



ARNE SIERENS

BY

ERWIN JANS, GEERT OPSOMER AND CHRISTEL STALPAERT

KRITISCH THEATER LEXICON

VLAAMS THEATER INSTITUUT

2001

THE CRITICAL THEATRE LEXICON IS A SERIES OF PORTRAITS OF MAJOR DRAMATIC ARTISTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. THESE PORTRAITS ARE COMMISSIONED BY THE VLAAMS THEATER INSTITUUT AND THE FOUR UNIVERSITIES: U.I.ANTWERP, UNIVERSITY OF GHENT, K.U.LEUVEN & V.U.BRUSSELS. THIS PUBLICATION FORMS PART OF AN ALL-EMBRACING HISTORICAL PROJECT ON THE PERFORMING ARTS IN FLANDERS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. THE EDITORIAL BOARD COMPRISES THEATRE ACADEMICS FROM THE FOUR UNIVERSITIES AND PEOPLE FROM THE THEATRE WORLD. PUBLICATION STARTED IN SEPTEMBER 1996.

BIOGRAPHY

Arne Sierens was born on 15 August 1959. He grew up in the Brugse Poort, a working-class district on the west side of Ghent. His attachment to that district has clearly left its mark on his work. What Aalst is to Louis Paul Boon, Rimini to Fellini or Little Italy to Scorsese, this island of workers and tenement blocks is for Sierens: 'a place where the human condition becomes visible. There are no gods living there, just no-hopers, you see no tragedies, just melodrama.'¹ From his father, the prematurely deceased novelist and film critic Frans Sierens, he gets his love of literature and film. Thus, right from childhood Arne Sierens came into contact with the tension between Art with a capital A and popular culture, a tension which has come to play an important role in his work.

After secondary school he studied directing at the RITCS (academy for theatre directors) in Brussels, where he graduated in 1981. He began his career as directorial assistant in a number of Ghent theatres: NTG (Nederlands Toneel Gent – Dutch Theatre in Ghent), Arena, Arca. For a while he was also a member of the performance collective Parisiana. During his student years he was active in the music world as a singer in the punk group Perfectone (1980-1981), which he set up together with his brother Sven Sierens and Johan De Smet. Johan De Smet was among other things to compose the music for the three operas Sierens has written: *Het rattenkasteel* (The Rats' Castle) (1984), a key production based on the strip cartoon by Marc Sleen; *De liefde voor de drie manen* (The love for the three moons) (1988) and *Je pleure des bananes* (1989). The music and the whole (rebellious) subculture associated with it are an important source of inspiration for Sierens' texts and productions. In 1977 Arne Sierens had seen Tadeusz Kantor's *Dead Class* in the Zwarte Zaal in Ghent, a production which was to influence his work strongly.

Arne Sierens is known mainly as a theatre writer. In fifteen years he has written a considerable amount of work that can be divided into purely dramatic texts, song cycles and opera libretti. But Sierens regards himself primarily as a theatre maker and not as an author. Working on stage and performance are for him

of crucial importance. Sierens has been involved in many productions as director or codirector. At the first performance of *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel* (The soldier-postman and Rachel) (1986) he featured as actor as well as author and codirector.

In 1982 he set up the theatre group with the programmatic name De Sluipende Armoede (Creeping Poverty). They were active on the margins of officially subsidized theatre, which offered little or no possibilities to a new generation of theatre makers. A number of Sierens' plays and operas were created within this company. An important milestone was the creation of *Mouchette* (1990) at the Oud Huis Stekelbees, directed by Johan Dehollander. The text won several prizes nationally and internationally and for Arne Sierens led to the breakthrough to a broader circuit. He then wrote *Constant Pardon/Falstaff in Congo* (1990) for the Toneelgroep Amsterdam, but the play was never performed.

From 1992 to 1994, as resident playwright of the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie, he continued the collaboration with Johan Dehollander as director. In this context *Boste*, *Dozen* and the diptych *De drumleraar* (The drum teacher) and *Juffrouw Tania* (Miss Tania) were created. For Het Zuidelijk Toneel he translated Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* and Jean Genet's *Splendid's* (1994). After leaving the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie he found an artistic partner in choreographer Alain Platel. Together they created *Moeder & Kind* (Mother and Child) (1994) and *Bernadetje* (1996). Both shows, produced by the Victoria theatre in Ghent, were an original mixture of dance, theatre, music, action and narrative. They enjoyed particular resonance both nationally and internationally. *Moeder & Kind* was selected for the Flemish-Dutch Theatre Festival in 1995, received the annual Hans Snoeck Prize and the Canadian Masque de la Production Etrangère de l'Année. With *Bernadetje* the Victoria theatre was chosen for the Flemish-Dutch Theatre Festival in 1997 and the Festival of Avignon in the same year. The French newspaper *Le monde* put the production on the same level as productions of Peter Brook and Pina Bausch. In 1999 there was a third collaboration between Sierens and Platel: *Allemaal indiaan* (All Indian).

In 1995 an artistic alliance was forged between Arne Sierens, Johan Dehollander (ex-Blauwe Maandag Compagnie) and Stef Ampe (ex-Beursschouwburg) in the Nieuwpoort theatre in Ghent. The trio wanted the Nieuwpoort theatre to evolve from a

presentation platform to an arts centre. Together with Dehollander Sierens created *Napels* (Naples) (1997) and *De broers Geboers* (Geboers & Co) (1998). In 1998, for the first time in years, Sierens directed alone: *Mijn Blackie*, a coproduction between HETPALEIS and the Nieuwpoort theatre.

What is striking about the published texts of Sierens' plays is his surprising play with form and typography. At first sight this seems to express the literary autonomy of his published work, but a closer look reveals that it is actually a printed theatricalization of the text. In this way, Sierens' texts continue to refer to the stage. He himself often describes them as 'physical scores': they are the distillation of a creative process in which actors and director have also played their part. In 1996 the first volume of Arne Sierens' collected plays was published. In 1999 the second volume appeared. Volume I contains the so-called collage plays such as *Dozen* and *Napels*, together with the scores of *Moeder & Kind* and *Bernadetje*.

There is interest in his work abroad too. *Mouchette* and *De drumleraar* have been published in French. An English translation of *De drumleraar* has appeared in a collection which also includes texts by Lodewijk de Boer, Judith Herzberg, Frans Strijards and Karst Woudstra. A proof of Sierens' recognition as author, although he prefers the title theatre maker.

ARTISTIC IDEAS AND RECEPTION

Realism as misunderstanding

One of the greatest misunderstandings regarding Arne Sierens' work is that it is purely 'naturalistic'. His plays and performances are often described in terms such as 'crude realism',³ and extolled for the 'authenticity' of the dialect and the recognizability of the situations. A production may be dismissed as 'naturalistic', or the suspicion may be voiced that the writer is paying homage to the old romantic belief that the 'genuine' can be depicted without any mediation.³ For anyone who likes a good helping of 'street credibility' in art, this 'authenticity' and 'recognizability' is a plus point, but for many critics who think there should be a clear-cut distinction between stage and daily reality, it is leading nowhere.

A considerable number of commentators continue to write enthusiastically about Sierens' Ghent dialect, his genuine fascination with the underbelly of society and with the experiential world of the young, his roots in the Brugse Poort district and the rawness of his documentary material. But when the construction of the production, the composition of the movements and the assembly of texts and other material are under discussion, then generally they resort to vague references to a journalistic reproduction of the living conditions of the fourth world, the jargon of the Brugse Poort district and soap opera structures. All these elements are indeed present, but only as an initial phase. They are the point of departure of a long process of transformation, reduction and assembly: artistic processes that have little to do with a faithful depiction of a social reality. When Sierens describes his theatre as 'autonomous', he is situating it emphatically outside any naturalistic or psychological theatre tradition. Asked about Belgian artists to whom he feels affinity, he invariably cites Panamarenko and Marcel Broodthaers.

The misapprehension is understandable to some degree. 'The theatre of poverty is the most radical expression of the human condition. Poverty is a metaphor for the lot of the poor, naked human being in a terrifying world. The only message of mankind is his human condition; in the theatre he talks about it or remains silent about it,' says Sierens. Sierens' sensitivity to the environment, the desires and survival strategies of the common people,

is undeniable. But it would be wrong to regard it as simply a statement on his existentialism and his humanism. Poverty, of course, indicates a social situation, but it is also a metaphor for an artistic process of reduction, dilution and purging to arrive at the essence. Those failing to appreciate these processes doggedly rank Arne Sierens among the realists of today, and formally very refined productions such as *Moeder & Kind* and *Bernadetje* are invariably seen as a 'realistic slice of life'.⁴ The subtle play of the-atrualizing and ritualizing generally goes unnoticed. Nevertheless, in *Moeder & Kind* nothing is what it seems. Apparent clichés about an average working-class family or about relationships between man and woman, mother and child, father and child, are danced and acted to the hilt. Dancing and acting, the characters explore their sexual and familial identity. A good example of this is the dance fragment to the music of 'Can you feel it'. What is being communicated here is not primarily 'a clip of the young Michael Jackson' or a 'slice of family life to a nice little tune'. The choreography shows a boy in girl's wig and clothes feeling his crotch like Michael Jackson and dancing on, over and around his scarcely older father: a complex game of rivalry and duplication in family and sexual relations. Not by chance, the performance ends with an imitation of the father by this son. At the same time, in the son's dance number and in the playing of precisely that musical number lurks an elementary act of protest. All movements are carefully decided and assembled as the production is being created. The scene in which Linda (the mother) glides between the furniture, with a cigarette in one hand and a hairdrier in the other, to Aaron Neville's *Ave Maria*, and then, after a threatening gesture with a knife at a teddy-bear's throat, drags it along like a corpse, looks more like a magic ritual than a domestic situation. When she then, waving a cigarette lighter in Last Night of the Proms mode, crawls over the ground on all fours, the scene achieves a definitely sacral and hypnotic effect. It becomes a ritual taking place in a sort of dream time, that no longer belongs solely to the social context of the characters – but cannot be detached from it either.

It is amazing that this meticulous composition can remain unnoticed, that it is not realized that what people call 'realism' is carefully assembled fragments and quotations, stripped of their realistic conventions: the 'chaos' in *Moeder & Kind* is the result of a carefully constructed choreography; what is called the 'lan-

guage of the people' emerges only on the basis of a very formal transformation and the 'real emotions' on the stage are a (re)construction of assembled emotional material. The extremes of hyper-realism and hyper-formalism meet. What appears rather thin and spontaneous on the surface, is the result of a very conscious process that quotes small details from daily life and detaches them from their anecdotal context in order to insert them in a new theatrical order. Behind an apparently very simple realistic façade hides a manipulative *mise-en-scène*, such as we find in the work of Sierens' beloved filmmaker Robert Bresson: 'In Bresson there is the same ability to glide over the essential gesture, the "knack" – the craft. No camera effect must be visible. It must be concealed, elegantly. The "tricks of the trade" must not be seen. This very skilful directing is hidden behind a façade of extreme simplicity.'⁵ Just like the illusionists, Sierens sometimes hides his manipulation, craft and directing behind a hyper-realistic mask – he does not show the theatrical means the way Brecht would – but his work process and the results are totally different from the realistic theatre tradition. He shows and suggests the poetry and richness of the surface; unpolished anecdotes next to magical moments, raw material next to clichés of mass culture, series of movements, sounds and voices in an exciting assembly, and so on. The magical world he creates coincides with fragments of raw reality. An insight into Sierens' method of working, as both writer and director, can help to correct a too reductive realistic reading of his work.

Transcendental realism as method

Already as a young theatremaker, Sierens was confronted by a paradox: 'Actually I wanted to be very realistic, as crazy as possible even, but at the same time I didn't want to make "realistic theatre". [...] I wanted to make Japanese, physical theatre and at the same time deal with drinking coffee in the Brugse Poort.'⁶ The division between art and life and the paradoxical link between primary human material and artistic composition is something Sierens has had to deal with since his youth. At home there were books literally even in the lavatory, he recounts, and visitors to the house tended to be artists. In this way the Sierens family formed an island in an island: on the one hand he was

confronted in his own home with the Great Repertoire and Great Values, all leaning toward art with a capital A, but outside the artistic island of the Sierens family he came in contact with raw reality: 'people who had to stand at a machine their whole life: that was for me reality and not what the classics presented me with.'⁷

Arne Sierens got to see how theatre could be reconciled with realism during the production of *Dead Class* by Tadeusz Kantor, in which he divests reality of its psychological and symbolic ballast and shows it naked. Sierens learned from Kantor how you can depart from primary tales about war, misery, Wielopole (Kantor's birthplace) or the Brugse Poort and how you can transform this 'true material' by diluting it and processing it until only isolated realistic details remain, which can then enter into new relationships. Sierens himself describes this method of work in imitation of Kantor as follows: 'Those details are so powerful that you have to free them from their context, so that they enter a "free zone", but that is a long process. You need an intuition for it, you have to rarefy, scrape off, divest the context of its superfluities, its symbolism, its petty anecdotes.' Once freed of their original context, it is a matter of letting these liberated elements enter relationships anew, creating new contexts for them, 'creating new clusters'. That is the phase of the visionary, 'where the "true artist" appears, the sorcerer, the juggler, the composer, the assembler who weaves all these elements together to a tapestry of details that throw another light on people, without explaining them. Because we are dealing with people here,' states Sierens.⁸ Formalism and humanism go hand in hand here. In a process of formal reduction and fresh assembly of elements from human reality, human reality achieves a nakedness that neither needs nor offers explanation.

Arne Sierens describes this work process as 'transcendental realism', a term borrowed from a book by Paul Schrader on Yasujiro Ozu (Japan, 1903-1963) and Robert Bresson (France, 1907-), his two great models. According to Paul Schrader these directors are the two most important representatives of transcendental realism in the art of film: 'Transcendental style *stylizes* reality by eliminating (or nearly eliminating) those elements which are primarily expressive of human experience, thereby robbing the conventional interpretations of reality of their relevance and power. Transcendental style, like the mass, transforms

experience into a repeatable ritual which can be repeatedly transcended.⁹ Here again we find the combination of attention to daily experience and ritualizing that experience beyond any interpretation.

Instead of interpreting, Sierens tries to capture man in his nakedness in a minimal but cogent image. In the reduction, he reveals the main lines in a telling way through details, while striving after the essential. Theatre is primarily the evoking of emotions and not the relaying of content. The process of reduction means a dilution of content, but an intensification of emotion. These moments can be seen both in his texts and in his productions. In *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel* the freezing cold is sketched in in an elementary and at the same time autonomous, poetic image: 'Never in my life have I so cursed the winter,/when I took off my coat,/it could stand up on its own,/it was frozen so hard.' The performances themselves are also often built up around a concrete image that can best be described as an 'archetype': the drum set in *De drumleraar*, the castle in *Juffrouw Tania*, the bumper cars in *Bernadetje*. It is not only Tadeusz Kantor who uses the transcendental style to resolve the conflict between reality and illusion, between the reality of life and the fiction of drama; we also find this approach in Ozu and Bresson.¹⁰ They sketch the history of the little man, as opposed to the Great History, of Japan and France. After the Second World War Ozu made films of the Japanese Shomin genre, telling the story of the proletariat and the middle class, focusing on the comic or bitter relations within a family. Just as in Sierens' family dramas, the whole world is contained in that one family: 'The ends of the earth are no more distant than outside the house.'¹¹ Ozu situates the focus of his work on tensions between home and work, parent and child, as emanations of the tensions between old and new Japan, between tradition and westernization, between man and nature.¹² In Sierens too, from his first play, *Het 'vermoeden'* (The 'suspicion') to *De broers Geboers* (Geboers & Co), the family is the pre-eminent site of archetypical conflicts: between man and woman, between parent and child, between brothers, between the group and the individual.

Between Brecht and Artaud

The tension in Sierens' work between his sensitivity to a social reality and his formalistic-ritual design can be understood even more clearly if viewed according to the concepts of Brecht and Artaud. To Brecht he owes the idea that the (hidden) social truth of a character or a situation can be revealed in a dynamic series of gestures or a 'gestus'; a truth of which the character is not aware, but the actor is. *Moeder & Kind* and *Bernadetje* are not superficial imitations of daily life, but a translation of unconscious social behaviour in a social reflection via activities on the stage. Just as Brecht initially worked in a freely intuitive way and, for example, assembled slogans from demonstrations, so Sierens too uses the image- and language-material he collects from daily life around him (interviews, documentaries, photos...). But where Brecht places the emphasis on alienation via a reasoned conscientization of the mechanisms that control capitalist society, Sierens parts company with him. In his work it is not conscientization that dominates, but ritual. An example from *Bernadetje* can illustrate this tension.

The play shows us a group of young people and a couple of dubious adults hanging around the bumper cars at the fair. At a certain moment a young man appears who is drunk. He staggers, falls over and drags himself up again. In the depiction of his drunkenness a realistic credibility is aimed at: the young man has drunk too much and can scarcely stand. The falling down can be seen as a 'gestus' that tells us something about the difficult relationship between parents and children, a motif that occurs more than once in this play: the parents are absent or don't care much about the children. The young people construct a world which is both precocious and immature. But then something happens which makes us forget this social interpretation: the young man keeps falling, not once, but eight, nine, perhaps even ten times. The falling down becomes choreography. From then on the movement tells us nothing more about social and emotional misery, but only about itself, its own elegance. It is no longer an interpretation or a representation. It is no longer a 'gestus', but becomes a 'hieroglyph', to use Artaud's term. Artaud used the word 'hieroglyph' to describe the dance movements of a group of Balinese dancers he saw performing in the 1930s. He was struck by the stylization of the gestures that contained not a single indi-

cation of reality. These signs, according to Artaud, strike us intuitively and make any translation into a logical and reasoned language superfluous. *Bernadetje* is full of such shifts from 'gestus' to 'hieroglyph'. It is up to the spectator to make his narrative of the performance with these shifts between reflection and ritual. In Sierens the reflection is intuitively assimilated in the image material, but is subjected to a strict principle of form than makes now chronicle, now the choreography of hypnotic rhythms and dances central.¹³

DEVELOPMENTS IN SIERENS' WORK: THEATRE BETWEEN ACTION AND NARRATION

Exercises in polyphony and narrative theatre

In *Het 'vermoeden'* (1982), Sierens' first theatre text, the conflict with first-degree realism is already present subliminally. The immediate background of the play is the war, not as an anonymous mass conflict or a historical fact, but as a concrete event that intervenes in the daily life of ordinary people.

More than once Sierens has pointed out that he does not write tragedies but melodramas. 'That is why the characters in my plays are not bowed down by fate, but by fatality: the chance coming together of factors they have no hold over.'¹⁴ The war functions in an initial phase of his writing as a concentrated collection point of such fatalities that make up the *condition humaine* of the ordinary man. The main characters in his plays are therefore, as he himself has said, not heroes or gods but no-hopers, not tragic fighters against Fate, but the beaten and the victims of circumstances and fortuities – not, however, bereft of a certain greatness. It is a matter, in the words of Kantor, of 'the little, poor, defenceless, but splendid History of individual human life.'¹⁵

Het 'vermoeden' is described by the author himself as a piece of 'Belgian living-room misery'. The living-room, the family (or the lack of it), are important constellations in Arne Sierens' theatre universe. *Het 'vermoeden'* is situated in the aftermath of the Second World War. Eddy, returning home after three years working in a concentration camp, discovers that his father has expanded his coffee business, thanks to collaboration, and made a lot of money. It comes to a conflict between father and son, in which not even the mother can mediate any more. In spite of the realism in the dialogue, the depiction of the characters and the recognizable dramatic situations, the relationship between the family members is defined by what is not spoken, namely the father's past as a collaborator. About the writing process Arne Sierens was later to say: 'I only create an electric field in which something can happen. Those people must be linked to one

another in the spectator's head. I don't write that.¹⁶ That at the end of the play the mother does state everything and make the situation clear for reader and spectator, perhaps indicates the author's doubt concerning the power of the electric field he created with his text.

The Korrekelder production of *Het 'vermoeden'*, directed by Jan Leroy, was described as 'a kind of buffo-naturalism: naturalism cranked up to comic hyperbole. [...] *Het 'vermoeden'* is poised accurately on the dividing line between melodrama, the tragic and the comic. The play shows how dangerous stupid cliché ideas can be.'¹⁷ Whatever, the writer of *Het 'vermoeden'* had not yet found his own voice beyond realism. He remained within the limits of traditional drama and of theatre as dramatic action: a recognizable dramatic situation develops via dialogue to a moment of crisis. On the level of language too, Sierens was still seeking his own idiom: the characters' speech is rather stilted. With his second published text, *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel* (1986), the problems were resolved and the way opened for the development of a very personal dramatic and theatrical style of writing. From now on Sierens was to be heavily inspired by the vocabulary, the sentence structure and the tones of Flemish dialect, although his theatre language is a much more carefully considered construction than appears at first sight. The musical, rhythmic and plastic power of Sierens' sentences are used to create concrete images with a maximum of expressive power.

It is perhaps not without interest to dwell for a moment on the texts and productions created between *Het 'vermoeden'* (1982) and *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel* (1986), although these do not belong to Sierens' most important work. *Rode Oogst* (Red Harvest) (1983 and 1984), a play about power, conspiracy, blood and revenge, is based on *Arden of Faversham*, a play wrongly attributed to Shakespeare, that was mentioned by Artaud as material for his 'Theatre of Cruelty'. *Red Harvest* was never published, but a journalist praised its compressed and poetic dialogues: 'In his text there is scarcely anything that could be pared away.'¹⁸ Later that was to be said frequently of his texts. On the directing too, undertaken by the author himself, the journalist's remarks are relevant: '*Rode Oogst* is a slow-moving theatrical performance influenced by Japanese theatre on the one hand and the Théâtre du Soleil on the other. Sierens also brings in sung fragments and ritual dance. Johan De Smet composed

supporting, basic music with Brechtian influences and repetitive patterns.'¹⁹ The reference to ritual and Japanese theatre clearly indicates where Sierens sought his inspiration. In that period he wrote two operas together with Johan De Smet: *De rattenkasteel* (The Rats' Castle) (1984), after a strip cartoon by Marc Sleen, and the spoken opera *Genoveva* (1985), an adaptation of the old Flemish legend 'Genoveva of Brabant'. *Het rattenkasteel* in particular is, according to Arne Sierens, an important stage in his development.²⁰ The play has a rapid rhythmic construction and a dynamic that anticipate *Bernadetje*. These attempts to renew an opera genre and open it up to popular subject matter, modern rhythms and a new public, were not great successes, but exercises in 'polyphony' which the author turned to good account in his later plays.

In his dramatic oeuvre this polyphony began with *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel*. Just as in *Genoveva* – 'a soldier's play in which every man is a soldier and every woman a soldier's wife', according to the writer – the First World War is experienced from the personal world of the little man: 'One thing is certain/it was a war of poor people./Nothing about: in the trenches everyone is equal./Whoever was a farmer or workman before the war,/was a soldier./Others didn't get within kilometres of a trench,' says Louis, the soldier-postman. The above-mentioned 'electric field' has a strong epic dimension in this text. There is no question of a dialogue-structure. Sierens is experimenting with the possibilities of narrative theatre and in particular simultaneous narration. Two narratives that are separate from one another are placed side by side and told alternately. The narrative of Rachel and the narrative of Louis are two monologues linked by the theme of war. By turns Louis and Rachel tell about themselves, their past, their fears, but above all about their loved ones and about the all-dominating urge to survive the war. The narration takes place in the first person and in the past. The epic form admits identification, but at the same time creates a certain distance. Towards the end of the play the monologues seem to take on the character of a dialogue because they become shorter and shorter and can be read as mutual reaction. Sierens constructs the narratives contrapuntally, whereby the characters at the culminating point complement one another's lines, or even repeat them, without this detracting from the autonomy of their own narrative line. This is the moment in which Arne Sierens, by means of the tight con-

struction, achieves the emotional highpoint of the play: Rachel's cry on the birth of her child coincides with Louis' cry after having shot himself in the hand in order not to have to return to the front. The realism of a recognizable dramatic situation is replaced by a simultaneous narration with an epic, contrapuntal construction. For Sierens simultaneity is less a technique than an attitude to life (which he traces back to the Chinese, among other things). It has to do with the realization that side by side with every narrative, thousands of other narratives exist. The uniqueness of the individual is eliminated in order to merge it with a greater something – a group, a collective, a community. It is an attempt to inscribe events ritually into history.

Sierens does not just narrate, in his narratives he conjures up and transforms. He borrows narratives from the community and after a process of formalizing and ritualizing, he gives them back. Thus he is at the same time a revealer and a concealer. Here too the same tension as between 'gestus' and 'hieroglyph', between explanation and magic. The musicality of Sierens' language occupies a central position and provides the incantatory power of the narrative. Basically the rhythmic effect often goes back to the ancient forms of oral tradition: the repetition of the litany (A A A A A) or the alternation of the ballad (A B A B A B A). What the narrator does is not just narrate, but try to reach something in his public. Narratives take by surprise or confront the public. They have a highly activating content. Thus Sierens compares the work of a theatremaker or text writer with narrators who stand in the marketplace calling to one another, or with waiters who have to court the attention of their customers. He describes how in a beach restaurant near Malaga a good 500 people are sitting eating outside. There is no menu and 20 waiters are running around with piles of plates who have to stand out in some way from the others, calling out. 'They have to cut with their voice.' One calls 'Pulpo' with a metallic tone, another calls very deeply 'Puulpoo', another again using a very high voice. It is the essence of opera. They seek the correct pitch, the suitable rhythm or lengthen the sound 'Arroooooz'. Every possible way of creating a contrast is permitted. When two of them sound totally alike, one of the two must look for another tone or another rhythm or he cannot sell his wares any more. Sierens' theatre texts and productions are situated in this oral tradition of narrating and calling. In rap music too or in rock culture, one has to constantly

appeal to the public. One has to narrate hard and fast, with vivid colours and strokes.²¹

Los Muertitos/Onze Lieve Doden (1988) (Our Dear Departed), like *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel*, is based on the power of simultaneous narration: two narratives that both demand the attention of the spectator. There is *Coyoacan 20 08 40*, the story of Natalia Sedova Trotskaia, Trotsky's wife, who is living together with her husband in exile in Mexico, on the eve of the Second World War; and there is *Todos Santos*, the tale that three Mexican peasants tell about Zapata, about the revolution, about the bloodbath brought about by General Caranza.... In contrast to *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel*, Sierens is dealing with the present in these narratives. Here too, both narratives are told alternately and constructed contrapuntally to a moment in which both Trotsky and the sweetheart of one of the peasants are murdered. The narratives are built around absent characters: the sweetheart, Zapata, Trotsky.... In later plays too, the absence of certain characters will be an essential element of Sierens' narrative dramaturgy: the absence of the mother in *Mouchette* or the character Serge in *De drumleraar*, the absence of the parents in *Bernadetje* and of the mother in *De broers Geboers*.

Absence also indicates the formal process of dilution and distillation as described above. This corresponds well with the ideas of Ozu and Bresson. Ozu states: 'I want to portray a man's character by eliminating all the dramatic devices. I want to make people feel what life is like without delineating all the dramatic ups and downs.'²² Robert Bresson called his transcendent style 'la reconstruction de la surface'. This reconstruction of the surface is achieved by 'a very precise choice of details, objects and accessories; through gestures charged with an extremely solid reality'.²³ Just like Ozu, Bresson understands transcendent reality through a stylization of daily life, which arises more out of elimination than of assimilation or addition. Bresson defines reality as 'privation: by the qualities that an object lacks yet has potential for'.²⁴ This also holds for Kantor: 'In Kantor's thinking the negation- or annihilation-principle holds as necessary point of departure in a constructive artistic work process.' Kantor states that 'life can best be expressed by showing its absence'.²⁵ In *Los Muertitos/Onze Lieve Doden*, negation, making absent, is used in a dramatically powerful way in the narrative of Trotsky's wife. She narrates the murderous assault on her husband by denying

every moment that was to lead inexorably to his death: ‘We don’t go slowly home [...] Jackson doesn’t come in with us [...] The door does not close [...] There is no cry [...] There is no ambulance. There is no operation [...] There is no hole in our head.’ In Trotskaia’s narrative Sierens achieves great poetic linguistic autonomy, as is clear from the first lines of the play (which in some images and through the lack of any punctuation is reminiscent of texts by Heiner Müller.): ‘Coyoacan/I the wife his Natalia I/Of the old pitiful bag of bones/World arsonist number one Major General of evil/in our room with steel shutters/surrounded by spirits with a hole in their head/Each morning/We are not murdered in the night/And now you are still not content. No.’ Perhaps this poetry was one of the reasons why the Dutch company Els Theatercollectief staged solely the narrative of Natalia Trotskaia. But this meant that the writer’s epic intention was largely lost.

Narrative as weapon: The encounter with Johan Dehollander

With *Mouchette* (1990), Sierens stood at the cusp between dialogue and narrative theatre: in addition to many narrative moments there are scenes in which the characters actually meet one another. *Mouchette* was the beginning of a still fruitful collaboration with director Johan Dehollander (from Oud Huis Stekelbees via the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie to the Nieuwpoorttheater) and Stef Ampe as intendant (from Oud Huis Stekelbees via the Beursschouwburg to the Nieuwpoorttheater). Text and performance were very well received and meant for Sierens a step in the direction of a large theatre and a large audience. Sierens found his inspiration in the eponymous film by Robert Bresson, but used his own narrative. *Mouchette* tells of the relationship between Arsène, an elderly, seedy character who has been abandoned by his wife, and Colette, a fourteen-year-old girl with no father and a sick mother, who looks after the housekeeping and her little sister so that the outside world does not see what is going on. In *Mouchette* Sierens succeeds in making ‘clusters’ of archetypes of the two characters. Each character harbours within him/herself numerous other characters. Colette is playing at keeping house, an immature housewife, unmarried

mother, a mistress, flamboyant flamenco dancer, a schoolchild playing truant and brutal adolescent. Arsène is zany, a criminal, failed husband, seducer, voyeur, ‘murderer’, lover, substitute father, stranger and child. In spite of all these roles they remain enclosed in their own universe, their own fantasies and lies, in order to be able to survive. On the stage their worlds are simultaneously present: Colette’s little house and Arsène’s field of action.

In contrast to Bresson, Sierens concentrates more on the survival- and escape-strategies of his lower-class characters than on the misery. Music in particular plays an important part here. Concerning *Moeder & Kind* the subversive element was pointed out of Michael Jackson’s ‘Can you feel it’. In *Mouchette* it is the classical ‘Summer in the city’ and flamenco music that prise open the world of the characters and voice their longing for freedom. Popular music genres such as ‘rembetika’, tango and rock are for Sierens special subcultures: ‘They are popular cultures. They are very authentic, great bearers of a rebellious spirit and a rebellious mind. They are my great models and also my sources. They are what I want to do. They possess what I call “a great formal tension” that goes together with “a deeply human content”’. It seems popular, but actually it is only great specialists who can do this.²⁶ After such a statement it is not surprising that Sierens knows the music of a production before he has written a single word.

Whereas *Mouchette* was limited to the emotional world of the two main characters, *Boste* (1992) has again a much more epic scope, that in a way is reminiscent of *Los Muertitos/Onze Lieve Doden*. The play, written for the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie, with whom Sierens was to work for a while, deals again with a socio-political context and for the first time the problems of the artist (although already in *De reis naar het donkere kontinent* (The journey to the dark continent) of 1985 a third-rate writer puts in an appearance, destined to fail both in literature and in love). In more than one respect *Boste* is a turning point in Sierens’ work. As in *Mouchette*, he goes a step further in his search for a theatre between action and narration. In most of Sierens’ previous plays the number of characters is limited. In *Boste* something else is going on with the characters. Boste: ‘Your play? Where does it actually take place?’ Richard: ‘In my head.’ In *Boste* the world is fragmented. It is as though the writer’s head has burst and all his anxieties, both personal and

professional, are incarnated in the characters that constantly waylay him. There is no longer a story, still less a narrative that gives the whole a clear direction. The chaos that plays such an important part in productions such as *Moeder & Kind* and *Bernardetje*, already appears here. The play forms a turning point in the author's oeuvre.

As explicit sources for his play, Sierens points to Fellini's *Otto e mezzo* and to the Flemish novelist Louis Paul Boon's *Kappellekesbaan* (Chapel Road), two works in which the artist is waylaid by characters and their comments, wishes and complaints in connection with the work he is engaged on. It is the people out of his environment that Richard, the writer, is constantly pestered by ('Pa? An egg, how long does that have to boil?') and who become the characters of his play. The same people compel the writer, who has to write a play about Orpheus and is wrestling with writer's block, to descend into his own underworld and look around. The narrative turns on the Boste-Richard opposition. Boste stands for compulsion, vitality, social and political awareness, the desire to make an opera on the murder of Julien Lahaut (the Belgian post-war Communist politician). In Richard there are the doubts, the private problems, the impossibility of creating 'something great'. These two are surrounded by all the other characters, whose tales constantly break into one another and turn the play into a real tangle. Only towards the end does it come to a greater epic repose in a number of longer narratives.²⁷ The production was directed by Luk Perceval. Johan Dehollander was co-director and provided the set, that as in *Mouchette* is distilled and abstract. After the chaotic dramaturgy of *Boste* Sierens embarked on a number of productions with Dehollander in which the work process and the input of the authors into the realization of the text was essential: *Dozen* (Boxes) (1993), an investigation into the relationship between narrating and acting, *Juffrouw Tania* (Miss Tania) and *De drumleraar* (1994), two plays with a minimum of narrative, a rather thin and economical formulation in which encounters between people are central.

In *De drumleraar* Paola is a divorced woman who puts an advertisement in the newspaper to find a drum teacher for her son Nick (who does not appear on the stage). Raymond responds to this covert 'contact ad'. It emerges that he is the younger step-brother of Serge, Paola's former great love. Both characters are

what Arne Sierens calls 'archetypes': their physical presence is always very suggestive and they evoke prototypes in the collective memory. 'Raymond is not looking for a particular woman, but for woman. Paola is not looking for a particular man, but for a dream of completeness.'²⁸ They also wear a variety of masks – for example, Paola at one moment plays the mother, then Raymond's lover or Serge's young love – and they act in the shadow of the absent characters. The audience must themselves give form to the relationship between these characters via their imagination. For each play Sierens creates an exact balance of how much and how little an actor may show on the stage so that he/she becomes not an illustration, but a living apparition of a human being. In the banal situation seen on the stage, yet another reality plays a part, simultaneously or projected into the past. This absent reality titillates the imagination of the reader, the spectator and the theatre maker: an empty space to be filled. Now too the link with Kantor is clear who has stated that the ultimate theatre no longer shows anything, but suggests everything.

Via plays such as *Mouchette* and *De drumleraar*, Sierens has gradually developed another view of the past and memory. Where the characters in the first narrative plays 'remain stuck in the memory (of the war), objectified the past as it were', you now get a completely 'subjective and sometimes arbitrary reproduction of a past, which the characters use as a weapon'.²⁹ The past is manipulated when it proves useful for the present. The characters have completely different opinions on their parallel past. They each tell their own version of the past, in which wish-dreams intersect the truth. For characters like *Mouchette* or Paola, lying is an acceptable separation from reality, they use their memory of the past as a weapon in their fight for survival. But there is more involved.

In *De drumleraar*, how the past continues to carry over into the present is explored. The characters re-experience and transform their past in the now, without really getting a grip on it. Raymond's memories do not always tally with Paola's. He relives the period when he was fourteen, roughly the same age as her son now; she remembers the experience she has lost of the young, beautiful and independent woman. Their memory is a contest to seize the past, to conjure up time, to find a rhythm. Paola arranges dried flowers and Raymond tries through drumming to control time, but they are unsuccessful in gaining control over

the time ... their time. In the silences that follow the responses the characters become witnesses of their own story and run the risk of no longer synchronizing in it. They are the subject, but also the object of their remembering – of memory, in fact. Their story is also told by time and by their traumatic experience which lays an imperishable veil over all the facts, so that they can only be evoked as spectres circling in their own past. Father Time, the seasons and generations do their work. The traumas are passed on in the generations: from Serge to Raymond, from Serge to Paola, from Paola to her son, from Raymond to the son... . ‘When one character enters, he immediately brings a whole gang with him’.³⁰ The absent characters hang like a shadow over Paola’s and Raymond’s tales, on the stage they stand for more than just themselves: there is something that exceeds them and that they can only evoke in language. Not only in language, but also in rhythm, tempo and the swelling sounds of the drums, transcendental time takes shape. Just as the sounds of voices and instruments in many Eastern theatre rituals indicate the passing of time. It was not by chance that the point of departure of the play was *The Drum of the Waves of Horikawa* by Chikamatzu Monzaemon (1653-1724), a Japanese playwright admired by Arne Sierens.

Whenever this memory is seen not only within the fiction of the narrative, but also as an event that any actor, any narrator must create anew time after time for an audience, we are witnessing an investigation into acting and narrating, such as in *Dozen*. The core in narrating is the ‘re-experiencing of the event’. The narrator does not inform, but bears witness, experiences everything anew.

Dozen is again an important step in Sierens’ development. Here the idea is radicalized that text and production arise during the rehearsal process and via the materials of the makers (actors, playwright and director). Sierens and Dehollander start out from a restricted number of texts and invite the actors to tell something about their joys and woes, about memories of childhood via fragments of text, dialogues, monologues, drawings. All this material is sampled and assembled by Sierens until a text collage emerges. The characters of *Dozen* are ‘the average man or woman’, they are archetypes. The narratives are sometimes searing, sometimes extremely funny: stories about mothers, fathers, sisters, love affairs, etc. The actors continue to narrate in their acting, without going into a complete theatrical transformation.

For a big company like the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie, *Dozen* became a rather unusual and intensive process. In the two production processes that followed, *De drumleraar* and *Juffrouw Tania*, a latent conflict between the writer Sierens and the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie came into the open. Sierens learned that he is primarily a writer who follows his own projects and rhythms and not a super-dramaturg-writer or repertoire creator who helps to realize the artistic process of a director. (It is significant that not he but Tom Lanoye was to get the commission to adapt Shakespeare’s history plays.) He also came increasingly into conflict with the theatrical approach of the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie, who encourage players to assert their own rhythm against the original text or to explore deeper layers of meaning. Meanwhile Sierens was writing musical scores in which the rhythm of the text had to be exactly observed, in order to be able to evoke images and emotions in players and audience. Moreover, the process that was adapted to *Joko* and *Wilde Lea* – halfway through, stop rehearsals and go in a different direction – did not seem feasible for *Juffrouw Tania*. Sierens contends that his ‘umbilical plays’ are too closely bound up with his personal biography and that theatre or narration are only means, not an aim in themselves. The conflict led to a break and Sierens left the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie in 1994. Immediately after, he translated Genet (*Splendid’s*) for Ivo van Hove’s Zuidelijk Toneel company.

Physical theatre: the encounter with choreographer Alain Platel

After the period with the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie, Sierens began working freelance. A new, impressive collaboration emerged. Together with the Ghent choreographer Alain Platel, Sierens created the trilogy *Moeder & Kind* (1994), *Bernadetje* (1996), and *Allemaal Indiaan* (1999), productions aiming at a fusion of theatre and dance, narration and action. The Ghent arts centre Victoria produced these works, which enjoyed great international success.

After his experience with the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie Sierens wanted primarily to work with actors marked by their history, with young people, not with all-round professional

actors. In Platel Sierens found an ideal partner. They share an interest in popular subcultures and their working method runs in exact parallel: first bring material themselves (photo album, films...) and then let this be improvised on. Through Platel Sierens also came to work much more with a close analysis and recording of eloquent details and with the suggestive power of non-verbal behaviour. For him Platel is a wizard or an alchemist, who with movement and music creates the electric fields necessary for a magic tension to emerge. More than ever, Sierens was to concentrate on action and ritual theatre and dance as a form of exorcism. Through this his work regained momentum. He radicalised and partially relinquished epic or dialogue texts in favour of the purified physical scores of a physical theatre. Dance is for him a form of exorcism, just like the texts that spontaneously arise.

