

On the Border

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Two men are sitting at a table. They are looking through the kitchen window frame, staring at the fields that stretch out behind the scullery. On the left on the horizon a white triangle appears. Slowly, a mainsail slides from left to right past the window frame. It comes to a standstill and for a while just lies there, flapping in the wind. Suddenly it disappears beneath the horizon, as if it were devoured by the earth. After a short while it appears again on the right hand side of the picture, and imperturbably continues on its way. Then it disappears out of the frame of the window. 'That's theatre,' one man says to the other.

Dancer, actor and director Johan Simons met Paul Koek, a percussionist, in 1982 at the theatre company De Appel. Simons was heading a workshop, Koek had been acting in Eric Vos' theatre productions for close on eight years by then. Koek, an advocate of associative theatre, was the founder of the Nederlands Rok Ensemble and was at that time a member of the Hoketus ensemble of Louis Andriessen. Based on a critical view of minimal music, the group aimed at a more earthly form of repetitive music. Simons is a member of the actors' co-operative The Wespetheater, which defined itself as a group that 'makes socially engaged theatre about the historical setting of a location, using our own scenarios based on topical matters, and performed in places where there never are any theatre performances, accompanied by the local brass band'. When Simons founded the Regiotheater in 1983, of which he afterward became (artistic) director, the practice of writing their own scripts was thrown overboard. After *Golven over Breesaap* (Waves over Breesaap, 1983) by John Macgrath, he and Koek together directed *Cakewalk* (1984), by Hugo Heinen – a staging of a local tale that originated during the digging of the North Sea Canal – and *Koninkrijk IJmond* (The Kingdom of IJmond, 1984), written by Edgar Caïro and in doing so tried to lure the local residents into their abode.

Theatre company Hollandia came into being in 1985 as a result of a merger between the Regiotheater and Acht Oktober, a theatre company from North Holland. Simons became Hollandia's artistic director. His first production was *Bruidsuikers* (Bridal Sweets, 1985), written by Karl Valentin. Koek joined up with him for good in *La Paloma* by Louis Ferron, which was played in a lock in Zaandam in the summer of 1986. For the first couple of years Koek, who in the meantime had become a member of Peter van Bergen's music group LOOS, still regularly acted in plays by Gerardjan Rijnders of Toneelgroep Amsterdam, among others in *Bakeliet* (Bakelite, 1986). Within five years Hollandia had grown into a theatre group in which social-political commitment and a form-experimental approach entered into a completely new relationship. The attention paid to local history returned in the Noordpunt-Zuidpunt (North Point-South Point) projects that Simons consigned to young up and coming directors. Their base of operations became an old school in Zaandam, which was traded for a nunnery in 1996. Simons takes care of the acting and imagery, Koek takes care of the tactile-rhythmical sound concept. Simons is the farmer looking out over his land, Koek is listening to the granulated structure of the clods.

Together with generations of young actors and assistants on location, with dramatists Tom Blokdijk and Paul Slangen, scene designers like Leo de Nijs, costume designers and kindred spirit 'art worker' Dick Raaijmakers, Hollandia has developed her theatre work into – to put it in the words of the European Union, who awarded them a prize in April 2000 -- a 'new theatrical reality'.

How should one herald a review of fifteen years of theatre that has led to a new theatrical reality? What should be discussed in totally different media – words, photos and a CD-Rom – to give an impression of what's 'new' about Hollandia's theatrical reality? There's such an abundance of similarities in the subject matter, form, style and concept of the location and playhouse performances – more than a hundred – that Hollandia staged between 1985 and the year 2000. Initially, the plays were about eccentrics and marginal figures who, in various settings, are destroyed by a riving sense of community and a moral ambiguity. Sometimes they were love tragedies: *La Paloma*, that was performed in a lock in Zaandam, *La Musica Twee* (1991) by Duras or Büchner's *Leonce & Lena* (1993). They can take on the form of a music theatre play, as in *Liefdesdrama* (Love Tragedy, 1998), in which passages from Heiner Müller were a starting point for an investigation into the OPPOSITION between nature and culture. Later on, more statements were made with a political slant. Not just *Twee stemmen* (Voices, 1997), *De val van Mussolini* (The Fall of Mussolini, 1995), that was staged in co-operation with Dick Raaijmakers and Toneelgroep Amsterdam, Visconti's *De val van de goden* (The Fall of the Gods, 1999) and *Ongebluste kalk* (Quick Lime, 1999), based on the diary and letters of Rinus van der Lubbe – but other plays as well, often based on less well known Greek tragedies, have a political background. At the same time nearly each and every one of the performances was the starting point for experiments in form and style that were to become so characteristic of Hollandia. With a 'performance character' that stands out more powerfully after Büchner's *Leonce & Lena*, and the specific style of acting in which Hollandia's core of actors excel: Elsie de Brauw, Fedja van Huêt, Bert Luppés, Peter Paul Muller, Frieda Pittoors, Betty Schuurman and Jeroen Willems.

Hollandia's pedagogical and educational ambitions and activities cannot be passed over. Through the years, young, unknown actors and directors have been given the opportunity to shape their ideas in the North Point-South Point projects. And in school projects pupils were confronted with Hollandia's theatrical reality in a very own way. In view of the current mandatory course options in secondary school education, the cultural-political significance of these educational activities could be much greater than we think.

1 Borders

To define what the quintessence of Hollandia's theatrical multiverse exactly is, isn't that simple. The immense diversity of the plays does not allow for an unambiguous characterisation, even though there are recurring fascinations and systematic explorations of themes that are inextricably bound up with Hollandia's specific imagery. Hollandia moves within a critical tradition in which experiments in form and a critical eye are natural. This leads back to Artaud and Pasolini, and not so much to Brecht. Most of all, Hollandia is a 'work theatre'. With this aesthetic and political background it's clear that if anything is at stake in Hollandia's work, it must be the border between life and theatre. The 'novelty' most probably lies in the extremely ingenious way in which they play with their own boundaries. If you try to gain a comprehensive view of Hollandia's work, a few 'archetypal' boundaries and transitory sites will stand out: the table, the lock and the greenhouse.

Table

The table is the central point for conversations. Generations of Hollandia contributors have sat down around the table to work on the theatre productions. The table has also been a stage, as was the case in 1998 in Kunstcentrum Witte de With in Rotterdam, when actresses Jacqueline Blom and Sanne van Rijn paced about on the table while the inhabitants of the South Holland islands and art loving visitors told each other stories and courteously enjoyed a peasant meal. Or a dining table, at which the audience was frequently invited to sit and have a meal together, either before the performance, or in between two performances, as in *De laars en zijn sok* (The boot and his sock, 1995). In *Voices* (1997), after having finished their meal the audience gave up their seats to the actor Jeroen Willems, who then unfolded a theatrical reality behind the table and on top of it. But the borderline between reality and theatre has been explored in a far more subtle manner. In *Der Fall/Dépons* (1993) 'art worker' Dick Raaijmakers staged a 'performance': Raaijmakers, not an actor but a 'real' person, is sitting behind a table on the floor of the Westergasfabriek, an old gas plant in Amsterdam. His opening line: "What's going on?" The answer is that I'm standing here in front of you and just asked "What's going on?" This goes on for a while, after which Raaijmakers remarks that he is not an actor and that therefore this is not 'theatre'. Then he invites an actor to come on and repeat the whole situation, what subsequently happens. At which moment the play actually started – reality became theatre – remains unclear.

Lock

Frits Staal, a philosopher, Sanscritist and researcher of the oldest ritual in the world – the Vedic Agni or fire ritual from India – once gave the following description of the basic dynamics of a ritual: someone enters a marked out area, sits down, does something, gets up and leaves the area. A transformation has taken place during this sequence of events. The ritual channels someone onto a different level of reality or perhaps even to a completely new reality. The lock can be interpreted as a transitory point: as a pseudo-ritual space the lock makes a multi-staged ascent possible, but a structured descent also takes place. Horizontal and vertical correspond. It was this kind of controlled, decelerated fall that was explored theatrically in *Der Fall/Dépons* and *The Fall of Mussolini*.

But above all, the lock is responsible for the fall of Holland's most elusive element: water. Water that destroys and unites. Water that fills farmers and fishermen with awe; that they revere yet fear. Water that Johan Simons heard sloshing against the walls during the great flood in 1953, water in which Paul Koek hears a layered sound structure, water that at the beginning of *Herman's Hand* (1995) heralded the slow-motion images, water that falls down behind brutal Korbes in the agricultural [JA, WAT IS DIT EIGENLIJK? Een vakbond? IK DENK HET] *Landbouwbelaan* in Maastricht. In all of the tragedies, water, one of the basic elements, is silently present alongside fire and air: in *Prometheus* (1989), in *Perzen* (Persians, 1994) and in *Fenicische vrouwen* (Phoenician Women, 1996) it drips down the azure blue walls of the Zaandam breaker's yard. In *Dood water* (Slack Water, 1996) it formed the background of a local tragedy that originated during the damming of the Zuyder Sea and like an abyssal horizon reflected heaven's boundlessness.

Greenhouse

The transition from the lock and the water to the greenhouse speaks for itself. Hollandia's 'crystal palace' is a solidified structure of fluid glass and steel, nineteenth century inventions.

The inside is out, the outside is in. YET the greenhouse is Hollandia's most paradoxical border. The glass house may stand for Hollandia's aesthetic-political statement – away with the foetal darkness of playhouse theatre. But in a political-economical sense, the greenhouse, an agricultural factory, surely embodies the issue of the industrial power to make anything and the uprootedness that are often brought up in Hollandia's plays. Frail and lucid, the greenhouse does away with the cyclical changes in our climate: seasons can be created. It is striking that Hollandia has awarded the place where the downfall of the farmers originated with a monumental importance. As an industrial machine the greenhouse is Hollandia's Subconscious.

