

## **Teachers' notes - for GCSE and A Level students**

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### 1. THE PRODUCTION

**Direction, choreography & film** Wim Vandekeybus

**Performed by** Laura Arís, Elena Fokina, Robert M. Hayden, Germán Jauregui Allue, Jorge Jauregui Allue, Mala Kline, Thi-Mai Nguyen, Manuel Ronda, Helder Seabra

**Music** Arno & Ad Cominotto, David Byrne, Thierry de Mey, Pierre Mertens, Marc Ribot, Peter Vermeersch

**Movement Assistant & Rehearsal Director** Iñaki Azpillaga

**Dramaturge** Greet van Poeck

**Styling** Isabelle Lhoas

**Scenography & Lighting Design** Wim Vandekeybus

**Costume** Stéphanie Croibien, Heidi Ehrhart

**Film actors** Iñaki Azpillaga, François Brice, Carmelo Fernandez

## 2. ABOUT SPIEGEL

Wim Vandekeybus founded his company, Ultima Vez in 1986 and since then his work has been at the forefront of dance theatre, consistently astounding audiences worldwide. Vandekeybus' work pushes dancers and sometimes his audience, beyond their limits in a powerful fusion of live action, film and music that seethes with energy, danger, emotion and sensuality.

Describing his own work, Vandekeybus says *"I read that I do spectacular things, but what counts for me is actually something really small, almost under the skin. A pent-up energy that is not released. Pure intensity."*

To celebrate twenty years, Wim Vandekeybus has composed Spiegel (meaning Mirror), an evening featuring some of the most remarkable scenes from his early work as well as more recent productions. Flirting with danger, nine dancers – performers who have already danced with the company, as well as some newcomers - strive to make sense of the world through daring movement sometimes more animal than human. The piece is a journey through the evolution of the company.

*"For all those who discover the universe of Wim Vandekeybus for the first time, Spiegel will be like a body blow. The rolls, the jumps, the fights, the throwing of bricks, the bodies suspended in mid air have lost nothing of their vital energy, their force at the edge of rupture. For those who have followed the career of the choreographer and his ensemble, Spiegel allows them to relive some great moments, but also to observe the real coherence of the physical work within Ultima Vez." Le Soir*

### 3. WIM VANDEKEYBUS

Describing his style, Wim Vandekeybus is clear that he does not view his work as having a particular 'vocabulary'. For him, his work is simply, "*A return to something real in movement, which others later called dance.....*

*What interests me is not so much pure dance as what can be expressed in dance. Why the problem with dance vocabulary?"*

Wim Vandekeybus - director, choreographer, actor and photographer, was born in Belgium in 1963. Brought up in a rural environment, the son of a veterinarian, Vandekeybus was often in contact with animals in their natural environment. These experiences had a great emotional impact on him. Animals, their movements, their instinctive reactions and their trust in their own physical power are often integrated into his performances.

He studied psychology but did not complete his course - he found the subject weighed down by 'objective science'. However his interest in the complex relationship between body and spirit stayed with him. He came into contact with theatre when he took part in a workshop led by Flemish theatre director and playwright Paul Peyskens. He followed this with some dance courses (classical ballet, modern, tango) and took up film and photography.

In 1985 he auditioned for Jan Fabre and subsequently toured internationally for two years as a performer in *The Power of Theatrical Madness*. During this time he met painter/photographer Octavio Iturbe in Madrid, who later became an important artistic collaborator.

1986 was an important year for Wim Vandekeybus. He moved to Madrid for a few months with a group of young dancers to work on his first production. Here he founded his company *Ultima Vez* (Spanish for 'last time'). In June 1987 his first piece *What the Body Does Not Remember* premièred in the Netherlands. The dancing in this piece was powered by the music of Thierry De Mey and Peter Vermeersch. With tempestuous energy and strength the performers made daring leaps, launched themselves into the air and smartly intercepted each other's falls. Bricks were thrown above each other's heads. Every gesture had to stick to absolutely precise timing; the performers put their trust in and surrendered to their instincts. Although the première was received with scepticism, the performance was soon being presented on international stages. In 1988, Wim Vandekeybus received the Bessie Award in New York for this production, which was credited as "*a brutal confrontation of dance and music: the dangerous, combative landscape of What the Body Does Not Remember.*"

Reviewing this piece in the New York Times, Anna Kisselgoff described it as "*Tough, brutal, playful, ironic & terrific.*" It was during these early years that the term 'adrenaline choreography' became synonymous with his work.

An article in newspaper De Morgen cited his early work as entirely unique. “No one had ever done what Vandekeybus did: introducing real danger to the stage. Here Vandekeybus explores a concept of dance, or movement art, that no one else has.”

The decades that followed saw a proliferation of work and awards. For a detailed choreology visit [www.spiegeltour.co.uk](http://www.spiegeltour.co.uk) and follow the links Ultima Vez>Who's Who>Wim Vandekeybus/Ultima Vez

#### 4. SPIEGEL – A BREAKDOWN OF SECTIONS

Spiegel revisits and reworks some memorable scenes from past works:

Scene 1. **Stamping** - revised from *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987)

Scene 2. **Pushing** - revised from *Inasmuch as Life is Borrowed* (2000)

Scene 3. **Girls** - revised from *Immer das Selbe gelogen* (1991)

Scene 4. **Boys** - revised from *Immer das Selbe gelogen* (1991)

Scene 5. **Talking Hands** - revised from *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* (1999)

Scene 6. **Sheepskin solo** - revised from *Bereft of a Blissful Union* (1996)

Scene 7. **Stones** - revised from *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987)

Scene 8. **Feather** - revised from *What the Body Does Not Remember* (1987)

Scene 9. **Dust** - film in *Bereft of a Blissful Union* (1996)

Scene 10. **Oranges** - revised from *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* (1999)

Scene 11. **Silver** - revised from *7 for a Secret never to be Told* (1997)

Scene 12. **Air** - revised from *Inasmuch as Life is Borrowed* (2000)

Scene 13. **Blood** - revised from *Inasmuch as Life is Borrowed* (2000)

Many of these pieces are compiled in a DVD box set of Vandekeybus' dance & short fiction films. For more information go to [www.ultimavez.com](http://www.ultimavez.com) and follow the links miscellanea>shop>DVD

## 5. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

Vandekeybus' work often challenges the audience. This is his intention. On this subject he says, *"I don't want people in the audience thinking, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah...' the whole time. No, I want them to hate what they see, and think 'No! Wrong!' And only in a given moment, after they have had to fight for it within themselves, 'YES!' "*

- Taking the piece as a whole, discuss how it made you feel as you watched it.
- What feelings did you take away from the performance with you?
- Did you relate to any section in particular?
- Why? How did it feel relevant to you/your life?
- Write a short review of Spiegel in 150 words.

### Scene 7. **Stones**

The performers run, leap and dodge each other whilst hurling stones high up in the air. They catch the falling stones with precision timing, sometimes pushing other each other out of the path of the stones as they drop. This section is fast and dangerous!

- Discuss this particular section – how would you interpret it?
- What do you think the stones might symbolise?
- What stimuli do you think may have been the starting points for this section?
- Discuss the following choreographic devices used – motif, repetition, chance, climax.
- How do you imagine the dancers manage to perform this section without injuring themselves?

### Scene 11. **Silver**

Couples dance passionate/combatative duets using powerful leaps and catches. Sometimes tender, sometimes brutal - knocking each other's limbs out of the way, and then catching a falling body, ending in a sudden counterbalance/embrace.

- How many performers danced in this section?
- How did their costumes, the stage design, the music & the lighting influence the impact of this section?
- What do you think the original concept of this section was?
- How would you describe the choreographic structure of this section?
- Were any specific choreographic devices used?

## 6. SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATIVE TASKS

### Task 1 – solo work

Using the style of movement in Spiegel as your inspiration, create a short solo sequence using a combination of the following actions, in any order:

- a fall/drop to the floor
- a roll
- a jump
- a sudden stop
- a rest on the floor
- a run

Once this solo has been created, learn it in a 'loop' so that it can be repeated 4 or 5 times in the space using a different direction as front each time.

Try dancing this 'looped' solo sequence alongside two or three others in the group. Perhaps once you have tried this, you can agree on ways to enter and leave the space.

Decide on an order for the dancers to enter, or maybe you can use chance as a device here....and see what develops.

### Task 2 – duet work

Use Scene 2. **Pushing**

In this section dancers engage in close contact duets using their full body weight as they lean and push against each other. Sometimes the movement looks awkward as they battle to gain ground and distance.

Using this scene as your inspiration create a short duet using a combination of the following actions in any order:

- pushing against each other using different parts of the body; use backs, sides & fronts, rather than hands
- asymmetric counterbalances using as much body weight as feels safe, to pull away from each other
- running whilst linked together (e.g. a side embrace, arm in arm)

Think about your stimulus for this duet. Are you angry with each other? Is one partner more dominant than the other? Is there a resolution?

Once this duet has been created, learn it in a 'loop' so that it can be repeated three or four times.

Experiment with the dynamics of this duet by applying the concept of a video remote control. Ask an observer to call out the following directions at random – play, pause, fast forward, slow motion, eject. (Eject could direct both dancers to drop to the floor, a common motif in Spiegel.)

### Task 3 – Group work

#### Use Scene 13 **Blood**

In this section the dancers use a simple motif, opening their arms as they stand, then crossing their arms across their bodies as they fold over bending their upper bodies forward. This motif recurs throughout the section.

Using this scene as your inspiration, as a group learn the simple opening and folding motif, or create a similar one yourselves. Through discussion, agree on two other group motifs, perhaps a fall and some work lying on the floor. These can differ from dancer to dancer, or everyone can learn the same movements.

Create your own **Blood** finale section:

- Number the dancers in the group
- Use the opening and folding motif as a 'background' movement that occurs continually
- In sequence, numbered dancers perform the two other motifs whilst the remaining dancers repeat opening and folding motif
- Perhaps use the solos created in Task 1 as dancers break out of the group motif
- Build to a climax in this section with all dancers performing the opening and folding motif ten times together with increasing pace – use breath and the sound of feet to increase tension
- Section ends as all dancers fall to floor in unison, perhaps with one remaining standing

## 7. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

For recent reviews of Spiegel see [www.spiegeltour.co.uk](http://www.spiegeltour.co.uk) and follow the links Spiegel>Reviews

For general interest see [www.ultimavez.com](http://www.ultimavez.com) and follow the links About>Wim Vandekeybus>Vocabulary/Biography/Publications

For more information on Vandekeybus' collaborations, past and present see [www.ultimavez.com](http://www.ultimavez.com), follow the links About>Synergies and select a collaborative art form from the menu