

NieuwZwart – Beyond the Eclipse of the Body

Theatre - Chronicles and Essays

By Gina Șerbănescu

December, 2010

Disjointed elements melting together to create a self...this is the reconciliation of the opposites...a pair makes and makes not a whole, two things can live in agreement and disagreement at the same time. Because all things make a whole and each and every thing is identical to the others...(Heraclitus).

Three types of language: words, music and movement...

Sentences weaving together in a story bearing the sign of power, a story shrouded in a dark-surreal fog.

Naked bodies put under the scrutinizing light (like sun rays burning their skins), bodies from which pain and scream surge. This is one of the first images the eye of the audience meets in “NieuwZwart”, a performance created by Wim Vandekeybus, featuring seven dancers, an actress and a rock band “hanging” above the stage (live music interpreted by Mauro Pawlowsky, Elko Blijweert and Jeroen Stevens who are perched on a platform above the stage).

Words, sounds and gestures intermingle as to give birth to a story not meant to be listened to or be interpreted by making out a coherent plot. Instead one can “peel its layers” according to one’s capacity of debunking the enshrined concepts regarding the meanings of words, the function of sounds and the image of the body as seen by the contemporary society.

These types of discourse cannot be analysed one at a time. The performance draws upon a well-balanced synthesis consisting of Peter Verhelst’s text, Mauro Pawlowsky’s music and the stage movement as imagined by Wim Vandekeybus. The gestures become increasingly abrupt, the

bodies engage in impossible movements (Kylie Walters, a protagonist, describes them as ranging from “human to alienish”). Bodies coming into the world, suffering, colliding against each other, invading and assuming new identities, all these hint at a dream world, a world shaped by each letter of every word, by the power of each sound and by the tragic spasms of bodies.

It would be narrow of us to label this world as violent. Violent as the gestures may seem, the stage does not host a single act of violence. The things we see are but the desperate call of a world in its attempt to unshackle itself from a common human condition, an attempt at inscribing the representation of the human body on a new sphere of perception. Each dancer’s body language stands as an epitome of a certain type of gesture, each dancer attains a certain uniqueness only to lose it after running the whole gamut of body movements. A spectacle of rebirth bursts of sound and a shower of word meanings.

One never ought to indulge in the idea that this is a mere live concert in the background. In this performance the music is a sort of energy highlighting the variety of meaning of the body language. A sort of energy that gives birth to words and is, at the same time, the fruit of words. The feminine presence telling the story is projected in a dynamic stance, so that we should be able to see things from various angles.

We also should not let ourselves be deceived into believing that the individuals on the stage represent concrete characters. In fact, they stand for certain human conditions one should escape and try to reinterpret. As beings trapped into contemporaneity we are used to moving according to social decorum, we utter words strangled by enshrined meanings, we listen only to that music that suits a limited personal context.

The performance Wim Vandekeybus imagines unveils this very grey recurrence in the life of the contemporary man: if we want to escape the cozy human futility we must experience a total eclipse of the body, we must learn “to move and bend” unnaturally without losing sight of the fact that we should also stealthily integrate these new movements into the social decorum. The laborious body language Wim Vandekeybus proposes to us bears a rather personal touch and must be perceived beyond its flamboyant and seemingly violent appearance. The trademark of this language is the poetry of power and force, a reconciliation of opposites that moulds stage movement into a fresh discourse – a discourse advocating for the leap towards a new understanding of our condition. The condition of body-endowed beings.

Once we have looked at the sun we can see a new, black horizon (NieuwZwart means “new black”) beyond which we may perceive a new aspect of the human condition to which our eyes will gradually adjust. Then everything will become as it was, everything will grow obsolete directing us to a new eclipse, towards a new beginning/end. The struggle of the body must perpetually repeat this cycle in order to deconstruct and build its own

condition. It's all in the "eternal flow of things" foreseen by Heraclitus, it's all in Plato's description of the physical world. Once thrown in the stream of existence, this world has to wither and crumble in the very nothingness from which it will rise anew.

NieuwZwart

World Premiere: 9th of May 2009 Mercat de les Flors, Barcelona

Direction, Choreography, Scenography: Wim Vandekeybus

Music composed by: Mauro Pawlowsky

Starring: Tanja Marín Friðjónsdóttir, Dawid Lorenc, Bénédicte Mottart, Olivier Mathieu, Máté Mészáros, Ulrike Reinbott, Imre Vass, Kylie Walters

Adaptation: Peter Verhelst

Written by: Greet Van Poeck

Light design: Alban Rouge, Wim Vandekeybus

Photo: Josep Aznar and Pieter Jan de Pue.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thHzOF8jdoc&feature=player_embedded

Translated by: **Andrei Alecsa** and **Diana Maftai**

MTTLC, Bucharest University