

joachim robbrecht

The
Great
Warmachine

Words are bullets

Information is stronger than art

Louis

Aitana

Tashi

note on the characters

There are no ‘real’ characters in this text , as such. During the rehearsal process, we chose to use the names of the performers, Aitana, Tashi and Louis, in order to make clear who is speaking. Despite that, it is also clear that it is not so much the performers themselves who are speaking. They are somebody else, an identity not completely defined, like somebody popping up on the net, in a panel discussion, at a product launch; a person, or speaking voice, of whom nobody knows anything else apart from a name and the fact he or she must be considered an expert on the topic.

note on the use of quotes

This text has been developed as a kind of *cadavre exquis* of my own writings and citations. I have woven into the text shorter and longer quotations from statements and speeches by: former Commander of the Royal Netherlands Army Peter van Uhm, visual artist and NASA crew commander Angelo Vermeulen, philosopher Slavoj Žižek, martial artist Miyamoto Musashi, writer and director of *Call of Duty Black Ops 2* Dave Anthony, space craft designer Burt Rutan, jazz composer Sun

Ra, philosopher Buyung Chul-Han and professor in the History of Consciousness Donna J. Haraway, amongst others. Some parts of the text have been created, through improvisation, during rehearsals with Aitana Cordero, Louis van der Waal and Tashi Iwaoka.

Furthermore, I have been advised and supported by Nina Aalders and Bruno Listopad.

out of the box

louis I am really honored to be here tonight. When I look around I see a very interesting audience. When I look around I see people who want to make a contribution, I see people who want to make a better world, by doing groundbreaking scientific work, by creating impressive work of art, by writing critical articles or inspiring books, by starting up sustainable businesses. And you all have chosen your own instruments to fulfill this mission of creating a better world. Some chose the microscope as their instrument. Others chose dancing or painting or making music. Some chose the pen. Others work through the instrument of money, and the world now is evolving in such a way that we really need a lot of thinking... out-of-the-box thinking I mean... of like how are things going to develop? I mean, we are writing the battle narrative ourselves, right?

tashi We are the ones now that have the toolbox to shape our environments... we are the ones that have the programming language of life available with the push of a button, that can invent amazing things, like for example... geo-engineering, it's up to us. It's our project.

aitana Yea, it's like being in a laboratory... or... like being in the Manhattan project, you know, with all these smart people coming

together to design the first atomic bomb. Or like how they developed stem cell technology? I mean that's close-to-divine...

louis ...exactly...

aitana ...out-of-the-box-thinking that can only be done with a co-creative attitude.

louis Yea well. I believe it's essential, to regularly update our styles of engagement, you know... I mean also I really believe, if you want to prevent excessive and completely destructive outbursts of violence, then you really have to offer an alternative narrative or plot to that... because warfare nowadays is really to create this dream or a common goal... beyond 'Let's liberate this or that country from the nasty dictator'. You have to challenge people! Really, I believe in a kind of... pre-emptive warfare, like always having a kind of low intensity conflict going on.

aitana Exactly, I mean for example, I've been working lately on this project, on ecosystems, like symbiotic relationships between computers, humans and plants...

louis Oh that's interesting.

aitana Yea well that's the game I am working on!

louis Haha, yea...

aitana Well, we actually ignite conversations between these communities of plants humans and computers. Like for example we use algae [/'æɪ.lgi:/] to cool down computer processors so they can run faster while the heat that is then generated by the computer electronics is used to make the plants grow.

tashi Wow, that sounds great.

aitana Yea, I love it. It's a kind of open source project, and you know it is really special that it creates this dynamic that is really the catalyst for collaboration between artists, biologists, computer scientists, game designers, gardeners, community organizers, members of local communities, and...

tashi ...plants and computers.

aitana Yes, exactly. There is this whole ecosystem that we are engaging in this like...in this vision... and like everybody is becoming an artist in the process, you know... kids, old people, plants... we mobilize all kind of... creative powers... that they don't even know they had it in them.

louis Yea like: 'Come on, let's think beyond "let's liberate this or that country from the nasty dictator"'.

tashi And I think it is really important that you really stretch the definition of what a combatant can be in this struggle and who can be the enemy.

aitana I agree, I agree... I mean the next few wars - and really probably we are right in the middle of one - ...

louis ...yea...

aitana ...the next wars are really not going to be fought with armies or soldiers.

tashi Oh no.

aitana I mean that is really a nostalgic idea... the concept that we have nowadays of the soldier...

louis Oh that's quite hopeless.

aitana What we need now is an expanded notion of what a combatant can be... like, already if you look at urban warfare today I mean civilians become combatants and combatants can become civilians in no time. Identity can be changed as quickly as gender can be feigned, to the extent that it doesn't make much sense to hold on to these kinds of distinctions between soldier and civilian. It's like asking what kind of color does a chameleon have? Which doesn't make much sense, right?

tashi Wow, well that's really well formulated. That's really some insightful poetry going on right there...

aitana Well, really I love poetry.

louis Oh yea me too, to me the whole world is really all about poetry.

