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movements contrasted with the stage's frenzied actions, Foreman's usual downtown slapstick and late-vaudeville stew. A floppy stuffed donkey emerged as a particularly important prop. Behind this frenzy, the austere projections featured students and the occasional professor, often blindfolded, performing what seemed to be strange and slow initiation rituals. When the live performers acknowledged the projections, their attitude was often hostile as though they were trying to erase the screened "semi-visible Gods," to use a phrase from Foreman's program statement. *Zomboid!* tempts one to revise the earlier title and ponder the postulate: *Theatre Is Evil, Film Is Good*.

The now-reflexive use of video tends to place theatre in overwhelmed opposition to the force of the hypertrophied media for which film is the icon. *Zomboid!* by contrast, used film to very different effect. Here, film did not stand for the might of theatre's controlling and overwhelming mass-cultural doppelganger, but instead offered a meditative, if also cryptic, alternative space. Like his fellow travelers at Jonas Mekas's Cinemateque—site of the first Ontological-Hysteric production—Foreman is carrying on a tradition in the theatre of playing film against film, screened images against the hegemony of Hollywood.

Theatre and film were not the only media made to collide in *Zomboid!* Foreman continues his experiments in recorded sound and sampling. One of the remarkable elements in this production was (if I'm not mistaken) a collection of snippets from German interviews with Hanns Eisler, one of Brecht's most important collaborators among composers. An advocate for useful, historically charged, engaged music, the scratchy voice of Eisler, fading in and out, survived as the untranslated voice of another, committed modernism—a revolutionary modernism that believed it could shape mass culture in its own image. Foreman's soundtrack pays homage to a hope the Ontological has surrendered. His movie theatre imagines alternative forms without imagining that these forms might reach, or change, all those wonderful people out there in the dark.

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KOMMER. By Kassys. Directed by Liesbeth Gritter. Under the Radar Festival, The Public Theatre, New York. 20 January 2006.

BIG 2ND EPISODE (SHOW / BUSINESS). By Superamas, Under the Radar Festival, The Public Theatre, New York. 21 January 2006.

The 2006 Under the Radar Festival, produced by Mark Russell (former artistic director of P.S. 122) and held at The Public Theater in New York City, highlighted international theatres this year, many of which featured the use of film in their productions. This compact, five-day festival provided high-quality work from Europe, South America, and Asia. The festival also suggested that we live in a postmedia culture in which various forms of technology—from film to video and photography—easily interweave with theatre to create a more contemporary image of the world. Two productions in particular that did so proved to be the hits of the festival: *Kommer*, by the Netherlands-based theatre company Kassys, and *Big 2nd Episode (show / business)*, by the Vienna- and Paris-based collective Superamas. Both productions employed the banalities of popular television and film culture in order to comment on the ubiquity of these media in our lives, as they provide us with the comfort of a common language while at the same time diminishing our capacity to express ourselves honestly. The question addressed by these productions is: How has our behavior been standardized and commercialized by a media that is constantly selling us on the way we should act and speak?

Based in Amsterdam, Kassys was founded in 1999 by Liesbeth Gritter and Mette van der Sijs. The founders' background in dance places emphasis on movement as a core element in the company's work. Kassys's mission is to create shows in which theatre and film are combined in order to examine their codes. Kassys's piece *Kommer* consists of two acts, the first performed live, the second projected as a film. Deceptively simple on the surface, the first half of *Kommer* ("Grief"), directed by Liesbeth Gritter, is inspired by the world of the television soap opera. Limiting the text to phrases from Dutch subtitles that accompany the Netherlands' telecast of the US-generated soap opera *As the World Turns*, Kassys creates a Beckett-like minimalism as the characters rely on simple clichés in the face of tragic loss:

How are you?

I'm fine, considering the circumstances. And how are you?

Yes.



Jan Kostwinder, Mischa van Dullemen, Esther Snelder, Saskia Meulendijks, Ton Heijligers, Rinus Krul in *Kommer*. Photo courtesy of Kassys.

You have to give your grief a special place.

I never told him I loved him.

Life goes on.

These platitudes are contrasted with often minute, but sharply etched physical gestures of angst as the mourners confront the disappearance of a young man, who is presumed dead. They counter their powerlessness with subversive actions, from subtle nervous movements of a foot to the apparently unconscious and compulsive digging up, with bare hands, of a group of potted plants that are part of the funeral parlor's décor. The "stoic" wife of the deceased sublimates her grief by insisting, to the point of violence, that the others let go and express their grief. The mourners sit around a CD player and alternately push the selection button with increasing rapidity as they disagree over which sentimental popular song should be playing at this wake.

