

RUMOURS AND DAYBREAKS

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The show's on in three minutes. The audience is getting ready. Technicians are busy setting up. Relaxed, the commentators of Epigraph sit down behind their microphones. Smoking a cigarette, one of them plays the programme's opening music, an old swing number. Three, two, one... "For want of sun, learn how to ripen in the snow": such is the topic of the last episode of the show, which has just been brutally cancelled. Sensing that the set is about to fall apart around them, that the lights will go crazy and dim, the commentators nonetheless begin a new debate. Each in their own way, they will challenge the neoliberal ideology that has just taken them off the air, in a final assault of poetic thinking, with more than a little self-deprecation. A weapon that could by itself destroy that doctrine—articulated in the 1950s by the Mont Pelerin Society—and its provocative slogan, "There is no alternative," an "argument from terror that disqualifies any other worldview." From Henri Michaux to the Huichol people, the various inspirations of this Belgian quintet lead them into a situationist reflection on the world. Arguing that the time and moments spent together are essential, and that humour and deep thinking aren't antithetical, the Raoul Collectif give us with their second play a hilarious show about aesthetics and politics, about the collective reappropriation of power through language and imagination.

RAOUL COLLECTIF

Romain David, Jérôme de Falloise, David Murgia, Benoît Piret, and Jean-Baptiste Szézot met at the l'École supérieure d'acteurs du Conservatoire, in Liège. Although they didn't attend the same classes, they worked together on a single project, having been given carte blanche to choose their partners and pick their subjects and methodology. They came up with a short form, *Voyage d'hiver* (*Winter Trip*, 2008), which played student festivals, then at the Théâtre national in Brussels, before hopping the linguistic border to play in Flemish-speaking Flanders. Brought together by their desire for theatre, they decided to continue this adventure without waiting for all of them to graduate and started working on their first show, *Le signal du promeneur* (*The Sign of the Walker*, 2012), before founding their own structure. Based around "the strength of the group and eruptions of individual brilliance," the Raoul Collectif is created in 2009, "like a cry out of childhood," claiming with one voice that "in a world bent on its own destruction, to create is the only way not to destroy oneself with it." *Rumours and daybreaks* is the company's second show.

INTERVIEW WITH RAOUL COLLECTIF

Henri Michaux, the Mont Pelerin Society, situationism, the cosmogonical philosophy of the Huichol Indians of Mexico, a radio show: the very different sources of inspiration for your latest creation all have something to do with systems of thought.

Raoul Collectif: At first, we wanted to question the dominant system of thought and its mechanisms. The Mont Pelerin Society seemed like the perfect example. It was a group of intellectuals who got together in a specific historic context, in 1947, right after World War II, and who progressively managed to influence the way the world works, without anyone noticing. If we live today in a neoliberal society, it is because those people got together to act against a world order they disapproved of. They wanted to oppose the collective that then took the form of Soviet socialism, which itself reminded us of the revolutionary and artistic ideal of situationism. What seemed interesting is that the members of that society had to create a group to extol the virtues of individualism, working in the field of thought. They knew that by changing the way people think, by creating new thoughts, they could recreate History. We also thought of radio shows, like *Table d'écoute* in Belgium or *Le Masque et la Plume* in France, during which erudite commentators dialogue. We sat down to comment an aphorism by Henri Michaux, from *Tent Posts*: "For want of sun, learn how to ripen in the snow." We were trying to see what our reflections could generate, simply through our mental perceptions.

Isn't there also a criticism of this contemporary phenomenon of loss, of the attrition of language which paralyses thought for want of tools to express it?

If something unites us, it is indeed a sort of disappointment when it comes to the state of language. We're obsessed with shows like *Table d'écoute* or *Le Masque et la Plume*, or with the speeches of politicians from the '50s and '60s, yet we consider that a beautiful language shouldn't be something of the past, but must belong to the present. The show was also based on an episode from our trip to Mexico, where we met Huichol Indians who live in an entirely different system of thought. For them, the sun doesn't rise in the same place it does for us. To try to get in touch with that thought is one of the strengths of the show, for which we asked ourselves how deciding to meet the unknown allows us to move. We think that there would be many possible alternatives to the world in which we live if we weren't so afraid to venture towards the unknown, speaking not only in terms of economics, but also of philosophy. We tend to forget that, we all do. The strengthening of the kind of conformist thinking expressed and spread by the members of the Mont Pelerin Society is one of the consequences of that collective act of forgetting.

In the play, the commentators are the victims of an institutional attack, their show is doing badly and is about to be cancelled. They fight back with poems.

We asked ourselves how to put conformist thinking into perspective, how to weaken it. Poetry opened a space we could oppose to the rationality of the language of technocrats, but also to the rationality of the social phenomena we question in the play. Simply by small shifts in perspective, the same ones that allowed Henri Michaux to go back to another conception of the world. We're not leaving the field of thought, because this is also what theatre is: to create forms that call on people's imaginations, that conceive and infiltrate thought. If today neoliberal thought can say that there is no alternative to a whole series of social phenomena, such as economic austerity in politics, it's because that idea has been skillfully expressed and shared. It's the result of some serious work on ideology and on the way we talk.

Hence this incarnation of TINA, “There is no alternative,” a political and economic slogan?

TINA is the ideological weapon invented by a minority to impose its choices. A weapon that Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan used, which was the cause of the economic crisis of 2008. We wanted to have it sit there next to us, to have it speak for itself, because usually, it speaks through other people. We wanted to be able to fiddle with it, manipulate it, approach its limits, test things with it. Can we kill it? Can we change its mind? Can it express clearly what it is? How can we understand it in order to overcome it, to see how we can maybe avoid it in the future? It's important not to forget that TINA is an argument from terror that prevents our conception of the world from evolving and legitimises a certain form of violence through language. It's a terrorist idea that stops any other from even existing. The violence of conformist thought is the worst kind of violence imaginable: unilateral, it rejects any other kind of thought. A violence that exists in the West, but whose borders also separate the North and the South, allowing for the exploitation of the Third World. It's an idea that defends clear causes and objectives: to maintain the gap between the rich and the poor in order to preserve the hegemony of a specific intellectual and economic class. TINA supported General Pinochet in Chile in the name of freedom, thus eliminating a number of alternatives to the regime that could have led to other political models. The violence of TINA is very real. Ask the Greeks, whose democracy was denied by Europe, or the actors of cultural life who, like the commentators of our show, disappear as a result of budget cuts...

In five years, you've only created two shows, which is unusual. Is the form of your company, a collective, a way to invade this field of thought while creating new temporalities, new languages, new modalities of being together?

Our working method encourages all that take part in whatever way to the show to become creators. What we're challenging isn't the position of the director or of the actors, but the separation of functions and methodologies that are traditionally associated with the director, the scenographer, the costume designer, etc. Every one of us is author of the show. That's why we don't start with the text. It allows us to escape a certain fixity that would threaten our conception of creation, would compartmentalise our attitude. Moreover, we are lucky in that Belgium doesn't have as strong a dramatic tradition as France. We come up with a text without thinking about the text. We think first in terms of projections onto the stage, of games, of images, of feelings, and from all that we build a text, dialogues, a play in the literary sense of the word. The question of the text is never a preoccupation! What matters to us is to tell stories. *Rumours and Daybreaks* also started with this sentence: “*Most people don't think, we need to think for them.*” We start from the opposite point of view, from the idea that we are all thinkers, all philosophers. If we talk about society, there are very few spaces left where we can take the time to listen to each other, to take into accounts everyone's arguments and ideas to build something else, to go beyond the limits of one's own talent. The moments we spend together on the stage allow us to escape that model. It's true that it takes time. But this time allows a feeling of necessity to spread to every single member of the group. It's a time for thinking, a time of dreams, which leads to the creation of literature and ideas. It took us two years to create our first show, *The Sign of the Walker*. And it seemed entirely normal for it to take just as long to create the second. The way we work is, we spend time together, a time which may not serve an immediate purpose. It's important for us to meet scientists, to walk through the Mexican desert, to meet an indigenous people. It's a time we would argue is necessary for the creation of shared territories.

AND...

WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Dialogue artists-audience with Raoul Collectif, July 23 at 17:30, Louis Pasteur campus of the Université d'Avignon

TOUR DATES OF *RUMOURS AND DAYBREAKS* AFTER THE FESTIVAL

- September 27 to October 2, 2016
Théâtre national de Bruxelles
(Belgium)
- October 11 to 15, Théâtre de la Croix
Rousse, Lyon
- October 18 and 19, Carré-Les
Colonnes, Saint-Médard-en-Jalles
- October 22, Agora Theater Saint-Vith
(Belgium)
- October 25, Centre Culturel de Nivelles
(Belgium)
- November 2 to 25, Théâtre de la
Bastille, Paris
- November 29, Forum Meyrin
(Switzerland)
- December 1st, Théâtre Palace
Bienne (Switzerland)
- March 1st, 2017, Centre Culturel
de Ciney (Belgium)
- March 14 and 15, Maison de la Culture
de Tournai (Belgium)
- March 16, Centre Culturel Soignies
(Belgium)
- March 18, Théâtre de Châtillon
- March 21 to 25 Théâtre Liège
- April 4 to 7, Trident in
Cherbourg
- April 20 to 22, Théâtre Royal
Namur (Belgium)

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