

# DTF Review: Book Burning

An exercise in unadorned storytelling and sparing stagecraft resists the information overload of the modern world



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[Pieter De Buysser](#) appears from behind a large black trunk like a magician, presenting this charming creation from visual artist [Hans Op de Beeck](#) like an elaborate box of tricks. That's also a serviceable description for De Buysser's story, developed by the Belgian performer in tandem with the casket, which is a cabinet of curiosities itself; a childlike fable constructed from political realities that decants philosophies and provocations as though from secret compartments.

De Buysser first reports his encounter, at an Occupy rally, with Sebastian, a scientist whose involvement with Wikileaks comes back to haunt him, but is so radiant with sharing information that he glows light from his torso. ("I have no secrets," he says, beaming.) De Buysser will also play a cat – Schrödinger's cat, as it happens – which is

the precise point at which the less philosophically whimsical may cut their conceptual losses.

In this guise, he accompanies the scientist's daughter, Thilde, as she packs her trunk and attempts to escape a destiny decoded and mapped out from her DNA.

Folding present-day concerns about privacy, surveillance and corporate domination into the structure of a fairy tale makes for an intriguing juxtaposition of the timely and the timeless.

The sliding and rotating secrets of Op de Beeck's trunk have a Luddite charm, unfurling its scenography in miniature: the horizon of a family home given doll's house proportions, a still-life image of a writing desk or a hand-cranked mountain rising into the air.

Across whimsical literary interludes that variously recall Carroll, Kafka or Swift, De Buysser is pursuing something trickier, though; an analysis of "diffuse inverted totalitarianism" in which information overload, not censorship, is used to inhibit and control the masses. (If [Noam Chomsky](#) ever wrote a pop-up book, this would be it.)

Without ignoring its tragic history, book burning is here presented as a form of metaphorical liberation, where people who have severed earthly constraints immolate books dear to them and celebrate their content, as though rekindling a meaningful oral culture.

In its Byzantine storytelling, sparing stagecraft and imagined revolution, *Book Burning* embodies such digital escapism. Simplistic? Perhaps. But De Buysser knows that simplicity is harder than ever to achieve.