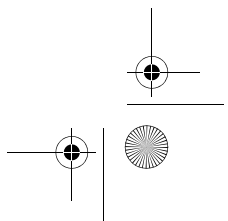
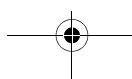
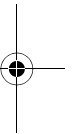
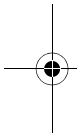


## C&H's conspiracy with the audience: the accomplice spectator

Kristof Van Baarle

The Brussels-based collective C&H brings together three different disciplines. Christopher Meierhans is a music composer; Christoph Ragg is a scenographer and Heike Langsdorf a choreographer and dancer. The assemblage of these different disciplines characterises the work of C&H, which constantly seeks to blur frameworks. They experiment with the frameworks that separate disciplines but also demarcate the boundaries between the artist and the spectator. The relation between the spectator and C&H has ever since their first project – *Mites have no problem* (2002) – been a peculiar one as they abstract the event of the theatre into a ‘conspiracy’. The artists invite the spectators to an event and give them a code that enables them to understand (something as) a performance. This creates a situation where only a few people know the rules of the conspiracy, which is why some spectators see things that others maybe don’t. *Konspiration* (2006) was the first production that explicitly demonstrated the mechanisms of this specific performance structure. The piece consisted of two parts spread over two evenings: a lecture and a performance in a bar. On the first evening a lecture was given to explain the intent of the next evening. The members of C&H told the audience that several actors were going to perform in a bar. With the help of a PowerPoint presentation, they initiated the (future) spectators in the upcoming ‘conspiracy’. The latter had to sit at specific tables in the bar and had to look in the right direction in order to witness the performance. The other people in the bar might not even be aware of the presence of a ‘theatre’ audience and even less so of the ongoing show. This is why the interventions of C&H are not innocent, “*they are also an experiment with how we can manipulate the way people look at things*”, says choreographer Heike Langsdorf. This article explores the functioning of C&H’s conspira-



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cies in relation to the spectator, based on an artist talk with the collective and the Hamburg-based multi-disciplinary actionist collective Lou Grevenstorff at *The Gaze is Us!* conference, on the occasion of their collaboration *We have no choice* and of C&H's project *Postcards from the future*.

## Photographic performance projects

For their most recent project, *Postcards from the future – Brussels* (2010-2011), C&H took their conspiracy method to the streets, the public place they call “*their favourite playground*”. Here the collective finds its material and the possibility to blur the line between daily life and staged intervention. After other versions of *Postcards from the future* in Geneva, Metz and Leuven, the streets of Brussels and its complex reality provided the inspiration for the eight postcards C&H designed for this project, each one dedicated to a different Brussels district. On these postcards scenes of what seems to be the daily life in the streets or public buildings of Brussels are depicted; referring to situations that were to be created on the future time, date and place indicated on the postcard. This indicated time, date and place also invited the addressee to come and join or witness the performance that would take place. The postcards play with clichés concerning e.g. poverty, upper class, migrants, connected to several neighbourhoods, but also with the cliché of the postcard as a picture that shows an idealised version of reality that can never be seen if one would stand in the exact same position from where the photograph was taken. C&H for that matter refer to the danger of short-circuited thinking that is connected with postcard-clichés. As Gilles Deleuze has pointed out, the double meaning of *cliché* in French indicates both the reproduction mechanism at the basis of photography and at the basis of stereotyped thinking. The use of clichés entails “a particularly dangerous form of short-circuited thinking and representation, since its chemically based realism gives it an air of authenticity, of innocent directness that anchors and supports all its stereotyping” (Polan in Stalpaert 174). The performative context that the postcard refers to, also indicates that the scenes of the C&H postcards are most likely not going to be reproduced exactly as they are depicted, also because they will ‘vanish’ in the crowd or traffic in the streets, squares or buildings. In this sense a postcard reveals itself as always already a failure of reality. C&H, however, turn this failure into a positive aspect and calls it “*a failing magic attempt*”.

The North Station postcard for example, shows people standing in a specific position around the elevator; a beggar, two people with dogs, an old man sitting,

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another man calling with his cell phone, a man with dark skin standing next to a mailbox and someone wearing a witch hat sitting at the counter of a bar. The card states that on Friday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, between 17h00 and 17h30, these 'scenes' will take place. The video that was shot during the performance shows how the spectators were looking for the scenes depicted on the postcard they were holding, while strolling through the Brussels North Station. It was the collective's aim to create this conspiring relation between spectator and performers (inhabitants and extras engaged for this project) but also to confront the audience with the alternative reality of the North Station as a place for more permanent residence, in opposition to the conventional functionality of the station as a place of passing through. Every winter many homeless people look for shelter in the main hall of the station, transforming the function of the train station as a transport hub into an emergency home. It is this reality the audience is faced with while looking for the enacted scenes of daily life, since during the time of the performance, the poor and homeless would become part of the 'décor', of the environment in which the spectator had to seek for the performative acts and engage with the location and its 'inhabitants'. C&H generates in this sense a debordian *dérive*; an alienation to a place otherwise so familiar in the Brussels context, where numerous homeless, beggars and other people living in precarious condition are a fixed part of the everyday scenery of the city. Instead of running to catch a train – the general movement in the station, ignoring its other function of homeless shelter – the spectators are now urged to slow down and change their relation to the environment, engaging with the problematic precarity it hosts.

Another interesting example is the postcard depicting the members of the European Parliament (MEPs), standing up from their seats in the Parliament of the European Union in Brussels. Again, a specific time and place are indicated on the postcard and the audience – in the case of *Postcards of the Future* the audience consists of the people who have obtained such a postcard – is invited to participate in the project by sending this postcard or its electronic equivalent to the addressed MEPs, asking them to execute what is shown in the postcard, meaning to stand up from their seats at 12h00 on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2011. In the absence of an actual performative event to attend, the audience is here clearly connected to the project through the logic of the conspiracy. Targeting the European parliament, C&H points at the presence of another entity in Brussels. The location and concentration of the EP's activities in the Schumann quarter, the mostly upper class expatriate community around it and the large scale on which the parliament operates, create a distance between the European institution and the other inhabitants of the city.

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While the North Station postcard confronted the spectator with the presence of people in the train station that usually goes unnoticed, pointing at problems like homelessness, migration and poverty, the European Parliament postcard raises the question of democracy and the possibility of direct influence of the citizens on their representatives. The European Parliament being the only democratically elected entity of the European Union's governmental structure, has relatively little power in comparison to the European Commission, which is the only body that can propose laws. The lobbies exerting influence on the MEPs and the lack of communication of decision making processes along with the technocratic style of the European Union which focusses more on economic than social issues, make the EU – at least in perception, but also in practice – a questionably democratic institution. The direct link between a vote and the policy is missing, as well as the connection between the debates in the EP and the concrete consequences for the European citizens. Presenting their participation as a symbol of democracy and connection with their voters, the MEPs were asked to show the democratic status of European Parliament by standing up – something that is rarely done and almost exclusively to honour the dead – and by doing so recognizing the artistic project of C&H as “something that happens”. This would contradict the general feeling about the European Union as a non-democratic, distant and unreachable institution and might generate a dialogue between the spectator/citizen and their representative at the European Parliament<sup>1</sup>. On their *Postcards from the future* website, C&H has published some reactions of MEPs and spectators, proving that the project has had a certain impact, although only eight MEPs stood up at the time provided.

The dialogue that the postcards enabled but also the dialogue that really took place, questions very much the promise of democracy and the open dialogue as something that maybe is first not really possible and second also really not necessary.

A simple action like standing up can thus become a metaphor for democracy and might have an impact that far exceeds the small-scale project that *Postcards from the future* actually is. In addition to the dialogue that was initiated between several participants and the MEPs, the EP postcard poses a more general question: “How can we do something political together?” From this point of view, the spectator becomes an accomplice to the C&H collective, striving together for the outcome of the postcard's prediction. The spectator who participates and sends the postcard to an MEP is a necessary part of the performance, determining it in a rather fundamental way.

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This 'empowerment' of the spectator can be found throughout the whole oeuvre of C&H. In *The Nickelodeon* (2008) the audience could press buttons with names of famous movie excerpts on it, which immediately started a moving sequence on the stage, connected to the specific excerpt that had been chosen. The performers executed the camera movements by using different aluminium frames, in this way performing the position of the cameramen, but unlike in films, they now remained visible. *Curator's Cut* (2007) was a project in cooperation with the dance journal *Ballettanz*. C&H were given two pages in the magazine, to do whatever they wanted. They decided to divide the pages in 32 pieces for advertising and sell them to theatres in order to gather enough money for their next production, also named *Curator's Cut*. The advertisers were asked to pay for the space in the magazine and to suggest something that should absolutely (not) be part of the piece that was to be created with the profit of this action. Additionally to this 'aleatoric' technique in the magazine, the last part of *Curator's Cut*—the performance consisted of a question to the audience for suggestions for the next performance. The best suggestion was chosen and then added the next time *Curator's Cut* was performed.

These performances activate the spectator and perceive the audience as executors within the production context of the performance. In the context of a theatre with a clear temporal and spatial demarcation, the empowerment of the spectator can be considered a positive and constructive element. The participation of the spectator results in a 'successful' performance that is not perceived of as a failure. *The Nickelodeon* is constructed out of the audience's choices, and the ending of *Curator's Cut* (the performance) is an addition made by a member of a previous audience. However, by taking the structure of the conspiracy and the empowered spectator outside, into the city and daily life, the conditions of the performance are altered. As *Konspiration* and the *North Station postcard* have proved that not everyone is aware of the fact that a performance is going on. Especially considering the status of the postcard image as already failed reality (cf. supra) the spectator's participation in *Postcards from the future* does not necessarily mean that the proposed project – in this case the reconstruction of the postcard's picture at a specific time – will succeed.

### Failing spectatorship and the power of weakness

As the postcard is always a failing – because not being a true *analogon* of reality to put it with Barthes – image, *Postcards from the Future* also seeks for a way to fail together, and C&H do not consider this failure to realize the suggested image as a

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defeat but rather as a positive and unavoidable aspect of their project. The spectator that in other C&H performances became aware of his or her own potential thanks to the constructive participation, now has to fail together with the organising collective. The *City centre postcard* predicts a traffic jam in the Rue de Flandre / Vlaamsesteenweg on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May at 19h00. The picture shows the Vlaamsesteenweg, filled with cars, vans, pedestrians and cyclists that – if you want – are choreographed in a specific way. In order to recreate this particular situation, an open call was released through the postcard, the Internet, and so forth. People who wanted to participate in the traffic jam – and thus wanted to create a situation of failed movement together – were invited for an information meeting beforehand, during which the realisation of the postcard was prepared. The participating spectators become actors and thus form a second order of accomplices; they are involved far more than the audience that will come to witness the traffic jam. Because of the fictional and constructed status of the postcard clichés, the traffic jam as it has been depicted, cannot be reconstructed exactly. Despite the good organisation and the will of the audience and C&H to execute their prediction, it is bound to fail on this level too.

This does not mean, however, that the spectator's participation is irrelevant or useless. On the contrary, it remains necessary and the combination of the spectator's potential and the failing reconstruction of the postcards, has a strong critical meta-message. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben considers the true potentiality as the potential that can decide not-to-be. This potential as opposed to actualisation, is not executed but remains pure potentiality. It is this potentiality that is for Agamben both the sole goal and the most natural state for humanity. Experiencing this potentiality is to him a pure ethical act, which implies that one accepts "*in every act one's own inactuality*" (Agamben 2007: 44). Our potential status always already means that we are in a certain sense unable to fully actualise ourselves and that we are in a permanent status of *failing*. It is only when we accept this failure, that we can overcome ourselves and the ever-present pressure of progress and commodification that characterises modernity.<sup>2</sup> The group of spectators that was gathered by the *City centre postcard* for that matter develops its potential. They are united by the will to do something, even though it is almost certain that it will be unable to execute the postcard's image. It is the creation of this kind of community of *failing spectators* that is the true goal of C&H's *Postcards from the future* and that is an answer to one of the interesting questions the collective poses: "*How can we fail together?*"

