

SOUDAIN LA NUIT

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The product of a collective work begun three years ago by the Compagnie du Zieu, *Suddenly the Night* is the third and final part of a cycle called *Spectres of Europe*. This play focuses on the figure of the foreigner, apparently split into two roles: that of an Arab doctor, Dr. Chahine, who heads the medical wing of a European airport, and that of a young man, an Arab whose sudden and unexplained death feeds the health and security fantasies of a continent already on the defensive. The airport, a place of transit, exchange, and separation, becomes for the night a place of waiting, where time is like suspended. The contradictions and ghosts that all carry within themselves, passengers and health professionals alike, turn out to be contagious. In the silence of the night, knives are sharpened, words spread like wildfire. With this play, Nathalie Garraud and Olivier Saccomano continue with the actors and technicians of their company an experiment that is at once a radiography of modern ideologies and the discovery of a collective dramatic gesture that explores the active and expressive possibilities of their art.

The show will premiere on 5 July, 2015 at the Gymnase du lycée Mistral, Avignon.

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NATHALIE GARRAUD AND OLIVIER SACCOMANO

Nathalie Garraud, director, and Olivier Saccomano, playwright, continue the work they started in 2006 with the Compagnie du Zieu, an original dramatic project based on thematic cycles. After *The Suppliants*, a cycle on tragedy (2007-2010), *It's Good, It's Bad*, a cycle on youth (2010-2013), they began a cycle revolving around the figure on the foreigner, called *Spectres of Europe* (2013-2015). After two short plays, which they call study plays, *The Benefits of Spring*, rehearsed and created during their time as artists-in-residence at the FabricA in November 2013, and *Othello, Variation for three actors*, which played last year at the Festival d'Avignon, Nathalie Garraud and Olivier Saccomano will present *Suddenly the Night* to close this cycle. Their work with the company plays an integral part in the creation of the play, and they see their unique writing style as a constant dialogue with the times, in which poetics and politics are inseparable. The text and the stage are to them the setting of a collective research about dramatic writing and the practice of the actor, as well as of an experiment in collective thinking.

INTERVIEW WITH NATHALIE GARRAUD AND OLIVIER SACCOMANO

With *Suddenly the Night*, you are reaching the end of an artistic process you split up into three plays on the same theme. This is an unusual way of doing things; how did you organise it?

Nathalie Garraud: We usually work on cycles that last two to three years, based on a specific pattern. The cycle that ends with this play, called *Spectres of Europe*, revolves around the figure of the foreigner. We began by creating two plays, which we refer to as study plays, since they are based on pre-existing texts. The final play, *Suddenly the Night*, is an original creation, written by Olivier Saccomano.

When you talk about the first play of this cycle, you use the words “documentary play,” yet it was also an original creation, as is the case here. Would it be accurate to talk of collective writing?

N.G.: It was closer to a documentary play because actual biographical elements taken from the lives of the actors appeared in a text that detailed a fictional situation. In all our plays, we use the personal experiences of each and every actor, which appear in our writing and on the stage. But with *Suddenly the Night* we are squarely in the domain of fiction, even though there is no such thing as “pure” fiction. There is no pre-existing text before we begin rehearsing. All we have is an idea, addressed to the way of thinking and the praxis of everyone involved. This idea is put to the test on the stage, and the text that will eventually be published is the product of this encounter between writing and the stage. Writing happens simultaneously with rehearsals, it is part of the same process, but it isn't simply a transcription, either.

So you don't write directly during rehearsals?

N.G.: Not really, even if the writing is necessarily influenced by what happens on the stage, which is in itself a form of writing, initiated by my visions, of those of the actors. One could almost say that our way of working is similar to the way Socrates' dialogues work: we start with an idea, which is discussed, worked on, twisted, contradicted, and unfolded by the various participants. Sometimes we do improvisations, sometimes we start from very structured propositions, giving actors ideas for roles, pieces of text, situations, but without any preconceptions. We never settle on who is going to play what role until very late in the process.

Olivier Saccomano: In the end, the work we build belongs to no one in particular. It is the product of a sort of association, which is also a sort of struggle.

Your protagonist, around whom *Suddenly the Night* is built, is a doctor in the medical wing of a French airport. He's a foreigner who is well integrated into French society. Why this choice?

