

LEVIATHAN



CONCEIVED AND DIRECTED BY

Lorraine de Sagazan

TEXT

Guillaume Poix

Leviathan

Premiered in July 2024 at Festival d'Avignon

Duration
1h45

**Winner of the Syndicat de la critique's 2025 Award
for Best French-language création**

Conceived and directed by
Lorraine de Sagazan

Wigs
Mityl Brimeur

Text
Guillaume Poix, based on real events

Horse staging
Thomas Chaussebourg

With
Khallaf Baraho - *the witness*
Jeanne Favre - *the lawyer for the 'homeless', the 'thief'*
Felipe Fonseca Nobre - *the 'adjuster', the association Le
cœur tranquille's lawyer*
Jisca Kalvanda - *the 'adjuster's' mother, the
policewoman's lawyer and the 'thief's' lawyer*
Antonin Meyer-Esquerré *alternating with* Romain Cottard
- *the prosecutor*
Mathieu Perotto - *a lawyer, the 'homeless'*
Victoria Quesnel - *la présidente du tribunal*
Eric Verdin - *the Judge, president of the court* Eric
Verdin - *the lawyer of the 'adjuster', the director of the
association le cœur tranquille, the prison warden
and the horse Oasis*

Vocal work
Juliette de Massy

Mask work
Lucie Valon

Recorded music performance
Silvia Tarozzi (violin) and Maitane Sebastián (cello)

Coordination Manager and video live
Vassili Bertrand

Stage Manager
Kourou

Touring lighting Manager
Claire Gondrexon, Amandine Robert, Paul Robin
-alternating-

Touring sound Manager
Théo Cardoso, Camille Vitté -alternating-

**Administration, production, distribution, press
relations**
AlterMachine | Camille Hakim Hashemi, Marine
Mussillon, Carole Willemot

Apprentice director
Danaé Monnot

Set construction
Ateliers de la Comédie de Saint-Etienne, Atelier
Coulons Tapissier et ateliers du Théâtre National de
Bretagne

Costumes making
Anna Carraud, Marnie Langlois, Mirabelle Perot,
Flore Chrétien, Tom Savonnet, Zlatoslava Novytska,
Oscar Houtin et ateliers de la Comédie de Saint-
Etienne

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Agathe Charnet and Julien Vella

Assistant director
Antoine Hirel

Set design
Anouk Maugein assisted by Valentine Lê

Light design
Claire Gondrexon assisted by Amandine Robert

Costume design
Anna Carraud assisted by Marnie Langlois and
Mirabelle Perot

Video creation
Jérémie Bernaert

Sound design
Lucas Lelièvre assisté by Camille Vitté

Sung immediate trial music
Pierre-Yves Macé

Choreography
Anna Chirescu

Masks
Loïc Nebreda

Guillaume Poix's LEVIATHAN is published by Éditions Théâtrales.

Photo credit: Simon Gosselin

Production

La Brèche, La Comédie de Saint-Etienne – centre dramatique national

Coproduction

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Tour calendar

2023 – 2024

15.07 – 21.07.24 - CREATION
Festival d'Avignon, Gymnase Aubanel

2024 – 2025

13.11 – 16.11.2024
Théâtre national de Bretagne- Rennes,

20.11 – 21.11.2024
Le Grand R, scène nationale La Roche-sur-Yon

28.11 – 29.11.2024
Théâtre Sartrouville Yvelines CDN

05.12.2024
La Passerelle, scène nationale Saint-Brieuc

11.12 – 12.1.2024
L'Azimut, Antony I Châtenay-Malabry

30.01 – 06.02.2025
Théâtre du Nord CDN Lille Tourcoing
Hauts-de-France

25.02 – 27.02.2025
Comédie de Reims, CDN

04.03 – 07.03.2025
Théâtre de la Cité – CDN Toulouse Occitanie

18..03.2025
L'Estive, scène nationale de Foix

25.03 – 28.03.2025
Comédie de Saint-Etienne, CDN

02.04 – 06.04.2025
10.04 – 11.04.2025
Les Célestins, Théâtre de Lyon

16.04 – 17.04.2025
Comédie de Valence, CDN Drôme Ardèche

02.05 – 23.05.2025
Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe

07.06.2025
Klaipedos Dramos Teatras, Klaipeda - Lituanie



2025 – 2026

28.11–30.11.2025
La Criée – Théâtre National de Marseille

12.12–17.12.2025
Théâtre Dijon-Bourgogne, centre dramatique
nationale

24.01.2026
Palais des Beaux-Arts de Charleroi, Belgium

28.01–29.01.2026
Théâtre du Beauvaisis, scène nationale

05.02.2026
L'Espal, scène nationale du Mans

11.02–12.02.2026
Théâtre de Saint-Nazaire, scène nationale

05.03–06.03.2026
Comédie de Béthune, CDN

11.02–14.03.2026
Cité européenne du théâtre et des arts associés
Domaine d'O, Montpellier

25.03–27.03.2026
Comédie de Clermont-Ferrand

02.04.2026
Les Salins, scène nationale de Martigues

Presentation

LEVIATHAN stages a critical investigation into the way we perceive the organisation and application of modern law, questioning our impulse to judge and repress. Organised around four significant immediate trial hearings, the show questions the validity of this procedure and includes a meeting with a witness who has been tried several times in this context. Under a tent imagined as a makeshift court, the theatrical counter-space becomes a chamber of memory, with eight performers including an amateur actor who acts as guarantor of our story in the same way as he encourages it, and confronts our ideal of justice with the gaps in the contemporary criminal justice system

LEVIATHAN attempts to turn some obvious facts on their head and set up tipping points beyond good and evil, confronting us with the dilemma of violence, its legitimate exercise and its regulation by the law.



Note of intent

Genesis of the project

During the health crisis of 2020, the writer Guillaume Poix and I began a new working protocol, conducting some 300 interviews in closed theatres with people from all backgrounds. From these encounters, we identified what we saw as 'gaps' or 'inadequacies' in the social field. Far removed from any documentary, therapeutic or evangelical approach, I then conceived a cycle of shows that would use the symbolic and performative means of fiction to try to 'respond' to these gaps through as many theatrical acts. Third part of this cycle, LEVIATHAN examines the workings of the French criminal justice system and its gaps.

Justice, an institution

Because it organises relationships and regulates conflicts between members of a society, justice is the keystone of the social and civic system. Yet while everyone agrees on its ideal and its mission, opinions differ as to its application. The fairness of justice is measured by the way it is delivered. Like other European countries, France, the defender of freedoms and human rights, is currently experiencing an unprecedented crisis of confidence in this institution.

Lack of time and resources, exhaustion among magistrates and lawyers, loss of meaning, this institution is no exception to the exponential decline of the public service. It struggles to function as a forum for integration and collective organisation, is instead involved in political conflicts and reproduces social power relations. The work of the justice system is marked by a radical gap between the values of neutrality, impartiality, equality and the reality of its effects.

Deprivation of liberty, punishment, prison

If the purpose of the right to punish is to maintain public order and ensure social peace, the question is whether modern criminal law, through an increasingly repressive policy, manages to fulfil its reason for being. We only have to look at the situation in French prisons, both in terms of overcrowding and the social environment in which prisoners live: lack of privacy, insalubrity, lack of medical care, absence of private life, etc. Rehabilitation remains problematic, recidivism is high, and social peace is far from being achieved. We also note that for the same offence, the risk of being placed in detention is multiplied by five if you are homeless. The risk of being sentenced to prison is eight times higher. All in all, the people who live in prisons are often the ones we don't want to see. Judicial repression is not the same for the entire population. Most of the time,

punishment precedes the crime. So, facing so much misery, what do we expect from prison? At the very least, we could expect it to fulfil its primary role, that is protecting society. But there again, it's not enough. In the long term, prison is even an additional factor of insecurity because it generates recidivism. Research has shown that imprisonment for short periods even reinforces the factors that lead to delinquency, increases exclusion, keeps people away from housing, employment or family, increases the number of people who associate with delinquents and exacerbates the feeling of injustice and resentment towards institutions. 61% of people serving a prison sentence are re-convicted within five years of their release. As if we were used to reading and hearing the endless list of prison woes year after year, this information is most often met with indifference, or at best timid indignation. Today, despite its profound inhumanity, there is little or no opposition to prison, whether from inside or outside, and no fundamental questioning of the prison institution.

Immediate trial

'There is no justice in a court of immediate trial' is the phrase I heard most often from the lawyers I worked with over several months. Urgency and speed are dominant concepts in post-modern societies and our era, which is part of a radical change in our relationship with time, is marked by the emergence of new concepts of time, such as urgency, immediacy or instantaneity. These new demands have extended to the law through the introduction of rapid reactions mechanisms to circumstances deemed exceptional, resulting in a judgment which, despite the speed with which it is handed down, is neither provisional nor incidental.

Immediate trial is a simplified and expeditious criminal procedure that lasts around twenty minutes (in Marseille recently, records of 6 minutes were reached). Its purpose is to try the alleged offender as soon as he or she leaves police custody. When there is an investigation into the facts, it lasts no longer than fifteen minutes.

Anyone can attend, and hearings are public. It is becoming more and more widespread and largely favours incarceration, since 70% of sentences handed down are imprisonment sentences. The penalty can be up to 20 years in prison.

This rapid criminal procedure clearly highlights the ambivalence with which the judicial institution takes time into account. Described by those who practice and endure it as a 'justice of slaughter', a 'chamber of misery' or a 'machine for elimination', the immediate trial procedure has truly been established in France.



However, it is unconstitutional in several European countries.

Once an exceptional form of justice, it has become normalised over time, thoughtlessly. As a result of a managerial logic serving ultra-security electoral policies, fairness and quality are no longer evaluation criteria. In an immediate trial, the defendants (almost all men in extremely precarious situations) arrive handcuffed and locked in a box. Presumed innocent, they face only one thing: the prosecution. Who is on trial? How?

Responsibility

The sociologist Paul Fauconnet defines the history of modernity as the history of the growing hegemony of individual responsibility to the detriment of any other system. Today, it is very difficult to call this into question. The individualisation of responsibility is said to be an effect of the division of social labour, the diversification of society and the strengthening of the state. The history of responsibility would follow the history of individualization: it would be part of this essential dynamic of modernity that Durkheim identified, and which would consist of the affirmation of the autonomy of the subject in relation to the group to which he belongs. This sociological and historical process would also be reinforced by political and legal mechanisms. Namely the birth of the modern State: the State establishes individual rights, institutes them and monitors their application. This is the reason why there is no contradiction between states and individuals.

If it is true that something like society exists, that we are constituted by the relationships and social groups to which we belong, then we must accept the idea that we are all involved in what happens to each and every one of us. Stating such an idea does not mean adopting a revolutionary or absurd position. It simply means drawing the consequences of the existence of the social world. Forgetting the validity of this proposition would be even denying the idea of society. Questioning the penal system requires us to identify the reasons why, when faced with an event, with what happens, there is this desire to identify, to single out, to judge rather than to understand, to generalise, to politicise: what is the point of the individualising perception of what happens and assigning responsibility to individual subjects? People we consider to be the failures of socialisation cannot be dissociated from the conditions of socialisation.

