AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT
Bus I Welcome by Amnesty International France, July 19-20,
Parc des expositions

NAVE OF IMAGES IMAGES (projections)
Excerpts of pieces with Maud Le Pladec (2008-2011) and *Les Amantes* by Elfriede Jelinek, directors Joël Jouanneau and Isabelle Marina (2004), July 19 at 14:30, Église des Célestins

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

– September 20-12, 2017, Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam
– October 5-7, Centre dramatique national Orléans Centre-Val de Loire
– October 12-13, Le Phénix Scène nationale de Valenciennes
– October 18-19, La Filature Scène nationale de Mulhouse
– October 26, Toneelhuis, Anvers (Belgium)

***Les Suppliants* by Elfriede Jelinek, translation Magali Jourdan and Mathilde Sobottke, is published by Editions de L'Arche.**

71st EDITION

In order to bring you this edition, over 1,750 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tireless and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.

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#GRENSGEVAL
#GUYCASSIERS
#MAUDLEPLADEC

GRENSGEVAL (BORDERLINE)

A group of refugees are crossing the Mediterranean. Risking their lives in makeshift boats, they only encounter mistrust once they reach the other shore; an ambiguous world plagued by its own fears and questions, at once concerned and powerless to do anything. Guy Cassiers, director of the theatre of Antwerp, the Toneelhuis, has chosen to adapt Elfriede Jelinek's engaged and provocative text and to collaborate with choreographer Maud Le Pladec to question our relationship to the other and our capacity for understanding. "*We can only, in reality, talk about ourselves*." If this is a topical subject, its representation is made possible thanks to the distance theatre and dance create, and to the dreamlike quality of the images and the violence of the words of the Austrian writer, which echo great mythological texts about population movements and negotiations about the notion of welcome. Divided into three movements, the text and the scenic creation reflect those long, nightmare-like journeys through language and space, "*to the point that the audience loses the thread, no longer able to distinguish who's talking between European and refugees, because words meld until arises a certain schizophrenia that's symbolic of our society*." The general feeling of powerlessness then becomes almost tangible.

GUY CASSIERS

After studying visual arts at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Guy Cassiers focused on creating a dramatic language with a strong visual and sensorial identity. Adapting and directing non-dramatic texts allowed him to grapple with a language that is often politically-charged. He is now the director of the Toneelhuis in Antwerp which he leads with the desire to share his creative process with artists from diverse backgrounds: visual artists, choreographers, video makers, and writers. Guy Cassiers's theatre explores the history of Europe, and particularly the discourse about it and the sociopolitical forces that vie for dominance, always focusing first and foremost on the human dimension of those stories. Guy Cassiers is a regular at the Festival d'Avignon, where he has presented many of his plays: *Rouge décanté* (*Decanted Red*) in 2006, *Mefisto for ever* in 2007, then *Wolfskers and Atropa*. *The Revenge of Peace* in 2008, Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* in 2010, *Blood & Roses*. *The Song of Joan and Gilles* in the Cour d'honneur in 2011, and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* in 2013. He will present two shows at the 71st edition of the Festival, *Grensgeval* (*Borderline*) and *The Dry and the Wet*, based on Jonathan Littell's writings about Waffen-SS Léon Degrelle.

MAUD LE PLADEC

Maud Le Pladec joined in 1999 the ex.e.r.ce course at the National Choreographic Centre in Montpellier, directed by Mathilde Monnier. She then started performing with many choreographers, including Takiko Iwabuchi, Guillermo Bothello, Boris Charmatz, and Herman Diephuis. A desire for collaboration and research is ever present in her work: she created the collective Leclubdes5 with Mickaël Phelippeau, Typhaine Heissat, Virginie Thomas, and Maeva Cunci, has worked with composer Fausto Romitelli for the diptych *Professor* (which received the prix de la révélation chorégraphique from the syndicat de la critique) and *Poetry, Ominous Funk,* and *Demo* with the collective Bang on a can, as well as *Democracy* with the Ensemble TaCtuS. Her first collaboration with Guy Cassiers dates back to 2015, with *Xerse*, created for the Opéra de Lille. Since June 2016, Maud Le Pladec has been the director of the National Choreographic Centre in Orléans.

INTERVIEW WITH GUY CASSIERS AND MAUD LE PLADEC

***Grensgeval (Borderline)* talks about the fear of the other, and more specifically about the situation we're currently experiencing, with the arrival of refugees in Europe.**

Guy Cassiers: I've noticed that in the way they communicate information, many media conflate the terms "refugee" and "illegal." In Flanders, to talk about refugees almost means to talk about "illegals," or that's what the media say, it's the language they use to turn people against the idea of welcoming refugees. Manipulation starts there, with the choice of the words you'll use to talk about important subjects and thus orient the reflection of a mainstream audience. But the refugees coming to our countries shouldn't be seen as illegals before they have even been given a chance. Language has a large influence on the way we think, on sociocultural relationships. The risk here is the simplification of situations through language, so that things lose their complexity and opinions lose their nuance and become excluding. A simplified world is a dangerous place for everyone. Elfriede Jelinek explains the complexity of the situation in which Europe and refugees find themselves very well. With her text *The Suppliants*, she tries to understand, through her writing, the point of view of the refugees who arrive by boat as well as the difficulties that the people of Europe must face.

Maud Le Pladec: *Grensgeval (Borderline)* is an example, both in its aim and in its result, of the way different arts can come together on a stage. The text, scenography, costumes, music, and dance are there to serve a project that goes way beyond the simple desire to bring together those diverse artistic forms. The media we use exist for a reason, and serve above all a higher level of writing: Elfriede Jelinek's text, and the way Guy Cassiers wanted to direct it. It's as if we needed several bodies, several voices, several points of view to talk about such a subject, which isn't just topical but is our ultra-modern reality. Dance attends to all that the text says, all that Guy Cassiers may have wanted to say. And that's why it takes so many different forms, why it is so porous and shifting. It is a committed dance, and it is within the bodies of young dancers that it manifests itself, within a group of young people who belong to a generation that looks at the question of refugees and the world of today in a specific way. It's a dance that's full of that paradox, at once sublime and tragic. To dance is at once to exert oneself and to resist, in the way that Georges Bataille defined it. It's an act of resistance that can have several meanings: resisting death, resisting oblivion, resisting fear, resisting also the temptation to say that we know, that we can understand. Dance in *Grensgeval (Borderline)* expresses, in some ways, that very real inability to feel empathy for what is happening.

There's a powerful opposition between the figure of those in power, here Europe, and the figure of the other.

G. C. Indeed, in *Grensgeval (Borderline)*, Europe wants to speak but can't seem to figure out how it can actually help. The strength of Elfriede Jelinek's writing resides in its myriad references to the cultural history of Europe, like *The Odyssey, The Trojan War*, all those great texts that talk about large movements of population and similar questions. Jelinek combines this cultural foundation with topical events. The photographs of dead children lying on beaches that have been used by the media, or the problem of car pollution, share the stage with ancient drama in *Grensgeval (Borderline*). Her writing takes the form of a nightmare, like an urge to vomit that can't be fought back, caused by the urgency and the need to say. To the point that the audience loses track at times of who's talking between the Europeans and the refugees, because their words get mixed up to the point of schizophrenia, a symbol of our society. This form of writing tackles the problem of autocentrism: even as we talk about others in a desire to help them, we can only see ourselves in the mirror. It's true of theatre as well: how can we talk about the refugees? Does an actor have the right to appropriate the situation and the words of a refugee? Jelinek's text tackles that question head on.

How did you choose to stage a text with such modern themes which pours out and blurs the line between who's talking at any given moment?

G. C. Four actors share the text, and about fifteen dancers dance the choreography created by Maud Le Pladec. The show is made up of three parts, but the text itself hasn't been divided among the actors beforehand. They know the text in its entirety, and we've been working on a choral approach to it, at times almost indivisible. The show can be seen as a triptych: in three scenes, we relate three "stations" of the "passion" of the refugees. In the first part that tells of the crossing aboard boats, there's little difference between the words of one actor and the next, as they embody in a way the role of the Greek chorus, which comments and watches but distances itself from the situation. The show begins that way, with a distanced analysis of the situation, thanks to language and with the help of cameras that project the disproportionate bodies of the actors. They dominate the dancers, whom the situation, both physical and symbolic, prevents from dancing and forces to lie down with their faces against the ground. This first scene takes place in a dark atmosphere, so as to create confusion and to make it difficult to distinguish the performers. The scenic difference between dancers and actors is constant. The four actors represent the gods at the height of their power, superior both in terms of physical and symbolic location, watching from afar and effortlessly as men struggle. The second scene is the long march throughout Europe, the stage lights up completely and gives way to a society characterised by too many images and too much information. Getting to Europe is possible, but it's harder to find the right way once you're there. There are many possibilities, and at the same time there isn't any. All the media of the theatre (both aural and visual) are present, as if they were looking for a way to cohabitate onstage. The themes of separation and gathering allow me to question the way I can write and create a show based on such a topic. The third scene describes the arrival of the refugees in a church that serves as both shelter and prison. The scenic construction closes down on itself to create a claustrophobic scenography, and the semi-darkness makes it hard to distinguish the dancers from the actors. The individuals have been absorbed into a shifting and shapeless mass. I create scenic situations in which the audience can sometimes feel trapped, finding itself in a boat with those refugees.

M. L. P. Guy Cassiers is an extremely precise director when it comes to his intentions, to his vision of the project and of the great dramatic lines that support it. All that while leaving considerable room to each of his collaborators. If I say that, it's because the relationship that Guy imagined between the text and dance was very clear right from the start. However, and that's what makes such a project so rich, I was given free rein to translate the intentions at the heart of the projects into a choreography. Concretely, as Guy puts it, Jelinek's text is divided into three very distinct parts, and I had to communicate those dividing lines without turning dance into an illustration of the text or of the actors' words. The presence of the dancers, that purely physical and sensitive dimension together create a sort of "umpteenth body," an alternative voice that would be at once at the edge of the text and an echo to it. In other words, a showcase, at once visual and corporeal, of the hidden dimensions of Jelinek's text. The meaning of the story becomes more ambiguous, its time more anachronistic, which opened a last dimension that's entirely subjective for each spectator.

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Interview conducted by Moïra Dalant and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach.