

as the ‘Cannibalist Manifesto’, suggests that an invasive culture should not be merely rejected, but rather be eaten, digested and shitted out in a different version. Of course, as citizens living in the West, we have been and we still are the invaders. Nonetheless I asked myself the question: what aspects of western culture would I reject? Which aspects would I consider problematic? Maybe I should start to cannibalize these? In 2012–2013 I have been working with a group of youngsters on ‘Love Songs (veldeke)’. I proposed to the group texts about love and politics. We asked the question whether love could be a tool for politics. We read these texts together, but during the breaks the youngsters were playing music, mostly pop music, and they danced on it. And while I saw them, I thought: ‘This is interesting. Here we have a sort of movement and image culture invading these young bodies, including mine. Couldn’t we generate movements and dance material from this improvisation? Instead of fighting it with contemporary dance phrases, rather eating, digesting and shitting out this dance material from popular culture in a different form: that is what we have to do!’ Now, precisely this principle of ‘cannibalism’ is at work in my recent pieces.

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JUSTIN BIEBER FT. MILEY CYRUS (2014).
#twerk.
 ROBIN THICKE, T.I. & PHARRELL (2013).
Blurred Lines.
 DILLON, F. & DJ SNAKE (2014).
Get low.
 DJ SNAKE & LIL JOHN (2014).
Turn Down For What.
 LAMAR, K. (2014).
M.A.A.D. City (Eprom remix).
 GODARD, J.L. (2011).
Eloge de l’amour.
 MUDSKIPPER247 (2009).
Wetting Auss & TN’s.
 SPEARS, B. (2003).
Everytime (instrumental).
 GODARD, J.L. (1998).
Histoire(s) du cinema.

D

Imagining the agora of the 21st century

Anna Siegel: In ‘Our times’, you work with contrasting material, which you have reappropriated from different sources. Can you shortly introduce this piece? How did you arrive at this mix of material?

Michiel Vandevelde: The idea is to appropriate material of various origin that is present in our current western culture (which, – problematically –, is often also a global culture). The dance material is based on pop video clips. The music is based on the soundtrack of the movie ‘Spring Breakers’ by Harmony Korine (rap, trap and EDM music, a style which is very popular – think of Tomorrowland). We also use a lot of obscure film footage from Youtube. And there is text: a dialogue about ‘thinking’, based on a conversation between the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and the curator Daniel Tyradellis. We gather all this material, in a setting that is merging together a film set, a gym space, a maker space and a club (a.o.). We try to create something like an ‘agora’ of the 21st century. The juxtaposition of the material we make use of is not meant as a critique of the age

we live in. It is part of contemporary society, a society that is often criticized for its lack of political agency on behalf of the people. In ‘Our times’, but also more generally in my artistic work, I aim at thinking the public sphere in a new way. Instead of rejecting contemporary Western culture I use its material and I cannibalize it in an attempt to construct the public sphere anew.

Sources:

POSTMAN, N. (1985).
Amusing ourselves to death.
 NANCY, J.L. & TYRADELLIS, D., (2012). *Qu’appelons-nous penser?*
 HARMONY, K. (2012).
Spring Breakers (Soundtrack).
 DE ANDRADE, O. (1928).
Manifesto Antropófago.
 OAKI, S. (2015), *Cake face.*
 TRECARTIN, R. (2013),
Center Jenny.
 RPSMUSIC (2013).
One Pool—Two Helly Hansen Downjackets.
 FREAK FAMILY VLOGS (2016).
Hitting Eggs & Cupcakes with Baseball Bats.

A

A.S. *Juxtaposition creates contrast. This seems to be inevitable with such a list of materials.*

M.V. Yes, I am interested in juxtaposition, tension and conflict. In my recent work I bring together contrasting material hoping to create conflict in the spectators' mind, and to open up thought processes. This is the function of conflict for me: it urges us to deal with a particular question, and hence, if one doesn't reject the question, it initiates a thought process.

Besides, I think that the juxtaposition of various materials is an interesting operation in order to challenge the diversity and fragmentation that characterize contemporary society. In my view, public space is occupied by opposing groups. In the near future, the number of groups and its diversity can only increase. Hence we will need more than ever an agora, a public place for conflicts to be played out, a scenery for spectacular disagreement.

A.S. *The piece also suggests an interplay between high and low culture. Between depth and superficiality.*

M.V. In 'Our times' I want to explore the tiny line between depth and superficiality: how superficiality can generate depth and vice versa. It is hard to avoid this opposition, but also, to a large extent it is fake. Both poles belong

to the same world. They feed each other. We need both. Similarly the opposition of high and low culture is not very useful.

A.S. *'Our times' is closely connected to your previous piece 'Antithesis, the future of the image' (2015). Again, you use a sentence that can be found in Neil Postman's 'Amusing ourselves to death'. He writes: 'Thinking does not play well in an image-based culture. There is not much to see in it. It is not a performing art.' How did this sentence become the starting point of 'Our times'?*

CYRUS, M. (2013).

Wrecking Ball.

BEAUTIFULLOONERS (2016).

In love trailer (non pop).

DUPONT LOONER, A. (2015).

Cig pop 47" cattex balloon.

SARLEY, S. (2016).

Fingering fruit.

FRAGOLA, N. (2016).

YES CHEF.

WTF (2013).

Inflatable Superman.

LORDDANOF LONDON

(2013). *Journey through the universe beyond the speed of light.*

LAMAR, K. (2012).

Swimming Pools.

PHETCHARAT, W. (2015).

Showry—More!

M.V. I read this passage from Postman at the time when I was creating 'Antithesis, the future of the image'. In this piece, I used it as part of a larger argument. Back then, this quote was not my main focus. However it continued to occupy my mind afterwards, because it questions my own premises about the potential of the theatre space. I used to defend theatre as one of the last spaces where one can exchange thoughts and forge more or less new concepts. But maybe this space, where we are supposed to assist to a spectacle and where performances are expected, isn't a good domain at all to share thoughts, ideas and even knowledge.

Hence my question: what do I mean when I claim that the theatre space is a space for thought? What makes us think? How is thought approached today? What is its status? These questions became the starting point for 'Our times'.

A.S. *There is still another connection with your previous work, not only with 'Antithesis, the future of the image' but also with 'Love Songs (veldeke)'. It is the notion of cannibalism. Can you elaborate on this?*

M.V. Some years ago I started my (still ongoing) project 'The Political Party'. The idea was to start from a blank page and write a new political program. And then, I attended a film

seminar by Federico Rossino titled 'Appropriation as the ultimate political gesture'. This seminar was a revelation to me. It completely reversed my own logic and my approach of the world. I saw the absurdity of my attempt to start from a blank page. Why not try to operate from within the heart of the capitalist system instead of from the outside?

Even the very existence of an outer space has become problematic today. Anyway, the idea of appropriation seemed interesting to me. This idea is linked to the 'Manifesto Antropófago' from the Brazilian writer, poet, philosopher Oswald de Andrade. This manifesto from 1928, also referred to

BOYFEETDREAM (2016).

Nike soccer fetish (sock & sneaker sniff).

CURTIS, A. (2014).

Oh dearism II.

AUSSIE50 (2013).

Front Load Washer Total Carnage.

PSY (2012).

Gang nam style.

BEYONCE (2008).

Single Ladies (Put a ring on it).

GS BOYZ (2008).

Do the Stanky Legg.

FILTHY FRANK (2013).

The Harlem Shake.

LADY GAGA (2009).

Bad Romance.

TOM JONES (1965).

It's Not Unusual.