

A family trilogy

Vader (Father) – Moeder (Mother) – Kinderen (Children)

Moeder (Mother)

by Lieve Dierckx and Sébastien Parizel, September 2016
(translation: Emiliano Battista)

Moeder (Mother, 2016) is the second volume of a trilogy about the members of the family that opened with *Vader* (Father, 2014) and will close with *Kinderen*.

Peeping Tom's new production takes the spectator into a series of seemingly familiar spaces: a maternity ward, a funeral parlor, a recording studio, a museum ... Spaces where the public and the private intertwine. Where past, present, and future try desperately to hold on to the cyclical time of an archetypal mother figure. Mourning for the mother is the starting point from which the performers inject the stage and the spectator with a larger conception of absence, lack, and the anxieties and associations that result therefrom. *Moeder* doesn't shy away from the bleaker view. We see a little girl grow up in the prison of an incubator. The older she gets, the more she is crushed. What forces hold her there? Why can't she break out? Meanwhile, any form of new life seems to cause anxiety and torment in those around her.

In *Moeder*, choreographer Gabriela Carrizo shows the body as a storehouse in which a multitude of conscious and unconscious recollections merge, collide, and define who we are. The work creates unexpected connections that thread the boundary between suffering, mourning, and celebrating, between holding on or letting go, structure and madness. Here, life and death can be art, showcased for all to see. Out of the flux of the individual memories of the director and performers – the matrix of the piece – a universal and collective memory shines through. And this memory triggers disturbing reflections on the meaning and responsibilities of being a woman, a mother, a parent.

Following the seclusion of a senile mind in a retirement home (Franck Chartier, *Vader*), *Moeder* marks a natural evolution in Peeping Tom's work and in its exploration of a staged space that is at once more public and less defined, with a sophisticated light plan adding abstraction. As a company, Peeping Tom is a structure that developed organically, with deep roots, one in which life and work, research and performance, merge. From the start, the founders have worked with a very solid group of artists who turn their souls outwards during the slow and intuitive creative process that precedes each new production. Typically, the performers on stage address each other by their real name. In *Caravana* (1999), an in-situ show set in an RV, the audience could peep in through the windows and see the life of the young couple, Franck and Gabriela, inside; since then, their productions have allowed the external world to inch its way in more and more. Meanwhile, the company's organizational model has gone through three stages of development: first a

collective, followed by the joint artistic direction of the two choreographers (Carrizo and Chartier), and gradually evolving towards its current configuration, in which each production is directed singly. This last phase has given the choreographers more space to nourish their own vision with what comes from outside, while still being able to rely on the other for artistic input and an as an external eye.

Similarly, in terms of tone and theme, *Moeder* is a natural outgrowth of Peeping Tom's work, which has always shown great affection and tenderness to the human being. In *Moeder*, too, humour and empathy are means to reach into the most personal and recognizable: the family and its constellation, upon whose surface float and swirls the hidden and unstable thoughts of the characters. All through their oeuvre, Carrizo and Chartier have looked for new angles to reveal this parallel mental world, governed by other laws, whose fears, neuroses, and individual fantasy disrupt conventional social movements and interactions.

Their work is at once an attempt to touch on realities that belong to the ineffable, the indiscernable, and to show the dissipation of certainties. The problem of how to capture this world through the body in movement as its central signifier is a research process that the two choreographers have been refining and condensing permanently over the years.

An initial source of inspiration for *Moeder* was the death of Gabriela Carrizo's mother. And what was originally supposed to be a tribute to her changed over the course of the artistic process through the input of the troupe. Another starting point was the choreographer's fascination with the way in which sounds trigger associations and memories. This allows Carrizo a new angle from which to continue Peeping Tom's exploration of sensory immediacy and the impact of sound as means to bring the audience into their universe.

More precisely, prior to the start of rehearsals, Gabriela Carrizo organized a workshop with a Foley artist, someone who creates, or recreates, sounds for film in a studio during post-production. How to follow a dancer to find his or her particular sound? How to record and manipulate a sound? How to elicit sound from an object? These are some of the questions that *Moeder* addresses. The origin of this phase of the project can be traced to 2013, when Carrizo was involved in the making of a piece, *-1*, which premiered at the Théâtre National in Brussels (part of the Festival XS), and for which she worked with a sound engineer in a reduced space with a coffin at its centre.

In *Moeder*, the sounds are intimately linked to the characters, the dance, and the objects. The sounds of bodily organs and machines are amplified. In this way, Gabriela Carrizo exposes the visceral performing body and the interiority of scenic objects, as well as the hidden mental universe of fears and fantasies. While we are used to seeing sound onstage as a tool, *Moeder* seems to transform it into tangible matter that brings into relief a dimension that would otherwise have remained invisible. *Moeder* uses sounds to zoom in on situations and characters in an almost filmic manner: they orient the spectator with great precision towards details and characters.

Likewise, sound is at the forefront of the choreography. The sound of inhaling and exhaling can inspire the dancers to launch into a wave-like movement or set them adrift while, a bit further off, the sound of dance steps or objects lead the audio tapestry towards new dance sequences that echo it; meanwhile, the sounds of swallowing or clicks betray the

emotions at play in a seemingly calm and composed performer. In the indefinable space-time of the piece, sound and movement form a loop that is at once concrete, because it generates a material of movement, but also, as sound, abstract. The cohesion between the different elements of the representation that Gabriela Carrizo is after demands extremely precise timing from the performers and technicians. To work with time, to find the right moment, to know when to wait or slow down – all of these infuse *Moeder* with a great musicality.