



Damien Chapelle with, in the background, the screen showing Vandekeybus and his son.
© Danny Willems

FILM/PERFORMANCE

SARAH VANKERSSCHAEVER

'I enjoy doing death scenes.' The actor hesitates. 'Although I am terrified of death... I have panic attacks if I think of the moment when it will actually happen. The year, the month, the day, the hour, the minute, the second. It gets worse as I get older. The distance becomes shorter. My time is approaching.' *Monkey sandwich* sees Wim Vandekeybus asking the great questions about life and death, not in choreography, but in a 'film performance'. Through a film which is projected onto a screen above the stage and the almost simultaneous performance by the 21-year-old Damien Chapelle on stage, he allows the actors to cast doubts out loud: is it by telling stories that we feel the blood racing through our veins? Is it when we let a young child balance high on the palm of our hand that we feel death prowling about? But also: when is an actor at his most genuine? When he's acting? When he cries that he cannot follow the director's instruction because he has been trained 'to pretend he is eating people, but never really'? The greatest insult uttered in *Monkey sandwich* is therefore 'you're a phoney'. It is a dark stage on which the questions are raised. It contains ventilators, paper bags crumpled up to form the bodies of cats and dolls, a water basin and a steel pole. Damien Chapelle walks around. Naked, uttering a muddled story about the adventures of Toon Tellegen's squirrel and ant. Stoking the fire, burning his bum, ducking down. Above the stage is the screen on which fragments of film are shown. We see, amongst others, Jerry Killick from the British theatre company Forced Entertainment and our own Carly Wijs. Through the medium of the actors, Vandekeybus reflects on the lie that is theatre, on the relative boastfulness of leaders and how we are always searching for stories. Or fighting to be heard. We want to leave behind traces of ourselves which live longer than our story on earth.

Wonderful disunity

Monkey sandwich differs greatly from Vandekeybus' previous work. If *Nieuw Zwart* was a full-blooded choreography set to a guitar riff, then *Monkey sandwich* is a film performance which fluctuates between lies and truth. More palatable thanks to the cinematic storyline, but just as abstract in the associative staging and the performance by Chapelle. This disunity is wonderful. The film script of a director who tries to inspire those around him with stories is as tangible as Chapelle's short interventions are ethereal. Film and performance part company but then end up at the same point: the logical montage breaks under the pressure of streams of consciousness and ultimately everything becomes confused. We, the audience, can put together our own urban legend. Vandekeybus admits his uncertainty as an artist, his pride and vulnerability as a father (his 16-month-old son Iago is given a wonderful role) and his greediness as a collector of stories. *Monkey sandwich* raises far-ranging questions about what is taking place on stage: a screen full of emotion and a stage that formulates an independent answer. A new story on old themes. Go and see it, use your imagination and be surprised at the energy which Vandekeybus is able to bring together so beautifully.

The thousand and one stories of Wim Vandekeybus

'*Monkey sandwich*' is, for Wim Vandekeybus, a movement away from dance straight into the arms of film.