bit teatergarasjen

INTERVIEW WITH SARAH VANHEE



Sarah Vanhee er en belgisk kunstner, som kommer til Bergen denne våren med to prosjekter; Unforetold (teater) og The Making of Justice (dokumentarfilm).

Her er hun intervjuet av Rune Salomonsen.

The title of Sarah Vanhees performance is from the science fiction author Ursula Le Guin and her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness.* (Better fantasy than Tolkien, according to the former literary hot shot critic Alan Bloom). The protagonist Genly Ai visits a people who can foretell the future, even though they live as everybody else. It seems they find it difficult to answer most questions because words are too unprecise. And they see their art of foretelling as the insight in the perfect uselessness of knowing the answer to the wrong question. The foreteller Saxe says to Genly that there would be no religion if God was known to exist or not

exist. And that the only thing that we can know for certain about the future of everyone is that we will die.

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Av Eirik Gjære

The quote goes: «The unknown, said Faxe's soft voice in the forest, the **unforetold**, the unproven, that is what life is based on. Ignorance is the ground of thought. Unproof is the ground of action. ... The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty: not knowing what comes next.»

Rune Salomonsen (RS):So – the meaning of life is not being told what is going to happen. The unforetold is what makes life meaningful. Could you tell us, Sarah – why did you chose this name for the performance, and what about this book of Le Guin? It sounds very interesting.

Sarah Vanhee (SV): Why I chose the title unforetold is because it opens a space of possibilities. Because if one thinks of everything that has not been foretold, and that's a lot, we cannot even imagine it. And I think the strong reference to the novel of Le Guin comes exactly with this importance of asking good questions, rather than knowing answers. In our world today we are so busy finding the one right answer, – and first of all, I never believed in this the one unless we practice exact science, but we have enough of exact science already in the world.

So how to open up this space of possibilities, of things that we could not foretell, could not foresee, could not imagine. The world as space for a plentitude of possibilities, intuited through questions, through asking good questions, for which we may not have the right answers, but to which we can have many answers. Answers that don't always come in the form of a logical, cerebral answer, but that might come through, speculation, intuition, the spiritual, the magical. The title opens up for questions that allow for a myriad of possible connections...

RS: And that's also where the children come in, because they are known to be good at asking about everything.

SV: Exactly. They are very good at asking questions, but what we do in our life, in the way we educate children today, at least in this part of Europe, is basically the opposite, telling them to stop asking questions. And it is this quality of asking questions that I want to embrace as a way of making different stories, and different lives, and different worlds possible. And I think they are not only good at asking questions, they are also closer to where we come from. And where we come from for this piece is connected to an ancient kind of wisdom. So both something very ancient, and something, you could call it sci-fi, very futuristic. The children are close to the past where they come from, but they are also the future of course.

And they have not lost all the different kinds of intelligences yet. So when we grow up in the west, we learn that one form of intelligence or knowing is dominant to other forms, and I think they are closer still to a knowing that is also physical, that is embodied, that is magical, maybe ancestral and spiritual, and that even also opens maybe for connections to what is not human. All these aspects are important in working with the small beings.

RS: Can you give an example of how they are connected to what you call ancient?

SV: Ancient, yes, take the connection to darkness for instance. When we think of children and darkness, the first inclination is to think that they would be afraid of the dark. They are not. Not in this kind of darkness, that is really a warm and protected darkness. Here they can also hide, and they can transform. They can become other selves, they can become something different, and it connects them I think with their animal beings. Here they cannot focus mainly on the visual, something we do very much as adults, but they have to use all their senses. I think this especially connects them to their animals selves. And the darkness is also this space, this ancient space. It's the world when there was not this dominance of enlightenment and of light. Both the philosophical and physical concept of light encouraging us to see things clearly. It is exactly this place of seeing clearly that I want to leave to rather maybe listening and intuiting. Being in a space of darkness and being able to move in there and to become constantly other, and also to transform that, that space of darkness.

RS: This makes me think once more about the word unforetold. Because in the Norwegian translation of the book, the word is equivalent with foreseen, and unforetold is not even a common English word.

SV: No, it's an old English word. I really have a love for words that have become old, have become obsolete or are disappearing, or are not being used anymore. And I think it is not being used anymore exactly because this dominance of the sight, so it is not about what has not been foreseen. What has not been foretold is a much larger scope that we could not predict, but also that we have not picked up as a story.

RS: But there is also something about them speaking a different language, the children, or the small beings. And this language is also translated...

SV: Sometimes it is translated. Sometimes not. So as a spectator, like the ones who will be sitting in the audience, we are kind of witnesses to their world. And we are sometimes in it, but not always, and not completely. And in relation to the language, it's called Lutie Chaakaa, – sometimes we hear it only as sounds, almost as a pre-language I would say, like Daniel Heller-Roazen calls it echolalia. Like the kind of babbling, the kind of talking that infants do for instance before they have words, before language get this kind of structured form that conveys meaning. But of course it does have meaning, it is just that we don’t always have access to it. So in the piece it is sometimes translated and, sometimes not. Sometimes we will understand what they say, and sometimes it will occur to us as just music. Much in the way you

go to a country where you really don’t understand the language, like when I go to India, I cannot understand anything, it's just like music. The connection to language is also something that is there not only to give meaning, but to be music as well, and to connect to these universes they create from a musical or a rhythmical point of view.

RS: But when its translated, is it your text then ...

SV: No, actually it's all their text. All the text that is in the piece is their text. Some of the conversations and texts they first made up in Flemish. Then it was translated into their language. They know exactly what they say.

RS: You also come to Bergen with a film, *«The Making of Justice»*. A film with inmates in a prison. And I guess it was practically much easier to make a film with them than to make a performance. Is that's why you chose the format, and...

SV: He, he. Yes, travel with several convicted murderers would not be easy.

RS: But this must really have been interesting to work in such a space.

SV: Yes, I worked in prison before. It was not the first time. So I had some experience. In 2013 I made a work in prison, and basically from that work I realised I was not finished with prison as a trope in society. So I developed this project in another prison, this prison for long term convicts. The choice for film is only partly practically, because I cannot travel with the guys, but also the film says something about film in general, in the sense of image making on criminals, like the kind of image making we are mostly confronted with when we think of criminals in main stream cinema for instance, or in the mainstream press, which doesn’t connect at all to the image you get of the criminals you see in *«The Making of Justice»*. So the format is important.

RS: We will introduce you to a very nice, local philosopher when you come to Bergen, who has worked with questions concerning alternative ways of punishment. It will be interesting to hear more about that then. So, thank you very much for the conversation. Now I have a lot to write down, if I got it on tape at all.

SV: I hope for you!

RS: Thank you very much. And see you in Bergen.

Transcribed by Rune Salomonsen