

KAAI THEATER

CHRISTOPHE MEIERHANS TRIALS OF MONEY

18>19/04/2018 | 19:00 | KAAISTUDIO'S

PREMIERE | THEATRE/PERFORMANCE | 4H (INTERMISSIONS INCL.) | IN ENGLISH

EXTRA SNACKS ARE AVAILABLE AT THE BAR



CHRISTOPHE MEIERHANS

TRIALS OF MONEY

NL *Trials of Money* maakt van de theaterzaal een rechtbank die nog niet bestaat. Beschouw dit als je uitnodiging om te zetelen in het Special Tribunal for Semi-Human Persons waarin het ding dat we doorgaans 'geld' noemen voor de rechter wordt gesleept. Kunnen we het verantwoordelijk houden voor de erbarmelijk staat van de wereld? Maar hoe moet deze zaak verlopen, wanneer iedereen op de één of andere manier betrokken partij is? En hoe kunnen we iets dat geen eigen stem heeft, ter verantwoording roepen? Tien getuigen treden aan: van een psycholoog tot een ex-bankier, van een dakloze tot een rijke filantroop.

Deze rechtszaak verloopt als een collectieve oefening: terwijl de performers getuigen, kan het publiek ingrijpen en vragen stellen. Ondertussen kun je, op basis van je overtuigingen en het procesverloop, zelf kiezen of je aanklaagt dan wel de verdediging opneemt. Als geld effectief schuldig blijkt te zijn, wat zou dan een rechtvaardig vonnis kunnen zijn?

- Christophe Meierhans is artist-in-residence in het Kaaitheater. Hij maakte de voorbije jaren indruk met *Some Use for Your Broken Clay Pots* (2014) en *A Hundred Wars to World Peace* (2015) – voorstellingen waarvan de uitkomst steevast in handen ligt van het publiek.

FR *Trials of Money* transforme le théâtre en une cour de justice qui n'existe pas encore. Le spectacle invite son public à prendre part au Tribunal spécial pour les Personnes semi-humaines afin d'entreprendre le procès d'une chose complexe appelée le plus communément « argent ». L'argent peut-il être tenu responsable de l'état désastreux du monde ?

Mais comment mener un procès si tout le monde dans la salle d'audience semble être impliqué avec l'accusé ? Comment appeler l'argent à répondre de ses actes s'il ne peut pas parler de sa propre voix ? Dix témoins seront appelés à la barre : d'un psychologue à un ex-banquier, d'un sans-abri à une riche

Ce procès est mené comme un exercice collectif : pendant que les acteurs livrent leurs témoignages, les spectateurs peuvent intervenir et leur poser des questions. Chacun peut adopter librement le rôle d'accusateur ou de défenseur, en fonction de ses propres convictions ainsi que du déroulement de l'audience. Si l'argent devait être jugé coupable, quelle serait une juste peine ?

- Christophe Meierhans est artiste en résidence au Kaaitheater. Ces dernières années, ses spectacles *Some Use for Your Broken Clay Pots* (2014) et *A Hundred Wars to World Peace* (2015) ont été très remarqués, entre autres, parce que leur dénouement était toujours aux mains du public.

EN *Trials of Money* turns the theatre into a court of justice which does not yet exist. You're invited to take part in the Special Tribunal for Semi-Human Persons in order to undertake the trial of a thing – the very complex thing most commonly called 'money'. Can it be held responsible for the disastrous state of the world today? But how do we hold a trial if everybody in the court seems to be involved with the accused? And how do we call money to answer for its acts if it cannot speak with its own voice? Ten witnesses will testify: from a psychologist to an ex-banker, from a homeless person to a rich philanthropist. The trial is conducted as a collective exercise: while the performers deliver their testimonies, they will respond to any question the audience has. You freely take the position of accusation or defence, based on your convictions and the course of the proceedings. Should money be found guilty, it leaves us with a very problematic question: what could be a just sentence?

- Christophe Meierhans is artist-in-residence at Kaaithheater. He has made a mark over the past few years with shows like *Some Use for Your Broken Clay Pots* (2014) and *A Hundred Wars to World Peace* (2015) – of which the outcome lies invariably in the hands of the audience.

CREDITS

CONCEPT & REALISATION Christophe Meierhans | PERFORMANCE & CREATION Shila Anaraki, Jochen Dehn, Luca Mattei, Christophe Meierhans, Adva Zakai | DRAMATURGY Bart Capelle | SCENOGRAPHY DECORATELIER Jozef Wouters | PAINTING Giammarco Falcone | LIGHTING DESIGN Luc Schaltin | COSTUMES Sofie Durnez, Valérie Le Roy | PRODUCTION Hiros, Elisa Demarré | CO-PRODUCTION Kaaithheater, AUAwirleben, BIT Teatergarasjen, kunstencentrum BUDA, FAR*, Vooruit, Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil, Teatro Maria Matos and ZonaK | SUPPORT Vlaamse Gemeenschap, Pro Helvetia

WELCOME TO THE TRIBUNAL FOR SEMI-HUMAN PERSONS!