The voluntary creation of a standstill by organizing a traffic jam gathers a lot of potential (just think of the enormous amount of horsepower) trapped in inactuality

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because of the impossibility to move. C&H, however, also provided an alternative during the performance. The participants were given 'Future Francks' (referring to the former Belgian monetary unit, the Frank / Franc), a new monetary unit without a determined value. Experimentation, it was said, will prove the value of the Future Franck, which might also be worth the accepting instead of offering of a service, turning the supply and demand structure of capitalism upside down. By suggesting this alternative 'worthless' monetary unit, C&H offer its accomplices the opportunity to not take part in a capitalist structure that demands constant actualisation through consumption. Operating as an almost immanent *dispositif*, the capitalist apparatus increasingly limits the potential to 'not to'. Work, success, consumption and, foremost, progress are the actualisations promoted by the consumerist neoliberal logic (Agamben 2011: 44). The standstill produced by *The city centre postcard* does not only emphasize the potential (and violence) of the car engine, it also turns the failure to move into a claim for the right not to move, for the right not to be part of progress and of consumption. The traffic jam, which in its normal condition is a symptom of capitalist work and consumerism, is now turned to its potential. It is a standstill that is not experienced as a source of stress and waste of time, on the contrary, it is a standstill that opens up new possibilities. The Future Frank is such a possibility, potentialising money to a new, liberating system, making the suggestion that one could even be paid to consume, annulling the basic system of trade and replacing it with that of the gift.

The European parliament postcard predicted a similar failure. The gesture of standing up without any specific reason or function related to the daily activities of the parliament can also certainly be seen as an act of potentiality. This kind of gesture then is a means without any specific end, "*nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported*" (Agamben, 2000: 57). It would recognise an action that wants to establish a direct contact with politics, not to influence decision making, but to show the people's potential. The relative failure – apart from the dialogue that was started between some MEP-members and spectators – of the action, becomes rather indifferent to this gesture that does not seek to accomplish an objective. C&H call *Postcards from the future* slapstick exactly for this reason. As they say themselves:

20,000 electronic postcards were sent to the MEPs, asking them to stand up. Of course this is not much compared to real political action, but since it's only slapstick, it is okay.

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In that way, *Postcards from the future* becomes a means without an end, a work of art that creates nothing that can be sold or reproduced in the exact same way, like a painting, a piece of music or a play. It is a development of potentiality, a forming of a community that is assembled out of very different people. A community that does not have any demands or material goal that justifies its existence, it just 'is'.

The conspiracies of C&H create communities of accomplices that work together to accomplish a certain failure. Although it might seem contradictory at first sight, this still entails an empowerment of the spectator, not only because of the spectators' ability to participate and the necessity of his or her actions within the performance, but also because of the subversive character of the 'neutral' slapstick character of the project. "*What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity*" (Agamben 2007: 86), and this is exactly what *Postcards from the future* does. The absence of a clear identity of the community has a lot to do with the functioning of the conspiracy. Because no one knows the rules, the awareness of the existence of the community is relatively low. It might even go unnoticed. The formation of an identity is also thwarted by the possibility that spectators are not aware of each other. Still they are a community, bound by the rules of the conspiracy laid out by C&H. This community without identity consists of *whatever singularities*, and remains in the atmosphere of potentiality. (Agamben 2007: 35) Potentiality is the sphere of *existence of non-being*, indicating that something or someone, in this case a community, has a faculty. The choice not to go along in progress and to voluntarily stay 'jammed' as happened in the *Vlaamsestraat*, resonates with the creation of an anonymous community, without demands or goals besides its mere existence. It is this *whatever* faculty that is so hard to grasp for the consumerist apparatus. Also, a community without identity cannot be judged or condemned. Just like the *indignados* or *occupy* movements in Spain and the whole of the Western world, the community created by C&H is subversive by its mere existence in potentiality and its refusal to actualise itself.

