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Dance: A New Work by Wim Vandekeybus

By Anna Kisselgoff

Tough, brutal, playful, ironic and terrific. Adjectives seem unduly passive in describing *What the Body Does Not Remember*, the extraordinarily innovative dance piece that concludes the 'New Work from Belgium' series at the Kitchen.

The program credit for this mind-boggling display of intense physicality by five men and five women goes to Wim Vandekeybus, a Flemish dancer who is listed here as a director of the piece. Elsewhere, he is named as a co-choreographer with a Spanish dancer, Eduardo Torroja.

Thursday night's local premiere at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th St., suggested the collaborative nature of the venture. The violent eroticism of a central section, stunning the audience by its fusion of precision and of energy pushed to an extreme, could be performed only by a collective on a single wave length.

This is highly confrontational art, aggressive toward the audience but aggressive also in the relations it depicts. Its originality is in giving the illusion that form generates content.

Hence the heavy insistence on formal elements, consistently made obvious. We see the change in lighting, in spatial arrangements, in the way the same movement is repeated and varied in each section. We are conscious of simplicity in the use of props like chairs. We are aware of the atmosphere created by the music, in this case by Thierry De Mey (also heard in Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's *Rosas Danst Rosas*) and Peter Vermeersch.

The key to all these pieces is the ordinary gesture of ordinary movement, suddenly deepened into meaning that has a frightening truth about it. This is not conventional body language. In this instance, *What the Body Does Not Remember* is an apt title. Mr. Vandekeybus is creating adrenalin choreography. A program note speaks of the 'intensity of moments when you don't have a choice' such as 'falling in love, or the second before an accident'. This idea is behind the imagery in each section. In the first, two men lie on the floor or roll gently until their movement becomes complex and punishing. Eventually, an imaginary electric shock seems to jolt them upward. A woman hits an amplified table and creates percussive sound - the equivalent of a radio sound-effects man who is revealed.

In the second section, three dancers walk on white bricks or cinder blocks and then these are thrown with near-miss accuracy among a larger group of running performers. Cleverly, the choreographers alternate their grim games with playful passages. Walking past each other, the dancers strip each other of clothes or towels with pickpocket precision in a quick-change act.

The core of the work is 'Frisking', a brutal cross between the apache dances and machine dances of the 1920's. Three women stand legs apart and arms out to each side as a partner frisks them. Examined repeatedly as objects, the women stand coldly until they are suddenly yanked in out of clinches. One rages, one slices coldly at her partner, another is more sensuous.

Extremely well performed, the section is revealing of a male sensibility. As tough as Ms. de Keersmaeker's work once seemed, it did not show women as willing partners in their own denigration. The light side comes to the fore again in a passage in which a nonconformist lies on the floor with a chair while others strike up bourgeois family-portrait poses. A more dangerous game involves a stamping dance in which the performers must avoid being stomped by their partners. There is an element of repetition here, but it is clear that such work can no longer be termed Minimalism. The name of the musical ensemble heard on tape (with its textured mix of deconstructed mayhem and percussion) is *Maximalist!*. The exclamation point is part of the title and fits the entire performance.