

WIM VANDEKEYBUS

BY
ERWIN JANS

KRITISCH THEATER LEXICON

VLAAMS THEATER INSTITUUT
1999

THE CRITICAL THEATRE LEXICON IS A SERIES OF PORTRAITS OF MAJOR DRAMATIC ARTISTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. THESE PORTRAITS ARE COMMISSIONED BY THE FLEMISH THEATRE INSTITUTE AND THE FOUR UNIVERSITIES: U.I.ANTWERP, UNIVERSITY OF GHENT, K.U.LEUVEN & V.U.BRUSSELS. THIS PUBLICATION FORMS PART OF AN ALL-EMBRACING HISTORICAL PROJECT ON THE PERFORMING ARTS IN FLANDERS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. THE EDITORIAL BOARD COMPRISES THEATRE ACADEMICS FROM THE FOUR UNIVERSITIES AND PEOPLE FROM THE THEATRE WORLD. PUBLICATION STARTED IN SEPTEMBER 1996.

BIOGRAPHY

Wim Vandekeybus was born on June 30th, 1963, in Herenthout. With his rural upbringing, Vandekeybus was often in contact with animals in their natural environment. His father was the only veterinarian serving six neighbouring villages. As a boy, Vandekeybus accompanied his father, sometimes deep in the night, when summoned to help deliver a calf. These moments had a great emotional impact on him: 'Before calling my father, the farmers would have tried everything. We would be confronted with an atmosphere of catastrophe. My father would have to put things right, and quickly. Calmly and with precision, he did what he had to do. And suddenly relief would come. Sometimes death was the only salvation he could offer. Quickly and efficiently, without pathos.'¹ The danger, the imminent catastrophe, the risk, the precision of the movements: they are experiences that Vandekeybus was to use, time after time, in his dance compositions.

He began studies in psychology in Leuven, but did not complete them, irritated, as he says himself, by the surplus of 'objective science'. But his interest in the complex relationship between body and spirit remained. A workshop with Paul Peyskens brought him into contact with theatre. He followed some dance courses (classic, modern, tango), and took up film and photography as well. An audition for Jan Fabre was a turning point. Vandekeybus was taken on and travelled around the world for two years with the Fabre performance *The Power of Theatrical Madness*, playing one of the two naked kings. After this tour he decided to strike out for himself, and withdrew for several months with a group of young, inexperienced dancers calling themselves *Ultima Vez* (Spanish for 'Last Time'), to work on his first production, *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987). During the rehearsals in Madrid, he met the painter Octavio Iturbe, who was to become one of his most important artistic collaborators. Even though the première in Holland of *What the Body Does Not Remember* was received with scepticism, the performance made an international breakthrough. Vandekeybus suddenly became one of the world's top young choreographers. Twice he received the prestigious Bessy Award in New York, for the original confrontation between dance and music. Despite

fundamental differences in their work, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Jan Fabre and Wim Vandekeybus are seen as the representatives of a Flemish impulse in modern dance characterised by immediacy, authenticity and physical energy. Vandekeybus has been working with changing international casts since his first production. He recruits his dancers through countless auditions at home and abroad. Because of the lack of structural financial means in his own country, his productions are always international coproductions. More than twelve pieces have been created by Wim Vandekeybus and Ultima Vez between 1987 and 1999. From 1993 to 1999 he was 'artist-in-residence' at the Royal Flemish Theatre, which strengthened the financial situation of his company during that period. The 1995 revival of his very first production, *What the Body Does Not Remember*, was an enormous success. Vandekeybus was guest choreographer for the first time in 1996, directing the performance of *Exhaustion from Dreamt Love* for the Israeli company Batsheva Dance Company. In 1997 he worked for the first time since *The Power of Theatrical Madness* with Jan Fabre, on the solo *Body, Body on the Wall...* In 1998 Wim Vandekeybus and Franz Marijnen, stage director and artistic director of the Royal Flemish Theatre, worked together on a performance about the life and work of Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Day of Heaven and Hell*. Franz Marijnen withdrew during the rehearsal period when the descendants of Pasolini refused the rights to his works, and Vandekeybus continued alone. In spite of the difficulties, the Pasolini project gave the initial impetus to his latest production, *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* (1999), a performance created with male dancers only. Vandekeybus' performances are programmed at all the important international dance festivals.

SOCIAL AND ARTISTIC CONTEXT

It is an impossible task to sketch in a few lines the social and artistic context of the eighties as a background against which the work of Vandekeybus can be interpreted. It is a period which is too recent to be viewed in a mature perspective; moreover, every artist is linked with 'his times' in a complex and often untransparent way. Not only do his times speak to us through his work, but his work is also an expression of those times: while his work embodies the themes of his times, the artist also imposes his own themes on his times. His work makes us recognise the times as his (and ours).

The eighties is a crucial period in the development and renewal of the performing arts in Flanders. The beginning of the decade is characterised by an exceptional artistic vitality. A generation of young theatre-makers developed their own radical, personal aesthetics. They searched for their own production norms and abandoned established artistic structures. Hardly anything was brought along from the past and from tradition. The traditional theatre space, repertory, classical use of text, traditional acting were left behind and theatre turned to to experiments with space, time, form, video, film, dance, music, performance. Jan Fabre, Jan Decorte, Jan Lauwers with the Epigonen-theatre and later the Needcompany, among others, each developed their own strongly visual theatre language. The overlapping of genres and interdisciplinarity were two central ideas of the new aesthetics developed at the beginning of the eighties which sought to link up with the international theatre avant-garde.

Also (and especially) in the field of dance, Flanders awoke violently from a long hibernation. Klapstuk, the international dance festival in Leuven, introduced the international avant-garde in dance. Just a few years later, with Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Jan Fabre and Wim Vandekeybus, Flanders had taken its place among them at the avant-garde top. With reference to *What the Body Does Not Remember*, a Dutch dance journalist wrote in 1987 of Vandekeybus: 'He obviously belongs to the new bunch of theatre-makers (Fabre, De Keersmaeker, Needcompany) who have made the Belgians the Masters of the Body for the last few years.'² Such an observation clearly indicates that the distinction between the genres has become less clear-cut: theatre, dance, per-

formance overlap in a concentration on the body. About the work of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Michèle-Anne De Mey and Wim Vandekeybus, the American critic Anna Kisselgoff wrote in the same year: 'Seen together rather than in isolation, they bring into relief a voracious passion for movement. Energy and physicality are primary. The same physicality often results in a powerful and ambiguous eroticism'.³ A passion for movement, energy and eroticism: the body as the ultimate reference of dance.

Yet it would be wrong to deny the body (and thus the performances of Vandekeybus) any social meaning. Even though in his first productions Vandekeybus tried to reject all unambiguous meanings or interpretations, his dance vocabulary does say something about the society in which our bodies function daily. The title of the first performance, *What the Body Does Not Remember*, refers to the way in which the body is dealt with in society, as a result of which the body forgets and is itself forgotten. As a reaction against that social 'forgetting', Vandekeybus emphasises the necessity of instinctive movement. What the body has forgotten in its everyday reality is its instinctive trust in its own nature. We also appear to have less and less need for that instinct in order to survive, or so it seems. We try to take chance and the unexpected into our calculations, to protect or insure ourselves against it. When the body actually comes up against immediate danger or menace, instinct may or may not manifest itself again. It is that moment that Vandekeybus looks for and puts on stage in his performances. 'The world has become more extreme. On the one hand, a lot of violence is committed against the body. On the other hand, there is more security. People are afraid and they want to protect themselves, insure themselves, shelter themselves. (...) For me it is important that we work with physical and mental aggression. To make the public question the authenticity of things. Right from the beginning, one of my mottos has been: Back to reality. A return to "real" movement, which others later called dance,'⁴ says Vandekeybus. In Vandekeybus' performances the body is shown 'in free fall'⁵, delivered up to forces it can no longer control, given over to 'reality'. It can be said, somewhat simplistically, that in Vandekeybus' dance, nature breaks through culture once again. Set against a society that depends on an unambiguous and coded physicality, Vandekeybus presents a body that frees itself of its cultural references under extreme circumstances. In order to remember, the

body must forget. But Vandekeybus certainly does not present a natural, paradisaical body as an antithesis to the body that has become alienated from itself. The titles of his performances alone make it obvious that the universe of Vandekeybus is one of antithesis, conflicts, tensions and ruptures.

More than any other art form, modern dance is shaped by the body, its possibilities, its power and, finally, its vulnerability and finiteness. The human ravage that the Aids virus has caused (and not the least in the dance world) has tragically marked dance, and how we think about the body. Then there are the countless images of wounded, mutilated, tortured, raped, murdered bodies which bombard us daily through the media. It would be a one-sided view to see Vandekeybus' performances as simply a display of bodily energy and physical power. The presence of the blind dancers in a performance such as *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul* (1993) makes the borderline between power and vulnerability very thin and almost physically perceptible. In fact, for Vandekeybus the world seems to be growing more and more chaotic and complex, while human control over the world is no more than an illusion. In philosophical terms one can speak about the forces of contingency that determine the world. It is this contingent world that Vandekeybus wants to put ever more emphatically on stage. In the program book of *7 for a Secret never to be told* the American writer Paul Auster is cited: 'Our lives don't really belong to us, you see - they belong to the world, and in spite of our efforts to make sense of it, the world is a place beyond our understanding. We brush up against these mysteries all the time. The result can be truly terrifying - but it can also be comical.'⁶ It is in the attention for the physical, chaotic, complex and contingent reality of the body that the performances of Vandekeybus are of our own times, and thus contemporary in the full meaning of the word.

THE OEUVRE

In the performances of Vandekeybus, the body is at stake in a world of conflicts. It is an arena of tensions and contrasts: horizontal/vertical, high/low, hard/soft, active/passive, man/woman, body/mind, man/animal, order/chaos, intellect/instinct, nature/civilisation... On the basis of these types of contrasts where formal, physical and existential categories overlap, we shall attempt to examine the dance oeuvre of Vandekeybus.

Movement / Dance

'A return to something real in movement, which others later called dance,' is Wim Vandekeybus' succinct and somewhat provocative definition of his own basic principle. Provocative because he rejects the most obvious word to describe his work. More than once in interviews he questions concepts such as 'dance' or 'choreography' and prefers using words which refer to theatre: he calls himself a 'director' and speaks about his performances as 'pieces'. With reference to *7 for a Secret never to be told* (1997) he remarked in an interview with a German newspaper '...dass ich am reinen Tanz nicht so sehr interessiert bin. Mich interessiert die Aussage im Tanz.' What interests me is not so much pure dance as what can be expressed in dance. Why the problem with dance vocabulary? A reason for the scepticism is undoubtedly related to Vandekeybus' own lack of any specific dance training. In selecting his dancers, dance training or dance experience are not the most important criteria (although over the years, professionally trained dancers have also joined the Ultima Vez group). Vandekeybus lays the emphasis strongly on the personality of the dancer. The blind Moroccan Saïd Gharbi, with whom he has made five performances up until now, is perhaps the most obvious example of the choice of someone who has no professional dance training, but who brings along a very personal world and language of movement. In any case, it is obvious that the dance language of Vandekeybus did not develop in the first place in a dialogue with, or as reaction against, the classical and modern dance traditions. Vandekeybus draws his inspiration from other domains: his familiarity with animals, the stylised dance-fight of the tango, physical

effort, physical risk, the bizarre and magical world of writers such as Paul Bowles, Italo Calvino, Milorad Pavić, Julio Cortázar, ... As his work develops, it becomes obvious that the creative motor is the expansion and deepening of his own mythological world and not the search for an autonomous dance vocabulary.

Man / Animal

As the son of a veterinarian, Vandekeybus came in contact with animals from a young age, with their bodies, their movements, their fears, their instinctive reactions and their trust in their own physical possibilities. This animal world is emphatically present in his performances. The film of *Mountains Made of Barking* (1994), shot in an inhospitable Moroccan landscape, brings, in an almost obsessional way, a blind dog into the image, and later the ritual slaughter of a chicken. The movements of the dancers, wearing hairy masks at a certain point in the performance, refer to an animalistic movement pattern: a sort of crawling on outstretched arms and legs, a movement that finds its origins in *Her Body Doesn't Fit her Soul* (1993). The same performance includes, probably not coincidentally, the image of a dancer being plucked like a screeching chicken, his whole body having been covered with plastic bags. In *Alle Größen decken sich zu* (1995) Carlo Verano's hamster with the striking name of Herr Baron is a fascinating personage, and in *7 for a Secret never to be told* a magpie is the thread of the narrative. Vandekeybus has been a horse rider for many years, and that too has left traces in his performances. *Elba and Federico*, the short film edited into *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul*, contains an oppressing slow-motion scene in which a horse is pulled down with ropes. More than its defeat, the slowed images show the impressive power of the horse as it fights for freedom. The performance itself opens with a similar image: a female dancer is tied up with ropes which can only just restrain her wild movements. In his latest performance, *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* (1999), Vandekeybus again pays tribute to the horse. In the opening scene of this performance, Vandekeybus and his dancers trot across the stage like horses. With a minimum of gestures they suggest the turbulence and strength of horses. Among them walks a man with a whip attempting to discipline their wildness.

Movement, power, energy, trust in instinctive (animal) reactions: these are key concepts in a description of the dance language that Vandekeybus has developed. 'I do think that one shouldn't humanise animals, as is so often done today. It is much more necessary to make people more like animals,'⁷⁷ says Vandekeybus. The animal belongs to what the body does not remember. Since *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul* (1993) and *Mountains Made of Barking* (1994) Vandekeybus speaks not so much about the 'instinctive' but rather the 'unconscious': two terms which are not mutually exclusive, but which give a different emphasis. The shift from a word that refers to a physical reaction to a word that refers primarily to a psychological reaction gives a general indication of how the oeuvre of Vandekeybus can be interpreted in a dynamic, developmental context. Instinct and the unconscious both escape our desire for self-control. The loss of self-control is a violent interference in our actions. *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* expresses that in a powerful image wherein dream, violence, the unconscious and the animalistic merge together. While a dancer sleeps, a pillow explodes loudly in the centre of the stage, sending feathers fluttering down. It's as if something inside the head of the sleeping man has exploded: he begins to scream, loudly and fearfully, and tears his clothes off of his body. With his wild beard and hair, he looks like a wild man running across the stage, a mute Kaspar Hauser, not connected with our culture. Is he our dark side: uncontrollable and dangerous, but also maladjusted and afraid? Is he what instinct has degenerated into in our human unconscious? It also looks as though the increasingly compelling use of film images has something to do with this shift. Film and photography are certainly early interests of Vandekeybus which are taking a more obvious place in his work. In this latest performance, the dancers are suddenly frightened out of a deep sleep and realise, to their great distress, that their teeth are black. An image which is difficult to interpret until the film at the end of the performance tells of a group of courtiers with black teeth who murder the king. Is the film their dream, their nightmare? Are their black teeth the symbol of their guilt, which they try to wash clean as quickly as possible as they wake? It is not a coincidence that the shift from instinct to the unconscious is accompanied by a greater use of film and video images in Vandekeybus' performances. Film and photography, two of his early interests, are taking on an ever

more central role. The possibilities of fast editing and changing images, visual effects and enlargement, make film and video the right medium to give form to an irrational and capricious dream logic.

Discipline / Energy

Vandekeybus considers working with Fabre on *The Power of Theatrical Madness* as one of his most important experiences and learning processes. The concentration on the body, on its discipline, its power, its stamina / exhaustion is also characteristic of Vandekeybus' work. When *What the Body Does Not Remember* had its première in Haarlem, the Dutch press in general did not see much more in it than the influence of Jan Fabre. But Vandekeybus has taken a very different direction from Fabre: 'I wanted to explore the opposite of aestheticism and of what obsessed Jan Fabre. The uncontrollable, that which escapes from our consciousness and the body, the intensity of reflexes. I told myself: Back to the reality.'⁷⁸ Unlike Fabre's emphasis on the disciplined body, Vandekeybus puts the focus on the instincts and reflexes of the body. Fabre's view of the body is distant and analytical: the body concentrates completely on achieving extreme control over the muscles. Vandekeybus places the muscles under high tension, and waits for the inevitable movement to explode, which makes any aestheticism impossible. It is this movement which Vandekeybus describes as going back to 'reality'. More than a decade after *The Power of Theatrical Madness*, Fabre and Vandekeybus worked together again on the solo *Body, body on the wall...* (1997). Fabre wrote and directed a text which was partly based on statements about the body made by Vandekeybus in various interviews. Vandekeybus tells the story of how his body was photographed by a photographer, and how she divided up his body analytically and hung the enlarged photos in different halls (one hall for the muscles, another for the digestive system, the cardiovascular system, etc.). Against Fabre's view that divides the body up into parts, Vandekeybus places his own view of the body: powerful, restless, unpredictable... This unpredictability and uncontrollability is the centre of Vandekeybus' own philosophy of the body. Dance critic Anna Kisselgoff of the New York Times began her review of *What the Body Does Not*

Remember with the later much cited words: ‘Tough, brutal, playful, ironic and terrific. Adjectives seem unduly passive in describing *What the Body Does Not Remember*’. In the same article she also uses the description ‘adrenaline choreography’, a clear reference to the physical impulse of Vandekeybus’ dance and its physical impact on the public. The unpredictable and the uncontrolled remain core concepts, but now with an extra dimension of existential significance in addition to their immediate physical meaning. They are also statements about this life that always escapes us and leaves us in confusion.

Dance / Theatre

Looking back on his work, it is possible to view the first three performances, *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987), *Les porteuses de mauvaises nouvelles* (1989) and *The Weight of a Hand* (1990), a compilation performance of both earlier performances with live music, as the first period in his oeuvre. There are indeed ways in which *Immer das Selbe gelogen* (1991) can be seen as starting a new phase. While early productions were marked by a conspicuous lack of concern with cohesion and meaning, from *Immer das Selbe gelogen* onwards Vandekeybus was more clearly in search of ‘stories’ in which the physical body language of the earlier productions was articulated in different ways. The encounters with the old German variety artist Carlo Verano and with the blind Moroccan Saïd Gharbi played an important role in that development. The performances become more theatrical, showing a considerable increase in the use of text, literary and mythological references, film and video images. The universe of the performances expands: the body becomes part of a larger whole. Both real and fictional worlds are brought together in the performance. *Immer das Selbe gelogen* includes film images from the first, chance meeting between Wim Vandekeybus and Carlo Verano in Hamburg, filmed by the choreographer. In *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul*, (1993) the fictional short film *Elba and Federico* is inserted and for *Mountains Made of Barking* (1994) Vandekeybus went to the birthplace of Saïd Gharbi to film. *The Day of Heaven and Hell* is a performance based on the life and work of the Italian artist Pier Paolo Pasolini. Although the actual texts could not be used because of

an interdiction by his descendants (and that interdiction becomes a scene in the piece), certain scenes and scraps of text are echoes of novels such as *Ragazzi di Vita* and *Teorema*, and films such as *Mamma Roma*, *Comizi d'Amore*, *La Ricotta*, *Uccellini e Uccellini* and *Salò*.

Through the years Vandekeybus remains surprisingly faithful to his original intuitions about dance and movement language, but the context in which this language is expressed undergoes a substantial shift.

Virtuosity / Vulnerability

The performances by Vandekeybus are a dramatisation of danger, of risk the body surrenders itself to. The dancer pushes his body to the limits of danger and then beyond: here he must trust his own instinctive reactions or those of the other bodies on the stage. When a dancer, in making a leap, propels himself off the floor horizontally into space, he has no other choice than to trust in his instincts or in another dancer’s well-timed catch. The moment when a dancer lets his safety, his security (and to a certain point his identity) pass out of his own hands, is defined by Vandekeybus as an ‘imaginary catastrophe’: the moment when fantasy is given a free rein to imagine a possible catastrophe. The catastrophe is something that can happen at any moment, and radically change our existence. The catastrophe is something we can neither predict or rationalise. One moment there is nothing, and the next moment there is the catastrophe. Vandekeybus often speaks about the moment of ‘falling in love’ – with the emphasis on ‘falling’. The title of his second performance, *Les porteuses de mauvaises nouvelles (The Bearers of Bad News)* (1989), includes such a moment: the physical and emotional tension of the messenger just before he tells the bad news. The moment of tension contained before the explosion.

The ‘imaginary’ aspect of the catastrophe is important. The body is at stake in Vandekeybus’ world, but this world is also submitted to a number of rules, a number of calculations. The scene from *What the Body Does Not Remember* in which a dancer throws a stone in the air and remains standing under it until another dancer pulls or pushes him away, is a typical example of a scene from Vandekeybus’ initial period. The complex

organisation of time and space is executed perfectly, and at the same time the choreography has a nonchalance heavy with risk. The body is a platform for tension, threat, chance, impulsivity, suppleness and calculation, all at the same time. 'We don't play tragedy, but pure movement,' says Vandekeybus.

Through their emphasis on physical energy, speed, precision, stamina and exhaustion, the performances of Vandekeybus are often described as 'spectacular and virtuoso', with the underlying meaning of 'acrobatic and free of all engagement'. But the 'imaginary catastrophe' not only forces the body to go to the furthest limits of its endurance and capability, it also forces the body to recognise and acknowledge its own vulnerability and fragility. Virtuosity includes signs of power as well as vulnerability, of both control and surrender. Working with blind dancers is another demonstration of that vulnerability. *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul* is not a demonstration of the abilities of 'the visually handicapped'. The rope hanging across the front of the stage is a tangible sign enabling the blind dancers to recognise the edge of the stage. Blindness becomes a metaphor for the frontier between security and vulnerability which Vandekeybus' dance is searching for. The body goes to the limit of its physical possibilities (in a jump) or is placed in a dangerous situation (underneath falling stones). It comes to the point where the body has to surrender blindly to what it can no longer remember: to its own instincts (which ensure that the falling body lands safely on the floor without being hurt) and to trusting in another body in the vicinity (to pull it away from the falling stone in time). Not only does the catastrophe force the dancer to go to the limits of his powers and capabilities, it also confronts him with his own vulnerability. The catastrophe shows the moment when power comes up against its own limitations, and recognises and admits its own fragility.

Active / Passive

The bodies in Vandekeybus' performances find themselves in a complex alternation between active and passive, dominating and being dominated, power and impotence, control and submission. Even though his performances are associated with powerful bodies full of energy, the bodies are also often shown as passive objects at the mercy of something else. The horizontal-vertical

axis is very important in this context. The vertical body is the one that has control, that has a grip on itself and on the world. The body in the horizontal position is the body that is surrendered to something else (sleep, exhaustion, pain, death). Numerous scenes start out with bodies in horizontal positions. As if lifeless, they hang in cords from which they must be cut loose before they can move. This image is most strongly present in *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul*, with echoes in *Mountains Made of Barking* and *Bereft of a Blissful Union* (1996). *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* explicitly thematises sleep, dream, immobility of the body. Numerous are the moments wherein bodies are carried and carelessly thrown on the floor. And in the dance sequences themselves, the vertical position of the body is continually thrown out of balance by backward turning movements, falling movements and horizontal jumps. In the *Four for a Boy* section of *7 for a Secret never to be told* the dancers can hardly keep themselves upright. They spin around on their own axis and fall flat on the floor, struggle to get up and get in each other's way as they do so. In duos and trios the bodies often find themselves between active and passive, between being master of their movements and being overpowered by the movements of others (the sex of the dancer hardly plays any role here). In the same performance there is a scene in which dancers kick out at the legs of the other dancers, tripping them up and then catching them in a horizontal position. The female dancers throw themselves head down into the arms of the male dancers. The bodies of the blind Moroccan Saïd Gharbi and the old Carlo Verano are in effect a personification of the turning point between active and passive, between control and being overpowered. Blindness and old age are used here as the external signs of vulnerability and the limits of the body. Passive and active are not merely dance categories here, but clearly stand for a vision of reality. Chance, catastrophe, the unpredictable, the incalculable, the unconscious, the intuitive, the instinctive, ... these are all concepts describing the magical, unexpected and terrible complexity of reality.

Hard / Soft

The materials that Vandekeybus uses in his performances are very diverse: stones, wooden platforms, tree trunks, ice, pieces of

clothing, leaves, darts, giant feathers, tiny feathers, eggs, a giant sheepskin, ... This is a fairly arbitrary and non-chronological list, but it is not difficult to discover a contrast between soft and hard. In *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul* Saïd Gharbi boxes violently against a sandbag and at that moment thousands of leaves whirl slowly downwards. In the same performance fragments of interviews with the boxer Mohammed Ali are recited by a blind actress: again the tension between hard and soft, power and vulnerability. In *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* ends with an impossible attempt to defy gravity: the dancers lie on the floor and try to spring up and fly away. For a brief moment the bodies are as light as birds in the air before being confronted with the hardness of the floor once again. The dancer belongs on earth, in spite of his desire to fly. The objects and materials represent resistance to the dancers. A block of ice turns out to be a frozen shirt that must first be thawed over a sizzling iron. Shirts hang high in the air, and can only be reached with great difficulty. The game with the clothing in *What the Body Does Not Remember* is just as complicated as the scene with the stones, if less dangerous. By placing everyday objects in a strange context, they become obscure: they lose their self-evidence.

