



6 A.M. HOW TO DISAPPEAR COMPLETELY

INTERVIEW WITH BLITZTHEATREGROUP

“Daily I go out, and seek another, always./All the paths of the land I have asked of her/There above on the cooling hill, the shadows all I have visited/And the streams; back and forth the spirit wanders/Asking for peace.” Like the opening lines of Hölderlin’s poem, which you chose as “text” for your new creation, *6 a.m. How to disappear completely*, you invite people to wander the countryside, to go underground. Would you say your show is an initiatory trip, a poetic quest?

Christos Passalis: Yes, like in the opening lines of Hölderlin’s poem, we’re faced with people lost on the periphery of a city, in a no man’s land, a distant suburb, at the edge of the world... People are looking for a new place where they could live free. The poem is an elegy, an initiatory trip, in which you have to accept to lose yourself in order to, maybe, better find yourself.

Angeliki Papoulia: We’ve tried to create a poetic world on the stage which wouldn’t be easily recognisable, which couldn’t be easily described or explained. We wanted to create a world with its own rules, its own modes of existence, which wouldn’t necessarily be realistic or close to our usual perception of life.

Yorgos Valais: Yet we’re still at the theatre, but there’s no narration, no realism.

This new creation does indeed give the impression that you position yourself beyond theatre, like poetry can be said to be beyond literature...

C. P.: That’s what the title means. “How to disappear completely?” Disappear from the theatre, but also escape causes and effects, logic, material reality... We therefore worked on two main axes. First on musicality, for we were searching for emotion without necessarily having to name it. You don’t have to “understand” a poem to be moved by its beauty and deeper meaning. Hölderlin’s poem isn’t just the story of a boy and a girl who meet each other and die, it’s much more irrational than that. We also worked on associations. Poetry doesn’t create new words, it uses words in a different way, by associating them. And so we tried to create associations between music, movement, and text. Always in an irrational and musical way.

A. P.: We try to lead the audience down hidden paths, unconscious or subconscious, without trying to engage with them directly. Without taking the time to justify or analyse what’s happening so as to avoid certain forms of recognition.

Y. V.: Ever since we started working together and created the blitztheatregroup, we’ve refused to work on stories from the repertoire. All our creations, up until now, were based on our own experiences, our own texts. This time, the text isn’t ours, but Hölderlin’s poem arrived just at the right moment, for we’d always dreamt of a theatre that would be capable of conversing with abstraction, with abstract ideas.

Why did you choose this poem?

Y. V.: Because it carries within itself a great need, an urgency.

C. P.: And we feel that urgency all around us. Every age, every decade has its own stories and comes up with new ways to tell them. It seems urgent to us to find with each show the most efficient way of showing what makes sense right now. What makes sense not in terms of what’s happening in the news, but in terms of questioning where we are right now. Urgency comes up with new ways to talk about our time.

A. P.: We try to create experiences for the audience, and to find a way to be together that would make them more than just voyeurs or witnesses to a given situation. It’s a founding principle of our work, but for our last three shows, we went even further in that regard. Cinema knows nowadays how to tell stories beautifully, the narrative process it uses is unstoppable. The theatre can’t compete. It doesn’t need to. However, it has to explore other forms of narration.

This show is indeed more radical than the previous ones, more radical and more poetic, working with wide shots, but exploring themes that have long been present in your work. War is everywhere, everywhere around us...

C. P.: We use Hölderlin's poem as if his words were magic and could change reality. Poetry invents and proposes another perception of the world without which living would be unbearable. Similarly to what it offers, we've tried not to impose anything but to offer a new perception of the world, far away from the general narrative that surrounds us: the economic crisis, war, the rise of extremism, terrorism... The point isn't to escape the world but, through a poetic shift, to find its magic again, like a religious feeling, a certain spirituality that seems to have oddly disappeared in Greece and in Europe. I mean spirituality in the sense of an existential experience. Hence the choice of this particular poem, in which Hölderlin offers to take away the logical world in order to enter another reality, one that's closer, I think, to the truth.

Y. V.: As if poetry were at the heart of the true meaning of existence. From Lautréamont to Japanese poetry, the meaning of poems is closer to the mysteries of human nature. Because of their uselessness, poems are able to describe the world and existence in a much deeper way than reality.

C. P.: "What does it mean?" "How to get close to it?" It seems to me that to disappear, one would have to betray one's country, one's class, one's gender, one's sex, one's logic, oneself... That's what disappearing means: to betray our shared logic.

Y. V.: To escape from the place that's been assigned to you.

Like your previous creations, this show's influences are numerous...

A. P.: Yes, the most important being Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Before we even began rehearsing, we talked a lot about the "zone" the movie describes. We tried to invent it for the stage, like a space in which anything could happen. Without logic or rules. The actors try in vain to communicate with the zone, with that space they can't understand and which surrounds them. It's a strange place, dangerous and quiet, with the power of life and death. The show is built on that duality.

C. P.: The movie itself is based on a short science fiction novel, *Roadside Picnic*, written by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky in 1971. Going back to that text, we imagined the zone as a sort of living organism, an eighth actor. It behaves like a video game in which the graphic environment would interact with the characters, as if modern science fiction had joined with poetry, beyond reality. Hölderlin is very close to Einstein!

A. P.: And Hölderlin is also very close to Tarkovsky, they're both looking for another form of spirituality, another form of existence. As if they were both trying to communicate something they don't know.

Y. V.: They're both artists following unique paths at different times. Hölderlin's cultural references are pagan in nature, close to the Greek gods, while Tarkovsky's are Christian, orthodox. However, both are wondering how to live in search of spirituality rather than just struggling to survive.

How did you create this "eighth actor," which seems to be at first very metallic, only to become very organic...

C. P.: We followed the dramaturgy of Hölderlin's poem, which opens on a cruel and desperate environment and, gradually, turns towards light.

A. P.: As if, from chapter to chapter, the space changed, transformed, became more internal, more comfortable, more protective. Like a movement from the outside to the inside.

Y. V.: We're walking through a structure that's at first cold and metallic, then the stage turns into a forest, before finally being bathed in a warm light over which can be read the word "Enthusiasm." The space is evolving with us, following the poem's rhythm, as if it were embracing us and responded to our efforts in a positive way.

C. P.: In Greek, the word enthusiasm means: God in me. The meaning is stronger than in French or English.

Sarah Kane, whom you know well, wrote 4.48 Psychosis in the late 90s. If 4.48 is the time of suicide, is 6 a.m. the time of resurrection?

C. P.: It's the time at which you're on the edge of... The time at which everything can be transformed, the time of in-betweens, when everything is perfectible or definitive. That crucial time between night and day when anything can happen, but nothing is for sure yet...

A. P.: If we don't die at 4.48, we might just be brought back to life at 6 in the morning...

Interview conducted by Hervé Pons Belnoue
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