

From Straightjacket to free play

by Wendy Lubberding: theaterkrant march 11 2016

The music is almost carnival-like in its cheerful lightness.

Hilde Elbers takes the time to show everything that those happy beats bells and bubbles evoke- but the tragedy that lies underneath increasingly breaks through the surface. The having to's and the should be's. The idea that this is how it supposed to be: that you look cheerful and light and jump around happily and excited when the music dictates so. It doesn't let this woman go, while we see how much effort it takes her to keep going. She tippytoes, throws her arms like the wings of a small bird upwards and smiles until the rubberband wants to jump out of her hair. but her back betrays a growing tiredness weariness, in her eyes you can read the weariness and the despair becomes stronger.

In the surprising The Animated with which she toured in 2014 and 2015 was already visible how Hilde Elbers in her choreographical work plays a physical game with structure and expression, with contact and conflict. In that show together with Lea Martini she looked for freedom to express different intentions while moving within a limited spectrum on a compelling barren beat. In her new work she searches alone.

In A manual for walking we see a woman that seems captive in a restricting structure. Her room to maneuver is tight: she puts her audience facing each other in two long rows of benches. In between is maybe two meters. The first part is a bit weird it takes a long time before the wait and see attitude of the audience gives way to public acceptance. The music plays also a decisive role, initially it has a strong presence and as said forcefully cheerful, but then all of a sudden totally absent. The busy woman that we saw so bravely busy with everything at once literally falls silent. writhing on the ground, with arms that do nothing to let her find her balance she excruciatingly slowly reinvent herself. Now she gets to us, she touches deeply. Lying on the floor with her face very tired leaning against somebody's shin, she makes everything and everyone quiet.

And also here she shakes the watching experience. Where *The Animated* gave you a different sense of time through consistent repetition, here she plays a game of responsibility with the viewer. Because she comes so close and the audience looks each other straight in the eye there is a direct role for every individual in the small audience. The dancer shows you your place, gives you a high 5 or she takes your knee to get up. Her look and movements constantly asking for a response.

But the contact continues. The role of the viewer reaches further. Because what if she is shivering and sweating and wants an eskimo kiss from you: nose-noses? What if she scratches her ass and then wants to shake your hand? What if she takes your purse and wants to give it to another viewer, and you really don't like that? It's almost impossible to stay untouched. literally. Out of everything speaks the urge to make real contact. If need be she makes you angry. Right through the initial awkwardness of the beginning Elbers keeps going until she establishes the playful connection between the audience which she appeared to be looking for. The smile on the faces reflect the liberation. So Elbers proves that dance appeals to more than just our eyes. To see dance awakens the desire to play. And in our from Numbers saturated times, with the many holy have to-ing, with agendas and targets and being constantly available, the free play gets very often compromised.

Definitely one of the most generous and vibrant dance pieces I saw lately, performed by beautiful and generous human being and dancer Hilde Elbers: personal emergency, dedication, care and human connection all right in front of your eyes, passing through you and everyone in the room. (Elisabeth borgermans)

GREAT creation and performance by Hilde Elbers!

These kind of pieces that you walk out and instead of only seeing the dance/innovation/technique, you actually see existential and transpersonal issues coming to rise that we can all relate to. (Mauro probato)

