



*Photo: Michiel Devijver*

PRESS KIT  
A PIECE BY MILO RAU  
**THE REPETITION**  
**HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE (I)**

# CONTENT

0	CREDITS	3
1	THE REPETITION. HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE (I)	4
2	CONVERSATION WITH MILO RAU	6
3	MILO RAU	13
4	CAST AND TEAM	14

# CREDITS

## **THE REPETITION. HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE (I)**

A PIECE BY MILO RAU

**PREMIERE:** MAY 4<sup>TH</sup> 2018, THÉÂTRE NATIONAL, WALLONIE-BRUXELLES, AS PART OF THE KUNSTENFESTIVALDESARTS, BRUSSELS

**CONCEPT AND DIRECTOR** Milo Rau **TEXT** Milo Rau and ensemble **PERFORMERS** Sara De Bosschere, Suzy Cocco, Sébastien Foucault, Fabian Leenders, Johan Leysen, Tom Adjibi **RESEARCH & DRAMATURGY** Eva-Maria Bertschy **DRAMATURGIC COLLABORATION** Stefan Bläske, Carmen Hornbostel **SET & COSTUME DESIGN** Anton Lukas **VIDEO** Maxime Jennes and Dimitri Petrovic **LIGHT DESIGN** Jurgen Kolb **SOUND DESIGN AND TECHNICAL DIRECTOR** Jens Baudisch **PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT** Mascha Euchner-Martinez, Eva-Karen Tittmann **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR** Carmen Hornbostel **ASSISTANT DRAMATURG** François Pacco **ASSISTANT SET DESIGNER** Patty Eggerickx **FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHY** Cédric Cerbara **VOCAL COACHING** Murielle Legrand **MUSICAL ARRANGEMENT** Gil Mortio **PUBLIC RELATIONS** Yven Augustin **EQUIPMENT** Workshops and studios of the Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles

“The Repetition” is a **PRODUCTION** by the International Institute of Political Murder (IIPM), Création Studio Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles, **SUPPORTED BY** the Capital Cultural Fund Berlin, Pro Helvetia and Ernst Göhner Stiftung, **IN COPRODUCTION WITH** Kunstenfestivaldesarts, NTGent, Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers, Tandem Scène Nationale Arras Douai, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz Berlin, Théâtre de Liège, Münchner Kammerspiele, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm Frankfurt a. M., Theater Chur, Gessnerallee Zürich, Romaeuropa Festival. **WITH THE SUPPORT** of ESACT Liège.

**DURATION:** approx. 90 minutes, without break

**LANGUAGE:** French and Flemish with subtitles

# 1. THE REPETITION HISTOIRE(S) DU THÉÂTRE (I)

**One night in April of 2012, Ihsane Jarfi gets talking to a group of young men in a grey VW Polo in front of a gay club on a street corner in Liège. Two weeks later he is found dead at the edge of a wood. He had been violently murdered after being tortured for hours. The crime upsets and unsettles the entire city. Milo Rau is reconstructing the case – working with professional and non-professional actors – for the stage.**

A manifesto for a democratic theatre of the real emerges.

From the very beginning, theatre has been an incantation of the dead, a ritualized experience of original sins and collective traumas. In "The Repetition", the first part of a series curated by Milo Rau titled "Histoire(s) du théâtre", the director and author approaches tragedy in the form of a multi-perspective narrative of a criminal case in 5 acts. What is at the beginning of a crime? Intention or coincidence? What part does the audience play? How much is the collective to blame? And who is on stage? Milo Rau and his four actors Sara De Bosschere, Sébastien Foucault, Johan Leysen and Tom Adjibi, as well as the storeman Fabian Leenders and the dog-sitter Suzy Cocco set out to discover a capital crime, in search of the essential emotions of tragic experiences: loss and grief, truth and falsehood, disaster and fear, cruelty and terror. Six professional and non-professional actors ponder the glamour and depths of life and theatre and slip into the roles of the protagonists involved in a brutal murder case: A manifesto for a democratic theatre of the real emerges.



