

Ivana Müller and David Weber-Krebs are young artists who are going their own way in the field of interdisciplinary theatre. Their work fits in with a broader European development and they produce their performances with financial and/or productional support from a number of international co-producers.

As shown in the history of their country, the Dutch don't have much trouble embracing things which are flourishing elsewhere. This is confirmed once more if you take a look at the programme of the Informal European Theatre Meeting. In this programme, Ivana Müller and David Weber-Krebs are showing, respectively, the productions *How heavy are my thoughts* and *This performance*. A choice that is both interesting and remarkable. Because although Müller and Weber-Krebs come from the Dutch breeding ground of young talent, they are part of a crop of theatre makers whose way of working could be considered European rather than Dutch. Appreciation of the work seems to come mainly from across the border as well. It would appear that the old Dutch trading trick is still working well. After all, the tulip, which originally came from Turkey, has also had a good long life as a Dutch export product.

Berlin Along with Nicole Beutler, Paz Rojo, Hester van Hasselt and Inge Koks, David Weber-Krebs and Ivana Müller have been part of the Lisa Foundation for the last year and a half. The makers from this collective have created a sensation in recent years with their individual productions and performances. They work independently from each other, but sometimes perform with another member of the collective in a production and discuss important issues in each other's work. During the 2004 Holland Festival, they entered into a dialogue with each other and with other young artists, prompted by the productions that were presented. 'We didn't found the association as only the next production facility, even though we do discuss the economic and political position of art and we want to enter into joint talks with the Fund for Amateur Art and Performing Arts about the situation of young artists'. The Lisa Festival will be organised in the spring. In Berlin.

The productions of Ivana Müller (1972), who is originally from Croatia, spring from three sources: movement, images and language. Müller studied literature and French literature in Zagreb. As a student, she performed with a variety of groups. When she had completed her studies, it didn't take her long to decide to apply for the School for New Dance Development (SNDO) in Amsterdam. She was accepted, and she spent her third-year apprenticeship as a guest student at the Academy of Fine

Arts in Berlin . Her curious, investigative and open view is shown not only by her choice of study, but also in her productions.

Ivana Müller asks herself questions about what is happening in the world around her and she likes to communicate this. Initially, she concentrated her artistic investigation on subjects such as identity, logic, confusion of ideas, and language. As an artist, she feels a responsibility to approach these subjects from her own point of view. 'I want to keep rediscovering myself in my work. But it is not a psychological process. It is philosophical or structuralist. Why me? Because that's what is closest to myself'.

The form she chooses for a production varies according to the issue concerned. She creates a different framework for each problem, in which the subject can best be highlighted. One time, there might be lots of movement in a production and another, more texts and/or images. She is not directly concerned with developing one of these artistic disciplines further, but works mainly from concepts. 'When you dance, you are always exposing yourself. That can also be a way of rediscovering yourself; in your relation to space, time or the audience. That's the way many makers work. I'm now doing that in another way'.

Truth In her earlier work, the emphasis was on movement, but she also incorporated text and video. In 2001, she made her last dance production for the time being. Because with *Lovely performance* (2002), she embarked on a conceptual path. The production consisted of three elements: *Lovely Video*, *Lovely Life en Lovely Book*. Each member of the audience got a book in which the characters were printed in a special ink which glowed in the dark. In *How heavy are my thoughts* (2003), text played an even greater role and Müller subjected science to an investigation. Science is an important source for her: 'People have a fixed idea about what it is and how you should look at it. Nowadays, science stands for truth. I don't agree with this'. In *How heavy are my thoughts*, the audience's perceptions are put to the test. What is fact and what is fiction?

Müller chose to present this theme to her audience as a lecture performance. She thinks it is interesting to present a non-theatrical form of performing in a theatrical setting. For instance, her production *Under My Skin* is a guided tour. 'It will be interesting to see what happens if you do this in a theatre. How these forms come across to the audience, how they produce a different experience, how they put the spectator in another position and place the subject you're working with in a different light'.