The function of the penal system is to relieve us of our responsibility by individualising the system of punishment and law. The world indeed disappears. Everything external becomes internal. Crime is no longer the translation of a relationship with the world, but the externalisation of a relationship between the self and the self. Where the criminal state sees murder, we should see the violence of precarious life, the violence of male sociability, the violence of the state, the violence of economic relegation. The system of judgement is a system of depoliticization, it instils categories in which it is integral to the framework of perception that prohibits politicisation of what happens to us, diverts our attention, destructures and consequently

hinders the faculties of problematisation, mobilisation and protest. The system of individual responsibility generates an inability to feel responsible for what happens. The image of the monster prevents us from questioning ourselves.

Pierre Bourdieu mentions several examples of symbolic revolutions that have transformed the perception of certain realities, inscribing them in collective rather than individual logics and thus making it possible to deal with them socially.

Illness first of all: thinking in terms of collective risk and public interest rather than in terms of negligence and faults

- hence the creation of health insurance, where the infections from which everyone suffers are seen as the consequences of social risks rather than the results of individual choices. But the strongest and most relevant examples are accidents at work - equivalents of which can be found in most legal systems. These were seen as the result of carelessness, failure or indiscipline on the part of the employee. At the end of the 19th century, French law reclassified them as the result of a combination of factors that could be controlled by preventive measures.

And by describing the birth of the social State history, Pierre Bourdieu intends to affirm the idea that there is a theoretical dimension to the construction of the State. The State is not an institution whose genesis and form are rooted solely in political, administrative or economic logic. The State as we know it would not have been possible without the establishment and dissemination of new ways of seeing and thinking. It presupposes a relationship with the world, a way of seeing the world. And in exchange, its existence helps to reinforce a certain perception of reality of society. The State is not just a material fact, it is an idea, at best, a kind of institutional concretisation of a prior symbolic revolution. In other words, the intellectual and theoretical struggles that influence the representations we make are very political.

Zemiology is a new criminological discipline. It proposes to study the harm done to individuals because of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or age, but also the harm that can be caused by pollution, poverty or working conditions. Rather than thinking in terms of crime, it thinks in terms of injury.

Looking for those who are responsible for criminal offences leads to an indifference toward the injury. Is a crime defined by the penal code or by the presence of a victim? Is it the penal code that demands justice or the injury and its reparation? Why a repressive law rather than a restitutive law that would provide reparation for the harm suffered?

Repressive law / restitutive law

Repressive law has an expiatory function, inflicting suffering on offenders through an organised system of sanctions: a reduction of their wealth, honour or freedom. The aim is to deprive them of something. The aim of restitutive law (particularly in civil law) is to repair

the damage. Civil justice simply organises inter-individual reparation for the harm caused by the criminal act in order to restore the initial situation, whereas criminal justice adds something: it represses the act and punishes the perpetrator.

Nietzsche describes the way in which the institution of justice is articulated and derives from the logic of trauma and compensation: being affected generates an inclination willing to cause pain. It is the psychological need to complete this cycle of reaction that drives us to punish, to repress and therefore to seek someone to blame. The origins of criminal law lie in the belief that it would be possible to find an equivalent between damage and pain: to administer pain to a third party. To seek a substitute for the past by inflicting suffering on the present. There is a cruelty and suffering economy in our societies, which function out of comfort and habit. An organisation of killing. Derrida denounces a hypocrisy: by abolishing the death penalty, we would have abolished only the most spectacular aspects of the way in which death is inflicted. This totally unequal justice is sacrificial.

The idea that the repressive apparatus fulfils a function of maintaining order was asserted by Michel Foucault. In his view, the penal system was designed to ward off the threat of seditious masses, of protests from below. It was created as part of the fight against popular insurrection, to control the rumblings of battle: it monitors and represses the slightest disturbance, locks up the most agitated individuals, who are thus removed from the dominated group, creates a delinquent environment, distracts people from politics, inculcates a tendency towards docility, and divides the working classes into criminals and honest workers. The penal system should not therefore be understood primarily as a response to delinquency. They are first and foremost a protection against sedition in society.

Restitutive law, on the other hand, reduces actions and their effects to what they really are, i.e. their singularity: a criminal act is an interpersonal relationship in which one individual has inflicted harm on another. A crime is a lateral and local matter. It brings together victims and perpetrators rather than, as the contemporary right would have us believe, individuals and the State, individuals and society or individuals and the law. This does not call into question the need for prison for certain serious crimes, but there are too many acts defined as crimes. Damages can be a much more appropriate and less costly punishment. It is only because there is a victim that there is a crime, because the existence of a victim attests to the existence of a crime, so it is the actual nature of the damage inflicted, and only it, that must determine the nature and scale of the punishment. The law and the judicial system only come as a means of organising sanctions and reparation for damage: they are instruments placed at the service of individuals and their rights.

The 'transformative' justice system

In France, alternative sentences, and especially alternatives to sentencing, are extremely marginal, if not non-existent.

During my year at Villa Medici, I became interested in transformative justice, which ranges from truth and reconciliation commissions to criminal abolitionism, from restorative justice to people's courts. These movements, to which we can add others, have in common that they call into question the penal system as a whole - police, courts, prisons - and imagine alternatives that are struggling to be considered in France. There are few French translations of these texts.

Unlike prison, these procedures reduce recidivism, promote the reintegration of convicted offenders and generate social harmony. The idea is to bring the parties face to face, to create the conditions for a genuine 'political debate' within a courtroom where the victim and the needs he or she may have are at the center of considerations and decisions. Experts may be involved in this process, but their presence should be minimal. The challenge is for civil society to reclaim the work of Justice.

I have worked particularly on penal abolitionism, an intellectual and militant movement that developed in the United States and Scandinavian countries. It is based on the observation that the criminal justice system dispossesses the people concerned of their conflictual situations, imposes prefabricated legal categories on them, and determines a mode of settlement that both parties are forced to accept, to which they must submit to, independently of their will. Criminal justice means that the State takes over private conflicts and deprives those involved of the ability to negotiate and determine sanctions according to their own terms, their own will and their own needs, and to find those considerations derisible and credible. The question we face today is: can the penal system be abolished without a revolution?

Léviathan

This mythological and biblical figure, which gives the show its name, has given rise to many interpretations. It is an ambivalent creature that we identify without really knowing it, and whose symbolic power has continued to evolve over the centuries. Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, written in the 17th century, deals with the transformation of the state and sovereignty. This palimpsest of biblical and philosophical-political legacies conjures up the figure of the monster to question the violence inherent in the idea of justice and reparation.

A heterotopia

In a lecture given to the Cercle d'études architecturales in 1967, Michel Foucault theorised the concept of heterotopia (*Des espaces autres*, 1967). Heterotopia refers to a counter-utopian place with the 'power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several locations that are in themselves incompatible.' Heterotopia leads to differences in behaviour, deviations from the norm, and even the invention of new norms. It is a sacred place reserved for individuals who find themselves in crisis in relation to the society they live in. While utopia offers an ideal 'without a real place', heterotopia corresponds to a real place.

A form

I artistically evolved a lot when I was a resident at Villa Medici, and that's probably what I was looking for. I now attach fundamental importance to the form of a work and its plastic dimension. The link between contemporary justice and the Judeo-Christian tradition is edifying. For *LEVIATHAN*, the set designed with Anouk Maugein is an immense fabric cathedral embodying the idea of an institution that inherits more than it builds. This imposing, versatile mass presents itself sometime as a trap, sometime a shelter, a living membrane that swallows and breathes.



It stands on a manure plain: the sacred and the profane, the monument and the pigsty, the ideal and the abject, coexist.

I worked on the ambivalence of the violence of the situations we witness in the show, confronted to the aestheticism of the images, the colour of the tent and the singing part. For me, it's about challenging the idealisation of the penal system, the romantic vision of a justice system so often described as lax, a serious drift towards security and the exaltation of punishment. The constant presence of images reinforces the old adage saying that 'justice must be done and shown being done'. I also commissioned Loïc Nebreda to make realistic masks for all performers, to accentuate how disembodiment is our view about this institution and its mechanical, repetitive workings. I'm looking for a strong aesthetic experience, a brutality in the shift to accompany the bitter observation of a society on the brink of inequality implosion.

A horse

« 'At the same time, another image appeared to me: Nietzsche was leaving a hotel in Turin. He sees a horse in front of him and a coachman beating him with a riding crop. Nietzsche approaches the horse, grabs its neck between his arms in full view of the coachman and bursts into tears. This was in 1889, and Nietzsche had already distanced himself from mankind. In other words, it was precisely at that time that he became mentally ill. But in my opinion, this is what gives his gesture its profound significance. For Descartes, Nietzsche had come to ask the horse for forgiveness. His madness (and therefore his divorce from humanity) began the moment he cried over the horse' KUNDERA *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

The horse was a symbol of justice in the Middle Ages. Its presence also refers to an alternative justice system: equine mediation. In prisons, several associations try to organise meetings between prisoners and horses, which take over when human mediation reaches its limits. Perhaps because the animal does not judge, it is the mirror effect that is generated, a justice beyond words that accentuates the shame of human incapacity.

A performative show

Against documentary or testimony: art as a force for action. I want to affirm the performative essence of a work: not to represent but to act. To find a type of theatre performing the original force of action. Theatrical ritual is not a substitute for anything; for me it has a value in itself, it adds something. It is an act of thought. I believe in the idea of art as an experience. Kantor says that a work of art should not be a reflection or a mirror of true reality, but its equivalent. LEVIATHAN is a collective experiment in dissolute and conscious time. Who have the right to have time in the era of ultra-liberalism, of disintegration of public services and of neo-fascist ultra-repression? Who will still be willing to share their time as a society?

It's also a show organised around the setting up of a face-to-face confrontation, as in transformative justice. It is a confrontation between the civil society we represent and an amateur actor, Khallaf Baraho. He is at once the witness, the reporter, the one who attends and refuses to testify, to cooperate to the end, who refuses to adhere to the word's system that betrays and of the evidence that allows judgment. His presence exposes violence, ridicules order, forces people to recognise his law, challenges it, gives him back his confiscated conflicts, frees himself. It's not a whispered confession, but one that's thrown open to public scrutiny.

Irreparable

The past is gone, the mistake was made, it happened, it existed, it is forever irreversible. Irreparable. It's an interesting semantic construction. The prefix marks the privative and the suffix marks the possibility. The end of the show is this ambivalence.

As Durkheim wrote: accept the shock, suspend judgement and start thinking.

Lorraine de Sagazan, juillet 2024

Real time: author's note

Immersion

For several months, with Lorraine de Sagazan and part of the creative team, we successfully completed a vast immersion with the various players in the French penal system.

In February 2021, I followed a training course in restorative justice provided by criminologist Robert Cario, in partnership with France Victimes association, in order to understand the issues of this complementary system to criminal justice, as it began to be introduced in France by the law of August 15, 2014.

Then, between November 2021 and June 2023, after obtaining the agreement of the prison administration, I was able to spend several weeks with the staff of Villeneuve-lès-Maguelonne remand center, near Montpellier. I followed many guards and management staff on a daily basis, in their workplace, in the heart of detention, in order to nourish both the writing of LEVIATHAN and that of my fourth novel which will be published by Verticales in 2025.

With Lorraine, between September 2023 and June 2024, we attended many days of immediate trial hearings at the 23rd chamber of the Paris Court and, at the same time, held many meetings with criminal lawyers, magistrates, prosecutors, detainees or former detainees, and facilitators of reintegration associations.

The first rehearsal sessions led us to formulate multiple dramaturgical hypotheses, generating many attempts at writing and improvising to identify what, theatrically, would allow us to trace a gesture capable of accounting for all this documentary wealth without being limited to it. To invent a form capable of opening a path of thought on the question of alternatives to institutional justice – a subject that powerfully mobilized us with the discovery of the trends of minimalism and penal abolitionism.

Immediate trial hearings

The decision to focus the writing of the show on immediate trials, this French procedural exception unanimously decried by both lawyers and magistrates because of its expeditious nature, made it possible to define the dramaturgical structure of each major scene of the show. The strict framework of the appearance obeys in fact immutable sequences, similar to those of trials that take place in correctional or assize courts: statement of charges, reminder of the facts, interrogation, cross-examination, indictment and pleading, hearing suspension during deliberations, verdict.

But the specificity of the immediate trial is its duration. Each hearing lasts on average less than 30 minutes. It is this real time, highly problematic, that the show proposes to

explore and experience. How to judge a supposedly simple situation – immediate trials normally concern flagrant so-called simple offenses – in such a short time? Is it possible to render justice when time is lacking? The penal inflation coupled with the glaring lack of resources available to the French institutional justice system despite the recent increase in its budget, produces alarming situations, the very ones that we have witnessed or that have been reported to us during our immersions. Justice professionals are exhausted and pressurized; civilians are misjudged and mistreated. Distrust continues to grow. The immediate trial is symptomatic of an impasse.

It is this tipping point that LEVIATHAN attempts to analyze by proposing to unfold three significant immediate trial hearings – three true stories that have each reached us thanks to different sources. Each situation described thus examines a critical element of institutional justice: traffic offenses that clog up the courts and are severely punished as an example – the sentences handed down sometimes serve as a political showcase; victimless crimes, which are legion and contribute to worsening prison overcrowding; sexual and gender-based violence, which today challenge the justice system to urgently reform itself.

Through the critical prism of immediate trial, the show confronts us with a procedure that is little known and rarely treated in fiction, often caricatured as it assigns and disfigures, incapable of tackling the social causes that fuel it. It also evokes alternatives in counterpoint – restorative justice, penal minimalism –, all devices that attempt to reform the penal system based on the police, the court and the prison. LEVIATHAN is thus not just a scathing inventory: it is an attempt at methodical deconstruction, an act of transformative justice that performs, before our eyes, an alternative. Here, it takes the form of a face-to-face.

Impeachments

From all the documentary material gathered, I tried to develop a chiseled writing style, at the level of reality. However, my approach is never that of a restitution, but rather of a reconstruction – as one reconstructs a crime scene, or as an archaeologist tries to resurface a submerged world based on the relics he was able to unearth.

This version of events allows for accidents – sometimes it deliberately provokes them by disrupting the judicial machine, by upsetting the implacable protocol of criminal procedure in order to exhibit its springs. I thus tried to dissect the principles as well as the language deviations of the magistrates and lawyers as we had been able to observe them. To autopsy the uses and verbal tics.

To expose the judicial rhetoric in all its opacity. To paint it from nature in order, in a certain way, to thwart its grandeur and its traps.

For the sung trial, I suggested to Lorraine to versify the documentary material. By mixing registers, I tried to draw the outlines of a social opera that would assume the oxymoron. The insult stands alongside the excessively codified legal lexicon, but also the aphorism and the plea. Vulgarity is stylized, the penal pomp degraded. The language is sometimes brutal, sometimes figurative. Pierre-Yves Macé's music allows this specific stylistic treatment – the rhymed verse that disseminates its assonances like so many muffled screams – to be a polemical device in itself. In this chamber of justice, everyone sings so as not to scream. Because the language that the law speaks is abstruse, paranoid, obsessed with detail, periphrasis, anxious to riddle. It overwhelms. It exhausts. Each situation is technically named, each eventuality is specified. The words are sometimes rare and unusual. The turns of phrase are outdated and convoluted: a beauty as much as an obstacle. It is a foreign language that is violent because it creates a chasm between, on the one hand, the specialists who handle it and pass it around as if they were sharing a secret, and on the other hand, the people subject to justice, whom it misleads and intimidates.

Scientific, although opening up a considerable field of interpretation, it is sacred in our eyes because it regulates the social order and decides our lives. A verdict is a performative statement: to say is to execute. The words of the law are also the fruit of a very long history. But there are so few of us who speak this language of specialists and experts. The paradox is great between its exaggeratedly sustained and verbose character and the civilians to whom it is addressed in immediate trials. Socially disadvantaged since this procedure is notoriously applied to precarious people, the defendants, even before being judged, are already overcome by its domination. Its authoritarian and brutal character leaves no chance – an ancestral newspeak with a fixed syntax that assigns and evacuates the body and affects.

By a voluntary contrast effect and faithful to what we have observed, the language of the defendants as I have worked on is emotional, chaotic, situated, contemporary: it characterizes an individual, it exposes him and provides information on his history, his wounds, his memories. It tries to give a sense, for each defendant, of these elements of life that surface in the words, the stammerings, the silences and the cries. It does not domesticate itself, it does not frame itself: it rears up. It is a lively and anxious language, a hesitant language that broods and fights.

Many passive turns of phrase reflect the confiscation of civilian's conflicts by professionals. One of the defendants thus insists on the spiral of abductions that made him the stranger in his own life: "I *got* beaten up, I *got* arrested, I *got* convicted, I *got* incarcerated," he unfolds, in a hellish litany.

In the penal system, we let others do for us. We delegate. We *get* defended. We *get* questioned. We *get* summoned. We *get* incriminated. We *get* judged. We are amateurs; the professionals appropriate our case, our words, our lives.

