

"In order to love you, I accept the risk of failure" Thomas Hauert

1

In Belgium, dance is in every respect a young art form. The Flanders Ballet, our first classical company, was only established in 1969. From 1980, young dancers such as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker started to develop their own modern dance idiom. A lot of hard work has been done since then. Brussels has for some years now been marked down on the map of the world as a city of dance. In the wake of these choreographic developments (De Keersmaeker, Platel, Fabre, Vandekeybus, etc.), many young choreographers came and settled in Flanders, and especially in Brussels. Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's founding of the P.A.R.T.S. dance school in 1995 signified additional allure for Brussels as a city of dance. A large number of young choreographers live, work and create here.

2

One of them is Thomas Hauert. He was born in a small village in Switzerland. As a small boy he danced in the hall of his home. When he was five or six he went to a performance of *Holiday on Ice* with his parents. It was at the moment that he decided somewhere in his mind, to become a dancer. After training as a teacher in Switzerland, he went to the Rotterdam Academy of Dance and then found himself in Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's company in Brussels. While there, he participated in the creation of such pieces as *Erts*, *Mozart Concert Arias* and *Kinok*. But it was clear there and then that he wanted to be a creative artist himself-among other things he did a choreographic 'exercise' set to Dziga Vertov's *The Man with the Camera*. Another important event was his meeting with the choreographer and improviser David Zambrano. After a solo in 1997, in 1998 he created the piece *Cows in Space* with five dancers, for which he immediately won several prizes at the major gathering of young choreographers at Bagnolet in France. Since then he has done several solo projects and continued to work on his following group choreographic pieces (including *Pop-Up Songbook* and *Jetzt*) with the same dancers: Sara Ludi, Samantha Van Wissen, Mark Lorimer, Mat Voorter and Hauert himself.

An exceptionally stable young group that is extremely interested in the research work that it is able to carry out while putting the choreography together. Thomas is actually 'the choreographer of the group', but always emphasises that the work is done as a collective and that his dancers are 'co-creators' of the performances. The company's name is ZOO, which, significantly, we can translate as meaning 'looking at animals', and especially at the most bizarre variety, 'the human'.

"Wednesday. I was walking along an eucalyptus-lined avenue when a cow sauntered out from behind a tree. I stopped and we looked each other in the eye. Her cowness shocked my humanness to such a degree-the moment our eyes met was so intense-I stopped dead in my tracks and lost my bearings as a man, that is, as a member of the human species" (Witold Gombrowicz)

3

There are two approaches that invariably appear in Thomas Hauert's work: on the one hand he works with his dancers on moments of improvisation and sequences that are in no sense fixed in advance, and on the other, his starting point often consists of well-defined geometric or spatial patterns that seriously determine the choreography. It is precisely this duality of 'fixed' and 'non-fixed' that gives his choreography its vitality. Hauert has a tremendous confidence in the intelligence and spontaneous reactions of the body: we could never have devised beforehand the movement that we improvise, and what we carry out in accordance with chosen patterns acquires an added physical value which we could not in theory have imagined. Dancing as a practice, with the body in action.

4

Thomas Hauert does not 'just' create; there is thought and a philosophy behind his steps and movements. In *Cows in Space* he examined, among other things, the space 'between' the dancers and wanted to give the audience the impression that they were in the moving train observing a landscape with cows as if it were that that was moving: an attempt to manipulate the audience's perception. In *Pop-Up Songbook*, it was not only the body, but also the voice that was subjected to examination, and what's more, Hauert and his dancers were here already involved in intensive experimentation on balance and gravity: for example, in a long sequence in this piece the performers try out the most varied movements, standing on one leg, and so on. In *Jetzt*, the study of weightlessness was continued: every possible floating state between falling and landing was tried out: what happens to the body between the beginning and the end of a fall? The following solo that Hauert created was called *Do you believe in gravity? Do you trust the pilot?*

"Life could never have come into being in a stable situation. In such as state the growing complexity of its forms could never have appeared. It is, on the contrary, in a constant state of instability, like that of a man who, pushed in the back, chases after his own centre of gravity in order not to fall, that life became possible" (Henri Laborit, biologist)

5

Thomas Hauert is currently making a new group choreographic work that builds on the experiences gained in his solo 'about gravity'. The voice will be heard once again in this group project: "we want to write our own songs", but the essential starting point is the one great contradiction that dominates theatre, that between the Real and the Simulated, between true and not true. The beauty of a work of art is in part the enjoyment of the lie we see in it. Not maintaining any more pretence about reality. "The lie, the telling of fine, untrue things is the actual purpose of art", so wrote Oscar Wilde.

This time, Hauert wants to work with theatrical elements and characters. When do you become a character? When you move your arms in a certain way, different from the others? At what stage can your posture be said to reflect a character? How do you change yourself visibly, for the audience-by means of particular movements? When you speak lines, do you automatically come closer to being a character? Surely movement has its rights too? So many questions, but no answers. The performance will give a provisionally answer.

"What is positive, the weight or the lightness? Parmenides answered that the light is positive, the heavy negative. Was he right? That is the question. One thing is certain. The antithesis of heavy and light is the most mysterious and ambiguous of all antitheses" (Milan Kundera)

Marianne Van Kerkhoven about the work of Thomas Hauert
(Kaaithheater, program Jan-Feb 2002)