When we two parted
in silence and tears
half broken hearted
to sever for years
pale grew thy cheek
and colder they kiss
truly, that hour
foretold sorrow to this.

Lord Byron... I mean when I work on a game,
I read the world as poetry... you know... patterns, structures,
alliterations, rhymes and rhythms, syncopations. *pause*
But no I really think she is a poet.

tashi It's all in the metaphors we believe in.

aitana Yea... like... if you say, you know... like Hobbes would have said: 'The state is a body and the king is the head of the body'... and if everybody starts to believe that... then it becomes their reality! But you know, Adorno was saying after World War 2, like he was saying: 'To write poetry after Auschwitz would be barbaric' but to be honest... I think only poetry can give us the tools to grasp this kind of err... 'event'... no seriously, we think of poets like they are these rigid beings, a bit melancholic, out of joint with the time, cannot cope with reality, but really... that is a really antiquated notion of the poet.

louis And yea, if people would ask you, what do you do for a living? What would you answer?

aitana For a living... I find that extremely difficult to answer! Yes, I am an artist, I am biologist, I am a game designer, I am human being, I am a machine, a cyborg, but also a plant, living, dying, I am a participant, a spectator, I am a surfer, a lover, engineer, a runner... I am I am I am a father, mother, whatever, I wanna be really a really amazing whatever... you understand what I mean?

tashi Oh yea, but that really is poetry. And I think the new generation warrior is going to be a complete hybrid: it's gonna be a well trained architect, a philosopher, a chess player and a bomb disposal expert all in one.

aitana Or like... err... what they do with 3d printers like how they are used on the... like nowadays, if there is some kind of a

humanitarian disaster somewhere, you just need to drop off a few nurses and a couple of 3d printers

tashi ...and they print out the whole hospital, really!

louis Oh yea! And very soon you'll have people with 3d printers built directly into their asses - haha. I mean, it's a fact now, that soldiers in the field, they are printing their own guns and bullets and when one of them gets his hand shot off, they make a prosthesis with the same printer!

aitana We are speeding things up and I think it's very natural...

louis I think so too.

aitana For me, this is really what human beings are all about... extremely vulnerable beings, very playful, very ambitious, always wanting to go faster, and sometimes crossing over into the other lane!

tashi ...yeah...

aitana The rest is a matter of trust. Let's move on!

louis *patronizing* Which involves some risk.

aitana Yes, some risk and a lot of devotion!

the next big thing

louis You know, sometimes... I try to read or see or hear the news... and what I am really astonished by is... they have all these intelligent people over there and they honestly try to inform me about what happened yesterday. And I am thinking... really, who cares? I don't wanna know what happened yesterday, I don't even wanna know what is happening right now, all I wanna know is what will happen tomorrow... that's what I wanna know.

aitana You mean, we don't wanna have a weather forecast for yesterday either... do we?

louis Exactly, that's what I mean.

tashi Well, regarding 'yesterday', that's an aspect that I find quite problematic about war, that it produces history. And this attachment to history, is really what keeps us from improving our society.

louis Sure, sure in essence, history is the waste of humankind, and...

tashi The only thing we collect in history is all the mess we've done to each other. I think people who build museums or archives for history are essentially suffering from a lack of self-confidence.

aitana Like as if they are saying: 'We couldn't do better than this'.

louis ...or: 'Sorry, we fucked it up'!

tashi And I would really want to say to those people: 'Trust the future. Don't look back. Invest in the future!' Really, it's not history

that produces the now, it's the future! It's not tradition that makes us who we are. It's the future! It's curiosity!

louis Yeah, I totally agree one hundred percent. The only bits of history that interest me are the ideas that build the future.

tashi Yes, and if one builds a museum, I think it should be a museum for the great visionaries of the future; like Da Vinci, who was really - I mean he even made the early sketches for a bike, a helicopter and a tank!

aitana And not only Da Vinci, you know, but like err... I mean, Steve Jobs or Elon Musk, I mean, they were really artists.

louis Well and that's something that Europe, I think, really lacks - that capability of inspiring people. The more museums we build, the more I realize this continent has no confidence at all. It's too sentimental, too full of it's own past, and too attached to it's own traumas...

tashi Like last year I traveled around Europe with my friend Shoko and went around... like everywhere... I mean mostly the south, you know... Sierra Nevada, Sicily, bit of Balkan, Vienna... Alps... Belgium and then, in Normandy, I had this revelation, seeing all those bunkers!

aitana The Atlantic Wall.

tashi Yes, and then I saw this bunker turned into a museum, a war history museum. And then, I thought, this is a perfect representation of the essence of Europe: a bunker and a museum in

one. This safe haven where you wait for the battle outside to be over while you enjoy the art hanging on the walls!

louis Yea, great collections! Beautiful stuff... but a bit too much... I mean, France and Italy... it's too much. We could get rid of some stuff... but we keep on accumulating, like madmen. *to Tashi* You're right, I mean the whole of Europe is born out of the marriage between a bunker and a museum. And basically Europe is nothing but a 3d cartoon version of Hitler's phantasy of the third Reich. No seriously, I mean, Churchill was a little Hitler too.

aitana Anyway, I believe the next game that is on is going to happen elsewhere.

tashi I agree, I agree...

aitana Sao Paolo... Beijing... Bangalore...

tashi ...or even Astana...

aitana ...or Venus.

louis Ha, yes indeed! I mean, I believe the next big thing... is not gonna happen somewhere geographically, it's gonna happen... how could I say... in another dimension! In another language!

tashi Maybe even without humans!

aitana Yea, very probably...

louis But you know, we can't openly state that nowadays. When one says something like: 'In the future, we are not going to need men or women to make babies, no, we can grow them in water in a petri dish, plugged into a computer... err... we will also feed them with little bits of high tech info, so they have a digital retina,

they'll be able to talk with plants and cure themselves.'...people will freak out!

aitana 'Oh my fucking god! They are building the next Frankenstein, they're creating a new monster, and it's going to take over' ... always this: 'Be careful, slow down, slow down, look back.'

louis ...yes yes...

tashi Well, I have been looking back and the only people that interest me are the people that are looking forward.

aitana Exactly, and we should simply say: 'Yes, we are building the next Frankenstein!' 'Yes, we are creating a monster and it's going to be a great one!' I mean, what's the point of thinking of research driven by curiosity as something despicable? Or why would babies, bred by computers, be morally wrong?

tashi Think of the future or even beyond the future, beyond time-categories of past - present - future.

aitana I think, that's it! Let's abolish time! That's the next step! That's the revolution!

We've come to a point in evolution where we are able to reprogram biology and that's exactly what we should keep on doing.

louis Or like I mean, look at weapons technology, you know, there's a lot of objectors out there and they are telling us: 'Ohhhh, the weapons industry, it's so lucrative... we should stop it!'

aitana That's a very naïve and one-sided opinion.

louis Yes, because if you look at how effectively all these instruments contribute to peace and progress. And its true, in the

last few decades, we've been producing gigantic stockpiles of weapons...

tashi ...and we shouldn't forget, that there has been some horrible stuff going on.

louis Oh no no, we shouldn't, but I tell you... Do you know what the chances are that you will die from a weapon in our time? The killing rate world wide has dropped by a factor of 30 since the Middle Ages... but hey, I don't want to glorify weapons! That's not...

aitana & tashi But you are!

louis Oh haha, I know, I know.

aitana No no no, I understand.

louis (The) only thing is that, actually, mankind wouldn't have gotten to where it stands today without the development of weaponry. Like, recently, I've heard that story about the 'magic bullet', the one that searches out its own target and I think war culture is going to be...

aitana I know, I know, I've been reading that very very interesting book by what's-his-name-again and I've been thinking lately... I mean, if you look at what weapons are... in essence... they are nothing but extensions of the human body. And hey, monkeys also kill each other. And if we would ban all weapons, then wouldn't we just pick up a tablet and smash each other's head?

tashi Yes, we never escape the economy of war. It's a human condition.

aitana Yes it is and ‘battle’, if you boil it down to it’s essence, is nothing but communication. And weapons are just a ‘medium’... like words.

louis Yeah, and words can also hurt. A lot. I know. From experience. Haha. I mean, words can be much more dangerous than bullets, because bullets, when they hit, you just simply explode, but words stay floating in your body. You can urinate and defecate as much as you want, but the painful words stay in your body.

aitana Exactly, and so I really believe that very soon... we are going to find... a way... by revolutionizing weapons as means of communication, by revolutionizing warfare... we are going to find - or might find - a way out of the ‘problem’ *making quotation sign of* killing people. Because in the end, why are we constructing all these weapons? It’s not to kill people. It’s to save our asses, no?

tashi Well, I think we are very close to finding a way out of killing people. And it is really beautiful to witness... that happen.

aitana I agree, I agree it’s really thrilling, and for example, if you go to the British Museum in London or the Metropolitan in New York...

louis Oh, woaw!

aitana I mean, many of the most intense experiences I have ever had with art are somehow related to agony, conflict and war.

tashi Yes, if you read the Greek tragedies, or Tolstoi or if you look at Goya’s disasters of war, or Picasso’s Guernica.

louis I can live my whole life in the Prado.

tashi And - woaw - so many impressive movies!

louis Oh yea, there are so many great war movies... and when I am working on a game, we are really every five minutes referring to the classics. You know we've got our lines set... 'You're so ugly, you could be a modern art masterpiece!'

tashi That's Full Metal Jacket.

louis Or: 'If I say it's safe to surf the beach, captain, then it's safe to surf the beach.'

to audience Anybody? That's Apocalypse now! But, of course, movies are over. I mean you will always have movies like you always have literature...

aitana Yea, sure!

louis But it's gamification all over now. Especially 'sandbox games'... people love that kind of stuff. Like before, everybody wanted to become a movie star and make their own movies or like broadcasting themselves, but that's completely over. And I am pretty sure, within the next fifteen years, we're gonna have something new, beyond game... super enhanced 4-d playing. Ten years max, and I'll be dead and forgotten - I mean metaphorically speaking.

tashi There will be a kid in a garage...

louis A kid in a garage, yes.

tashi ...who will invent the next big thing.

louis That's what I mean. I love kids, how they pick up on things sooo fast.

aitana Well, I think the next generation will have a built-in-
software-update-system since birth. And they can interconnect and
share information with brain-to-brain communication.

louis Yea and they can upload their minds to some kind of backup
system...

aitana ...and then they reinstall the update. And when you travel to
China, for example, you can just flip to Chinese and your nerve
system steers your muscles so that all the things you think in
English come out in Chinese.

louis Haha yea, ideal for business!

aitana Yeah!

louis If business still exists.

mindset

tashi What we need now is a completely different mindset, a mindset that is able to adapt to an ever changing environment. A mind like water, you know? If you pour water into a cup, it becomes the cup. If you pour water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle. If you pour water into a teapot, it becomes the teapot. And water can flow like a river or it can crash like a tsunami. Be like water! Shapeless, but honest and clear.

louis That's beautiful.

tashi Or like Musashi, the great Japanese Sword master, said in his book *Gorin No Sho, The Book Of Five Rings*, he says: 'Basically there are only two principles to address anything in life. And if you do understand these principles, you can achieve anything.' And the first principle is... Are you with me?

louis Yes.

tashi To keep inwardly calm and clear, even in the midst of violent chaos. And the second is: Not to forget about the possibility of disorder in times of order. And as we as humans experience those two very different worlds, the world of war and the world of peace, we should practice both of these fundamental aspects.

louis Which totally reminds me of what Martine Rothblatt recently said, that many people think that peace and war are of a different

substance, but according to her, peace and war are like wind and storm. And I think that is pretty much to the point.

tashi That's very true.

aitana In the end, you know, I think it doesn't make much sense that people make statements like 'the war is over' or 'we shouldn't have begun this war in the first place' or 'this war is unwinnable'.

tashi No, I agree, the war that we are in now is open-ended...

aitana ...constantly morphing and translating itself.

louis It's like a weed, growing everywhere, seeding itself into every tiny bit of fertile ground it can find. But some weeds you can make nice medicines from.

tashi Or soups!

aitana Yea, I love cooking. I wanna cook for you guys. I am a good cook.

tashi I love food! And travelling.

louis Me too, like detox holidays in Nepal once in a while.

tashi Intox is the new detox!

call of duty

aitana So, what got you interested in future unknown wars?

louis Yea... I've been, just been fascinated with war in general, and particularly the last game I've been working on, I've had very extensive experience and learning on World War 2 and also Vietnam, which was, I mean World War 2 was heavily featured in Call of Duty games and particularly in Black Ops which I played a lot. So, I've always been fascinated by it. And the more I learned about it, the more fascinated I got. And I think war is changing, it really is, I mean, err... eh, if you look at the recent wars, and you look at combat deaths. You know, World War 2 was about three hundred thousand US combat deaths. So World War 2, you know...

aitana ...yea and you have Vietnam, fifty thousand combat deaths.

louis Yes, that's true, something about that amount.

tashi Which is obviously a tragic loss of lives.

louis Yes, it is, it is.

aitana But six times less than err... than err... World War 2.

louis Yea and you know, if you look at the combat err... total death of Iraq and Afghanistan...

aitana Exactly!

louis I believe, I believe, it's around five to six thousand... yes, so you can imagine...

aitana It's ten times less than Vietnam.

louis Vietnam! Yea, yea and you can see when you are conceptualizing future war that death amounts are getting smaller and smaller. And I think, we would maybe end up with zero combat dead! Can you imagine? *pause* Would be interesting - or not? *laughs*

tashi Sure, war is changing.

louis Yea, it is changing obviously.

aitana It's no longer rows and rows and rows of err... sexy guys, you know, on either side of the battlefield.

louis Just fighting each other. It's dramatically...

aitana It's different, it's very, very different.

tashi But really, yea what really captures you intellectually?

louis What is engaging me intellectually, is that what you mean?

tashi Exactly, yea, that's the question.

louis I am thinking about... What is the next one of those that is going to happen? That's the thing I'm thinking about. For example, like... I think about the next war that we need err... to be worried about is, you know, not another World War 2 is coming where there's gonna be millions of people fighting in battlegrounds ... you know, I don't think it's gonna be like that.

tashi No, I don't think it's gonna be like that.

aitana I think... I think it's gonna be err... an unexpected nature kind of war, you know, probably based on...

louis New computer enhanced information technologies.

aitana Yea, like drones, you know.

louis Yea drones are really important in-in-in-in phantas... in the way we've got to see future wars... for example, I can't even get my

head around how staggering the potential is, for drones to be either... err... misused or abused and I think that this country and the world needs to be ready for it... for that. But that's just drones he, they... err...

aitana They are just one element, but there are so many different factors...

louis That's true.

aitana ...that you can look at.

louis That is really true. Yea, for example, you can be interested in...

aitana Yea, what you can be interested in?

louis Well, you can be interested in ways of killing people... that can be very interesting - there are many ways to do that - but, maybe that's not the thing you're interested in?