Music / Movement

What the Body Does Not Remember received a Bessie Award for its original confrontation between dance and music. Music has always been an inherent part of Vandekeybus' performances. He has shown that twice very explicitly: in *The Weight of a Hand* (1990) and *Bereft of a Blissful Union* (1996) the musicians were on stage with the dancers. The two composers with whom Vandekeybus has worked most intensively are Thierry De Mey and Peter Vermeersch (and more recently Charo Calvo and George Alexander van Dam). They compose during the work process. Only very exceptionally does Vandekeybus work with existing music. Dance and music do not illustrate each other, but stimulate each other. The opening scene of *What the Body Does Not Remember* shows a dancer moving both hands rhythmically on a wooden surface. The sound is amplified and seems to electrify the two bodies lying in front. It is a beautiful image of music propelling dance in Vandekeybus' universe. The growing com-

plexity of the performances increases the need for greater diversity in the music. Music that not only propels, but that also makes other connections (regarding content or atmosphere) with what is happening on stage. In *7 for a Secret never to be told* the music for the seven scenes is composed by six different musicians. The musical score ranges from a modern string quartet (Kimmo Hakola), to a folk song (Pascal Comelade), via a pop song (Arno), to a sound collage (Charo Calvo): all worlds that Vandekeybus includes in his universe. David Byrne (Talking Heads) composed the score for *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting*. One composer, but a multitude of musical worlds and sounds are present here, sources of energy and atmosphere for the performance: sometimes threatening and compelling, then dreamy and moving, shifting between sound and music, between landscape and background.

Man / Woman

The tension between two dancing bodies is never a neutral tension with Vandekeybus: a body is explicitly masculine or feminine. In *Immer das Selbe gelogen* a dancer inquires about the sex of the unborn chicks in eggs, and divides them into the two natural categories: 'chicken'/'cock'/'chicken'/'cock'. Man-woman is one of the elementary confrontations in Vandekeybus' dance. The tension between the male and female bodies cannot be neutralised or harmonised, it is a tension that knows no peace, either in the movements or in the hearts. One of the most powerful scenes in *What the Body Does Not Remember* is when the male dancers frisk the female dancers in a very explicit manner. At first the women seem to allow the men to go ahead, but then a complex physical response to the frisking begins to emerge: not disapproval, not indignation, but a choreography of attraction and rejection. Often, physical power is what the dance is about, but in contrast to classical ballet, the power here is evenly divided between the male and female bodies. With Vandekeybus, the female bodies seem to be a sort of primitive force, untameable physical energy. In *Mountains Made of Barking*, the personage of the German cabaret artist, representing the world of popular entertainment, is nearly torn to pieces by three female dancers, who had been sweeping the floor a moment before. The violence

of (female?) nature can break through the flimsy screen of (male?) culture at any moment. The video *La Mentira* (based on *Immer das Selbe gelogen*) shows a number of dance sequences with the female dancers in a barren but impressive stony Spanish landscape, further reinforcing the relationship between feminine primitive energy and nature. We have already mentioned a scene in *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul* in which one of the female dancers tries to free herself from the ropes restraining her. In the following scene three other female dancers join her and all dance with a similar and yet individual dynamic: hard, often square movements whereby waving arms and legs throw the body off balance. The arrival of the male dancers immediately sets off a ritual of provocation and challenge. In *Immer das Selbe gelogen* the female dancers are carried by the male dancers and carelessly thrown on the floor. The same energy as described above emanates from these bodies in 'sleeping positions': an energy that seems to be regenerated by the frequent contact of the body with the floor. Female energy is also placed in the context of the animal world, and acquires mythological dimensions in *Bereft of a Blissful Union* when the female dancers wear a kind of dog mask. In the film (in the performance) we witness dancers tumbling into water and drowning because the surface is covered by a carpet on which a sleeping woman lies (a reference to the mad Ophelia who drowns herself): the men are pulled into the depths by the women wearing the dog masks. Nevertheless, there are also moments of tenderness between men and women. The same performance includes a moment during which the female dancers sit on stone amphoras with their backs bared. The male dancers kneel and kiss their naked backs. A spectacular explosion of the jars marks the end of the scene. Stillness and then explosion: this elementary pattern also reflects the relationship between man and woman. *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul* deals with the theme of the tense man-woman relationship in a more emotionally nuanced, if not less aggressive, way. The short film *Elba and Federico* is based on a story by Italo Calvino. The man works at night, the woman during the day. The moments that their paths cross may be moments of unexpected tenderness, but more often of out-of-hand futilities and pent-up frustrations. Many dance sequences in the performance are also marked by the desire for another. The man-woman relationship is explored most intensively by Vandekeybus in *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul*, but it

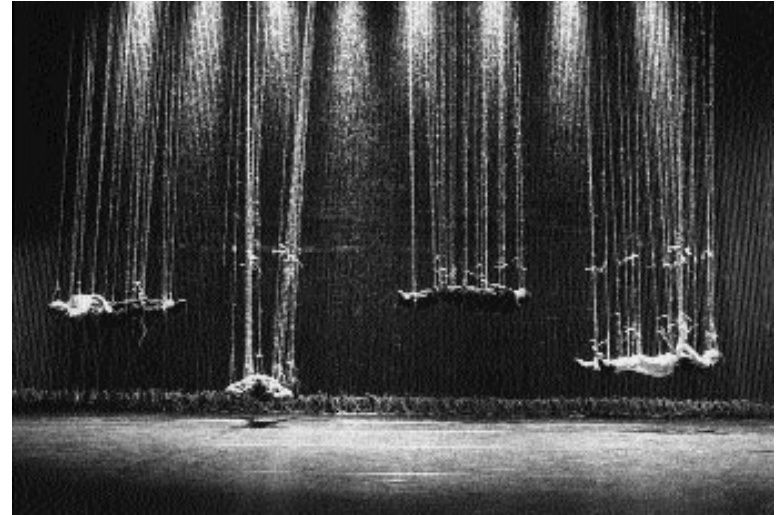


[1-2] *What the Body Does Not Remember.*

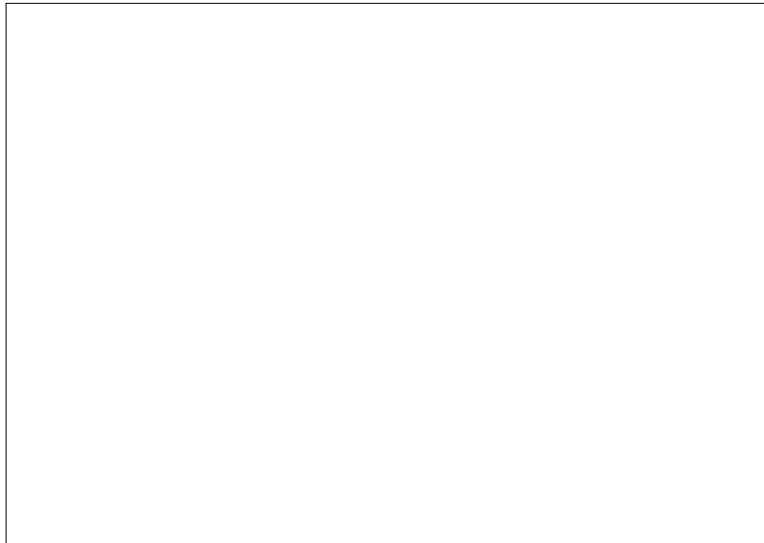
Choreography and directing: Wim Vandekeybus. Ultima Vez, 1987.



[3] *Immer das Selbe gelogen.*
Choreography and directing: Wim Vandekeybus. Ultima Vez, 1991.



[4] *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul.*
Choreography and directing: Wim Vandekeybus. Ultima Vez, 1993.
[5] *Bereft of a Blissful Union.*
Choreography and directing: Wim Vandekeybus. Ultima Vez, 1996.



[6] *7 for a Secret never to be told.*

Choreography and directing: Wim Vandekeybus. Ultima Vez, 1997.

[7] *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting.*

Choreography and directing: Wim Vandekeybus. Ultima Vez, 1999.

THE OEUVRE

is a conflict that recurs throughout his oeuvre. On the surface, this conflict seems to be absent in *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* (1999), a performance with male dancers only. This is a boy's world, somewhat tributary to Pasolini's emotional world seen in *The Day of Heaven and Hell* (1998). The brief fighting scene that starts as suddenly as it stops, and the scene in which the dancers try to get to sleep, laughing and giggling like boarding school kids in a dormitory, link both performances. Rivalry between men is not the main theme of *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting*, although these moments of tension are present. About working with only male dancers, Vandekeybus said: 'Through concentrating on this male world, one starts to see the femininity in the men.' It is thus (not) astonishing that the dance movements have a feminine dimension to them. At one point the men dance bare-chested in long coloured skirts, which gives their movements – and there are many arm movements in particular – an unmistakable sensuality. In *The Day of Heaven and Hell* the male dancers carry the female dancers in front of them, holding them by their legs. Slowly and with a visible effort, the female dancers raise themselves up, still carried by the men, and speak into a microphone hanging above them. The same movement is used in *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting*, but with male dancers only. The dancers who are being carried now have a transparent mask over their faces. While rising, instead of speaking into a microphone, they emit groans reminiscent of orgasm. The suggestive masks also make this scene sexually ambivalent.