*Photo: Michiel Devijver*

With this production, Milo Rau will be introducing the series "Histoire(s) du théâtre", a performative long-term study on human kind's oldest art form, which the Congolese choreographer Faustin Linyekula will be continuing in the 2018/19 season. Rau and his

team return to the fundamental problems of their artistic work over the last 15 years: the question of representability of violence and traumatic events on stage – in search of the essence of the fundamentally tragic *human condition* and in celebration of the power of theatre.

It is about the question of the representability of violence and traumatic events on stage.

*"The Repetition" is the first production to follow the "Ghent Manifesto" – a set of rules which will apply to all productions at the NTGent under the artistic direction of Milo Rau. It will be published officially on May 18th 2018 at NTGent.*

## 2. "IN ART, RESTRICTIONS CAN BE LIBERATING."

A CONVERSATION WITH MILO RAU ABOUT HIS NEW  
PLAY "THE REPETITION", THE IHSANE JARFI CASE AND  
HIS "GHENT MANIFESTO"

**"The Repetition" will be the first part of the series on the nature, history and future of theatre, which you have titled "Histoire(s) du théâtre" in reference to Jean-Luc Godard's history of cinema. What is it about?**

**Milo Rau:** Godard's "Histoire(s) du cinéma" are highly personal anecdotes, they are picture stories – it's about his own biography as an audience member, stories about the Hollywood world of stars, about how montage works, and so on. And indirectly it is also always about history, about the (violent) history of the 20th century. In the same way, the first part of "Histoire(s) du théâtre" will be about the theatre maker's view on the complex of "theatre", about the actors' obsessions, about my obsessions. This includes very technical issues: How do you enter, how do you exit? How does a character evolve from a text? How can human borderline experiences – shame, grief, extreme violence, but also commitment and revolt – be represented on stage? What does "truth" actually mean in theatre? As the artistic director of the NTGent I will be curating the series with one production per season and in the second part, the Congolese choreographer Faustin Linyekula will continue the work focusing on his own issues with theatre as well as on his homeland, the Congo.

**In your current production you are dealing with the brutal murder of Ihsane Jarfi which took place in 2012. As opposed to the Dutroux case which your last successful production "Five Easy Pieces" was about, the Jarfi murder drew little attention outside of Belgium and remained a so-called "fait divers". How did you come across it?**

»In art, restrictions are usually liberating.«

*Milo Rau*

One of the actors, Sébastien Foucault, who lives in Liège, followed the case in court back then. Almost obsessively, he went to see the trials and when we were looking for a focal point, a "case" for "The Repetition", he suggested this one. And there was another, quite absurd coincidence: Jean-Louis Gilissen, a lawyer from Liège with whom we have been working together for a long time – he was the president of the "Congo Tribunal", for example – told us about the case over dinner. He had defended one of Jarfi's murderers and the trial has been on his mind ever since. So, during the first week of rehearsals we went to Liège with the actors to meet the people involved in this case – and in order to find other actors, including someone who would play the victim himself.

### **But what does this case have to do with a "history of theatre"?**

We deliberately chose to use the plural, as Godard did: "Histoires", meaning (hi)stories of theatre. I started researching this play with the three actors Sarah De Bosschere, Sébastien Foucault and Johan Leysen, whom I have been working with for quite some time now. We had a casting and found our fourth actor, Tom Adjibi. In the end, more by chance, the dog sitter Suzy Cocco and the storeman Fabian Leenders joined us, both of whom are non-professional actors. We all asked ourselves a number of questions: Why do we do theatre? How do we do it? To what end? In the process I realized that in order not to fall into the trap of autobiographical truths, I had to rely on something else, something more objective. Ihsane Jarfi was tortured and killed by a group of young men for several hours without any reason. He had done nothing to them, he had just happened to come out of a gay bar when they stopped at the corner and started talking to him. What happened next can only be reconstructed from the murderers' accounts. They were extremely brutal. But how can we recreate this case on a stage? How do you play a murderer? How do you hit someone? And how do you repeat all of this night after night?

**The so-called "Ghent Manifesto" will be released on the occasion of the premiere and will be read out at the beginning of the play. Similar to the filmmaking movement "The Repetition" is the first production to follow the "Ghent**



*Photo: Michiel Devijver*

**Manifesto" that will officially be released on May 18th at NTGent. Similar to the "Dogma 95", which appeared over 20 years ago, it is a very specific, almost technical set of rules. For example, one rule determines the number of non-professional actors and languages on stage, another limits the amount of text which is not self-written or researched. Even the maximum size of the van for the set is specified. Is "The Repetition" a model play?**

In a way, yes. It's about using rules to unleash something new: something I call "global realism". I want a light theatre that doesn't have huge sets and can tour and travel around the whole world. I also want a democratic theatre which everyone has access to: as an actor, as an author, as a critic. In short, I want to programmatically crack open the hermetic space of the theatre, also with regard to today's classics, myths and styles. When the literal adaptation of classical texts is not allowed, you are forced to write new texts – and if you involve a certain amount of foreign languages and people who have little experience with theatre in the creative process, inevitably something new arises. In art, restrictions are usually liberating. Incidentally, every artist has his or her own rules, but most of them are implicit and politically speaking, I find that unproductive.

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*Milo Rau*



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**"The Repetition" is also the title of an essay by Søren Kierkegaard. What does repetition mean to you?**

The format of repetition has been playing a very important part in my work for almost 15 years now. Even though only two or three of my over 50 works are actually reenactments, the term is practically causally connected to my name. So I said to myself: Why not begin the series on "Histoire(s) du théâtre" with a scenic study? What is interesting about this format is that a lot of things that interest me about theatre come together. For example, the fact that – especially in a murder case – the statements differ completely. This is due to the different motivations but also for purely technical reasons. A testimony, a memory or a plea do not express historical truth, it is all about repetition according to Kierkegaard: the victim's mother, but also the perpetrator or the lawyer all try to extract an existential (or political) meaning from the event.



They remember it, but at the same time they recollect it according to their respective – for the most part unconscious – intentions, as Kierkegaard would put it.

**The production also focuses on the tragic experience, loss and grief, truths and lies, cruelty and horror. Is Ihsane Jarfi's death a tragedy?**

Even though we obsessively deal with the night Ihsane Jarfi was murdered in the play, we are basically not interested in the event. What is interesting is how the deeper you get into it, this often multiplied, inflated murder case turns out to be a banal and pointless sequence of coincidences, an unfortunate series of events. There are two birthday parties and different people who encounter each other completely unintentionally. There is social violence that is catalysed. It's really like in an ancient Greek tragedy: the people, the characters are blind, they become increasingly entangled in disaster and culpability, with which – in an almost somnambulistic way – they always can only relate to in retrospect, during the reconstruction of the event. Jarfi died because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, because he – possibly – said something wrong. The murderers had no reason to kill him, they had no intention of doing so at the beginning – just as Oedipus has no intention of killing his father, whom he meets by chance at a crossroads. But the tragedy in all of my plays and here too is the traumatic impenetrability of violence. No reason, no psychology, no sociological explanation can help the audience in the end. A tragedy is not a narrative, it is an attempt at the impossible truth, at futility, impenetrability and the non-communicable nature of death.

**Your productions are always preceded by detailed research. How did you conduct the research for the current piece?**

I always try to do the research with the actors and the many other participants of the project. This is also one of the rules of the "Ghent Manifesto": collective authorship with all of the participants. We went to Liège for two weeks and met with relatives of the victim, his father, his mother, his ex-boyfriend. We visited one of his murderers in prison. We spoke to their lawyers.

»A tragedy is not a narrative, it is an attempt at the impossible truth, at futility, impenetrability and the non-communicable nature of death.«

*Milo Rau*



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»But the tragedy in all of my plays and here too is the traumatic impenetrability of violence. No reason, no psychology, no sociological explanation can help the audience in the end.«

*Milo Rau*

»So we can also see this case as a tragedy of unemployment.«

*Milo Rau*

A lot of what they said was included in the play. The characters on stage are full of these encounters, but other experiences and observations are written onto them, as well. We also wanted to learn as much as possible about the surroundings – in the broader sense – in which this murder took place. Liège is a city with a very high unemployment rate. Since the 1980s, as part of the deindustrialisation of Europe, the metal industry, which used to be so important for Liège, gradually disappeared. The city was not able to recover from this. So we can also see this case as a tragedy of unemployment: The murderers all come from the same industrial suburb of Liège, from Seraing, where the Dardenne brothers shot their famous social dramas. The deactivated blast furnaces are still standing there like memorials. Here, we meet all of these people, hear what they have to say. In addition, there are improvisations, imaginations, personal obsessions of the participants, beauty and horror – and so slowly a play is created.

**It must be hard for the actors to be confronted with this kind of reality.**

Sometimes the encounters are difficult, almost absurd. We hear someone tell us something horrible, say goodbye, go our separate ways and start working on what we heard. Funnily enough, this is more difficult for actors who are used to working with a completed text than for the non-professionals. In our productions we start out from an empty stage, a tabula rasa. Fear of nothing is the rule of the game. I need the panic, the constant looming possibility that everything could fail. What is it worth that something is on stage, that something is said? If you have Chekhov, Schnitzler, Shakespeare, a novel or a film – I used to adapt plays and films – then the work has already been done: someone else has made these infinitely difficult decisions for you, has assumed the almost unbearable weight of responsibility for you. For me, at the beginning of rehearsals there is only the actor who is there with all of his or her incompleteness and prejudices, passions, wisdom, his or her small life – and the audience that watches the actor. During this encounter something new, something unknown has to happen, otherwise, for me, there is no sense in theatre. I think with "The Repetition" we are deliberately approaching this level zero, of course with all necessary humour, and are confronting the nothing. We actually force ourselves into it

»Where is the transcendence behind human misery?«

*Milo Rau*



*Photo: Michiel Devijver*

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using a set of rules. There is no freedom without responsibility, as Hannah Arendt so beautifully stated. In an interview Johan Leysen said that what interested him in collaborating with me was precisely this confrontation with emptiness: "When you're working with Milo, you go to the first rehearsal and have no idea whatsoever what will happen. It's terrible, but it's also the only reason why you should do theatre."

**You are interested in social dramas by filmmakers such as the Dardenne brothers and Ken Loach. "The Repetition" is also a kind of critical homage to the social drama.**

That's true: The way the Dardenne brothers or Ken Loach depict social destitution in their work corresponds to a form of committed cinema which younger generations of filmmakers are no longer interested in. Why is reality not represented like that anymore? Why isn't there a notion of a collective, a class, even more, a humanity with a common destiny? Why does the description of misery, the atrocious coincidences of history which are crushing us no longer include the revolt that is represented in all of the films by the Dardenne brothers or Ken Loach? The fact that I have brought together a somewhat unusual group of professional and non-professional actors for "The Repetition", people who would usually have never come into contact with each other, is consistent with the notion of theatre as a fundamentally solidary accomplishment. At the same time, of course, I wonder whether naturalism is still possible at all in theatre. How do you perform it, how do you create a design: the milieu? What does it actually mean when an unemployed person is cast "for his face", as Fabian states at one point?