aitana Exactly, yea, no. No, I am also interested in learning new ways of killing people. Why not?

louis Yea.

aitana Exactly.

louis But I think information technology is is is now quite err... typical. It's a kind of hype going on. You think you can only win a war with hi-tech: with the newest of the newest things that are going on, but even drones are really old-school now. You can follow the things I'm saying?

aitana I think so... I think so... I mean, this isn't too complex.

louis Well, you have somebody... you have a fleet of drones coming in our direction in a way in the future they gonna think err... they

gonna neutralise, they gonna calculate how err... how important you are as an enemy... But I think, the more important thing is that the enemy... you don't know anymore where the enemy is hiding or what the enemy is. The fascinating thing is that the enemy can be already inside, inside of you for decades. Imagine, if the enemy... if the war is going on inside of you. You've got to kill yourself!

aitana With a drone, imagine.

louis Yea, with a drone.

aitana Imagine, a drone that will just attack you.

louis No, the thing I wanted to say... you gonna shit on a drone and the drone cannot attack you because it is...

aitana Yea... *laughs*

louis The thing I wanted to say is that the drone has a program because for example in two hundred years the drone is programmed as if people are shitting on me, or if pigeons are shitting on me, I have to kill those people. But the program has to be rewritten all day long that it gets stays up to date. The drone will completely kill itself by updating within seconds.

tashi It's a funny metaphor, because in the first World War pigeons were the drones.

louis Yes, very true and for example in the past they send pigeons to send letters. But in a way, when a pigeon or a nice dog is coming in the front door of your house and you think: 'Oh that's a nice dog, but it's full of anthrax' for example, the dog's full of anthrax and you're caressing the dog and you are full of anthrax *pause* And

that's the game I am writing now... about dogs... full of anthrax
fucking each other...

aitana Fucking each other?

louis No that's not true, I think sex, sex is completely overrated and
I think we are in the last twenty years of sex. I think in 2035, sex
will be err... yea, people will not care anymore about it, because I
think sex won't even exist anymore, actually, because it's not
interesting. You can fuck somebody to get children but believe me,
we're gonna find out that err... there are a lot more interesting
things than having sex with someone, because having sex is really
difficult, err... when you've got to train yourself twenty years to
get a real nice fuck with somebody.

tashi Well yea, as the saying goes: 'It's all fair in love and war'.

aitana Did you ever watch Japanese porn?

louis Japanese porn? No, but you know what my big project is?

Actually, I've come to this idea because since our sex lives are not
so interesting anymore, I came to this idea...

I mean, it's the ultimate game and well... right now, my whole team
and people all over are working on this.

aitana Which is?

louis To really take over reality. That is the ultimate game I am
working on. I mean, it's by now an old story that reality is
completely saturated with virtuality. Society of the Spectacle, Guy
Debord, Baudrillard, Simulacrum. For sure... everybody knows that.
But look, nowadays when wars are fought, that's really interesting,
that you find more journalists, more story-tellers on the ground

than soldiers. So you see... it's all about the fiction nowadays. And then... they get their heads chopped off. Like as if reality is saying: 'Watch out there! This is something real happening here' as if the real is jealous of the fiction. It is a kind of duel between real and fiction, like a contest to see which can be the most unimaginable. And who is going to win this duel? Well, for me it's clear, I mean if you look at the history of humankind... the only real World War that is going on here... the only battle narrative is a struggle between two or three or even ten different authors, poets:

Who can invent the most funny, amusing and interesting story, so that everyone thinks: 'This makes sense, ...ah yes, indeed, the earth is flat, or ah yes indeed the earth is a ball, or ah yes indeed man is a machine, or ah yes indeed man is an open information system.' But what I really want is to push it even a little bit further like... reinventing the real as the ultimate fiction... like everything is a toy. I am a toy, you are a toy and we are floating around in space... war toy... post-sex toy...theatre toy... through the fictions. Indulge in the fact that we're all just toys of planet earth playing around with us... telling a big story to another planet.

aitana It's a nice approach.

messy phase

louis No, seriously, I really am positive about the future, and yes there is a battle going on.

tashi There is always a battle going on, but let's keep the morale high... like, let's get high!

aitana Yes, we definitely don't need another war on drugs!

tashi And dare to dream on.

louis Well, if you look at how the mobile phone has been developed...

aitana *affirming* Mmmm.

louis I mean, even like end of nineties most of the people, if you would have told them like in twenty years from now, you will take out your phone, like 'this size' and have a video call with your auntie... and there will be a map in it and you will play games and it will also be a cookbook and agenda and all that, they would have laughed their asses off. Dreamers meet a lot of skepticism and a lot of fear... Be fair and admit it.

aitana Yes well, and I think we have to better manage our fears, because the system is uncontrollable. But I say... hey look guys, what-the-hell is wrong with uncontrollability?
Uncontrollability is not a bad thing!

tashi On the contrary, we need uncontrollability!

aitana That's how we arrived where we are right now...

uncontrolability, serendipity and contingency. Like, I cannot even control my breathing, so...

louis Yea, cut the crap. The whole universe is uncontrollable. Hello!

aitana Or like what the net has been offering us, is nothing but a universe of freedom and a total sense of... at the same time a total sense of comfort... It's been a new found land, a continent of potentialities!

louis That's exactly what I wanted to say.

aitana And now that we have arrived here, there is no way back - and really I understand people, a lot of people, they are really nostalgic, pessimistic, they think we've lost 'it', the connection, belonging, nature... whatever... and sure I agree, what we are going through here is... a messy phase!

louis Exactly, it's just a messy phase.

tashi Well, yea, let's acknowledge that and let's go on... it's a messy phase and what we need people to do right now is... to push the favour-button! Affirmative! Enjoy the potentialities, enjoy the process.

louis Yes exactly! Do something, learn something, really...

whatever... Just contribute in a way that gives you pleasure. It's as simple as that, really... I mean, you see so many young people quite helpless nowadays, having a really difficult time to find an occupation... but I am always telling my interns...

aitana Just start somewhere.

louis Exactly, exactly. I mean, young people are very often aaam...
err... - a bit conservative.

tashi That's so weird.

aitana It's fear, I think. I guess.

louis Yea, maybe yea... err... yea... and I'm always telling them:
'You're a very talented person and you are critical of what's going on
and that's good. You think this and that is unjust or horrible and
should be changed?

Well, then pick out one of those things and go and improve it. Make
your criticism productive!' And we should learn from nature, I feel.
If you look at how animals learn... They don't waste their time
with: 'Err... I don't like this, this situation stinks, let's be critical.'
No! They either face the situation or they get their ass out of
there. Or if you look at, you know, how lion siblings learn! They
really go by their likes, you know, they just do it. No really, I love
animals, I love watching nature documentaries, really. And I am
really amazed about the ability of all kinds of... birds and all kinds
of predators to transmutate into killingmachines in no time. If you
look at eagles, for example the bald eagle... the speed it can
attain, that's unbelievable! Or the great grey owl and it's night
vision systems... or bats and how they communicate... or the African
wild dog and it's hunting strategies!

to a member of the audience Or what kind of animal do you like?
audience member answers for example Fox.

louis Well 'fox', that's interesting, they are such intelligent
animals, quite close to human beings - or jellyfish! Some jellyfish

cannot die, they are eternal... they can transmutate - I can show you some videos! Jellyfish, they are really amazing! It's so - when I reincarnate I hope I am going to be an animal. The sophisticatedness of animals, you know, animals are the perfect machines slash information systems... I'm always saying M M M M M 'mind meets meat meets machine'

No seriously, I think... I mean, concerning incarnation, we can really learn from our friends in the Far East. They have this very - how to say - natural relation to technological relationships. They can completely settle in this way of life.

aitana Exactly.

louis But maybe, I was thinking recently, that this has maybe - might have something to do with their notion of reincarnation, don't you think so? Which, of course, implies a general interconnectedness of living beings. Or like the Chinese philosopher Laozi says: 'The skilful traveler leaves no traces.' And traveling in virtual space does come quite close to that, doesn't it?

aitana Well err... but internet users do leave a lot of traces: their data.

louis That's true but... Do you meditate?

aitana Oh no, no, I don't.

louis No?

tashi But really, life is messy. Specifically in our time - I mean the chaos we are living in - like, I mean there is only a few people out there that I know who can handle this situation.

louis That's true, really for a lot of people - I don't want to generalize - but for most of them it is a shit-uation and so... what I have been really interested in... is... is there a way to help them out, like bring a kind of order to this chaos. To 'sort of' generalize these potential threats to the world. Anything from global warming to terrorism. And to try to figure out potential solutions to this or... even ways to predict the kinds of things that can happen, before they do and before it's too late?

aitana But you know, I think maybe the big mistake is to already think of these kind of things as a kind of threat and to believe you have to stop all these things... you have to stop the whole cycle... you have to do something about it... like this 'Act now, let's prevent the apocalypse'... whereas it is... maybe there is just a natural process going on here.

tashi Like for example nuclear power plants. The ones we built now.
louis I know.

tashi ...they are totally one hundred percent safe... the old ones not... but it's the same as with planes... I mean the first ones, the prototypes, most of them were crap. Many people died, but after the first World War... we knew so much about them. Nowadays you're safer in the air than on the ground...

aitana Or something else, like okay, climate is changing... So what? Let's grow strawberries in Siberia, artichokes in Greenland, what's the problem? No seriously, people, stop moralising!

louis I know - I know - I know. It's a kind of ecological prudishness, like life-style ecology replacing catholicism. Instead of saying: 'Did you do your prayers today?' they say something like: 'Did you throw out the bottle today?' or: 'Did you recycle the paper?' and: 'Oh no? You didn't? Well then, because of you, we might all end up in hell'.

aitana Seriously, if this, what we are living in now is how the apocalypse looks like, I am completely into it! I mean, I know life is not going to last for ever and even this world is not going to last for ever.

louis Yes, I mean, even if we all become vegans, the next day we might face a comet in a collision course with the earth. And then what do we do?

