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PIETER DE BUYSSER IMMERWAHR

On 2 May 1915 Fritz Haber returned home from Ypres. He had seen one of his inventions being successfully put to use: chlorine gas as a weapon of mass destruction. A party was given in his honour. His wife Clara Immerwahr, a brilliant physicist herself, found her husband's invention a perversion of science. After the party she shot and killed herself with her husband's service revolver. She died in the arms of her thirteen-year-old son.

A project by Pieter De Buysser

We start from a true story. Since it is a true story, we can fully use our imagination to pave future ways, to invent, to form, to knead, we just have to collect the facts and documents and present them in good order.

Our guide and structure in this musical essay-story is miss Immerwahr. Clara Immerwahr (June 21, 1870 – May 2, 1915) was a German chemist, the first woman with a PHD magna cum laude in chemistry at a German university. A pacifist, she was the wife of Fritz Haber, fellow chemist. Fritz Haber was the scientist who developed the fertilizer that made Bayer the industrial giant it still is in the 21st century. This fertiliser still shapes our landscapes, agriculture and diet. The annual world production of his synthetic nitrogen fertilizer is currently more than 100 million tons. The food base of half of the current world population is based on his invention: the so called Haber-Bosch process. He won the Nobel prize for chemistry in 1919. Fritz Haber not only gave humanity the most powerful and widespread fertiliser, he is also the “father of chemical warfare”. He discovered, developed and deployed chlorine and other poisonous gases during World War I. They are also known under the name “Yperite”, or “mustard gas”. In early 1915, he suggested the simple idea: to release highly toxic chlorine gas so that it would drift across to the enemy trenches, where it would kill, maim and disable without an artillery bombardment. This strategy was so successful that up until today it has in every region and every period its followers.

Appalled, Clara Immerwahr came out in open opposition to her husband's work. She pleaded with him several times to cease working on chemical weapons.

Haber defended gas warfare against accusations that it was inhumane, saying “death is death, by whatever means it is inflicted.” The first poison gas attack took place on April 22, 1915, on the Western front in Ypres, Belgium. Of the seven thousand casualties that day, more than five thousand died. Countless additional attacks resulted in the deaths of at least a hundred thousand soldiers on both sides. Haber was promoted to the rank of captain. He had personally overseen the first successful use of chlorine. He returned home from Ypres on the second of May 1915. There was a welcoming party in his honour in the garden of his house. When the party was over, Clara Immerwahr committed suicide in the garden, shooting herself in the heart with her husband's service revolver. She died in the arms of her 13 year old son. That same morning,

Haber left for the Eastern Front to oversee gas release against the Russians. Haber left behind his grieving 13-year-old son Hermann, who had been the one to discover his dying mother. Later, Hermann left for the USA out of fear of the nazis. Soon after WW2, it became publicly known that Zyklon B, the gas the nazi's used to exterminate the jews, was a derivate product, only made possible to be produced on an industrial scale thanks to research by his father in WW1. Clara's son Hermann committed suicide in 1946. 99 years after Clara Immerwahr's death, the story of her life, epic and dramatic, will haunt the scene like a cloud.

We will also draw a line towards Emmanuel Kant, the great philosopher of Enlightenment who was so fond of mustard that every week he ordered his valet Lampe to prepare the strongest mustard for his master. And every week he wanted his mustard to be stronger. Mustard gas and Kant's mustard have certain things in common. There is an undeniable relationship between an accelerating Kantian philosophy of modernity and progress and the genesis of a culture of efficiency, speed and massproduction. This relationship gave birth to the monstrous introduction of the first weapon of mass-destruction: the use of mustardgas in Ypres, may 1915, in WW1.

The first use of gas in WW1 coincides with the advent of film, with the advent of the sound recording, with mass production and mass reproduction. In short: the use of gas in WW1 not only coincides but could be considered as a pars pro toto for a culture of the elimination of the unique bodily presence.

Craft has been chased down by massproduction, the movie, the sound recording, all that was singular and physical became abstract and uncountable. The uncountable is a universal mass, but untouchable and untangible like a gas. Maybe and I, on the contrary, will be physically present. (More and more I believe performance to be the most urgent and subversive artform of today: physical, vulnerable, naked, singular). We will tell/play/do this essay-story. We will talk about gas, body to body fights, the origin of weapons of massdestruction and the elimination of the body as a unique singularity. We will tell the true story of Clara Immerwahr, her research, her breakfast habits, her husband and her son. We will tell about the emergence of the uncountable, of the simultaneous birth of massproduction and of mass extermination. We will tell and by telling a new figure will arise.

CREDITS

Concept & text: Pieter De Buysser

Performers: Pieter De Buysser & Maike Lond

Production: Hiros

Co-production: Kaaitheater, Kanuti Gildi Saal (Tallinn)

TOUR

10 + 11.03.2015.	Kaaistudio's, Brussels (BE) - PREMIERE -
22 + 23.03.2015	Archa Theatre, Prague (CZ)
25.04.2015	Kunstencentrum De Werf, Brugge (BE)

BIOGRAPHY

PIETER DE BUYSSER

°1972, lives and works in Brussels.

At the age of 20, Pieter De Buysser took a train to Paris to visit a school for clowns. He decided to study philosophy. Since, he writes fiction and non-fiction, theater and non-theater and he performs his own texts on stage - as a non-clown, a speculative realist, a transformatador in one. His fables are political, radical, epic and concrete. He has been described as “a contemporary Hiëronymus Bosch of literature” and “a 22nd century storyteller”.

His plays have been invited or commissioned by houses and festivals such as Kunstenfestivaldesarts Brussels, Berliner Festspiele, Taipei Festival, Biennale Wiesbaden new plays from Europe, Dublin Festival, Melbourne Festival, Baltoscandal Estonia, Théâtre de la Bastille Paris, Fondation Cartier Paris, HAU Berlin,... His writings have been translated and staged into Polish, French, German, Italian and English. His first novel “De Keisnijders” was published in 2012 at De Geus. Currently he travels extensively over Europe with his last monologues “Book Burning” & “Landscape with skiproads”.

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BIOGRAPHY

MAIKE LOND

°1981, Estonia, lives and works in Tallin.

Maike is an artist making theater performances, exhibitions, sound design and video/ light solutions and she has been teaching or mentoring the students of Estonian Art Academy and Tartu Art College. Maike is also one of the initiating leaders of an artistic company MIMproject, a research based artistic structure dealing with the theater space, its conventions and politics as such.

MIMproject started in 2005 and by now has grown into a network of professionals, both from within and outside of the art field.

Maike's works as a solo artist or in MIMproject have been shown in venues and festivals across Europe. Besides touring with her latest solo "10 journeys to a place where nothing happens", she has been working on a retrospective of MIMproject in Tallinn Art Hall; she exhibited an installation in Draakon Gallery (Tallinn); an interactive sound/light installation for Lumina Festival in Portugal and a concert with MIMproject on Art's Birthday in Estonian Public Broadcast where the music travelled from the radio studio to the Moon and back and was then broadcasted to the public radio stations around Europe.

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HIROS

Hiros is the joint venture of the management offices Margarita Production and Mokum. Together we continue to build a solid framework for individual artists and artistic projects.

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