

## Land without Dreams, 2018.

Co-produced with Eventministeriet/The Royal Danish Theatre.

By Erik Exe Christoffersen

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### How do We Imagine the Future?

The performance is a long monologue performed by a female actor in an empty theatre space in front of the audience: “I am the woman from the future, and you should not be afraid – everything will be fine. The future is neither bright white walls with blinding LED lights nor women in tight sexy sci-fi outfits. The future will be just fine.” Many of us are worried about the future. One crisis after another is emerging, and there is little faith that anyone is willing or able to try to solve the problems of the future. Rather, many politicians seem to be busy magnifying the problems. *Land without Dreams* takes a different approach, trying to conjure up a future that is a kind of dream. Lise Lauenblad is the actor who leads the audience through a theatrical universe with supreme confidence and great credibility. The audience follows her suggestions for dreams about the future.

The monologue is addressed directly to the audience. At the same time, however, there is also an implicit address in the text. The “I” of the text, a woman, speaks to the *audience* of the text, but at the same time a relationship between the actor and the spectator is created in the specific performance itself in front of those who are present that particular day. As the actor says, “imagine an empty room, spectators come in and then this woman comes in and says: ‘I’m from the future’”. But the actor regretfully says that no one takes her seriously, no one believes her. It is just theatre and she is an actor. On this metafictional level, she goes on to say, “It’s just so as not to scare you or frighten you that I look like you”. And she predicts what will happen: “A spectator gets up and leaves. She’s angry that it’s not getting any better”. But there will also be a spectator who feels “that she is the one being spoken to. That she is the chosen one”. Should we trust the woman who says she is from the future?

### The Future Begins Now

Putting it briefly, I suppose it means that the future begins *here and now*. Here in this room where we are watching theatre. The future is conditioned by what we say, think and do right here and now. The future has already begun and the performance has a number of suggestions about what will happen to us, the spectators, because we have come here today for the performance. Some will start a relationship because of this unexpectedly powerful experience, one will get up and leave because he receives a call on his mobile phone that his daughter has had an accident, another will go into politics, and one will regret that the time was not spent on something other than this ridiculous piece of theatre. Theatre is made up of illusions and fantasies, beginning with the notions and imaginations that the play conjures up. Will they, as a form of reality, actually change reality concretely?

It is a pure, minimalist performance. No set, no costumes, not many light effects. The imaginations, the so-called “magic ifs” that we as spectators experience, we have to evoke ourselves, asking ourselves: What if this woman is actually from the future? The performance plays with fiction



# LANDET UDEN DRØMME

21. APRIL – 2. MAJ Skuespilhuset

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and real time. She goes out, comes back in, repeats lines, looks at the audience, smiles and repeats I am from the future. The actor tells us everything that is going to happen on stage. And she praises herself for remembering the text.

What does the future look like? Will there be hungry bears? Will there be floods? She tells us that there will be drops of water from the ceiling, and soon the room will be filled with water and the audience will drown. It is just theatre and theatrical imaginings, dreams. But we can relax, because the future will be without the crises we know.

“When does the performance begin?” The actor tries to understand what a spectator is thinking. But it *has* begun and the spectators *are* the chosen ones. She imagines that some spectators are considering if they should walk out and try to get their money back. She is the future and there are no crises or catastrophes, but is that not rather naive, the actor herself suggests?

### **Transformation for the future**

She scratches herself like an animal. She is credible and seems sincere when she dances. Something changes when she enters. Is she transforming into another (future) being? Are there leaps in time? It is a performance about coincidence; something may fall into place in the future. It will be good, but different. But it is not a coincidence that we are here and we will determine the future.

She takes off all her clothes. Naked, she stands with a bucket. It turns out to be white clay, which she covers her whole body with. She becomes another being: an organic being unlike anything we have seen before, neither man nor woman, neither animal nor human, it looks like a foetus, perhaps a creature of the past, perhaps a creature of the future? She is reborn, wrapped in slime and mud, wordlessly trying to find her footing on the slippery floor. She rises as a creature that speaks to us across time, reminding us that the future is being formed now – and that we are the ones who must create it. In the future, we will be able to sail on water, walk on the moon, fly and talk to each other at great distances. No one will starve. She walks on two legs, but at the same time is reduced to organic dream life.

Here the performance ends, but before the usual curtain call, a woman stands up from the audience, walks on stage and say, “I am the future”. Several spectators follow and repeat. The spectator sitting right next to me also stands up and goes up on stage and says “I am the future” and adds “don’t be afraid”. I actually feel like going up on stage and repeating “I am the future”.

### **Director and Writer Play Together**

Tue Beiring has created an intriguing performance in which the roles of playwright and director enter into a kind of mirroring interaction with each other. The text and the performance create an infinite reflection of each other. The text and the audience are mirrored in the actual actor and the actual spectators. The fiction of the text is mirrored in the real space. This is called *Mise en abyme*. It is a form of dramaturgy that inserts a story within a story. Here, the spectators, who are actually present, are slowly inserted into the fictional universe. It is a technique familiar, for example, from Shakespeare’s famous scene in *Hamlet*, where the actors perform a mimetic mirroring of the plot of *Hamlet*. In *Land without Dreams*, fiction mirrors reality, which means that the future is created here and now by the spectators present.



Photo: Søren Meisner

### **The Late Modern Tragic Subject**

*Land without Dreams* is in many ways reminiscent of several performances by the British theatre group Forced Entertainment, especially *First Night* and *Tomorrow's Parties*. What these performances have in common is that an actor addresses the audience directly in a largely empty space. *Land without Dreams* centres around the subject without dreams of the future in the late modern age.

What is disturbing is how easily the stable reality can seem to slip if our capacity to imagine a different future is not actualised.

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*Land without Dreams* is produced by FIX&FOXY in collaboration with Eventministeriet at The Royal Danish Theatre.

**Actor:** Lise Lauenblad.

**Director and writer:** Tue Biering.

**Dramaturge:** Tanja Diers.