aitana Well, I think we go to our beach house... like, haha, in Deep Impact, with Tom Cruise, when the comet hits, you know, there is that gigantic wave crushing New York and everything. Did you see that one?

louis Yeah, that's an amazing movie.

aitana Well, I would take out my board - my surfing board and wait for that amazing wave to hit and try to ride it. Like really!

tashi But seriously, I think we really over-estimate our dear planet earth. I mean, she can't even do without the sun... she doesn't produce sunshine... or even rain... She doesn't produce rain or wind. All mother earth produces are the dead bodies of humanity. That's her only creation. Isn't it? Everything else is coming from outer space.

louis And I truly believe that what we are going to see in the next few years... the major booming business is going to be like manned space exploration.

aitana Possibly yea, I mean, for example what I don't understand is people still seriously asking: 'Is their life on other planets?'

I mean, if there hasn't been any, we are surely going to bring it out there, within the next few years. We are going to spread our bacteria through the cosmos, for sure.

tashi Well yea, well I think, I am sure, like hundred years from now, really... people are not going to ask that question like: 'Is there life on Mars?' because, really it's going to be full of life' It's our instinct... we need another planet...

aitana ...to destroy. *laughs*

louis *laughs*

aitana Yes, but no seriously...

louis I think, space exploration is a morale imperative. Because...

tashi Because...

aitana Because... that's what we as a species have always done. And that is, instinctively we've gone out and climbed over difficult places, and went into more hostile places, and found out later, maybe to our surprise, that that's the reason we survived. And that is the narrative we need to pass on to our children, to look forward to colonization; to look forward to breakthroughs. We need to inspire them, because they need to lead us and keep us from going extinct in the future.

tashi That's the bigger picture.

aitana Exactly. But really, to be honest, I really believe it's not Mars that we are heading for nowadays... Recently, I got in touch... there was this reunion...

louis She is in a group with very interesting people.

aitana ...and I got in touch with some friends and we chatted and they told me really they were in the middle of finalizing some technical drawings for an off-world colony 'floating' around Venus.

louis Yes, that's a great project.

tashi Very ambitious.

aitana Because Venus is... apparently it's... if you stay like fifty kilometers or something above the surface of the planet, the conditions, heat, gravity and such things are like very similar to earth. Except for the bad weather. I mean it's sunny over there, like twenty-four seven Hawaiï.

tashi Hawaiï yea... and there's enough sun, of course, to run all of it on solar energy. So, Mars has lost his monopoly.

aitana Yea well, well yea, in the future you can make love on Venus...

louis ...or war on Mars...

tashi ...and recycle on Earth.

aitana And you go to the supermarket, and get your mushrooms from Venus.

I mean, Venus is full of resources - I guess - don't know - wild guess. You could build like a million space cities.

tashi Which is a nice job opportunity for urbanists and architects.

aitana Yea, and we can shoot our criminals into the galaxy.

louis And that's nice for the criminals too.

I mean, they're gonna have an amazing view out there.

aitana Yea!

louis Yeayea... so-ooo, but err... well, I think space exploration is really underestimated.

I mean, if you look, for example, at the threat of pandemics that we have had in the past few decades, like ebola, bird flu... The reason we've come out of that so easily is really all thanks to GPS and things like that.

post ironic

tashi But you know what I really detest... is this global lack of seriousness.

There's so few people who really believe in anything at all!

louis Oh, that's so true.

tashi You know, like in Japanese, we have this expression, 'shinken ni suru', 'to do something with a real sword'.

louis Woaw.

tashi Which means, 'to do something with deadly seriousness'. But I think we're losing that ability and it's really, it's a pity. In all aspects of life, so many aspects of life like... love, politics, business, art, even in the sciences... we're losing the ability of true commitment.

louis It's a lack of commitment.

tashi Yes, but isn't that horrible? This global pandemic of cynicism.

louis And irony... I hate irony... I mean, I never really trust people that are poised with irony!

tashi That's it, if everything only has relative value, I mean ethics, aesthetics... or even no value at all, then, how can we trust each other?

louis Yes, you know, when you look at animals again. They have a very complex language system...

tashi Oh yes.

louis ...and all animals speak very different languages... but what they have in common is... a complete lack of irony and cynicism.

tashi And I tell you, it makes things much easier for them. Integrity.

louis That's the word!

tashi But the positive thing is... that we are really entering, I think we are really entering a new age... and maybe we needed to go through this messy phase, and now we have to return to 'Shinken'.

louis 'To do things with the real sword.'

That's so true, and I think, really, I am always saying to my colleagues, always saying... I mean, that's our motto: 'The chicken is involved in breakfast, but the pig is truly committed.' We should be committed. You understand? The chicken only gives the egg, but the pig is chopped into bacon, bacon and eggs.

tashi Ha that's a good one! Yes. But I am not such a breakfast guy. I just have tea and a chewing gum for some mouth fitness.

zombies

louis No really, I believe we are closing the chapter of the capitaloscene.

tashi But are we? Really? Are we?

louis That is the reason why a lot of people are suffering from transitional stress syndrome. Like, OMFG, what's coming up next?!

tashi It's so hard nowadays to distinguish a fashion from a deep change.

aitana You know, I think it could very well be that the end of capitalism is just another disguise of the same thing, you know. Like it's faking it's own death.

tashi And having a come-back as a zombie.

aitana And maybe that's not a bad thing, is it? I mean if you look at zombies, they are really...

louis But they are very ugly... mostly.

aitana Did you ever meet a zombie for real?

I mean, the only thing we have seen of them till now is prejudiced representations. And they have eternal life!

louis O yea, they are resistant to like any disease you can imagine.

tashi They are hyper-democratic...

louis ...and super stupid.

aitana I don't know, I am kind of attracted to these kinds of borderland creatures... like zombies and cyborgs... or zombie-

cyborgs. They are the ones that open up our thinking. They might very well be the continuation of our era, transition figures. Why are people so infatuated with humankind?

louis I think I can explain that.

aitana Yes exactly, if we really have some interest in an improved version of this world... let's forget the antropos! And I am not being suicidal. I mean all of the most significant and generative or creative work that has been done on Gaia has been done without humans. It's not the humans that have produced oxygen. It's not humans that produced the layers of carbon. No, no, we are not the protagonists of this earth. It's the algi, the diatoms, the plants, the insects, the bees, the worms, the tectonic plates and the volcanos...

tashi ...and in the pretty near future, artificial intelligence.

aitana They are going to probably make us into a very tiny marginal phenomenon in the history of the universe. So let's not limit our thinking to doing business as usual, to preservation, restoration, to functionality, being efficient... We should destabilize our own stories, denormalize... at least, if we want to understand what we are heading for.

louis So, in the future, I imagine you are going to have two creatures speaking to each other:

'Do you think we should teach our off-spring something about the humans?' And we are going to be this very tiny chapter in cyborg history.

aitana I think, our own minds are the only constraints to evolution.

We should open up that mind, really!

tashi So, let's take some psychedelics!

louis Yes, to get rid of the limits of natural thought.

aitana Yea.

De première van *The Great Warmachine* vond plaats op 3 februari 2015 in Theater Frascati in Amsterdam

Spel:

Louis van der Waal

Aitana Cordero

Tashi Iwaoka

Regie:

Joachim Robbrecht

www.joachimrobbrecht.com

Voor het schrijven en maken van *The Great Warmachine* werd Joachim Robbrecht ondersteund door Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, Stichting Ammodo, Fonds 21, Gemeente Rotterdam, Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst en Fonds Podiumkunsten

Joachim Robbrecht (Gent, 1980) maakte sinds 2006 eigen werk als tekstschrijver en regisseur bij productiehuis Frascati, productiehuis Rotterdam en Toneelgroep Amsterdam en sinds 2014 met zijn eigen Stichting Show Machine. Daarnaast werkt hij ook als tekstschrijver en speler samen met regisseur Sarah Moeremans en Moeremans&sons en verschillende andere groepen waaronder Andcompany&co en Dood Paard. Hij schreef teksten in samenwerkingen met Wunderbaum, de Warme Winkel en voor jeugdvoorstellingen van Toneelgroep Oostpool. Ook geeft hij les aan de toneelopleiding van ArtEZ en adviseert hij geregeld makers bij DasArts-Master of Theatre.

In 2011 ontving hij de Charlotte Köhler prijs.

Crashtest Ibsen II / Volksvijand werd genomineerd voor de Taalunie Toneelschrijfprijs 2014. *The Great Warmachine* werd geselecteerd voor het Vlaams Theater Festival 2015.

www.joachimrobbrecht.com

Toneelwerk

The Great Warmachine - 2015

Crashtest Ibsen II - Volksvijand - 2014

Crashtest Ibsen I - Nora - 2013

King Oeboe - 2013

Figaro Desire Machine - 2012

Noord - i.s.m. Rutger Kroon - 2011

Oh Polsko - 2010

Rosto in turansureishon - 2009

Rashomon-effect - 2009

Goemans, Kroon, Van Den Brink - i.s.m. Rutger Kroon - 2008

Venlo - 2008

Darling you're free - 2008

Voc Wijde Weelderige Wereld - 2007

IJs - 2006

Since 2006, Joachim Robbrecht (Ghent, 1980) has been working as a playwright and theatre director, creating his works at Frascati Theater, Productiehuis Rotterdam and Toneelgroep Amsterdam a.o. Since 2014, he is producing his works independently with Stichting Show Machine. Additionally, he collaborates as a performer and playwright with director Moeremans & Sons as well as several other groups such as Andcompany&co, Dood Paard and De Warme Winkel. He has also written several plays for youth theatre, commissioned by Tg Oostpool, and is a lecturer with the bachelor of theatre at ArtEZ in Arnhem.

In 2011, he received the Charlotte Köhler Award as acknowledgement and support for his theatre work. His play *Crashtest Ibsen II / Volksvijand* was nominated in 2014 for the Taalunie Toneelschrijfprijs. His current work *The Great Warmachine* has been selected for the Flemish Theatre Festival 2015.

www.joachimrobbrecht.com

Texts digital available in English

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