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[Review: 'Schwalbe speelt op eigen kracht' \(Schwalbe perform on their own'\)](#)

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The doors close and in the dim light of the emergency exit signs, we watch seven performers undressing to their underwear. They climb onto exercise bikes that have been lined up directly in front of the audience and slowly, yet erratically, begin to pedal. A lamp on a stand just in front of the first row flickers to life.

In June 2008, a new group of mime artists came to the forefront. They were about to graduate from the mime programme that year and had asked Lotte van Berg to mentor them during their graduation performance with the explicit instructions that they didn't want to make a subdued show. It had to be rock 'n roll. It turned out to be techno. In the performance 'Spaar ze alle negen' ('Save all nine of them'), the nine performers dance themselves into a frenzy to a deafening, gritty, house beat in the dimly lit and further empty Frascati. Nine individuals circling each other, pairs every now and then breaking out of the monotony to have private conversations (which are inaudible to the audience) but for the most part just dancing and leaping wildly. During a brief moment of unity, when the deafening sounds dies down for a minute, they scream in unison, "we love you hardcore, we do".

I was very impressed. Here stood a generation of young creators, overflowing with energy, tackling their own issues of lack of focus and philosophic lethargy whilst at the same time making a passionate statement. And, despite the mandate, they still managed to achieve a certain stillness. The performance went on tour, some of the performers left to work elsewhere, and the title was eventually shortened to 'Spaar ze' ('Save them'). The group named themselves Schwalbe.

At the start of this year, they began with a new performance: Schwalbe speelt op eigen kracht (Schwalbe perform on their own). Once again we are confronted with energetic activity that requires no play acting: cycling for an hour or until it's no longer fun and then some. They must be some of the fittest people in the theatre (and that's saying something) but their irrepressible energy has now found a goal. This time the creators are tackling climate change: their endless cycling is in fact powering dynamos that are, in turn, creating the energy for the light that is shining on the performers. They call it 'a climate neutral performance'.

Climate neutrality is played out in the details: the flyer is made of old paper and used envelopes with the performance details stamped on them; the exercise bikes are second hand and there's no lighting in the theatre as the audience files in. It is this attention to detail which more than hints at the consistent approach of Lotte van Berg. Lotte was responsible for the final production and invited the group to the workspace of her Company, Omsk, in Dordrecht.

The cyclists pedal on, finding their rhythm; the light gets brighter and more constant. Little is happening, so I use this space to associate. They resemble competitive cyclists, or young city dwellers lined up for a work out at the gym. It's quite sexy, these young, good looking bodies, working themselves up into a sweat.

You find yourself concentrating more and more on the details: the pent-up glare of Ariadna Rubio Lleó, the red face of Daan Simons, Marie Groothof's awkward bra strap slipping off, Hilde Labadie, the only one who, instead of cycling, is on a cross-fit machine; and Floor van Leeuwen who seems to be doing it purely for pleasure and has probably already done a few hours that afternoon. Then there are the beautiful shadows cast the single light on the back wall, the loud drone of the machines and Christina Flick, the only performer who is sat to the side of the stage.

At a certain point, it begins to get boring. Is this all? From what I heard earlier I know that yes, this is it. No dances, no solos, no rest. Isn't that very little? And isn't it also conceited? What's actually happening here? Young people, working themselves into the ground, just to stay in view. If they don't pedal, the light goes out. So they pedal. As hard as they can.

Finally the performer who had been sitting on the side of the stage stands up. She walks to the light and moves it, agonisingly slowly. Deliberately, she revolves the light around its base. First, it's the performers on the right who are in the spotlight, then the back wall, then the side walls where the piles of clothes are lying. And then further, until the light reaches the gallery and shines onto the audience. And then something incredible happens. I recognise these people, they are regular theatre goers, colleagues and acquaintances. Because there were no lights when I arrived, I had to find a place in the dark and therefore missed out on the usual ritual of watching people and greeting them, which accompanies arrival in a theatre. I'm confronted by my own conceit: I too want to be seen in the theatre.

As the light revolves, finally resting once again on the cyclists, something has changed. The performers are no longer just tired; they are exhausted. You can even see it happen: they are in pain, they don't know how to manage the next pedal, they don't know what to do with their hands and grab at the handlebars of the machine next to them for support. It takes a while, too long. To be conceited also means to be perishable. Even the strength of the performers is limited.

Suddenly, one of the performers stops. She gets off her bike and walks to the side. Others quickly follow. You notice this in the light which then dims. With three cyclists remaining, the light pulses with every push of the pedal. It's a lost battle to keep the fire alive. It's a death scene.

Maybe this performance isn't much; maybe it's not even theatre. But a better word would be simplicity, I think. In a modest form, we witnessed a fundamental tragedy.

The light goes out. The performers are applauded in the dark. They have used their energy to show themselves to me and I have watched.

Schwalbe speelt op eigen kracht, by Schwalbe and Omsk.

Seen: 30/1/2010 in Frascati