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Liikkeellä marraskuussa / Moving in November: It's Going to Get Worse and Worse and Worse, My Friend

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Julkaisuaikakohta: marraskuu 06, 2012 – **Ei kommentteja** (#comments)

The students of **International Performance Research** (http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre_s/postgraduate/maipr/) (MA) write about their experiences during **Moving in November** (<http://movinginnovember.fi/>) festival for Liikekieli.com. **Melanie Jame Walsh** and **Viola Karungi** analyse and review **Lisbeth Gruwez's** *It's Going to Get Worse and Worse and Worse, My Friend*.

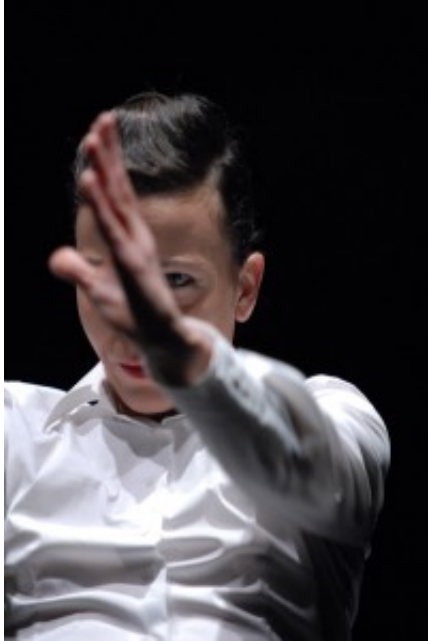
It's Going to Get Worse and Worse and Worse, My Friend

This November is my second living in Europe. It's cold here. And dark. Early. It messes with one's circadian rhythms. Really. This battle with the overwhelming desire to hibernate is new to me. By the time I sit down in the Stoa theatre for Saturday night's performance of *It's Going to Get Worse and Worse and Worse and Worse, My Friend*, I am so inexplicably tired that I fear I won't even manage to be awake for the start of the show.

Sitting in the front row of this black box space I am greeted by the image of a sole female figure in clean, close-cut masculine white button down shirt and grey, quasi-military long pants. Her dark hair in an androgynous quiff, she waits for us, her eager audience, at the upstage end of a long rectangular corridor of harsh white light. A clearly delineated, controlled space for a clearly delineated, controlled performance.

As is quickly revealed, this work is about the relationship of words and gesture, rhetoric and embodiment, rhythm and control as employed to particularly successful manipulative end by charismatic leaders and types the world over.

The example of such a leader used by Gruwez is that of fallen American Pentecostal tele-evangelist **Jimmy Swaggart**. Cuts and repeated samples of words from a recording of one of Swaggart's fervoured sermons form the basis of **Maarten Van Cauwenbergh's** sound design. The score of Gruwez's movement is in responsive tandem with these initial abrupt spurts and increasingly flowing releases of repetition. Every burst, blurt and phrase of Stewart's hysterical and hyperbolic fire-and-brimstone deep-south accent is amplified and embodied by a corresponding burst, blurt or phrase of the dancer's crystal clear, knowing movements.



(http://www.liikekieli.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/LisbethGruwez_1.jpg)

Lisbeth Gruwez: It's going to worse and worse and worse, my friend, photo: Luc Depreitere

The exacting raised eyebrow of assurance on Gruwez's face throughout this jerking, start-stop, play-rewind-repeat assemblage of movement and sound gives sinister dark comedy to the whole affair. It denotes a mastery, a knowing, in the consummate manipulator – whether an incredibly skilled dancer/choreographer or promiser/seller of salvation on your 1980's TV screen – that is conversely chilling and seductive. Therein lies trouble, and the genius. Gruwez is a woman, but somehow she is the spirit, the very convincing embodiment, of not only Swaggart himself, but every charismatic leader that we have known.

The dramaturgy of *It's Going to Get Worse and Worse and Worse, My Friend* operates as a cycle of three waves, or passages. Each builds on the next and follows a text book pattern of Jo-ha-kyu – the 'beginning, break, rapid' structure of traditional Japanese art, of traditional drama, even of our own orgasm and also of most of the truly compelling speeches we have ever heard. The age old harnessing of this dramaturgy is under close examination by *Worse and Worse*. In the first passage, Swaggart's vocal samples are abstracted blips and blurts and Gruwez's rhetorical mode of embodying these in razor-sharp gestural phrases is established – we are given just enough to pursue our curiosity beyond our dismissal of, 'is he/she mad?'.

I am battling my involuntary hibernation coma, I nod off repeatedly despite being gripped by a fear of snoring in the front row of the theatre. I am given just enough by Gruwez to pursue *my* curiosity to

warrant a desperate pinching and clutching at the pressure points on my ears to wake myself. An in space adjustment in costume – black tights are pulled up over the grey pants to the knee, a similar white stocking from the waistband to the ribcage – transforms our leader into something more of a marionette, ready to spring, but I remain convinced of *our* status as her puppets.

She is subservient only to her desire to make us, in spite of ourselves and no matter what she tells us, buy what her movements sell in the sound of his master Swaggart's voice. The samples in this second act become longer, more intelligible in their repetition. The repetition more intelligible as a rhetorical trope and a trope of trance. Gruwez covers more space, threatening to break the downstage line of her white light rectangle to reach us, to connect with us on the line, '...my friends'. A nervous laughter ripples through the audience.

Throughout Gruwez is rarely anything but upright. Constrained to this level of movement a sense of growing momentum of energy is established – she is a tightly coiled caged tiger – the power of the word is charging faster in her body toward us, she is excited but resolutely in control. This passage ends with her on the ground, a first break in level. The third, and final, passage begins with the dancer back on her feet, upstage center. The rumbling undercurrent of Cauwenbergh's soundscape is really moving now.

Arms outstretched before her at 90 degrees Gruwez begins a lengthy durational phrase consisting solely of her body rapidly shaking, heels bouncing off the ground, the skin on her face wobbling, fingers jangling – it is the ascent, the journey of surrender which will transport all who follow. Our leader's gambit and sacrifice. The suspense is excruciating, and completely compelling. Come on, *come...on!* Finally...she is leaping in the air. Again and again. The arch raised eyebrow of knowing now knowing triumph.

We are here, in this space of ultimate release and even in her leaping, again and again, there is a certain control. She has been here before. This final, prolonged leaping surrender is an embodiment of eschatological ecstasy for the coming of the end of days. It is also a stunning, disturbing image of the triumphant internal victory dance that takes place somewhere deep in the psyche of every grand statesman, dictator, evangelist, local scam artist and everyday sociopath at the end of a successful gambit into manipulation.

It is the same pattern of release as a banging techno set on a dancefloor, clocking a long run, an orgasm or perhaps what it is like to kill at the end of the hunt. It is also the same, very carnal, satisfaction that one can feel at the end of a performance that has really 'worked'. I am wide awake and I am hooked. In rapture. Lisbeth Gruwez has won me over. Her androgyne officer's uniform stalking that clear rectangle of harsh white light has become a direct image of the mythic space in which the latent charismatic sociopath in all of us resides. She has led, and despite how transparently she has rendered these dark machinations, I have followed. With pleasure.

Melanie Jame Walsh

Writer is an Australian artist and performer currently based in Berlin. She is a member of triage live art collective and creative director of savage amusement. www.triageliveartcollective.com & www.savage-amusement.com

When There Is No Exit!

A solo performance and a dance one at that, is not an ordinary path. And this applies for the various perspectives that quickly come to mind: the subject matter, production and performance; and its ultimate capacity to consistently capture the audience and earn a thunderous applause at the end of it all. In light of these elements, I review the 45 minute performance *'It is going to get worse and worse and worse, my friend'* as staged by **Lisbeth Gruwez** on the evening of November 3rd 2012 at Stoa.

The title of this performance connotes unpleasant thoughts in the first place (although it could also be interpreted as a playful statement). It's a caution by a friend telling a friend to prepare for 'some kind of trouble'. This is the first tactical sway to attract an audience; but it also directs the audience's predictions which is both exciting and biasing.

Upon entering the auditorium, we are requested to occupy the centre seats – another preparation for the audience. Lights off, a figure in black and white is illuminated by a spot light centre stage up, the figure takes about three steps towards the audience. Now she is visible: grey trousers, a white shirt – well tucked in into the trousers and shining black shoes. She stands like that army lieutenant who has been summoned by the commander. The costume and posture shoulder influence there and then. The audience awaits for what this figure has to deliver. A rectangular space has been well demarcated in white paint in the centre of the stage, and that is where all action takes place.

Slow and low sound, like an airplane disappearing into the sky plays. Gentle and fine motifs grow from arm gestures and incorporate the rest of the body, a somewhat a stiff body, although there is no indicator that Gruwez is struggling to move. Movement develops into break dance with each body part at play. Her face is rather stiff without obvious emotion. She suddenly halts, dead silence in the audience, lights slowly fade out but not completely so she is still visible. This is one of the two halts in the performance which serve to create suspense and tension, but also to allow breathing space for the audience and performer since much of the action is rather rigorous. Playing with the spot lights creates various illusions for the audience, as well as twisting the atmosphere which I think enhances the entire experience especially considering that there is only one character whom the audience may easily get tired of looking at. However, it is commendable that throughout the performance, Gruwez maintains a sharp eye contact. This does well in keeping her visually connected to the audience.

Then a voice in the background begins to play with words, generating sentences, and then statements We hear a monologue:

It's going to get worse and worse and worse my friend

What are we to do?

Nooo. I am sick of this!

There is a short-cut laughter from the audience which I guess is a reaction to the awakening by the statement. The deep voice was produced in a powerful manner such that it became an unseen character and a good blend with the female character before the audience. The words made a significant input on the psyche of the audience. I imagine that they would have had even more impact had they been a dialogue between the voice and Gruwez. For instance the last two lines could have been left for her as a way of enhancing her role as the protagonist in this harsh moment, and to emphasize the hopelessness of the statement as felt by the visible character rather than the invisible one.

The choice of the demarcated space helped to suffocate the character's mobility choices such that she was left with one choice of encountering trouble in a confined space. This was a powerful directorial choice in enhancing the subject. For example, the line '*What are we to do?*' came in handy in this situation as the character could not even run away from the torture space itself. This is in comparison to for instance if she had the entire stage where she could easily run from one corner to another for relief.



(<http://www.liikekieli.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Lisbeth-Gruwez.jpg>)

Lisbeth Gruwez: It's going to get worse and worse and worse, my friend, photo: Luc Depreitere.

When she lay on her chest for about two minutes, with the music as low as possible such that we could almost hear her breath, I thought that this was a natural reaction of the worry triggered by the statement. It was also a moment to change the level of viewing for the audience. Considering that she was confined to only the centre of the stage, various eyesight levels could have been explored to relish the stage picture as well.

As she staggered finally while shaking her head like a possessed zombie, I saw a defeated human being. Then the voice like a church sermon took us to the cloud of intensity as she jumped up and down repeatedly. The intervention or imploration of religion is typical of many human beings during turbulent moments as was in this performance. She almost smiled but did not: She showed this victorious look of the hero in the play who wins the empathy of the audience, an energetic performer, a conscious artist. But even then, there was no exit. Then she looked down and halted again, this time harder than before. A thunderous applause.

Viola Karungi

Writer is a drama graduate. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in International Performance Research at the University of Helsinki.

Lisbeth Gruwez / Voetvolk: *It's going to get worse and worse and worse, my friend*

Choreography and performance: Lisbeth Gruwez

Sound design and assitant: Maarten Van Cauwenberghe

Costume design: Veronique Branquinho

Artistic Advisor: Bart Meuleman

Lighting design: Harry Cole

Production: Voetvolk vzw

Co-production: Grand Theatre Groningen, Troubleyn / Jan Fabre, Theater Im Pumpenhaus

Supported by: Provincie West-Vlaanderen & Vlaamse Gemeenschap

Premiere: 27.9.2011 Contemporanea Festival, Prato (IT)

Read also **Olivia Furber's** (<http://www.liikekieli.com/archives/5158>) and **Maria Prokhorova's** (<http://www.liikekieli.com/archives/5169>) reviews of the same performance.

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Lisää kommentti...



Julkaise Facebookissa

Julkaistaan nimellä Maarten Van Cauwenberghe ([Vaihda](#))

Kommentoi

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