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## CHRISTOPHE MEIERHANS

### SOME USE FOR YOUR BROKEN CLAY POTS

Works of science fiction give us an insight into a future civilization by telling the adventures of one of its individual inhabitants. **SOME USE FOR YOUR BROKEN CLAY POTS**, on the contrary, provides us with the code that rules the life of the society it imagines.

The future is apprehended the other way around: it is up to us to picture what the adventures of our individual lives would be like under a defined set of new conditions. Developed in collaboration with a team of experts from different Belgian universities, **Some use for your broken clay pots** is a theatre piece whose script is the constitutional text for a democratic state that does not yet exist.

# CREDITS

**Concept, realization and actor:** Christophe Meierhans **Dramaturgy:** Bart Capelle **Conceptual advisor:** Rudi Laermans **Advising team:** Anne-Emmanuelle Bourgaux(ULB), Rudi Laermans(KU), Jean-Benoît Pilet(ULB), Dave Sinardet(VUB) **Constitutional jurist:** Anne-Emmanuelle Bourgaux **Scenography:** Sofie Durnez **Conception & graphic design publication:** The Theatre of Operations **Illustration:** Nuno Pinto Da Cruz **Co-production:** Kaaitheater(Brussels), WorkspaceBrussels, VooruitArts Centre(Ghent), TeatroMariaMatos(Lisbon), BITTeatergarasjen(Bergen), Kunstenfestivaldesarts (Brussels) **Production:** Mokum / Hiros **With the support of:** de Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie & Government of Flanders

**Trailer:** [vimeo.com/94984956](https://vimeo.com/94984956)

**Full registration:** [vimeo.com/91286270](https://vimeo.com/91286270) (PW= pleaseletmewatch)

# ON TOUR

13 & 14.12.2012 Workspace Brussels (Kaaistudio's), Brussels (showing)

13 & 14.06.2013 Workspace Brussels (Kaaistudio's), Brussels (showing)

19 & 20.02.2014	Kunstencentrum Vooruit, Ghent (BE) - PREMIERE -
26 & 27.02.2014	Kaaistudio's, Brussels (BE)
07 & 08.03.2014	Teatro Maria Matos, Lisbon (PT)
13.03.2014	Frascati, Amsterdam (NL)
11 & 12.04.2014	Teatergarasjen Bergen, Bergen (NO)
17.04.2014	IETM, Montpellier (FR)
27.04.2014	Kunstencentrum BUDA, Kortrijk (BE)
03,10,17 & 24.05.2014	Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels (BE)
19 & 21.05.2014	Spring Festival, Utrecht (NL)
14 & 15.06.2014	Theaterformen, Braunschweig (DE)
03.08.2014	Festival Thinking Together, Darmstadt (DE)
14.09.2014	Ultima Contemporary Music festival, Oslo (NO)
19, 20 & 21.09.2014	Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil, Paris (FR)
08.10.2014	Malpertuis, Tielt (BE)
10.10.2014	KC nOna, Mechelen (BE)
15.10.2014	Festiwal Konfrontacje Teatralne, Lublin (PL)
20 & 21.11.2014	MuCEM, Marseille (FR)
05 & 06.02.2015	Thalia Theater, Hamburg (DE)
24 > 28.03.2015	Théâtre Paris Vilette, Paris (FR)
04.04.2015	STUK (Feest vd Filosofie), Leuven (BE)
17.04.2015	Schaubühne (FIND), Berlin (DE)
04 & 05.05.2015	AUAWIRLEBEN [Theaterfestival Bern], Bern (CH)
19.05.2015	ON (Sala del Consiglio Comunale di Bologna), Bologna (IT)

30.05.2015	M HKA, Antwerp (BE)
27 & 28.06.2015	Belluard Bollwerk International, Fribourg (CH)
10 - 12.07.2015	Santarcangelo, Santarcangelo di Romagna (IT)
29.10.2015	Theaterfestival Spielart, München (DE)
23.02.2016	Gessnerallee, Zürich (CH)
23 - 25.03.2016	Le Phénix, Valenciennes (FR)
06 & 07.04.2016	National Theatre of Greece, Athens (GR)
08.05.2016	Teatr Powszechny, Warsaw (PL)
19.06.2016	Mon Inouïe Symphonie, Dunkerque (FR)
04.11.2016	Frascati, Amsterdam (NL)
11.02.2017	Théâtre du Rond Point, Paris (FR)
17 > 18.03.2017	Zona K, Milan (IT)
20 > 23.04.2017	Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil, Paris (FR)
25 > 28.04.2017	Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil, Paris (FR)

## PRESS ABOUT SOME USE FOR YOUR BROKEN CLAY POTS

### **The splendour of change \*\*\*\*, De Standaard (BE)**

“Meierhans for president? (...) Everyone can ask questions, Meierhans has a sound answer to everything. He convinces you; also of the lack of democracy in our current participatory. Afterwards no one is discussing acting skills. This show realizes that which in theatre is sometimes a mere sales pitch: artists think an alternative.”

### **Meierhans' broken Clay Pots, E-tcetera (BE)**

“What initially comes across as a joke develops into the core of a system that starts making more and more sense, slide after slide, argument after argument. (...) Precisely because of this meticulous balance of seriousness, consistence and playfulness Meierhans succeeds in starting off a provoking brain exercise.”

# BIOGRAPHY

## CHRISTOPHE MEIERHANS

°1977, Geneva, Switzerland, lives and works in Brussels.

He works with and within performances, public spaces, theater, installations, sound, music and video. His work consists mainly in developing strategies for interventions in our daily life protocols through manipulating conventional agreements, social habits or simple usages. Fragments of reality such as an existing speech, a café, a theater performance or our daily audiophilia become frameworks for artistic operations which attempt to redirect banality so as to only let it reappear under peculiar angles. His work raises questions of norms and conventions by confusing casual contexts with another and confronting the spectator with some kind of otherness, the strangeness of being in the “wrong” place, or of the place itself being the “wrong” one.

[www.contrepied.de](http://www.contrepied.de)

## CHALLENGING FICTION

**Bart Capelle interviews Christophe Meierhans on  
Some use for your broken clay pots, 'NOV 12**

The work of Christophe Meierhans often involves interventions in everyday life, aimed at revealing and confusing social codes, unspoken agreements and norms. Some use for your broken clay pots will be a theatre piece that is part of a triptych, revolving around one challenging proposal: a new constitution for modern-day democracies.

**What made you want to create a new constitution? And in what sense will it be different from democracy?**

I want to find a way of uncovering some of our a priori assumptions as westerners, who have been living in democracies for a long time. We have the idea that we are living in a state structure that has existed forever. By the most critical it is considered the least bad system and by the less critical the only possible way of living a good life in a community. Through theatre I want to find a way of making these firm unquestioned convictions visible and mobile again. A constitution is the basic contract between all citizens in a society, serving as the measure for every decision and every judgment. Modern democracies are based on elections as the organizing principle to transcribe the will of citizens into the institutions that govern them. As an exercise - and in the first instance just for the hell of it - I want to reverse this principle and devise an imaginary constitution that is not based on election (voting based on promises for the future) but on disqualification (elimination based on past actions).

**What made you decide to use it as the basis for a theatre piece?**

If you propose a new fictional model to people in a political context, you have to deal with judgment, doubt, fears and resistance. The framework of theatre works in completely the opposite way. People go to theatre with a willingness to believe in the fiction that is presented. Combining both worlds enables you to make use of a theatre audience's desire to believe in a story. And in this particular case the story told, is the proposal of a new constitution. The 'trick' probably boils down to this: you do not have to make people believe in the constitution, you have to make them believe in the fiction. The constitution is a story and every story has a kind of moral or ethical background or a connection to reality. What do you do with this story when you are back in the real world? I hope it will reveal that the real constitution we have is also a fiction, an invention. It was constructed some time ago and is just a tool as any other.

**What happens if you discover gaps or loopholes in the constitution while performing the piece?**

In the first place, the ambition is to prepare the constitution in such a way that all the possible gaps are covered. The audience is there to challenge the constitution and the fiction that is in place. And again, I think that this is a very normal aspect of theatre. The audience is challenging the fiction. A good theatre piece should be able to incorporate these challenges. But the constitution as a basic script can be improved, that's for sure. If there are better suggestions, there is no reason not to make amendments.

