



## The state of the school

It's September 2016. This academic year the school's name is changing from de Theaterschool to the Academy of Theatre and Dance. This change is a response to the many people – both inside and outside the school – who have wondered why the word 'dance' didn't appear in the name of our school. But was that truly the case? Were our forerunners choosing not to acknowledge dance in the school's name? The answer is to be found in language. And in time. When the name de Theaterschool was chosen in 1968 by my much-admired predecessor the cultural philosopher Jan Kassies (the man who ran around the school writing the word 'Why?' on all the doors) it was all-embracing: it encompassed drama and mime, dance and ballet, and all the cross-fertilisation and interactions between these disciplines. 'Theatre' is an umbrella term for all the art forms that live performing artists make for live audiences. And 'a theatre' is a building where dance and drama and music theatre are most often performed. So, that's what time does to the collective memory. We are the Academy of Theatre and Dance. In two years we'll be celebrating our 50th jubilee. That's half a century of theatre history.

If you don't keep a careful watch, time eats away holes in society's memory. That's as true for an optimistic theatre school that wants to believe in progress as it is for old Europe, which, for the first time in far longer than 1000 years, believed that the borders and walls should be torn down once and for all to prevent us from ever again becoming capable of wreaking a Holocaust on our oh so civilised continent. And here we are today. They want to close the borders. There's Brexit. There's fear of the other. We're following populist and religious leaders. We're making egocentric choices for whatever is easiest. We are in denial about uncomfortable truths regarding the climate and the insanity of the financial economy, and we only open our windows and doors to get rid of something, or someone. 'Oh brave new world that has such people in it': that's what Shakespeare said.

It's proof – if proof were needed – that the human condition is of all time, of all ages; the philosophical concept of '*la condition humaine*' is also the title of a novel by André Malreaux, which was published in 1933. Eddy du Perron translated it beautifully into Dutch as '*het menselijk tekort*', or 'human shortcomings'. People have the capability to think, but thinking is the source of suffering, believed Malreaux. In the name of morality we do immoral things. That same morality-driven motive – the will to do good – is the motor for our quest for progress, truth and beauty. We try to find the balance between responsibility and guilt, and to restore the balance of power, by doing good. In our case we do that by making arts, for their beauty and their ability to penetrate into people's soul and make things happen – no matter how small, apparently inept. To little effect if you take a historical perspective. Our art takes place in the here and now, where people can see each other and touch each other, where something fundamental is set in motion. The flutter of a butterfly wing in the Amazon can cause a tiny gust that can be magnified in the stratosphere and grow to become a hurricane somewhere else in the world. The opposite is also true, of course: the butterfly can prevent a hurricane. According to Chaos theory, which uses this anecdotal image, the same butterfly can exert both effects.

That's why I am so proud that I can work at this school – at this academy for theatre and dance – so together with you, the artists – our students, our teachers – and the staff can continue to make theatre that is vital and influential in this 21st century. And in doing so we



are connected with new generations that want to stand and to stand up for change, to work for a sustainable and open society that believes in progress and learns from our collective memory and invests in education in which creativity and knowledge are the source for media-savvy, cultured citizens who can tackle this century's great questions.

Yes, I know. Those were grand words. But they are allowed in a State of the School address. The same words were spoken a few weeks ago at the debate – the Paradiso Debate – on culture and the world, to make it clear to our politicians that we should no longer avert our gaze from the great issues of this century. It was striking, and encouraging, that all the politicians present at the debate fully acknowledged the fact that art – both the soul and a tangible component of our culture – is essential, and must receive continued investment.

In recent times, other gatherings have been held that focused on culture and the world. And there will be more. Go to them. Let your voice be heard. Join in the discussion about your own future and listen to how human shortcomings can paralyse the process of arriving at obvious conclusions. And ask yourself, 'What can I offer?' 'What can we offer?' Could we perhaps do something by joining forces, by ensuring that the differences that will always remain are less important than the things we stand for: solidarity, connectedness and the freedom to be what we believe in? This is something that we as a school cannot do enough of. Like here at HALf6, for example. Organise your own HALf6. Come here. Your course has already given you the time off. Let HALf6 [17.30] on Tuesday be your time and your place to get together and plot together. You can get moving by joining Nasrdin Dchar for a walk on 25 September.

At the same time let's turn the Academy of Theatre and Dance into the best school we can come up with together; into a school standing with both feet in this 21st century; into a place where tradition and innovation come together at the very highest technical level, where technique and craftsmanship are as important as personality and the issues engaged with, where cooperation means an investment in a generation of theatre makers (and yes, that includes the dance makers). A place where being enterprising means being able to express yourself sharply and smartly, and effortlessly finding your way into networks – if that's what you need – and being creative enough to use what we are good at – imagining and storytelling – and rendering it not only theatre, but in all the other corners of society: in film and games, politics, education and the creative industry. A place where we come together – like in our new ID LAB – and encounter professional practice in new and unexpected forms. But most of all, a place where we never, ever forsake our art – no matter how wayward and awkward. That's not a contradiction. It's a pre-requisite. Likewise, the human condition is a pre-requisite, the source and essence of countless stories from world literature. Oh brave new world that has such people in it. Why? Just because. Have a great year. Work well and independently. Remain open and be critical. Be radical in what you do. And enjoy yourself.