### The limits of spectatorship in *We have no choice*

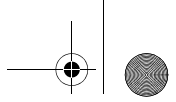
A good example of how performance can create a conspiracy that results in anonymous individual action, is *We have no choice*, a production of C&H in collaboration with the film collective Lou Grevenstorff. The production consists of two parts: a video that is to be watched by the audience and a second part where the audience is 'activated'. The video made by Lou Grevenstorff shows abstract images



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that involve revolutionary situations where something happened of historical significance. These images were partly shot in Ghent; the city where *We have no choice* was being performed during 'The Gaze is us!' festival at arts centre Vooruit. Shots of the revolutionary place of 'Vooruit', the former newspaper and socialist movement of Ghent in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, were to remind the audience of the social battle that started from this building, where they were – at least for now – comfortably watching this movie. *We have no choice* demonstrates the contingency of choices, but at the same time it endows them with a sort of necessity, with the feeling that certain evolutions in society, like climate change, economic crises or wars, couldn't have been otherwise – even though it seems the worst of options. When revolution is due, it has to happen. After this fifteen-minute movie, a voice tells the audience that they should think of something they would want to do or want to change and that there is a machine that will do this for them. Lou Grevenstorff refers here to the concept of the electric monk, developed by Douglas Adams. The electric monk is an automaton that 'believes' for you. It can believe everything; you only have to ask it. This electric monk automates the essentially human function of believing something and is besides a critique on desubjectifying automation, a displacement that shows that the way we perceive the world is a matter of convention and conviction or belief.

After the more abstract images of revolution, a typically concrete C&H-revolution follows. A spotlight illuminates the exit, indicating that the audience is to leave the theatre hall. Passing by a Kafkaesque – since nothing is being explained, only indicated – desk consisting out of four counters, six types of envelopes containing six different options are offered. These options relate to specific fields of society like home, poverty, ecology, etc. The spectators have to fill out a form to indicate which aspect of society they would like to change or influence. In exchange for this form they receive the matching envelope. After this rather 'bureaucratic' process, the audience is pushed outside the theatre. On the cover of the envelope directions are given that ask the spectators to walk a certain amount of steps, without stating where these steps are guiding them. Once you have reached your destination, you are asked to perform an intervention in the public space, like selling or asking something. After this 'performance', you are invited to come back to the foyer of Vooruit where you can share and discuss your experiences with other spectators and the members of C&H. During an interview I had with her, Heike Langsdorf pointed out that although revolution was the central concept they worked on during the creation period, failure remained an essential aspect of the performance.



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Often, spectators were distressed because they thought 'they did it all wrong', this is of course totally unnecessary. There is no right or wrong execution of the instructions. It goes beyond good or bad, since we are not aiming for a 'success'. This is also why you cannot applaud for this performance, there is no climax, no progressing tension, it just happens.

In the absence of an exact or correct execution lies the failure of *We have no choice*. The performance cannot succeed, since there is neither a concrete goal nor a specific expectation that has to be fulfilled, leaving the performance even more in Agamben's zone of potentiality than *Postcards from the future*. Here as well a reference to the *dérive* might be interesting to understand the potentiality of *We have no choice*: the necessity (the inability not-to-be or do) of behavior and movement through public space is broken. Standard patterns are altered and a new relation to the environment is developed. Failure or the inability to execute 'correctly' are intrinsically part of this potentiality.