It might be easy to get trapped into a sentimental viewing of this piece as a comment on how difficult it is to express grief; however, the insistent use of platitudes and their subversion by the angst-ridden gestures of the mourners offers an absurd and highly humorous rather than tragic vision. The piece shows us what happens when human beings at-

tempt to sublimate their feelings through the use of media or pop culture-generated clichés that cannot penetrate the core of the disappointment, sense of loss, and guilt that accompany the death of a loved one. Anyone who has had the opportunity to live in the Netherlands will recognize the cultural juxtaposition of the American text, which oozes pathos, and the Dutch gesture, which desperately strives for stoicism. *Kommer* provides a delightful, rigorously executed and often hilarious and insightful glimpse of the Dutch and their somewhat reserved culture in the face of America's culture of "expressing yourself." This is proselytized by American television programming such as *Oprah*, which has enjoyed great popularity in the Netherlands and engendered several Dutch spin-offs. Kassys manages, however, to transcend the highly conceptual and regional aspects of the piece by maintaining the humanity of the characters through an almost child-like deadpan acting, reminiscent of Buster Keaton, complemented by the precise and imaginative use of expressive movement. We are left with a deeper appreciation for the strangeness and awkwardness that arises when we subjugate our personal feelings to the dominant cultural posture.

The first part of the show finished, the actors disappear and a screen descends for the second part of

the show—a “mockumentary” of sorts that shows what the “real life” of these actors is like. Taking the reality-show format and subverting it by actually presenting “reality,” Kassys provides us with a highly intimate and relentlessly unglamorous insight into the lives of these actors once they leave the theatre. There is no narrator; the camera simply follows the actors as they struggle to overcome the frustrations of their private existences. One actor attempts an evening of relaxed socializing, but his new girlfriend is unavailable and after having several beers and disco dancing by himself, he bicycles home inebriated, only to be mugged on the way and ending up in a stranger’s yard communing with a goat. Another actor returns home where, alone in his bedroom, he indulges in an eating binge by consuming a massive dose of assorted junk food. One whom the camera follows reports to her job as a flight attendant where, because of the pressure of serving a full cabin of passengers, she disappears into the restroom, grabs the fire extinguisher, and methodically and thoroughly demolishes the space. Another actor goes to visit his sick father in the hospital and drives his car home at top speed, sporadically keeping his eyes closed, tempting fate in the face of his inability to communicate with his father.

As stark and realistic as these scenes are portrayed, their extravagance maintains a theatricality and takes on a surreal comical dimension, again reminiscent of Buster Keaton and his tribulations in the face of life’s relentless opposition. We are reminded that the glamorous and heroic that we may seek in our lives are hardly the destiny of everyman, in the theatre or otherwise. Sharply and slyly critical of the media and its promises to the consumer of an easy life if only its language and values are embraced, *Kommer* demonstrates that, whether we are before a live audience or a camera, life is often an awkward, lonely, and tragic business.

Where Kassys takes a droll look at the expression of grief in the era of postmedia culture, Superamas, through its production *Big 2nd Episode (show / business)*, takes a cheeky look at the commercialization of sex and the commodification of the artist. Superamas is a French-Austrian collective that was established in 1999 and named after a Mexican supermarket. Refusing to identify its members by name, it points to such corporate organizations as Sony, suggesting that a trademark name provides greater commercial possibilities. The group is skilled in various media, including set and sound design, choreography, and filmmaking. In program notes, Superamas terms its presentations “dé-montrer,” a form of deconstruction, “dismantling that which in its original state presented a unit or entity,” in order to emphasize the codes and conventions contained within the



Superamas, with Elisa Benureau as Catwoman.
Photo courtesy of Superamas.

unit. It views its work as research into the arts and is not interested in presenting solutions.

A multimedia event, *Big 2nd Episode (show / business)* pairs live action, repeated several times with variations, with a sequence of film clips. The live action begins with a club-like atmosphere: members of the group perform as an air band, pretending to play pop tunes on their guitars and lip-synching songs as they casually establish the artifice that will dominate throughout the piece. The first scene follows, creating a world of “beautiful people”: two young men, dressed in Hawaiian shirts and standing at a cosmetics counter, explore the possibility of using makeup when a beautiful airline hostess appears (Elisa Benureau, who also plays Catwoman). Ultimately, the woman offers to change into sexy lingerie to which the men give an enthusiastic thumbs-up. The text of the scene is prerecorded and lip-synched by the actors, which creates a mechanized, Disneyesque cartoon quality. Various relationships are explored between the men and the woman as the scene is played through several times. In one version, the men snarl at each other like animals fighting over a potential mate; in another, they French kiss à la Madonna and Brittany Spears after the airline hostess goes off to change into the lingerie. The artificial replication of the scene simulates the prefabricated options provided by television, emphasizing the media’s commodification of character and story as it produces banal fantasies for our entertainment.

