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“We’re Pretty Fuckin’ Far From Okay”: Lisbeth Gruwez’s deconstruction of bodies in distress

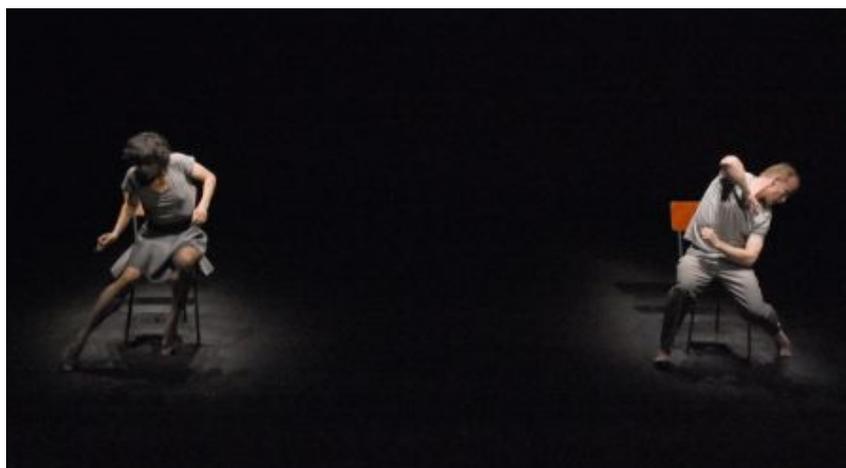


One doesn’t say no to [Avignon](#). So when the French summer festival asked [Lisbeth Gruwez](#) for a new piece, she accepted, notwithstanding her company Voetvolk’s very busy international touring schedule. *We’re Pretty Fuckin’ Far From Okay* – which actually premiered at Julidans in Amsterdam – is the last part of a trilogy focusing on the ecstatic body, comprising also the successful performances *It’s Going To Get Worse And Worse And Worse, My Friend* and *AH|HA*. This time around the Belgian dancer/choreographer zooms in on fear and what it does to our body and breath.

Two people on two chairs. A woman and a man. Facing the audience. That’s how it starts. And the sound of breath. In and out. In and out. They just sit there for a while, before they start moving. Slowly. Their bodies taking on positions of bodies in fear. The knees going up, the arms shielding the face. Gradually, their moves become more and more frantic.

For *We’re Pretty Fuckin’ Far From Okay* – a phrase taken from Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, apparently – Gruwez watched movies and YouTube-clips, looking for what people do when they are panicking, or in fear. As her previous performances have proven: that’s what she’s good at, isolating moves/expressions, stripping them of their context and using them as building blocks for a choreography.

Once again she succeeds – she is, above all, an amazing performer – in capturing your attention. Proof? You wonder afterwards when those chairs actually started moving, or those two grey walls in the back. In the second part both bodies cling to each other. The man and the woman almost tearing each other’s clothes; two bodies trying not to be separated by the force of a tornado, or by people pulling them apart. And then they let go of each other again for the third part, for which Gruwez and the other dancer, *Nicolas Vladyslav*, stand apart. Itching and twitching.



For the whole time the sound scape – by Gruwez’s cohort, musician/composer Maarten Van Cauwenberghe – has been the driving force behind the performance. Building up to a climax, and then releasing the tension. *The Birds* (Hitchcock), is what you’re thinking of, or *The Shining* (Kubrick). Sometimes the sound of breathing is accelerated and amplified so much that it resembles a frightful sawing.

It’s that third part that somehow made me think of some of the flaws in Gruwez’s way of working. First of all, you see her using the same technique to build a scene, over and over again. Secondly, by thus relying on repetition, and building up to a climax, every time again, Gruwez and Van Cauwenberghe make you expect a grand finale. And when that third part is the weaker part of the three, you can’t help but sit there with a feeling of slight disappointment when the performance has ended.

What makes Gruwez’s performances such a success is, apart from the focus and the intensity, the fact that she never forgets about her audience. She knows how to take you along for a trip, and comes up with aesthetically alluring performances. This time around you wonder though if the piece wouldn’t have benefited from more radical choices (or more rehearsal time?). What she presents, is almost what you expect beforehand, going to watch her, thinking: Gruwez/fear. Some will say that she could have linked it more openly to current events, in these

frightful times, but opting for a more abstract take on fear and distress, is a choice I fully understand.

PS: For Belgian performances of *We're Pretty Fuckin' Far From Okay* you'll have to wait until 2017.

Video trailer [here](#). Tour schedule [here](#).

Utopia Parkway-reviews of *It's Going To Get Worse and AH/HA*, [here](#) and [here](#).

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