Confrontations

Of a completely different nature, the monologues performed by the "witness" reflect a singular experience that collides with the dehumanizing mechanics of immediate trials. These islands of words suspend the tragic accumulation of verdicts and sentences. They disrupt our perception and shift our gaze. This witness is, as he humorously evokes, "a faithful user of the police, judicial and penitentiary public service." He is the holder of knowledge that he recounts as one sows the seeds of insurrection. He is not a proselytizer: he has lived too much, suffered too much, committed too much. He confronts our evidence, our comforts, our illusions, with the raw presentation of a collective situation that he knows better than anyone.

These fragments are the fruit of lively exchanges with the amateur actor who carries them, but they do not in any way claim to reduce him or reassign him to a role. He is the conveyor of a story larger than his own, he never locks himself in his own biographical circumstances – he will not even say anything about them. This is perhaps the most salient act of the show: by deindividualizing his speech without taking away any of its singular character, without losing any of the originality of his voice, he collectivizes his destiny.

We delve into the meanders of his memory and probe, in his presence, the traces left in him by a summary class justice. His presence is eminently political, his words sharp. His language is a power, his silence a force.

Guillaume Poix, July 2024

Excerpts

*

(...)

Judge.- Did you equally
threaten
to burn down
the Eiffel tower?

Accused.- I don't remember
saying that.

Judge.- You are
aware that
it's a threat
of the worst
terrorism?

Accused - I wouldn't
even know
what to do
to burn down
the Eiffel tower.
Where to start,
what you do
to burn down
that many tons
of steel?

Judge.- That's
the claim of
every
terrorist.

Accused .- I am
not
a terrorist.

Judge.- What do you think
of your
behaviour
Mister?

Accused .- What do I think?

Judge.- Yes what do you
think of it?

Accused - What I think
is that in France
there are

laws.

I spent forty-eight hours
in custody.
Someone should have
questioned me,
but they didn't.

Judge.- All this,
your anger,
did it start
with your phone?

Accused.- Yes.

Judge.- Where did
it get stolen
from you
in
the home?

Accused.- It's not
a home,
I repeat.

Judge.- The association,
if you prefer.

Accused.- In a home
you sleep,
but I don't sleep
in there
at the Tranquil Heart
because
it's not
a home.
You have to know
words
things
words
have meaning.
Poverty
is precise.

(...)

*

*

Witness.-'Flagrante delicto' procedure.

That's the ancient name for immediate trial.

An offence is underway.

The culprit is arrested on the spot.

They're placed in custody.

Then they're presented to the Prosecutor who decides whether or not to try them immediately.

Each trial only lasts a few minutes.

In France, there are 60,000 a year.

And it's exponential.

In the beginning it was an exceptional procedure that has gradually normalised with time.

That often happens, I've noticed.

The exception becomes the rule.

I come from a neighbourhood, a road even, where everyone is going down, has gone down, will go down.

That road where everyone ends up, one way or another, in immediate trial.

A road which knows the song well.

(...)

I often say education is imitation.

If my friends from the 'hood had been choristers or harpists, I'd be a harpist by now.

But I'm not a harpist.

I'm a member of a different species.

The homo sacer.

Homo sacer was a special status under Roman law

It means sacred man or cursed man.

One or other, it's ambiguous.

A homo sacer is someone that the people have judged for a crime they consider severe.

They can't be sacrificed according to holy rites, but whoever kills them can't be convicted of homicide.

A Homo Sacer is an unsacrificeable being, completely exposed to death.

And not an extinct species.

There are still quite a few of us present today.

Our life often passes in prison.

It's that environment which fosters violence and exposes us to death.

In prison there's a suicide every three days.

The penal system is a numbers game.

An economy.

A day in prison costs 110 euros.

A day with an electronic tag costs 10 euros.

Why continue overcrowding prisons if it costs so much more?

Because it brings in more.

The majority of prisons today are outsourced.

Sodexo, Gepsa, Idex.

They're the three private companies which control that market in France.

These companies manage prison food, and maintenance of infrastructure.

Some are listed on the stock exchange.

Which means they have shareholders to remunerate. And dividends to increase.

The more prisons we build, the more prisoners there are.

It's not because there's more spaces prison overcrowding isn't going down.

Quite the opposite.

The more prison overcrowding increases, the more the equipment wears out.

The more the equipment wears out, the more work it needs.

And the more work that needs doing to it, the more Sodexo, Gepsa and Idex charge us.

The more we imprison, the more Sodexo, Gepsa and Idex profit.

The Homo Sacer fuel a penal system generating as many jobs as votes at the ballot box

*

*

Judge.- (...) Do you want to say anything about the charges of which you are accused?

Accused.- No, there you go. I... I took the clothes but didn't... didn't have time to pay.

Judge.- You didn't have the time, you're saying?

Accused.- I was going to pay, OK?

Judge.- What do you mean, you were going to pay? Are you sure about that? The security guard was clear you were on the verge of leaving the shop

Accused.- I was going to pay

Judge.- You are sure that you did not intend to leave without paying, Madam?

Accused.- Anyhow, I need to pay, OK?

Judge.- I can confirm that, yes, Madam. Before leaving a shop, if you want to purchase something, you have to pay for it at the till, that's hardly a surprise, I think, so unless you confused the exit with the tills...

Accused.- That's it, I confused them..

Judge.- Madam, if you please... do not mock this court. Who were they for, these clothes? Madam? Did you hear my question? If you don't want to answer, simply say so.

Accused.- I don't want to answer.

Judge.- Understood. Do you not want to reply to any question?

Accused.- OK.

Judge.- No, not 'OK', madam, I asked you the question: would you like to express yourself or not?

Accused.- No I've nothing else to say. I didn't steal the clothes, alright? I was going to leave and to pay for them, those clothes. I returned the clothes, returned them so it's not a theft, OK?

Judge.- It's attempted theft, madam, that's what this is called.

Accused.- There you go, very good.