The second scene takes the notion of commodification a step further by showing Superamas trying to obtain sponsorship from John Rose, the CEO of Rolls-Royce, suggesting that no one is above the demands of the commercial world, including theatre artists. The tone of the second scene, in contrast to

the first, is hyper-realistic and Superamas maintains an awkward pose of submission to the CEO. Rose's business remarks about firing five thousand people (text taken from a magazine interview) are interrupted when Elisa Benureau appears on stage. Rose changes his focus to the fulfillment of his libidinal urges, ultimately receiving a very business-like blowjob. The scene is thick with male prerogative and power, which is suddenly shattered by a lengthy and loud terrorist attack, convincingly produced using the battle sounds from *Saving Private Ryan*. The disruption is temporary, however, as the CEO and others return to live another day, suggesting that events like 9/11 are just another media event, a noisy but ultimately inconsequential interruption in the world of business.

The above performance is both reinforced and subverted by use of various film clips throughout the piece. The first live scene is punctuated by a clip from the Hollywood film *Zoolander*, in which Ben Stiller plays a brainless supermodel who considers the possibility of turning towards social philanthropy, but is quickly distracted by the pleasures of an orange *macchiato*. This farcical episode underscores the consumer mentality of the first scene and emphasizes the difficulty we have in maintaining our heroic fantasies when surrounded by endless consumer distractions. During scene 1, Superamas includes its own film that promises, like the live action scene, erotic fulfillment, in this case of a young man by a sexually charged woman dressed as Catwoman. However, just as we anticipate fulfillment, Catwoman discovers that the young man has a great deal of tension in his neck and we are taken instead through a step-by-step demonstration of the Alexander technique.

During the second scene the audience is treated to the filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard reflecting on cinema as a bridge between art and reality. This aesthetic meditation is countered by his revelation of the ease in which his role as a film director allows him to pick up women off the street, for both professional and personal uses. The artist suddenly steps off his visionary pedestal and merges with the Rolls-Royce CEO as the libido takes center stage. Each projected film clip promises one thing and delivers another, forcing us to recognize the inevitable conflict between public expectations and private agendas.

Big 2nd Episode (show / business) effectively satirizes and plays on our willingness to be seduced by that which will never really be ours, thus highlighting, like *Kommer*, the inevitable disillusionment wrought by consumer culture. Both Kassys and Superamas represent young performance groups that are equally comfortable with theatre and media and who use film effectively to heighten their theatrical vision,

suggesting that live performance still has much to say in an era dominated by the media.

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TRILOGY. Adapted and directed by Theodora Skipitares. La Mama E.T.C's Annex Theatre, New York. 18–19 March 2005.

As the audience for Theodora Skipitares's *Trilogy* journeys with Odysseus from Troy to Ithaca, three beakers spilling over with dry ice signify movement into the Land of the Dead. Figures emerge onto the stage, moving like mummies, like zombies, like creatures from the deep. These creatures—actors with video monitors for heads, depicting faces made of only one eye—move as if to both taunt and reassure Odysseus in his quest. Each eye represents a specific character—Achilles, Tiresias, and Elpenor—through the choice of a specific film image on the video screen. The figure of Tiresias is represented through the combination of a larger television monitor displaying an aged, blind eye with a body composed of shortened duct-tubing, bent at odd angles. This scene illustrates *Trilogy's* unique synthesis of media techniques and ironic twists on classic monster images—creatures typically created for film with complex puppetry and robotics.

Since the early twentieth century, filmmakers have employed puppets, especially in the genres of horror and science fiction. More recently, puppeteers have tried to balance the stylistic ebb-and-flow between puppetry and film by introducing cinematic techniques into live puppet productions. New York City-based artist Theodora Skipitares has been creating, designing, and directing multimedia theatre pieces since the early 1980s. In her latest production, Skipitares combines puppetry with film techniques while taking a historical perspective on Greek mythology and epic literature. *Trilogy* depicts three stories surrounding the Trojan War—*Iphigenia*; *Helen, Queen of Sparta*; and *Odyssey: The Homecoming*—adapted by Skipitares and dramaturg Andrea Balis from a variety of texts, including the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, Euripides's *Helen* and *Iphigenia*, and Robert Graves's *The Fall and Sack of Troy*. Skipitares's performance style typically includes synthesizing numerous cultural and artistic influences to address how society and individuals create and shape knowledge. In *Trilogy*, she negotiates these influences, specifically puppetry and cinema, thereby creating a symbiotic relationship wherein puppetry both supports and is supported by cinematic styles of camera movement, character creation, and story structure.