**In your productions, one can always find the desire to place the theatre at the centre of the city, to confront the public with the violence of the world, with the opacity of this violence, which in a way recalls the Greek tragedy.**

Yes, the idea that theatre is made for an audience, that it is a public endeavour, is a crucial part of my aesthetics. In the "Ghent Manifesto" the audience's position is included in the authorship of my theatre. "The Repetition" is actually an allegory on the audience's function: Why are they watching? Why aren't they on stage? Why aren't they involved? And this leads us back to the deeply committed cinema by the Dardenne brothers or Ken Loach:

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*Milo Rau*

the fact that there is no "audience" and no "creators", no "actors" or "critics", that we are all part of human kind, part of the same great story. As it happens, this is a very Greek notion of theatre: Ihsane Jarfi and his murderers are not particular psychologies, they are not characters, they are all of us. But there is one important difference: in ancient Greek tragedies the events take place with the Gods watching. When Oedipus accidentally encounters and then kills his father, then this is no coincidence, but is part of a greater destiny, the fate of "human kind". So there's a purpose to everything that happens. But how do we find that purpose nowadays? Where is the transcendence behind human misery? For me, this question is the most important of all: We tell a story in order to understand the narrative in the process of telling it, in order to overcome it. It may sound a bit romantic, but I'm actually trying to find transcendence.

*This interview was published in part in "AND#11", the magazine of TANDEM Scène nationale and written by Hugues le Tanneur.*

### 3. MILO RAU

Critics called him „the most influential“ (*DIE ZEIT*), „most awarded“ (*Le Soir*), „most interesting“ (*De Standaard*) or „most ambitious“ (*The Guardian*) artist of our time: The Swiss director and author Milo Rau (born 1977), artistic director of the NTGent beginning in the season 2018/19. Rau studied sociology, German and Romance languages and literature in Paris, Berlin and Zurich under Pierre Bourdieu and Tzvetan Todorov, among others. Since 2002, he has put out over 50 plays, films, books and actions. His productions have appeared at all of the major international festivals, including the *Berlin Theatertreffen*, the *Festival d'Avignon*, the *Venice Biennale Teatro*, the *Wiener Festwochen* and the *Brussels Kunstenfestivaldesarts*, and have toured more than 30 countries worldwide. Rau has received many honours, most recently the *Peter-Weiss-Prize 2017*, the *3sat-Prize 2017*, the *2017 Saarbrücken Poetry Lectureship for Drama* and, in 2016, the prestigious *World Theatre Day ITI Prize*, as youngest artist ever after Frank Castorf and Pina Bausch. In 2017, Milo Rau was voted "Acting Director of the Year" in the critics' survey conducted by the *Deutsche Bühne*. Rau is also a television critic, lecturer and a very productive writer.



»Milo Rau is currently the continent's most influential director.«  
*Die Zeit*

»Milo Rau is the most exciting artist in Europe at the moment.«  
*De Standaard*

»Milo Rau is a genius«  
*Die Welt*

»Lover of scandals«  
*La Vanguardia*

»Theatre innovator«  
*Der Spiegel*

»Milo Rau is one of the smartest and most unrelenting critics of our time – a visionary.«  
*Jean Ziegler*

»Where understanding ends is where Milo Rau's theatre work begins.«  
*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*



The actors Sébastien Foucault, Sara De Bosschere, Suzy Cocco, Tom Adjibi, Johan Leysen, Fabian Leenders, © 2018, Michiel Devijver

## 4. CAST AND TEAM

### **TOM ADJIBI** (ACTOR)

Tom Adjibi moved to Brussels to complete his studies in political science and enrolled in INSAS (Institut National des Arts du Spectacle), from which he graduated in 2016. He collaborates with the French-Belgian director Armel Roussel on a regular basis. He stages productions with the dancer and choreographer Mercedes Dassy, for example the performance TWYXX. In 2013 he received his first part in a film, "Deux Jours Une Nuit" by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. He then appeared in several short and feature films, including "Je me tue à le dire" by Xavier Seron and "May Day" by Olivier Magis and Fedrik De Beul.