Body / Story

Vandekeybus' performances are marked by a deliberately open structure through the emphasis on bodily energy, and the intensity of the moment. This loose structure enables the performance to switch from one rhythm to another, and allows for moments of humour and flashes of insight and perspective. That is particularly true of the pieces in the initial period. Time in the early productions is the time of the body, of the instinctive reaction, the time of the now-moment, of the imaginary catastrophe, of the immediate and excessive bodily energy. But at the same time, a time of humour, of anecdotes, of an informal telling of stories, often in various languages (as a result of the changing interna-

tional cast of the company). In *The Weight of a Hand* each dancer tries to tell a story in his or her own language, for as long as the others who are lying on the ground are able to hold their breath. The moment a dancer can no longer hold his breath, he jumps up and begins to tell a story himself. The dancer who had been telling a story must stop, lie down and in his turn hold his breath. The stories just don't have a chance. The time of the story is defeated by the time of the body. The first performances tell no other story than that of the body, its energy, the risks it runs and its humour.

In more recent performances as well, the story is often defeated by the body: in *Mountains Made of Barking* a female dancer tries to tell a story but her narration is made impossible by a male dancer who tries to pull her over. The moment some meaning could emerge through words (the story), it is immediately made impossible in Vandekeybus' performances: by the body, screams or a profusion of unintelligible voices. And yet he is clearly looking for a broader framework, for a new articulation of the physical dance language, for stories and images which are less non-committal and anecdotal than before. The time of the body is intersected by other 'times': the time of the story, the time of the dream, of the unconscious, the ritual, the myth. Literary themes creating 'images' in which dance stands for more than the physical energy of the first performances, without necessarily telling an unambiguous or linear story. The word imposes itself on movement, dance searches for contact with theatre. In *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul* Vandekeybus works with Dirk Roofthoof, a professional actor, and in *Alle Grössen decken sich zu* words play such a dominant role that for many spectators it is theatre rather than dance.

Literature becomes a source of inspiration. Numerous quotations pop up in the performances, often in a hardly recognisable form. Some stories have a greater impact on the events on stage. *The Khazars Dictionary* by Milorad Pavić is one such reference point for Wim Vandekeybus. He refers to it more than once in interviews, and in the program books of *Mountains Made of Barking*, *Bereft of a Blissful Union* and *7 for a Secret never to be told* fragments are cited from Pavić's strange 'lexicon novel' about the vanished Khazar people. The elusive interplay of the countless overlapping stories, the dream life that for the Khazars is as real as everyday life, the mixture of lyricism and violent

physicality, the development of a very personal logic: all these are elements in which Wim Vandekeybus has recognised his own fascinations. The story of Petkutin and Kalina appeals to him in a special way, and he uses it in two performances. It is a gruesome, poetic love story. Petkutin's father made him out of clay and brought him to life. He fell in love with Kalina, and she with him. After their marriage they go on a trip to the ruins of a Roman theatre. During the picnic, one hundred and twenty invisible dead souls, the theatre spectators, keep a close watch on them. When Petkutin cuts his finger, the dead souls throw themselves on Kalina and tear her to pieces. Kalina now belongs to their realm and can no longer be seen by Petkutin, only heard. She puts on his coat and speaks to him. She asks him to cut himself so that she can recognise him by the taste of his blood. He does so and she in turn tears Petkutin to pieces. Vandekeybus incorporates elements of this story in the short film he made for *Mountains Made of Barking*. The film was shot in Morocco, in the area where Saïd Gharbi was born. We see him with the dancer Mary Herbert on a cart pulled by a dark horse. The novel tells: 'From far it looked as if Petkutin drove a pair of black stallions, but when the smell of a flower made him sneeze or when he cracked his whip, a swarm of black flies flew off of the horses and one could see that they were grey.' In the film we see a grey horse on a hill and a laughing man who looks at the approaching cart. Suddenly someone sneezes (Saïd/Petkutin?) and the horses have suddenly changed places: the cart is pulled by a grey horse and a dark horse stands beside the laughing man. The presence of spectators can be felt through the almost obsessively repeated close-ups of horses' and dogs' eyes. Later in the performance the dancer Mary Herbert tries to tell the story of how Kalina was torn apart. She goes from a microphone on the left of the stage to a microphone on the right of the stage, chased and hindered by Saïd who crawls after her and tries to seize her legs. She screams more than she narrates. Just when she is about to tell how the dead souls threw themselves on Kalina, another dancer silences her roughly and pulls her away from the microphone. In *Bereft of a Blissful Union* the rest of the story is told in a dialogue between film images and events on stage. The screen shows us Saïd speaking to the coat worn by the invisible Kalina. Mary Herbert/Kalina is present on stage and answers the questions of Saïd/Petkutin, each speaking their own language:

Moroccan and English. On different levels, the ruptures referred to in the title are shown: man/woman, visible/invisible, film image/stage, Moroccan/English; nowhere does the 'blissful union' seem further away. The performance begins with a reference to a story by Julio Cortázar about a man who sells screams. It is also a storyline in *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* and is projected in the form of a short film during the performance. Text fragments and dance sequences from the performance become more comprehensible when interpreted in the light of the film.

Film / Stage

As is already obvious in the last example, complex relationships are created between film and stage. Film shows what the stage cannot. In *Bereft of a Blissful Union*, a number of amphoras explode on stage. The screen shows us shards sinking under water and then coming together to form a vase again, as if the explosion had been 'undone'. *Mountains Made of Barking* ends with three naked men washing themselves and then being covered with a layer of dirt, although they don't notice anything and simply carry on getting dressed. In *Bereft of a Blissful Union* this scene is repeated on film, but this time, just as mysteriously, the dirt flies off the men's bodies, into the air. Film introduces distant and strange worlds onto the stage: the alarming underwater world in the same performance is just one example.

Form / Content

Recent performances are constructed more consciously around the theme content rather than on the basis of setting up formal antitheses. In *Les porteuses de mauvaises nouvelles* the fundamental spacial antithesis of horizontal/vertical played an important formal, organising role: a wooden floor, consisting of dozens of square platforms, was spectacularly dismantled and stacked by the dancers to form several wooden towers. In *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul*, the antithesis between horizontal/vertical is also important: in a strong visual image, four dancers hang over the dance floor in a web of cords until the cords are cut by a female dancer and they fall on the floor. The tension between

horizontal and vertical is more than a mere formal tension: it is closely linked with the contrasts between dream and reality, day and night, man and woman which recur throughout the whole performance. The film *Elba and Federico* is built entirely upon the antitheses between man/woman and day/night. The film ends with the woman's hallucination. The film footage in *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul* and *Mountains Made of Barking* was recorded on location in Mexico and Morocco. In both cases it concerns a world beyond our rationally controlled, unmagical reality. Mexico and Morocco stand for a brutality and vitality that is at once liberating and alarming: dream and nightmare at the same time. Festivity and yet a threat. A world in which death is never far away. A carnival-like world. It's not by accident that a scene of pure chaos is central in *Her Body...* as well as in *Mountains...*: a scene where it becomes impossible to follow any storyline or understand a single word, a moment in which the multitude of elements deteriorates into physical violence.

Visible / Invisible

Two encounters have had an important influence on the personal and artistic development of Vandekeybus: with the old German variety artist Carlo Wegener whom Vandekeybus met by chance in Hamburg and on whom the performances *Immer das Selbe gelogen* and *Alle Grössen decken sich zu* are based, and with the blind Moroccan dancer Saïd Gharbi, who performed in *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul*, *Mountains Made of Barking*, *Bereft of a Blissful Union*, *The Day of Heaven and Hell* and *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting*. Carlo Wegener and Saïd Gharbi are 'marginal figures': they move in the margin of daily reality as most of us know it. Carlo's perception of reality was marked by his excess of past life, an excess (or deficit) of memory. Vandekeybus met the old Carlo Wegener, a former artiste, in Hamburg, immediately struck up a friendship with him and persuaded him to move to Brussels. Saïd's perception of reality is determined by a paucity of images and (a plethora of) imagination. He lost his sight as a child. These two enigmatic worlds, the world of Carlo Verano and the world of Saïd Gharbi, introduced a number of stories and important themes into Vandekeybus' performances. Attention for the inner world, not only for the

inner workings of the body, but for those of the mind as well.

The performance *Immer das Selbe gelogen* could have taken place in Carlo Wegener's mind. Many elements refer to his life. His voice is present in the sound decor of the performance: his songs have been put to music by Peter Vermeersch. The unexpected encounter between Vandekeybus and Carlo Wegener in Hamburg (Vandekeybus walking around with a camera and the old man suddenly beginning to sing and dance) became part of the performance in the form of video images. The floor, covered by a cloth made up of dozens of women's dresses sewn together and which later becomes a curtain (horizontal becomes vertical), is a reference to Carlo's wife: one day he spread out on the floor the dresses of his already long deceased wife to give some colour to his house. But because of the absence of Carlo Wegener on stage, the connection remains abstract. *Alle Grössen decken sich zu* is a much more obvious homage by Vandekeybus to his now deceased friend. The text of the performance is a loyal reconstruction of dozens of statements by Carlo (about his past, his apartment, his dreams, his irritations,...) on the basis of audio and video cassettes that Wim Vandekeybus made during their encounters. The monologue, the unceasing dirge of an old man, is divided over two personages: Wegener (Carlo's real name) and Verano (his stage name). References to popular entertainment (cabaret, variety, circus, freakshows) crop up more regularly in Vandekeybus' performances since the meeting with Carlo Verano. The decor is partly a reconstruction of Carlo's overloaded apartment, a decor that is deconstructed at the end of the performance to create, next to the overcrowded space, a nearly empty one where Wegener and Verano speak their last texts. Their complaining is in sharp contrast with the almost wordless presence of the two other figures: Herr Baron, a hamster that lives downstairs, and Melona, a girl who lives upstairs. Their expressive physicality (crawling, making love) stands for femininity, animality, instinct, the physical, producing the most powerful moments in this performance.

Carlo's presence is never physical, like that of the Moroccan Saïd Gharbi. He is a sort of guide, a blind guide who shows others the way (an old theme in world literature). In *Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul* Saïd frees the tightly bound, wildly struggling dancer. A few scenes later, the blind girl cuts two sleeping dancers free from their ropes. In the same performance we see

Saïd teaching a dance to the other dancers in the way that blind people have to learn movements: through accurately feeling the body of the person demonstrating the movements and on the basis of that, imitating the movements. In *Mountains Made of Barking* his central role is even more obvious. The film images from Morocco and Saïd's presence in the film strengthen the impression that the performance takes place inside his head. At the beginning of the performance he is alone on stage, screams hard and tries desperately to claw something off of his skin. Something which is not on his skin but underneath it, invisible and therefore inescapable. The performance ends with the same image: three naked men stand washing themselves when suddenly dirt falls over them. They seem not to be aware of this, and carry on washing, rubbing the dirt over their bodies, after which they dress. The image is a strong metaphor for an anonymous power which cannot be washed away, for nature taking revenge on culture, for something impure endlessly thwarting our calculations. That anonymous, impure force has many names: instinct, catastrophe, the unconscious, the animal, the dream.

The dance of Vandekeybus moves in that frontier land, not obsessed by the perfection of the choreography, not interested in an obvious narrative, but mesmerised by something elusive, by what is 'real' in the movement: that realness that withdraws the moment it shows itself: 'I read that I do spectacular things, but what counts for me is actually something really small, almost under the skin. A pent-up energy that is not released. Pure intensity.'⁹ In order to prepare for *Mountains Made of Barking*, Wim Vandekeybus went to Morocco. His fascination with one of writer Paul Bowles' stories, led him to visit him. *The Circular Valley* is about a spirit entering people and animals and stealing their experiences. When Bowles heard of Vandekeybus' plan to base a performance on that story he remarked: 'It's impossible. It's about the invisible. It's a mountain made of barking.' We are not masters of our lives, of our bodies. Our body is always something other than our body. The title of Vandekeybus' latest performance, *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting*, speaks of that 'other'. There is something that defines us in spite of our wishes and desires. What that is, the title doesn't say. Not only are screams sold in the performance, desires and dreams are given away. Where do desires come from if they don't come from ourselves? What do they express? Why do they continue to motivate

our actions? Because we have no grip on our desires, we are, paradoxically enough, exposed to manipulation and power. *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* is also about that. Side by side with images of unconscious and instinctive power, there are images of manipulative power in the performance: the horse tamer; the man who sits on the side of the stage, sometimes laughing and rarely intervening; the tyrant in the short film. When the screaming, naked wild man threatens the others with a knife, the man from the sidelines walks up calmly and disarms him. The cries of wonder in the wild man's reaction restore a sense of proportion and bring humour back into the events on stage.

After a dozen performances, it is obvious that Wim Vandekeybus is constructing a highly original, imaginary world wherein dance is only one of the references. In performance after performance, a mythology is being elaborated, in which the body, instinct, control and the unconscious forge ever-changing links.

RECEPTION

At the première of *What the Body Does Not Remember* in the Toneelschuur in Haarlem, the Dutch press frequently referred to the work of Jan Fabre: 'Everything in this performance is redolent of Fabre'¹⁰; 'The most important difference with his teacher is that Vandekeybus hardly uses theatre to make a statement. His productions aim rather to amuse the public.'¹¹ There is esteem for the energy, humour, vitality of the dance, and for the original contribution of the music, but criticism of the lack of a clear dramatic structure. The performance received a very favourable review from the influential dance critic Anna Kisselgoff in New York: 'Tough, brutal, playful, ironic and terrific. Adjectives seem unduly passive to describe *What the Body Does Not Remember*', and she goes on to describe it as an 'extraordinarily innovative dance piece'.¹² Only after an international tour did the performance come to Belgium, where it was received favourably by the public and the critics.

Two major opinions can be distinguished in the critical reception of Vandekeybus in the national and international press. There is a group of reviewers who follow the development of Vandekeybus with enthusiasm. They often write in an impressionistic and associative way about the multitude of images and stories, and in this manner try to do justice to the artistic complexity of the dance performances. A second group is more detached and its appreciation varies from production to production. According to this second group, Vandekeybus rather indulges himself in projects that he cannot oversee and which result in 'excess': too much theatre, too much film, too much music weighing down the performances. Some of these reviewers think that Vandekeybus' strength is pure dance and that he shouldn't venture onto other paths. For others his dance language has not really evolved since his first performances and is limited in expressive power.

A remark that keeps cropping up is the lack of a dramatic structure to unify the multitude of elements. *Bereft of a Blissful Union* (1996), Vandekeybus' most chaotic production, receives the sharpest criticism in this respect: 'But the question remains: does the sum of all these moments lead to something with a greater significance? Does this say something about theatre or art

today? Can one distill a certain view of reality from these performances? I'm afraid that the answer is negative.¹³ A Dutch critic spoke about 'an incoherent hotchpotch of dozens of multi-interpretable symbols in dimly lit scenes.'¹⁴

7 for a Secret never to be told (1997) received in general very favourable reviews. The performance is seen as a sort of 'synthesis'¹⁵ between attention for the instinctive and interest in the unconscious. Vandekeybus' concentration on dance and movement is also appreciated: 'To the surprise of many, in this new production the choreographer concentrates on theatricality and dance. Is it a resting point in an oeuvre? A return to the source? Or a radical overhaul of the vocabulary of dance, including a deeper investigation of various themes?'¹⁶

In spite of the fact that Vandekeybus was and still is regarded, together with Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker and Jan Fabre, as one of the top figures in Belgian dance, his work has never been accorded the same intellectual attention as that of his two colleagues.

1. Diez, Claire. 'Danser ce qui s'échappe de la conscience', in: *La Libre Belgique*, December 20th, 1996.
2. Janssen, Hein. 'Sprakmakend, enerverend, fysiek theater', in: *Haarlems Dagblad*, June 13th, 1987.
3. Kisselgoff, Anna. 'From Belgium, Fierce Artistic Statements', in: *New York Times*, December 1987.
4. Vandekeybus, Wim. 'Ik zou alles willen stilleggen en dan tot ontploffing brengen', in: *De Schouwburgkrant*, Royal Flemish Theatre, November 3rd, 1993.
5. Bousset, Sigrid. 'Lichamen in vrije val', in: *Etcetera*, 9, 33, March 1991.
6. in: *7 for a Secret never to be told* program book.
7. Devens, Tuur. 'Mensen moeten verdierlijken', in: *Het Belang van Limburg*, December 12th, 1996.
8. Diez, Claire. O.c.
9. Roox, Gilbert. 'Blindeman ziet beter. Het onderhuidse danstheater van Wim Vandekeybus', in: *De Standaard Magazine*, May 27th, 1994.
10. Middendorp, Jan. 'Theatermafia slaat flater met Vandekeybus', in: *De Volkskrant*, June 15th, 1987.
11. Steijn, Robert. 'Mooie jongeren brengen theater zonder illusies', s.l., June 1987.
12. Kisselgoff, Anna. 'A new work by Wim Vandekeybus', in: *The New York Times*, November 22nd, 1987.
13. T'Jonck, Pieter. 'Wim Vandekeybus richt chaos aan', in: *De Standaard*, March 2nd, 1996.
14. Van Schaik, Eva. 'Wim Vandekeybus op doodlopend spoor', in: *Trouw*, May 10th, 1996.
15. Van Besien, Dominike. 'Het mysterieuze verhaal van de ekster', in: *De Morgen*, July 1997.
16. Sels, Geert. 'Choreografie bezweert duistere krachten', in: *De Standaard*, July 27th, 1997.

WORK / DANCE HISTORY

1987

What the Body Does Not Remember. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Created and performed by: Charo Calvo, Marian Del Valle, Yves Delattre, Patrick Dieleman, Maria Icaza, Dorothée Morel, Caroline Rottier, Simone Sandroni, Eduardo Torroja, Wim Vandekeybus. Music: Thierry De Mey, Peter Vermeersch. Performed by: Maximalist!, Ictus.

1989

Les porteuces de mauvaises nouvelles. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Created and performed by: Charo Calvo, Nicolas Crow, Marian Del Valle, Muriel Hérault, Lieve Meeussen, Dominique Tack, Eduardo Torroja, Wim Vandekeybus. Music: Thierry De Mey. Performed by: Maximalist!

1990

The Weight of a Hand. Concept: Thierry De Mey, Wim Vandekeybus. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Created and performed by: Assumpta Arques Surinach, Jabi Bustamante, Nicolas Crow, Charo Calvo, Vincent Dunoyer, Muriel Hérault, Peter Kern, Nathalie Locatelli, Shannon McMurchy, Lieve Meeussen, Eduardo Torroja, Wim Vandekeybus. Music: Thierry De Mey, Peter Vermeersch. Music performed live by Ictus. / *Roseland* (video). Direction: Walter Verdin, Wim Vandekeybus, Octavio Iturbe. Dance and performance: Assumpta Arques Surinach, Jabi Bustamante, Nicolas Crow, Charo Calvo, Maria Grazia Noce, Muriel Hérault, Peter Kern, Shannon McMurchy, Lieve Meeussen, Simone Sandroni, Eduardo Torroja, Wim Vandekeybus.

1991

Immer das Selbe gelogen. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Created and performed by: Grace Bellel, Lenka Flory, Octavio Iturbe, Peter Kern, Lieve Meeussen, Branko Potocan, Nienke Reehorst, Simone Sandroni, Wim Vandekeybus. Music: Peter Vermeersch, Charo Calvo, Carlo Wegener. Music performed by: X-Legged Sally, Charo Calvo, Carlo Wegener.

1992

La Mentira (video). Direction: Walter Verdin, Wim Vandekeybus. Created and performed by: Grace Bellel, Lenka Flory, Octavio Iturbe, Peter Kern, Lieve Meeussen, Branko Potocan, Nienke Reehorst, Simone Sandroni, Wim Vandekeybus.

1993

Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Created and performed by: Florence Augendre, François Brice, Vivian Cruz, Saïd Gharbi, Octavio Iturbe, Klaus Jürgens, Lieve Meeussen, Machtelt Philips, Nienke Reehorst, Dirk Roofthoof. Music: Peter Vermeersch. / *Elba and Federico* (film). Direction: Wim Vandekeybus.

1994

Mountains Made of Barking. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Created and performed by: Iñaki Azpillaga, François Brice, Saïd Gharbi, Mary Herbert, Thomas Lehnhart, Lieve Meeussen, Nienke Reehorst, Florence Rougier, Ana Stegnar, Wim Vandekeybus. Music: Peter Vermeersch, George Alexander van Dam, Charo Calvo. / *Mountains Made of Barking* (film). Direction and scenario: Wim Vandekeybus. Acted and performed by: Saïd Gharbi, Mary Herbert, Thomas Lehnhart, Abderrahim Asra, Abderzak Asra, Nouh Asra, Abdelaziz Mohamar.

1995

Alle Größen decken sich zu. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Created and performed by: Iñaki Azpillaga, Peter Kern, Thomas Lehnhart, Lieve Meeussen. Music and sound: Charo Calvo, Jan Kiepora, Schubert, Meat Loaf... (from dialogues with Carlo Verano. Adapted by: Jan Goossens, Peter Kern, Wim Vandekeybus.)

1996

Bereft of a Blissful Union. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Dance and performed by: Iñaki Azpillaga, François Brice, Ursula Courtney-Robb, Carmelo Fernandez, Saïd Gharbi, Roni Haver, Mary Herbert, Thomas Lehnhart, Lieve Meeussen, Rasmus Olme, Florence Rougier, Ana Stegnar. Music: Peter Vermeersch, George Alexander van Dam. Music performed by: X-Legged Sally, The Smith Quartet. / *Bereft of a Blissful Union* (film). Direction and scenario/ Wim Vandekeybus. Danced, acted and performed by: Ultima Vez. / *Exhaustion From Dreamt Love*. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Danced and performed by: Batsheva Dance Company, Israel. Guest choreography.

1997

7 for a Secret never to be told. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Danced and performed by: Nordine Benchorf, John Campbell, Carlos de Haro Flores, Lorenza Di Calogero, Lieve Meeussen, Rasmus Olme, Orlando Ortega Gonzalez, Céline Perroud, Isabelle Schad. Music: Arno, Charo Calvo, Pascal Comelade, Thierry De Mey, Kimmo Hakola, Pierre Vervloesem. / *Body, body on the wall... , a solo directed by Jan Fabre*. Performed by: Wim Vandekeybus.

1998

The Day of Heaven and Hell. A Royal Flemish Theatre production in collaboration with Ultima Vez. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Created by: Yves Bombay, Jim Clayburgh, Max Cuccaro, Antonella Cusimano, Ronald De Bruin, Angelo Dello Spedale, Alessandra Fabbri, Saïd Gharbi, Benoît Gob, Lisbeth Gruwez, Liv Hanne Haugen, Damien Jalet, Franz Marijnen, Rasmus Olme, Igor Paszkiewicz, Stefano Questorio, Anna Redi, Diego Roveroni, Ali Salmi, Nicola Schossler, Barth David Schwartz, Giancarlo Sessa, Wim Vandekeybus, Andres Waksman, Georg Weinand. Soundscape: Charo Calvo and Dimitri Coppe.

1999

In Spite of Wishing and Wanting. Choreography and direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Created and performed by: Nordine Benchorf, Saïd Gharbi, Benoît Gob, German Jauregui Allue, Juha-Pekka Marsalo, Christophe Olry, Igor Paszkiewicz, Ali Salmi, Giovanni Scarcella, Piotr Torzawa Giro, Wim Vandekeybus, Gavin Webber. Music and soundscape: David Byrne. / *The Last Words* (film). Direction: Wim Vandekeybus. Scenario: Wim Vandekeybus, Jan De Coster. Performed by: John Campbell, Max Curraro, Stefano Questorio, Alessandra Fabbri, Ultima Vez, and others. Soundscape: Charo Calvo.

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archive Material

Flemish Theatre Institute (VTi), Brussels. Ultima Vez, Brussels.

Articles and Interviews

Jans, Erwin. 'Als de hond blaft, groeit de berg.', in: A.M. Lambrechts, M. van Kerkhoven, K. Verstockt (editors) *Dans in Vlaanderen*, Stichting Kunstboek, 1996.

What the Body Does Not Remember

Degand, Cathérine. 'Révélation d'un chorégraphe étonnant, détonnant, novateur!', in: *La Libre Belgique*, February 5th, 1988.

De Jonge, Peter. 'Vandekeybus verzamelt extreme reacties.', in: *Notes*, 7, July / August, 1997.

Diez, Claire. 'Les instantanés urgents de Wim Vandekeybus.', in: *La Libre Belgique*, May 8th, 1988.

Kisselgoff, Anna. 'Dance: A new work by Wim Vandekeybus.', in: *The New York Times*, November 22nd, 1987.

T'Jonck, Pieter. 'Vandekeybus' verdienstelijke debuut.', in: *De Standaard*, February 6th, 1988.

Les porteuses de mauvaises nouvelles

Bréniel, Pascale. 'Porteur d'une énergie nouvelle.', in: *La Presse*, Montréal, October 6th, 1991.

Kisselgoff, Anna. 'Maximum-Energy Minimalism.', in: *The New York Times*, October 28th, 1989.

