



THE LAST NIGHT ON EARTH

Fabrice Murgia / Laurent Gaudé

Premiere 7th of July 2021



Night has always been the kingdom of freedom and fear, an area where boundaries become blurred, where everything changes appearance and meaning in a state of rapture or terror.

Night asks questions of our lives and examines our finitude. In fact, in the “Epic of Gilgamesh”, the Mesopotamian hero wanted to try and free himself from the cycle of sleep: to stay awake for more than six days in order to become immortal. Centuries later, are we about to succeed where he failed? And if we are, what will we be in the future? An eternal yet exhausted human race?

Does night perhaps gaze at us now with great pity, we who have lost the art of sleeping? Is it perhaps time to listen to the voice of night and let it sweep us off our feet?

LAURENT GAUDÉ

AT THE BEGINNING...

INTERVIEW WITH FABRICE MURGIA, BY SOPHIE DUPAVE

What was the starting point for this project?

I worked with Laurent Gaudé in 2014 at the Limoges Opéra. The production we did together was an opera called *Daral Shaga*. Laurent wrote the libretto. I took care of the staging in collaboration with Cie FERIA Musica. It was a true meeting of minds, as we very soon complemented each other in our narratives.

We promised to repeat the experience, to re-explore a form that would not strictly speaking be situationist theatre, but something that juxtaposed two types of writing: a romantic and literary style, penned by Laurent, and mine, a way of writing with images for the stage.

It's been six years since *Daral Shaga*. We stayed in touch. Then one day, as we were tossing themes back and forth, sharing reading matter, this question cropped up from an essay by Jonathan Crary: "*24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*": can human beings live life 24 hours a day and 7 days a week? Is it healthy, right or desirable to stay awake and keep constantly active to the detriment of night?

Suddenly we had an interesting selection of themes allowing us to dream up several stories in several places in the world. Because this was about something all of us have above our heads: the stars, the sky, the night.

We were faced with a universal catch-all that lent itself to the construction of narratives, coupled with a highly political theme.

Can we take another look at the work that informed your thinking: 24/7 by Jonathan Crary?

Jonathan Crary's essay explores the many ways in which people endeavour to put an end to night. Night qua night, in other words the absence of light, of the sun. But also night which brings sleep, a vital function.

All research that aims to put an end to night is directed at a form of consumption, exploitation and continuous production. Karl Marx had predicted that capitalism would put an end to all natural cycles. Nowadays, everything has a market value: love, friendship, food, hunger, thirst... Night is one of the human race's last bastions of resistance. It indicates that human beings have not yet turned into machines. That they need to sleep. For some, this is extremely irritating, even taboo.

Let's consider a few examples of attempts to end night: the white-crowned sparrow is a bird that travels long distances every year between the United States and Mexico. It can stay awake for 7 days and 7 nights without losing any cognitive faculties. This bird was of interest to the American army, which developed neurochemical substances and carried out magnetic stimulation tests on soldiers to give them the abilities of the white-crowned sparrow, thereby replacing combat drugs.

Another project dating from the 1990s involved Russian satellites with 200-meter long mirror wings which, deployed in outer space, could permanently reflect the sun onto areas in Siberia to maximise work on the land.

Other stories provided us with material. Such as research into sleep deprivation. We know that laboratory rats can go without sleep for three weeks before they die. Human beings, however, can only last an average of 7 or 8 days. To be exact, the ultimate experiment in this area is 11 days and 25 minutes. That is the longest time a human being has been known to stay awake.

Our capitalist world is reaching its limits. We have gradually moved away from our primary ways of life, in which night plays a role. Beyond its poetic value, night represents a right to introspection. And this right is adversely affected by a factor that often passes unawares: the sheer scale and continual presence of artificial light. It blocks out the stars and prevents us from gazing at the night sky.

The need to protect night is a new demand. It is championed by many nations: the First Nation peoples of New Zealand, for example. Their successful negotiations have caused lights to be switched off for a certain number of hours per month. Because in their culture, not being able to see the stars creates problems. Darkness is therefore elevated to a political issue.

Your contribution to this production is multifaceted. As Laurent Gaudé's mission-bearer, director, then performer. It's a long time since you appeared on stage. Is that something you have missed?

It isn't so much the desire to act, to interpret emotions or play characters that brings me back onto the stage. It's more that of being a passing witness in front of an audience. The need to tell them a story, in the here and now. As director of the Théâtre National, I'm very busy with site management and providing support to other artists. However, I think it's important to maintain the connection with the stage and its reality, like other directors such as Wajdi Mouawad or Tiago Rodrigues. They are organizational heads but at the same time they maintain a presence on stage, sharing the problems experienced by actors, artists.

Perhaps it gives me peace of mind not to lose contact with the stage.

The format of the show will be very moveable. Is it important to tackle subject matter like this by ensuring that it reaches the widest possible audience?

In view of the themes, there is first of all the desire to perform it in the open air. We're therefore preparing two versions, one for inside the auditorium, the other for beneath the stars... We want to create something fairly simple and therefore moveable, which won't stop it from being complex in its use of stage grammar. The idea is to make it universal in form so that it can travel.

After huge projects like *Sylvia* and *The memory of Trees*, it's good to get back to a small format, included in the repertory and available for an intimate capacity setting, which will allow us to increase the number of venues.

THE STORY AND THE STAGE DESIGN

BY FABRICE MURGIA

Laurent and I decided to write a tale. We wanted something catchy, that would lay the foundation for a world that is ours; a tale in a near future, a « tomorrow » in which something has significantly changed the nature of human beings.

Our starting premise is the market launch of a pill that allows us to sleep for 45 minutes in order to be completely rested.

What is it going to change? What will it change in our relationship to others, in our relationship to consumption?

We are in a world where people - who now have more time - have stopped consuming too much, and take time to read, to listen to others, to learn, ...

They talk less, they listen more.

Nevertheless, there's something liberticide and fundamentally unnatural hidden in this.

It's epic, we are in a novel, in a told story:

It's the tale of Gabor who played a key role in the launch of this pill. He works in The Communication and has participated in the elaboration of slogans to convince the

population to consume/benefit from the drug; he developed shock arguments to attract lobbies into financing of the miracle cure for sleep.

At the same time, we learn that Gabor has lost his wife, Lou. She has vanished.

The great History of the world - which he helped turning upside down - gets mixed with his own intimate story: Lou's disappearance and his stubborn goal of finding her.

On stage, we are facing a device that combines a recording studio and a screen-board. The radio universe gives way to a glass studio in which the sounds and environments of the places we are talking about will be created; a space in which the voices of the foreign people involved in this story (on video) will be dubbed.

The pictorial universe, as for it, acts like a photo-novel narrative. The small screen will distill portraits of people, like images that slowly come to life, and breathe.

TEXT FRAGMENT BY LAURENT GAUDE

The voices of the world:

It might seem unimaginable, yet this will soon be a reality:

In precisely one week, we'll be thrust into the era of the partitioned night...

La fin de la nuit...

Une nouvelle façon de dormir, travailler, vivre...

Are we really living through this revolution?

This is what many of us are wondering, but I can tell you that here, the governments are getting ready...

Dapertutto, la gente si prepara a vivere anche di notte...

Taking children to school at 2 am,

Shopping in the middle of the night,

That will all be possible soon.

54 countries have signed the fragmented night agreement...

The United States, Europe, Russia, Japan, China, Brazil, India,

Most of the major countries on the planet will attempt to meet this challenge:

Inhabit the night to unburden the day.

Der Tag auch nachts.

The countdown has started.

... *La ultima noche se acerca*

The world is holding its breath.

Fireworks, bars, carnivals, gigantic concerts...

Considering the preparations being made in each major city, everything suggests that this last night will be a sleepless one!

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Written by: Laurent Gaudé ● Staging and with: Fabrice Murgia ● With: Nancy Nkusi ● Stage design: Vincent Lemaire ● Assisted by: Véronique Leroy ● Video creation: Giacinto Caponio ● Lighting creation: Emily Brassier ● Sound management and sound installation: Brecht Beuselinck ● Sound management: Célia Naver ● Video management : Dimitri Petrovic ● Stage management: Marc Defrise

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Contact Cy :

Virginie Demilier

COMPANY MANAGER ARTARA

v.demilier@artara.be - M + 32 (0)474 83 98 95 - www.artara.be

Contact touring :

Frans Brood Productions

info@fransbrood.com - T +32 (0)9 234 12 12 - www.fransbrood.com