

Hope is no plan

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The dancers of Ultima Vez return to the theme of the animal inside us in *Monkey Sandwich*

Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus last weekend brought Ultima Vez to the Czech Republic for the seventh time. Thirteen years ago he presented the dance performance *Mountains Made of Barking*. On the other hand *What the Body Does Not Remember* is a performance which has achieved worldwide success and has defined his demanding style of raw physical theatre mapping the human subconscious, aggressiveness and animal instincts. His latest production, *Monkey Sandwich*, which had its world premiere on September 10 at the Royal Flemish Theatre in Brussels, returns to the theme of the subconscious and the animal in man.

This time he has abandoned the style of demanding group movement theatre and experimented mainly with content and form. He has created a multi-genre performance in which the language, the film and other elements – musical, artistic and acting – serve more as commentary supplementing and developing the events in the film.

Through theatre the spectator sees into the “animal subconscious” of the main characters in Vandekeybus’ film. In it the first theatre director, Jerry Killick, a performing member of the Sheffield theatre company Forced Entertainment, attempts Shakespearean drama and compels naturalistic performances from the actors bordering on self-sacrifice and cannibalism. He himself goes to places where the borders of reality and crossed and dreams and instincts are fulfilled. He talks, listens and invents bizarre and cruel stories, exorcises his demons and hallucinations, until he goes mad... One character on the stage, played by the physically gifted Damien Chappelle, behaves like a crazed animal throughout the more than two-hour performance. He is naked the whole time. He makes human sculptures from metal and paper, which he hangs around the stage. He climbs up onto a high column from which he enters into the footage on the screen. He moves between industrial machines – huge fans. He drowns in a transparent pool full of water. He tells fables, crawls, hides, raps. Until he goes mad...

The period is demonic and so are the people living in it, says Vandekeybus. Hope is not in the plan. We are enchained by our instincts and the strongest of them is murder. *Monkey Sandwich* is a kind of theatrical reflection on Trier’s film *Antichrist*. Both detect and show the extreme states of human beings on the borders of normalcy in order to achieve the maximum emotive and intellectual effect. Trier looks for life and finds pain and death.

Vandekeybus looks for pain and death and finds madness. Some turn to God and head off into nature; others look into the subconscious and find myths. Both discover powerful, hitherto unseen stories and images. Neither film nor theatre can go much farther.

Wim Vandekeybus and Ultima Vez: *Monkey Sandwich*