

## TOMBOUCTOU DÉJÀ-VU

A community of seven performers puts its unity and its bonds to the test. Trapped within a narration that keeps looping back to the beginning, they topple the balance of every situation, keeping in mind that the central concept of repetition forbids neither movement nor transformation. On the stage, they draw cards: the *Oblique Strategies* created by musician-producer Brian Eno and painter Peter Schmidt, which give them rules to follow, to break, to stack one on top of the other. Their accumulation creates the fertile ground on which the group play and stumble, eager to experiment with states, emotions, intentions. Mischievous and sometimes wicked children, romantic characters that fall prey to melancholy...Everything is created in front of us, between extreme precision and fragility, carried by pre-recorded sonic loops which are then reinvented by the dancers. In this invariably circular process begin to appear breaches, like pockets of freedom that each and every one can enter to escape destiny. Through this attempt to break free within repetition itself, what we're talking about here is artistic creation. Much like Timbuktu, a name everyone is familiar with but which is forever fantasised, interpreted, sublimated.

The show will premiere on 4 July, 2015 at Théâtre Benoît-XII, Avignon.

## EMMANUELLE VO-DINH

Emmanuelle Vo-Dinh is a choreographer of phenomena, be they social, physiological, psychological, or mechanical: she picks precise facts, observes them, understands them, then transforms them into choreographic and plastic material. After the creation of her company Sui generis in 1997, she first started looking into emotions. She spent two months with neurologist Antonio Damasio in Iowa City to work on *Texture/Composite* (1999). She then read Jean Oury on schizophrenia, which inspired the play *Sagen* (2001). This was followed by a more minimalist cycle, based on the themes of repetition, time, and memory, a product of research, work, and life experiences: *Croisées* (*Crossroads*, 2004), *White light* (2005), and *Ici/Per.For* (2006). The masculine/feminine dichotomy, as well as a more formal research on the relationships between bodies, music, and voice, have been the central axes of her work since 2007 (*Ad Astra*, *Eaux-fortes*, *-insight-*). Since 2012, she has been the director of the Phare, Centre chorégraphique national du Havre Haute-Normandie, and her interest for science has progressively joined her research on fiction and narration to give her plays an additional dramatic dimension.

## INTERVIEW WITH EMMANUELLE VO-DINH

**The title of your play is *Tombouctou déjà-vu*, yet at no point is the Malian city mentioned. Why this title?**

Emmanuelle Vo-Dinh: The title is somewhat misleading. It's a reference to a key moment in my childhood, namely, the day I learnt that Timbuktu was an actual place. That city was the object of a sort of fantasy for me, which I imagine is the case for a lot of people. Almost no one knows that city, yet its name alone triggers wildly different imaginations. It was this idea of the fantasy that struck me, and I chose to associate it to a seemingly contradictory concept, that of *déjà-vu*. This feeling to have already seen or lived through a moment you encounter later, except from another angle, in a different light. The idea of an action being repeated, lit differently or perhaps slightly askew, is at the heart of the dramaturgy of the show. Situations are repeated, their resolution and meaning changing each time. This creates a community that alienates itself, whose games become more and more unbearable. One member of the group is systematically kept apart or victimised. The idea behind that is that there always comes a time where something breaks, when one mind breaks free. This is what I call our decompensation scenes. Those situations are like pockets, spaces that free the mind from the clutches of analysis and allow it to slide into something closer to a state of dreaming.

**How did you create the choreographic material of *Tombouctou déjà-vu*?**

Everything was more or less written directly while working with the performers, based on moments of improvisation on which we would elaborate. For this particular play, what matters to me is this central concept of repetition, of gradual progression, by strata. Once we've done that, we can explore states of bodies that slowly take shape. If there is a psychological dimension to the situations we've chosen, the duration of the piece and the principle of repetition allow us to free ourselves from it, to doubt, to create more than one possible reading. It's a significant aspect of my work. We also worked with concrete instructions, the *Oblique Strategies*. Each new set of instructions contained the one that came before, the idea being to accumulate them, stack them on top of each other, all while trying to dig deeper to discover new meanings.

