

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

The Lessons of the University with Julien Gosselin, July 10 at 12:30, site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

NAVE OF IMAGES

2666 (parts 1 and 2) by Julien Gosselin (2016), July 7 at 14:30, église des Célestins

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- October 6 and 7, 2018, Le Phénix Scène nationale Valenciennes
- October 14 to 20, Théâtre du Nord, Lille
- November 17 to December 22, Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe, Festival d'Automne, Paris
- January 6, 2019, Thalia Theater, Hamburg (Germany)
- January 19, Bonlieu Scène nationale, Annecy
- February 16, Théâtre de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, with Onde, Théâtre centre d'Art de Velizy-Villacoublay
- March 2 and 3, Théâtre deSingel, Anvers (Belgium)
- March 16, Le Quartz, Brest
- March 23 to 30, Théâtre national de Bretagne, Rennes
- April, International Theater, Amsterdam (Netherlands)

MAO II, PLAYERS, THE NAMES

By bringing together three works by Don DeLillo—*Players*, *The Names*, and *Mao II*—Julien Gosselin is able to weave together narratives revolving around the theme of terrorism in the '70s, while opening up the show to other dreamscapes as well. The variations in DeLillo's writing, the subtext, and the relationship to time have become for the young director key aspects of the American author's work. "I don't want to overemphasise connections between three different texts to create a convincing and explicit trilogy, but rather for the fiction to shatter so that events can arise from anywhere." For both men—the writer and the director, history cannot be experienced in a linear fashion: it is as splintered as the flows of information that surround us, punctuated by moments of incredible intensity and other out-of-time experiences. Just like a novelist interrupts his plot to establish a setting, and just like reading itself can only be a discontinuous activity interrupted by the events of our everyday lives, the ten-hour show in which Julien Gosselin and his collective submerge us is above all a sensory experience. From the moment we enter the theatre to the moment we leave, fictional time and real time strive to come together.

JULIEN GOSSELIN

In 2009, upon graduating from the EPSAD in Lille, Guillaume Bachelé, Antoine Ferron, Noémie Gantier, Julien Gosselin, Alexandre Lecroc, Victoria Quesnel, and Tiphaine Raffier created *Si vous pouviez lécher mon coeur* (If you could only lick my heart). After *Genoa 01* and *Tristesse Animal Noir* (*Sadness Black Animal*), and under the direction of Julien Gosselin, the collective focused on literary works which play with the reader/audience's perception of time, offering them ultra-sensory experiences, including adaptations of Michel Houellebecq's *The Elementary Particles* and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, both of which played in previous editions of the Festival d'Avignon.

DON DELILLO

Don DeLillo is an American novelist, playwright and essayist. His works have covered subjects as diverse as television, nuclear war, sports, the complexities of language, performance art, the Cold War, mathematics, the advent of the digital age, politics, economics, and global terrorism.

Players, *Mao II*, *The Names* by Don DeLillo, translated by Marianne Véron, published by éditions Actes Sud, are on sale at the bookshop in the Maison Jean Vilar.

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INTERVIEW WITH JULIEN GOSSÉLIN

***Players, The Names, and Mao II*: three novels by Don DeLillo within a single theatrical object. Why did you bring them together?**

Julien Gosselin: I've been a Don DeLillo reader for years, and I've always wanted to do something with his novels for the theatre. For a long time, I couldn't figure out how to approach them. It was a mystery I couldn't quite solve. After the creation of *2666*, I went back to DeLillo and knew it was time I worked on his writings. The places of theatre in his work I couldn't imagine before now seem obvious. There's a very clear thematic concordance between those three works, they all talk about 1970s terrorism, especially in the United States, either explicitly or implicitly. But in the end, it's the question of the words that remains at their centre. It becomes possible to question what a word is, the archaism of the concept of word, what writing is. Jean-Luc Godard made a film called *Goodbye to Language* and is a source of inspiration for the American writer, and he says the same thing. What's the difference between the word and the image? The image contained within the word? DeLillo wonders, sometimes he writes so that the pattern the words form on the page may move the reader in some way. It goes beyond meaning. These books draw a parallel between the question of violence and terrorism on the one hand and the question of writing, of creating a fiction out of reality on the other. At the centre of *Mao II*, for instance, is the idea that terrorists have replaced novelists. As creators of fiction, they're greatly superior to writers, even though the latter also favour revolt over the status quo. But in spite of their weirdness, writers manage to integrate society. This terrorism is one of exaggerated language, it's the era of slogans and manifestos, of powerful political language. Violence through words, in *The Names* in particular. The book is about a cult killing villagers only because they share initials with the place they live. It's an archaic way of thinking, according to which language alone would be enough to cause death.

