



# NOTRE PEUR DE N'ÊTRE

## INTERVIEW WITH FABRICE MURGIA

**Would it be accurate to say that loneliness has been a central theme of your work as a director and a writer since the very beginning?**

Fabrice Murgia: The new forms of loneliness, the way people are alone today, fascinate me. I depict people who belong to our time and who feel more and more lonely, even though they are more and more connected. My writing feeds on reality. I observe it as an artist, I look at it somewhat askew, which may have something to do with the fact that I am hard of hearing and have a natural tendency for isolation, for standing a little apart from everyone else. I am first and foremost an actor, so I write like an actor would, staying as close to the characters and to what they feel as possible. I walk with them, I try to understand their emotional path. I've realised that actors resemble machines in some ways, just like machines resemble living beings. Every element—video, sound, light—is like an arm or a leg. My characters are often trapped in boxes, in vivariums, exposed to the eyes of the audience, and what they say is like so many messages in bottles thrown into the sea. The relationship between the audience and the actor would be of a nature similar to that of relationships on the internet: we communicate without seeing each other, we show off, we tell stories about ourselves in order to exist, but we lose out in terms of quality, of a personal and direct relationship.

**You used the word machine. What do you mean by that?**

I like talking of machines, but also of people who resemble machines. On the one hand, I'm talking about "algorithms of life" that would condition us, standardise us, would make us insensitive, emotionally but also in our bodies. On the other, I can create theatrical devices that work together to follow the evolution of a character. Sensory and mental devices that react to the intensity of the characters. "Technology," when used in theatre, should always be moving, it should never be stationary; it is like a lung for the character or the story.

**How do you create the texts of your shows ?**

I don't really think about the way I write, or about the way the text works. What I see is that the text takes the form of what I want to say, even when I begin with a documentary material that comes from reality. Things that inspire me are very diverse. Blogs, an image on the street, a story I read in a newspaper...

**There's a common theme, but the forms are different.**

Which is a good thing, for a very simple reason, which is that I'm getting older. We're always moving in a time that is also moving. Sometimes we feel as if we can't understand or even identify what's going on; when that happens, we need to be able to produce a map of the world. Writing then takes the form of our preoccupations.

**For *Our Fear Of (Not) Being*, you said you wanted to "reverse the syntax of narration."**

What I would want is for the show to begin in the dark, that movements appear as if by magic, until actors step out of the shadows to take control of the story, of this machine.

**What is this machine you're talking about?**

In general, I like it when a character is crushed by the dramatic machine, when there's a duel which leads to the character either taking power or being defeated. But in *Our Fear Of (Not) Being*, I would like for the opposite to happen; I would like it to be an optimistic look at the machines that surround us, those machines that are supposed to help us save time and instead take all the time we have. I want to depict some solitudes as involuntary and crushed by machines, and others as chosen, hidden away in deserts or in rooms, close to a state of total happiness. The show could end with a machine on stage, a machine humans would feed, a machine that could stop, reversing our current fear.

**So you don't want to talk about the evils of cyberspace.**

Of course not. I just want to depict these lonely people. A loneliness of our time, which has little to do with the loneliness that may have existed ten or twenty years ago. But we can't talk about loneliness today without talking about communication or non-communication. I think it has to go through a preoccupation in the audience's head. I don't have a message or a solution. You'll see on stage people crippled by this kind of information overload and some will inevitably think that it's something I'm denouncing. But the reality of such a state is bigger than me, all I can do is ask the question of its existence. I've noticed that the youngest and the oldest among my audience seem to be able to receive my shows without attributing me a specific message. It's an ambiguity I always want to clear up because my job is all about sensory stimulations.

**In *Our Fear Of (Not) Being*, you focus on the story of one of your closest friends and on that of the *hikikomori*, those young adults who refuse any contact with the outside world. Can you write on topics that are far from your own existence, from your own experiences?**

If I go far from what is close to me, it's to go looking deep inside me. When I ventured into the desert of the American West, which is diametrically opposed to what I am, it was to meet people who had found a place that matched who they were. The idea of going very far to find what is deep inside us appeals to me. I often think of that movie by Patricio Guzmán, *Nostalgia de la luz* (*Nostalgia for the Light*). It's about the largest observatory in the world, lost somewhere in the Atacama Desert



in Chile, from where you can see the farthest stars and at the foot of which women look for the remains of their husbands, murdered during the dictatorship. By talking about the biggest there is, Guzmán is able to talk about the smallest. Basing my work on my own experiences isn't narcissistic, it remains connected to what theatre is and to what the public expects of it. I can talk about a number of topics—immigration, since my parents are immigrants, rural life, since I've experienced it, a friend in prison—specifically because I'm an artist and not a sociologist or a philosopher.

**In *Le Chagrin des ogres (The Sorrow of Ogres)*, loneliness was thrust onto children and teenagers. In *Our Fear Of (Not) Being*, this loneliness seems to be a choice.**

It's sometimes even a political choice. For instance, parallel to the *hikikomori*, there is another group called NEET, *Not in Education, Employment or Training* that first appeared in the United Kingdom, then in Japan. In both cases, it's a movement born of the huge pressure teenagers are under at school to fit into a political and social system they reject. Solitude becomes a choice here; a life choice that severs one's relationship with the other to protect one's emotions and one's world, made up of a few elements over which one has total control. But in the show there will be a second part on those solitudes that aren't chosen, the solitudes of work that express itself through burnout and the feeling that you're alone even when surrounded. We'll then talk about how the individual can reappropriate his or her own body and mind, something that is a sort of utopia.

**You seem to have been inspired by the texts of philosopher Michel Serres about those new means of communication.**

I came across the writing of Michel Serres, who doesn't belong to my generation. He says that we now have an entire library in our pocket, and I agree. Yet I wonder if we are free to choose the information we want to look for. It's a concern I share with Pier Paolo Pasolini, who was a visionary in his analysis of communication and television, which we could apply today to the internet. At the same time, though, we need to seize, and not just passively put up with, the great opportunity those new forms of communication represent. In *Thumbelina*, Michel Serres looks at those new mutations with optimism.

**Is anyone else accompanying you in this adventure?**

There are other references, like Romeo Castellucci or Falk Richter, but also a direct collaboration with Belgian director and writer Jacques Delcuvellerie. He speaks for the generation that came before mine.

**Does video appear as essential in your shows?**

It's an evidence; it's light that moves. Nowadays, using video in a show has become almost banal. In *Our Fear Of (Not) Being*, we wanted to work on a very cinematographic sequence shot. The actors will be the ones manipulating the technology.

**But you reject the label of a "multidisciplinary" show.**

We all work together, and disciplines seem to meld together. We're not creating a series of small works of art that we would then put next to one another. If we really need a label, I like "undisciplinary" better. Working together in the service of one work of art.

**In the very contemporary debate that opposes a theatre of text to a theatre of image, what would your position be?**

In 2005, I was at the Festival d'Avignon, in a show by Jacques Delcuvellerie and his research centre, the Groupov. I experienced this debate firsthand and it has of course influenced my own work. What I'm doing isn't experimental research, but it isn't entertainment, either. My shows are built around texts, but those texts aren't beautiful enough to be at the heart of my theatre. When I first started out, I wanted everything to sound spontaneous, like in the movies, with a poetry that would arise in a rural way, with local accents. I like accents and dialectal expressions. But I always feel uncomfortable when a publisher asks for one of my texts... We shouldn't forget that everything isn't about the text or the image anyway. There's lighting and music, too, which in my shows are what connects the stage to the seats.

**You have long wondered about the relationship you could establish with the generation that came before you. You accused it of having murdered your generation. Do you still look at things that way?**

When I made those "violent" comments, I was twenty, and more than a little fiery. Today, I'm thirty, my son is seven, and I'm scared of losing this energy that belongs to those who are fifteen or twenty. My parents' generation tried to invent a new world by rebelling against their own parents, which was more difficult for them. That generation saw the birth of individual liberties, those liberties we criticise today because we feel they may have destroyed this sense of the collective that we miss. Now my generation needs to accept the role that has been thrust upon us, without losing the fire that drove us ten years ago.

Interview conducted by Jean-François Perrier.

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