

Wandering through a labyrinth of proliferation

On Andros Zins-Browne's Welcome to the Jungle

by Marnix Rummens

1.

Step into the latest installation performance by choreographer Andros Zins-Browne and set designer Erki De Vries and you find yourself in a purely sensory world. Meagre light flickers whimsically through a shimmering labyrinth of mirror foil. A subtle landscape of smells and fine mist plunge you into a sultry microclimate. And because of the gentle breeze and erratic sound vibrations, at times the space seems to lead a life of its own. What you gradually discover in this twilight zone is a fragile and sensitive ecosystem, but then one you yourself are unmistakably part of. The sheets of mirror foil react with heightened sensitivity even to the displacement of air caused by a passer-by, creating flares of light and sound. But the many shifts in light and the at times thundering soundscape also fracture the mirroring effect, causing the space in its turn to change form and send the passer-by off in a different direction. In this whimsical choreography of environmental elements space is no longer well-configured and incontestable but a highly unstable equilibrium of all its elements. Everything is linked to everything else and mutually determinate. And you are in the middle of it.

2.

However metrical and monumental the labyrinth may seem at first, it is in fact a shifting cycle that constantly eludes the senses. The unremitting reflection alone makes you feel as if you are in an infinite space. Each wall reflects the labyrinth from a different perspective. And at times several walls move up and down or rotate, thereby creating ever-new virtual spaces which branch off imperceptibly into the physical spaces of the labyrinth. But there is more. Depending on the play of light, some mirror walls dissolve into transparent membranes with a concrete, material depth. Reflection and concrete space are now indistinguishable and constantly tip over into each other's opposite so that all reference points are lost. In the middle of that multiverse you realize that whatever your position, there are always other possible spaces, links and interpretations too. Your immediate surroundings become a hothouse of potential and your perception can only take in a fraction of it at any one time. But the experience of that limitation indirectly brings you into contact with the complexity and diversity of reality. Walking through the Jungle means losing your way not only physically but also in terms of the mind and the sensibilities. And as you go, you stumble upon a broader perception of reality that escapes the individual perspective.

3.

Visitors to *Welcome to the Jungle* find themselves in a relationship with their surroundings that is completely at odds with their trusted and controlled relationship with reality. Unlike the unambiguous dividing, controlling and taking stock of nature, in the Jungle the opposite movement takes place. Reality is unmasked as an intricate, heterogeneous composition in which nothing is permanent, like a reality which constantly reproduces itself in the most diverse compositions. Any hierarchy becomes precarious. And yet that does not lead only to fear or uneasiness, for an existential poetry develops in the midst of the diversity. Not only do you find yourself in an indefinable and transient architecture, but you also stumble upon yourself in different guises. Your body, shadow and silhouettes are reflected nearby, at the end of a corridor or sometimes in a corner of the eye. Some of those images become an almost tangible reality in themselves, because their medium allows the underlying material space to partly shine through and so surpass the purely virtual. Other images mix imperceptibly with shadows and silhouettes of other passers-by into an experience that literally brings with it another embodiment. In a world where the 'here' and 'elsewhere' begin to merge and reflection almost becomes matter, we are each other's insider and outsider at one and the same time.

4.

Welcome to the Jungle generates its own brand of physics which redraw the contours of the self and the other. And like the space, they inextricably spill over into each other. And then you discover that there are people living in that world that is so strange to us. You may have heard or seen one or more of them pass by earlier. But only after a while does it become clear that a group of children has made this inhospitable place their playground. It gives the Jungle a post-apocalyptic dimension. And yet they seem to be in their element. Evidently prompted by their surroundings, they play all kinds of games. And just as unpredictably as the weather, they in their turn drive the various spatial elements. At times this leads to such an intense climax that it seems as if the world will literally and figuratively perish (again). At the same time, it is their very capacity to be swallowed up in the unpredictability of the world that allows them to be an unalienated part of it. Powerlessness becomes power. By not trying to fit the world into an existing mould, they manage to inhabit it, experience it, and at times even play a part in it. If the ecosystem in *Welcome to the Jungle* is an organism with a will of its own that surpasses man in scale and power, then paradoxically enough it is the children who are its personification.

5.

Whether you become part of the children's game or go your own way, in *Welcome to the Jungle* not only does a sense of space and self-awareness open out but also all computation of time. Decay and regeneration literally converge. Causal links become meaningless. You are here and there both at once. Your senses are enlivened and reality is returned to a state even before it is determined by – or reduced to – any line of approach. And in that way (just for a moment) the evocation of the phenomenon of *global weirding* tips over in the opposite direction. The seemingly irrefutable problem of our increasingly whimsical and unpredictable climate becomes an indication of what can put us back on the same wavelength as our environment: confusion and inevitable uncertainty. And that causes us to think afresh about our environment, thus giving us a new relationship and identity, and placing us in a reciprocal rather than a hegemonic relationship with our environment. If our growing hegemony over nature underlies the current ecological problem, then *global weirding* or alienation is not a symptom to combat, but the seed of change. And then the problem wouldn't need to be avoided or neutralized, but it could be an active remedy for its own cause.

6.

That's what makes *Welcome to the Jungle* so extraordinary. The installation is not about looking for ways to control our environment, whether by means of exploitation or an ecological counter-reaction. The poetical experience provided by the Jungle dwarfs mutual polarization and reveals a concealed and often subconscious perception that delineates the whole environmental debate: the illusion that we can or must control or predict nature. If we want to observe reality in its entirety - as a dynamic and complex (eco)system – only a dynamic and variable perspective gives us that option. The constant oscillation between control and openness. So the installation does not so much oppose a particular approach, principle or point of policy, but its questionability, the constricting or ossifying effects of the consensus, the politically correct, the *idée fixe*. Because it is in the ambiguous, indefinable, ignored poetic space – which is given an (almost) tangible place in the Jungle – that we find the potential creativity that can help us deal with an ever-changing reality. Without convulsively subjecting it to our rigid expectations. In that sense *Welcome to the Jungle* is perhaps first and foremost an open invitation to follow that roundabout route to our home in what in essence characterizes our environment: its changeability. To edge our way, open and vulnerable, but with the senses sharp, through the proliferation that defines us just as much as we define it.

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Translated from Dutch by Alison Mouthaan