As in *Mouchette*, in *Moeder & Kind* Sierens' point of departure is an unusual family, a proletarian family difficult to work out. It is some time before we know who the father, the mother and the children are; the social situation is constructed on the basis of a volume of photos, *Living Room*, by Nick Waplington. During the performance chaos steadily builds up: children who eat spaghetti off the floor or who go and sit in the rabbit hutch, in between violent scenes of quarrels and fights, playbacks, a boy who puts his little brother in the fridge, eats with one hand and with the other gets himself ready for a dance session, phone conversations, an eccentric who says nothing and then suddenly starts wildly dancing, a routine with dustbins, a woman balancing on a swing, panic, screaming, macho strutting, a small child who imitates his father's fit of temper, and so on. A carefully constructed fragment of chaos in an enclosed space that explodes. At a furious tempo electric fields develop around the characters. The whole world is poured into that one family, the characters explore one another at all possible levels: child, father, mother, boy, girl, lover, man, woman. Where the electrical discharge in *Mouchette* occurs in the dialogue between two characters, here we have eight characters on the stage. The simultaneous narrative and action lines can no longer be observed in one field of vision. The chaos is no longer kept scrupulously outside, but has become the content and form of the performance itself.

This chaos was already present in *Boste* through a countless number of fragmented narrative lines in the protagonist's head.

There was no longer a narrative there that led, in fact it seemed as though all those narratives constantly set traps for the writer. In *Boste* the chaos is linked to an imploded world, with a descent into the underworld. *Moeder & Kind* on the other hand delivers an explosive burst of energy, vitality and rebelliousness. The chaos of the world has seeped through into the characters, they are no longer at the turning point between world and underworld and are no longer alone in their struggle against the big bad chaos of events (like Rachel or Mouchette). The little innocent man is no longer separated from the chaotic world, he stands right in the middle of it. Like the Russian chaos theory exponent Ilya Prigogyne, Sierens states that chaos and accident are the rule and order the exception: a temporary chemical balance.

The audience has to be taken by surprise by this chaos in the play, hence *Moeder & Kind* has a high action content. The dialogue is spoken action, the live act on the stage and the music have the effect on the audience of a concert.

The music is a form principle in Arne Sierens' work which should not be underestimated. Mostly he decides on the music of a production before he has set a word down on paper. Consequently the music has a very great influence on the tempo, the rhythm, the dynamic and the colour of his productions and of his texts. To understand Sierens' language, one should pay more attention to sound and rhythm than meaning and content. The musical elements of blues, flamenco, tango, rock or 'rembetika', but also the power of their texts, the ritual performance practice and the dancing that are so much a part of it, are very important.

For Arne Sierens a production must define itself first from a total void and develop from that. For *Moeder & Kind*, for example, this idea was an empty sofa around which theatrical means defined themselves. During rehearsals with the actors these means take on form whereby Platel and Sierens guide everything carefully from their emotional matrix. A production like *Moeder & Kind* gives the impression that the play has arisen from the actors' disconnected improvisations. Nothing is farther from the truth. The working method is carefully thought through and stylistically balanced; it is akin to Kantor's 'free actor's art': 'In the technique and the organization of the totality of actions the main motivation is "the combined action" of the company, the forging of invisible bonds between the actors, who create an almost tele-

pathic syntony between the respective elements.²³¹ In spite of the personal motivation of the creation, the impulsive input of autobiographical material and the impression of chance associations, Sierens carefully arranges and calculates the effect of each component in his productions. The sequence, length, place in the play are enormously important, something that Kantor called a 'constructivism of emotions'.³²

Like *Moeder & Kind*, the next project with Alain Platel at Victoria, *Bernadetje*, was hailed both at home and abroad as one of the most striking productions in recent years. The interest that Sierens nurtured for opera and narrative theatre in the first work had meanwhile developed into a dynamic action theatre that stunned the audience. Here music, dance and movement play an important part. Through a careful montage of the various components everything falls into place in the imagination of the audience. *Bernadetje* is assembled in ballad form: text, music, text, music ... an ancient form with a magical effect. Where content of the components is concerned, the assembly also follows a very simple contrapuntal pattern. As in a melodrama, a simple mechanism is at work: fall and rise, sacrifice and resurrection, expulsion and paradisaical state, guilt and innocence, murder and miracle, the victims become saints. In the choreography the pattern is: if one falls, the other rises. In *Bernadetje* there are plenty of scapegoats and victims: Yves comes out of prison, Jackie is 'a thief and a cheat', Kelly is the victim of her longing to be famous, Tamara is a Polish migrant, and then there is also the rat who is shot dead and the attack on the pope ... a 'genuine' miracle. Moments of rise and fall follow one another at a furious pace, often the dance sections are the magical moments in which sanctification, purification, takes place. In music these are among other things fragments of Bach. The structure of *Bernadetje* in many ways resembles that of *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel*, where in one scream birth (Rachel's child) and mutilation (the soldier's hand) coincide. In *Bernadetje* fall and resurrection, sacrifice and sanctification gradually flow into one another and the mechanism itself is shown. Not by accident, the printed text is prefaced by a reproduction of a painting of the Lamb of God – sacrifice and sanctification in one – and an important focus falls on the Medusa scene in which the dancers and actors, in a game of attraction and rejection, try to get their bodies on the slowly revolving bumper car, like drowning people trying to get on to a



[1] *Het 'vermoeden'* (The 'suspicion'). 1986-1987.

Writer and set designer: Arne Sierens. Director: Jan Leroy. Production: De Korre. With, inter alia, Jos van Geel and Ben Hemerijckx.

[2] *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel* (The soldier-postman and Rachel). 1986-1987.

Author: Arne Sierens. Directors: Arne Sierens and Jan Leroy. Production: De Sluipende Armoede. With Arne Sierens and Geertrui Daem.



- [3] *Mouchette*. 1989-1990.
 Author: Arne Sierens.
 Director: Johan Dehollander.
 Production: Oud Huis Stekelbees.
 With Goele Derick
 and Mark Verstraete.
- [4] *De drumleraar* (Drummers).
 1993-1994.
 Author: Arne Sierens.
 Director: Johan Dehollander.
 Production: Blauwe Maandag
 Compagnie.
 With Gilda De Bal and
 Lucas Van den Eynde.



- [5] *Moeder & Kind* (Mother and child). 1994-1995. Author: Arne Sierens.
 Director: Alain Platel. Production: Victoria. With, inter alia, Lies Pauwels
 and Gert Portael.
- [6] *Bernadetje*. 1996-1997. Author and director: Arne Sierens and Alain Platel.
 Production: Victoria. With, inter alia, An Pierlé and Lies Pauwels.



- [7] *De broers Geboers* (Geboers & Co). 1997-1998. Author: Arne Sierens.
Director: Johan Dehollander. Production: Nieuwpoorttheater and Theater Zuidpool. With, inter alia, Wim Opbrouck, Didier Deneck and Wim Willaert.
- [8] *Mijn Blackie* (My Blackie). 1998-1999. Author and director: Arne Sierens.
Production: HETPALEIS and Nieuwpoorttheater.
With, inter alia, An Miller and Johan Heldenbergh.

raft. Meanwhile a Bach cantata resounds, in an old performance by the bass Hans Hotter. The choreography has a great magical attraction reminiscent of certain sacral key scenes from the work of Robert Bresson.³³ Bach's text provides the sacrifice theme and the longing for death: 'With you, world, I do not stay. Little or nothing do I receive from you. Which improves my soul. Misery is my lot below. But there, there is my destiny. Calm, sweet rest and peace.' The passage shows the extent to which the magic-sacral dimension is beginning to play a main role in the work.

From this thought of death and the whole emotional context the performance makes a seamless transition to Kelly's sober reasoning on the failed attempt on the pope's life. According to Kelly, the church calls this a 'miracle of Mary': 'Had Mary now for example made that bullet deviate twenty centimetres, then no blood would have been spilt. No. [...] But then there would not have been any miracle. If Mary intervenes you have to see it. There must always be a lot of blood. You have to have something bad first that she can then heal.' Kelly's down-to-earth common sense here touches a core of the Catholic faith: there is a mechanical alternation between innocent martyrdom and purification. The title *Bernadetje* refers to a religious-historical fact: the miracle and canonization of Bernadette Soubirous, but nowhere does the anecdote become the main issue of the play, although the mechanism scapegoat-sacrifice-sacralization is examined in the play at the level of form and content. In the final scenes the miracle is accomplished and the characters levitate, the figures from the chronicle become saints. Kelly sings her way up to heaven via a soundmix act to 'Eternal Flame' by the Bangles while Pascaline's little daughter Francesca sings along while looking pathetically at her mother. At the end the little daughter herself becomes a 'Bernadetje' and stands centre-stage as a saintly apparition while the bumper cars go past. The miracle has been accomplished. Curtain. Or no curtain. The play returns to reality and ends with a rather banal scene: Pascaline is hungry and wants to go and eat something, she wants to buy a dog for her little daughter. Through the slowed down movement of the bumper cars the play remains caught in a world of magic and hieroglyphs in order finally to return to the level of reality.

In spite of all, that level of reality remains extremely important: Sierens writes his texts for and about a community. You notice this in the adapted social narrative. Sierens, similarly to Boon,

calls himself a writer of chronicles. The material is 'genuine', but it does not always tally, it is not historically correct, because Boon and Sierens both try to name the nameless: the forgotten history that is not contained in pictures and writing; 'what is not written down in books'. Yet in *Bernadetje* and other plays Sierens does not disdain clichés from mass culture and popular culture: Madonna, Michael Jackson, the Bangles, Prince, Joe Meek... They are capitalist icons, but time and again icons of the lowest levels of society. For Sierens they are critical icons: 'they express a positive dream of independence and in no way resemble the soaps and bourgeois icons. Through these icons little people try to realize their own escape routes and dreams. They are victims who from their position as a lower caste suddenly want to control everything. For these people Prince and Madonna are victims who have become heroes. During the playbacks Kelly experiences her personal heroism by imitating her idols. "Eternal Flame" is a ritual burning. To be subsumed in something else. Levitation, as pop idols again and again make the leap from realism to the hieroglyph. They levitate and also awaken the dream in us to levitate.'³⁴ The point of departure in the reality of such a playback scene is always the victim who tries to overcome his own traumas, who tries to survive and goes in search of a rebel culture in mass culture.

This hankering of the outcast who plays back songs is also part of the working method that Sierens adopted after the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie, i.e. working with young people. They are people who, while acting, process their own traumas. The professional actors often work with their own autobiographical material too. The anecdotes collected during the rehearsal process are translated into poetry, gestures and metaphors. Sierens' and Platel's working method, i.e. the transformation of personal material and the 'samples' of the actors and makers, resembles Kantor's when he says: 'These are not actors who play Hamlet or Macbeth. They can play no other roles than those in this play. Each actor has an individuality. I make use of this.'³⁵ The personal histories of the makers are ultimately brought together in a collective chronicle. In *Bernadetje* Sierens goes a step further in his personal journey, in that he tries to reconcile the freedom of the narrative with the purely physical: the beauty of actors who fight, fall, stand up, dance, etc. 'How can I bring Dario Fo and Pina Bausch together?'³⁶ An important moment is

the fighting or war scene in *Bernadetje* in which Angelo and Yves and the others start fighting one another: here words no longer help, the scene is brought to an end with a shot from Jackie's revolver that kills the rat. In his first direction for years of one of his own plays, *Mijn Blackie*, Sierens was to radicalize even more the investigation into the connection between narratives and physical scores, in the direction of an autonomous physical event.

In productions like *Moeder & Kind* or *Bernadetje* the core that for him was the main thing in operas and epic texts remains intact: simultaneity and narration. The many simultaneous themes and narrative lines are held together in Sierens' recent work in an archetypal framework: in *Moeder & Kind* this is the family situation, in *Bernadetje* it is the bumper car tent that briefly brings all kinds of shadowy figures together as a family without kinship, in *Mijn Blackie* the grey fence and the dog on a chain out in the country. The basis remains profoundly human epic material, a series of narratives of and about people who are removed from reality in a hyperformalistic form, in order, in the form of a ritual via dance, music and celebration, to return to reality via the moment of performance. While with the ritual framework the narrative structure is exploded, Sierens nevertheless continues to work with epic-narrative elements: the poignant narratives of the characters (e.g. Angelo, Kelly, Jackie) are shown on the stage via small scraps of dialogue, via their behaviour, their act (dance and music), their concrete interaction on the stage and above all via suggestion. The action of *Bernadetje* is permeated by epic and simultaneous elements.

The world of Sierens' and Platel's productions seems to be expanding all the time. *Moeder & Kind* was set in a living room, *Bernadetje* took place in a bumper car tent at the fair and for *Allemaal Indiaan* the set was two houses in a working-class district. On these sets, children, young people and parents cross one another's paths. The family or the lack of one: that is the archetype around which the narratives are constructed. The whole emotional world is poured into that family. It takes some time before the spectator knows exactly what the relationships are. Different narrative lines are woven together in an almost musical manner. The audience are immersed in this chaos and swept off their feet by the abundance of what they see and hear. *Allemaal Indiaan* (1999) has become the most 'realistic' of the three plays.

On stage there are two homes in a working-class district constructed life-size with a small passage in the middle. The spectator looks in from outside. When the characters are at home, he sees them partly through the window, but he does not hear them. The spectator must constantly choose where he looks, as on a single afternoon countless dramas take place. Small and large, important and unimportant, tragic and comic events intersect one another and take place at the same time: racist remarks, an unsuccessful suicide attempt, a dream future in America, a mother in a psychiatric institution, fear of a mentally handicapped boy, but also music, solicitude, being in love... . Arne Sierens: 'What I want to show in my plays are not slices of life. No, *c'est toute la vie*.' Or as choreographer Alain Platel put it: 'The performance in itself is a form of hysteria, an exalted state, a concentrate of one and a half hours in which you try to show everything. But at the same time you try to stuff the whole world into one work of art.' The 'voyeurism' Sierens and Platel imposed on the audience in this 'realistic' production also provoked critical reactions: 'What disturbs me most in *Allemaal Indiaan* is the gratuitous reproduction of a handful of stereotypical ideas about "working-class life". Their apparent veracity is fake: it is based on the recognition of images, established among other things via TV soaps, of the life of uneducated workers, down-and-outs and other members of the underclass.'³⁷ The sensitivity to the daily life, longings and survival strategies of the working class is unmistakable, but they are never glorified in a naive way. In this production too the constantly lurking clichés are broken up by fragments of music and a physical theatre language that assumes the force of a ritual act. Theatrical vitality and the depiction of an abrasive existence go hand in hand here too.

If he worked in the first epic plays very intensively around what is not shown (characters who never appear on stage, events that have happened off stage, the traumatic past), now he was to place much more emphasis on the magic and suggestive dimension of what is in fact shown. The bumper car tent is the framework within which the world is shown. The booth is stripped of glitter and of its anecdotal context, i.e. the funfair, and becomes a diluted, stripped down readymade. Hyper-realistic, but also ready to become a metaphor. '... when the cars are not moving, they have to remain at the side, so that it can also be something other than a fairground, a square, a city, a motorway, a labyrinth

... but also a temple, a church, a sacred place.'³⁸ The same dilution process takes place with the other elements in the play too: the autobiographical material of the actors, the film material, the music ... everything is sampled in such a way that sparks fly between the different components. That is what Sierens understands by the action fact, the magnetic effect of a play on the audience. This action fact can be present in the epic narratives (*De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel*), in the dialogues (*De drummleraar*) and in physical theatre (*Moeder & Kind*, *Bernadetje*). After *Bernadetje* Sierens was to shift the accent temporarily to epic narrative (*Napels*) and to dialogue (*De broers Geboers*), then with *Mijn Blackie* he returned to physical-action theatre.

A new artistic alliance

In 1995 a new artistic alliance was forged: Arne Sierens and Johan Dehollander (ex-Blauwe Maandag Compagnie) decided to work together with Stef Ampe (ex-Beursschouwburg) in the Nieuwpoorttheater in Ghent. The new three-man team immediately provided an evening programme in this arts centre. Katelijne Damen acted there among other things in *Wie ... een vreemde* (Who ... a stranger), directed by Arne Sierens and Johan Dehollander, a text sent to Louis Paul Boon by an anonymous author. It is a short, simple tale about a strange ballad singer, a beggar who goes from café to café.³⁹ The text links up with Sierens' first plays and shows an ill-fated slice of reality seen through the eyes of an outcast, not a god but a no-hoper... The point of departure, '*un document vrai*', and the search for present-day ways of narrating through acting, herald a new accent. This is also clear from the project set up by the Nieuwpoorttheater team, *Kuiperskaai*, in the 1997 Timefestival. In a sweeping public investigation the chronicle of this run-down port district is rewritten by the protagonists themselves: the owners and customers of bars and other local voices. In addition, a huge collection of interviews, stories, short films and photos was assembled: raw material, that also served as fuel for Sierens' and Dehollander's productions.

In 1997 the first production of the Sierens-Dehollander duo followed within the new context of the Nieuwpoorttheater: *Napels* (Naples). Initially the production was called *Dozen III/De*

Bedienden (Boxes II/The servants), a clear reference to *Dozen* (1993) which the two directed with the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie. The point of departure of that first production, i.e. that the texts were created from what arose during its making and from the input of the players – not a common method of work in repertory theatre – became the point of departure for the new form of collaboration. Furthermore, like *Dozen*, *Napels* is an investigation into what narration is on stage. The two creators (in their mutually interchangeable roles of author and director), together with the players, bring narrative material to the rehearsals: TV documentaries such as *De Assisientouristen* (The Assisi tourists) by Karel Martens or *Délits flagrants* by Raymond Depardon, film material, texts by Armando, Belcampo, Paul Auster, Luigi Malaparte, Carlo da Ponte, Woody Allen, Jules Renard, Jean Eustache, Norman Lewis, Françoise Sagan, Luis Buñuel, Primo Levi. The texts used, as in the case of *Dozen*, are sampled until a new whole is left, sometimes only one thought of the original remains in the new writing that emerges from the disconnected narratives. In turn the players perform their tale: the performance consists of an interaction of these narratives.

The tales are poured into the matrix of the apocalypse narrative with 'vedi Napoli e poi muori' as motto. They are nearly all last judgment and trial cases in heaven and on earth, or quite special moments in the life of the narrator. Yet little is judged, rather, the result is watched with great tension and fear. The framework is that of a contemporary mystery play: the text begins with the Gregorian *In paradisum* and is followed by a series of narratives on life and death, good and evil, saints and demons. After a number of life stories, among others on the threat of volcanic explosion and the worship of saints in Naples, an apocryphal tale about Peter and the beautiful breasts of Saint Agatha, about a woman's toilet in a Parisian café with a peephole at ankle height, about Lola's abortion, the play takes an apocalyptic turn and there follow a number of tales which take place in startling Kafkaesque locations. In succession the spectator is witness to an interrogation, the narrative of one Van Impe about angels and devils, a lament over burning Hamburg (or is it Iraq?), and in the last scene, 'The End of the End', a dialogue between Death, the Actress and Bunny, the rabbit philosopher. Magical-ritual passages alternate with folk narratives and recognizable passages in a familiar world suddenly turn into a very surprising situation.

Assisi tourists are suddenly acted out at an existential level and in the apparently banal tale of folk figures such as Van Impe, the apocalypse takes place.

Where *Dozen* consists of a montage of texts about fathers, mothers, love-lorn children, brothers and sisters, aunts and of cops and robbers and cowboys and Indians stories, and suchlike, the tales of *Napels* refer to time (the end of time) and place: Naples, Paris, Hamburg, battlefield, hell, etc. The places are not anecdotal, but allegorical. If one arrives in *Dozen* in a surprising situation (death, an interpreter) only at the end, *Napels* from the beginning exudes eeriness through its recognizable setting. The profoundly human material that is touched on by the actors, television (human interest) and the literary passages, is rewritten by Arne Sierens in *Napels*. The narratives are placed beside one another and made compatible. After a process of reduction and abstraction, whereby sometimes just a few fragments remain from the original, the texts are taken out of their original context, conventions and anecdote to become autonomous signs, readymades. This dilution has the effect that tales from apparently mutually exclusive traditions react on one another. Sparks fly between the tales. Through the mixing of the diluted fragments of reality new chemical processes are achieved. In *Napels* the mystery place is the testtube in which all the narrative elements are brought together. If all the anecdotal, picturesque and conventional is banished, the magic or the miracle can take place. In order to achieve this result, suggestion is very important. In *Napels* this is obtained by the constant shifting of space and time, by calling up a magical world which transcends judgment over good and evil and through the fact that the people being discussed, as in many of Sierens' plays, are not present. The signs are placed opposite one another with meticulous precision: the exalted style of the lament over the burning city exaggerates the contrast with the preceding folk tale of Van Impe. Yet the suggestive element in *Napels* sometimes turns into its opposite, if only because in no other Sierens play are the references to another time and world so explicit. Nowhere is the family so concentrated as in this play (in the middle there is a play called 'Pa & Ma'). It is far more a dispute in heaven or in a family of saints than a quarrel in a working-class family.

Dialogues and physical scores [*partituren*]

In *Napels* Sierens and Dehollander are caught in the magical moment and they do not return to the recognizable world of the audience. In *De broers Geboers* (Geboers & Co) the recognizability of the situation and the plot is an ever-present trap, all too easily fallen into.

In this play, written before production began, Sierens (apparently) chooses a rather classical external form: a play text in acts. Yet here too the form is not imitated, only quoted. Over the customary five acts the dramatic outcome has not been accomplished at all, and what is more: everything the characters are concerned with happens off-stage. Strangely enough, it is only in the additional sixth act that the facts occur which people are expecting in a tragedy, or in this case a melodrama. Furthermore, the terrible things do not take place on stage, but are narrated in a 'report' by the Grandmother: Marnix's retreat, Ivan and Andrei caught making love in the car, Andrei's jealous passion, Andrei's revenge (a firebomb), Ivan's murder attempt on Andrei, etc. The messenger comes, as in a tragedy, to bring a report on the war being waged outside. A great part of the external action of the play is contained in a purely epic fragment. The epic takes precedence in this play over the pseudo-connection supplied by the plot. Yet in *De broers Geboers* it is more difficult to keep the narrative and action apart. They seem to coincide in a language in which each spoken word means an action, speculative text is kept to an absolute minimum. The first words are as usual immediately to the point: 'Marnix: What nonsense are you up to here? Take that off. Right now. Silly bugger. Ivan (takes his wig off): It's not what you think.' Perhaps to prevent people reducing the sixth act too much to a melodramatic conclusion or an anecdotal structure, it was played in a surreal way. The young actress who had played the role of Grandmother throughout the play in a thin little voice assumed a very unnatural pose in order to narrate the messenger's report. Her voice sounded even stranger than before. That this is a very daring method of attacking the problem of realism in this play was made clear from allusions to 'slice of life' realism in the reviews. To this the author retorts: 'What I want to show in my plays are not "slices of life". No, it is the whole of life.'⁴⁰

Sierens obtained the material for his text partly through his discussions with members of the famous Bende van de Kat (Cat

Gang), a notorious motor bike gang from Ghent who in the fifties drove in V-formation along the Veldstraat. The leader of the gang, the Cat, hanged himself in prison. In *De broers Geboers* Sierens shows how social circumstances and traumas are passed on from generation to generation. The two brothers, Marnix and Ivan, struggle to survive through every disaster, but unavoidably fall into the patterns of the previous generation. As the play progresses, Marnix, the eldest brother, slips more and more into the role of the father, while Ivan literally assumes the role of the absent mother and also takes over her lover, Andrei. In the battle the brothers engage in in order to survive and in order not to find themselves again in the same determinism, they go from bad to worse. 'No. God dammit, Dad, we're bunglers. Why do we always get screwed? The Geboers always lose out.[...] They piss on you. You're nothing. A louse. The way they pronounced my name: GEBOERS MARNIX. MAAR-NIX. YOU ARE NIX!'

Yet the brothers keep desperately trying to escape their fate. During these survival feats they are transformed, become like all the important figures in the theatre of Sierens' saints, they levitate. The family trauma is passed on like a wound that never heals, but they do not go under as in tragedy, they resist and ward off painful events. Warding off is not wanting to go under, trying to stay upright. In the first plays chaos and the violence of the world is still divorced from the innocent little man, but here the Geboers are themselves in part the cause and the tragedy of their lot: 'The Geboers brothers are of course a gang of utter arseholes, but I'm like that too. They come from my reservation. It's my tribe. I have to live with it. What should I reproach them with? That they vote for the Vlaams Blok? They deserve to have their heads knocked together, but they don't understand the consequences of their own actions. And of course it goes wrong...'⁴¹

In contrast to the characters in *De drumleraar*, the Geboers brothers think they do have, or will have, the situation in hand and they go for it. They are survivors and they believe in what they are doing against all logic. They create a counter-time, the text evokes action-reaction. The play is teeming with 'brothers', who in their urge to survive, somehow to belong or to transform themselves, imitate or deviate from one another. The absent again define the ritual of imitative behaviour. Just as in many other of Sierens' plays (cf. *Mouchette*, *Moeder & Kind*), dressing

up is an important feature: Ivan puts on his mother's clothes. As in carnival, it is not at all a matter here of disguise in itself or of the tragic transmission of a family trauma, it is just as much a conjuring up of a tragic universe, of not wanting to go under. Just as in *De drumleraar*, the parents here have become children, and the children have to take over the parental tasks. As in so many of Arne Sierens' plays, the hierarchy of family relations has shifted. Even though things do not look very bright, the mimetic urge is innate in the genes and in the circumstances, the brothers' craving is ineradicable. In their striving for purity and in their idolization of models worthy of emulation, the Geboers brothers land up in the monstrous, wretched and ugly sides of the dual characters they want to become. They have something of the brothers Karamazov about them for a Flemish audience. In the play reflections and doubles occur, whereby the shadow figure of the one reproduces what is repressed in the other.

In spite of all the setbacks the Geboers brothers keep on fighting. The constant war they wage with themselves and others is constantly expressed in their language: 'Marnix: You're a washout. Ivan: Look who's talking. Who's just come out of the nick? Marnix: Who dropped out of school? You're a washout. A sodding washout.' The rowdiness and impulsive reactions follow one another in rapid succession. There is no question here of re-experiencing, as in *De drumleraar*, only of a powerful and violent physical narrative. It constantly clashes and goes at a fast pace, they outpace time. The physical force of plays like *Bernadetje* or *Moeder & Kind* is reflected here in the text as a verbal and reactive score.