1. EXPOSITIONS

Hollandia stage what's left unsaid about modern times: the smaller and larger tragedies of modern man. Hollandia cuts open its stomach and makes space to ecstatically vent the curbed anger that lies within the illusion that man and nature can be made according to one's desires. As if Hollandia wants to ward off violence by 'acting out'. Hollandia reallocates peasants, fishermen, soldiers, petty bourgeoisie, the middle class, labourers, industrialists and multinational capitalists to the post-industrial sites that were left behind by them: market gardens that have been cleared out, breaker's yards, abandoned gas plants or flour mills. Or she let them put in one last appearance en masse at still operative transit buildings: under bridges, in locks or in the cargo distribution hall of the Dutch airline KLM in *KLM Cargo* (1998). By portraying the life of oddballs who are through with life and eccentric outsiders, Hollandia ruthlessly held up a mirror to our information society, that in the all-absorbing world of images transforms every misfit into a source of information and entertainment.

The plays are about alienation and community, lack of power and perverted exercise of power, estrangement and authenticity, hypocrisy and humility. But the displacement and disruption always betray a broken sense of community. The eccentrics that pass the review are socially disrupted and morally broken. They feel out of place, are maltreated and maltreat others and are finally brought down by their ecstatic fears or their high-and-mighty tyranny. In the pseudo-rituals, irrelevant lives temporarily become coherent: despair leads to compulsive behaviour. If things take a change for the better, then this happens in an equally miraculous as morally ambiguous manner. 'Of course life is completely pointless,' Karin remarked in *Ossitown*, 'but it has to be wonderfully pointless.'

Peasants and Fishermen

One of the most striking genres in Hollandia's oeuvre was introduced in *Ella* (1986) and *Gust* (1987), rural dramas staged in a chicken run and a market garden. The degeneration that was introduced in these performances, also played a very important part in other theatre plays figuring city fringe groups, fishermen and soldiers. In the various spheres of theatrical reality, the existential tension between having established roots and being uprooted becomes greater with the subversion of every theatrical constant. Not just by choosing new locations, but by interfering with 'actoral' interventions: in *Gust*, for example, *Lies*, *Gust's* wife, is played by a man, Ernst Boreel. But the sex change is just a simple actoral intervention. Soon after Hollandia ingeniously elaborated on this idea with role reversals and doubles until it reached its apex in *The Fall of the Gods*, in which servants not only act as prompts and actors, but actually interfere with the play.

Uprootedness

Because of the critical, objectifying view that urban people develop and their mechanical dealing with things, the contact with the earth has been broken in our metropolitan society. The struggle of the peasants against alienation and uprootedness is the central theme in Hollandia's early work, in particular in the trilogy *Gust*, *A Peasant's Death* (1998) and *Stallerhof* (1990). The raw directness of Achternbusch's and Kroetz' theatre resounds in an unruly image in which the broken lives of wandering eccentrics inescapably head towards their end. They try to find their niche in a world beyond all recognition, but of no avail. With the disintegration of the traditional communities, their self-image has lost every sense of coherence. The violence, that in the past was invested in channelled work and was checked by social control, erupts with great intensity.

Hollandia shows us how the peasants are ruined by the process of modernisation. Their lives are accustomed to seasons, but every 'cyclical' anticipation of what's to come – a future past – is contradicted while they are pushed forward amidst hectic innovation and a race of the nations. The dismantling of seasonal labour, brought about by the nineteenth century project of industrialisation and emancipation, has left the peasants to face an insecure future. An organic pattern doesn't exist anymore. Everything has to be new and better. First cyclical time short-circuited and then it disintegrated. The peasant, now a *homo faber*, is slung back and forth between hope and fear: by exercising its creative forces on nature, the future has become a projection screen of the peasants' dreams and nightmares. He vainly hopes to humanise a cruel nature by cultivating these disarranging emotions – hope and fear. To achieve this, he anticipates a new type of community during the slow process of emancipation, in the hope that in it the alienation will have disappeared and his degeneration will have been forged into independence and freedom.

But for the peasants, the loss of their native soil is never compensated by the perspective of 'a promised land'. The breach in their times turned out not to be a passage to a better future, but a gaping wound in a dying past. They were trapped in the cracks of a world beyond repair. By performing surviving or artificial rituals, they routinely try to hold together the broken fragments. In *A Peasant's Death*, the native soil of a brother and sister has become an abyss out of which they want to escape. They manage to flee, but once they are in the city they are driven apart by paranoia. Using pseudo-rituals they try to negate their uprootedness and degeneration: with artificial demarcations of time and space and with repetitive routines. Or, in other words, in the ritual the meaning of their existence is briefly illuminated. But in effect, the rupture endlessly repeats itself from then on, because rituals only have a meaning during their performance. They only suggest some kind of ties with an outside world that only exist for as long as the repetition goes on. Just as the frame of a film screen creates the invisible, so the rituals create a reality beyond itself. A reality beyond borders that in fact are never transgressed.

When the city shows its true self, the reverie turns into a nightmare. The characters in *A Peasant's Death* are reunited in a desultory fringe area that from then on becomes their 'home': the body of an unfinished flat. In this no man's land hope turns into despair. At last in their nostalgia they hear the voice of earth, which they could not hear before because they took it for granted: before their flight their identity coincided with the land by which they were possessed and which they possessed. They dig up the earth beneath the concrete and use it to rebuild their house into the farm that they left behind, but it is of no avail. In their urban adventure the abyss of their native soil turns into a lost paradise, of which, on their return, nothing is left but a last resting-place of the dead. Unable to settle down in the city, the brother and sister answer the call

of a community that's doomed to die. After a period of religious rapture and sexual excesses they return and, at the cemetery where their parents lay buried, let themselves be snowed in and freeze to death.

Their voluntary fate is only endurable during the ritual reproduction of the land that they possessed. In the blood rituals, that are performed after the earth rituals, the brother and sister call on their native soil to ward off their degeneration. But it's just an eroded life that is theatrically effectuated by all these hollow feints in the ritual. Although they imagine themselves to have overcome the rift for a short while, their ruptured consciousness at the most only transcends itself in the excesses and the trance. During the ritual they seem to find their niche for a brief while, but the plummeting, that had already started, is only slowed down.

The opposition between rural and urban life binds all other oppositions: nature-culture, body-mind, human beings-gods and in the end the all-encompassing antagonism between life and death. From the outset Hollandia placed her protagonists in the existential tension between these positions, so that they are not broken up. In the tension, moral urges are tried to extremes. This cosmic conflict goes beyond good and evil, although in the eyes of the moralist good sometimes seems to turn into evil and the continuing effects of evil produce extremely benevolent results.

The irreparable breach is a solid basis for a ruptured consciousness. In *A Peasant's Death*, the breach takes on the tangible form of flight, in which the opposition between rural and urban life come to life. This theme was already represented in *Suus* (1988), in which the main character runs away to a city to study there. It emerged again in *Yankee-weiland* (*Yankee Field*, 1995) in the escape of a woman with her child. In some cases the escape does really mean salvation. But if the curse is to become a blessing, then every claim to a sense of community and therefore every claim to power has to be sworn off, as was the case in *Varkensstal* (*Pigsty*, 1997). Or they find salvation in the actual process of running away, as in *Leonce & Lena*.

In Hollandia's performances it's about ritualising violence. In *A Peasant's Death*, the partners in misfortune fruitlessly try to draw hope from the rituals they created in an attempt to make death endurable. Although a large number of plays culminates in the death of one or more characters and although the locations are interlarded in an anecdotal way with a dead dog or cat, it's always about death in life: life from beginning to end as a skydive and death as the salto mortale. In *Gust*, the death agonies of Lies complete the totally pointless life of her husband, who, when Lies has passed away, puts the pointlessness of his life in the following simple words: 'I always thought, I'll never become eighteen. It really took ages before I became eighteen. My God, it went so slow. And now all of a sudden I'm eighty-one.'

Garden Mould

Pointlessness was also the subject of Greiner's *Ossi-Town* (1990), in which the micro-political excesses of a new world are brought up. The violent lives of banished Karin, Hein and Jan are paragons of ruin and decline. Their life is a salto mortale. In the former workers' state – when the play was written Ossi-land was still German East Friesland – the youngsters, addicted to drugs, alcohol, violence and sex, decide to sell 'garden mould' in a last desperate attempt to give their collective existence meaning. But 'garden' mould, like the greenhouse, is a product that attests to the victory of culture over nature. The capitalised remains of lost soil, it is the ultimate symbol of a terrible truth: the earth has been sold out. When their joint venture turns out to be a failure, nothing is left for the youngsters but to indulge their concerted urges in excessive bodily pleasures.

Violence, excesses and community are also the starting point in *Beton* (Concrete, 1987), which was made together with the Dutch football player and writer Jan Mulder. From various lines of approach they zoomed in on the football stadium and its rituals and excesses in violence: the violence on the pitch, that of the spectators at the Heysel stadium who crushed each other to death and that of rulers who, in an attempt to consolidate their dictatorship, used the stadium as a concentration camp and centre for torture. As in Plattling (1992), wherein there's talk of 'concreting up', concrete IS the urban counterpart of earth in a pastiche of violence and hilarious parodies of our 'spectacle' society.

In *Stallerhof*, the characters are slung back and forth between love and hate within a no man's land inhabited by affects. They feel an equal amount of attraction and repulsion. In the end it's not love but jealousy that binds them. In Hollandia's later work, the theme of hopeless degeneration is reintroduced in *Korbes* (1996) in the form of a uncompromising cultivation of evil. The apex of the play is reached when Korbes, played by Bert Luppens, is sitting in a table turned upside down, like a Job soiled with dung. Händel's music can be heard around him like in a passion play. Not even to this godless, raving tyrant can the raptures of evil offer any salvation. In 1998 Hollandia tried to mend the breach by developing an interdisciplinary project together with Kunstcentrum Witte de With, an art centre in Rotterdam. Various locations were used in the theatre production. Photos were taken of several families from the Hoekse Waard, one of the islands of the Dutch province of South Holland, and of citizens connected to the project. Sound recordings were made of the peasants on site and stories were told about the disastrous flood of 1953. Together, the photos in the exhibition room and the sound recordings formed the basis for the conversations around the table at Witte de With, at which villagers and urban citizens together enjoyed a potato meal.

Drainage and Land Reclamation

The great flood of 1953. Uprootedness is inextricably bound up with floods. If fishermen are the peasants of the sea, then the taming of the seasons in the greenhouses corresponds with controlling the tides by land reclamation, drainage and damming. Dikes and dams kill the sea. The damming of the Zuyder Sea and the construction of the Delta Works meant the completion of the industrial revolution in the Netherlands. An old account with the sea is squared for claiming victims every year as an offer in exchange for what was taken from her. The polder becomes an industrial machine. That the mechanisation of the elements doesn't offer a full guarantee, became clear during the millennium night: while everybody in the north of France was glued to their screens in anticipation of the unleashing of the millennium bug, the infrastructure completely collapsed in the howling winds outside.

