

A slow Implosion of Feminine Bodies

After a number of large productions, Wim Vandekeybus has changed tack. For the première of his latest production, *Scratching the Inner Fields*, he chose Théâtre des Abbesses, the smaller stage of Théâtre de la Ville. Seven women, a sparse decor, texts by Peter Verhelst and music by Eavesdropper are the ingredients of a surprisingly sober performance with recognizable touches. Or, how often less can be more.

'If your heart is plundered, your chest implodes', writes Peter Verhelst in *De Kleurenvanger*. That atmosphere perfectly describes the newest performance by Wim Vandekeybus. The universe of *Scratching the Inner Fields* looks like one after the apocalypse. Desolate and sober. Only populated by women. Restrained bodies which, through an impulse, suddenly move. A slow implosion of feelings. Perhaps they are the women from *Bereft of a Blissful Union* (1996), under whose feet vases exploded, whose world is lost.

These women survive by their instincts, as wild animals. They grab at the white masses that fall at the beginning of the performance. The masses turn out to be membranes, which the dancers hang over lamps at the back of the stage. That image is a literal reference to the title of the performance, *Scratching the Inner Fields*. Where in his earlier performances Vandekeybus interpreted inner life in a fairly surrealistic way, with headless men or women with hairy faces, in his last two performances he has chosen for a purer method to evoke the unconscious. The storms of images – not always successful – have made room for larger blocks of text and less aggressive, spun-out, choreographies.

In *Scratching the Inner Fields* he goes further up this turn in the road, and eliminates more. Film images have been replaced by simple wooden panels, branches and sand. Nightmare is suggested by the dark lighting. In all this sobriety, echoes of earlier performances sneak in nevertheless. The heartbeat that comes back several times in the soundscape by Josh Martin makes reference to *Inasmuch as Life is borrowed...* (2000). The intertwined duos or trios that come early in the performance can make one think of the dance scenes from the 'male' production *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* (199). With the difference that the women seem to get closer to each other, to kiss each other, or to lightly touch each other's lips with their thumbs such as Belmondo in the legendary film *A Bout de Souffle*.

It is a tender gesture that refers to a fragment out of *Zwellend Fruit*, which Peter Verhelst reworked for *Scratching the Inner Fields*: 'You have fingers and a tongue. That is all you need to read me.' After an October visit to the *Fairytale Brothel (Zwellend Fruit)*, Vandekeybus was immediately convinced. He had understood that Verhelst's texts were very sensual and would work perfectly in this performance with only women.

Even though *Scratching the Inner Fields* is a very fragmented, sometimes babbling performance which is sometimes in need of something in order to keep you on the edge of your seat for an hour and a half, Vandekeybus' force flares up in a number of fine images. Above all, he has drawn around himself a remarkable team of female performers. All self-willed personalities, that balance between the feminine and demonical. That alone makes *Scratching the Inner Fields* worth it.

Sally De Kunst, De Morgen, March 1st, 2001