**Can you tell us more about those *Oblique Strategies*?**

It's a deck made up of a hundred cards invented by musician-producer Brian Eno and painter Peter Schmidt. They used randomly-drawn cards as instructions for their work, thus introducing an element of randomness in artistic creation. The idea of instructions we'd have to interpret and perform was something we had right from the start, but early on it was the dancers who came up with them. It turned out they were psychologically loaded and weren't open enough. Stéphane Laudier, who is in charge of the dramaturgy of the play, introduced me to the *Oblique Strategies*. We decided to use the cards during our rehearsals, even came up with some new ones. During the play, the cards are on a tray, and new ones are regularly drawn.

**You also use excerpts from literature in the show. What role do they play?**

It is an entirely new process for me. It is my discovery of *Der Hochwald* (*The Great Woods*), by Austrian writer Adalbert Stifter, that made me want to set the play in a mysterious location. The first excerpt we use is meant to give us a sense of place. Another is used later, as a sort of very clear counterpoint; it describes a situation of psychic decompensation, where the mind can roam free, wander somewhere else. It describes a beautiful landscape, which clashes with the concrete image of bodies piled up on top of each other on a table.

**How did you approach the space of the stage?**

Right from the start, I had in mind a space that would look like the one used by Lars von Trier in *Dogville*, at once neutral and constrained. My plays always take place in very specific spaces. At first we used blinds to divide space, video to structure it: I always begin with many different elements, then work my way to something simpler, purer. What remains today is simply white markings on the floor. It suggests a domestic place, a house maybe; it evokes familiar places, without showing them.

**At some point, the dancers even start chanting, which gives the play a mystical quality...**

This mystical aspect was a deliberate choice. I was hell-bent on having the dancers sing at some point. They sing *Simple Gifts*, a famous Mormon hymn about the life of American pioneers. It was also used for a ballet by Martha Graham, there's a powerful sense of history behind it. It's an American classic. At the end of a residence at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York, we presented the result of our work: the audience was moved to hear that hymn sung by Frenchmen and women. I picked it because it is a song that is sung by a community, to come together and celebrate unity. Of course, in the play, there's no such happy ending. In this attempt, too, the community eventually fails to come together.

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Interview conducted by Renan Benyamina / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

## AND...

### THE NAVE OF IMAGES

*Scandal point*, choreography by François Raffinot (1996), with Emmanuelle Vo-Dinh / Realisation Marie-Hélène Rebois  
6 July at 05:30 pm, Église des Célestins, free admittance

### CINEMATOGRAPHIC TERRITORIES

*Inside Rainbow-LH* by Nicolas Simon  
Screening followed by an encounter with Emmanuelle Vo-Dinh  
7 July at 11:00 am, Utopia-Manutention

### ENCOUNTER FAITH AND CULTURE

with Emmanuelle Vo-Dinh  
7 July at 11:00 am, Chapelle de l'Oratoire, free admittance

### THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Encounter Research and Creation : *Bodies in presence: gestures, laugh, consciousness*, with, among others, Emmanuelle Vo-Dinh, organised with the Agence nationale de la recherche / 10 July at 10:00 am, Cloître Saint-Louis (free admittance, please sign up on recherche-creation-avignon.fr)

THE SHOW WILL BE BROADCAST on Culturebox from 20 July during one year.

## TOUR DATES OF *TOMBOUCTOU DÉJÀ-VU* AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

- 3 November 2015: Le Volcan, Scène nationale, Le Havre
- 6 November 2015: Le Rive Gauche, Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray
- 24 November 2015: Le DSN Dieppe Scène Nationale
- 26 January 2016: Le Théâtre, Scène nationale, Mâcon Val-de-Saône, in partnership with the Festival Art Danse Bourgogne
- at the beginning of March 2016: Le Quartz, Festival Danzfabrik, Brest
- 22 March 2016: L'Arsenal, Val-de-Reuil, in partnership with the Scène nationale Évreux-Louviers

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