

# About *Monique*

In this short essay we consider *Monique* as a (set of) space(s), in two ways. Firstly, there's the scene: the space the public sees when they enter. Lastly, we deal with the spaces that are formed in and through the bodies on stage: the bodies of Alix Eynaudi and Mark Lorimer, but also through a loudspeaker that is tied up, as if it were also a body.

## The scene

*As to the religious consciousness of the Greeks, if a couple forms it is because the two deities are on the same plane, because their actions are applied to the same realm of reality, because they assume related functions. Concerning Hestia, there is no possible doubt: her significance is transparent, her role strictly defined. While her lot is enthronement; forever motionless in the centre of domestic space, that of Hestia implies, in solidarity and contrast, the swift god who rules over the realm of the traveller. With Hestia, it's the inside, the closed, the fixed, the decline of the human clan in itself; with Hermès, it's the outside, the opening, the mobility, the contact with those other than oneself. We can say that the Hestia-Hermes couple expresses, in its polarity, the tension that is notable in the archaic representation of space: space requires a centre, a fixed point, a privileged value, from which we can orient and define directions, all qualitatively different; but at the same time, space appears to be a place of movement, which implies a possibility of transition and of passage from any one point to another. (Jean-Pierre Vernant)*

First there is the scene. During the creation of *Monique*, I often thought about the atmosphere that typifies the part of a house where the household tasks are performed. Sewing, for example, or washing or ironing, the house and the things it contains, maintains or provides, as well as: taking care of each other. You do not immediately expect such activities to occur on a stage where there is dancing. If there's something special happening at home, and a dance is something special, such places are usually avoided. Home is not often the place for dancing, anyway, unless there is an upbeat atmosphere, or just to be crazy without others noticing. *Monique* would nevertheless not register as largely domestic (read: having that kind of homely atmosphere where sewing, washing and ironing go on, and where everyone cares for each other), I always thought. The pace of many of its movements is reminiscent of that of domestic operations. Although only some of these movements recur, they suggest something of a routine. A head is being cradled, or two legs are being swung back and forth. A foot seems to be getting measured. A part of a costume is being adjusted.

The use of bondage and SM practices as a source of inspiration only partly aims at their most striking aspect - the erotic. Certainly as important is the degree of caring that such

practices assume, for each other and for the material with which they work. When the audience enters *Monique*, Alix is filing and clipping Mark's nails and moustache, while Mark reads a book. What happens on stage looks like a private scene. Thus, the gaze shifts from one that watches dance to one that could just as well be seeing theatre. Indeed, we are looking at a relatively small spot on the stage, where two people enact a play (although the theatre they are bringing coincides with the dance itself, or better, the preparations of such: Mark's nails have to be filed so that the two cannot hurt one another).

In his essay of 2002, 'The meanings of domesticity', philosopher Bart Verschaffel takes up the complex relationship between domesticity and femininity. He refers to the Greek gods Hermes and Hestia, and how Jean-Pierre Vernant, a historian and anthropologist, describes this divine couple. Where Hestia is the goddess of the hearth, immutability and certainty, Hermes is the god of movement, change, exchange, correspondence, travel and communication. This pair of gods makes the meaning of domesticity and its equation with femininity, traditionally ambiguous. While the place of women in domestic scenes is too often quickly associated with Hestia's living space in the centre of the house, Bart Verschaffel indicates the fact that even indoors Hestia cannot do without Hermes, and that therefore the relationship between femininity and domesticity is much more complex. He shows this by means of artworks featuring female characters he sees materialising in 17th century images of Dutch interiors, and in a 19th century painting by the Antwerp painter Henri De Braeckelee. The women who appear in these interiors are much more complex than merely devotional representations of female virtue, Verschaffel discovers. Many of the characters are not only positioned against the 'distance', but they can also associate with it. This is suggested by the architecture of the houses in which they live or work, through windows, doors and thresholds.

In *Monique* a man and a woman stand together on stage. Sometimes one of the two looks at the other, as if dancing a dance, in reduced form, performed for a certain someone else, of the opposite sex. And there is that slightly-too-small blue cloudy sky, an old piece of cloth that hangs there unmoving for a long time, until at the end of the performance it goes dark, and Brahms plays. The domesticity then differs radically, to an outside view. The antipode of Brahms booms, and the light too. *Monique* goes outside, where it thunders and quivers. The blue cloudy sky is a premature nocturnal landscape. Something was afoot, because earlier even the stereo speaker started moving.

Very quickly, in the realm of Hestia, everything begins to shift. Here the dance turns back to where there was no place for her. No dancing in the living room, and certainly not in the wardrobe or laundry room! *Monique* is constantly shuttling between a homely and a restless pace. Alix and Mark sit quietly together before they begin to dance. Also, in the dance itself, a kind of homely geniality succeeds in removing the danger that many of the movements carry within them. From this perspective, *Monique* is an elongated back-and-forth swaying between the sphere of influence of Hestia and Hermes. It lies in the movements themselves. Flipping each other over, tilting each other, undoing an imaginary knot... the bodies themselves refer to small, routine

movements that usually occur indoors. But there is as well the sound of Nancarrow's strange machinal (and therefore touching) piano music, and in many of these movements danger lurks.

That back-and-forth movement is nothing new, as Bart Verschaffel informs us, because to the Greeks, Hestia and Hermes were already an inseparable divine couple. What is new, or contemporary, if you will, is the endless pace of that shuttling. Hestia and Hermes are no longer two clearly distinct gods, no; *Monique* lets them dance together until their heads start to spin. Just for a second, because *Monique* is no iconoclast. Nothing is exposed or refuted; nothing or no one wins the dance. In the curtain that hangs in the background, finally lurks the double movement. It is clearly a curtain - thick, with the folds still in, a bit dirty. When the light shines on it, it is first and foremost a piece of fabric, to most contemporary eyes. Even so, however, the cloudy sky makes for a distance, and thus for imagination. And it can take on very many different forms, as shown over the course of the performance.

At the end of *Monique*, the Brahms that sounds like a euphoric thundercloud rolling over a scene of eroticism and horror, is no climax, nor is it something destructive. Rather, it's yet another counterpoint within the performance, which once again reveals that this is not about timeless truths about dance, theatre, or even man and wife. The game in which we play out these sorts of truths against each other is timeless. As timeless, perhaps, as Hestia and Hermes having always been an inseparable couple indoors, and so it shall be. In that sense *Monique* also brings tranquillity. Nothing or no one here takes up radical propositions, and smiles occur more than once, as at times what's seen on stage also just looks ludicrous.

This essay has been very well mannered so far, every *Monique* spectator would agree. *Monique* would not be *Monique* if we had refrained from talking about its kinky sides. In sadomasochism there are rigid hierarchies. Masters and slaves, being tied up, small cages... In a cheap paradox, that becomes: Hestia goes into *overdrive*. The role-playing that in many an SM torture chamber is played-out, only exists by virtue of a longing for clear, premodern hierarchies. It is also this tension, perhaps, that is played-out in SM rituals or bondage. In these rituals the mistress appropriates a male role, and the spaces in which she receives customers at home are hung full with ingenious household gear and kitchenware.

## **Bodies**

*The ties, the threads that are woven and that weave between conducting bodies and conduits are acting sustainably; they are not waiting to be invested with meaning or soul or spirit, they are the reality of bodies that the music binds, assembles, shapes, composes and removes. That is to say, fictionalised. (Peter Szendy)*

We conclude with the bodies on stage. At first sight there are two bodies on view, those of Alix Eynaudi and Mark Lorimer, but maybe there are a lot more. How does a loudspeaker, for example, see itself? Or a high figure in the twilight, from which two little lights shine - are they eyes? - lights? Or a shape that moves and resembles a pine tree? It seems that *Monique* shows her audience a multitude of bodies that (whether or not constricted) all interact.

In his *Membres fantômes. Des corps musiciens* (Phantom limbs. Musical bodies) from 2002, Peter Szendy queries the history of organology as a discipline that moulds all bodies which generate sound. Szendy suggests that a music-making body - a *corps musicien*, which is a living body, can also be a musical instrument - itself a space where music can be played. He thereby handily refers to the double meaning of the word organology, which not only defines a learning tool, but also the organs and their functions in the body. A special feature of a body is that it can be linked with other bodies, and also with itself.

A crucial moment in the history of instrument theory is the discovery of electricity. The moment electricity was discovered, the body did not need to be touched to be played. Szendy devotes the last two chapters of his book to the consequences thereof. Among other things, he talks about the conductor and the way in which he steers the other musicians with his movements. Finally, through the writings of Freud and Adorno, he also discusses the emergence of crowds. What happens between people the moment they form a mass is perhaps not fundamentally different from what electricity is able to do: there occurs something intangible (without necessarily having to be grand or sublime) between all those people.

Szendy is not only concerned with music, he also writes briefly about dance and theatre. It is often professed that we would appropriate the spaces where we play and dance as a kind of extension of our own bodies. According to Szendy, however, the reverse is true: man himself is only sonorous, or a maker of music, inasmuch as he is an instrument. This applies to music as well as to dance and theatre. In summary, Szendy reacts against any sense of nostalgia for a body that would not yet be instrumentalised, as well as against an (all too confident) anthropocentric perspective on the history of dance and theatre and its spaces.

Rather than being a body, we usually talk about having a body. In *Monique* it is clear that many things on stage have a body, and between all these bodies a constant electricity hangs in the air. A speaker from which music emanates seems to be tied up, Mark is bundled-up and driven around to the strains of a beautiful piece of Brahms that enwraps the body, a composition written by Gerard Pesson, and at the end of the piece we see and hear music by Brahms himself.

*Monique* has something animistic about it. Not only does Conlon Nancarrow's piano music start to stir as if spontaneous (Nancarrow had more confidence in electricity than in human hands, and had his music set on piano rolls), the cloudy heavens hanging in

the background come to life due to the lighting effects in the last scene. Conversely, the dancers regularly behave like animals. It's not at all dramatic -- Mark and Alix look at each other quietly while they do this, as if they were doing things that might happen every day in a living room (even though these things appear a little *kinky*).

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## **Bibliography**

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