O.S.: From a dramatic standpoint, we wanted to break away from the *cliché*, often pathetic representations of the outsiders of Europe: immigrants, etc. What the play does is take people who are or see themselves as “free” and “integrated,” and puts them in an impasse, in a situation of detention that the immigrants face. In an airport, too, that is to say in a rather abstract space that doubles as a border... From there, let's see what happens.

N.G.: We came up with this character by thinking about the medical notion

of “foreign bodies,” about its metaphorical possibilities, its potential political exploitation. Immigrants, jihadists, Ebola victims, all are different faces of a “foreign body” within or without an organism. Nationalist politics are built around those fantasies of a “foreign body” that needs to be destroyed. We researched jihadist movements, the catastrophic arrival of immigrants to Europe, the Ebola epidemic, and we understood that the question, metaphorically speaking, really was that of a foreign “body,” which made the character of the doctor perfect in that context.

Between this initial desire to work on the figure of the foreigner and the upcoming premiere of this new play, the events of January 2015 happened. Did this change anything in your artistic process?

O.S.: If you go back to the title of this cycle, *Spectres of Europe*, which echoes the first sentence of the Communist manifesto, it seems clear that the “spectre” that is haunting Europe today as well as the nationalist ideologies on the rise within it is the figure of the jihadist. But our project is bigger than those events, because it is interested in a situation that has existed throughout the history of Europe.

N.G.: If we do theatre, it's because we think there is something to maintain in our thinking and our praxis that wouldn't be subservient to the latest news. You need to stand a little apart from this never-ending flow in order to create links and echoes. An observation room isn't a detention room, but there are possible links and junctions which allow you to go beyond the simple illustration of a point.

O.S.: In airports, the meticulous control of bodies has become commonplace. You can hide drugs inside your body, even explosives. But how can you see what is going on within a soul? That is what we want to talk about with our play.

The title of your play, *Suddenly the Night*, suggest a rather dark image...

N.G.: We always pick our titles very early. Of course, the night brings to mind the idea of darkness, but in Plato's cave, all you have to do is turn your head to see the light of day, and go towards it...

O.S.: There is obviously a desire for lucidity throughout the entire show, even though we do start with a rather dark situation. Let's just say we should learn to try to see in the dark, it allows us to see things so far invisible to us. Only then something can break out, the same way we say an epidemic or a war breaks out. Our darkness isn't that of this apocalypse that is constantly being predicted, to the point that it serves to lull us. It's a struggle, a test, an experience.

N.G.: Our theatre isn't intended to pass down values, humanist or moral. Rather, it seeks to study relationships of power and domination, to exhaust them in order to discover what they hide. We can then get rid of them, dramatically speaking at least, maybe politically as well, but it's important not to get those two confused.

AND...

THE WORKSHOPS OF THOUGHT

Site Louis Pasteur de l'Université, free admittance:

- 7 July at 03:00 pm, *The professions of the theatre* with, among others, Olivier Saccomano, organised with the magazine *Théâtre/Public*

- 8 July at 05:30 pm, *Dialogue artists-audience* with Nathalie Garraud, Olivier Saccomano and the team of *Soudain la nuit*, encounter hosted by the Ceméa

- 10 July at 03:00 pm, *Profession: performer*, with, among others, Nathalie Garraud, organised with the magazine *Théâtre/Public*

Cloître Saint-Louis:

- 9 July at 02:00 pm, Encounter Research and Creation: *Plot creation* with, among others, Nathalie Garraud and Olivier Saccomano, organised with the Agence nationale de la recherche, free admittance (please sign up on recherche-creation-avignon.fr)

TOUR DATES OF SOUDAIN LA NUIT AFTER THE FESTIVAL D'AVIGNON

– 8 and 9 October 2015: Théâtre du Beauvaisis, Beauvais

– from 14 to 16 October: Maison de la Culture, Amiens

– 9 and 10 March 2016: Le Fracas, Centre dramatique national, Montluçon

– 17 March: Scène nationale, Evreux-Louviers

– 30 and 31 March: Théâtre du Gymnase, co-hosted with the Théâtre Massalia

– 3 May: Les Scènes du Jura, Scène nationale, Dole

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