Judge.- No not very good, madam... what's more, you struggled violently. You damaged equipment. What happened was violent, madam, are you aware of that or not?

Accused.- It really hurt, I don't deny that, OK?

(...)

*



Lorraine de Sagazan

Lorraine de Sagazan studied philosophy and trained as an actress from 2006 to 2010. At the Studio-Théâtre d'Asnières - Centre de Formation des Apprentis comédiens (now ESCA), she learns to create collectively, thanks to a work-study program. It was here that she met the men and women who are still her acting partners and peers today. She decided to turn to directing in 2015. At a time when there was only one directing course at the École Nationale du Théâtre de Strasbourg, Lorraine de Sagazan asked those who inspired her to follow them for the duration of a creation. In 2014, she went to Berlin to assist Thomas Ostermeier at work on *The Marriage of Maria Braun* after Fassbinder, conversed with Marius von Mayenburg, met Falk Richter and observed Romeo Castellucci in rehearsals for the plays he presented in Paris in 2015 and 2016.

After presenting *Ceci n'est pas un rêve* (2014) at La Loge Paris, her first collective work with four Studio-Théâtre acolytes, she was invited to take part in the Fragments d'Été Festival in Paris, for which she chose to work on an adaptation of Lars Norén's *Demons*. The company La Brèche was founded on this occasion, in 2015. This manifesto piece reveals her focus on both the author's gesture and the status of the spectator, his place, his gaze, his state. It marks the beginning of what has come to be known as a first cycle devoted to the adaptation of texts from the classical and contemporary repertoires, and to the way in which «the fiction of a work confronts reality».

In 2016, Lorraine de Sagazan signed the second part of this cycle with an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, accentuating the search for what, today, reactivates the shock of past masterpieces. Supported in particular by the Scènes Nationales network, she has deployed her company La Brèche throughout France and is now looking to international. In 2017, she directed the winning text of the Prix RFI Théâtre 2017: *La Poupée Barbue* ("The Beard Doll") by Édouard Elvis Bvouma, the first show for young audiences to tour eight African countries. In 2018, commissioned by the Conseil Général du 93, she created *Les Règles du jeu* ("Game rules") by Yann Verburgh, a second project aimed at young people. That same year, in Vienna, she staged an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* with Austrian actors. She closes her first cycle in 2019 with *L'Absence de père* ("The Missing of a Father"), based on Anton Chekhov's *Platonov*, an adaptation she co-wrote with author and playwright Guillaume Poix, which marks the start of a second creative cycle focused on collecting testimonies and exploring how, this time, fiction responds to reality. Guillaume Poix co-wrote the following plays with

Lorraine de Sagazan, who was an associate artist at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe - CDN de Saint-Denis and a member of the Ensemble Artistique de la Comédie de Valence, Centre Dramatique National Drôme-Ardèche.

La Vie invisible ("The Invisible Life"), presented at Théâtre de La Ville in January 2022, questions the spectator's gaze, decides to meet those who can't see and

invites a blind amateur actor on stage. Caught up in the upheavals caused by the pandemic since March 2020, she abandons the project of staging Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Le Décalogue* to «radicalize» the previous gesture by going out to meet and question as many people about reparation as there are days in a year. This writing project conducted with Guillaume Poix deepens the experience of a subtle metatheatricality that was already apparent in Lorraine de Sagazan's early research. *Un Sacre* ("A Sacred") will be premiered in 2021. Accompanying this piece, *Mater Orba*, written as a testimonial for an actress, is a small form destined to be performed in situ in non-dedicated venues.

Considering artistic encounters as 'a remarkable tool for emancipating the greatest number of people, and a powerful lever for popular education in a given region', she and her team offer regular workshops for teenagers, amateurs and young actors, as well as frequent cultural actions and advanced or professional training programs.

In 2022, as part of the Chantiers nomades program at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe, Lorraine de Sagazan led a workshop on two fundamental aspects of her research: the experience and the invisible. As part of the Nuits de Fourvière festival, she presents a very free adaptation of Lars Norén's *Category 3.1* with students from various disciplines graduating from ENSATT. That same year, during the Douze heures des auteurs organized by ARTCENA as part of the Avignon Festival Lorraine de Sagazan directed a reading by Talents Adami performers of a text written by Guillaume Poix following the collection of anonymous testimonials about «L'auteur ou l'autrice qui a changé ma vie» («The author who changed my life»). With Julie Deliquet, she co-directs *Fille(s) de* ("Girl(s) of"), by Leïla Anis, another associate artist of the Théâtre Gérard Philipe, a collective creation for young girls, teenagers and women from Saint-Denis who take part in the CDN's amateur workshops.

In Rome, Lorraine de Sagazan, resident at the Villa Medici for a year from September 2022, was conducting her research and meeting the men and women she will write about with Guillaume Poix *LEVIATHAN*, premiered at Festival d'Avignon 2024, and performed for instance at Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe in May 2025. In keeping with

2025. In keeping with her immersive writing style, she hopes to «invent a ritual of justice through theater».

In January 2024, she also created *Le Silence* (“*The Silence*”), based on the work of Antonioni, at the Comédie Française - Vieux-Colombier.

She also creates with Anouk Maugein the art installation *Monte di Pietà*, as part of the final exhibition for Villa Médicis’ residents in June 2023. The art installation/performance is then showed in July 2024 at La Collection Lambert in Avignon during the Festival d’Avignon, and then in the Biennale of Contemporary Art of Lyon from September 2024 to January 2025.

She will create new art installations and performances in 2025, especially at La Ferme du Buisson – Scène Nationale – Centre d’art, at MAC VAL, Contemporary Art Museum of Val de Marne and at the Biennale of Architecture of Venice.

(Mélanie Jouen for Artcena)

Guillaume Poix

Former student of the École normale supérieure, Guillaume Poix is a writer.

Born in 1986, he is the author of around ten plays published by éditions Théâtrales, including *Straight* (Prix des Journées de Lyon des Auteurs de Théâtre 2014, Prix Godot des lycéens and Prix Sony Labou Tansi des lycéens 2016), *Et le ciel est par terre* (Prix Scenic Youth 2017), *Tout entière* (adapted for the opera by Benjamin Dupé in 2020), *Fondre* (Prix Godot des Nuits de l'enclave) and *Et soudain Romy Schneider* (finalist for the Grand Prix de littérature dramatique 2020, broadcast on France Culture in September 2021 in a production by Cédric Aussir, Grand Prix de la Fiction radiophonique francophone de la Société des Gens de Lettres 2022).

His plays have been translated and performed in around ten countries.

He has translated into French, with Christophe Pellet, *Quand nous nous serons suffisamment torturés* by Martin Crimp (L'Arche, 2020) and *Tokyo Barby Tennessee Williams*, directed by Manon Krüttli with whom he regularly collaborates in Switzerland (Théâtre de Poche, Théâtre du Grütli, Théâtre Populaire Romand).

Since 2019, he has worked with Lorraine de Sagazan. Together, they created *L'Absence de père* based on Chekhov's *Platonov* (Nuits de Fourvière, 2019), *La vie invisible* (broadcast on France Culture in March 2021 in a production by Laure Egorroff), *Un sacre* and *Le Silence* (Comédie-Française, 2024).

Between 2020 and 2022, he was an associate author at the Grand R national stage in La Roche-sur-Yon.

In 2022, he was selected by Arte to join their talent incubator.

In cinema, he collaborates with Claire Simon, Nicole Garcia and Masha Kondakova.

His first novel, *Les Fils conducteurs* (Verticales, 2017; Folio, 2019), received the Wepler Prize - Fondation La Poste.

His second novel, *Là d'où je viens a disparu* (Verticales, 2020), received the Alain-Spiess Prize and the Frontières Prize - Léonora Miano. It was adapted into a radio series for France Culture and broadcast in a production by Cédric Aussir in December 2023.

His third novel, *Star* (Verticales), was published in March 2023.

Reviews

'Here is our warning: justice is a circus, a theatre of masks and puppets. (...) Lorraine de Sagazan's LEVIATHAN is a theatre of questioning, but she constantly weaves together reality and dreams, which come together in the most fantastic moment of the show. A horse, a real horse, in a dapple-grey coat appears on stage, magnificent, an apparition synonymous with freedom, power and, perhaps, consolation (...) Between the grotesque and the beautiful, the director creates images of staggering power.'

Fabienne Darge - Le Monde

'Sagazan's impressive achievement with LEVIATHAN is that it is anything but documentary theatre, anything but the harsh realism that is more obvious when it comes to the courts. (...) LEVIATHAN is a work of striking and disturbing plastic beauty. (...) It is astonishing to be able to say just how excellent the actors are.'

Sonja Faure, Libération

'LEVIATHAN is a powerful act, a rare vision of space, a dazzling text, a tragic denunciation. It's a masterpiece, a true masterpiece that we know will change us for a long time to come. The images she creates will go down in theatre history. What a shock!'

Amelie Blaustein-Riddam Cult.news

'Through these four cases, Lorraine de Sagazan and Guillaume Poix point out the flaws in the criminal justice system. The prospects for a transformative justice system are hinted at in a plea by the defense lawyer to which the jury remains deaf. The show goes on at breakneck speed and the charge is relentless.'

Callista Croizer, Les Echos

'With the magic of a visual artist, Lorraine de Sagazan forces us to take a 'Brechtian' distance. She delicately masks magistrates, lawyers and defendants, imposing on them a deliberately theatrical and chaotic diction, choreographed postures and strange, fantastical costumes. The only one who's not masked, who wears an ordinary costume, is an ex-con (10 years of imprisonment) became here a remarkable actor and who comments a process he's been through.'

Fabienne Pascaud, Télérama

'In one hand, the permeation of real and carnivalesque, true and false, amateur and professional in Avignon reduced me to rubble. In "Léviathan," a terrifying burlesque of the French court system directed by Lorraine de Sagazan, actors wearing plastic masks and moving like windup toys act out several swift "immediate" trials: legal procedures that are offered to those who are caught red-handed.'

Helen Shaw, The New-Yorker

'Based on an immersion in the heart of the judicial system, exploring the immediate appearance procedure, Lorraine de Sagazan and her team have created a strange and gripping theatrical ritual that shifts the focus away from reality to better examine it and reveal its malfunctions. It's an effective and disturbing play on judicial authority, arguing for restorative justice.'

Agnes Santi, La Terrasse

« 'Who is the monster?' asks Lorraine de Sagazan. Her LEVIATHAN has not finished haunting us. (...) On stage, the stopwatch starts, and when the verdict falls, a number appears on the screen with a loud crash: the spectator receives it like a slap in the face, so disproportionate and inadequate does the sentence seem to be to repair their actions. The actors masterfully give body to the little people of the precarious people judged in correctional courts.'

Marie-Eve Barbier, La Provence

'Frantic applause, and a standing, overwhelmed audience. You don't come out unscathed from LEVIATHAN, the latest creation by Lorraine de Sagazan (...) The overzealous policeman's rounded end of the month, the prosecutor's satisfaction in putting those who have no business being there in their place... The scenes follow one after the other, unbearable.

There will be little mention of victims. But the prison, the metaphorical belly of Leviathan, will be very full.'

Sonia Garcia Zahar, Vaucluse Matin

'What a slap. That's the watchword at the release of LEVIATHAN. Lorraine de Sagazan and Guillaume Poix have created a monster show, with a mystical plastic beauty and a language with scathing accuracy. (...)

Joshua Thomassin, Premièrepluie.com



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