### **SARA DE BOSSCHERE (ACTRESS)**

Sara de Bosschere grew up in Antwerp and performed on stage at a very early age. When she was eleven she performed a piece by O'Neal in the Stadsschouwburg in Antwerp, at sixteen she had a part in a Wedekind play with Lucas Vandervorst. During her studies she was a member of the theatre group "Maatschappij Discordia", whose work shaped the Dutch and Flemish theatre tradition. She founded the theatre collective "De Roovers" with three other actors/artists in 1994 and they have been performing the specific vision of their repertoire in the most important theatres in the Benelux countries and in Europe. She performed with the "Toneelgroep Amsterdam" and has worked with Gerardjan Rijnders, Johan Simons, Jan-Joris La-mers and Jan Decorte. She has also appeared in several films and on television. For the IIPM she worked with Milo Rau on "The Civil Wars" and "Five Easy Pieces".



### **SUZY COCCO (ACTRESS)**

Suzy Cocco is of Italian descent and was born in Liège when her mother was still a teenager. She is a trained podologist and nurse, she has two sons. After separating from her husband, she took theatre courses and has since appeared on stage in several productions. She is an active member of the Belgian Labour Party (PTB) in Liège and works as a dog-sitter to earn extra money to add to her low pension. She is part of the Civic Platform which supports refugees and welcomes people into her home. She regularly appears as an extra in feature films by the Dardenne brothers, among others.



### **SÉBASTIEN FOUCAULT (ACTOR)**

Sébastien Foucault studied French literature at the Sorbonne in Paris before training as an actor and director at the Conservatoire de Liège. Early on, he specialized in documentary theatre. In Belgium he collaborated with director Françoise Bloch (Grow or Go, Société de Services, Money) and actor and author David Murgia (L'âme des cafards). Sébastien Foucault has been collaborating with Milo Rau for many years. Since 2011, he has been working with him as a researcher and actor. In "Hate Radio" (2011) he played the part of Belgian radio presenter Georges Ruggiu and in "The Civil Wars" (2014) he recounts episodes of his own biography.



### **FABIAN LEENDERS (ACTOR)**

Fabian Leenders grew up in the community of Welkenraedt on the German-Belgian border, he worked as a bricklayer in Liège for 13 years after which he trained as a storeman. In his spare time he composes and performs electronic music under the label "paint-box.x" and released his first album in 2018. He attended several theatre courses and was an extra or played smaller parts in several feature films.



### **JOHAN LEYSEN (ACTOR)**

Johan Leysen began his career as an actor in Belgian and Dutch theatres. He appeared in several films and met Jean-Luc Godard in 1983, who cast him as the professor in his film "Je vous salue, Marie". Leysen appeared in numerous French and international film productions and received several awards. At the same time he remained committed to the theatre. His collaboration with directors such as Guy Cassiers, Johan Simons and Heiner Goebbels made him one of the most important and distinguished stage artists in Europe. Johan Leysen previously worked with Milo Rau on "The Civil Wars" and "Five Easy Pieces".



### **EVA-MARIA BERTSCHY (RESEARCH & DRAMATURGY)**

Born 1982 in Düringen (Switzerland), she studied sociology, economics and literature at the University of Fribourg. As a freelance dramaturg and production manager she has collaborated with Ersan Mondtag, Schaubplatz International, Hannah Hurtzig / Mobile Akademie Berlin, Judith Wilske and Tim Zulauf / KMU Produktionen, among others. Since 2013 she has been a dramaturg and researcher for Milo Rau / International Institute of Political Murder. They have produced numerous plays, theatrical formats and the international documentary film and theatre project "The Congo Tribunal".

### **ANTON LUKAS (SET & COSTUME DESIGN)**

Anton Lukas has created set and costume designs for dance, theatre and musical productions at municipal and independent theatres. Since 2009 he has been working as set and costume designer for Milo Rau and was responsible for designing over 30 theatre, television and film productions as well as exhibitions created by the director.