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHE MEIERHANS
BY EVA DECAESSTECKER (KAAITHEATER, APRIL 2018)

For theatre maker Christophe Meierhans, the theatre is the ideal place to conduct community experiments, because people gather with the explicit intention to give credit to things which they wouldn't per se take seriously otherwise. In *Some Use for Your Broken Claypots*, he lead an audience into discussing the basis for a new constitution, in *A Hundred Wars to World Peace* the public found itself engaged in an anarchist collective cooking process. Now, with *Trials of Money*, the theatre audience becomes the members of a court of justice prosecuting a thing: money. By questioning witnesses, the spectators are put before the grave responsibility of deciding whether money is guilty or not. Welcome to the Tribunal for Semi-Human Persons!

In *Trials of Money*, you take money to court. What are you accusing it of?

In the trial, money is accused of secretly shaping our worldviews. There is this idea that humans have always exchanged and that money has only appeared as a facilitator of this “natural” tendency, as a purely logic evolution. But that is historically wrong. You could rather say that it is the existence of money that made exchange the prime modality of humans’ economic interactions. Primitive forms of money were given a mostly symbolic function: it stood for a price that couldn't possibly be quantified, such as the dowry in marriages, or as a symbolic compensation when someone died. At one point though, probably with the emergence of larger empires, this symbolic currency started to be used as a means to actually measure the value of goods. Looking back, money is mostly seen as something that just responded to existing needs, but it was in fact itself very instrumental in generating these needs.

The form of money we use today is a very specific kind of money with a very specific mode of functioning, even though we often just refer to it generically as ‘money’. It embeds specific values at the very core of its technical design which aren't innocent pragmatic technicalities. In some respect you could refer to money as being a kind of source-code of the economy. In this view, anything that is running on top of this source code (markets, trade regulations, etc.) must be somehow conditioned by money's own embedded logic. So when you use a form of money that is designed around debt and scarcity it is very likely that any types of relationship that are mediated by it, will have to deal with these issues as well.

Has money always been created in relation to debt?

Yes and no. Money is debt in itself in a way: it is there to represent something that you own to someone else, already in its primitive symbolic forms. Florentine banks in the renaissance started to issue debt papers as a means to enable long distance trade. They became the central nodes of a network of trust: I trust a bank that they give me something back when I put something in. This trust is transferable. It enabled people to trade with people they've never seen before. You could say that the system we know today is the expansion of this logic. The electronic money you have on your bank account is nothing more than a promise from a bank to provide you with cash money if you would ask for it. When you wire money to another bank account, you just transfer the promise your bank has made you to someone else. The technology has changed, it is faster, more global, easier, but the principle remains.

Are there examples of currencies outside of this monetary system of debt and accumulation?

Yes. In the piece we present a new cryptocurrency called the Ğ1 to the court as an example of such an alternative. The way it works, illustrates well the manner in which the technical design of a form of currency can have direct socio-political impacts. In the Ğ1-system, currency is produced every month and distributed equally among all users. This means that you have a constant inflation: there is always more currency put in circulation, so the value of the each unit of currency diminishes accordingly every month. This forms a strong incitement to exchange rather than to keep and stockpile the currency. Another effect of this mechanism is that it establishes justice between generations: if you have been around longer, you will have received more monthly instalments of currency, but this advantage is compensated by the fact that the value has gone down. The fact that you're given money every month, on the other hand also compensates for the loss of value of the money. But it only compensates for the average quantity of currency people have: the total amount of currency in circulation divided by the number of people who use it. That way, if you are richer than the average, your stock of currency will devalue. But if you are poorer than the average, then the value of your stock of currency will increase until it reaches the average. The Ğ1 system has an in-built tendency towards an equal distribution of wealth, whereas the monetary system as we know now tends towards an increase of the cleavage between poor and rich.

The fictional court of justice you set up in the theatre is called the 'Special Tribunal for Semi-Human Persons'. What are semi-human persons exactly?

With semi-human persons we mean everything that has been invented by humans, but that in its functioning gained independence from us. Artificial intelligence would be the most obvious example. Such semi-humans persons already generate juridical nightmares. What to do in the case of drones that are able to take independent decisions about firing at a target of not? Who is responsible then? The programmer? The one who bought the drone? Or the face recognition algorithm itself? Semi-humans can also be technologically much less advanced. Their sheer size is already

giving them autonomy. Take the financial markets: there are so many actors and forces at play, that there is not one authority that can decide how to stop it. Also any decentralized network, like internet, has this too. But nonetheless, even if we can't really stop them, semi-human persons still depend totally on humans to exist. If humans would stop making use of it, money would disappear.

And what kind of laws do we need in such a tribunal?

Ideally, you would need laws that are specific to semi human persons, of course. If you look at the problems that peer to peer networks create for legislation, for example, you see that the only response so far, was to become more and more complex. And basically it goes backwards, because it's not setting principles to deal with a new paradigm. Instead, it is complexifying an old paradigm.

For the play, we decided to stick with laws the audience can identify with. We use existing law as it applies to humans today. Also the crimes are universally recognized as such: non assistance to a person in danger, incitement to hatred, slavery, etc. The idea is to emphasise the gap that separates us from a world in which such semi-humans would be recognised as legal subjects. The fiction we try to create in the theatre is to imagine how to bridge that gap.

How did you prepare for this piece? On what base did you create the witness characters?

The witnesses are all based on existing people, many of which we interviewed. In the beginning the research was very systematic, but the moment we transferred the research material onto the stage, the limits became very clear. Some positions would only make sense on stage if we could give a short conference first to explain a whole context, or they required quite a lot of specialised background information. These are the limits of the theatre. In a real trial, time is not really a problem. It takes the time it takes to go through all that needs to be investigated and understood.

In that sense, *Trials of Money* is quite far from a real tribunal. In terms of dramaturgy, a real tribunal is rather boring, especially in Europe. In most sessions of the International Court of Justice, you just see people sitting in front of computers. You don't see who's talking, it goes on for ever and you are not likely to understand much unless you have really studied the case. Nobody would relate to that in the theatre. In fact I realised that most people's representation of a court case are derived from Hollywood representations. So we went for that, in part, but we also invented a lot of new, specially semi-human tailored protocols.

What makes theatre an interesting place this kinds of experiments?

The theatre is a place where people willingly put themselves in uncomfortable situations, just for the hell of it, but also in the attempt to push reflections and perceptions to some kind of limit. In that sense it is the ideal place for it. But it also always remains a kind of scale model of reality, a place of 'as if'. Sometimes I'm wondering why I keep on working in an art context. Shouldn't I put all the energy in something that is more directly

involving in the matter? Because I would really like to contribute to some form of change. And the question there for me always is whether art is really the best way to do it...

Do you also try to question your own daily life? Do you for example try to step out of the monetary system you're criticizing?

Yes, I try. Together with ten people, we have started an experiment which we call *The common wallet*, in which we share all income and all expenses. Since January, we have one common bank account and each one of us has a bank card for it. Everything we earn goes in it and each of us can freely take money from it. This is starting to challenge our relationship to money, but it also questions more fundamentally our capacity of valuing things outside of a monetary paradigm. What happens when someone takes more than he's put in the account? Is that a problem or not? Does it need to be compensated? And if so, what could this compensation be? These questions are at first quite pragmatic, but they also touch at your basic notions of justice and equity, which, as I discovered are extremely conditioned by the underlying rationale of money.

DANCE DAY

For the third time, Dance Day – along with Flemish and Brussels dance organizations – invites you to sample dance in all its forms. At Kaaitheater and the Kaaistudios, you will encounter these choreographers:

**JONATHAN BURROWS & MATTEO
FARGION**
ANY TABLE ANY ROOM

Jonathan Burrows, dancer and choreographer. Matteo Fargion, musician and composer. Always the two of them... but not this time! They invite four local artists – Mette Edvardsen, Dounia Mohammed, Lili Rampre and Andros Zins-Browne – to address the subject of 'the possibility and impossibility of community'.

25>26/03 | 20:30 | **KAAISTUDIO'S**

**DD DORVILLIER
& SÉBASTIEN ROUX**
ONLY ONE OF MANY

How does your perception of a dance or music sequence change when it is combined with a different choreography or a different musical composition? What meanings, impressions and images are conjured, and what unexpected relationships to listening and looking are stirred?

27>28/04 | 20:30 | **KAAITHEATER**

ANNELEEN KEPPENS
THE MOON IS THE MOON
IS THE MOON

The moon is the moon is the moon deconstructs the structure of a dance trio and exposes its building blocks. Just like the preparatory sketches for a painting, the performance begins with various perspectives and movements. The individual layers that you discover in the choreography invite you to see things in new ways.

27/04 - 20:30 | 28/04 - 19:00
KAAISTUDIO'S

METTE INGVARSTEN
LECTURE ON THE RED PIECES

Mette Ingvarsten gives a lecture on the relationship between sexuality, pleasure, performance, and economy. She reflects upon the way borders between private and public space are dissolving and how this process is fueled by an increasing demand for self-performance and self-exposure.

28/04 | 19:00 | **KAAITHEATER**



Vlaanderen
verbeelding werck



Klara

BRUZZ

dS
De
Standaard