If we line up Arne Sierens' plays, we see various sorts of forms, genres and energies cropping up which all form part of a colossal attempt to let people in all their rebelliousness survive, and a desire to tell this in a robust way. Sometimes the craving to survive and to banish one's traumas and surroundings actually runs from one of Sierens' plays into the other. From the last lines of *Bernadetje* it appears that Linda is going to buy a dog, at which Jackie warns: 'You'll forget to feed it, I'm telling you. With your bad character, it won't last a week, or the thing will hang himself on its own chain.' Dog – chain – wall, in *Mijn Blackie* the action centres around a dog hanging by a chain on a grey wall. The framework is set for a new play about a collection of old archetypes: a neglected dog, a concrete wall in the country and a boy

from the city (Matthieu) who after a time returns to his holiday village and meets his old friends there: his ex-lover, the baker and the dog. For the first time in eight years Sierens directed alone. He created a physical score with a lot of action and relatively little dialogue. The centre of the play is a wild orgy which takes place almost completely behind a wall. The audience only get to see snatches of the birthday party through everything that takes place in front of and on the wall: knife-fights, wall-diving, the lovers who make themselves scarce, quarrels, an erotic group dance, etc. Where Sierens in his plays takes suggestion to great lengths by not showing the object of the narratives in his tales or dialogues, he now applies the technique to the physical theatre of *Mijn Blackie*: he suggests what happens behind the wall. The central section, the baker's birthday party, is an eruption of physical force and explosions. Before this, there is a section consisting of laboriously expressed and clumsily formulated dialogues in which Matthieu is welcomed. The least eloquent are precisely those characters who knew him beforehand. They know, but say nothing. The others, just like the audience, are curious to get to know more. This very suggestive construction and the explosive central section are a necessary condition to maximize the effect of the third part as regards atmosphere (the hangover after the party) and suggestion. In the third part Sierens achieves a filmic fusion between text and physical elements.

The main difference from a play like *Bernadetje* is that the chaos is kept within limits. The young world of the amateur actors, who in *Bernadetje* were in the majority and helped to define the rave rhythm, is tempered here by professional actors, who contribute their own autobiography. The team in *Bernadetje* consisted of 2 professional actors and 9 young people, whereas in *Mijn Blackie* there were 5 professional actors and 5 amateurs.

The clamorous ambiance of the scene 'Do the Bernadette' in *Bernadetje* is transformed into enormous calm and quiet in the third part of *Mijn Blackie*. The gestures, words and movements are slowed down to actions 'after the catastrophe', as in a memory full of melancholy, quiet violence and hangover.

By way of conclusion

Over the years Sierens has come to need less and less language to tell his tales. His plays have to a high degree become physical texts which in some cases scarcely need text at all to exercise a strong action effect on the audience. The best examples are the action scenes in *Moeder & Kind* and *Bernadetje* or the birthday party in *Mijn Blackie*. All these scenes achieve optimum effect because they are still always assembled on the basis of a text/music alternation. Yet in these texts Sierens has given up classical narrative structure and replaced it with ritual elements.

However sparing and thin Sierens' use of language has become, it has taken on a steadily increasing action effect in the course of years and it echoes long in the memory. This comes partly from the gesticulatory power of the language, such as in the opening sentence of *Bernadetje*: 'In Morocco, they are not ordinary dogs there, they really bite'. Often Sierens takes a sentence that serves as raw material (in this case a scrap of dialogue from the rehearsal process), he strips the sentence of its anecdotal value and places it as a distilled text in a new context, through which the sentence can obtain a totally different meaning. The sentence also undergoes a formal transformation. By placing 'in Morocco' at the beginning, the filmic character is heightened: first comes a long-shot on the place (where is it taking place?), then follow the subject and predicate, finally the gesture (what?). The sentence has obtained a concrete verbal gesture parallel to the musical gesture: first a concrete sound impulse, then a little adagio under a clear image and then an explosion in an aggressive action (Morocco/desert/dogs). For Sierens it is not a matter of a vague lyrical idiom, but of a concrete image that explodes in language, an eruption of action. Words that at the same time cause action in language. The material is also at the same time conflictual, people see bumper cars and there is discussion of Morocco... The audience hear only the voice of Angelo; they do not see what they hear and do not hear what they see. That creates a tension and a desire for the narrative that follows. The sentences are often also profoundly human clichés that surprise and do their work in a convincing way: 'You never want to see me' from *Bernadetje* (Angelo on the telephone). They are all coarse signs, harsh sounds and vivid colours. For Sierens each sentence must stand alone and do its work. What precedes it or follows it to

make the narrative complete does not interest him. More and more in Sierens' work, the dialogues and texts function as rhythmic and musical patterns. In *De drumleraar* and *De broers Geboers* rhythm has become an important element of composition.

Gradually the sampling-technique has also become an important component of Sierens' work. Out of the material he has collected, which he invariably adds to that of the actors, can be deduced who his idols are: Pasolini, Fellini, Kanevski, Bresson, Cassavetes, Lanzmann, Pertz, Scorsese, etc. In one text, dozens of other texts, films, photo albums, etc are processed. That material is subsequently made compatible with the personal material of the players. As the years have gone by, the creative chaos and the complexity in Sierens' working method has increased. Although he has always written from the basis of a theatre practice and even directed himself in the beginning, over the years he has become less and less a theatre author and more and more a theatre maker. The so-called improvisation dramas or collages (*Dozen* and *Napels*) and the action plays (*Moeder & Kind* and *Bernadetje*) are good examples of this.

The working form and the context in which Sierens works has also fundamentally changed. It is now quite obvious that what should have been a high point, i.e. Sierens' admission into the *Blauwe Maandag Compagnie*, proved a damp squib. In order to be able to comply with the demands and choice of repertoire of such a company, Sierens is perhaps too much an autobiographical author; he wants to keep complete control over his texts. For such a person it is not easy to create a fruitful framework. This context he has now found temporarily with Johan Dehollander in the *Nieuwpoorttheater* arts centre. Furthermore, he is trying to collaborate with the *Nieuwpoorttheater* and Stef Ampe in larger contexts (e.g. the collaboration with HETPALEIS for *Mijn Blackie*).

The hip productions from the 1990s are models of an alchemy between contemporary youth culture, classical music and mass culture of the 1970s and 1980s. With this tendency, the sacral-religious and poetic dimension is also increasing in Sierens' work. His plays remain at the same time very political too because they undermine the process of image-making in the mass media itself and because they are about little people, victims who keep hoping. Attempts to add their own history to the great History. 'The

walking. The stopping. Falling. Staggering to his feet. Walking on. Stopping. Walking' (Paola in *De drumleraar*). Exercises in survival.

In an article for *Etcetera* his urge to transform is described as follows: 'His plays do not present a slice of reality, they constantly transcend it. What arises is drawn-out metaphor, that never loses its link with the banal.'⁴²

In this way Sierens' theatre remains a theatre of poverty in both meanings of the word: sensitive to the world of his working-class figures and their survival strategies and at the same time searching for a theatrical expression that stands in the sign of distilled images and words strung together in ever new clusters.

1. Lampo, Jan. 'Hic Sunt Leones of de Gigantische Schoonheid – Arne Sierens over Boste, in *De Standaard*, 7 February 1992.
2. T'Jonck, Pieter. 'Het rauwe realisme van Arne Sierens en Alain Platel', in: *Etcetera*, vol. 16, no.65, 1997, pp. 21-3.
3. Ibid.
4. Piryns, Piet. 'Scharrelen als de kippen', in: *Knack*, 15 March 1998.
5. Pélégri, Jean. 'Robert Bresson ou la fascination, 1960', in: *Robert Bresson, éloge*, Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1997, pp. 38-9.
6. Arne Sierens, in a communication to the authors.
7. MVG, 'Kunst met een grote K? Bullshit!', in: *Het Nieuwsblad*, 6 December 1994.
8. Arne Sierens in conversation with Gommer Van Roussel, published in the Nov./Dec. 1991 magazine of the Blauwe Maandag Compagnie.
9. Schrader, Paul. *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1988, p. 11.
10. Ibid.
11. Richie, Donald, *Japanese Movies*, Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1961, p. 359.
12. Schrader, op. cit., p. 19.
13. Jans, Erwin. 'Over Bernadetje, gestus en hierogliefen', in: Geert Opsomer en Marianne Van Kerkhoven, *Van Brecht tot Bernadetje*, Brussels: Vlaams Theater Instituut, 1998, pp. 31-3.
14. Lampo, op. cit.
15. Kantor, Tadeusz. 'Redden van de vergetelheid (1988), in: *Het circus van de dood*, Amsterdam: International Theatre & Film Books, 1991, p. 162.
16. Gerrits, Jan Peter. 'De toeschouwer maakt het drama: de anti-cerebrale stukken van Arne Sierens', in *Toneel Theatraal*, vol. 115, no. 5, May 1994, p. 37.
17. Six, Fred. 'Arne Sierens en het "Theater van de Armoede"', in: *Ons Erfdeel*, Nov.-Dec., 1990.
18. Bauwens, Daan. 'De eenzaamheid van een Einzelgänger', in: *Etcetera*, vol. 2, no. 5, January 1984.
19. Ibid.
20. Arne Sierens in a communication to the authors.
21. Arne Sierens in a communication to the authors.
22. 'Ozu on Ozu: the talkies', *Cinema* 6, no. 1, p. 5.
23. Ayre, Amédée. 'The universe of Robert Bresson', in Cameron, Jan (ed.). *The Films of Robert Bresson*, London: Studio Vista, 1969.
24. Schrader, op. cit., p. 63.
25. Mallems, Alex. 'Tadeusz Kantor: "Ik zeg het ronduit. Mijn ambitie is het publiek te doen wenen"', in: *Etcetera*, vol. 3, no. 9, January 1985, p. 26.
26. Arne Sierens in a communication to the authors.
27. Jans, Erwin. 'Arne Sierens, Gent en de wereld', in: *Etcetera*, vol. 10, no. 37, 1992, p.35.
28. Arne Sierens quoted by Gerrits, op. cit., p. 37.
29. Arne Sierens quoted by Van Ganzbeke, Wim. 'Je zou moeten horen, wat er niet gezegd wordt: BMCie creert "De drumleraar" van Arne Sierens', in: *De Morgen*, 22 February 1994.
30. Arne Sierens in a communication to the authors.
31. Kantor, Tadeusz. 'De kunst van het acteren', op. cit., p. 86.
32. De Boose, Johan. 'Ontmoeting met de Picasso van het theater: Tadeusz Kantor, anartiest', in: *Etcetera*, vol. 5, no. 18, June 1987.

33. In *Le diable probablement* there is a very beautiful obscurely lit scene in which the protagonist is lying asleep in a church. He takes his leave of the world which has nothing to offer him and has taken the decision to commit suicide. Ultimately he is discovered. The music is by Monteverdi, *Ego dormio*.
34. Arne Sierens in a communication to the authors.
35. Opsomer, Geert. 'Van Brecht tot Bernadetje. Kroniek, tekst en representatie in de jaren '90', in: Geert Opsomer and Marianne Van Kerkhoven, *Van Brecht tot Bernadetje*, Brussels: Vlaams Theater Instituut, 1998.
36. Piryns, op. cit.
37. Rudi Laermans, 'Kritiek als lange mars door de taal', in: *Etcetera*, vol. 71, March 2000, p. 68.
38. De Smet, Zoe, 'Bernadetje en de dansende botsauto's', in: *Blaazuit*, 2 October 1996.
39. Nieuwpoort and Victoria, November-December 1995, pp. 40-3.
40. Arne Sierens in a communication to the authors.
41. Piryns, op. cit.
42. Op De Beeck, Griet. 'k Moest alleen JA zeggen', in: *Etcetera*, vol. 15, no. 61, 1997, pp. 52-54.

THEATRICAL HISTORY

You will find here, chronological order, the title of the production, the name of the author (in brackets), the name of the director, the choreographer, the set designer, the costume designer, the lighting designer, the composer, the conductor, the actors and/or dancers, the date of the premiere, the company, the venue of the premiere.

1981

graduation project RITS

Avonduur in de late herfst (Friedrich Dürrenmatt). Direction: Arne Sierens. Actors: Daan Van den Durpel, Mark Coessens, Elisabeth Van Dooren, Erna Palsterman. 3 June (single performance). / *Slaapkameratleet* (freely adapted from Courteline). Adaptation: Arne Sierens and Rudi Van Den Daele. Direction and costumes: Arne Sierens. Sets: Willy Van Sompel. Actors: Moniek De Beun, Rudy Van Den Daele. 16 December. Vertikaal. Theater Vertikaal, Ghent.

1982

De Ruiters/De Zee (from J.M.Synge). Translation, adaptation and direction: Arne Sierens. Sets and costumes: Bert Vervae. Music: Walter Verschaeren. Actors: Rita Baert, Geertrui Daem, Jan Leroy, Ann Bellemans, Guy Hostie et.al.. April. De Sluipende Armoede. Theater Arena, Ghent. / *Het 'Vermoeden'* (Arne Sierens). Direction and sets: Arne Sierens. Co-Direction: Jan Leroy. De Melomanen, by order of de Vrienden van Dachau. / *Stella* (from J.W. von Goethe). Translation and adaptation: Lieven Tavernier. Direction: Arne Sierens. Sets and costumes: Bert Vervae. Music: Walter Verschaeren. Actors: Rita Baert, Lydia Billiet, Marijke De Bisschop, Freya Ligtenberg, Bert Van Tichelen. 6 October. Vertikaal. Theater Vertikaal, Ghent.

