

KRISTIAN LARSEN meets

HANS VAN DEN BROECK

Imagine 23 strangers, thrown together for two weeks in an abandoned factory in New Zealand, working, playing, constructing, devising their own rules, and creating their own temporary commune. These elements drive Hans Van den Broeck's latest work, *Settlement*. Formerly of Les Ballets C de la B, choreographer, performer, ex-clinical psychologist and founder of the performance company SOIT (Stay Only If Temporary) Hans Van Den Broeck travels the world creating *Settlement* with dancers from different countries, including Australia, Austria, France, Corsica, Zimbabwe and Belgium. As a dancer I enjoyed the challenges of *Settlement*, and often felt provoked by Van Den Broeck's playful but intense style of performance making. I wanted to get a deeper understanding of why he does what he does.

SOIT in Gelderland. Photo: Hans Van den Broeck



After working with Les Ballets C de la B in Belgium, what made you want to strike out on your own?

I joined les Ballets C de la B. in 1990. I did an audition for Alain Platel and we made a funny, rather awkward piece dressed in old fashioned white underwear called *Alchemie*. I then performed two more pieces with him, *Mussen* and *Bonjour Madame*. In 1992 Alain needed a break so I created my first piece, *How to Approach a Dog*. From then on we (Les Ballets C de la B) became a collective, creating one work after another; every year a different choreographer. I was heavily influenced by living for a long time in New York. In 2001 I left Les Ballets, because it was time to make my own way, to explore other ground. I created *Almost Dark* and started touring with it. It made me focus on a new road.

So what have been your major influences?

My mother, she was always archiving things around her. We had a little room full of cardboard "thematic" boxes, each with articles on subjects like life, history, geography, religion, and wellbeing. Steve Paxton, Contact Improvisation sessions at PS1 in New York during the early 90s, taking lots of workshops and courses at the Leuven University, including tap, modern, and classical, Pina Bausch's *Café Müller* - saw it 4 times, still love it. Also Jan Fabre, his persistence, passion, intense universe; so strong and cruel - like life. Lots of films:



SOIT in *Settlement*. Photo: Kate Baker

hard-boiled, quite violent films like John Woo's have beautiful choreography. They are often beautiful movement pieces which inspire me more than dance. Television, cinema, reading, the street, waiting in the subway. Daily life is a very satisfying source - watch the news, read the papers, the contemporary drama is all around us.

Did your background in clinical psychology then influence your creative process?

I think it's an underlying inspirational source. Also, coming from a big family I have been drawn to the dynamics of groups and families, interactive analysis, and the psychology of interaction. But I also look into dysfunctional situations and conflicts. Harmony is rather dull and uninteresting for performance. We need to speak about conflict whilst also showing the power of the individual's attempts to surmount it. We can show that physically in movement.

You have now created *Settlement* in many countries around the world. How have performers in these different cultures responded to the work?

In Zimbabwe performers enjoyed the ritual and commonality of moving as a group, something they do naturally. They also used the performance to talk about their own politically difficult situation. In New Zealand I felt (in the performers) a tendency for calm and balance, so I tried to provoke that a bit in rehearsal. I am always amazed by how many similarities there are between people

from different countries and cultures; one can travel 10,000 miles and meet people you already know in some way.

What about the site itself - how does each actual location affect the feel of *Settlement*?

I am very dependent on the geographic setting for the site. Some *Settlements* were outside (Zimbabwe - behind a national museum patrolled by security police and military people; Corsica at the seaside - someone nearly drowned swimming to the *Settlement*). Other *Settlements* were set inside with a panoramic view of the space. This was the case in Australia and New Zealand.

How has your approach and response to *Settlement* evolved over time?

I encounter more interesting conflicts, situations, and settings. I vary the way in which the movement is approached. More and more I am abandoning synchronicity, perfection, and beauty. [I have gone...] from fear, and nervousness to calm and enjoyment. I now feel less pressured by time. I see it as a great opportunity and a gift to be able to work with different people. It's also a challenge.

What's next for you?

From April SOIT starts work on a new creation called *We Was Them* which we will premiere at the KVS theatre in Brussels in October 2009.