Dear friend,

I recently received a mail from the extraordinary laka Hayosh, the Israeli artist who uses ‘ten thousand bombs and grenades’, and who at our invitation put on an incredibly entertaining fireworks performance in Antwerp several summers ago. He gave us a glimpse into his correspondence with his father on the world and art.

Having seen his son’s latest work of sculpture, his father wrote: “Ah... the work itself is quite impressive, I’ve checked the construction and it is very clean and well made. Also the name plate helped a lot.

However, for your next big piece, I suggest you might want to draw inspiration from more extreme cases of the “fear factor”, with topics such as:...

Animal abuse; cars and drivers getting carried away by floods; illegal immigrants getting violently apprehended by the authorities; unchecked terrorists wandering around the world looking for a target; countries painting nuclear missiles at each other; loaded weapons in domestic homes; kids going to school carrying knives; alcohol and grenades; loaded nuclear missiles at each other; loaded terrorists wandering around the world being handed by the authorities; unchecked property; death by tsunami; death by suicide spots; the vandalising of public property; death by avalanches... Maybe we can have some for our next correspondence, what do you think?”

In an incredibly comical way, this mail summarises what is being discussed in virtually all public dialogues, colloquia and art forums in Europe. Art and the intolerably heavy responsibility it bears for the world in which it exists.

The question raised by the father, who seems to me just as extraordinary as his son, is very relevant and the answer is not simple. After all, at a time of great uncertainty, the call for clarity is a signal that cannot be ignored. The demand for a hierarchy of subjects is absolutely classic and recurs again and again. The portrait of the king is absolutely classic and recurs again and again: the portrait of the king is a signal of submission, and went off. I know for sure that this play will be performed for years to come. Perhaps until the last witnesses have died. This version was real and had nothing to do with art.

Well, well, I would so much like to have influenced the world and its history. I would also like to listen to all those sociologists, philosophers and politicians who know which way art should go in this world. But it is so hard. The quest involved in every work I do has until now never led to a solution. The questions I ask myself have still not been answered. The world still remains too much outside. I am afraid a great many artists might be subversive a vain notion? Or is art here being confused with survival? When the means become the end, is autonomy superfluous and even dangerous because of its seemingly worthless return? Or is the call for a complete change of life and thus also of art not so futile after all?

So that’s what the correspondence between the father and son is all about. It is comforting that this sort of conversation is taking place all over the world. Comforting because it is a small sign that the autonomous image is always essential and so hard to achieve.

I find it perfectly alright for artists to compromise themselves if the aim is a better world. But I know for sure that the only true artist is the uncompro- mising artist. I find compromise much more fashionable and thus worth no more than the marching rhythm of an advancing army. This marching rhythm is fine for the morale and so is just as quickly forgotten when the spoils of battle are abundant.

This is not cynical, but quite realistic.

I recently experienced an extremely intense moment of mal emotion on seeing a piece of work headed by Matthias Hartmann at the Burgtheater, called ‘Jewish man who comes to the front of the stage and says: ‘Survival is a privilege, and that creates obligations.’ The thirteen hundred members of the audience gave the old man and the other final witnesses a standing ovation lasting several minutes. The old man looked at them, casually showed the palms of his hands, shrugged his shoulders as a sign of submission, and went off. I know for sure that this play will be performed for years to come. Perhaps until the last witnesses have died. This version was real and had nothing to do with art.

I would so much like to have influenced the world and its history. I would also like to listen to all those sociologists, philosophers and politicians who know which way art should go in this world. But it is so hard. The quest involved in every work I do has until now never led to a solution. The questions I ask myself have still not been answered. The world still remains too much outside. I am afraid a great many artists will agree with me that the search for the autonomous image is terribly hard. And that the autonomous image always changes the world but never gives an answer to all these questions. And this contradiction is the real problem.

JL
The next few months at Needcompany

In Needlapp XX, Needcompany kicked off a manic year. Those who were there in Frankfurt witnessed the first intimations of a new work by Jan Lauwers, Maarten Seghers, Mohamed Toukabri (replaces Yumiko Funaya), Benoît Gob, Sung-Im Her, Maarten Seghers, Mohamed Toukabri, Catherine Travelliti, Jan Lauwers, Elke Janssens. Production: Needcompany | Coproduction: Richtkunst, Burgtheater (Vienna) | Figurentheater-Festival (Erlangen).

In March, Grace Ellen Barkey & The Residents will give the order for the MUSHROOMersion. It’s going to get gritty lovely at some places in Flanders, when this dance performance calls in at Teerlingen, Dendermonde and Antwerp. The music: the American art collective The Residents wrote specially for this production has now been issued on vinyl as well as on CD.

The next Needcompany premiere will most on the shoulders of Maarten Seghers. What do you mean what do you mean and other pleasantries is a solo lasting 55 minutes and 42 seconds that is midway between pure spoken comedy, performance art and visual art. The Frankfurt audience were in stitches and saw only a fraction of the madness that Seghers will be spreading at the premiere in the FIDENA Festival on 21 May. Seghers witty and eventually exposes artistic practice by way of stunning absurdity. In this exiting fantasy world, the sculptures around him transform into actor, instrument and witness. You don’t want to miss this.

Maarten Seghers rounds off the series of premieres with the concept performance Rhythm Conference feat. Inner Splitts, its makers, Hans Petter Dahl and Arne Sophia Bonnema, unfold a concentration, fantastic conferences on stage, together with the Swiss performers Nicolas Field and Catherine Travelliti. Bodies vibrate, fixed up by Field’s live drumming, visuals and abstractions sustain the space and put you in a trance.

“We say no to existing forms and conventions, and seek out the monstrous, the unexpected, in an attempt to escape the prevailing capitalist consensus, whether it be the aesthetics of the beautiful and new, or the codes of social communication.” — Dahl and Bonnema

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