1983

Rode Oogst. (Arne Sierens from *Arden of Faversham* – based on improvisation). Direction: Arne Sierens. Sets: Bert Vervae. Music: Johan De Smet. Actors: Rita Baert, Ann Bellemans, Monique De Beun, An Decaestecker, Guy Hostie, Jan Moors, Peter Rodrigues. 6 March, De Sluipende Armoede in collaboration with Vooruit. Vooruit, Ghent. / *Rode Oogst-second version* (Arne Sierens). Direction: Arne Sierens. Sets: Bert Vervae. Music: Johan De Smet. Puppets: Erik De Volder. Actors: Rita Baert, Dirk Celis, Monique De Beun, Luc De Wit, Jan Leroy, Suzanne Visser. 7 October. De Sluipende Armoede. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent.

1984

Het Rattenkasteel (libretto Arne Sierens – an opera adapted from Marc Sleen's Nero comic book of the same name). Direction: Arne Sierens. Music: Johan De Smet. Sets: Bert Vervaeet. Costumes and masks: Erik De Volder. Lighting: Geert Hinnaert. Conductor: Vincent D'Hondt. Singers: Martien Decraene (Blanche), Lieven Deroo (Van Zwam), Guido Naessens (Ratsjenko), Marc Van Malderen (Nero). Actors: André Simon (Tito the dog), Jan Leroy (the horse), Ann Bellemans, Greet Devos, Luc De Wit, Brigitte Louveaux, Dirk Opstaele (the rats). With 14 musicians. 14 July. De Sluipende Armoede. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent.

1985

De reis naar het donkere kontinent (Arne Sierens – based on improvisation). Direction: Arne Sierens. Sets: Bert Vervaeet. Costumes: Frank Quadflieg. Actors: Marc Lemmens (Bruno), Caroline Vanderlinden (Marie), Floor Huygen (Virgenie and La Duchesse d'Egypte), André Simon (the uncle), Lucienne Schaut (Amalia and Achmed). 3 Oktober. De Sluipende Armoede. Vooruit, Ghent.

1986

Genoveva (Arne Sierens in collaboration with Luc Devos and Marc Holthof – a spoken opera). Direction: Arne Sierens. Music: Johan De Smet. Sets: Bert Vervaeet. Costumes: Greet Devos and Jenny Marien. Conductor: Vincent D'Hondt. Actors: Jappe Claes (Golo), Jo Decaluwé (Siegfried), Carmen Jonckheere (Genoveva), Martine Jonckheere (the washerwoman and soldier Droste), Bart Van Avermaet (Drago and clerk of the court), Tony Van Eeghem (soldier), Mark Verstraete (soldier Hondskloot). With 3 musicians. 16 January. Arca. Arca, Ghent. / *De Soldaat-facteur en Rachel* (Arne Sierens). Direction: Arne Sierens. Co-direction: Jan Leroy. Sets and costumes: Erik De Volder. Actors: Arne Sierens (Louis), Gert Portael/Geertrui Daem (Rachel). October. De Sluipende Armoede. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent. **Awarded the theatre prize of the Flemish Provinces (1989).**

1987

Het Vermoeden (Arne Sierens). Direction: Jan Leroy. Sets: Arne Sierens. Costumes: Arne Sierens. Lighting: Jan Leroy. Actors: Rita Baert (mother), Ben Hemerijckx (son), Jos Van Geel (father), 12 April, 1987, Theater De Korre, De Korrekelder, Bruges.

1988

De liefde voor de 3 manen (libretto Arne Sierens – a comic space opera, freely adapted from *L'amore delle tre melarance* of Carlo Gozzi). Direction: Arne Sierens. Music: Johan De Smet. Sets: Willy Van Sompel. Lighting: Stef Viaene. Costumes: Tine Claeyns. Conductor: Hans Rotman.

Singers: Marc Van Malderen (Star Moderne), Guido Naessens (Commodore Rolex and Yuri Gagarin and the Mass), John Dur (Captain Douglace, the Distance), Annemie Rogiest (Fatima, Creonta), Johan Van Keirsbilck (crew, the admiral, the Energy), Kris De Becker (crew, the Time), Miet Bolssens (Noix de Coco) and Hilde Geirnaert (Pluto-correction-Plato). With 10 musicians. 16 april. De Sluipende Armoede. Vooruit, Gent. / *Los Muertitos/Onze Lieve Doden* (Arne Sierens). Direction: Arne Sierens and Jan Leroy. Sets: Stef Viane and Toon Pauwels. Costumes: Tine Claeyns. Lighting: Stef Viane. Actors: Gert Portael (Natalia Sedowa), Bart Van Avermaet, Wouter Van Lierde, Mark Verstraete (the Mexicans). 18 November. De Korre. De Biekorf, Bruges.

1989

Je pleure des bananes (libretto Arne Sierens – an opera adapted from 'De reis naar het donkere kontinent'). Music: Johan De Smet. Direction: Sam Bogaerts. Sets: Willy Van Sompel. Conductor: Hans Rotman. Singers: Romain Bisschof (Bruno) and Henk Lauwers (the uncle), Irene Maessen (Virgenie and Madame la Duchesse), Maja Schermerhorn (Amelia and Achmed), Rolande Van der Paal (Marie). With 6 musicians. 26 September 1989. De Sluipende Armoede. Kunstencentrum Vooruit. Sinfonia Amsterdam. Vooruit, Ghent.

1990

Mouchette (Arne Sierens). Director: Johan Dehollander. Sets: Herman De Roover. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Yvan Pype. Actors: Mark Verstraete (Arsène), Goele Derick (Colette). 23 March. Oud Huis Stekelbees. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent. **Awarded the Nederlands-Vlaamse Toneelschrijfprijs (1990) and the SABAM-prize (1992). Winner of third prize of the Europese Toneelschrijfprijs (1991).**

1992

Colette (Arne Sierens. Original title: *Mouchette*. Translation: Jean Louvet). Director: Johan Dehollander. Sets: Herman De Roover. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Yvan Puype. Actors: Goele Derick (Colette), Mark Verstraete (Arsène). 3 February 1992. Théâtre de la Balsamine, Brussels. Oud Huis Stekelbees. / *Boste* (Arne Sierens). Direction: Luk Perceval and Johan Dehollander. Sets: Johan Dehollander. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Kees Van de Lagemaat. Actors: Michel Van Dousselaere (Richard), Jacob Beks (Boste), Stany Crets (Orfeo), Els Dottermans (Zoë), Ilse Uitterlinden (Madame Nowee), Vic De Wachter (Toni), Gilda De Bal (Rosita, the redhead). 6 February. Blauwe Maandag Compagnie. Vooruit, Ghent. **Awarded the triennial prize of the Vlaamse Gemeenschap voor Toneelletterkunde (1992).** / *Ambetango* (Arne Sierens). Compilation of the song cycle Edith and Henry, Pillen Plons, Bye Bye Anita and Ambetango. Music: Johan

De Smet. In a different compilation performed at Nieuwpoorttheater. (Director: Sam Bogaerts. Sets: Willy Van Sompel (1991)), at Vooruit – Grote Zaal (Director: Sam Bogaerts. Sets: Willy Van Sompel (1992) and Vooruit – Domzaal (Direction: Arne Sierens. Sets: Willy Van Sompel (1993) and Vooruit – Domzaal. With 3 singers and 4 musicians. Operachi in collaboration with Vooruit./ *Kaïet Kaïet* (Arne Sierens – based on improvisation). Director: Arne Sierens and Paul Carpentier. Choreography: Piet Rogie. Sets: Willy Van Sompel. Costumes: Lot Lemn. Lighting: Marc Claeyns. Actors: Helen Suyderhoud (Maria and Ka'tinka), Vera Puts (Imelda), Alexander Van Bergen (Orlando), Wim Van den Driessche (Sa'ied). 22 May. Eva Bal Speeltheater. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent.

1993

Dozen (Arne Sierens – based on improvisation and collage). Director: Johan Dehollander and Arne Sierens. Sets: Johan Dehollander. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Actors: Gilda De Bal, Stany Crets, Els Dottermans, Peter Van den Begin, Ilse Uitterlinden. 4 June. Blauwe Maandag Compagnie. Vooruit, Ghent.

1994

De drumleraar (Arne Sierens). Director and sets: Johan Dehollander. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Keest Van De Lagemaat. Actors: Gilda De Bal (Paola), Lucas Van Den Eynde (Raymond). 2 March. Blauwe Maandag Compagnie. Vooruit, Ghent. / *Juffrouw Tania* (Arne Sierens). Redaction, Direction and sets: Johan Dehollander. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Kees Van De Lagemaat. Actors: Vic De Wachter (Philip), Els Dottermans (Tania), Mark Verstraete (the colonel). 6 April. Blauwe Maandag Compagnie. Vooruit, Ghent.

1995

Moeder & Kind (Arne Sierens). Concept and direction: Arne Sierens and Alain Platel. Sets: Pol Heyvaert. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Wim Clapdorp and Piet Depoortere. Actors: Lies Pauwels (Linda), Helmut Van Den Meersschaut (Etienne), Mohamed Benaouisse (Ben), Gert Portael (Francine), Frederik Debrock/Mout Uyttersprot (Jean-François), Ian Mattan/Thomas Daenen (Filipke), Thomas Allegaert/ Simon Daenen (Ricky), Romy Bollion/Angelique Vanderhaeghen (Vanessaatje). 23 March. Victoria. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent. Selected for the Theaterfestival 1995, awarded the Hans Snoeck prize and the Masque de la Production Etrangère de l'Année 1996 Québec. / *Wie...een vreemde* (anonymous). Adaptation: Arne Sierens. Director: Johan Dehollander. Actor: Katelijne Damen. 9 December. Nieuwpoorttheater. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent.

1996

Bernadetje (Arne Sierens). Concept and direction: Arne Sierens and Alain Platel. Sets: Pol Heyvaert. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Philippe Digneffe. DJ: Timme Afschrift. Actors: Lies Pauwels (Pascaline), Dirk Pauwels (Jackie), An Pierlé (Kelly), Frederik Debrock (Yves), Magdalena Przybylek (Tamara), Titus Devoogdt (Ratte), Charlies Martens (Gino), Hakim Boulyou/Simon Dhanens (Angelo), Anna Buyssens/Laura Neyskens (Franceska), Seline De Cloet/Hannelore Vanheerswyngheles (Cocquyt), Melanie Nunes/Nejla Yilmaz (Jessica). 3 October. Victoria. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent. Selected for the Theaterfestival 1997.

1997

Napels (Arne Sierens) – based on improvisation and collage). Direction: Johan Dehollander and Arne Sierens. Sets: Pol Heyvaert. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Rudy D'Hondt and Johan Dehollander. Actors: Goele Derick, Koen De Sutter, An Miller, Karlijn Sillegem, Bart Voet. 14 May. Nieuwpoorttheater. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent. / *De soldaat-facteur en Rachel* (Arne Sierens). Direction: Koen De Sutter. Sets: Frans De Meyer. Costumes: Sabina Kumeling. Lighting: Jan Van Hove. Actors: Marijke Pinoy (Rachel), Jan Steen (Soldaat-facteur). 12 August 1997. Theater Zuidpool. Rubenshuis, Antwerp.

1998

De broers Geboers (Arne Sierens). Direction: Johan Dehollander. Sets: Guido Vrolix. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Harry Cole. Actors: Jakob Beks (Noël), Didier De Neck (Andrei), An Miller (Mémé), Wim Opbrouck (Marnix), Wim Willaert (Ivan). 14 May. Nieuwpoorttheater and Theater Zuidpool. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent. / *Mijn Blackie* (Arne Sierens – based on improvisation). Direction: Arne Sierens. Sets: Guido Vrolix. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Harry Cole. DJ: Timme Afschrift. Actors: Frederik Debrock (Matthieu), Thomas Dhanens (Patrickke), Johan Dehollander (Sylveer), Titus De Voogdt (Nico), Charlie Martens (Jean-Marie), Johan Heldenbergh (Daniël), Victor Peeters (Jos), Benjamin Verdonck (Marcel), Ann Miller (Mieke), An Verstraeten (Tantanna), Ran van de Leentjeshoeve (Blackie). 27 November. HETPALEIS in collaboration with Nieuwpoorttheater. Electrabel, Borgerhout.

1999

De drumleraar (Arne Sierens, revised version). Direction: Koen De Sutter. Sets and costumes: Sabina Kumeling. Lighting: Jan Van Hove. Music: Thou. Actors: Marijke Pinoy (Paola), Jan Steen (Raymond). 15 September 1999. Theater Zuidpool. Theater Zuidpool, Antwerp. / *Allemaal Indiaan* (Arne Sierens). Concept and direction: Arne Sierens and Alain

Platel. Sets: Karina Lambert. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Harry Cole. Actors: Thomas Allegaert (Joeri), Hakim Boulyou (Xavier), Frederik Debrock (Steve), Simon Dhanens (Xavier), Marie Gyselbrechts (Elleke), Johan Heldenbergh (Franky), Margot Neyskens (Elleke), Natasha Nicora (Kosovo), Lies Pauwels (Mireille), Arend Pinoy (Arno), Clara Van den Broek (Cri-Cri), Vanessa Van Durme (Tosca), Sara Van Kerschaever (Nancy), Nick Van Vlaenderen (Davy), Hanne Vandersteene (Kim), Jelle Vandersteene (Joeri), Lotte Vandersteene (Kim). 17 November 1999. Les Ballets C. de la B. and Victoria. Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent. Selected for the Theaterfestival 2000 and the Océ Podium Prize 2000.