Like the greenhouse, the polder is a machine of paradoxes: although the land reclamation gives the farmers a second chance, it's the death of the fishermen. One man's breath is another man's death. The fishermen dramas are complementary to the peasant dramas. The role of the earth in the peasant plays is now played by the sea. *Stale Water* (1994) by Gerard Rutten, Heijermans' *Op hoop van zegen* (In Good Hope, 1995), both directed by Mechtild Prins, and *De zee van twijfel* (The Sea of Doubt, 1995), directed by Peter Paul Muller, together form the three sea plays by Hollandia. These three plays form part of the North Point-South Point project, together with *De prins van Wiereland* (The Prince of Wiereland, 1994), directed by Muller and Jolien Wanninkhof, *Dik, Abe, Johnny en Hansje* (Dik, Abe, Johnny and Hansje, 1994), on location at Ruigoord, an artists' colony, *Ouderdomsvlekken* (Lentigo Senilis, 1995), directed by Don Duyns,

Wanninkhof's *Varkensgras* (Knotgrass, 1995) and *Whale Tale* (1997) by the Icelandic Rebekka Austmann Ingimundardóttir. *Stale Water* was inspired by a film by Gerard Rutten made in 1934, about the damming of the Zuyder Sea and the consequences for the fishermen from Volendam. It was performed on the beach at Wijk aan Zee. The audience nestled in a beach pavilion and followed the dialogues through speakers. The dialogues were recorded beforehand to brave the elements. The actors mimed their lines, therefore maintaining the stiff nature of the silent film. In *Good Hope* was performed on a slipway in IJmuiden with in the background enormous docked ships. In the play, the tragedy of Kniertje is no longer a cover for the narrow-minded way in which she drives her son to his death. Charges are brought against her bigoted fear of defying authority. In *The Sea of Doubt*, Peter Paul Muller worked with the local inhabitants. He based his play on eight poems by Jeroen Zijlstra, a lifeboat assistant from Oosterland, whose brother put them to music. Without offering a univocal answer – one of the hallmarks of Hollandia's oeuvre, like their rigid inconsequentness – Hollandia and the local population depicted how the sea attracts and repels them like a cheap whore and how they dealt with their inner conflicts.

The 'banks of flesh' – the enormous women about whom the fishermen dream at sea – are a symbolical gateway to Hollandia's other important genre in its history: the bourgeoisie plays. This theme first presented itself in *Rei!* (Round Dance!, 1998), in which Arthur Schnitzler's ten dialogues were presented as a monologue. In the play the monologues became a round dance, with one monologue taking up on another. A soldier, defending a ruptured community, meets a whore who seduces him. Their dance forms the first round of the round dance, that leads us from one person to another. The linking up and letting go becomes a repetitive ritual in which representatives of the hypocritical and fornicating bourgeoisie are depicted. A procession of citizens that doesn't stop until Potter's *The Bittersweet* (1998).

The actual ritual and the violence that is involved are lifted to a higher level in this love tragedy. The allaying of the loss now takes place through a different medium: language. In a desperate attempt to conjure up the past that they shared, the lovers try to exact confessions from each other on the day of their separation, first in passing but gradually more fanatically, more tenaciously and more desperately. Not to find the truth, but to experience each other's longing in the waves of jealousy. In ritual conversations they try to make contact with each other. Once again, the cinders of their dying love start to glow in the ritual games of questions of answers that by and by become more unbearable. During the moments that they speak, that are just as painful as relishable, both lovers become one for a brief moment in time. Language ritually allays the void. The man and woman realise that they can only access their lost past and subsequently the illusion of an organic unity by way of words, even despite their inadequacy. With every meaningful sound the unspeakable breach is delayed and the pointlessness suspended. In the (failing) communications they can share their emptiness. Every communication means a sharing. The inevitable parting is delayed in the ritual dance of words. Indirectly, Duras' play illustrates an unequalled remark made by Achternbusch: 'You don't stand a chance, but seize it.'

In the following ten years Wedekind's *Lulu* (1994), Louis Paul Boon's *Menuet* (*Minuet*, 1997), *The Bittersweet* (1998) and *Old Times* (1999) by Pinter were performed. In the theatrical adaptation of Boon's book elements from the peasant plays return; it can also be seen as the forerunner of the working-class plays. But most of all it's the narrow-mindedness that comes to the fore in the fantasies that are played out. Blokdiik assembled the streams of thought and the 'actual' interaction between the players in such a manner that the audience is placed in the space between the tacit longing and actual silence of the actors. In this no man's land a variety of

background sounds can be heard that played a role in Boon's life. The same also appears in *Old Times*, directed by Jeroen Willems, as the empty space of the truth: the inside of the knot in which the characters become entangled when they tell each other interlaced stories about the past.

It becomes clear that the bourgeoisie, just like the peasants and the fishermen, are degenerated. Slung back and forth between their various desires they search for a fixed reference point in the process of modernisation, like the woman in *Minuet*. But as soon as their routinely built up association with each other is infringed on by an earthly longing, their stomach turns inside out as well. By the intervention of an outsider -- a former teacher, a household help, an old girlfriend, an alleged childhood friend of an invalid daughter -- everything is turned upside down.

In *Teorama*, the land has become a desert. Without any notice beforehand, a young man arrives and confronts all the family members and employees with his deepest desires, apparently without much effort. This Christ-like youngster was reincarnated eight years later in *The Bittersweet*. Martin, played by Fedja van Huêt, asserts that he is a old friend of the invalid daughter of a middle-class family. Despite his evil intent, he helps the daughter, whom he rapes, out of her tormented isolation. He emancipates the ever-caring mother, who in spite of all the misery refuses to give up her faith in a wonder and he unmasks the real evildoer: the hypocritical father, who unintentionally brought misfortune on his daughter after she found him in bed with her best friend. The univocal demarcation of good and evil -- the foundations of bourgeois morality -- is pushed aside by the intervention of the 'saviour'. Evil intentions and perverted behaviour turn out to produce healing and relieving effects that eventually lead to the family's salvation. At the end of *The Bittersweet*, the primordial scream of the daughter's resuscitated body opens up the stomach of the hypocritical bourgeois man: 'No, daddy, no, please don't! I remember now.'

3 Industrialists and Politicians: perverted exercise of power

In 1996, in co-operation with the Antwerp Kunstencentrum deSingel, another play by Pasolini was performed under the Kipdorp bridge in Antwerp, in the middle of the traffic noise: *Pigsty*. If the theme of power was only reflected in a sultry and libidinous manner in the bourgeois plays, in the person of Julian, the son of a fascistic captain of industry Klotz, the theme takes on a negative shape. Contrary to royal prince Leonce in *Leonce & Lena* -- a play that Hollandia had performed three years before and that had sharpened the question of the authority of the actor -- Julian renounced his rightful inheritance. In spite of his robotic behaviour he refuses to be married off. The sensual smoke that smouldered from the longing of the peasants and the bourgeois libido slapped the audience straight in the face: Julian's libidinal lust goes out to real pigs, and not the human pigs that surround him. But he had to pay for his rather unusual hobby with his life: in the end he was devoured by his loved ones.

The cynical and unscrupulous pragmatism, so ingeniously cultivated by present day rulers, first emerges in a text compilation from Pasolini's posthumously published work. This and a story by Duras together formed the basis of *Voices* (1997), a play made up of two dialogues wherein people in various ways try to convince themselves of their immortality. In the part based on Duras, Betty Schuurman depicted the writer as an old woman who, facing death, keeps up the illusion that she can start writing again whenever she wants. The part based on Pasolini consists of six monologues by six different characters, all of which are played by Jeroen Willems. Apart from four fragments from Pasolini's posthumous work and a summarised version of one of

Pasolini's plays transformed into a monologue, a speech by Cor Herkströter, former president-director of Shell, was also assimilated in this metamorphic performance. In a round dance of politicians and captains of industry, the misunderstood aimlessness of the peasants and the hypocritical lusts of the bourgeoisie transforms into a tyrannical megalomania. Sitting behind the table where the audience had just enjoyed a lavish dinner, Willems interlaces the world rulers' craving for immortality and the smug no-nonsense mentality of the post-modern manager. A fragment from Pasolini's *Tales* was added in an attempt to extend the longing for eternal fame and divine omnipotence to sublime dimensions. In it a captain of industry gives an account of how he murdered his son and heir: due to the simple fact that his son exists he had to face the fact of his own mortality, contrary to his unbridled megalomania. This ink-black, retro-oedipal scenario even pushed Hollandia's most benevolent fan over the edge of the theatrical abyss. The epilogue is usually omitted.

In the peasant, fishermen and soldier plays the earth, sea and fiery body are the objects of desire. Only indirectly does a longing for death play a part: in the longing for the restoration of unity or in the disregard of death that is present in the soldiers. In the case of the peasants and the fishermen there is still a sense of a cosmic reality, in comparison to which the individual longings seem futile. Via the small number of soldier plays – although their lives are in the service of the omnipotence of the rulers, their disregard of death leads them to love – the sense of a cosmic reality is transferred to the bourgeoisie plays. The divided longing now develops within the oedipal family, where the balance of power revolves around the father's omnipotence. Obsessions now revolve around possession.

