

AND...

SHOWS

Grensgeval (Borderline) – Guy Cassiers and Maud Le Pladec, July 18-24 at 18:00, Parc des Expositions - Avignon

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Europe, new generation – Ircam, July 11 at 14:30, Cloître Saint-Louis

Ircam Open Sessions, July 13 at 11:00, 14:00 and 16:30, Cloître Saint-Louis

NAVE OF IMAGES (screenings)

Bloed & Rozen. Het lied van Jeanne en Gilles by Tom Lanoye, Guy Cassiers (2011), July 11 at 14:30, Église des Célestins

CINEMATIC TERRITORIES

Wrong Elements by Jonathan Littell, July 9 at 14:00, Utopia-Manutention

TOUR DATE AFTER THE FESTIVAL

– November 27, 2017, Le Parvis Scène nationale Tarbes Pyrénées, Ibos

***Le sec et l'humide* by Jonathan Littell, is published by éditions Gallimard.**

THE DRY AND THE WET

Writing *The Dry and the Wet*, based on the memoir by Waffen-SS Léon Degrelle, leader of the Walloon Legion, Johnathan Littell aimed to decipher, even dissect, the language of fascism. In line with *The Kindly Ones*, Littell's first novel based on his research, this new play allows Guy Cassiers to explore the figure of the "monster" Degrelle and examine the very material of the language of Nazism, which managed to seduce crowds, annihilate identities, and infected those who listened to it. Starting with a statement that also serves as context, "we all have within us a monster, who may or may not awaken," the director approaches the movement from dry to wet, from good to evil. On the stage: an austere conference, complete with stand and screen, where an actor takes on the role of a pedantic historian certain of his quasi-scientific rigour. But analysing the work of the Belgian Nazi isn't so easy... The exploration of this sinuous language built to persuade contaminates the man, but also his audience, us. Words and sounds become terrifying, mesmerising, and archaic songs. Using the experimental technology of *VoiceFollower*, developed by the Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music (Ircam), voices split and meld together in the service of an irreversible psychological process that would require resistance mechanisms not on an individual, but on a societal scale.

GUY CASSIERS

After studying visual arts at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Guy Cassiers focused on creating a dramatic language with a strong visual and sensorial identity. Adapting and directing non-dramatic texts allowed him to grapple with a language that is often politically-charged within an ever-shifting world that may seem at first incomprehensible. The use of cameras, video images, and live music serves to immerse the audience in the languages and stories on which he works. He is now the director of the Toneelhuis in Antwerp, which he leads with the desire to share his creative process with artists from diverse backgrounds. Guy Cassiers's theatre explores the history of Europe, and particularly the discourse about it and the sociopolitical forces that vie for dominance, always focusing first and foremost on the human dimension of those stories. Guy Cassiers has presented several of his plays at the Festival d'Avignon in particular *Blood & Roses*. *The Song of Joan and Gilles* in the Cour d'honneur of the Palais des papes in 2011. He presents two shows at the 71st edition of the Festival, *Grensgeval (Borderline)*, based on a text by Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek which gives voice to refugees seeking shelter in Europe, and *The Dry and the Wet*.

JONATHAN LITTELL

After the release of his novel *The Kindly Ones*, written in French, Jonathan Littell won the Prix Goncourt 2006 and the Grand Prix du Roman of the Académie française, and was given the French nationality for his "contribution to the cultural standing of France." The grandson of Russian Jews who emigrated to America, he has dedicated his work to understanding the violence of the Second World War and of the Eastern Front. After working alongside NGO Action Against Hunger in the wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, and Afghanistan, Jonathan Littell started writing in 2001 the fictional memoirs of SS Officer Maximilien Aue, directly inspired by the writing of Belgian far-right leader Léon Degrelle, which he meticulously analysed in *The Dry and the Wet*, published in 2008.

71st
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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INTERVIEW WITH GUY CASSIERS

Your play *The Dry and the Wet* was created in collaboration with the Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music (Ircam) in Paris, the centre for scientific research, technological innovation, and musical creation.

