

INTRODUCTION

Publishing a book about theatre invariably puts its authors in an awkward relationship to history. After all, theatre, as a live art, has a delicate relationship to time and history. It was Herbert Blau who once said that watching live performances is watching the actor dying on stage: the performing body is dying before our eyes. Sharing this moment creates a unique and moving confrontation with time. The lucid power of theatre, fleeting and ephemeral though it may be, is there in these moments of magic afforded by the communal (yet individual) experience of theatre as a live art. This very liveness, however, proves an obstacle when one tries to make the case for the historical value of theatrical performances. One has to deal with the traces that remain from having shared the liveness of the performance; the bits of recollections and dim affective resonances of what is often called 'corporeal memory'. In this kaleidoscope of memory the past is ever changing.

How, then, are we to deal with these traces when we glance back at Jan Lauwers' theatre work? Is there a way to grasp this body of work objectively, with a distanced look, a disaffected eye? Should we try to give a complete picture of the wide impact Jan Lauwers' theatre has had upon audiences through the years and around the world? Even if this were possible (which seems unlikely given the specific nature of theatre), it would not be desirable. If theatre, as a live art, leaves behind a series of traces, remnants, and memories, why not map these out by attending to their own logic, instead of imposing a linear, historical account in chronological order? Why not acknowledge that it is not only performers who die on stage, but texts also? Why not search for the after-life of liveness and for the reflective space that surrounds this presence-turned-absence?

The aim of this publication is to roam this reflective space, which surrounds Jan Lauwers' theatre work with Needcompany. By focusing on the work of Jan Lauwers and Needcompany — and not on the work of other artists associated with the company, such as that of the choreographer Grace Ellen

Barkey, Needcompany's co-founder — this publication tries to do justice to the wide diversity of tones and timbres in which these texts were voiced. We have taken a number of different approaches and placed them side by side in the book to remind the reader of the company's own paratactic theatre aesthetics, and also to draw attention to the equivocal effects it has had on writers of different disciplines, of different times, of different places. In addition, we have brought together past appraisals of and contemporary views on Needcompany's trajectory through recent theatre history. In other words, we have chosen to reprint here some of the best critical texts about Jan Lauwers' work with Needcompany alongside a number of contributions written especially for this occasion. We have not tried to bring a unity of style to the wide diversity of tones and timbres. A smooth anthology-machinery, in which style is subsumed into the dominant form of generality and difference, is regarded with suspicion. This publication, on the contrary, brings together poetic effusions, reviews, philosophical reflections, and academic essays.

We have structured the book around five clusters, namely: histories, stories, images, resonances, and communities. This clustering provides an open system: it develops a particular assemblage of texts in relation to a concept that at the same time invites the reader to shift-shape to resonating texts from other, interrelated clusters. The clusters, therefore, provide open trajectories and not systematic boundaries. This explains why we have provided the reader with 'theatre pointers' next to the table of contents — they hold a sort of middle ground between a theatrography and an index. They serve as a tool for the reader to trace his or her own pattern in dealing with the histories of Jan Lauwers' theatre work.

The two photo series that flank the texts are an expression of our respect for the artist's continued commitment to revitalizing and reshaping the medium of theatre. His endless internal drive to create is the condition *sine qua non* of theatre histories.

Histories

This first cluster tries to map the manifold 'histories' of Needcompany, each of them situated in their specific time and geographical context, and each of them affected by the personal viewpoints and memory (productive in its imperfection) of the authors writing them.

The opening article by Paul Demets is an investigation from a critic's perspective, of how Lauwers develops the concepts of voyeurism, death, beauty, and desire in his work. These are so omnipresent that we are not surprised to learn that Jan Lauwers calls sex, violence and death his 'Holy Trinity'. Written almost ten years ago, in 1998, Demets' text describes in broad outline the earliest period of Needcompany, from *Reeds gewond en het is niet eens oorlog / Already Hurt and Not Yet War* (1981) through the staging of the entire *Snakesong Trilogy* (1998).

Jean-Marc Adolphe, a prominent theatre and dance critic in France, reminisces about his first encounters with Lauwers' work; the productions of *De struiskogel / Bullebird* (1983) and *Incident* (1985). From the brief but intense hour he spent with *Incident*, Adolphe still retains the vivid corporeal memory of a discharge of energy that sparked, he says, his love for contemporary theatre. This subjective account goes hand in hand with a discussion of how the plays were received in France, and with an account of the theatrical climate in those days at the *Théâtre de la Bastille* in Paris and at Bordeaux' Sigma Festival. Trying to 'label' Lauwers' theatre work, he comes up with the concept of 'artist's theatre', "a theatre fully immersed in the dynamics of contemporary creation".

Luk Van den Dries, a theatre scholar from Antwerp, also refreshes his memory of Needcompany and locates its origins in the Flemish theatrical climate of the eighties. He is aware that "in memory everything is moulded into a different shape", and he does not shy away from the implications this has for his discussion. Van den Dries' historical mould is the connection between theatre and the performance art genre. His piece

describes how the marks of performance art, so clearly present in the productions of Epigonentheater zlv, are gradually covered over by the growing theatricality of Needcompany's early works.

The German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann picks up on this point and describes Lauwers' work as a kind of "scenic poetry". German audiences owe a debt of gratitude to Tom Stromberg, who coproduced Needcompany's productions and regularly invited them to the Theater Am Turm in Frankfurt am Main. These productions were, for Lehmann, an essential source of inspiration, and instrumental in opening up the horizon for his concept of postdramatic theatre. In his contribution, he lingers on the concept of *détachement* to describe the 'style' of acting characteristic of Jan Lauwers' work. He puts Lauwers' performances in the perspective of a postepic theatre form in which Brechtian motives persist, albeit in a different form. Because Lauwers' vision is more sceptical than Brecht's, there is hardly any room in his work for a utopian idea, for the belief that art can change the world.

To New York audiences, Jan Lauwers and his Needcompany are best known for their 1999 production of *Morning Song* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), a thriving urban arts centre that brings international performing arts and films to Brooklyn. *Morning Song* earned Lauwers an Obie Award, which acknowledges and encourages the best of Off Broadway and Off-Off Broadway. It put Needcompany on the New York theatre map and ensured Lauwers' return to BAM in 2001 with *Needcompany's King Lear*, and in 2004 with *Isabella's Room*. The American theatre scholar Martin Harries remembers quite well how 'those Belgians' confounded the well-established theatre categories of New York's audiences. In his reading, *Isabella's Room* is a violent fairy tale of European modernity: it offers a promise of happiness, but with disturbing postcolonial barbs.

Harries counters the promise of happiness with the one-liner, attributed to Einstein, "Happiness is for pigs"; Nicolas Truong, for his part, adapting Albert Camus' epigram, invites us to "imagine Einstein happy". This French philosopher and

journalist sees *Isabella's Room* and *The Lobster Shop* as artistic exercises in being happy in spite of everything. There, according to Truong, resides the *force majeure* of tragic joy: "not hope, but despair, or rather, in this instance, the energy born from despair and distress".

Truong's discussion of *Isabella's Room* also calls our attention to Lauwers' specific attitude towards the text. Lauwers, Truong points out, uses narrative at a time "when the dominant aesthetic has repudiated it as naïve, a relic of art history, something tolerated only if upstaged by the artist's knowing wink to the spectator". But there is nothing naïve about Lauwers' use of text and narrative. Lauwers seems, as it were, determined to go against the grain of one of postmodernity's central doctrines that is fixated on Lyotard's theorizing about the disappearance of grand legitimating narratives that give meaning to human choices and events. Lauwers keeps on telling stories and using text, well aware that every theodicy has already shipwrecked.

Stories

Heiner Müller, 'founding father' of the theatre aesthetics that we now call 'postmodern' or 'postdramatic', once said that there was "no new theatre without new plays". In his search for new theatre forms, Jan Lauwers feels a similar urge to write his own stories, or at least to rewrite existing ones. Like many of Müller's dramatic texts, some of Lauwers' pieces draw heavily on existing literary sources. But, unlike Müller, these sources are hardly ever plays. Lauwers used a Hemingway short story in *Invictos*, and parts of Alberto Moravia's oeuvre can be found in *Snakesong/Le Voyeur* (1994). In the dialogues of *Snakesong/Le Désir* we find bits and pieces of Lautréamont's *Maldoror*, Huysmans' *Against Nature*, and Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. For the theatre section of *documenta X*, the company did once present a stage reading of Albert Camus' *Caligula* (1997), and the piece *DeadDogsDon'tDance* (2000) links up to James Joyce via wordplays and puns. There is, of course, one major exception. If Lauwers produces plays from the repertoire, they are invariably

Shakespeare plays. He has created *Julius Caesar* (1990), *Antonius und Cleopatra* (1992), *Needcompany's Macbeth* (1996), *Needcompany's King Lear* (2000), and, at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, *Ein Sturm*, an adaptation of *The Tempest* (2001).

In his text "Exercises in Regicide", the Flemish theatre scholar Klaas Tindemans investigates the relationship between Jan Lauwers and Shakespeare through a discussion of the relationship between dramaturgy and space in *Julius Caesar*, *Needcompany's Macbeth* and *Needcompany's King Lear*. Lauwers is, like Shakespeare, an ardent opponent of 'unity of location', a characteristic that aligns him with the concept of post-dramatic theatre quite well. Tindemans argues that in his productions Lauwers translates the power games that drive Shakespeare's plays into spatial relationships on the stage, where actors and dancers struggle to control the stage by choreographical and rhetorical means. In this spatial negotiation lies the political significance of Lauwers' Shakespeare productions: the theatrical space is "an empty space" that embodies "the essence of power" — and that essence is that power "cannot be seen or touched, only ... encircled by dancing or oratorical movements".

The struggle of the performers on a diluted or — conversely — a saturated stage in *Needcompany's King Lear* also evokes a political stance which Christel Stalpaert, a theatre scholar from Ghent, grounds in the liberation from common sense and in the dismantling of the paradigm of representation. The performers recover their bodily space from the representative paradigm through the aesthetics of intensities released on stage.

According to the German theatre scholar Felix Sprang, Jan Lauwers negotiates aspects of narration by way of "a turn on the narrative turn". Sprang traces Aristotle's legacy in matters of narrative in light of this "turn on the narrative turn" in order to discuss the intricate relationship between (re)presentation and narration in *Needcompany's* early Shakespeare productions — *Julius Caesar*, *Antonius und Cleopatra*, *Needcompany's*

Macbeth — and in *Isabella's Room*. He shows that Aristotle's description of dramatic action in terms of 'imitation' or '(re)presentation' is more complex than may seem at first sight. Against the background of Aristotle's expanded notion of mimesis, Jan Lauwers' critical responses to that notion not only open a space for reflection, they also allow for an impassioned expression of character, emotion, and action even in the absence of the chronological constraints of the narrative.

The theatre critic Audronis Liuga approaches the theatre work of Jan Lauwers from his distinctive Lithuanian theatre background. He foregrounds Lauwers' preoccupations with 'accidents', which he claims serve a double function in Lauwers' work: they are a means to narrate the action, and they are the basis for the development of a philosophical matrix, one in which the individual can realize his or herself in spite of the laws of the surrounding world. Liuga sees *Images of Affection*, *Isabella's Room*, *All is Vanity* and *The Lobster Shop* as deeply interrelated by their common concern with the theme of the fate of man. Accidental twists of fate get the story going at the same time that they liberate it from a classical dramaturgical narrative structure based on the principle of cause and effect.

The Slovenian theatre critic Primož Jesenko expands upon the possibilities of narration in a society of multiple truths. Jesenko puts the accidental twists of fate that Liuga points out into dialogue with Baudrillard's concept of "the absolute event". In doing so, he sketches a daring parallel between the effects that terrorism has at the global level, and the effects that the death of a son, in *The Lobster Shop*, has at the level of the family. Events such as these fly in the face of all testimonial truths, perspectives, or quotes; they produce a "postepic narration" that embraces not one, but many truths, without any fixed measure to decide which one of them is really true.

Needcompany's postepic performance style is evident in the practice of reading on stage. The German theatre scholar Janine Hauthal argues that reading on stage is in fact a "performative tactic" in *Caligula*, the first part of a diptych

called *No beauty for me there where human life is rare*. In reading scenes, character is presented rather than enacted. These scenes, beyond shattering the illusion of conventional theatre, in which stage diction is supposed to sound like spontaneous speech, provide a mental space in between actor and role-text that keeps the actor from 'disappearing' in the closed formation of an embodied character-subject. Given Lauwers' reflective approach to *Caligula*, speaking with an accent should be understood as a similar "performative tactic". By putting an international cast on stage and making it so that members do not speak their mother tongue, Lauwers renders audible the materiality of their voice.

Lauwers' linguistic innovations, on top of performing unexpected negotiations with aspects of narrations, are also remarkably radical. Lauwers mixes different languages, and he oftentimes denies actors the ease of speaking their mother tongue. But he does not stop there. He also makes the materiality of the word itself visible through his experimental use of supertitles. After being treated to a 'shocking' experience by *Needcompany's King Lear*, the American theatre scholar Marvin Carlson was moved to explore the conventional and experimental use of supertitles in theatre, and to consider its potential contributions to the creating of theatrical meaning.

Images

"When Lear says 'kill', and you read the word kill on the LED screen, they are totally different phenomena. The word kill suddenly becomes an image", says Jan Lauwers, speaking about *Needcompany's King Lear*. This concern with rendering the word's materiality visible is also integral to the sculpture Lauwers mounted outside Brussels, in the fields at Grimbergen (2000). Lauwers' sculpture echoes Los Angeles' 'Hollywood' sign created as an advertisement back in 1923, and is a comment on cheap entertainment. "Now Hollywood has taken over where Shakespeare left off. Steven Spielberg is the Shakespeare of his time. We have the Internet, we have video, we have all kinds of media. But we don't know how to

see real people any more. It's as if they are behind glass. I think theatre is a method of teaching us how to see."¹

More important, however, is the sentence used for the sculpture: "No beauty for me there where human life is rare". The sentence is Lauwers', and he has been carrying it around with him as a motto for years. He translated the sentence into eleventh-century Dutch: "Verre van der menschen dinghen en vant ic neghene shoenhede". The sculpture does not spell out the sentence in its entirety: several letters are missing, making it even harder to read than it is already in its eleventh-century spelling.

We have several reasons for titling our book after this motto. Lauwers described the sculpture as the crystallization of everything he is doing, or has done and it is indeed a fact that the sentence has reared its head several times in the course of his career. We have already mentioned the diptych called *No beauty for me there where human life is rare*, composed of *Caligula* (1997) and *Morning Song* (1999). It captures Lauwers' material approach to language and text, his search for beauty as the only weapon we have against violence, and it encapsulates the interconnectedness of the painter and the theatre maker.

Jan Lauwers, perhaps because he is a fine artist who eventually became involved with theatre, produces highly visual theatre. Images in his productions obtain an autonomous structuring quality, allowing for readings that go against the grain of the narrative. Lauwers' visual art falls outside the scope of this publication, but the importance of the image in his theatre aesthetics goes without saying.

In 1994 Jan Lauwers started to work on a large project called *The Snakesong Trilogy: Snakesong/Le Voyeur* (1994), *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir* (1995) and *Snakesong/Le Désir* (1996); he staged the reworked version of the entire *Trilogy* in 1998. The power of images is, just as in his other performances, an important issue here. The piece by Flemish sociologist and theatre scholar

1. Rundle, Erika. "Images Freedom. Jan Lauwers. Interviewed by Erika Rundle." *Theater*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2000 p. 64.

Rudi Laermans, written in 1997, begins with a description of *Pearls*, the opening sequence of *Snakesong/Le Voyeur*, in order to evoke a theatrical language that confronts the audience with its voyeuristic gaze. He calls Jan Lauwers a “capturer of glances”, and he wonders how one might “establish a different relationship between the viewing subject and the viewed image in the midst of the general voyeurism of the media or entertainment society”.

The Flemish Jürgen Pieters, a literature scholar, argues that Lauwers’ work calls into question “a traditional mimetic conception by allowing images to clash with each other as well as with the ideas they supposedly represent”. The harmonious exercise of the senses is not the issue here. To get at the complexity of the disturbing game the images play in *The Snakesong Trilogy*, Pieters refers to the ‘figural’, as theorized by Lyotard, and to the ‘liminal’, as discussed by Georges Bataille. Lauwers’ ‘liminal’ images invite the spectator to experience the sublime at the same time that they demonstrate “that this very notion stems in part from the cruelty which (in its capacity as a work of art) the sublime is assumed to transcend”. The spectator is thrown back upon himself and, even more so, onto the limit within himself.

Frederik Le Roy develops these thoughts further. He wonders what power images have in a visual culture powered by hypercapitalism. What power do images have against images? His essay about *Images of Affection* explores what happens when Pop (Art) meets trauma. This play was conceived to celebrate Needcompany’s fifteenth anniversary, and it is a veritable “memory machine”: the stage is haunted by images from previous Needcompany productions, and by references to pop culture and to Andy Warhol. This ‘quoting’ of images is neither a festive nor a nostalgic tribute. Instead, it evokes the delimiting effects of trauma. The introduction of pop elements and the intertextual play with Pop Art are not at all obvious: “they contain the shreds of a broken subjectivity, which haunts the audience despite but also because of their allure and digestibility”.

The question — what power do images have against images? — brings us to the medium of video and film art. In 2002, Lauwers released his first feature film, *Goldfish Game*, a drama that follows the unusual cast of characters from *Morning Song*. But before that, Jan Lauwers already had a number of film and video projects to his name, including *From Alexandria* (1988), *Mangia* (1995) and *Sampled Images* (2000). Film work and theatre work are interconnected: in 2002, Lauwers created *C-Song*, a video film and installation that he later incorporated into *The Lobster Shop*.

Video images intersect the storyline of *The Lobster Shop*. The five films projected on a huge screen at the beginning, middle, and end of the play provide a break and a turning point. The Flemish philosopher Robrecht Vanderbeeken describes *C-Song* as an autonomous ‘eye-catcher’ which, by dialoguing with the performance, takes a sideways look at events that escaped the stage. In their dissonant effect, these video images are more than an allegory or a metaphor. They are instigators of a visual ritual that runs against the grain of the image.

The starting point for the piece by the German theatre and dance critic Arnd Wesemann are the photos that Maarten Vanden Abeele took of Needcompany, photos that have stuck in his mind ever since he first saw them. For the book *The Lucidity of the Obscene* (1998), this photographer followed Jan Lauwers and his Needcompany through Europe for one hundred and twenty days. Vanden Abeele, instead of photographing the theatre productions themselves, photographed all those things that one might catch in passing out of the corner of one’s eye. And this book of lost moments in hotel rooms and lobbies, on the road, behind the scenes, inspired Wesemann to write about the placelessness one experiences in the Europe of the mid-90s, in the productions of Needcompany, and in the figure of Jan Lauwers, the pre-eminent outsider.

Lauwers' postdramatic theatre raises the issue of the power of dance and music, insofar as these appeal to physicality, and not to cognitive recognition. Dance and music are here on the same foot: our sensory perception of them is the experience of our inability of ever appropriating. The most joyful and at the same time the most tragic of experiences.

This was already the case with the second part of the diptych *No beauty for me there where human life is rare*, namely *Morning Song*, a play that "takes frequent detours, incorporating music and numerous dance interludes". The American theatre scholar Erika Rundle saw *Morning Song* on tour, as part of New York's New Europe '99 Festival and the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival. Her review, which appeared in *Theater* (2000), describes how "stage conversation merges into a rhythmic chant", and how music and dance at first glance promise to parallel the action, only to betray our expectations in the end. "There is more in Lauwers' heaven than is dreamt of in dramatic theory", Rundle writes.

In May 2000, at the request of William Forsythe, Lauwers created, in co-production with the Ballett Frankfurt, a piece entitled *DeaDDogsDon'tDance!DJamesDjoyceDeaD*. In Lauwers' creation dancers from Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt were 'confronted' with performers from Needcompany. In her review, which appeared in the 2000 issue of *Dance Theatre Journal*, Ann Nugent discusses the production from the perspective of a dance scholar. Although the connection to Joyce, the wordplays and the puns impressed Nugent, what really moved her was to see what she calls the production's "sculptured dancing".

The notion that the dancers' bodies do something to your system is confirmed in the contribution by the Flemish theatre and dance critic Elke Van Campenhout. She describes dancers as living "in another dimension", and their actions as "independent from the narrative line". Lauwers provides the answer to Yeats' famous question, "How can we know the dancer from the dance?"; the dancers' bodies produce neither stories nor

excuses. They produce only themselves, making the performance resonate across time and space.

Isabella's Room also resonates: in this room the vibrations of the narration continue in the dance and music, despite — or due to — their lack of direction, says Karel Vanhaesebrouck. He interprets the production as a multi-layered artistic appropriation of the musical. According to Vanhaesebrouck, what Lauwers does in *Isabella's Room* is pair his own radical artistic language with this alleged pariah of the performing arts. With *Isabella's Room*, Lauwers cheerfully lets the eternal dichotomy between high and low implode. Still, we must not be deceived by this new mildness of tone, and a number of contributions to this book point out that this lightness is thorny, that melancholic and traumatic echoes can still be heard underneath the poppy songs.

Communities

The name of Lauwers' company is suggestive of something he has repeatedly confirmed: he needs company in order to create. Lauwers chooses the people he works with very carefully. He has to love them.

The longing for company is in fact a desire for rest and for community. And freedom is a movement not bound by the borders of (comm)unity. Lauwers cherishes both, hence the paradoxes in his work. Flemish dramaturge Sigrid Bousset shows that the term 'Needlabp', which Jan Lauwers coined a few years ago, goes to the core of this dichotomy: "on the one hand there is the need for the laboratory (lab) — for experimentation, testing limits, etc. — and on the other there is the desire for a 'lap', the need for intimacy and protection". Seen from this perspective, Needcompany is not far removed from Andy Warhol's Factory, "where the relationship between group and individual was in constant motion".

Flemish dramaturge Erwin Jans suggests that Lauwers' 'need' for 'company' extends even further, to the audience. In his view, *Isabella's Room* communicated with its audience with

evident generosity. What is the public other than a broken community, one that has lost its communal sense but goes on repeating a few of its elementary gestures? The live music and inviting group singing in *Isabella's Room* hark back to mourning and funeral rituals that Western culture has long forgotten. Jans argues that the crisis of community is as much an issue in modern art as in modern politics. In developing his argument, he brings into play Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the inoperative community, a community that does not achieve existence as such.

One might also say that Lauwers' concern with community intersects with Emmanuel Levinas' reflections on community and difference. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas inquires: "Does a face abide both in representation and in proximity; is it community and difference? What meaning can community take on in difference without reducing difference?"²

In *The Unavowable Community*, Blanchot describes how, when another person dies, the 'self' loses its familiar certainties and is irrevocably confronted with its own mortality and finitude. In her discussion of *Isabella's Room*, Christel Stalpaert looks at the thin line between mourning and the loss of self in the state of melancholia. She argues that Lauwers does not aestheticize the confrontation with our transience and mortality. His theatre of recollection does not consist of coagulated memories or solid thought constructions. On the contrary, the spectator is confronted with the complex simultaneity of present, past and future. Lauwers, by bringing the ethnographic objects on stage and giving them a theatrical role, emphasizes the temporal structure specific to theatre: he foregrounds theatrical time as pure present.

The French theatre scholar Georges Banu comes to attribute a similar function to the ethnographic objects displayed in *Isabella's Room* by way of a more general discussion of the human urge to collect and keep things lest they should perish. Banu is himself the son of a collector, and hence acutely attuned to the double sense of fascination and exasperation produced by the passion for collecting. Seeing the play, Banu claims

to have rediscovered the ambiguous relationship that exists between the collection on the one hand, and art, history, and the family on the other. Lauwers' decision to put his father's collection on stage is an act of generosity, in which he surrenders to a ritual that can free him from the hold the collection of the master of the household once had, but affectionately, gracefully.

The Belgian theatre scholar Nancy Delhalle weighs the pros and cons of Isabella's care of the self and her denial of the world. In her opinion, the character imagined by Jan Lauwers, passing as she does from a convent to a lighthouse on an island to a room in Paris, is first and foremost a cloistered individual. The room filled with African objects is a materialization of the world as the protagonist sees it. Is her view a colonial one, bringing a certain world — Africa — to an archival standstill? Or does Lauwers also reveal the myth's flipside?

Can we call Lauwers' theatre political? Katrien Vuylsteke Vanfleteren distinguishes between art that engages in politics and art that questions society. Examining Lauwers' newsletters for clues to his political side, she focuses on three one-liners of Lauwers — 'art is freedom', 'art is futile' and 'art is elitist' — which form the basis for an extensive reflection on art's place in society, with Lacan as theoretical guide.

It is no coincidence that several authors in this book call on their memory when writing about Jan Lauwers' theatre work with Needcompany. That 'theatre is an ephemeral art' is probably one of the biggest clichés about this medium. Still, every repetition of this commonplace seems to express the impossible urge to take hold of this very transience. In many ways, this book is just such an impossible act. All of the texts published here are in their own way acts of memory — acts of re-membering, re-imagining, re-interpreting, or re-reading events now long gone. Our intention in these pages — durable, permanent, archival — has been to gather some of these acts of memory, but not, by any means, to halt them. 'There are as many performances as there are spectators': yet another one of those clichés about theatre, but one, we hope, equally applicable

2. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1981, p. 154.

30

to this book. In the end, these pages will disappear as well, they'll 'turn to dust', as we might have said in times now long past (today we would probably say they'll be 'chopped to a pulp' and recycled into new books about who knows what). What will remain, we hope, will lie beyond these pages, in many acts of reading this one, or should we then say many, book(s).

As Jan Lauwers once said in an interview, explaining his love for theatre: "I work hard with people and you play for people. There's tension, and when it's finished it's finished. Then and only then it exists."

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GHENT, FEBRUARY 2007