The music theatre play *Oldenbarnevelt* (1998), too, is about rulers. Oldenbarnevelt's dilemma is classically tragic: as a ruler he is brought to ruin because he was forced to take a dictatorial measure to be able to protect democracy. After a long period of indecision, his partner in crime, Maurits, votes against him. He, too, put the nation's unity first, but he realises that it can't be saved by the undemocratic decisions made by Oldenbarnevelt – for which Oldenbarnevelt pays with his life. The full magnitude of an absolute longing for death and power, that form the centrifugal and centripetal forces of a fascistic desire, was shown in *Voices*. In the year 2000 in *Bloeddorst (Bloodlust)*, a compilation of violent theatre plays, it resulted in a ritual coping with the drama of Srebrenica, with the infamous discussion between Mladic and Karremans as the final destructive chord. The plays prior to 1997 contain indirect references to a fascistic longing. In the plays of Achternbusch, a South German, the longing is in the air. Gust, who who up till then had managed to remain aloof, succumbed to the economical pressure to become a party member: 'Hitler was all right, but those surrounding him were terrible.' In *Concrete* a more explicit statement was made with the torturing in stadiums in Chili and the skinhead symbols; in *Teorama*, the fascistic desires of the father plays a part – but in general it's anecdotal. *Pigsty*, *The Fall of Mussolini* and *Voices I* (Jeroen Willems' part) are the prologue for Visconti's *The Fall of the Gods* (1999), in which the matter is raised of the collaboration of the Krupp family with the nazis. Together with the contrapuntal working-class play *Quick Lime* (1999) about Van der Lubbe's naive idealism, Hollandia set forth it's view of fascism as a historical event.

The Fall of the Gods is about the sexual-political machinations and aberrations of captains of industry during the rise of National Socialism. The descendants of Joachim von Essenbeck, of noble birth, mercilessly fight for control of the family company. The family tragedy – a life-and-death struggle between his children and grandchildren for control of the company – is interlaced with all kinds of historical events: the rise of the National Socialists, the burning of the

Reichstag, the elimination of the SA during the Night of the Long Knives. The play ends with the death of most of the main characters, an illustration of the indissoluble bonds of omnipotence and a longing for death. With the SS' consent, former chairman of the board Joachim von Essenbeck is murdered by the new chairman of the board, Friedrich Bruckmann, who takes over control of the company. When Joachim's SA-son Konstantin threatens to succeed in dethroning them by using blackmail, Friedrich Bruckmann murders him as well, once again assisted by the SS. Bruckmann for his part is forced to drain the poisoned cup by Martin and Günther, two grandchildren and SS-converts. But they first staged a fake marriage with his lover Sophie, who also met the same end. The SS, in the person of cousin Wolf von Aschenbach and Martin and Günther, comes out on top.

In the Rotterdam Van Nelle factory, post-industrial ruins used as a hothouse of evil, Hollandia experimented with its style in yet another way. By interlacing the contents and the form, a theatrical texture was woven with a political edge. The actors each took on a cluster of characters. Paterfamilias Joachim, pining away from grief over his oldest son, killed in action, the hesitant, tyrannical chairman of the board Bruckmann and the perverted grandson Martin were all depicted by Jeroen Willems. Fedja van Huêt played both the role of Joachim's son Konstantin, who sympathises with the SA, and that of the honourable, anti-fascist vice chairman of the board Herbert Thalmann. In *Quick Lime*, he played the role of Marinus van der Lubbe, against whom he now fulminates. Elsie de Brauw played the women behind the men: one incites and gives them orders, the other calms them down and refuses to acknowledge the danger.

The servants rather cater to the actors than the characters. Actress Sanne van Rijn is urged as 'Sanne' to caress Elsie de Brauw. But the servants also act as prompts and assisting directors. At first, as 'real life subtitles' they follow the doings of their masters and mistresses. But little by little they start to lead their own lives as a 'shadow text'. Carola Arons interferes when the master text' does not comply with her directions. What the servants really are, remains unclear: servant, demon or annotations in the tradition of Brecht.

Tragedies: hubris

Visconti's *La Caduta degli Dei* doesn't just fit in Hollandia's repertoire because of the subject matter. In a form-technical sense the deconstruction of the theatrical reality in *The Fall of the Gods* was prefigured in *Phoenician Woman* (1996). The fall of the proud had already been staged in Hollandia's *The Fall of Mussolini* by Dick Raaijmakers. According to Hollandia's 'tragic' point of view, everything that aims at the top will be overturned. The subject of the downfall reaches back to the first tragedy that Hollandia performed in 1989: *Prometheus*. In the tragedies it usually about human pride, but in *Prometheus* the god Prometheus is the subject of the play. He has to eternally suffer for his gift to mankind: fire. In his pride Prometheus is still a god, in his suffering he comes one with his protégés.

Greek themes are abundant in Hollandia's work. Apart from the two forementioned tragedies, *Greeks* (1991), a combination of two (abridged) plays by Euripides about infanticide, *Hercules and Medea*, were performed as part of a school project. The subject matter of *Medea* had already been used in Müller's Liefdesdrama (*Love Drama*) in 1988, and was to return in the music theatre play *M is Muziek, Monoloog en Moord* (*M is Music, Monologue and Murder*, 1993) in an adaptation by Lodewijk de Boer. In 1994 Hollandia staged the oldest tragedy, *Perzen* (*Persians*), which dates back to 472 BC, and in 1995 they produced (a coproduction with Dutch television, the NPS) Xenakis' adaptation of the *Oresteia* in a church in Veere. In 1998 *Ifigeneia*

in Aulis was performed in the atrium of the town house in the Hague. Together with Dutch theatre company Het Zuidelijk Toneel Hollandia staged *De Trojaanse Vrouwen* (*Trojan Women*) in 1997. The brief preparation time left for a play about the biblical general Holofernes unintentionally made the performance of Judith a small tragedy in the eyes of some critics.

What does it entail to stage a classical tragedy in post-modern times without becoming a theatre archaeologist in the process? Are we, living in the process of modernisation and in the belief that everything can be controlled, at the mercy of a 'new' destiny? Does our technical pride go before a fall? Have we, heirs of a modernity that was destined to make history from its birth and nearing the 'end of history', seen our fate highlighted in the catastrophic and pointless violence? Do we lack the rituals to reduce everything that's bigger than us to human proportions? Hollandia is not bent on chastening and edifying its audience with its adaptations of classical tragedies. As in the peasant plays, but more insistently, she raises the issue of human proportions and illuminates current moral and political dilemmas from a unctemporary point of view.

As in the tragedies in the other plays the issue is raised of the meaninglessness of sacrifices in a calculating world Urban peasants die of senseless degeneration or blow themselves up in excesses, fishermen are devoured by the sea, soldiers are predestined to die for their country and fascistic captains of industry are brought down by their perverted exercise. In a society focused on benefit and efficiency, death does not play an important part any more, because everything is directed at the optimisation of vital and productive forces. The ritual has become a meaningless routine and the sacrifice the pointless effort by Van der Lubbe or a clever reinvestment by middle class who keep on slaving away. Wonders no longer exist. At the most they surprise people, as is the case in *Teorema* and *The Bittersweet* as an epiphanic madness.

In the two 'plaintive tragedies', *Persians* and *Trojan Women*, Aischylos and Euripides reveal the fate of conquered populations who used to be the aggressor and condemn the rulers. Are the Yugoslavic people and Milosovic represented in these plays, albeit invisibly? It is tempting to look upon Hollandia's performance of these tragedies as an attempt to conjure up new sympathetic images which can be used as a background in a reconsideration of the senselessness of current acts of war. No doubt the political context played a part in the minds of the directors, but in a theatrical sense it's more probable that the issue is being raised of the role of the ritual in the world of the proud. The static form and presentation of the chorus resulted in the absence of a heavy emotional load and gave the play a genuine ritual character. The three old men in *Persians*, who were left behind in the city after Xerxes' troops had gone to battle, are played by amateurs: they came from Roelofsarendsveen and 'had lived through the war'. A chorus made up of three singers sat behind them and spoke the choral lines of the old men in a recitative. The static ritualism was given a dynamic form by a preceptor: by Elsie de Brauw, who plays the queen-mother or by Jeroen Willems, who acts the part of the messenger, the ghost of Dareios and the proud Xerxes. The people who stay behind mourn their husbands, sons and brothers. The musical sing-speak acting goes through various registers and evokes an unearthly sensitivity.

But *Phoenician Women*, which was just as *Pigsty* staged in 1996, has a completely different starting point. Not only in a literal sense in the electronical handling of the voices, but more importantly in the political tension which was silently incorporated in the text and the staging of Euripides. The civil war theme was worked out more emphatically. In the staging of Euripides' tragedy (which is seldom performed), Hollandia reverberated current issues from the stylistically pressed view point of wonderment. Hollandia uses the allaying rituals of the classical rulers and the readiness to make sacrifices by their offspring to reverberate current issues without

having no thought for its own media. Contrary to in *Prometheus*, it's not about the conflict between humans and the gods, but about the lack of understanding between the different generations. The dénouement of the tangle of myths that were woven throughout this tragedy, lies in the sacrifice made by youngsters: sacrifices as a result of the tyrannical struggle for power in Thebe between Oedipus' two sons – Eteokles and Polyneikes –. Not the death of Oedipus and Iokaste's fighting sons – whose struggle perhaps rules out the possibility of a doubleheaded position in modern day politics – but the sacrifices of their cousin Menoikeus, the son of Kreon, and of their sister Antigone are the focus of the tragedy. They take responsibility for the generation and estrangement. The revolt, that had retreated into the background in *Prometheus*, comes to the fore in human proportions. Antigone's revolt. Her decision to bury Polyneikes, who died for Thebe but cannot be buried, after having challenged his brother's authority in a morally ambiguous manner, is against the wishes of her uncle, Kreon and can be seen as an indirect answer to the lamentations of the women from Phoenicia. And by doing so she distances herself from the old world.

Abstention and degeneration once again play an important part, just as in *Leonce & Lena* and *Peasants Dying*. Once again, just as in both other plays, the tested Dutch theme of fleeing is put forward in *Phoenician Women*. In this case in a group of women from Phoenicia, made up of representatives of cultures of former 'political-economical' migrants – Moluccans, Indonesians, Turks, Maroccans, but Greeks as well – who remark on the sorry state in which the city state Thebe is in. Without being stereotypical or politically-correct, via an experiment in style the tragedy becomes a multi-cultural drama, before the unsuspecting audience had realised what was happening.

Prometheus, *Persians* and *Phoenician Women* were all three performed in Jan Smit's breaker's yard: an industrial graveyard where the remains of our automobile society are stored. In *Persians* water played an important part – Elsie de Brauw's dive into freezing cold water as a finale – in *Phoenician Women* earth, in which Polyneikes must be buried, but in *Prometheus* it's all about fire. At the same time it's the setting in it's industrially exhausted form: dismantled car parts. As *the* symbol of western society and *the* material incarnation of our exhausted autonomy, the disassembled motor components are the stage setting for the struggle between the supreme god, Zeus, and the founder of our civilisation and benefactor of humanity, Prometheus.

In particular, the struggle between reason and passion, ratio and feeling was brought to the fore in the tragedies: in this field of tension, morality is temporarily deferred or totally transformed. In *Prometheus*, this ambiguity is symbolised by fire, that, just as water and air, can be a blessing, but equally well a curse. If Aristotle in a classical-Greek formula propagated that the middle is the measure of things, then Hollandia combined this existential tension with a performance in which tragedy is used as stylistic device: she literally makes the audience face the measures of things.

6 Working Class: authentic humility

The tragic Greek is just as degenerated and torn as the peasant and the fisherman. The tragedy as a cultural phenomenon is a pre-eminent way of expressing degeneration and inner conflict. It sees the light of life in the cracks of the mythical texture of the cosmos. In Aischylos' tragedies a world is shaped that was put into effect a few centuries later in the plays by Euripides: the world of the logos, in which the process of rationalisation started. The industrial revolution is a distant offshoot of it. The tragedy, that, from Aischylos till the period in which Euripides wrote his more

worldly and dynamic plays, became the aesthetic-political focus of the city-state culture, enlarges with a magnifying glass the haircracks in the cosmic awareness. The rift with the mythical cosmos slowly takes on immense proportions.

In the peasant and fishermen plays, a cosmic alliance was assumed in the degeneration and inner conflict. The struggle that Hollandia developed in these plays, was not that between myth and logos, but between nature and culture or the countryside and the town. The battle between myth and logos influenced these plays in all kind of ways. The performance of the rituals and the killing – even if they are hollow and senseless – play a crucial role. This time, Hollandia took the bodies and souls of the labourers in hand. The class war seems to be over: the uprooted peasants of the olden days have become factory workers who regard their factory as their home base. In 1997 – simultaneously with the politically slanted *Voices* and the multicultural drama *Phoenician Women* – the first working class play is performed: *Kingcorne vrouwen* – wordt het eerste arbeidersstuk gespeeld: Kingcorn or so to speak and everything. The monologue, spoken by Bert Luppés in a dismantled mill factory in Leiden, conjures up a portrait of Bram, the last labourer in the factory who has been running it for close on three years.

In *Biotex* (1999), that was staged in a closed-down soap factory of the same name, in the former VOC-building in Delfshaven, workman Charl van Rijn, acted by Peter Paul Muller, gives anyone interested a tour. Both plays, directed by Floor Huygen, are edited interviews made by Lex Bohlmeijer. The text was preserved word for word. Just as in *Voices*, documental material was deployed, that indicates a shift in the selection of texts from classical texts to material taken from ‘life’. In these plays there’s no allusion to the main themes of the other plays, yet these grotesque ‘king’s dramas’ say it all: the class struggle is over. The tragic tension has completely dissolved in acceptance. The seriousness is transformed into an anecdotal sense of humour. The repetitive pattern of the recurring anecdotes is the safety net for an effeted life, which betrays a terrifying resignation. Although the complete identification of the labourer with his employer testifies to an unequalled readiness to make sacrifices and although the resignation now and then betrays a suppressed anger, an explicit sacrifice is not at hand. Unlike Gust, Bram and Charl look back on a life nearing its end, that takes its reason from the power that they derive from their survival. At last they have become the administrators of their own microcosmos: the factory as a greenhouse in which they survived. Shunted workmen turn out to be the filing clerks of their own curriculum vitae.

[Herhaling tekst!!.. Zie boven. In *Biotex* (1999), dat zich afspeelt in een in het VOC gebouw in het Rotterdamse Delfshaven gevestigde zeepfabriek leidt de arbeider Charl van Rijn - gespeeld door Peter Paul Muller - belangstellenden rond. Voor dit stuk heeft regisseur Floor Huygen monologen uitgewerkt op grond van door Lex Bohlmeijer afgenomen interviews]. Just as in *Voices*, documentary material was deployed dramatically. Although a smouldering racism flares now and then in the humble profundities, Bert Luppés is not a Korbes and Peter Paul Muller not a Wolf van Achenbach this time. The small evil dies out immediately and the resentment is absorbed in the ever-continuing anecdotal without any comic reflection or political message. The workmen express the virtuousness of an industrious life. Sitting at a kitchen table, Bram tells the audience, who have drawn up their kitchen chairs as well, about the unaffected life of a labourer in the factory where he had worked for the past forty-eight years, He’s still got three years left before he can retire. Charl too embodies the victory of the city over the country: ‘not that I dislike modern, eh, modernisation, if it serves a purpose, if it serves a purpose, I’m all for.’

What’s fascinating about Bram and Charl is that in their repetitive identification with their working life they become themselves. With simple profundities a minuscule texture has been

woven from which resentimental frays hang. Hollandia's respect for the completed industrious lives is based on the fact that they've come to an end: what we see is the wisdom of a life, not that of a human being. The genuine character of such a life is not approached psychologically: it reveals the disposition of such a life. Where the tragedy lies is left to the other actors in this play: te audience.

In part one of the Industrial Project *1:KLM Cargo (1998)*, the silent swan song of the factory workers became a robotesque worker's dance and in *Quick Lime (1999)* it became an explosion of violence when Rinus van der Lubbe cried out with incapacity: 'Gottadusumfing!!!' In *Cargo* a triptych was performed in which the mechanical industrialisation was staged one more time. The mechanical behaviour of the labourers in the first part transform into a hilarious playfulness of the present day experience tourist. The flight portrayed in *Peasants Dying, Leonce & Lena* and *Phoenician Women* has turned into aironomical outing. During the flight the audience enjoys a meal, after which they move to another area of the enormous hall with it's transit sounds. In management jargon – Shell's top-executive Herkströter's speech – they listen to the ultimate legitimisation of modernisation. While the work continues in the midst of the play, and the acting becomes part of the work when Bert Luppés in the capacity of and with the lines of a fork-lift truckdriver intervenes with the course of the play – part one resonates for a moment in Andriessen's *Workers Union*. And the audience drifts along on the allochtonous tonalities of Najib Cherradi.

Rinus van der Lubbe, a bricklayer from Leiden, too is a rebellious workman, who as a youth worker constantly organised community activities. Naive and idealistic, he travels through Europe and sees what's happening. With his desperate act he tries to turn the course of events: a inspired loner, he goes to war against the forces of Evil that celebrated victory in *The Fall of the Gods*. When he finds himself in the hotbed of world politics, he is mislead and slaughtered: as a scapegoat for all those people who do not and cannot stem the rise of evil. Van der Lubbe is Prometheus and Antigone in a modern setting. In *Quick Lime* the historical act is given back to the character. Van der Lubbe's act was taken away from him, forst by the fascists and then by the communists. Hollandia gives him back his deed.

As soon as the human soul has been cut from it's mythological, religious and ideological skin, the body changes into an explosive, critical masse: it starts to spin round uncoordinatedly. The digitally dubbed voice of the demon in *Phoenician Women* bursts into a spastic screaming in *Quick Lime*, that is rythmicised in the compositions of Florence Boddendijk and Remco de Jong. Van der Lubbe's body screams with incapacity like the imagery of Francis Bacon. All desire to live has disappeared in the absent look and snapped head – an image that is burnt into everybody's memory: there's no sign of wistfulness, of humility and certainly not of pride. The tragedy of the idealistic young man is centred in the raised fist, with which he joins heaven and earth at the least expected moments, as if he tried to draw a last crumb of strength from heaven with this equally hopeful and powerless gesture.

The contrast between the tragic reality of working-class idealism and the pragmatic world full of hygienic vitality in *KLM Cargo* is developed to the full in Hollandia's final play. In *Vuile Dieve (Dirty Thieves, 2000)*, performed at the Low Pressure-cabin of the blastfurnaces the Hoogovens, Jannie Pranger sings the life story of Anita Roddick, the founder-chairman-owner of the multinational The Bodyshop. Her success story is in contrast with the story of 'looser' Nel, a ninety-seven year old worker from Roelofsarendsveen. Elsie de Brauw plays the life story of Nel, wheezing and groaning and for ever wetting her sunken lips, which was based on a video portret made by Marike Nieuwints. Although this life lacks the glamour and animation of Nina's life, the

unfathomable vitality that shimmers through Nel's frail vulnerability withstands every comparison with the euphoric shallowness of Nina.

Hollandia's earlier themes and styles slit in with each other: Reminiscing Gust from the peasant plays, the double standards in the bourgeoisie plays, the euphoria of power in the plays figuring politicians and captains of industry, the resigned wisdom in the working-class plays and the pitiable downfall in the tragedies all come back in *Dirty Thieves*. Even the fall is distinctly present. The fall is the cause of death of for Nel's husband, who had just retired and was trying to saw the dead branches from a tree: 'no more company, no more money'. At the end of the play it looks like she crashes to the ground once and for all. But she manages to get up again and, as if nothing has happened, she trudges over the bank, while the over-confident broken business woman Nina stares after her, who, for her part, has been brought down by the marketfall of her stock. Nina laments her tragic downfall as a mourner in sackcloth and ashes, but to Nel the fall is a very usual thing: the fall is 'the story of her life'.

What binds the local history of Nel with Nina's cosmopolitan adventures, is work: 'from seven till seven for seven pennies' and 'sixteen hours a day' – and dirty thieves: the cleaning ladies who steal from old Nel and the multinationals that have tricked Nina out of her ideals. There is hardly any sign of self-reflection, or it is the nearly routine, but nevertheless cautious 'Yes?' with which Nel concludes her 'memoirs' every now and then.

II. COMPOSITIONS

In *Dirty Thieves*, the actress, vocalist and musician each play their own part. But how do the theatrical acts, textual images and dramatic compositions relate to each other in this play? Music owes its existence to air vibrations, ears, muscles and bones. Theatre requires a higher frequency and another sense: an image can only be encompassed in light. Music occurs in a linear line with time. A surveyable image – which is easily created within a frame – can be sized up at a glance. The image that we see immediately makes us involved, albeit detachedly, but through our ears the image sinks in deeper. Our bodies are touched in a different manner by an image than by a sound. Through images the world remains at a distance, through sounds and rhythm we are admitted to that world. It may seem a contra-intuitive perception, but it's better to become blind than deaf.

If an image is stationary, then we have plenty of time to scan it with our eyes. If an image changes all the time, as in a theatrical setting, then more distance is needed to be able to have an overall view. In playhouses this kind of distance is taken for granted. Hollandia has neutralised this kind of distance in two ways: by using disorientating sounds and rhythm and by taking their audience to places where they do not feel at home. Hollandia makes music theatre and location theatre to close the distance with its audience, in the hope that by doing so the sense of involvement will be greater.

Simons' imaginative power becomes even more three-dimensional and more dynamic because of Koek's research into the transformative power of 'sound' medium and Raaijmaker's cinematic sound images. Sounds strengthen the unity of the images, the rhythm stresses the speed at which it's all happening. Before you know it, both have become a background. Sounds and rhythm can be so intensive that they start to have an hypnotic effect: like in the repetitive music that made Steve Reich, Philipp Glass, Micheal Nyman and the Louis Andriessen famous. These composers, in co-operation with theatre directors such as Robert Wilson and film directors such as Peter Greenaway, have opened up new dimensions in the sound imagery.

If you keep this musical background in mind, Hollandia's approach to sound becomes more comprehensible. Paul Koek, who was strongly influenced by Andriessen and Raaijmakers, shaped his ideas about relationship between sound, rhythm and imagery during his period at Hocketus. Musical experiments with the fields of sound and repetitive patterns lead to the development of 'hoketering', something which was already applied in one of the first plays - Suus: a stuttering pronunciation of syllables in one long drone. It is also present in the dithyrambs of the tragedies and in the plays by Raaijmakers.

Koek strokes, hits and brushes everything that comes his way. He created unprecedented timbres by brushing over an aluminium rod with his fingers covered in resin: the timbres of the aluphone sounded in a great number of plays. By linking timbre to rhythm, new sound images can be called up time and again. To Hollandia, composing is mostly about combining. Like in the first Russian films, wherein they cut image after image without connective anecdotal bridges – so Hollandia assembles sounds on rhythms, images, words and gestures. When a character cries out with misery, his raging, cursing and obscene verbal cruelty becomes a paragon of a discordant life by the sound performance.

While Simons is in search of penetrative images, positions and arrangements to tempt his audience into associations with the images and mental reflections, Koek is rattling and shaking civilisation out of a hospital bed IN DOOF and lets RiEnus van der Lubbe beat his soul out of material objects. Their stage image is as sure as fate and sounds magnificent. Sound and rhythm lead to a profundity in the images that exceeds every psychological realism. The composition makes the impact of the depicted misery so penetrating, that the audience can really feel it.

In 1997 a musical GROUP was founded within Hollandia in order to permanently link these experiments to Hollandia's development: the Veenstudio. In this sound and rhythm laboratory the boundaries between theatre and music were systematically and improvisedly explored. They paid specific attention to the imagery of the sounds. Together with Florentijn Boddendijk, Ton van de Meer, with musicians from the modern-classical world, such as Walter van Hauwe and Francis Marie UETTI and together with guest musicians such as Najib Cherrabi, they stretched the elasticity of the musical performance further and further.

1 Electronic music theatre: air

Sound and rhythm are effectively present in nearly all of Hollandia's plays. But the dithyrambs, madrigals, arias and non-western melodies are more than just a musical accompaniment. Music theatre is not concerned about theatre music. It's not concerned about making tunes to go with a picture accompanying a rounded-off speech: sound, image, light, acts and words enter into a far more interesting pact. As a music theatre, Hollandia strives for an integral approach. Spoken words are not only underlined and accentuated melodically and rhythmically by rolling earthly materials such as wood, iron, grass, vegetables, stones and paper. Electronically amplified and digitally edited sounds are brought into the play as independent elements. If you take these electronic and digital experiments in mind, electronic music theatre seems like a more appropriate title. The words become music, the voice an instrument that has produced theatrical and dramatic effects barely conceivable.

When all possible colours are converged, white light appears. In the same way Hollandia tries to near the theatrical zero point of silence by converging musical sounds, theatrical images, dramatic gestures and textual meaning. The zero point does not entail a deathly silence, or an absolute, dramatic gesture: it's more like a silent tension that arises in the cross-fertilisation of

various medial approaches. More justice will be done to the tension if we look at Hollandia's plays and theatrical performances in terms of compositions, tuning and sound imagery.

From exposition to composition

Although the co-operation with Dick Raaijmakers didn't take shape until later on in Hollandia's development of music theatre, nevertheless it is clarifying to start with this collaboration. In *Der Fall/Dépons* (1993), *The Fall of Mussolini* (1995) and *Hermans' Hand* (1995) Hollandia became a music theatre: in *Der Fall/Dépons* (1993) the words and the depiction became a perfect composition of sound, images and actions. Every allusion to a reality beyond the composition, every representation is diffused: 'What's going on?' non-actor Raaijmakers asked at the beginning of the play. At the end of his disordering fake performance the words were grafted on the images, the images on the sounds, the sounds on actions and the whole theatrical exposition was literally transformed into a composition.

Repetition is an important component. Repetitive music and elements from Japanese popular drama -- the Kabuki -- and puppet theatre -- Bunraku -- have been incorporated. Every reference to something outside of the play, every psychological reference to the characters is diffused by the self-reflective engrafting of various media onto each other. The idea that language is the exclusive faculty of the mind to express itself, is completely negated in this music theatre play. The staccato-type 'hokEtering' of seventeenth century texts transforms the words into rhythmicised sounds in the mind of the listener, who, listening to all these incomprehensible guttural sounds and sound modulations, are forced to abandon any specific way of listening. In the mad monologues -- kyogen -- even the Japanese text becomes a soundmix. It indirectly comes close to Artaud's theatre of Cruelty, albeit somewhat more stylised than he advocated.

Sound, text, imagery and actions topple over each other and generate the tumbling reflectivity that is so characteristic of Hollandia: theatre as a sky dive. In *Der Fall/Dépons* Hollandia recognises the fact that life as a dissonance should not only be exposed to the mind, but should also penetrate into the body as well. The audience understands a play much better with his whole body than just with immaterial reason.

The last scene in *Der Fall/Dépons* demonstrates that it's such a thin line between reality and appearances. Dennis Rudge, who plays Schubert, painfully manoeuvres himself down a steep iron staircase, running from one of the top corners down to the stage, with both his legs strapped to a rickety kind of wheelchair. The staircase has only got a banister on one side. The actor could easily tumble off the stairs. Even more so than in Nel's agonisingly slow descent, when she hauls herself out of bed on the coal bank at the beginning of *Dirty Thieves*, the extremely thin line between appearances and reality on which Hollandia performs its balanced theatrical act.

Another play about a fall is *Hermans' Hand*: this time it's about the fall of the Dutch writer Willem Frederik Hermans. The slow-motion images at the beginning of the play turn every movement into a fall -- in the slowing down every movement becomes visible as a movement. The play is about Hermans, who used to collect typewriters. In Raaijmakers' eyes what he was doing was something like defying the gods. According to Raaijmakers Hermans falls into his own trap when he sprains his wrist, after picking up an old typewriter at a flea-market in Brussels. The writer reaching out to his own ideal is theatricalised as a fall in slow-motion: his hubristic reaching out to the highest goal is doomed to fail.

In *The Fall of Mussolini* Raaijmakers' philosophical fascination with falling -- in a reversal of Wittgenstein's 'Der Welt ist alles was der Fall ist' - is music theatrically put to the ultimate test.

Together with Toneelgroep Amsterdam, Hollandia performed a variation on 'the making of' in the purification plant - de Zuiveringshal - at the Westergasfabriek. A cinematographic representation of 'the fall' was worked out in all kinds of ways in the staging of a film about Mussolini which was made in the thirties but never completed, with Jacqueline Blom as the director and Jeroen Willems as the sound technician. Two additional themes are 'Night Owls' by Laurel and Hardy, and Slauerhoff's novel about a stained-glass artist who feels out of place and is thrust into the position of the messiah during a Mexican celebration of the dead, to finally be crucified as a false prophet in the thirteenth STATION – REFERRING TO THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS - of the story. A whole repertory of industrial metaphors is unleashed on the idea of the reversed downfall – Mussolini hanging upside down. The idea was artistically expressed by means of a cinematographical medium, with its reels and projections. The machine is a texture of human relationships: the hissing, rattling and grating, together with the director's shouts and the muffled mumbling of the Theatre Festival's visitors who are walking around, eating and drinking coffee, becomes a staged composition. The artistic borders were, much to the annoyance of some of the critics, even more difficult to define than in *Der Fall/Dépons*.

Tuning in

Before Raaijmakers joined them, the tragedies were a gold mine of inspiration for Hollandia's music theatre. Because nobody knows what the original performances sounded like, the translation of the Greek metrical verses offers a unique opportunity to experiment with rhythm and melodies. The dithyrambs form the landscape in which the tragic situations develop: the chorus drowns the protagonists, it becomes disgruntled, agrees with them and reveals the tragic destiny of humanity. These dramatic modalities of the musical tuning turn the rhythmicised sounds into a reality in itself. It is developed even further by electronically distorted and computer-controlled sounds effects – a sound spectrum that stretches from the cello to the Japanese shamisens.

A direct translation of the classical texts into Dutch doesn't do justice to the original Greek phrasing. The Greek language has a different rhythm than the Dutch language. In Dutch the stress depends on the rhythm and melody; in Greek it's not about accents based on emphasis, but about the measured pronunciation of long or short syllables. Herman Altena's translation presented Paul Koek with a composition for the dithyrambs in which the Greek tempi and pitch were not lost. And so scale after scale resounded in Persians. The musicality of the tuning nearly accentuates its own presence: the tuning becomes a purpose in itself. Sometimes the metres of the various voices were proportionally extended in the hope that the listener would then experience a feeling of infinity.

In *Phoenician Women*, the dithyrambs were treated as concertanti: they formed independent compositions that in a sense had nothing to do with the tragic course of events. The more and more the latitude between the voice and the speaker -- often the concordance suggests a psychological profundity -- is deconstructed by the redoubling. Chorus members all sing and speak at the same time in various languages, while the tuning of earthly materials underline the sound and rhythm. And finally all these tunings are electronically edited as well. Some voices had been taped beforehand and were woven in the sound texture on the spot. Other voices served as their own echo or mimed themselves. Sometimes the actors contradict their own voice-overs. Sometimes a voice remained silent, after which the inner voice, the demon, took over. The inner

voice – typical of psychological realism – starts to lead its own life, something which was carried through in *The Fall of the Gods* in the form of human subtitles.

It wasn't just the Greek tragedies that sparked off voice experiments; texts by Samuel Beckett - *Rockaby* /*Woorden en muziek* (*Rockaby/Words and Music*, 1990) en *Gelukkige dagen* (*Happy Days*, 1993) - were also extremely suitable. In the chamber opera *Der Stein* (1995) Hollandia experimented with schizophrenic phrasing. Opera-like plays were also performed in co-operation with other composers: in the chapel of the psychiatric centre *Vogelensang* in Bennebroek they performed *Bethlehem Hospital*, *William Blake in Hell* (1990) by Huib Emmer. At the fish market in Schevingen they staged *M is Music, Monologue and Murder* (1993) with Andriessen and together with the music group LOOS they performed *Peter van Bergen's Scherven* (*Shards*, 1995) and *Oldenbarnevelt*, again with Andriessen and other musicians (1998).

Hollandia has quoted others to its heart's content and unabashedly stole tunings and tunes from other cultures. When they came in touch with Japanese popular drama and puppet theatre they latched onto the alternation of high and low voices in *Persians* to intone the terrible news of the messenger, played by Jeroen Willems, in a Japanese manner. In the three roles that he plays Willems completed a voice spectrum that ran from childish to frenzied. Elsie de Brauw's voice for the queen mother is based on a posh Hague accent and on the dialect timbre of the three wise men from *Phoenician Women*, which was also used in the monologue of ninety seven year old Nel in *Dirty Thieves*. As in Japanese theatre, a simple psychological characterisation is opposed by the emphasis on formal means: the character's emotions are toned in the formal structure.

Sound Images

Improvisation is the key word for the smaller productions which Hollandia performed during the first couple of years, often in co-operation with Peter van Bergen: *Doof* (*Deaf*, 1987), *Slijpen* (*Polish*, 1994) and *Scherven* (*Shards*, 1995). *Deaf* was based on a poem by Jan Bouts about the suicide of a friend. Bouts' friend, at least that was the message of the poem, would still be alive if he had remained deaf to the civilised scepticism that puts every value that we believe to be a definite fact of life into perspective. He would probably still be alive if his friends hadn't remained deaf to the state he was in. The play was performed in a small theatre, in front of a wall covered with scaffolding, with on the front of the stage a hospital bed, that in the course of the performance was transformed into a musical instrument. The beginning and end of the play are anecdotal and illustrative. Church bells ring in the dark – the stage setting for the fields of sound through which Bouts' musical poem was woven was made up of only a small amount of punctuated light. Koek's rolls and Van Bergen's 'speaking' saxophone – the inventor thought this instrument resembled the human voice the most – alternate each other. Rhythm, sound and melody gradually started to unfold more freely around the poem, that already seemed to somewhat resemble a music score with all its punctuation. Every abstract idea gradually evaporated in Hollandia's sound imagery. The theatrical image of a lonely man at the top of a staircase fully complied with the sound imagery. At the end of the performance, Koek flung himself with his whole body and two drum sticks in his hand on the bed, that thus became a musical aggregate. The throes of death end with a hawking and rattling saxophone and so in the end an anecdotal sound imagery manages to gain the upper hand after all.

In *Polish* (1994), another poem by Bouts was composed in co-operation with the deSingel in Antwerp, about the loss of Eden as the birth of the true human being. *Polish* suggests gleaming intimacy. It also refers to diamonds and dancing – a slow intimate embrace - but most of all

it's about the electronic polishing of natural sounds: edited bird sounds figure together with the human figures, who seem to have stepped straight out of Henri Rousseau's *Le Douanier*.

Art-historical images have frequently been a source of inspiration to Hollandia. Bacon's paintings, for example, have often been used. In *Shards* (1995), performed in a hangar at the airport of Ypenburg, a textual composition based on text by Ivo Michiels was composed, with an overture and a coda. The play contained pictorial images: Picasso's knees, Cobra's childlike, wild poetical imagery, Lucio Fontana's slashed paintings. With strings of sounds and rhythms, LOOS transformed these words into a sound imagery in which the story was depicted of a man and a woman who relive their past.

In 1993, the Scheveningen fish market was the stage setting for the music theatre performance *M is Music, Monologue and Murder*, that was created in co-operation with Louis Andriessen and Lodewijk de Boer and inspired by Peter Greenaway's videofilm *M is for Man, Music and Mozart* (1991). Astrid Seriese, who sings the alphabet in Greenaway's film, now played three Medea monologues together with both actresses from *Polish*, Robijn Wendelaar and Henriëtte Koch: the daughter, the mistress and the mother. It's not a complete coincidence that Greenaway crossed Hollandia's path: both Andriessen and Koek contributed to Greenaway's opera *Rosa* (1993). But more important than this biographical detail are the stylistic similarities between Greenaway and Hollandia in the grafting of images, sounds, acts and texts.

De Boer's adaptation of the text, Seriese's singing and the musical contribution of De Volharding were all music-theatrically incorporated in tried and tested tragic theme – Medea's murder of her sons in retaliation for her husband's infidelity. Hollandia parried Greenaway's sardonic ideas about evolution with trusty Hollandia themes: death, ruin and destruction, ending in the murder of the children. The rage and hate of the hissing and shouting women, who nearly spit out their lines, become even more violent in De Volharding's composition. But now and then the music distances itself from the frenzy and the interplay between the voices and instruments leads to a new artistic suspense.

Hollandia's sound imagery steadily became more complex. In *Su-pa* (1996), -- *Su-pa* means nutritious food – which was performed in the kitchen of the engine room at the Westergasfabriek, Hollandia experimented with digital techniques. Pots and pans and all kinds of pieces of scenery were fitted with sensors that were designed to react to movement and light and digitally actuate sounds. In *Machine Agricole* (1997) it was farming machines that were transformed into musical instruments: a seeder no longer sowed seeds, it strew notes. After the performance of *Fantastic Rhythm* (1998) and *Mijlpaal er trilt iets* (*Milestone, Something is Trembling*, 1998) the Veenstudio started to improvise with abstract cinematographic material (made by Joost Rekveld) in *De Film* (*The Film*, 1999). In *Sonic Acts* (1999), Hollandia's music theatre, in co-operation with students from the Combined Faculty of Imagery and Sound in the Hague, deconstructed dance parties thrown in *Paradiso* or during boat trips. A dramatic role was awarded to Frieda Pittoors, who, in a festival-like setting, dramatised texts by the sixteenth century Dutch poetess Anna Bijns about death and parting from life, while Jeroen Willems and Peter Paul Muller performed Monteverdi's war madrigals -- the same madrigals that served as a devout counterpoint to the cruel dialogues in *Bloodlust* (2000).

Monteverdi's compositional experiment in taking the words and not the sounds as his starting-point, formed the musicological context for the sound imagery, wherein Gregorian chants, madrigals and arias sounded when you least expected them. For Koek, a contrapuntal approach created theatrical and dramatic possibilities which underscored Hollandia's view on the interactions between different media. In a merely musical sense, Koek was focused on the

musicological theme of fourteenth century semitones. Half steps set the tone for Hollandia's music theatre, far more than the more rational, proportional tones that started to dominate Western music after Monteverdi.

This distinction was turned into a physical experience in the performance of *TasliT* (1999). This play was based on a Berber fairy tale about the disastrous marriage between a flea and a louse: the flea falls into the wedding soup and drowns, which leads to a number of disasters that eventually lead to the end of the world. The sound imagery encompassed a 'multicultural drama': not by creating a politically correct synthesis of world music, but by heightening the tension between the two different music traditions. Sanne van Rijn, the weeping bride defeated by the string of fatal events, is surrounded by the accumulating sound images produced by the musicians and soloist Najib Cherradi. More justice is done to the timbre of semitones in Arabic music than is the case in Western music. With the result that after having listened to semitonal music for more than an hour, Monteverdi's tempered composition suddenly sounds out of tune. Electronic music theatre is not a form of opera. In *Dirty Thieves*, it becomes clear that the musical actor and the acting musician are only the ultimate limits of electronic music theatre. A perfect music theatrical composition would have to discard these boundaries as well so as to achieve a musical and theatrical configuration in which artistic-disciplinary distinctions disappear. A 'Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk' probably lies hidden behind the self-reflective interference with the borderlines between the various disciplines and the boundaries between the actors and the audience – something which Harald Szeemann described as one of the main features of avant-garde imagination in 1985 in his review of 150 years of art history.

2 Location Theatre: earth, water, fire

Dirty Thieves was performed in the Low Pressure Plant at the former Hoogovens. The stage image is made up of two strips of coal and sand, mixed with fine stones, that run parallel to each other but are at right angles to the stand: Nel's coal bank and Nina's sand garden. Steam comes up out of the ground here and there. During the performance cinematographic images of industrial activity and typical Dutch ice-skating fun are projected on an ingeniously constructed steam screen that is hanging diagonally above the middle of the two strips. Ton van der Meer interweaves his compositions, full of industrial sounds, ducks quacking, bird chatter and a melange of Fauré and Varese with the ambience. Silhouettes, projected from inside the building, flicker on the building's tall rear windows – fragments of clouds of steam, hoists moving up and down, trains thundering by. Leo de Nijs brews an alchemistic ambience from the four elements: the stage setting, the stand and the stage become one big installation in which theatre and reality merge together, without destroying the tension between them that determines the reflection. The wafer-thin illusion of a convention theatre setting, that lacks any sense of monumentality, has been replaced by an atmosphere in which every participant is absorbed by the events. Nel and Nina tell their story within this earthly composition.

Theatre and life remain strictly separate in playhouses, buildings that Johan Simons and Paul Koek experienced to be stuffy and oppressive. Confined to a foetal darkness that cannot endure light, the actors and the audience are cut off from both each other and the world. Hollandia once considered building its own theatre: piles in the ground and a glass dome, like a temple. But one of the most adventurous aspects of Hollandia's theatre work would then have been lost: the audience's journey to various unknown, often 'unheimisch' locations where something unique, a one-off, is about to happen. This performance-aspect, which can hardly be

underestimated, did indeed work selectively as regards to the audience, but in the course of time it enabled Hollandia to build up its own audience.

Playhouse or Location: atmosphere

Although the reviewer's and critic's reaction to the first plays was somewhat reserved - they sometimes disqualified the use of artistic means as being 'unbalanced' - and unintentionally tried to see every new experiment in the light of late-modern art categories - Raaijmakers' performances are soon considered to be too 'theoretical' - they all unanimously agreed on one thing: a deserted greenhouse, a factory that has served its time or any kind of industrial site create a unique ambience for Hollandia's expositions and sound imagery. Furthermore, the enlivenment of theatre that Hollandia had in mind corresponds to the theatricalisation of life and the aestheticism of public SPACE that was characteristic of the last decades of the twentieth century. Within this cultural-political transformation of public nature and theatricality, Hollandia regauged the functions of the playhouse and the reflective capacity of its audience. At the sites, all kinds of sensory sensations play a part that are systematically filtered out in a playhouse: smells, sounds, images or tactile and kinaesthetic sensations that constantly make the visitor aware of its own physical presence and that of others. The boundary between the audience and the actors may never be lifted, but the shared awkwardness sometimes reduces it to very small proportions. At such moments the spectator becomes a partaker, sometimes even a partner in adversity.

In *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999), Hans-Thies Lehmann called Hollandia's location a area of 'Gemeinsamkeit' (306) for the actors and the audience. This word conveys interesting music-theatrical connotations: accordance, unity and relations could well be the essence of Hollandia's location theatre. This 'contactuality' resonates on every level of theatrical reality. The unconventional materiality of the stage settings designed by Leo de Nijs and Elian Smits has a physical impact. The spectators are tangibly and acoustically stirred by the costumes: while the water drips down the blue walls, the audience can hear the swishing of Keso Dekker's synthetic skirts. Together with the stage settings and costumes, the sites don't just stand for illustrative architectonic surroundings. They're not just any kind of location for a setting and a few lines: it's where a theatrical reality takes place. *Suus* was performed in a former cinema because the cinematographical flashbacks depicting the stages of life of an ageing woman, are put in a particular context in this ambience. Theatre becomes an all-encompassing event.

In Hollandia's location theatre the history of a place plays a virtual role. It were predominantly cultural-political considerations that inspired Hollandia to take on this form of theatre. Hollandia raised pivotal questions about the role that theatre plays in a post-industrial society or about the relationship between theatrical reflection and local, 'micropolitical' history.

The ruinous, dilapidated sites, 'tableaux mourants', exude a sense of faded glory. The decrepitude reveals a local, social-economical history that is recomposed in the performance. If *The Bittersweet* is performed in a cutting room instead of in a playhouse, then other associations are evoked in the minds of the audience and other things are emphasised by the actors. And in the adaptation for television even more changes have to be made: the ambience has to be compensated for by inserting flashbacks at the beginning. In the television version, there's hardly any question of a physical experience. And besides the social-economical embedment, the playhouse, as an institute, also forms its own virtual stage by its own specific stage history. In a

theatrical 'here and now', the present and past of both the location and the theatre are mirrored in each other.

Hollandia also experiments with the view and spatial orientation in the locks, greenhouses, football stadiums and busses, or under the bridges where they perform. It already starts during the drive to the site. Herman Brood's *Kamikaze* (1986), which is impossible to place in this retrospective, can be regarded as the ultimate limit of location theatre. As a transitional preliminary route, the journey in a blacked out bus turns into a stage, stand and location in one: a proto-virtual reality. What, in a radical sense, applies to this bus drama, also goes for the other plays: the audience is installed in a mobile environment, something which is sometimes emphasised even more by the movements on the spot, as in *KLM Cargo*.

In the light of the subject matter of Hollandia's themes – an uprooted community and homeless roamers – the location offers yet another meaning: a never satisfiable longing for authenticity and community is experienced in the desolate surroundings. By grafting the contents, form and style on each other, the cruelty of an irreparable breach resonates in the audience's experiencing of a 'here-and-now'. The audience shares its experience with the actors, who furthermore are manoeuvred into all kinds of exhaustive positions. Thus, a twofold 'sharing' takes place: not only of words but of material texture as well. The interactions between the contents, form, style and location get the audience's bodies by the short hairs. Reflectivity and corporeality no longer oppose one another: as a result of the voyeurism of the participants, a hypocritical physical statement lies hidden behind every critical view: non-theatrical images, sounds and smells create an atmospheric tactility. Together with the experiences with taste that are evoked in the culinary setting, Hollandia's theatrical reality becomes an overall experience. Because the audience and the actors are both in the same space, and psychically experience the same things, such as the cold, the rain and the wind, they are directly involved with each other. But the reflection does not cease to exist: the audience is physically given food for thought. In her 1993 analysis of reception, about the effect of the location and the use of space within Hollandia, Anne-Magriet Vos van de Kaa comes to yet another conclusion: specific location factors also detach the audience. The cold and the aversion make the audience repeatedly face the facts of their own place and position. This effect of alienation – in the tradition of a post-Brecht-era – is striven for methodically in the choice of locations.

In a receptive-aesthetic sense the 'view' becomes completely physical. Conventional blueprints for watching and listening are literally discarded. On the site, watching and listening become tangible. Although the awareness of being a fellow participant sometimes becomes so acute that some members of the audience start to think that they really are a fellow actor – explicitly looking at and talking to the audience is one of Hollandia's most hazardous tactics – the distance between the actors and the audience remains intact. Only then can Hollandia keep its intended micropolitical reflections alive: a heightened sense of the virtual dimensions and an acute awareness of the artificial nature of a theatrical ambience. The more the distance between the actors and the audience is stretched, the more intensive these reflective tensions.

Performance

A sense of 'here-and-now' is characteristic of the performing arts. Theatre, dance and music are determined by the performance. BECAUSE every performance is unique the quality of A performance can be judged: by comparing different performances of a same play with each other. With its location theatre, Hollandia has added another dimension to the theatrical performance,

comparable to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. Antonin Artaud had already tried to create a new kind of total theatre before the Second World War. The words increasingly started to act as stress marks, and thus the meaning of the words dissolved. In Artaud's theatre, the narrative facts of language were transformed into chiefly physical, musical elements. The scream is the ultimate limit of this theatrical reality.

Hollandia also followed the example of a tradition in art that, stemming from the visual arts, came into being in the 1960s as a reaction to the worn out, lifeless avant-garde. In the 'performance', 'happening' or 'Aktion', both the experiment with the physical boundaries of tolerance and the deliberate evocation of strong affective reactions within the audience are at the centre of things. Ulay & Abramovic, Chris Burden, Gina Pane, Joseph Beuys, and Wiener Aktionisten such as Hermann Nitsch are exemplary representatives of this artistic trend. A physical, ritual intention also methodically recurs in the music performances of representatives of 'minimal' or repetitive music, composers who inspired Paul Koek.

In regards to the receptivity, the performance entails a 'mobile' involvement of the audience. For the musicians and actors the performance takes on a different form. In a theatrical sense, the performance isn't that easily recognisable. The musicians and actors do improvise among each other, but initially not on methodical grounds. Looking back, the performative aspect was present in Kuschwarda City. It also came forward in music theatre productions such as Der Fall/Dépons. But qualitative changes on a dramatic level were most notably introduced after Büchner's Leonce & Lena. The influence that the performance of Büchner's play had on the development of Hollandia's plays after 1993 cannot be underestimated.

First of all, Leonce & Lena 'politicised' Hollandia. It smoothed the way for Voices, The Fall of the Gods and Quick Lime. The hilarious power drama is indeed a comedy, but in all the parodiC turns it raises the burning question of what gives someone the right to be invested with power and to exercise his power. That holds for the character of Leonce, the king's rebellious son, who, having fled in an attempt to escape his fate – he must ascend the throne and will be married off – during his flight falls in love with the woman who's been awarded to him. After this unexpected turn of fate he still ascends the throne. For the actors this play raised the question of the role of theatre in times when – shortly after the Gulf War – the Balkan is about to explode. Or, if you put it more pointedly: what does theatre mean in a depoliticised Global Village whose suburbs are ablaze? What does acting mean in a world where the influence of the media has turned politics into a circus.

Under the guidance of Johan Simons, the actors, just like the king's son, Leonce, regauge Hollandia's original cultural-political motivation in both an existential and a theatrical sense with the effort that they make when acting: what gives me the right as an actor to, as a character, make this statement? The character's inner dialogue is shifted to an 'actoral' na man's land: the actor and the character join in a conversation with each other. The framework of the role is reshaped while playing. Hollandia's experiment with forms now incorporates an actoral experiment: the way the characters are treated constantly becomes more reflective. The actor sometimes turns against the character which he is depicting, with the result that he seems somewhat absent, forgetful, lost, even displaced. During this brief moment of absence, the presence of the audience is accentuated.

The acting style changes: the actor starts to depict more than one character, a character can be played by various actors, various personages together form one character. The simple actoral decision made in Gust – changing the actor's and character's sex – is multiplied. In the beginning it confuses the audience. The audience is slung back and forth between identification

with the actor's body and the character's soul. But slowly but surely, the confusion is transformed into a new reflective reception of the play.

When Hollandia did incidentally return to perform in a playhouse, like with *The Bittersweet*, *Bloodlust* and *Quick Lime*, it preserved the interaction with the audience by reacting to the audience with a sometimes hardly observed absent look or attentive ear. Before *Bloodlust* and *Quick Lime* start, the actors give the audience a penetrating look when it's trickling in and it's not clear whether it's the actor or the character who is looking at you. During the performance, the characters and the actors react to the sounds coming from the audience. In *Dirty Thieves*, Elsie de Brauw draws a member of the audience who leaves the stand to – as it turned out later on – get a glass of water, into her performance with just a single glance and a hardly noticeable delay in Nel's monologue. A little later, she once again draws him into the performance, without being pushy, by asking him to open a bag of sweets that Nel cannot open with her trembling fingers. Just as a nearly acrobatical quality is displayed in the physical exertions of the actors, which threatens to exceed the bounds of theatre and take on the form of a circus, so the actors hover on the verge of theatre and cabaret, but not for one second does it actually head that way.