

Gadaffi kicks Albert II off throne

Boundaries between TV, games and reality cease to exist

What have King Albert II and Muammar al-Gadaffi got in common? Why do they both like the story of Salomé and her desire for John the Baptist's head? Learn the answers in Theatre, the latest production from Superamas.

Theatre instantly captures the attention of the male contingent of the audience when Karen Lambaek, Lieve De Pourcq and Bahir Temiz get the proceedings going with a belly dance. Off stage an almost casual commentary on Fra' Filippo Lippi's fresco in the cathedral of Prato is to be heard. The fresco highlights three phases in the story of Salomé and her mother Herodia.

A few seconds later the belly dancers throw themselves into various passionate interpretations of Richard Strauss's Salomé, now supported by Lucie Eidenbenz as Herodia. The on-stage spectacle though could cause you to miss an essential element of the piece. For it is just at this moment that a voice explains why nineteenth century West Europeans were so fascinated by the Orient, a distant region that the majority knew only from travellers' tales. The Orient became an imaginary stage on which all kinds of fantasies inappropriate for a westerner could be played out: the Middle East as a symptom of the West as Freud might say.

What if the roles were reversed? What if the West was, to the contrary, to become the stage on which the East played out its ideas – even though at least some of these came from the West. For example imagine our political disputes or occasional riots were to be seen as a violent civil war and for humane reasons or disguised self-interest Middle Eastern states were to intervene and liberate us. In other words more or less the reverse of what the NATO intervention did in Libya when it helped topple the Gadaffi regime.

How would such an intervention manifest itself? Superamas shows us. It all starts with conferences of the members of a fictive Middle East Treaty Organization (Turkey and Israel included). France's President Sarkozy is depicted as a hypocritical figure who denies the "real" problems of the Belgians.

In addition there is a series of mock, although unpleasantly realistic, television broadcasts, whose highpoint is the liberation of the Belgians from the yoke of the dictatorial king Albert II by Muammar Gadaffi. The latter then acquires the allure of a pop star and sex symbol in much the same way as Che Guevara achieved his secular beatification.

Spectacle

To top it all there is a game in which an avatar of Gadaffi hunts down an avatar of King Albert II. The game also clearly indicates what a remorseless potentate the king really is. He goes to the Opera in the Munt, where he enjoys Salomé, while ignoring the suffering of his people. The production ends in a whirlwind of images and events in which the boundaries between TV, games and reality simply cease to exist.

All of which is presented with a frequently astounding degree of technical sophistication.

The only objection that one can make to this show, is that it so totally absorbing that one forgets that important things are being said. Namely that our understanding of the world only comes about via and in the shape of spectacle. Or in actual fact, does not come about, as this piece illustrates.

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