

KIND – Peeping Tom

The Roots of Violence

Kind, the third part of Peeping Tom's family trilogy, explores the themes of memory, recollections, and the tragic search for links. The trilogy's first part, *Vader* (2014), was set in a retirement home as well as in the unbalanced mind of a lonely man who in the process of being consumed by dementia. *Moeder* (2016), for its part, was set in what looks like a museum, and it staged the multiple facets of the process of mourning as it unfolded around an absent mother, with the bodies of the performers serving as receptacles for inconsistent memories.

In *Kind*, Gabriela Carrizo and Franck Chartier explore the sources of psychosis from the point of view of the child (*kind* in Dutch). Six performers and three extras take us into a distant and out of joint universe littered by somber fairy tales and magic. A world that precedes good and evil, in which no limits have been set yet. The child they bring onto the stage is close to this secret space, which is the space of the origin of creation. The child has not been formatted yet.

The child

Onstage, the child, as the main character, is a disturbing presence. The audience sees a girl who is far too large riding a bike that is far too small for her. Her skirt is too short, and her flesh bulges out of the ends of her sleeves and socks. The mezzo-soprano Eurudike De Beul does not play the part of that child, she is that child. The simple fact that she is visibly long past her childhood years renders the confrontation with her world all the more disturbing for the audience. The gap results in an effect that we could qualify as the "uncanny valley": a disturbing excess of resemblance that cannot but impose an increased awareness of the potential implications.

With her infantile tics and gestures, this disproportionate child leads us into her universe: a somber forest at the foot of menacing cliffs. Although she lives in an environment that we are familiar with, she also slips, without any visible transition, into a primitive state that we have forgotten, on the fraying borders of the unconscious: a state where the earth speaks, where children grow on trees, and where strange events, rather than alarming anyone, only spark curiosity. The choreography of the other performers is tightly bound to the visual language of this child's world.

In *Kind*, the presence of "real" children is limited to an extra who is cast in the place where the production is being performed. Still, during the period prior to the creation and rehearsal of *Kind*, Peeping Tom organized a series of workshops with children of different age groups in a number of cities. This allowed the directors and the performers to gain a better

understanding of the plastic and artistic potential of children: the gestures children use, the way they see the world, the way they see the adults around them, and the way that expresses itself in their gestures and body language. And to gain more insight into how children deal with certain fears, fears that are essentially the result of an absence of support and framework, as for example when they cannot count on their parents. How do they manage absence, loss, conflicts?

Vital environment

Children are growing, they are in the process of becoming what they will be, and they are agile, supple, and receptive. Their particularly open attitude spreads into the set, which becomes an active player with a role to perform in the production. In it, we discover the world of the child as in a diorama: a peak between nature and construction, in a window that is the stage itself. And, surrounding the child, we see a variety of forms and appearances that are all treated in the same manner: trees, boulders, rocks, forest animals and spirits, hikers, children made from tree branches. Sometimes what we see are fully-formed objects, and sometimes we realize that we are seeing performers who have become confused with these appearances.

Kind unfolds in a still unstable space-time. Children – agile, supple, and receptive – are growing organisms. Their open attitudes extend to the scenography, which, more than a backdrop, is itself an active player in the production. The varied forms and appearances that surround the child – the trees, boulders, animals, forest spirits, hikers, as well as the baby made from branches – are all placed on an equal footing. Sometimes, these are inanimate objects, pure and simple; and, sometimes, they are performers whose body has become confused with these forms. Onstage we can see gorges and crevasses, distant grottos, a cavity evocative of a matrix: these are suggestive of spaces and worlds that run still deeper but that remain invisible to the audience. We hear sounds off in the distance, we see creatures appear and disappear. All of which raises questions, such as: who influences who? Is it the landscape that transforms the characters, or the other way around?

Also: who constructs who? The scenography, after all, shows the world of the child like a diorama, a mode of representation in which a natural habitat is reduced to a manageable frame (think of the displays at natural history museums). In the display case that is the stage, we see the constructors of abstract appearances emerge at regular intervals. Disguised from head to toe in sterile white disposable hazmat suits, these white figures intervene, now subtly and now violently, in the child's environment. Born from the artistic intuition of the creators/choreographers, these figures have only yielded their meaning over time. At the moment of writing, the show's creators see these white figures as emblems of the manipulative forces – be they cultural, sociopolitical, moral, or religious – that frame human life. Equally intriguing is the capacity of these figures to adapt themselves to the present. In

the context of recent events, we can also read them as signs for the controlling forces that, under the guise of protective measures, work to distance humans still further from nature, and from themselves.

Violence and identity

To a large extent, the environment we grow up in and the people who surround us determine the person we become. The same holds in *Kind*. The child reflects her environment, but she also resists it—precisely in order to be able to establish her own identity. In this duality, *Kind* questions the perverse aspects of identity formation.

A troubled paternal figure ensures that violence is omnipresent in this child's world. We observe the way in which this violence affects her, how she resists it, gives it a place, or withdraws into her own universe. In her games, the fascination with the extreme becomes increasingly darker: the path towards (self)destruction is not far off. The sound predicts this path, since the choice of music reminds of the '27 Club': a list of famous musicians such as Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix or Kurt Cobain who died at the age of 27 due to addiction, murder or suicide.

The question then arises: to what extent was this dark side already intrinsically present in her? And even more: is the violence present within ourselves, or does it arise from our environment? In this context, the theory of the intergenerational transmission of the phantom articulated by the Hungarian psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham (1919-1975) and Mária Török (1925-1998) was a main source of inspiration in the working and creative process for *Kind*. The ghosts Abraham and Török talk about are the taboos and secrets that lodge themselves at the heart of a family and that, many generations later, appear, suddenly and inexplicably, manifest themselves in the form of violent behavior or other types of unpredictable antisocial conduct. In *Kind*, we see how the seeds are planted in the child, while ancient taboos are perhaps resurfacing in and through her volatile father.

Out of the crazy authority of this father/forest ranger a political parable takes shape in *Kind*. The world of the child is as open and flexible as that of the father is closed and hostile. Because of his position of power, which he regards as unshakeable, all he sees are intruders that he greets barking orders at them, and by subjecting them to abuse and humiliation. This paternal figure embodies the way in which the Lacanian school of thought understands the emergence of mechanisms of racism and exclusion: the moment when an all-too-rigid identity collapses, the underlying emptiness gives way, and the "other" becomes the easy conductor for an unfathomable fear. As the representative of authority, this father embodies the collapse of patriarchal constructions and reflexes—even if, for the moment, no one around him is brash enough to challenge him.

This political dimension insinuated itself unconsciously into the production over the course of the creative process through numerous improvisations and across the different cultural contexts and varied experiences of the company's performers. What is striking once again in this Peeping Tom production is the company's intuitive creative method, which always results in productions that have a strong element of social engagement that render them identifiable to their audience.

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