



SUPERNAUT

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SOIT / HANS VAN DEN BROECK: THE LEE ELLROY SHOW

This is a very tardy review of the one show I did see in Vienna at ImPulsTanz. I'd planned to see two others, but the first coincided with getting from airport to apartment, and the second, following a bike-sprint from Arsenal to Schauspielhaus, suffered the fate of late arrival. That latter was Jérôme Bel's *Jérôme Bel*, a performance I've only seen parts of on video, which nonetheless had a significant influence on my work.

Lucky third then. Hans, of course I could not miss seeing a Hans show, and double lucky only a roll down the hill from Arsenal to Kasino. Outside I find Ivo, who was looking very healthy and relaxed, having moved to the hills outside Sophia; inside, behind the desk were Hans and Giacomo, and on stage Anuschka and Jake. Present only aurally: James Brown (no, not that one/yes, that one). Inside was late, as Dasniya and Florian shuttled themselves post-workshop (I was the early ticket collector), so my seat was exactly in the middle of the back row, where I got to stretch out above all the others squashed in.

The Lee Ellroy Show, then. Hans had been in Los Angeles with Anuschka and discovered that terrifying writer: James Ellroy. My discovery of Ellroy was as a student in Melbourne. A flatmate had a thing for crime fiction and introduced Ellroy to me, starting with the *L.A. Quartet*, moving chronologically backwards to *L.A. Noir*, and proceeding forwards again via *American Tabloid*. On a plane from China to somewhere (or the other way, not that it's important), I picked up *The Cold Six Thousand*. I never read his autobiographical *My Dark Places* then or subsequently; his fiction was disturbing enough without venturing into that.

In Melbourne also, I had a chance to meet him when he was doing a reading around the time of the *L.A. Confidential* film. My flatmate came back with autographed books; I was far too intimidated of him, or his persona as objectified in the inside-cover portraits, him leaning on a wooden chair with seated Pit Bull.

I haven't read him for years now, but I do have a distinct memory of the emotional and psychological trajectory that occurs like a leitmotif, one where the pressure and stress on the protagonist (usually in first-person) rearranges itself, as if looking into a scene reflected in mirrors which suddenly shift and displace the viewer's sense of self and certainty, It's like vertigo, or waking from a nightmare, where it's only after, once one has surfaced that the inchoate horror of the preceding pages reveals itself. These waves and drownings would repeat through each novel until the protagonist would put enough of the pieces together to drag himself clear, though not without damage.

I mention all of this because Ellroy seems largely unknown, at least amongst the audience of *The Lee Ellroy Show*; I mention it also to describe the feeling of watching the performance, and how it illustrated that very particular horror which is an Ellroy novel.

So, first: lights! There are few lighting designers as talented as Giacomo Gorini. I can think of only a couple—Henk Danner for Emio Greco, and some of Frankfurt Ballett—that are comparable, and I would watch a show for his lighting alone. He not only designs, but gets up the ladder, hangs the lamps, operates the show (with beer and cigarettes), which says plenty about his personal artistry and just how uncommon a designer he is. Second: sound, the very-much alive James Brown's fitted like a film-score with the lights and Dirk De Hooghe's plastic-walled box set. Third: Anuschka and Jake. Anuschka wearing a dress! I've never seen her wearing a dress in six years!

It starts as a long, uncomfortable anti-climax: Jake as Ellroy at a book-reading, or perhaps Jake as a Ellroy's character in 1950s' Las Vegas; Anuschka either way as the compère. Canned laughter repeats and cuts abruptly. Ellroy as a boy, or again a character—who is always a stand-in for Ellroy—rides in circles around the transparent walls on an old bike. The walls hang and shine like curtains in an abattoir. Each moment of Jake as Ellroy as the protagonist as authorial stand-in is in tension with Anuschka as Ellroy's mother, murder victim herself, murder victim in the book—either already or imminently—lover or potential lover, not quite betrayer, always there as a mute signifier and witness to herself, never entirely trusted or forgiven.

This is Belgian dance, so they do in fact dance. I've seen many brilliant dancers in Hans' works: Ivan Fatjo in *We Was Them*, Lars August Jørgensen in *Messiah Run*, and of course Anuschka in everything. Jake and Anuschka together is dance that makes me smile and say, "fuck, yes!" There is dance where the movement, its quality, the bodies doing it are not so far from mundane, most of the audience themselves could, with some preparation, perform no better nor worse. This is not that. This is transcendence of corporeality that comes from dance having so thoroughly infiltrated the person that they are irrevocably changed. It is virtuosity. They collide, fling together, apart, flailing, wrapping themselves around each other, falling and collapsing, now delicate, now explosive, terrifying, there is an inevitability here, as if we can almost see into the future, and when we arrive and look back it seems there was no other possibility. This is choreography.

Hans' works are cinematographic and have become more so since working with James and Giacomo, who have strong filmic influences in structuring light and sound across scenes and the entire work. I saw the Staatsballett Berlin performing *Onegin* recently: both works have progression and development over time of a narrative drawn from a novel, and both use choreography and dance to do this. This may seem a superficial comparison, but it does represent the history of dance and its continual involvement in narrative storytelling (as different from "a bunch of things happen on stage and we the audience get to create our own story", or straightforward conceptual dance). Hans is one of the very few choreographers I've seen who manages convincing narrative performance, in no small part by the highly talented people he works with.

On that, a couple of criticisms: I was speaking with someone after—a well-known Berlin performer whose work I also like—who hated it, who thought it was old and tired and unoriginal '90s Belgian dance of which the world has seen enough. It made me question my own perception, not the least if somehow in the last few years I've become old, my critical faculty is only good for ballet, and this new generation understands the world in a way I can never. By comparison, I see the current autobiographical trend in dance as a very late arrival at the Tracey Emin party, absent critical self-reflection. I did agree with him in part on the process towards nakedness, which is a habit of European dance generally. Even flipping this, so the ending was the clothed resolution of a prior nakedness would lend a different reading.

Writing this, I was thinking of British playwright Howard Barker's *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre*:

A theatre which honours its audience will demand of its writers that they write in hazard of their consciences, for writers are paid to think dangerously, they are explorers of the imagination, the audience expects it of them. If they think safely, what is the virtue of them? Do you want to pay £10 to be told what you knew already? That is theft. Do you want to agree all the time? That is flattery, and the audience is always flattered, which is why it has become so sleek.

An honoured audience will quarrel with what it has seen, it will go home in a state of anger, not because it disapproves, but because it has been taken where it is reluctant to go. Thus morality is created in art, by exposure to pain and illegitimate thought.

It's not simple as that, particularly with the last 15-ish years where racism, misogyny, homo- and transphobia are given free rein under the aegis of 'freedom of speech', 'post-blah', 'irony' and with simultaneous resistance of groups targeted by bigotry to (the idea of) "exposure to pain and illegitimate thought" being presented a priori as neutral or unproblematic. Much as I no longer read William T. Vollman, Neal Stephenson, the classics from Hemmingway to Miller to the canon of Anglo and American literature, I haven't read Ellroy for years: I'm looking for some other perspective, perhaps something of a Deleuzian Minority reading (and self-as-audience) project. I do however find in this quote something of what draws me to Hans' work, as audience, as performer, as friend. I also think Hans is one of the rare people who manages to be choreographer, director, artist simultaneously. It occurs to me now that he is close to Falk Richter in this, though personally I think Hans is a vastly superior, thoughtful, more considered, and interesting artist.

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