Korteweg, Ariejan. 'Spectaculaire kamikaze.', in: *Volkskrant*, May 2nd, 1989.

T'Jonck, Pieter. 'Snel, hard, opwindend.', in: *De Standaard*, March 1st, 1989.

Steele, Mike. 'Riveting dance explores danger.', in: *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*, October 14th, 1989.

The Weight of a Hand

Bousset, Sigrid. 'Lichamen in vrije val.', in: *Etcetera*, 9, 33, 1991

Del Val, Carmen. 'Despliegue escénico.', in: *El País* (Spain), January 19th, 1990.

Diez, Claire. 'Le Poids de la main, sursauts de vie obstinée.', in: *La Libre Belgique*, July 30th, 1990.

Immer das Selbe gelogen

- Amort, Andrea. 'Vom Jungsein, vom Altsein, vom Gewicht des Lebens.', in: *Hauptausgabe Kurier* (Austria), July 20th, 1991.
 Jans, Erwin. 'De andere gevoeligheid van Immer das Selbe.', in: *Etcetera*, 10, 37, 1992.
 Furst, Dan. 'At Last, a Real Festival: 'Always the Same Lies.', in: *Asahi Evening News* (Japan), September 16th, 1992.
 Steele, Mike. 'A riveting reminder of hardships of living.', in: *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, October 21st, 1991.
 Wynants, Jean-Marie. 'Wim Vandekeybus entre vitesse et tendresse.', in: *Le Soir*, January 21st, 1992.

La Mentira

- Diez, Claire. 'Mensonges en couleurs...', in: *Le Soir*, March 12th, 1993.
 Verduyck, Paul. 'Verrassend eerlijk en broeierig.', in: *De Morgen*, March 12th, 1993.

Her Body Doesn't Fit Her Soul

- Diez, Claire. 'Voir au-delà du regard...', in: *La Libre Belgique*, June 30th, 1993.
 Diez, Claire. 'Du coeur qui bat et de l'envers des yeux...', in: *La Libre Belgique*, November 24th, 1993.
 Fowler, Carol. 'Her Body combines dance, film on stage.', in: *Time Out San Francisco*, October 21st, 1994.
 Joannis, Marc André. 'Vandekeybus joue avec le risque.', in: *Le Droit* (Canada), October 7th, 1993.
 Luzina, Sandra. 'Kamikaze.', in: *Tagesspiegel*, Berlin, August 8th, 1993.
 Vandekeybus, Wim. 'Ik zou alles willen stilleggen en dan tot ontploffing brengen.', in: *De Schouwburgkrant*, Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg, November 3rd, 1993.
 Van Imschoot, Myriam. 'De eigentijdse tijdeloosheid van Wim Vandekeybus.', in: *De Scène*, February 1994.
 Verduyck, Paul. 'Gewoon kijken op een andere manier.', in: *De Morgen*, June 28th, 1993.

Mountains Made of Barking

- Baartman, Nicolinbe. 'Met dansers zonder uitstraling werk ik niet.', in: *De Volkskrant*, July 6th, 1994.
 Goossens, Paul. 'Het bloeden van de prooi.', in: *Knack*, May 25th, 1994.

- Levin, Jordan. 'Lush Mountains a moving dreamscape.', in: *The Miami Herald*, November 13th, 1995.
 Proctor, Roy. 'Mountains is unsettling, but it's also exhilarating.', in: *The Richmond Times* (USA), November 4th, 1995.
 Roox, Gilbert. 'Blindeman ziet beter.', in: *De Standaard Magazine*, May 27th, 1994.
 Van der Linden, Mirjam. 'Emotioneel Palet.', in: *Notes*, June 1994.
 Van Nieuwpoort, Marcel-Armand. 'Opwindende dans van Vandekeybus over mens en natuur.', in: *Het Financieel Dagblad*, July 30th, 1994.
 Wynants, Jean-Marie. 'Une plongée angoissante au-delà du normal.', in: *Le Soir*, May 30th, 1994.

Bereft of a Blissful Union

- Diez, Claire. 'Après l'explosion, l'expansion.', in: *La Libre Belgique*, March 2nd, 1996.
 Wynants, Jean-Marie. 'Plongée en apnée au coeur du chaos.', in: *Le Soir*, March 2nd, 1996.
 Frétard, Dominique. 'Le chorégraphe Wim Vandekeybus et ses paniques post-psychédéliques éclatent les limites du réel.', in: *Le Monde*, March 23rd, 1996.
 Oostveen, Margriet. 'Het teveel wordt niet meer op afstand gehouden.', in: *NRC Handelsblad*, May 9th, 1996.
 Verduyck, Paul. 'Een lichaam zonder hoofd.', in: *Knack*, March 13th, 1996.

7 for a Secret never to be told

- Del Val, Carmen. 'Plumas como dardos.', in: *El País* (Spain), July 25th, 1997.
 Dougill, David. 'You can count on it.', in: *The Sunday Times* (UK), November 9th, 1997.
 Kennedy, Gilles. 'Vandekeybus' magpies steal the show.', in: *Japan Times*, June 12th, 1998.
 Sels, Geert. 'Choreografie bezweert duistere krachten.', in: *De Standaard*, July 27th, 1997.
 Smith, Sid. 'Gutty, witty and scary choreography.', in: *Chicago Tribune*, March 21st, 1998.
 Van Besien, Dominike. 'Het mysterieuze verhaal van de ekster.', in: *De Morgen*, July 26th, 1997.
 Van der Linden, Mirjam. 'Bijgeloof of levenswijsheid.', in: *Dans*, September 1997.
 Wynants, Jean-Marie. 'Wim Vandekeybus au pays des superstitions.', in: *Le Soir*, July 30th, 1997.

The Day of Heaven and Hell

- Quoidbach, Serge. 'Pasolini: vie et mort d'un poète.', in: *Le Matin*, October 23rd, 1998.
Six, Gerrit. 'Wim Vandekeybus: puzzelen met Pasolini.', in: *De Financieel Economische Tijd*, October 17th, 1998.
Verduyck, Paul. 'Bruut is schoon.', in: *Knack*, October 14th, 1998.

In Spite of Wishing and Wanting

- Baudet, Marie. 'La beauté trouble des sommeils agités.', in: *La Libre Belgique*, March 20th & 21st, 1999.
Berghmans, Eva. 'Schoonheid tussen slapen en waken.', in: *De Standaard*, March 15th, 1999.
Goossens, Jan. 'Het verlangen om te vliegen.', in: *Knack*, March 24th, 1999.
Videtti, Giuseppe. 'Un sogno che si chiama desiderio.', in: *La Repubblica* (Italy), March 15th, 1999.
Wynants, Jean-Marie. 'Quand déboulent les chevaux fous de l'enfance.', in: *Le Soir*, March 22nd, 1999.

This is a Flemish Theatre Institute publication, in association with the Theatre Studies departments of the four Flemish universities: U.I.Antwerpen, University of Ghent, K.U.Leuven, V.U.Brussels.

Editor in chief

Geert Opsomer

Editorial board

Pol Arias, Annie Declerck, Ronald Geerts, Erwin Jans, Rudi Laermans,
Kristel Marcoen, Frank Peeters, Klaas Tindemans, Luk van den Dries,
Marianne van Kerkhoven, Jaak van Schoor

Design

Inge Ketelers

Photogravure and printing

Cultura, Wetteren

Print run

500 copies

Kritisch Theater Lexicon 11 E, a portrait of Wim Vandekeybus

Author

Erwin Jans

Research

Erwin Jans

Final editing and proof reading

Geert Opsomer, Veerle Decraene

Translation

Heidi Ehrhart, Kristien De Coster, Elizabeth Tucker

Photographic portrait of Wim Vandekeybus

Bruno Vandermeulen

Photos

p. 21: Octavio Iturbe, Bruno Vandermeulen / p. 22: Octavio Iturbe /

p. 23: Danny Willems, Jean-Pierre Stoop / p. 24: Bruno Vandermeulen en
Wim Vandekeybus.

Vlaams Theater Instituut vzw, Saintelettesquare 19, 1000 Brussel,

tel: +32.2/201.09.06, fax: +32.2/203.02.05

e-mail: info@vti.be website: <http://www.vti.be>

ISBN 90-74351-18-2 — D/1999/4610/03

No part of this book may be reproduced and/or published without the prior permission of the publisher.

The Flemish Theatre Institute is a centre for research, documentation, advice and the promotion of the performing arts. It is subsidised by the Arts Department of the Ministry of the Flemish Community, and sponsored by the National Lottery and Océ Belgium.

A translation of: Wim Vandekeybus, Vlaams Theater Instituut, Brussels, 1997.

© 1999 / registered publisher: Klaas Tindemans