The phrase *We have no choice* is in that sense essential for the makers of the performance; they are unable to control the performance after 'unleashing' the audience into the city. The choice is transposed to the latter. A spectator can decide not to follow the instructions because he or she is disappointed that the movie, promised to last an hour, was already finished, or because he or she finds the given directions ridiculous or frustrating. Even when they follow the directions, they can always choose not to return to Vooruit to talk about it. The audience fully controls these moments of decision-making. The way participation is being imposed on the spectator pushes the limits of spectatorship. Without expecting it, spectators are being asked to leave the theatre and to do things individually, without any specific instruction apart from the footsteps and a simple phrase asking to execute a simple action, without being controlled and affirmed about the quality of their action. This can frustrate the spectator and make him or her decide to stop being part of it or to question one's own capacity as a spectator of this performance. Because there is no control over this process by C&H, this kind of conspiracy makes the performance extremely fragile. Experience proved that some audience members were totally lost and did the strangest things outside the theatre. Although the footsteps were carefully measured out, it is unpredictable where people will arrive – someone even ended up in the toilet of the nearby Ghent University library.

*We have no choice* does not only challenge the limits of spectatorship by asking participation of the audience, the loose and uncontrolled manner also challenges the concept of spectatorship as community, making this group of people fall apart.



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In this sense, *We have no choice* makes the opposite movement of *Postcards from the future*. Instead of bringing people together on a specific moment, the audience is now dispersed during the supposed 'shared' event that a performance is. The lack of rules, control, unity and the absence of the possibility of qualifying the performance as good or bad, renders the conspiracy with the spectator in *We have no choice* very weak and fallible. It seems that, from the moment the accomplice-spectator is fully transformed into an independent actor and has to 'go solo' into the city, the limits of spectatorship are being transgressed. Compared to *We have no choice*, the spectator of *Postcards from the future* remains in the grey zone between spectators and actors, becoming a kind of hybrid entity that combines the engagement of the actor with the safe position of the spectator.

Another important difference lies in the feeling of being watched by people who are part of the conspiracy and thus know what you are doing. This was the situation with *Postcards from the future*, but was not the case for *We have no choice*, turning the performance into a highly individual event. This also points to the fact that we are only rarely by ourselves, in society, our private lives and also during a performance. This new independent status the spectator is endowed with, makes him feel awkward and might seduce him/her to stop 'the show'. The failure of *We have no choice* is in other words now also the responsibility of the spectator, whereas in *Postcards from the future* this was already inherent to the cliché status of its photographs. This different way of empowering the spectator can thus be said to go hand in hand with the limits of spectatorship. The empowerment through failure creates here once again a failing spectator, not because he or she fails to execute what is proposed, but because he or she fails to remain a spectator.

### Fighting systems: David vs. Goliath

How to prevent this kind of performance from falling apart? It is clear that *We have no choice* came close to a situation of failure. In the Ghent performances, nearly 80% of the spectators returned to Vooruit to discuss what they had done with their instructions, but if the audience would have been more stubborn or not willing to go along with the concept of the performance, the whole thing would have been – indeed – a complete failure, because nothing would have happened and the performance would have stopped at the moment of sending the audience out of the theatre. Although this would also have been an interesting case to study, it would keep the spectator from experiencing the individual empowerment through his or her own inability to execute the given instructions. The appropriation of failure or

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one's own inability emphasizes the individual's potential and is key element on the road to freedom (Agamben 2007: 40). This is the reason why in *Postcards from the future* a minimal theatrical frame was inserted. Because the conspiracy tells the spectator that they will see artificial scenes of daily life, he or she starts looking for these performative elements and will probably consider as 'artificial' more than was meant to be. Langsdorf calls this the catalyst-effect of *Postcards from the future*. This not only counts for the manipulation of the spectator's perception, but also for the performance as a whole.

Postcards from the future doesn't want to simplify reality or turn it into a symbol for something. Everything remains complex, because the performance tries to incorporate the whole complex system of the location's local society. This creates volume, because we do not try to make it compact to a level that it becomes tangible.

Because the depicted scenes always fade into the daily context of the city, you see more than you should see. This consequence of working outside the theatre and embracing Brussels' society in its entirety, became untenable (also from the organisational point of view, e.g. the cooperation with inhabitants) and forced C&H to re-insert a few archetypes of theatre, like a fixed time and place.

