

Henrik Vestergaard Friis

Zonkels Canon

e-book

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This book and the film Zonkels Canon contains material created between 2006 and 2012, where I - *Henrik Vestergaard Friis* as *Zarathustras Onkel* (*Zonkel* for short) - reconstructed all twelve works of *The Danish Cultural Canon* for the performing arts.

In January 2006, *The Danish Ministry of Culture* published a compendium of the most important Danish artworks throughout the ages - *The Danish Cultural Canon*.

The film is the best way to experience Zonkels Canon. The concept for it was developed with *Thomas Martius* who also co-directed. *Benjamin Bayer* was behind the camera. The film can be played from a Blu-ray player, but can also be seen on my homepage www.zonkel.com or on Youtube. Please watch in full screen mode and full HD (1080p) only. Enjoy.

Another way of experiencing the work is by reading this booklet, which is to be understood as a bonus material to the film. It contains many pictures that have not been published before, including pictures from the Canon exhibitions at the *Theatre Museum in Hofteatret, Copenhagen* (15.08.2011 – 25.01.2012) and at *Grimmuseum in Berlin* (26/5 2012 – 17/6 2012).



Björn Reissman photographed both exhibitions. The film *Zonkels Canon* was the centrepiece of both exhibitions. Björn has followed the project all the way from the first pictures of *Sylfiden* over *Anna Sophie Hedvig*, *Aladdin* and *Jeppe on the Mountain* to *Majonæse*. Where nothing else is stated, the pictures in this booklet were taken by Björn Reissman.



I have always considered myself more European than Danish, but during the ten years, I lived in Berlin, I felt increasingly Danish. But how can I understand myself as a Dane today? What does it mean to be an educated white, heterosexual male, born and raised in a western society? What does it mean to be Danish? To understand this, I wanted to research my Danish roots. It seemed that for this study in whiteness, the Danish Cultural Canon would be the right focal point.

One of my prejudices was, that I would not find a demonstrable and original Danish culture. That Danish culture is nothing but a mixture of other cultures. But that assumption proved too simplistic. *Pia Kjærsgaard* from the *Danish National Party* once said in a talk show: "Being Danish is new potatoes, strawberries with cream and a feeling inside." Normally, I am apprehensive about Pia Kjærsgaard and her political views. But maybe for once she was right? Maybe the feeling exists? I wanted to give it a try.

I decided to reconstruct the whole Canon under my artistic alias - Zarathustra's Onkel - to use my own body and mind as a litmus paper and let the twelve works pass through me. If the works could make me more Danish, they should leave some kind of mark, or/and I would become wiser in regard to being Danish.

Therefore, I showed myself naked at the finissage at Hofteatret. The video from this performance can be found if searching for Zarathustras Onkel: *Fullstop* on *YouTube*. Did I work as a litmus paper?

My YouTube channel contains lots of alternative versions and extra-extra material. Nobody noticed anything Danish about my body, but the Canon really did leave one mark. More about that later.

I did not want to create re-enactments. Neither details nor precision are important to me. Instead, I decided to identify the core of each work of the Canon and reconstruct it with appropriate contemporary artistic strategies. For every piece, the contemporary strategies were chosen, that seemed to best express the essence of the piece. The following text aims at explaining and telling some of the ideas and stories behind the reconstructions. Please enjoy.



My first reconstruction was of *Ur-Hamlet* by the *Odin Theatre*. Before the premiere in 2006, *Monna Dithmer* interviewed *Eugenio Barba* in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*. Barba said, he would use a robot as a ghost. I read no further and thought: Wow! I had to see that – the *Odin Theatre* with robots. But Barba kept it disappointingly simple. So I allowed myself to reconstruct the *Ur-Hamlet* press pictures taken by *Claudio Coloberti* with pictures of robots, to at least get an idea of how an *Odin Theatre* performance with robots would look like.

But *Odin Theatre* is not in the Canon. My first reconstruction of a work from the Canon was *The Santa Army*. In this booklet, the works will be presented in chronological order according to the years the original works were made. In the film, it is slightly different.

I recreated *Ludvig Holberg's Jeppe On The Mountain*, the 30th of October 2008 for the *Performance Art Day at Preview Berlin - The Emerging Art Fair at Tempelhof Airport* in Berlin. I focused on the moment, when Jeppe the peasant wakes up in the bed of the baron. I woke up at an art fair wearing nice clothes and with the permission to drink as much champagne, as I wished. I drank four bottles in four hours and then mucked around in the exhibition, closely followed by two security guards. Since I was paid to be there and get drunk, they could not throw me out. I was art - drunk art. I fell asleep again in front of the *Natural Theatre of Oklahoma*.





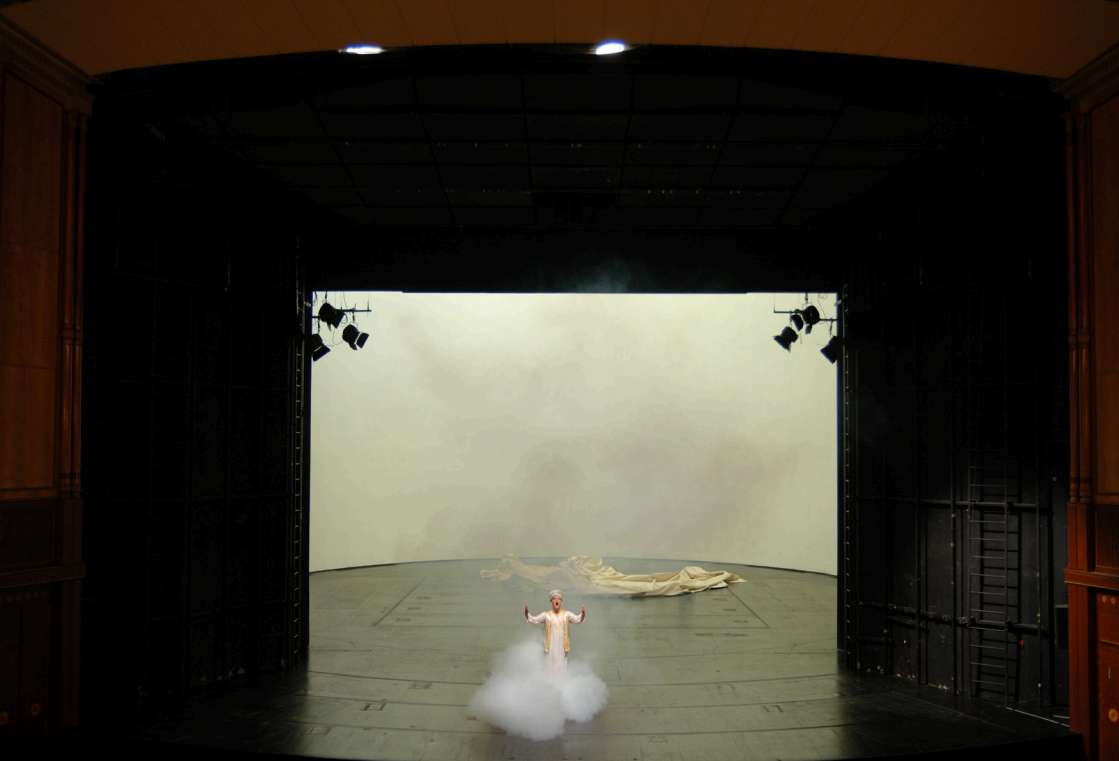
Imagine, if you could get everything you wished for? You would just say it, and it would be there. This happens to the young tailor *Aladdin*. With sinister intentions, an evil sorcerer lures him down in a dark cave to retrieve an old, dirty lamp. It doesn't look like anything special, but it holds the greatest gift: when Aladdin rubs the lamp, the genie appears and fulfils all his wishes, whether it is a princess or a kingdom.

Adam Oehlenschläger wrote the original Danish *Aladdin* in 1805 and I examined it as an electro-acoustic opera at *Volksbühne, Berlin* in June 2010. The only sound source was my voice, which was manipulated live into a soundscape, that could be heard alongside the text.

Or actually it couldn't.

When I was student in the heydays of Volksbühne Berlin, I spent days watching pieces by *Christoph Slingensief*, *Frank Castorf* and *Christoph Marthaler*. And when I felt bored, I dreamed, that one day I would create something for that stage.

With the Danish Culture Canon as my Aladdin's Lamp, I managed to get unto it for a photo shooting. There was no audience - I only performed for Björn Reissman. And for the audience watching the photos imaging how the real performance might have been like. The soundtrack was created later.





But as I started to fake being present in space, I could just as well fake being present in time. When researching for the Canon exhibitions at Hofteatret in Copenhagen, I went to the archives of the Theatre Museum and found some lovely press photos taken by an unknown photographer. It was from a version of *Aladdin* staged by *Johannes Poulsen* at *The Royal Theatre* in Copenhagen 1919. I photoshopped the fake image from Volksbühne unto the images from the Royal Theatre. Can you find me in the next pictures?











In these pictures from Hofteatret in Copenhagen, you can see a projector, which project images from Zonkel's ballet Etudes onto the ceiling.

The first ballet, I reconstructed, was *Sylfiden* at the *Performer Stammtisch* in Berlin, Spring 2008, and since then I have revised this reconstruction several times. It is said that through dance, emotions and gestures, you can convey a story. But I don't tell a story and have no use for gestures. My reconstruction is solely a study of emotions contained in the original steps. Can an untrained body attain them? *Majse Aymo-Boot* wrote:

“And here it is clear that this is an attempt to get beyond parody. Entrechats, grand jetés, pirouettes and pliés are executed by the performer in a strenuous and sweaty workout. Quivering legs, heavy leaps, and legs striving upwards in vain. It is emotionally gripping; however this effect is neither caused by the elements traditionally regarded as touching; such as the sublime balloon effect of ballet, the mimicry or the ecstatic strength; nor is it caused by the presentation of the demonic ballet teacher and his all-consuming passion for his art. It is profound to see a working body that takes ballet seriously, but without being able to master it. Behind “A Lesson” is an understanding of ballet language as a sign system of gestures. Can we express something of this language without mastering it as a ballet dancer? Is the content only redeemed in a sublimely mastered dance: each movement in the dance teacher’s solo repeated as anew. It is a long quote, loyal to the starting point, but garbled, almost demented. Any articulation fails, stammering, stumbling and falling short. The body speaks pidgin, incomprehensible, but all the more insistent. In this absolute absence of the sublime, it appears in its negative form; as a shadow of itself.”

The last reconstruction was with my wife *Ellen Friis*. During my research for my exhibition at Hofteatret, I discovered some press photos taken by *Ellen Price*. Ellen Friis and I reconstructed these and *Malle Madsen* took the pictures.







Georg Lindström  KØBENHAVN
Kobmagergade 42

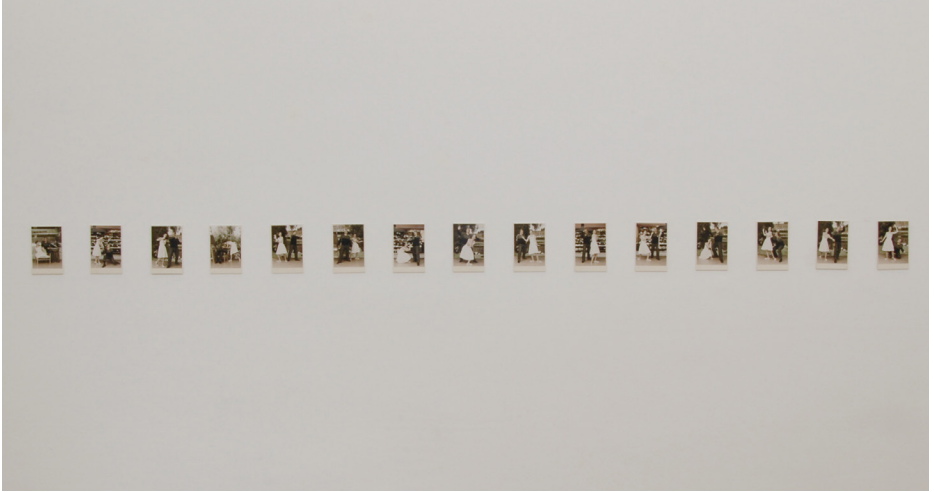




Georg Lindström



KÖBENHAVN
Kobmagergade 42



Hardly any another Danish theatre performance has applied the fourth wall as convincingly as *Henri Nathansen's Inside The Walls*. The audience felt truly transported into a real dining room complete with the strong smell of a freshly cooked soup. They completely forgot that they were in the theatre.



Today, an audience requires an entirely different set of tricks to get a similar experience and sensation. Even if we could put the audience in the same situation as Nathansen did, the original text is no longer of any use! A lively dialogue and a credible setting reflecting our present are needed. For my versions, I prepared nothing but the food and gave advice to the cameramen and directors. All dialogue was completely authentic. The picture below shows the red meatballs, I made for the soup at *Glogau AIR* in Berlin.



The picture from the exhibition at the Theater Museum below shows the final version of Zonkel's *Inside the Walls*. Here, my own family was acting family and discussing family matters in our home. *Jörn J. Burmester* played a person being thrown out. The film is a part of the Canon film on the Blu-ray disc and at my YouTube channel.



In this film version of *Inside the Walls*, I included some old thoughts. Concurrently with this Canon project, I developed a project called *Real Art*, where I tried to abolish the difference between daily life and art. But reality intruded too much, when my new-born son *Ludvig Vestergaard Friis* died. Five months later my father – *Tom Vestergaard Pedersen* - passed away. The last version of *Inside the Walls* is in a way a return to the *Real Art* project.

Kaj Munk's The Word (1932) is about believing in resurrection. A belief, I do not share, but I believe the dead live on in us. An important part of the Canon Project was to take the various works on or into my body. Therefore, I used my own very contemporary biography, when I performed *The Word* at the *National Museum in Szczecin (Poland)* in 2008. It was just two months after my father died and seven months after my son died. The pictures from the performance are by *Artur Koztowski*.









Beeing a litmus paper, I had to sacrifice myself for the art, even through I do not like the idea of artist's sacrificing themselves. But in order to do the whole Canon for the Performing Arts properly, I had to take all the works in and do as they commanded.

The decision to use the death of my father and son in an artwork was npt an easy one to take. But it was necessary to do the Canon the right way.

I never planned to use art as psychological praxis, but it turned out that art - the performance - provided me with a platform to live it out. So it really was not a sacrifice after all.

After working with the Word, *Kjeld Abell's Anna Sophie Hedvig* became a meta-piece about the Canon. What would I sacrifice for the Cultural Canon, for Denmark and for my work?

I took a tour through the culture houses of the Danish province disguised as a government representative/hooligan promoting the Culture Canon.

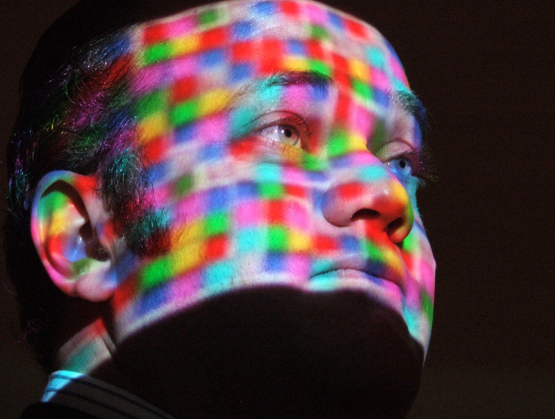
A shot from a photo session with Björn Reissman of me as a hooligan was sent to China to be painted. At the Theatre Museum, I placed it with the other great photos from Danish Theatre history and from that position; I could look *Ghita Nørby* straight into the eyes. At the Grimmuseum, the painting was the first to meet the audience.

Kjeld Abell wrote Anna Sophie Hedvig in 1939, when Denmark was about to be invaded. In the years leading up to the war - as the Nazis gained territory - *The Danish government* had remained neutral and urged the Danes to do the same. Most people did what the government asked, apart from some who joined the resistance. Others went to Spain to fight Franco's regime. They were the heroes of the Second World War. And then there were people like Anna Sophie Hedvig: everyday heroes - ordinary people. From their ordinary world, they only saw glimpses of the big world and all its possibilities. As did Anna Sophie Hedvig, when she stood there with Miss Møller on top of the stairs. Here, she realized, that now - right now - she had the chance to change the world, change her life and push the evil Miss Møller down the stairs.

Playing a government representative, I examined what it means to state art. I shoved my evil left wing thoughts down the stairs and propagandized for the Canon and for Denmark.

The four revue numbers part of the Blu-ray disc shows footage from *The Culture House* in *Vollsmose* outside *Odense*. Last stop of the tour. Members of the audience improvised *Skolekammerater*.

For unknown reasons, the Canon committee decided that no revue number was substantial enough to be on its own in the Canon. So they put four in just one slot.



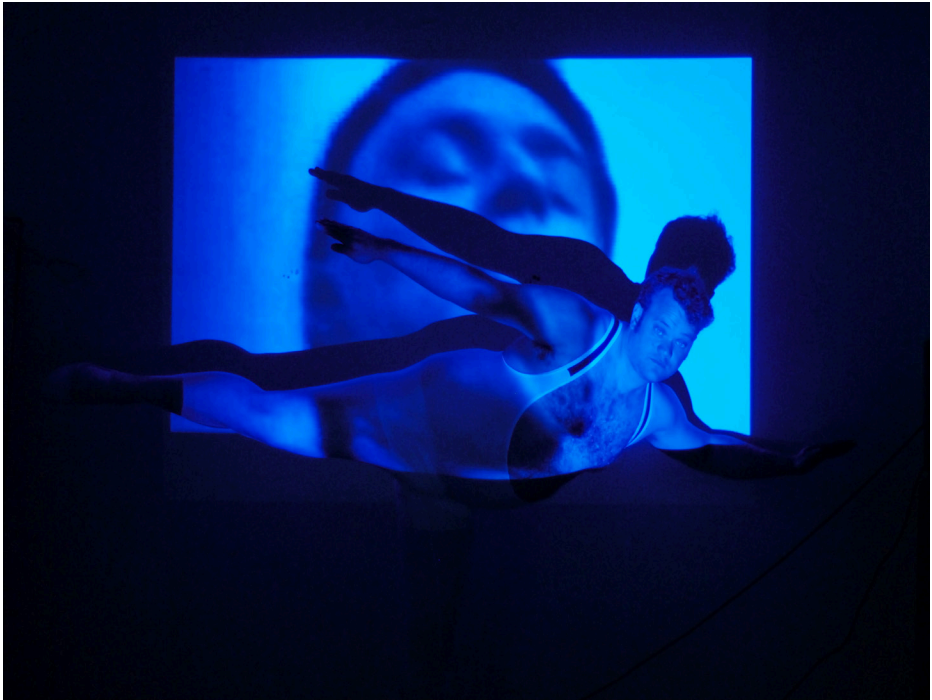
Interestingly, revue artists seem to steal even more from each other than theatre makers do. *Arvid Muller* did not write *Brev til Bulganin*, as he and the Canon publication claims. He just translated it from a text by the Austrian *Gerhard Bronner*. Picture on the top (left) on the previous page of me performing *Brev til Bulganin* taken by *Heine Bø*. *Dirch Passer* and *Preben Kaas* did not invent *Fingernummeret*, but copied it from an American comedian; *Mr. Art Metrano*. I have performed many versions of *Fingernummeret*. In one, I did it next to *Ole Ernst* in *Turbinehallerne*. Video still by *Peter Sloth Madsen*. That was important, because one of my first sexual memories was of seeing *Ole Ernst* naked on film. But the best version was performed by *Mogens Jensen*. See it on YouTube – just search for *Mogens Jensen*. It was created for the fernissage of my exhibition at Hofteatret in Christiansborg; which also is the place for the Danish parliament. I invited the cultural spokesmen from all political parties of Denmark. Everybody accepted the invitation; even *Pia Kjærsgaard*. But eventually the 2011 election was scheduled for the same night and most of them had to call it off. But *Mogens Jensen* (Cultural Spokesman of *Socialdemokratiet*) and *Troels Rasmussen* (Cultural Spokesman of *Venstre* (now *Liberal Alliance*)) agreed to perform for video, filmed by me. *Troels'* lovely version of *Man binder os på mund og hånd* can also be found on my YouTube channel. Videostills of both on the previous page. The night of the fernissage, *Pernille Ørsted* from *Konservative* performed *Man binder os på mund og hånd* and *Karl H. Bornhøft* from *S.F.* performed *Brev til Bulganin*. Again, members of the audience improvised *Skolekammerater*.

Zonkels *Etudes* were first performed in 2010, May 23rd, at *Viften* in *Rødovre*. With *Etudes*, I managed to speak the sublime and exclusive language of ballet. Not in the least due to *Helle Lyshøj's* live video work, which doubled my image many times. No matter how inaccurate my movements were (compared to the original), they achieved their own precision. *Hilary Briggs* and *Henriette Thorslund* thought me how to dance.

The iconographic picture on the front of this book is taken by Helle Lyshøj. The picture in this page is a videostill from a filmrecording by Thomas Martius at *HAU* in Berlin. The first photo on the next page shows the projection in the ceiling of the Theatre Museum. The second picture is from the show at *Residenz Theater* in *München*. The last two pictures are from Performer *Stammtisch* and *Grimmuseum* in Berlin. I could have toured the piece forever. But I am never gonna dance again. My wounded toe has got no rhythm.





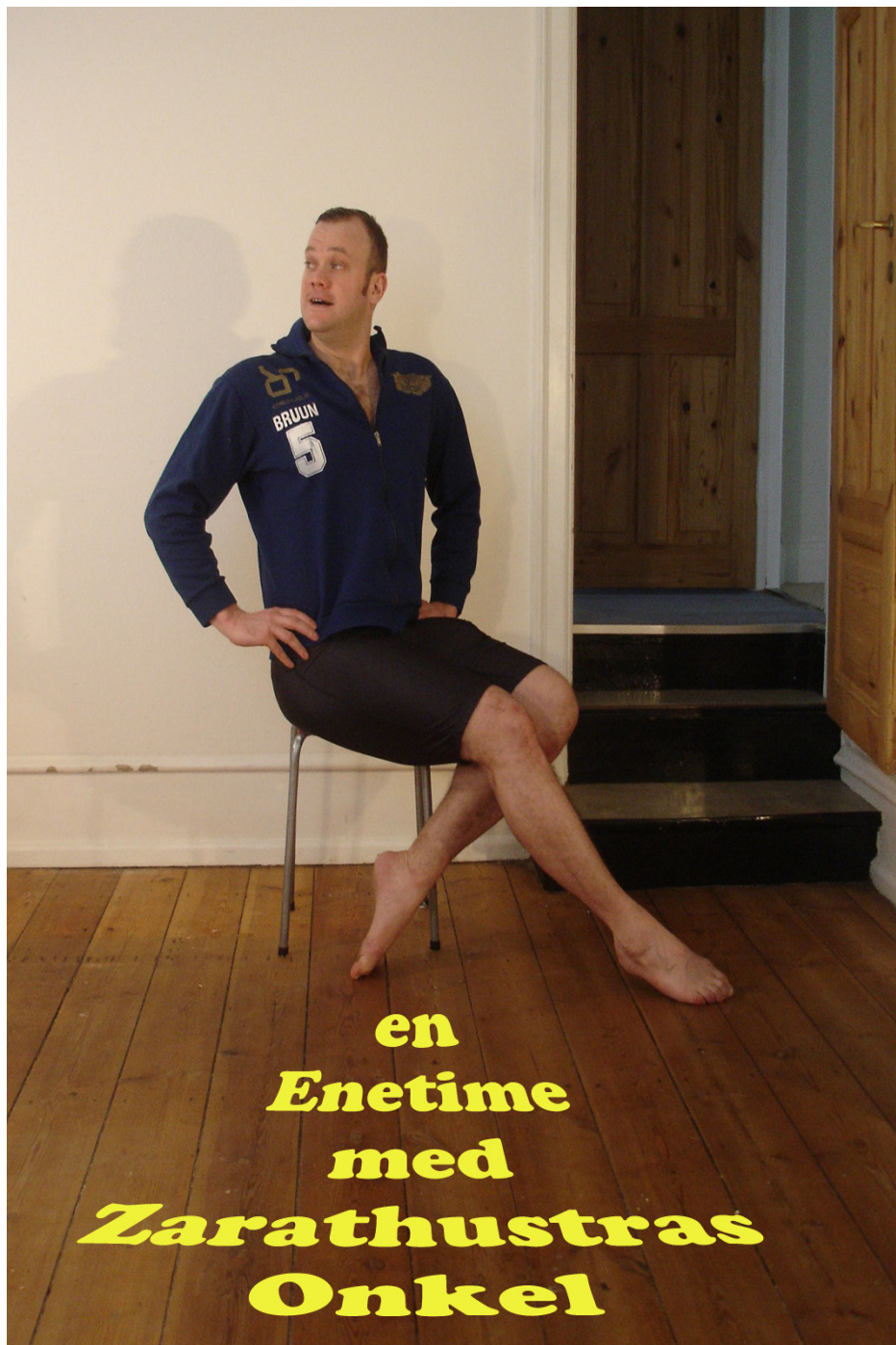


A Lesson by Zarathustra's Onkel (2007) was an investigation of the moment prior to a performance. A performance experience starts the moment, you hear about it, but what happens, if the performance does not take place? Can you create a performance, that happens in peoples minds only?

A Lesson by Zarathustra's Onkel was based on the choreography *A Lesson by Flemming Flindt* from 1963, which was again based on *Eugene Ionesco's* play by the same name from 1951. The cheap flyers (see page 40) handed out all over Copenhagen invited the reader to a one-to-one session with an overweight, mean-looking, middle-aged guy in a basement. Pictures by Ellen Friis.

Zonkels lesson did not take place in a Vesterbro basement in Copenhagen, as the flyer claimed. In fact, there were no ballet students, no set and not even a dance teacher! The actual performance took place in people's minds only, based on their own expectations and apprehensions. Hopefully, they wondered about the project for a long time.

Equally, the audience's expectations interested me, when creating *Aladdin*. Nobody experienced the show live, but many have seen evidence of it subsequently; through the documentation of the performance.



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Onkels fjerde rekonstruktion
af scenekunstværkerne fra
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**Rekonstruktionen af Flemming
Flindts "Enetime" finder sted
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2007 undtagen den første april.**

**Henrik Vestergaard Pedersen
danser rollen som lærer og du
er inviteret til at være elev.**

**Der er kun plads til én tilskuer
per aften. I alt kan kun otte
mennesker se forestillingen.**

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**For mere information om
Zarathustras Onkel og
Kanonprojektet:
www.ZONKEL.com**

I repeated the idea of A Lesson at the exhibition at the Theatre Museum with a plate with my name and phone number on a door. A secretary recorded all calls to the number through the exhibition period. For the exhibition at Grimmuseum, the gallery owner *Enrico Centonze* and I decided to build a whole ballet studio and finally present a physical reconstruction of A Lesson. For that, I invited the performance artist *Magnús Logi Kristinsson*, who previously has flirted with ballet.





The Santa Army. At 12pm exactly, December 18th in 1974, 100 Santa's turned up in red and white costumes off the boat from Norway the week leading up to Christmas - to fill Copenhagen with red and white happiness. Solvognen's members turned up on skates, they sang, they had animals with them, they visited nursing homes where they entertained people with old broadsheet ballads, they visited schools where they played old fashioned games with the children and distributed alternative history books, and then suddenly they were all in the department store Magasin. Here, they shared their gifts with real Magasin customers. 'Gifts', which they had taken down from the shop shelves.

Late November 2006, I sent an e-mail to friends and acquaintances asking them to show up in Santa costumes in Magasin's book department, December 18th. I did not tell them what to do, apart from showing up and forwarding the e-mail to others. Indeed, they did, because in Magasin, there were more guards and police than Santa's. We were 12 Santa's in total. Although it was far fewer than in the original action, much more media and more cameras were present.

The atmosphere in Magasin was intense, and it seemed wrong to break it. Had any of the Santa's decided to 'give' away books, he or she would have ended up in the news in both *TV2* and *DR*. We did not say a word and stole nothing, but this was not the principal issue in the reconstruction of the action of *Solvognen*. We were in fact arrested anyway. Solvognen used far more radical means to prove that Denmark is a police state.

All we had to do to prove this point was to stand in a shop dressed in Santa Claus costumes. Pictures by Erik Sløjfebinder, Steen Madsen, Gert van der Pumperlei and Politiken.tv.

December 18th, 2011, marked the fifth anniversary of Zonkels Canon and I celebrated it with another Santa performance: *Occupy Magasin*. But this time I asked people to turn up as themselves. I wrote: “The Santa’s should be disguised as ordinary people.” It confused the police. They were running around all over Magasin looking for Santa’s.

I also performed a small Santa version at *KaDeWe* in Berlin. Or actually, I did not. Dressed as Santa Claus, I interrupted a fernissage at the Grimmuseum in 2012, claiming I was in trouble for giving away books in KaDeWe. As in some other works of my Canon, I investigated the limits of reality, challenging the willingness of the audience to believe the fiction and remembering it as reality.





The remake of *Sort Sol's* concert was a performance of self-destructive and violent behaviour. To this purpose, we combined boxing with noise music. Jörn J. Burmester and I performed Zort Zul Live at *Warehouse 9*, Copenhagen, November 28th, 2009. Videostill below from film recorded by *Karl Stampes*.



In the first version, small microphones were attached to the boxer gloves and the sounds of Jörn J. Burmester being hit formed the music. The picture to the right shows the costume, I was wearing at Warehouse 9, exhibited at Hofteatret in Copenhagen next to other old original costumes. In the previous collage you can also spot my Santa Army costume in the exhibition at Hofteatret.



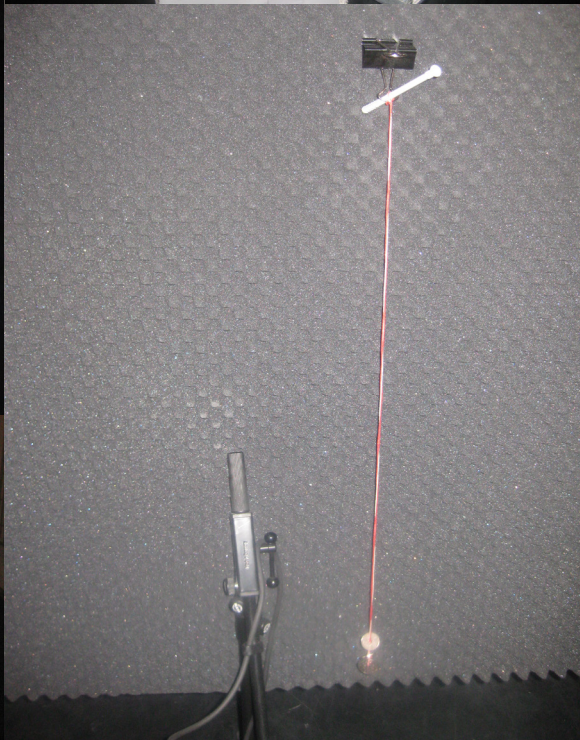


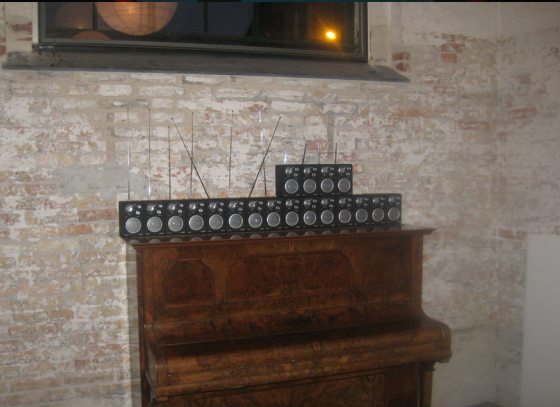


The picture on page 48 shows the band at Grimmuseum. The picture taken by Das Prinzip also shows the text Burmester generated from the original Sort Sol material. The second, very different version was performed at Grimmuseum, May 2012.

In Zonkels reconstruction of *Jess Ørnsbo's Majonæse*, *Poul Storm*, *Merete Byrial*, *Pelle Skovmand* and I used more than 95% of the original text from 1985, but turned the text on itself. The text is grim, dark, funny, and provides material for extreme physical playfulness. The performers chose to downplay the text in order to emphasise the subtext within the piece.

We put emphasis on staging the text's rhythm and metaphors to explore Ørnsbo's linguistic experiment. We used no instruments or pre-recorded sounds. All audio material of the show was created and manipulated live and differed greatly from night to night. The only pre-recorded material was the narrator's voice, which could be heard in twenty radios given to the audience and broadcasted by our own Pirate Radio sender. Other live audio sources originated directly from the text and created an electro-acoustic soundscape, which pushed the text to another level. Zarathustra's Onkel aimed at exposing the text's otherness to validate it. What qualities does it have; other than that which meets the eye?







The foley artist *Max Bauer* helped us recreating the sound from Ørnsbo's text. The press picture above is from a workshop with Max Bauer. All pictures on the previous page and the last pages of this booklet are by Gert van der Pumperlei.

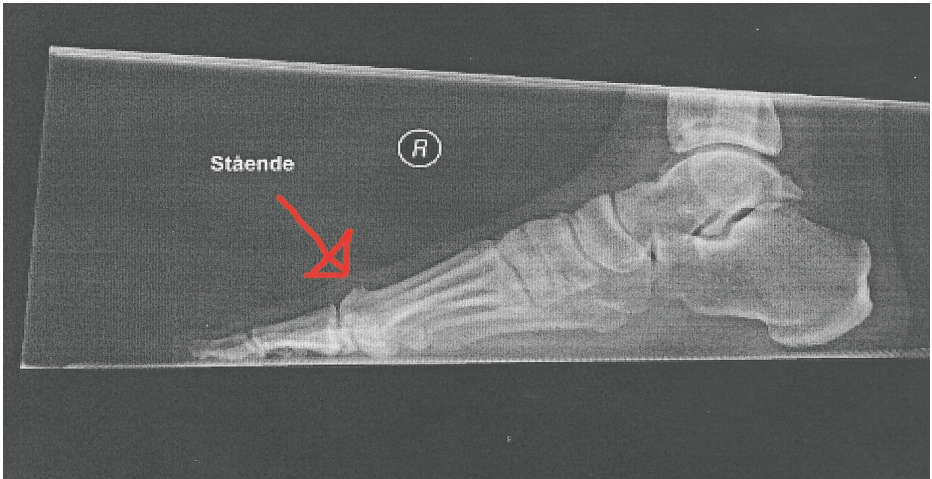
Apart from reconstructing the Canon, I also dreamed of remaking the performances, I personally thought should have been in a Canon for the Performing Arts. I recreated *Erik Pold's Bound to Fail*. Picture on next page by Malle Madsen.

I never got around to interpret *Kom De Bagfra, Bjørn Nørgaard, Værkstedet Værst* or *Billedstofteatret*. That will be a job for somebody else.



Since my first version of Etudes, I have had an increasing problem with my right big toe. A bunion was growing on it. So being a Litmus Paper did work; The Canon did leave an imprint. Or the pointe shoes did. But it was an imprint, my body rejected. September 17th, 2013, I had an operation of the foot.





There was no doubt that what was operated out was Danish. See picture next page. It was very red and white. The piece removed from my body will be exhibited at the release party for this book and Blu-ray disc. It is the last work of art made by Zarathustras Onkel and without a doubt the most original work. The essence of Danish Culture compressed into one small piece.



