



# THOSE-GOING-AGAINST-THE-WIND

---

## INTERVIEW WITH NATHALIE BÉASSE

**Your work as an artist is based neither on the adaptation of a text nor of the predominance of a theatre of images. It sits at the crossroads between several disciplines. You turn the stage into a space open to surprise, to the unexpected. How do you work?**

**Nathalie Béasse:** My work is like child's play; I build my toy as much as I break it. Every time, I try to come up with a new way to approach the stage, though I'm following the same path, with themes that come back time and again. However, I always feel a certain innocence upon approaching a new show, even though I could also say that the end of a show is always the beginning of another. Anyway, I try to stay connected to my subconscious, by focusing on my intuition and on my reactions to what's happening onstage, a material made of movements, both of objects and within the scenography, with always this connection to literature. I put everything on the same level and start digging into it. Sometimes I end up with really deep holes, sometimes shallower ones! But by the time I start working with the performers, I always have a lot of ideas and sketches.

**Your performers seem influenced by dark forces, which drive them through all sorts of feelings and attitudes, without ever letting them take root in a specific character. How would you describe your relationship with them?**

The number of performers is important in this new show; I wanted to create something like a chorus. In *those-going-against-the-wind*, it's the idea of community that prevails, with the strong desires to "tell things". However, as we rehearsed the show, those things kept going in different directions. And I felt free to follow them. For this show, my first idea was a "family" gathering around a table. Each performer would read a letter. With this question: how do seven people turn into a single entity? From there, my work unfolded around the notions of lack, absence, and disappearance. Those themes are like physical rituals about impediment, about the desire to express our difficulties to say things, to show how difficult it is to let them out. I really need to show the loneliness of the individual against the group, and to see how he or she reacts through the body—or through words. It's a way of *composing*. When I direct, I approach it as someone who knows nothing about it would. If I'm bored, I say it! I mentioned sketches earlier; similarly, I never ask the actors to improvise.

**When are you satisfied with what's happening onstage?**

I'm a very hands-on director. I have a very organic relationship to things, to what I see, what I hear... If it gives me chills, I'm more likely to be satisfied. I pay attention to my inner geography: my throat, my skin, my heart, my pulse. If I'm not satisfied, I drop something! I like surprises. Because of those images within me, I'll move this or that person, create a shift in energy. I allow myself to follow the dreams created by what the performers are doing; I dream up movements as well. My imagination works with movement, repetition, sound, music. From there, I have a very physical relationship to direction, linked to scenography, choreography, painting, costumes, to create a sort of total work. I take things in as a whole.

**It's an experience for the audience as well. They go through feelings that are never made explicit. Your direction challenges the norms of behaviour, and you like to introduce uncertainty, to the point of choosing as the title of your show the other name of the North Amerindian tribe of the Omahas...**

Building a team takes time. I need people to be generous in their work, to be available. To that end, I choose people with different backgrounds and bodies. In that way, my shows are political. But I don't want those differences to conform to a preconceived notion of performance. I want to go towards those artists' fragility, not towards some idea of power. My work is a wish: to make them more human onstage, to draw something out of them they don't know themselves. In this show, they work like technicians, transforming the stage right in front of us. As for the title of the show, I've had this book on my bedside table forever, an anthology of Amerindian poems that has long inspired me. I like the tribe of *those-going-against-the-wind* because of those hyphens that turn several words into one. The sentence becomes a word, which then becomes a title, and it invites me to walk against the wind, the current. It speaks to me, I'm sensitive to the cosmos, to elements. It lets me put the idea of the group right there in the title and brings together the presence of matter, the idea of walking forward, and the feeling of being impeded.

**In that sense, each of your show aims to reach a form...**

Yes, the hue of a show is key. Colour and sound have a big and very specific presence in my shows. Oh, you meant the "reach" (translator's note: "la teinte" is French for "the hue", "l'atteinte" for "reaching")! That's the unconscious speaking for sure! In the end, what matters is to invite the audience to set their certainties aside to give themselves over to a creative process where they can find their place and open up their imagination...

**Cinema, visual arts, poetry, and music are at the source of your work. You said something about the innocence necessary for any new creation. Isn't it a way to revisit your artistic loves and to connect them to a sort of "scenic primitivism"?**

If I feel like an author while working with the actors, writing, and writing poetry for instance, isn't something I can do. But I feel great pleasure bringing poems to the stage. I do it in my shows as a sort of homage. I become a smuggler of words; they're like gifts to the audience. I've been influenced by a cinematographic and plastic culture. I go from film to film, from book to book, from painting to painting. I need those markers to be able to get lost in the forest and lose others with me—even if it's also nice to have pebbles to find your way back. But I also feel the need to create "on a shoestring budget," it's part of my DNA as a former Fine Arts student. I may have that artistic culture, but I'd never think about covering a stage in soil. There's something of *arte povera* about me. I'm more interested in a little mound of dirt. That speaks to me. I don't need a forest to talk about the forest. A branch, a mound of dirt, and I'm happy. A text by Rainer Maria Rilke or Marguerite Duras is powerful in and of itself; the same is true of a performer falling or singing. A few things are enough to transport you. It's like a transfer, the possibility of opening up your thoughts, your sensations. The audience becomes active, works, acts on the show.

**In addition to those various materials, animality is also a big presence in your shows. Under the guise of trophies, masks, mounted animals... More than an attempt to raise awareness about the environment, there is in you a desire to awaken our animal part, and to grasp a form or wonder...**

I'm attracted to this relationship with animality, to the wolf, the forest, to what hides behind that life, those spaces. It amuses and scares me at the same time. Mounted animals immediately bring to mind the idea of death, they're about people stepping over the limit when they shouldn't. I've worked with psychotic and autistic teenagers, with children with anger-management issues. There's an animal side to them. When I work, I try to remain connected to the child in me, as if I was opening up my body, baring my stomach and my emotions, but a gaunt version of myself. I'm always striving for this instinctive state where you have to play again and again. I work by having fun, hence the need for the actors to be receptive to this way of working. Wonder is born of this relationship to childhood, to playing. I want to open doors we didn't know where there—doors even I didn't know about. Wonder is the opening of our bodies to possibilities.

Interview conducted by Marc Blanchet in January 2021 and translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cleach