

## Taking delight in postmodern looting

### Wim Vandekeybus premieres his latest piece 'booty Looting' at Impulstanz

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Vienna — We steal whatever we can. Or, to put it more politely, we live in a world of sampling. With his latest piece *booty Looting*, which is currently running in MQ-Halle G at Impulstanz, Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus plunges into that vast grey area which opens up somewhere between originality and voracious streams of consolidated material, images and stories.

The eponymous term 'booty looting' means 'the stealing of booty', and we need look no further than the sinister chasms of counterfeit products or online music, film and literary piracy to understand exactly what is at play here. Even the good old Grimm brothers took 'their' fairytales from age-old, spoken folklore, only to compile a cultural treasure which has since been repeatedly exploited – and at a considerable profit.

If you start to think about the possibility that there are no original creations, that everything builds upon already-existing material, it seems as though the Postmodern has opened the floodgates to stealing. Whatever your opinion on this, it cannot be denied that a new type of material has emerged, one born of a range of processes. The relevant cultural technique used in this phenomenon is called 'sampling'.

And this is exactly what Vandekeybus shows us in this piece. The German actress Birgit Walter, a member of the Schauspiel Köln theatre ensemble who worked with the choreographer on two of his previous pieces, creates a sampled character on stage. She is both real and fictitious. Her actual biography and the scenic effects become excitingly and increasingly intertwined with those of other characters.

The star of the evening is played by the *forced entertainment* actor Jerry Killick. He hosts *booty Looting* as the story teller — an anecdote machine. Using Joseph Beuys' 1974 performance *I like America and America likes me*, the narrator presents Birgit Walter as an ethnologist, one who is reminiscent of the artist and scientist Lili Fischer.

As early as the prologue, Birgit Walter is introduced as Medea. This theme is revisited later in the piece but only after she has metamorphosed into Romy Schneider as she appears in Georges-Henri Clouzot's unfinished and crazed film *L'enfer*. Vandekeybus' Medea kills her sons with the aid of the image-producing light bar of a photocopier. This makes sense given that the main theme of *booty Looting* is our modern-day craving for images. That's why the Belgian rock photographer Danny Willems also joins the performers on stage, with his fantastic photos being continuously projected onto a screen. Towards the end Birgit Walter also turns into Maria Callas as she recites her famous monologue from Pasolini's film *Medea* (1969).

What Vandekeybus manages to masterfully display here is the epidemic-esque fictionalisation of reality through a torrent of images and anecdotes in a world where the line separating information from entertainment is becoming increasingly blurred. Rehashed fictions end up ultimately being more real than the facts which support them; the choreographer takes delight in challenging his audience. Today they live in a world where they have to decide for themselves whether they want to experience reality or give in to the pull of looting.