Guy Cassiers: I was invited to work with the Ircam and to have access to new technologies in that domain, which gave me the opportunity to think about the voice of the actor and the way in which two voices and two thoughts can coexist to the point of becoming almost one. I'm talking about the voices of a historian on the one hand and of Léon Degrelle on the other. As we know full well in Belgium, Léon Degrelle was a collaborator widely liked by his fellow citizens, in spite of his lies. He didn't bother himself with historical truth or facts, and constantly opposed the vague and shapeless to the very organised methods of the German forces. He was saved by Franco after the war, and lived out his life in luxury. French-American writer Jonathan Littell was inspired by his *Mémoires* in his reflection about its language itself, its musicality, its references, its style... That was part of the research he did for his great novel *The Kindly Ones*, in which he explores the power of a language in relationship to a political dimension. The title *The Dry and the Wet* is a reference to a Manichaeian vision of the world, the good things being dry, vertical, and linked to the sky: it's the political idea of power. As for the wet, it's evil; it represents what is horizontal, blurry, lifeless, shapeless. Jonathan Littell explores in great detail the expression of that dichotomy in Degrelle's writings. Degrelle was of course completely disconnected from reality, but his writings are indicative of a certain vision of the world that Littell tries to understand through writing itself. Totalitarian regimes have "brilliantly" used language to persuade and seduce, to bring people together behind a distorted vision of reality. We then decided to work on the mixing of two voices, of two realities, thanks to the techniques available at the Ircam: on the one hand you have the grandiloquent terms of the Belgian SS who, with his husky voice, describes the advance of the German troops on the Eastern front on a frenetic rhythm, and on the other you have an analyst with a steady voice who decrypts, like German historian and sociologist Klaus Theweleit, the deceptive language used by the fascist speaker. The show then takes the form of a reading in which an actor alone onstage becomes the conduit for both those speeches, which slowly join and lose their individuality. We worked methodically with a voice follower software that allows you to superimpose someone else's timbre over your own voice. Little by little, the two voices become one, and the spectator no longer knows who's saying the words, the 1940s fascist or the modern historian.

Can you tell us more about this voice follower software you've been developing with the Ircam?

The voice follower lets you change people's timbre and play on the confusion between characters and individualities through the voice.

It's a new technology still, and it needs to be developed more. It reinforces the principle of amorphousness developed in the show: when two personalities become distorted and join to become one, when one influences the other so much that they end up merging, to the point that no one or nothing is recognisable anymore. And all that happens without being able to know beforehand towards which side things will lean, either towards darkness and evil or towards light and good. But here, what's good depends on your point of view. Léon Degrelle was of course convinced that he was on the side of good, that his reasoning was right, which is what made him so persuasive. At the heart of this show is the transformation of voices and sounds. We start with a classic situation, a conference by a historian who talks about someone else's writings. The usual dichotomy that distinguishes between two speeches and two people is strong at first, only to shift imperceptibly later on, creating confusion in the spectator, reminding us that no one is entirely safe from this kind of situation. Degrelle's words are powerful in how modern they sound, what's most frightening is realising how his text resonates today, that his words aren't that different from those of Marine Le Pen. Léon Degrelle's distorted view of the world leads him to present himself as a hero, and shows us how disconnected he is from reality. Yet he isn't that different from certain 21st-century personalities.

Jonathan Littell's books, inspired by the memoirs of a SS officer, tell of the subtle balance between the human and the monstrous in each of us.

It is indeed what I'm trying to explore with *The Dry and the Wet*, using the voice, the sensorial: the idea that each and every one of us has the potential to be a Léon Degrelle. We all have a monster inside us, which may or may not awaken based on the context. The novel *The Kindly Ones* also explores that theme through the voice of its protagonist Max Aue, a Waffen-SS officer who writes: "I'm a man like any other, I'm a man like you." Reading that, we realise that man needs civilisation to direct him, to tell him what is right or wrong. That's where you see that morals and ethics are necessary to life within a community, that the laws voted by politicians help create a society that controls our darkest impulses. I'm thinking of the pitfall of populism today, it sadly seems that if the people are given a chance to speak freely, it awakens the monster buried within humanity. You'll see it on the news, with the various expressions of racism and homophobia for instance... It seems that man needs to be led to tame his monster. To that end, literature, language, and the media have a huge influence over the public, you have to use them wisely. Jonathan Littell doesn't say that we interact with one another the way people did during World War II, but he implicitly talks about the tiny and constant manipulations we're subjected to, from the media or from certain public figures, and of which we must be wary.

— Interview conducted by Moïra Daland and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach