

AND...

Antigone by Olivier Py and Enzo Verdet,
with the centre pénitentiaire Avignon-Le Pontet, July 18 to 20, La Scierie
A history of the Festival d'Avignon in 72 posters by Olivier Py,
July 8, 15 and 23, Maison Jean Vilar

READING

Visions de Jacob by François Esperet, with Nâzim Boudjenah
de la Comédie-Française, July 11 at 11:00, Maison Jean Vilar

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

The question of cultural rights at the heart of artistic and cultural education
with Olivier Py, July 7 at 15:00

Jack Ralite Day with Olivier Py, July 12, Maison Jean Vilar

Culture and Social economy, a third way?

with Olivier Py, July 12 at 14:30, cloître Saint-Louis

The Legacy of Great Thinkers : Simone Weil, the rebel

with Olivier Py, July 12 at 16:00

Dialogue artists-audience with Olivier Py and the team of *Pure Present*,
July 19 at 16:30

FAITH AND CULTURE ENCOUNTER

Chapelle de l'Oratoire

With Nâzim Boudjenah de la Comédie-Française, July 10 at 11:00

With Olivier Py, July 15 at 17:00

FNAC ENCOUNTER

with Olivier Py, July 11 at 12:30, Fnac Avignon

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- January 23 to 26, 2019, Théâtre national Wallonie-Bruxelles (Belgium)
- February 28 to March 1st mars, Théâtre national de Nice
- March 14, Théâtre de l'Archipel Scène nationale de Perpignan
- September 14 and 15, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II, Lisbon (Portugal)

72th
EDITION

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

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#FDA18

PURE PRESENT

Made up of three plays, *Pure present* is based on Aeschylus's tragedies, which Olivier Py has been translating and directing for ten years. This intimate relationship with the ancient poet has opened a breach in his aesthetics similar to that created by his work with prisoners. For the playwright and director of the Festival d'Avignon, the plays born of this experience, here *Prison*, *Money*, and *The Mask*, are an opportunity to pare down his theatre and sharpen his writing. For "*this tragedy of our pure present*" in which "*the smallest gesture betrays our guilt*," Olivier Py chose swiftness and concision by focusing on a small number of striking characters and extreme situations: a prisoner and a chaplain, a banker and his son, a masked man and the crowd, a burning prison, a gunshot, a masked revolution. All take part in verbal jousts which echo and answer each other. All make theirs a question that cannot be answered either by morality or by the law: "*How to live with dignity?*"

OLIVIER PY

In 2013, Olivier Py became the first artist to be appointed director of the Festival d'Avignon since Jean Vilar. A director for the theatre, the opera, and cinema, but also an actor and poet, Olivier Py anchors his work in his contemporaries' preoccupations, in order to open up a poetic and political dialogue about the life of the individual as part of a community. Theatre is his culture and his instrument: with him, words become actions, without losing sight of the fact that this gesture—a poem—could one day be the basis of new democratic forms.

Pur présent by Olivier Py, published by éditions Actes Sud-Papiers,
is on sale at the bookshop in the Maison Jean Vilar.



FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON 72°

JULY 7 8 9 10 11 | 13 14 15 16 17 | 20 21 22
LA SCIERIE

INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER PY

Your project is to create a cycle of short contemporary tragedies. How did it come about?

Olivier Py: Over the past ten years, I've translated all seven of Aeschylus's plays to which we still have access today. His tragedies are always political, and always end with a reconciliation of the ideal and the real. I had to come up with a concise, necessary, and swift style. The words of the tragic hero are the last words that can be told. There's an energy specific to the agon (the fight in Greek). I also had to come up with a mode of representation pared down to the extreme, not showy at all, and very close to the audience. That's the style and the type of theatre you'll find in those three tragedies I wrote. Two actors and a chorus are enough to perform all of them. And the structure of *Pure Present* aims towards what Aristotle wrote about tragedy: alternating between verbal jousts with high dramatic intensity and moments of poetry, here mostly songs, under the responsibility of the chorus. This modern cycle that takes on an ancient form is like three tragedies by Aeschylus—*Prison*, *Money*, and *The Mask*—performed by three actors. And although they are connected by some of their events, they are above all about this fundamental question: how to live with dignity?

Can you tell us more about the three plays and their succession as part of the cycle?

These plays all have to do with social questions. The first one takes place in a prison. What I've experienced during the workshops I lead at the Avignon-Le Pontet prison changed me. Prison is a very important question when it comes to our democracy. It's the ultimate consequence of an ineluctable system. It's above all an economic system; the second play is a post-mortem of that system. The first play is a power struggle between a prisoner people call the king and a young socially-conscious chaplain tormented by guilt. It can also be read as a class struggle: the chaplain is the son of a banker whose speculation hurt the world economy; the king comes from the projects, where social injustice is rampant and leads to the incarceration of those who surround him, "his people." While they should be great rivals—the priest holds much power over the inmates and finds his love in his faith—, there is between them a fatal attraction that leads to both their destruction. Their confrontation is at once political, metaphysical, and romantic. There's also a chorus embodied by a third character: the prisoner, who tells us how the inmate community reacts to the fight between the priest and the king. The second play is linked to the first one since it focuses on the banker, the young priest's father, and his second son. The chorus speaks for a secretary who will become the third play's central character and thus bring an end to the cycle. The banker is aware of his responsibility in turning the economy virtual. He has created a crypto-currency and, thanks to it, has the means to trigger a financial crisis on par with that of 2008. The youngest son asks himself the same questions his brother did in a clumsy attempt at parricide.

Can one gunshot create a political upheaval now that politics has been replaced by finance? The third play is built differently. It requires three actors, even though there are many characters, since it takes place on the street during a moment of insurrection. The secretary is back, his face hidden behind a black mask he's made the vow of never taking off. He becomes despite himself the symbol of an impossible revolution. *The Mask* is about a generation trying to find a place on the political stage. It's an adjunct to dialogue. But how can one make a meaningful gesture when the real powers are beyond reach, when they haven't simply been replaced by algorithms?

Isn't this cycle asking the question of ethics, like the *Antigone* you created with the inmates of the Avignon-Le Pontet prison?

In the political and religious drama that is *Antigone*, Morals and the Law tell us what not to do. But who or what tells us what we should do? What gesture would allow me to say that I'm living with dignity? No book or even word teaches that. Talking about ethics, to quote Wittgenstein, is to come face-to-face with the limits of language. If we were able to say what ethics is, then it wouldn't be ethics! There needs to be an engagement, even a sacrifice. It's a question that's at the heart of *Pure Present*. How can we live with dignity today when even buying yoghurt makes us complicit in a system built to make the rich richer? All the characters in the cycle, be they powerful or victims, bastards or martyrs, share this boundless thirst for transcendence. There's a contamination of spiritual energy that drives the characters to outsized actions. Tragedy must instill nostalgia for the truth, and in that sense it can't be deleterious. There's no affirmative apotheosis, no organisation of meaning. Only a question brought to a searing heat by the stage.

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Interview conducted by Francis Cossu
and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach