



HOUSING ESTATE - WINNER OF IMPATIENCE AWARD

INTERVIEW WITH TOMMY MILLIOT / C^{IE} MAN HAAST

What does Man Haast mean?

I'm of Flemish descent, and *Man Haast* means "fast man" in Flemish. It's a reference to the beginnings of the company, which we founded in 2014. We started working on several projects very fast, even though we didn't have a lot of money. The theatre I defend is made of contemporary writing, with the avowed desire to be in the 21st century, to be close to the authors. To be in the 21st century means to try to live in the present. And the theatre is an art of the present. It's just that, actually. Working on contemporary plays allows me to enter in a direct dialogue with their authors, and since the theatre makes it impossible to reproduce what you've done, you have to be entirely in the present, with different people who get to think together at a given time.

What is this *Housing Estate*? What's your vision of this play, written by contemporary playwright Frédéric Vossier?

Housing Estate is a work about what lies elsewhere, about the void. My first vision of *Housing Estate*, then its realisation, was the construction of a space governed by light. I asked myself what the light of housing estates was like. I saw headlights, fog, people lit up by an open fridge or by computer screens. Those are bright, crude lights, particularly suitable at night. The work is also of course based on the text, before and during rehearsals, with the collaboration of dramatist Sarah Cillaire throughout: what sets *Housing Estate* apart is the way it is based first and foremost on what's left unsaid, on doubts, on misunderstandings. It was essential not to lose track of the text. With *Housing Estate*, we started with an empty space and with the implicit and incomplete meaning carried by the everyday conversation of the three protagonists. We had to face the unknown without trying to paper over it. Fortunately, we could count on the tremendous skill and power of actors Eye Haidara, Miglen Mirtchev, and Isaïe Sultan.

You say that "empty space is the starting point of creation;" what's this emptiness we're talking about here? The idea of a blank page? Of a clean slate? Or that of a quest, of an existential or metaphorical reflection? Can that emptiness still be perceived in the final creation itself?

The emptiness is a blank page, but it's neither abstract nor metaphorical. You have to start in a clean, bright space, and in that empty space, you can build another space. All the work then happens within and with the actors. They have to make an additional effort to work on this notion of emptiness, just like the audience. It's the opposite of this fullness we're so used to in our daily lives, all those things that come pre-packaged and ready to be consumed. But that emptiness doesn't really remain empty, it's filled with a certain tension, with fullness. There's no set, no details, it's filled by big things. It's full of the relationship of power that exists between the actors, of a tension fed by imagination (that of the actors, then that of the audience). The space is like a boxing ring that is never emptied because the gaze remains, that of the actors, but also that of the audience. I trust the audience completely, I let them work during the show. It's a gathering within the things themselves. There's no singular audience but only individual members of the audience, a multitude of imaginations projecting their desires onto what they see on the stage. The moves and spaces I create are very graphic, inspired by architecture, without being formal. For the audience, there's a freedom to be found in this "prison," thanks in part to imagination. I want to avoid being formal because it would prevent emotion from happening. I work primarily on sensations, on the emotion the audience will (or will not) project onto the actors and the stage. That's why I don't want to create a hierarchy between dramatic tools, so that they can come together and create an ensemble at the service of those sensations, of that emotion. That being said, the actors play a central part in this work, because the words they carry are primordial, and because they create the space with their bodies, they can never hide behind the set. I try to trigger a sensory experience, to make the audience lose their bearings, lose track of time and space and of the relationship between space and time. I try to make it so everyone's lost, wondering what's happening, so that they can better be brought back at the end. It's a displacement of the real.

What does *Housing Estate* have to say about our relationship as humans to the real?







Housing Estate is about characters who don't know how to talk to each other, but who look at each other. It isn't easy to look at each other, this isn't a comedy. This constant transformation of the real that's inherent to the theatre gives us the opportunity to lose ourselves, and can lead to emotional surprise, to an intimate shock. That was my first encounter with the theatre, back when I was 11 years old. We feel the need to come and gather together, driven by this need for representation, which I see as a great source of hope. I aim to share a feeling with the audience, this intimate emotion, just like my first time. We ask the audience to make a real effort, they have to create an opening inside themselves to reach or understand that emotion.

The title of the play carries cultural and social connotations; how did you use that?

The words "housing estate" are a source of fantasy. They bring up a series of images, they come with strong political and social connotations, and are often associated with a specific social group. It's a space full of constraints that ends up closing in on a single room. We start with a housing estate (which we never get to see), then we move to the house, then to a bedroom. We zoom in from the outside to the inside; you can't see this zooming movement but you understand it physically, like a secret you know without seeing it. We enter the story of a family, about which only a few details are visible. I try to turn those characters into icons, to make them bigger than they are. The father, a retired member of the French riot police, welcomes a young woman into his home. I want people to feel empathy for that man. The play is about the fantasies of the son about the relationship between his father and his younger girlfriend. It's the real that goes off the rail. There's an inability to communicate between the father and the son, and between the son and that young woman, who belongs to the same generation (because she, though she belongs to "his generation," is sleeping with the father). It is through the son that the audience enters the show, he is a sort of coryphaeus without a chorus.

Interview conducted by Moïra Dalant

Translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

	<p>JULY 6 TO 24, 2016</p> <p>All the Festival on festival-avignon.com</p> <p>    #FDA16</p>	
---	--	---