2001

Niet alle Marokkanen zijn dieven (Arne Sierens). Concept and direction: Arne Sierens. Sets: Guido Vrolix. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Harry Cole. Actors: Zouzou Ben Chikha (Habib), Didier De Neck (coach Ramon), Johan Dehollander (brigadier Roland), Aciha Lamarti (Assia), Ini Massez (Cynthia), An Miller (Bambi), Dahlia Pessemiers (Fadilah), Mourade Zeguendi (Jamaal). 21 February 2001. HETPALEIS and DAS Theater. Electrabel Gebouw, Borgerhout. / *Les frères Robert* (Arne Sierens. Original title *De Broers Geboers*, translation Monique Nagielkopf). Direction: Johan Dehollander. Assistant: Didier De Neck. Sets: Guido Vrolix. Costumes: Lieve Pynoo. Lighting: Harry Cole. Actors: Bertrand Ducher (Marnix), Hervé Guilloteau (Yvan), Yvan Lapous (father), Marilyn Leray (Mémé), Nicolas Sansier (Russian). 8 October 2001. DAS Theater and Le Lieu Unique, Nantes.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archive material

Vlaams Theater Instituut, Brussels. Private archives of Arne Sierens

Books

- Kantor, Tadeusz. *Het circus van de dood*. Amsterdam: International Theatre & Film Books, 1991. (Edited and translated by Johan De Boose).
- Opsomer, Geert and Marianne Van Kerkhoven, (ed.). *Van Brecht tot Bernadetje: Wat maakt theater en dramaturgie politiek in onze tijd?* Brussels: Vlaams Theater Instituut, 1998.
- Pélégrin, Jean. *Robert Bresson, éloge*. Paris: Cinématique française, 1997.
- Schrader, Paul. *Transcendental style in film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.
- Willet, John. *Casper Neber: Brecht's designer*. London: Methuen, 1986.

Articles on Arne Sierens work

- Adolphe, Jean-Marc, 'Documentaristes de notre temps. Alain Platel/ Arne Sierens', *Mouvement*, April-June, 2000: 46-49.
- Bastogy, Gilles, 'Du réel comme métaphore de la réalité', *Cassandra* (2000), n° 36/37: 28-29.
- Battisti, Rosella, 'La vita è un giro sull'autoscontro Platel e l'umanità da luna-park. Al Vascello arriva stasera lo spettacolo fiammingo "Bernadetje"', *L'Unità's*, 21.03.1998.
- Battisti, Rosella, 'Ladri e sbadati sull'autoscontro. Con "Bernadetje" va in scena il kitsch', *L'Unità's*, 13.07.1997.
- Bouffieux, Paula, "'En Flandre, on n'a pas de passé théâtral, on n'a pas d'héritage...'", Entretien avec Alain Platel et Arne Sierens', *Scènes*, June 2000: 62-66.
- Bourcier, Jean-Pierre, 'Des Indiens dan un jardin de délices', *La Tribune*, 23.05.2000.
- Bouteillet, Maïa, 'Chaos, ghetto, techno: portrait d'un quartier populaire par Alain Platel. Des "Indiens" dans la vie', *La Liberation*, 12.03.2000.
- Caigg, Christine, 'Kids and Pets: the Authentic in Contemporary Performance', *Performance Research* 2(1), Routledge, 1997: 34-36.

- Cesarale, Sandra, 'Il Luna Park dei miracoli', *Time Out Roma*, May 1998.
- Costantini, Emilia, Ragazzini di periferia. "I teologi ci accusano di essere blasfemi", *Corriere della Sera*, 22.03.1998.
- Cordelli, Franco, 'Bernadette? Si trova a Las Vegas. La storia della piccola veggente ambientata ai giorni nostri', *Corriere della Sera*, 27.03.1998.
- Dubach, Renate, 'Zuviel Realität – zuwenig Kunst', *Berliner Zeitung*, 05.07.1997.
- Fischer Eva-Elisabeth, 'Auf dem Planeten Sex. Mit dem Auto-Scooter zu neuen Ufern: Theater aus Belgien von Michael Laub und Alain Platel', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 08.07.1997.
- Gardner, Lyn, 'Fairground attraction', *The Guardian*, 30.09.1997.
- Hivernat, Pierre, 'Tribu urbaine', *Les Inrockuptibles*, 16.05.2000.
- Jans, Erwin, 'Continuously whirling vortexes. On the Flemish dramatic text', *Carnet*, 6 (1999), n°23: 3-11.
- Kessler, Marc, 'Realismus, Hektik und Gewalt auf der "Putschautobahn"', *Freiburger Nachrichten*, 03.07.1997.
- Kingston, Jeremy, 'Dance of the dodgems', *The Times*, 13.10.1997.
- Kühl, Christiane, 'Himmlische überholfahrt. "Bernadetje": rasante Eröffnung der "stage attacks" auf Kampnagel', *Die Tageszeitung*, 01.11.1997.
- Lison, Françoise, 'La scène de vif de victoria', *Le Courrier de L'Escaut*, 06.01.1998.
- Meier, Simon, 'Die Antisoap zum rohen Leben', *Theater Heute*, 41 (2000), n°10: 14-17.
- Raspoet, Diana, 'Crossing linguistic borders. Dutch-language drama abroad', *Carnet*, 6 (1999), n°23: 19-25.
- Schmitt, Olivier, 'La troupe belge Victoria révolutionne les canons du théâtre. Un poignée de très jeunes acteurs inventent une nouvelle forme de représentation', *Le Monde*, 09.03.1997.
- Six, Fred, 'L'oeuvre théâtrale d'Arne Sierens', *Septentrion, Revue De Culture Neerlandaise*, 20 (1991), n°3: 20-24.
- S.M., 'Compie vent'anni il Festival "Inteatro". L'elettronica si infila in scena', *Liberazione*, 13.07.1997.
- S.R., 'Le grand tamponnement', *L'Humanité*, 09.07.1997.
- Sourd, Patrick, 'Sur le sentier de la guerre', *Nova Magazine*, May 2000.
- Viesti, Nicola, 'Un microcosmo adolescenziale lungo un'aperta ista da autoscontro. Lo spettacolo belga "Bernadetje"', *Nuovo Corriere*, 13.07.1997.
- Wanzelius, Rainer, 'Selbst im größten Chaos gibt es eine Spur von Geborgenheit', *Rundschau*, 29.04.1996

Plays by Arne Sierens

- Het 'vermoeden'*. Antwerp: Dedalus, 1987.
- Rode Oogst*. 1983 (unpublished).
- Het rattenkasteel*. Ghent: De Sluipende Armoede, 1984.
- Massacre van de onschuldigen*. 1984 (unpublished).
- De reis naar het donkere kontinent*. 1985 (unpublished).
- Genoveva*. Ghent: Arca, 1986.
- De Soldaat-facteur en Rachel*. Antwerp: Dedalus, 1986.
- De liefde voor de drie manen*. Antwerp: Dedalus, 1988.
- Los Muertitos / Onze Lieve Doden*. Antwerp: Dedalus, 1988.
- Je pleure des bananes*. Ghent: De Sluipende Armoede, 1989.
- Mouchette*. Antwerp: Dedalus, 1990.
- Constant Pardon of Falstaff in Kongo*. 1991 (published in Arne Sierens: toneel).
- Kaiet Kaiet*. 1992 (unpublished)
- Boste*. Antwerpen: Dedalus, 1992.
- Dozen*. Gent: Blauwe Maandag Cie, 1993.
- De drumleraar*. Amsterdam: Atlas, 1994.
- Juffrouw Tania*. 1994 (published in Arne Sierens: toneel).
- Moeder & Kind*. Ghent: Victoria, 1995.
- Arne Sierens: toneel*. Amsterdam: International Theatre & Film Books, 1996. This compilation contains the following texts: *Het 'vermoeden'*, *De Soldaat-Facteur en Rachel*, *Los Muertitos / Onze Lieve Doden*, *Je pleure des bananes*, *Mouchette / Colette*, *Constant Pardon*, *Boste et De drumleraar*.
- Bernadetje*. Ghent: Victoria, 1996.
- Napels*. Ghent: Victoria, 1996.
- De broers Geboers*. Amsterdam: International Theatre & Film Books, 1998.
- Mijn Blackie*. Antwerp, Ghent: HETPALEIS – Nieuwpoorttheater, 1998.
- Allemaal Indiaan*. Ghent: Victoria, 1999.
- Sierens & Co*. Amsterdam: International Theatre and Film Books, 2000. This compilation contains the following texts: *Dozen*, *Juffrouw Tania*, *Moeder & Kind*, *Bernadetje*, *Napels*, *Mijn Blackie*, *Allemaal Indiaan*.
- Niet alle Marokkanen zijn dieven*. 2000 (unpublished)

Arne Sierens in translation

French

Mouchette / Colette (translation Jean Louvet); *Tambours Battants* (translation Monique Nagielkopf). Amsterdam: International Theatre & Film Books, 1996.

Le Soldat-Facteur et Rachel (translation Monique Nagielkopf). (unpublished).

Drummers (translation Monique Nagielkopf). (unpublished)

Mère et Enfant (translation Monique Nagielkopf). Ghent: Victoria, 1996.

Bernadette (translation Monique Nagielkopf). Ghent: Victoria, 1996.

Mon Blacky (translation Monique Nagielkopf). (unpublished)

Les frères Malherbe / Les frères Robert. (translation Monique Nagielkopf). Ghent: Nieuwpoorttheater, 1999.

Tous des Indiens (translation Monique Nagielkopf). (unpublished).

Les Marocains ne sont pas tous des voleurs. (translation Monique Nagielkopf). (unpublished)

English

Bernadetje (translation Rebecca Prichard). Ghent: Victoria, 1996.

Drummers (translation Nadine Malfait), in: Dutch Plays. New Dutch and Flemish Drama. London: Nick Hem Books, 1997.

Geboers & Co (translation Della Couling). (unpublished)

German

Der Soldat Briefträger und Rachel (translation Hendrik Braem). (unpublished).

Mutter & Kind (translation Petra Serwe). Ghent: Victoria, 1996.

Bernadetje (translation Petra Serwe). Ghent: Victoria, 1996.

Drummer, Mein Neger (translation Barbara Buri). Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 2000.

Italian

Il batterista (De drumleraar, translation Rosamaria Rinaldi), dans: Teatro Contemporaneo Olandese e fiammingo. Rome: Edizione Compagnia Teatro I.T., 1997.

Formichina (Mouchette, translation Michèle Tys). Ghent: Nieuwpoorttheater, 1997.

Bernadetje (translation Michèle Tys). Ghent: Victoria, 1997.

Il mio black (translation Rosamaria Rinaldi). (unpublished)

Translations by Arne Sierens

Het begeren onder de olmen (translation of *Desire under the Elms* de Eugene O'Neill, by order of Zuidelijk Toneel). Amsterdam: International Theatre & Film Books, 1992.

Splendid's (translation of *Splendid's* of Jean Genet by order of Zuidelijk Toneel). 1994 (unpublished).

This is a Vlaams Theater Instituut publication, in association with the Theatre Studies departments at the four Flemish universities: U.I.Antwerp, University of Ghent, K.U.Leuven, V.U.Brussels.

Editor in chief

Geert Opsomer

Editorial board

Pol Arias, Annie Declerck, Ronald Geerts, Erwin Jans, Rudi Laermans,
Kristel Marcoen, Klaas Tindemans, Frank Peeters, Luk van den Dries,
Marianne Van Kerkhoven, Jaak van Schoor

Design

Inge Ketelers

Photogravure and printing

Cultura, Wetteren

Print run

500 copies.

Kritisch Theater Lexicon 15 E, a portrait of Arne Sierens

Authors

Erwin Jans, Geert Opsomer en Christel Stalpaert

Research

Christel Stalpaert

Final editing

Kristel Marcoen, Griet Vandewalle, Katrien Darras

Translation

Della Couling

Proof-reading

Della Couling

Photographic portrait of Arne Sierens

Kurt Van der Elst

Photos

p. 29: Norbert Maes / p. 30: Jan Simoen, Corneel Maria Ryckeboer /

p. 31: Phile Deprez, Kurt Van der Elst / p. 32: Kurt Van der Elst

Vlaams Theater Instituut v.z.w., Sainctelettesquare 19, 1000 Brussel,

tel: +32.2/201.09.06, fax: +32.2/203.02.05

e-mail: info@vti.be website: <http://www.vti.be>

ISBN 90-74351-25-5 D/2001/4610/03

No part of this book may be reproduced and/or published without the prior permission of the publisher.

The Vlaams Theater Instituut is a centre for research, documentation, advice and the promotion of the performing arts. It is subsidised by the Arts Department of the Ministry of the Flemish Community and is sponsored by the National Lottery and Océ Belgium.

A translation of: Arne Sierens, Vlaams Theater Instituut, Brussels, 1998.

© 2001 / Registered publisher: Klaas Tindemans