**Where does the title Some use for your broken clay pots come from?**

The accepted beginnings of democracy are commonly situated in classical Athens, 5 BC. The ancient Greeks actually despised the idea of elections. They considered it completely undemocratic. To control their representatives they used a system called ostracism. Each year citizens could decide to ban someone from the city, for instance because that person was considered dangerous or a bad influence on the politics of the city. It is difficult to imagine in this day and age, but this banishment was not actually considered a punishment. It was just a measure to neutralize someone for a while. The banned person's goods were preserved and could be recovered upon return some ten years later. The term ostracism supposedly refers to the procedure of anonymous voting, in which the names of people to be cast away were engraved on either oyster shells (Greek: ostreon) or pieces of broken clay (ostraka). This inspired me for the title of the play. Broken clay pots are also considered useless, garbage. But we can actually reuse them, just as we can recycle the idea of positive disqualification.

**Is recycling the abolished principle of ostracism into a new constitution a way of writing an alternative history?**

You could say so. It is quite difficult to trace how the legacy of the Greeks actually transformed into the democratic system of today. There is a Roman empire in between which is very important. A lot of aspects of our democracy are Roman and not Greek. The Greeks would choose their governors by allotment and this obviously did not pass on to the Romans. To us this kind of random appointment may seem completely crazy, but there were very strong philosophical, religious, but also statistical and socio-political reasons for it. Appointment by lot is the best tool against corruption and the best guarantee for equal chances for anybody to access power. But it would be very difficult to defend today. In ancient Greece procedures of choice often involved an oracle. The fact that you find this chance-based selection in a religious context is not at all a coincidence. If you choose things at random, you leave room for the unknown, for something that is not in your power to decide.

**Ancient democratic systems were very much ritualized. Do you want to incorporate the importance of ritual into your constitution?**

Any system that wants to serve as a common basis for the organisation of

things among people, can only work if people respect it. And there are probably two ways to earn respect. One is repression: if you do not respect the system, you will be killed. The other one is belief. A system can function if people like it and believe in it. But believing in a system is a very artificial act. It is a leap of faith and that is an act of will, a conscious choice. And man has invented rituals in order to celebrate or cultivate this act. Through rituals rational choice transforms into something else, an almost natural will: desire. At the annual carnival in Cologne for instance, people take two weeks time off from work to participate. Not because they have to, but because they desire to. In terms of ritualization, a political system should actually be much more like a carnival. People vote, not because there is a moral obligation or social pressure or out of discontent, but because they believe it is the right way of doing things. Ideally, you should not have any problems of participation rates in elections. Ritualization is a rational submission to irrationality. And that is a form of wisdom, which we have probably lost in our modern societies. A ritual is a way of shortcutting those problems that will remain unsolvable because of the fact that no rational system can ever be perfect. A system that is supposed to interact with a changing world, with real people, will always know failure. So it needs faith and in theatre it needs suspension of disbelief. It does not have to be religious. The superhuman is that which people cannot rationally grasp. Things like death, birth, or hurricanes.

**Maybe that 's exactly what we are no longer capable of: accepting the fact that no system is perfect, that we cannot control everything.**

Definitely, I think this is the illness of modernity. Working on this project I often think about medieval medicine. Medicine in medieval times didn't work with pills. It didn't reason in terms of adding something to the body in order to make it better. It started from the idea that there was something, a bodily fluid or possession even, so you had to subtract something from the body. Philosophically speaking there is something interesting to that idea. Subtracting means refraining from something, not doing something. That might be wiser, after all. You don't need to do something, just because you can. That's something we have a hard time with in our society.

**How does this relate back to the shape of the piece? Will you try and incorporate the idea of ritual and the irrational into the project?**

It will be part of what the theatre piece aims at. It is a very thin line of course, because as soon as we go too much into some kind of exoticism, we will lose connection with reality. People will be relieved to keep it at a distance. But we want it up-close. We want it to be problematic. People should actually be bothered by the proposal. I would say the medium of theatre as such is already the ritual. On that level there is also a strong link to be made to the function of theatre in ancient Greece, one we shouldn't ignore. But I don't exclude any completely crazy moment occurring in the play if needed. Since I'm not a theatre maker, I don't have any theatrical fetishes. I don't have a specific taste that I want to pursue.

