House were performed in Grenoble, first separately and then as a trilogy. The Sad Face | Happy Face trilogy can also be seen at the MALTA festival in Poznan in June.

In April, The Deer House will be going intercontinental, touching down first in Bogotá. It will then move on to Sevilla, Granada and Marseille in the same month. In May it will have 5 nights at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris and will end up at the Burgtheater in Vienna in June, where Needcompany caused a furore during its first vear as artist in residence.

Needcompany's smallest splinter group, OHNO COOPERATION (Maarten Seghers and Jan Lauwers), will be giving a one-off concert at the GR!M in Marseille. with special guests Nicolas Field and Jean-Marc Montera.

Over the next few months Viviane De Muynck has several workshops scheduled in Berne and Grenoble.

Ian Lauwers' art work will be exhibited at Charim Ungar Contemporary in Berlin in February.

EDCOMPANY ш

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