These texts do not form a trilogy. How will they respond to each other on the stage?

When *2666* ended, I realised that it was precisely this relationship between violence and literature we were looking for. Apart from the themes they share, those three novels don't have much in common; there's no recurring character between them. I don't see them as a trilogy. It's the discontinuity I'm interested in. My theatre so far has used linear fiction as its engine. If the theatricality is broken by directorial stratagems, the narrative is rarely fragmented. I wanted to work with a material that would allow me to leave pure permanence behind. Even if there are common themes within all three objects, there's no common thread throughout. You have to find dramaturgic coherence elsewhere. In addition to the novels, I'm also working on other texts by DeLillo, short texts like *Hammer and Sickle*, which tackle questions of terrorism, finance, violence, and political discourse born of May 1968 and 1970s activism. Alongside the text, we're using moments of pure image and music. Godard inspired some of the images we're using on the stage, and is present through the text.

DeLillo himself was inspired by the filmmaker for *Players*. I don't want to create connections that don't exist between the three texts to build an explicit and convincing trilogy, but I want the fiction to break down so that events can arise from everywhere. We could perform the three novels over three nights, but for the Festival d'Avignon, which allows for long, exceptional experiences, it'll be a continuous eight-hour show.

Will the stage also allow for breakdowns and fragmentations?

On the stage, you'll see entire films, theatre in the truest sense of the word, and three live musicians. It's the same world I created for *Atomised* and *2666*, with formal innovations to try to break down, as you say, this linearity I'm usually attached to. Such a long object is a space where we can redefine our relationship to time and play with the audience's expectations, take them out of their comfort zone. To counter our relationship to theatre as "consumers", I'd like to, in the long term, create shows in which the time of performance would be more or less variable, so that the time of the fiction would no longer be limited only to the time of the performance. We're not talking about the historical events of the 1970s as we would in documentary theatre, especially since they've already been filtered through the subjectivity of an author. History is read not only through great historical facts, but also through minor events, hesitations, and anonymous actors.

Can your artistic research—changing our perception of time—be compared to the temporality of reading, which is at once discontinuous and interrupted by everyday events?

That's sort of the idea, yes. My dream would be to open a place where people would encounter a number of artistic forms unfolding before them, in which they could immerse themselves, without having to think about where it begins and where it ends. The formal research I've been conducting for a while now aims to create a dramaturgy that would be less oriented and linear. The texts stops to create moments of openness and imprecision, so that understanding is no longer tied to the narrative. The spaces thus left open create a shift in the relationship of the audience to the dramatic object. Telling stories is in the end something I'm not all that interested in, what drives me is the work on poetic material. Delving into the writing of a novel means not only following a narrative, but also entering a landscape, an environment that comes with it, sometimes complementing the narrative, sometimes going against it. I'd want to make the audience experience the whole thing. With those three texts, it's clearly DeLillo's words that lead the audience into these stories which remain non-discursive, even though bridges of meaning are clearly created. It's not the form of the theatre (the relationship between the stage and the audience, for instance) that I want to escape, but the way the audience enters the theatre. The show we're offering can be seen as a slice of life whose ending isn't entirely predetermined, and which can continue after the audience has gone home.

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Interview conducted by Moira Dalant and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach