

Goodnight: Waiting in Time

A translation of Sleeping Beauty by students at the FMI

In her choreography 'The Time', Betsy Torenbos demonstrates that life forms a continuous ongoing rhythm, alternating between action and reflection. Supported by the music of Louis Andriessen, she manages to translate the rhythm of entering and departing in an intriguing manner. A heavy stone, typical of the megalithic burial mounds in the Dutch Province of Drenthe, hangs permanently and immovably on a rope above the dance floor representing the elusive notion of 'Always', which can only be depicted in the theatre. Within this 'Always', waiting is an act.

When, in the latter part of the sixties, JCJ Vanderheyden had finished a working period, having equipped large white canvases with broad black (or yellow or blue) edges as portals from the present to the future (his skies and horizons above the Himalayas had not yet appeared), he decided to reflect on things by doing nothing more, by only sitting still, waiting until he could continue. He referred to this as 'being bored', but it was being bored as an action, as a meaningful occupation that would subsequently enable him to move on. He built a small temple for himself, a wooden box with a sofa he could lie on, exactly the right length, with an overarching window as a roof. He lay there with a view of the sky surrounded by the tops of trees that indicated the season. And he waited until it was time to move on.

Active waiting is contemplation, meditation. Activity is oriented toward emptiness, one is waiting to be reborn. ('... This is also similar to the idea of meditation, an almost motionless activity allowing the individual to think in clarity' (Camus).)

In conjunction with Bea de Visser, a semester docent, students following the advanced MFA Scenography programme at the Frank Mohr Institute (FMI) analysed the phenomena of *waiting* and *theatre* in a number of round-table sessions devoted to Sleeping Beauty, and put them into a mutual perspective. 'Waiting as an element of suffering as a precondition of creativity, inspiration ...' (Beckett).

In intensive brainstorm sessions on several consecutive Tuesdays, the students, inspired by the meanings of the fairytale, compared the physical charge of the film with that of the theatre, the consecutive stages (and layers) in time, the position of the individual person in time, his or her need to fill something in there, the individual process of waiting, the test card as a symbol of contemporary waiting, death and suicide, the significance of counting, numbers and series, yearning, Utopia, flying, future or escape...

Writers offered a challenge ... What did Beckett claim? And Camus? What about Roland Barthes, the philosopher of the individual moment in time who wrote the fascinating account of photography and death? The group opted for Barthes. He referred to time as the 'essence of waiting'. When you are waiting, time is a constant quality that you cannot grasp, despite its constancy. We (humankind) are dependent on this contrasting condition, because without time there is no existence, just as without time there is no waiting. Is waiting then the essence of existence?

NWU is an occasional company based on the FMI's MFA Scenography programme. The company is made up of students following this programme. They worked intensively on

the dramatic interpretation of *Sleeping Beauty* under the supervision of Bea de Visser in the first semester of the academic year 2005-2006. NWU means Not Wearing Uniforms. There was no hierarchy in the project, there was no rank or authority, and it was self-evident that the most creative and meaningful solution would be given pride of place. In the first period, the various angles of approach of the group and the various layers of the fairytale were examined. Under Bea's supervision, diverse interpretations were gathered, meanings extracted and the drama worked out. Waiting became the main theme. In her sleep, *Sleeping Beauty* waits for the liberating moment of the touch by which new life presents itself. In previous centuries, waiting became an important literary construction. But waiting has become intrusively commonplace and visible in the real world, too, as in asylum seekers' centres, refugee camps, and control posts. It is waiting driven by despair and longing, the result of political tension and social impotence.

The FMI is the Institute for Advanced Study and Research in the Arts and Emergent Media of Minerva Academy of Visual Arts and Design. It is a part of the Hanzehogeschool University of Higher Professional Education in Groningen. MFA Scenography is the youngest programme at this Institute. This post-graduate programme, co-ordinated by the core teacher Mirjam Grote Gansey, has the objective of intensifying theatre design by producing scenographers who are capable of bringing imagination to drama on the basis of a substantial knowledge of the various manifestations of theatre in both its autonomous and its literary guises. The students come from various (Bachelor's degree) backgrounds, such as the theatre school, dance academy, theatre technology, theatre design, the visual arts, graphic design, and architecture. They have followed their longing to apply their knowledge and skills in a world where the illusory side of life is predominant, where thinking is based on imagination. They want to work from an angle of approach in which the visual arts and theatre enter the arena of visual translation. Their interests vary from the autonomous performance and visual impact to a completely co-ordinated theatre play.

It was marvellous to see that Gerrit Timmers, one of the artistic members of the board of the *Onafhankelijk Toneel* ('Independent Theatre Company'), welcomed the idea of a theatre group and offered them the opportunity to perform in one of the auditoriums of the OT Theatre in Rotterdam. I wish to express my gratitude to him and his organization for this hospitality and for giving us the chance to show what we are engaged in.

The NWU group (Yaron Abulafia, Kim Geerts, Melissa van Geldere, Wikke van Houwelingen, Marloes van der Hoek, Zuzana Hudekova, Marieke Küttschreuter, and Franzis Wiese) consists of inspired people. All of them opted for the theatre because they want to realize more than an image. Their fascination is formed by the content and the social tension that produces this content. They want to work with people, with the implications of co-existence, with philosophical layers and psychological charges. They indicate that with their choice of topic. I thank them for their endeavour to apply their talent to produce this result.

The group was motivated by the film artist Bea de Visser who, more than anyone else, knows how to develop the train of thought of a group like this, to intensify it, and, indeed, to bring it to fruition.

Petri Leijdekkers, director of the Frank Mohr Institute

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