

A riveting reminder of hardships of living

By Mike Steele/Staff Writer

Wim Vandekeybus' riveting new dance-theater work, "Always the Same Lies," reminds us, with raw, kinetic power, what a constantly defiant act living is.

In the world of the young Belgian choreographer, that can mean sitting in an upside-down chair suspended high over the Northrop Auditorium stage, blithely defying gravity. It can mean rolling violently like driftwood in a storm-tossed sea inside a wildly careening hammock. It can mean carrying trays of raw eggs, those most fragile of objects, through a bewildering course of obstacles including the flying hammocks as well as bodies hurled like cannonballs at the unwary carriers who manage to duck and dodge and evade these forceful projectiles, but only just.

Kinetically, as we've come to expect from Vandekeybus, these theatrical images are punctuated by aggressive movement — bodies leaping, diving, rolling, spinning, hurtling at one another at great velocity; caught, spun about, redirected.

And through it all the precariousness of being is ever present. Dancers fall from the chair, crashing to the Northrop stage. The swinging hammocks collide stridently with passersby. Eggs are broken. Dancers crash into each other, pick each other up and hurl other dancers into space as though they were flinging sandbags. But always there's the will to go on, to pick up and charge forth, ever faster, into the face of ever greater danger.

The starting point for Vandekeybus'

A review

Always the Same Lies

Who: Created by Wim Vandekeybus, performed by Ultima Vez as part of the Northrop Auditorium-Walker Art Center Discover Series.

Where: Northrop Auditorium, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Review: Vandekeybus' latest work encapsulates the spirit of a lonely but defiant old man in a burst of kinetic imagery that presents the danger, absurdity and irresistible will to live that is the essence of being. It's an original and captivating voice, unsettling but deeply engaging.

work is Carlo, an 88-year-old man he met in Hamburg and filmed (multiple films of the old man are the backdrop to the early part of the piece). He lives now in solitude, a life that is part fantasy, part reverie, part reality as he uses his wiles and will to survive. Life batters him; loved ones die, loneliness intrudes yet there's a childlike twinkle to his eyes and he has time to dance, to blow the seeds from a white, cottony dandelion and to talk about his life of struggle in a crazed, visionary way.

Though Carlo is omnipresent in Vandekeybus' piece, this isn't narrative and there's nothing literal or biographical about it, even though little movements by Carlo such as the simple jig he dances occasionally show up transformed in the work. It's rather the spirit of the man, his defiance of gravity, his ability to collide and rebound, that

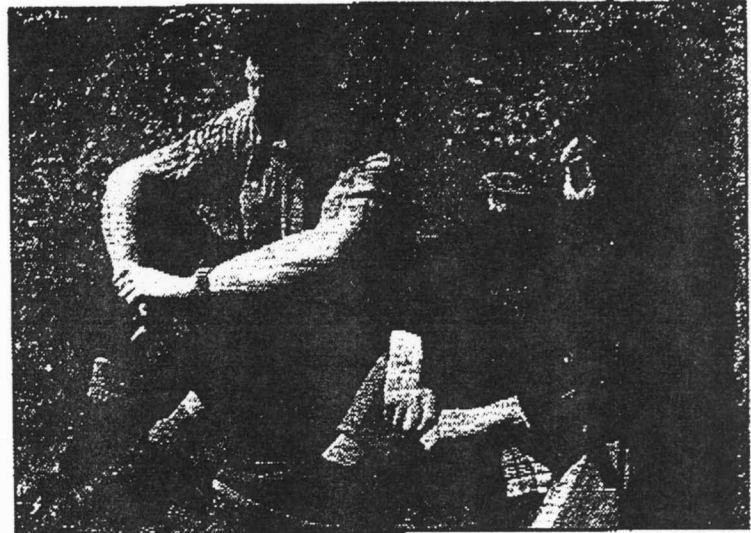


Photo by Octovio Iturbe

Wim Vandekeybus filmed several conversations with Carlo Wegener. The film, projected above the stage, forms the core of the work.

resonates through the movement.

That resiliency also is at the heart of all of Vandekeybus' work and what makes it so compelling. We are fragile, egglike, playing with danger, yet surviving against the odds, creating worlds, even mad fantasies, to fend off loneliness, always about to collide, to be overwhelmed, but bouncing off, spinning away and going on.

Vandekeybus' company, Ultima Vez, is a wonderful mixture of body types and nationalities that gives his pieces even more resonance. In this work they take turns speaking Carlo's words in a variety of accents, the accents paralleling the ways they move — long, extended lines here, quick, jerky, staccato movements there, blunt kinetic spasms juxtaposed with carefully detailed phrasings.

And always they're in peril, one misstep away from disaster, fighting to remain erect even when they're sitting upside down in a hanging chair defying the inescap-

able gravity that will soon send them smashing to earth.

But if there's a gravity to life there's also an absurdity, and Vandekeybus allows a puckish wit to show through everywhere. In the tradition of the great clowns he knows that falling is at once scary and silly, a mixture of danger and indignity. We hold our breaths as the eggs snake through the ever-increasing complexity of human obstacles, yet we sigh with relief and break into laughter when the inevitable happens and the first one breaks.

Vandekeybus more than most contemporary choreographers captures the essentials of existence — the gravity, the balance, the danger, the humor — and delivers it with great power in an absolutely original voice. It energizes and compels and totally engages, and over it all is the giggling presence of Carlo who, lest we forget, is us, too, unsettling but also defiantly unbeatable.