Compared to the complex system *Postcards from the future* tries to confront, their own performance can be seen as a "small system" (as they call it) that seeks to unveil the complexity it is working with. In order to do this, the embracing (or the attempt to embrace) of the complex system that is society or that is *at work* in a certain place – be it the European Parliament or the North Station – is necessary. If both C&H in the first preparatory phase and the spectator during the performance event get to know the complex system they are dealing with by absorbing it or by letting themselves be absorbed by it (e.g. the traffic jam of the City centre card), this will allow for interventions and encounters. The resulting dialogue again forms the link with theatre. As a system by itself, *Postcards from the future* might be small indeed, but inserted in the reality of the postcard location, it becomes the catalyst that generates new ways of watching, listening, talking and walking. Since it is nearly impossible to grasp the different complex systems present in the postcard situations, also these attempts are bound to fail, but in this failure is once again the success in the sense that to create a spontaneous situation of failure was exactly the goal (if one can call it like this) of the *postcard* series. The experience of the complex system and the impossibility to truly penetrate and fully understand it will hopefully result in an awareness of the complexity of the 'real' location and situation.

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The intrinsically impossible endeavour to encompass society's complex systems, makes *Postcards from the future* a slapstick system, that, analogue to the slapstick genre, in an attempt to reconstruct the postcard clichés, tries something it knows it cannot achieve. This creates another situation of collective failure.

The "Abattoirs / Slachthuizen" postcard, shows butchers, civic guards and fans of the Brussels first division soccer team Anderlecht, standing in the empty slaughterhouse of Anderlecht, a community of Brussels. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, starting from 12h30 pm, spectators could go search for these people, who at that time were to be absorbed by the crowd in the slaughterhouse's market. The spectator had to let him or herself be absorbed by the mass and at the same time needed to absorb it as well, in order to find the right persons. Once the people in the postcard had been located, the spectator could go up to them and they would let you listen to an mp3 that told something about Anderlecht. Considered from the point of view of the complex system, the spectator – who still is an accomplice to C&H's conspiracy – had to confront and embrace the local community, thus being included in the system, while still belonging to the community of failing spectators since they might not find the right people or not hear very well what is being said on the mp3 because of the market's noise. It is in fact the belonging to the conspiring community of the performance that renders the embracing of the complex system of the slaughterhouse possible. The theatrical frame that is inserted provides an alibi to encounter the complex system and make it 'manageable'.

*We have no choice* works in the opposite way. Instead of bringing people together, having different communities encounter one another, the spectator is alone. He or she is sent out into the city, to be by him/herself in a complex system. As has been stated already, less theatrical framing is provided in this performance and the spectator is expelled from the safe theatre building, into the 'real' world of public life. If he or she is still reading and following the instructions in the envelope, it might confront the spectator with the question on how to intervene in the complex system that is public space, when every collectivity has dissolved (even if it is only temporarily). The complex system is approached from an individual and lonely point of view here, once again making the performance more susceptible for abandonment by the spectator.

## Epilogue: giving something back

It is this feeling of being lost in a system, that might have also been the motivation for C&H to make a book on *Postcards from the future*. Although the last postcard




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was performed in June 2011, the collective felt the necessity for an epilogue in the form of this book. Partly for themselves, partly for all the inhabitants and extras that took part in the reconstructions and partly for the spectators, this book is supposed to give something back to all the individuals involved. In a performance spread throughout a whole year, where many different locations, projects, organisations, audiences and participants were engaged, the feeling of coherence is easily lost. According to C&H,

[...] the exigency to participate both towards the spectators and the inhabitants/extras could also be experienced as 'aggressive' because they enter a system, a community or a performance situation where they might not have actively asked for.



The epilogue book tries to consolidate what happened during the yearlong performance period and tries to connect different audiences with other groups of participants in a community sharing an experience with *Postcards from the future*. Also in this final episode of the project, the spectator was activated; as the book was made possible thanks to crowd funding. Hundred-fifty books needed to be sold in advance, before it could go into print. Once again failure peeked around the corner, but in this case, the conspiracy led to a happy end.



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