Müller does not want to rule out the possibility of making another movement piece. But right now she is focusing on other issues. 'I am redefining "body" and "presence"'. In *How heavy are my thoughts*, Müller herself is not present on the stage but she is shown as the fictitious character IM in the video images. 'I have lent out my face and body'. Bill Aitchison presents and interprets the video projections which transform this whole investigative process from a collection of information into an experiment. The extremely personal approach to the subject is fascinating and seems to have its own internal logic.

the Sublime Also being shown during the IETM is *This* performance, by the Walloon-German maker David Weber-Krebs (1974), who was nominated for the 2005 VSCD Mime Award for this piece. Weber-Krebs studied literature and theology in Switzerland and Germany before beginning the Mime School at the Amsterdam Academy of Arts. David Weber-Krebs expresses his ideas in film, performance art, physical theatre and installations. His work always stems from a concept. With this working method he opposed at the Mime School to what was generally done, a way of working where the productions are created on the floor, often on the basis of improvisations.

For *This* performance, he worked for the first time with the German dramaturge Jean-Philipp Possmann. 'Germany has more of an intellectual tradition; an idea is postulated. In the Netherlands, something is brought to life in a more empirical way'. Nowadays, text is an important component in his productions. In order to clarify the context of his performances for his audience, Weber-Krebs also gives lecture performances. In *The consequence of infinite endings* (2005), he presents his thinking patterns and sources of inspiration to the audience, which is a way of reflecting on his own work at the same time.

For a long time now, Weber-Krebs has been fascinated by the Sublime; the sensory experience which stimulates analysis at the same time. In contrast to many makers who draw on their own realm of experience in creating a production, Weber-Krebs takes the experience of the spectator as his starting point. He plays with that intense feeling that can be created when someone is moved by an interesting work of art or when someone becomes emotional because of overwhelming nature. Philosophers and artists have kept giving new significance to the concept throughout the centuries, because the Sublime is not tangible, and it is not known through which path this state of mind is achieved. In this context, a performance is not something which can be observed, but an experience

in which people take part. 'This performance is about to change the world'. In the production This performance, judgements are passed which cannot possibly be realised in the space. Expectations are created but the future is uncertain.

For movement's sake When David Weber-Krebs was about eleven, he had some mystical experiences. He talked to God. His world was small and easy to oversee. As he got older, he became aware of the complexity of the world. He still longs for his childhood, but realises that he can never return.

'My engagement with the Sublime gives me a connection to that period. For me, it is like a battle between wanting to lose oneself in the promise of deliverance and having a critical viewpoint whereby you can't let yourself go completely'. 'In my work, I try to keep all the options open. And yet that experience remains firmly in the here and now of theatrical reality'. He eliminates as many superfluous elements as possible from his productions and limits his means to the absolute minimum.

Weber-Krebs never moves for movement's sake. 'I try to see movement as an action. Movement has its own logic and inherent meaning'. In This performance, every movement is futile. That's what the production is about. 'Everything has happened already, there's nothing left to say, nothing more to do'.

In order to simplify the world and provide insight into it, frameworks were constructed through which people could view it, such as a religion or a political regime. 'The Sublime is always authoritarian as well; the work of art is coercive. The spectator is compelled to dive into the system'. And, like in a religion or a political regime, everything is aimed at leading or forcing you into submission along a strategic path. 'That's what I want to do too, but then at the same time make it transparent in order to show that it is authoritarian and an illusion'.

Of course, a critical spectator will not want to walk into that trap and so they mustn't be aware of it. That is exactly what Weber-Krebs wants to address. 'I find theatre interesting as an encounter. For me, the essence of theatre is the interaction between a group of people and someone who is being watched but who also watches back. Real people in a specific situation'.

A critical eye The path that young makers in the Netherlands are taking

appears to be quite well-paved, but actually has some pretty large holes and obstacles. In recent years, Ivana Müller managed – with difficulty – to squeeze a bit of subsidy out of a fund, but the money came more from the Mondriaan Stichting for visual art, or from the Fund for Amateur Art and Performing Arts. Yet she still succeeded in touring the Netherlands and abroad with thirty to forty performances. She travels a lot, lives in Amsterdam and Paris , and built up quite a network. She is regularly invited for residencies, and there are usually international co-producers involved with her productions.

In the Netherlands , Müller often seemed to be neither one thing or the other. Where should an interdisciplinary maker go to ask for money? And what is the effect of the conceptual way of working which is looked at with a critical eye in the Netherlands and often meets with resistance. Though discussions on the subject can be heated in the dance world and the press can be crushing, it must be said that the work of Ivana Müller and David Weber-Krebs does fit into a broader European development. These makers produce their performances with financial and/or productional support from a number of international co-producers and are thus following a different path to the usual one. Whereas most young makers in the Netherlands request subsidy for their production costs and manage to get their budget together with a number of buy-out sums, Müller and Weber-Krebs sought sanctuary in the European network and that is proving fruitful. Each production gets several performances abroad. And in this respect, they are way ahead of many young makers with similar ambitions.

Both Müller and Weber-Krebs have been presenting their productions over the last few years at the Amsterdam Theatre Workplace Gasthuis. In 1997, the subsidised Amphitheater reopened as the Gasthuis (Guesthouse) and started off in a new direction, led by Flemish artistic director Barbara van Lindt. After she left in 2001, her pioneering work was continued by Mark Timmer. Gasthuis, along with a number of other workplaces in the Netherlands , is a link in the artistic and professional development of beginning performing artists and it contributes to innovation in theatre practices. It is the first place for young makers in the Netherlands which works in a really interdisciplinary way. And Mark Timmer is actively investigating similar places in Europe . The members of Lisa regularly exchanged ideas with the artistic director about the Gasthuis policy decisions. Müller and Weber-Krebs feel at home there. Müller is now also receiving support from the Rotterdamse Schouwburg.

In the Netherlands , art academy graduates or other young makers can try their luck with the workplaces or production houses. Originally, the

workplaces were intended as places to experiment, with the accent on working processes and the development and crystallisation of ideas. And sometimes a project is rounded off with a studio presentation for a small audience. The production houses are facilities which guide young makers in their first steps on stage by helping them to apply for subsidies and giving them artistic feedback and productional support. The emphasis here is more on results; a production is staged and then goes on tour. Up to now, the workplaces and production houses could count on a small contribution from the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science so long as certain artistic and general conditions were met, but most of the budget for each project is requested from the Fund for Amateur Art and Performing Arts.

Future scenario As the Dutch government sees the production houses and workplaces as very important for the development and progress of talent, they also want to guarantee them national subsidy in the future. The Dutch Culture Council will monitor and assess these institutions. High demands will be made on the artistic leadership and a critical look will be taken at the way guidance is given to the young talent. This means that during the first couple of years of their career, young makers will have to deal primarily with the artistic director of the institution and only when their competence has been proven will they be able to request assistance independently from the Fund for Amateur Art and Performing Arts.

This future scenario appears to offer prospects to a new generation of young makers. Two or three years on, and after several productions, Ivana Müller and David Weber-Krebs have come to the end of their workplace period. Now, for the Lisa Foundation, they will have to apply to the Fund for Amateur Art and Performing Arts, and wait and see if the subsidies which are granted are high enough to be able to rent a studio and produce independently. There is also the possibility of paying brief visits to the larger companies by making guest productions. Or else they could go straight for the cross-European approach, as Ivana Müller and David Weber-Krebs have already done with success.

Marcelle Schots

Marcelle Schots is a freelance dance journalist and writes for a.o. TM and Ballet Tanz International. Before she has been working behind the scenes of the dance and theatre world and in the fine arts.