

AND

ATELIERS DE LA PENSÉE

Speaking and letting others speak, betraying one's word and depriving others of their voice, with Étienne Gaudillère, Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme, July 21 at 11:00, site Louis Pasteur Supramuros de l'Université d'Avignon

TOUR DATES AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- October 11 and 12, 2018, Théâtre Firmin Gémier / La Piscine Châtenay-Malabry
- October 16 to 18, Les 2 Scènes, Besançon
- January 14 and 15, 2019, Théâtre de Villefranche, Villefranche-sur-Saône
- February 5 to 7, Le TU-Nantes

PALE BLUE DOT - A STORY OF WIKILEAKS

Julian Assange, Bradley—now Chelsea—Manning, Adrian Lamo, Hillary Clinton, David Leigh, a passerby, Wikileaks, the United States, Iraq, a ghost... Famous and unknown people, politicians and whistleblowers, and dominoes falling one after another are at the heart of Étienne Gaudillère's first direction, inspired by the 2010 Cablegate affair and its treatment by the media. From the Iraqi desert, a young American soldier leaked United States diplomatic cables. Via its founder Julian Assange, Wikileaks revealed their existence to the world. And then things got complicated... Thanks to its inventive montage, halfway between surveillance and freedom of speech, *Pale Blue Dot* plays with multiple forms of expression—MSN conversations, media interviews, eyewitness accounts, even monologues in verse—and questions in a most lively way the blurring of engagements and boundaries. With characters such as the lone wolf Bradley "Chelsea" Manning and the troubling Julian Assange, wars are no longer fought on the battlefield but in the media, and a new world appears: ours.

ÉTIENNE GAUDILLÈRE

In 2015, Étienne Gaudillère founded Compagnie Y, with which he created *Pale Blue Dot* in 2016. Out of that first show, he then created *Conversation privée (Private Conversation)*, which zooms in on part of the story to question the idea of betrayal. As an actor, he recently appeared in *Merlin ou la terre dévastée (Merlin, or, the Ruined Land)* and *Neuf Petites Filles (Nine Little Girls)*. His company, named after the generation born between 1980 and 1999, is driven by an irrepressible need to tackle History head-on. In 2018, he will direct *Cannes 39-90*, a show exploring the history of the Cannes Film Festival.

72th
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INTERVIEW WITH ÉTIENNE GAUDILLÈRE

Your play is a montage of texts (reports, interviews, articles). How did you create it?

Etienne Gaudillère: I'd first like to warn people who don't know the story of the play or of Wikileaks that they probably shouldn't read this interview before the show! Even if they do know the story, actually. I think it would spoil the surprise. I wanted to say that because I like it when the programme only has a playlist of songs released in 2010, so that the audience can experience the story for the first time as the show unfolds. Well, I've said it, but I'm sure it'll be cut for the written version of this interview... Anyway, about the writing of the play: I came across that story during Cablegate, that is, the publication of confidential data about American diplomacy, on 20 November 2010. The front page of the newspaper *Le Monde* of that day said "How the Americans see the world". I didn't know anything about that story, or about Wikileaks. In 2013, I thought back on those secret documents about the war in Iraq, revealed by Bradley "Chelsea" Manning (a soldier who has since undergone surgery to become a woman) and spread by Wikileaks and its "leader" Julian Assange. I started digging and going over the facts. Very quickly, the discussions I found on the internet about Chelsea Manning oriented my research. Her MSN discussions with Adrian Lamo, a hacker who betrayed her soon after, became the centre of the play, thanks to the emotion and intimacy they brought. I found more material, made other choices based on echoes and contradicting facts. Many scenes had been told but never filmed. So I wrote them. What mattered above all was the type of discourse: political speeches, internet discussions, but also the invention of a monologue in verse for a Swedish institution... Any type of discourse belongs here if it expresses a point of view. And let's not forget the videos: a commercial for the iPad, a trailer for Christopher Nolan's *Inception*, an entire chronology of 2010. I wrote the play like I would have tried to solve a puzzle. It was a period of serene writing, with real questions about the different types of discourse and the choices I had to make.

Your show describes two antithetical visions of the world: global surveillance as designed by the United States and the freedom of speech defended by a number of very different independent characters...

I think the three main characters of the play are amazing: Julian Assange, Bradley "Chelsea" Manning, and Adrian Lamo. Assange is a very ambiguous figure. He's at once exceptional and megalomaniac, depending on how you look at it. Manning has hit rock bottom, trapped between his job as a soldier and real existential questions. Adrian Lamo, who doesn't have quite the same presence onstage, is the hacker who'll snitch on Manning, and who turns out to have Asperger's. All three of them are terribly human. They have scars; their lives are complicated. Manning inspires sympathy; Assange is mysterious, just like his story. Our vision of the head of Wikileaks had to be balanced: in the early 2010s, people attacked him for his attitude and because of two rape accusations against him. Since then, something has changed.

It probably has something to do with his status as a refugee in the Ecuador Embassy in London. With those three characters, we sometimes come close to excess, sickness, or pathology—and heroism.

Would you say the show is documentary theatre, or do you stand on the margins of that type of theatre?

That's the big question, isn't it? Many spectators don't see it that way. They see it as very theatrical. Some even talk of "journalistic theatre"! The situations on the stage are dramatic situations. They would be impossible in a documentary (if only because a ghost appears at some point!). Same for the finale, which we call "Le bilan" ("Taking stock"). Everyone comes back onstage; words and discourses clash together: it's not realistic. Someone told me: you're making a "dramatised documentary". Truth be told, I don't know. What I'm interested in is how to make theatre with all that material, those sources, while avoiding didacticism. It's interesting to play with moments of information or explanation, those essential moments. The pretext of the performance becomes stimulating: you have to find stakes for the actors.

Did you think about updating the play? About giving it new perspectives because of more recent events—like the Snowden affair in 2013, for instance?

Yes, I've been asked why I didn't write a sequel. There's a little "update" at the end of the show, to talk about how things stand today. There are three or four lines in a monologue by Assange about it. *Pale Blue Dot* takes place over a year, a slide from "everything is awesome" to "everything is broken"! It makes sense, from the point of view of the dramaturgy. The audience is invited to follow along with this "first time in history". The songs we use are all from 2010: Adele, Stromae's "Alors on danse", Shakira's "Waka Waka", her song for the World Cup. That was important to me. It's a story that's not over, that's still going on, but which isn't part of the "past" either (like the 1980s or 1990s, for instance), and on which we can look back. That's what I find interesting. The music help with that: it allows us to remember that memory from not so long ago.

There are many characters in your play. Politicians, journalists, activists... But also objects, songs, incongruous things. Isn't it a way to explore a complex, sometimes tragi-comic, state of the world?

It is. The story of Manning, who leaked secret information and dreamt of being a woman, is a fascinating example. Reality's like that. I hope people feel it in the play's writing: to be able to shift suddenly from levity to seriousness. Like that joke about Bill Clinton's philandering, or the bets about the next Nobel Peace Prize. I like those tonal shifts. The play is made of giant dominoes, one falls and all the others follow. It comes back to something essential: the confrontation of wildly diverse elements, which give rise to a poetic or dramatic picture. Because you can slide very quickly into a different time, a different space, or from comedy to tragedy, and that's pretty thrilling.

Interview conducted by Marc Blanchet and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach