

## **INTERVIEW WITH STEF LERNOUS ABOUT *SNUFF***

interview by Olivier Hespel (L'Ancre, Charleroi) in April 2009

### **Can you tell us anything more about the title, *Snuff*?**

Snuff refers to 'snuff movies', a genre of short, raw films that show a 'genuine' murder. No one has actually ever seen a snuff movie. Is it all a fabrication, or what? These questions and the whole atmosphere around it make it almost mythological, and that's what I like. So yes, we are making another piece about death, about the 'romanticisation' of necrophilia.

### **Death, macabre atmospheres, these are the sort of themes you like playing with, aren't they?**

Yes, but that doesn't mean we want to be masters of horror: I am not interested in the magic of the theatrical genre that goes something like 'look how well our special effect works'. But I do like the idea of gruesome theatre, in this case too, and also the mythology that goes with it. If you think back to that time... It must have been fantastic to see. There's some sort of sensationalism in it, which is what fascinates me and what I play around with. I think theatre should be a 'magical world' where the audience can experience something enchanting. In *Abattoir Fermé*'s case of course, it's a somewhat sombre enchantment.

### **A sombre but quite kitsch world too, certainly in *Snuff*.**

Yes, it is a little camp... *Snuff* is the first part of a new trilogy that focuses on the idiom we have built up over the last few years (which also explains the word 'index' in the title) and in which I assemble all the things I love, even though this time we are being very economical with set, costumes and props, since we want to touch on something more condensed, something concentrated. At the same time I like to show a lot of images. But because the props have now been deliberately kept to a minimum, we were obliged to re-use everything over and over again. I think that's where the kitsch comes from, because that introduces humour into the piece too.

### **It's almost overdone. You use all the ingredients of a dark world, but in a sly and tricky way.**

Yes, it is theatre after all, in the end none of it is any more than an act. By which I don't mean to say I don't take art seriously, but you have to be able to play with humour too. As far as that 'trickiness' is concerned, I find it interesting to mix up styles, to combine kitsch with humorous, dark, aesthetic elements.

### ***Abattoir Fermé* plays with desecration in a very specific way, but it's a way whereby it almost becomes holy again, or ritualised.**

I don't like religion, but I am a keen fan of religious aesthetics. I play with the iconography, the epic, monumental and romanticised aspects. But it's not my intention to deconsecrate things, although the images we used several years ago were certainly more blasphemous.

### **With its fetishist or even pornographic codes, though it doesn't revolve around 'sex', there is nevertheless something 'sexy' about your work.**

I love everything sexy. Nowadays it's actually hard to make anything that doesn't involve it in some way. For more than ten years everything has been presented to us in a sexy way. Sometimes it goes to extremes. For instance, a few days ago I saw a coloured object in a shop that looked like a dildo. It had a button and when I pressed it, it started to vibrate. At that moment I realised it was an electric pepper mill (laughs). I can hardly believe the designer had not thought about its ambiguous appearance.

### **If today's world is sexy, it's a sexiness associated with pop and glamour. That's not exactly your type of sexy.**

That's right. I like to create a strange world on stage, populated by people who walk around like zombies or the living dead. Sexy.

### **Music plays a crucial part in your work.**

Music is the most powerful 'effect' we use (apart from the actors, of course). It is like the script, the tempo... the blood that fuels the whole structure and which gives life to what is happening onstage, by underpinning or contrasting with it.

### **From a musical point of view, *Snuff* plays with the atmosphere of the thriller, with danger below the surface.**

Yes, and that's the only literal reference to cinema in the play. It's the idea of using it to constantly lead towards something you will never get access to anyway, of always shifting to something else. It is the creation of a lie, again and again.

**Here, more than ever, your visual theatre has a choreographic slant.**

I have always created choreographic miniatures, usually lasting only a few seconds. I love it. And, as I said, in this trilogy I want to do the things I love, so I've let myself go (laughs). I could have worked with a choreographer, but that didn't feel right. I really wanted to work with the actors themselves, so that things would not be too perfect, and to be able to play with that boundary between aesthetics, or beauty, and kitsch. These moments are like a breath of fresh air too, and put things into an aesthetic perspective rather than in a purely dramaturgical framework. They enable me to slow down the flow of images and directions.