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Memento Mori

Pascal Rambert / Yves Godin

Creation February 24th 2013 at CDC les hivernales en Avignon, 35th Festival les hivernales

structure production
c/o théâtre des bouffes du nord,
37bis bvd de la chapelle 75010 paris
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Memento Mori

Credits

Duration : 1 heure

Conception, direction **Pascal Rambert**
Artistic collaboration, stage device and light **Yves Godin**
Original Music **Alexandre Meyer**

With 5 performers
Elmer Bäck
Rasmus Slatis
Anders Carlsson
Jakob Ohrman
Lorenzo De Angelis

Stage Manager **Tristan Mengin**
Production manager **Pauline Roussille**

Delegated production structure
Coproduction CDC – Les Hivernales en Avignon

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Memento Mori

Statement of intent

Memento Mori has no other subject than movement in itself. Or more precisely the moment which precedes movement. I mean the very start, the initial moment, just before any sign of something moving. One would listen; one would hear some deep remote rumbling rising, drawing near, and they would appear: naked. One would conjure up all the images one carries deep inside and which belong to each individual, but which also belong to the high Aurignacian or even to earlier times? to a prelapsary world. Naked. Before the fall. Before the fault. Do the pictures on the cave walls dance? Do the hands on the cave walls dance? Yes indeed. They dance under the light. What is movement but substance changing from an former shape to a new one? and light allows this transformation. Yes, light allows this when it enters into the cave. The obscure cave of the brain; disclosing primary forms of joy, of dazzling rapture, when the Dionysian world of fruit! Grapes! Bananas! Tomatoes and garden come out and join the bodies! Dionysius everywhere!... just before terror. Dead scared to be alive; or afraid of losing life. Before they start licking one another, again and again; all of them; licking every single part of their bodies clean. And licking, licking endlessly, licking clean, cleaning life, cleaning the pictures we have of ourselves

Pascal Rambert, paris, september 2011

Memento Mori

Interview of Pascal Rambert

You realize both drama plays and dance plays, which is rather rare, how do you decide to stage one or the other?

After a period of a decade or so during which I made 'mixed plays' with more emphasis on body play than on text and subject, I felt I needed to go back to the French language, to return to the spoken word again. Hence *Clotûre de l'amour* and *Avignon à vie*; Now I want to give energy to the spoken drama and power to the body. So, I am planning separate projects at the moment, and before my next drama play to be presented in 2014, I am working on a dance play for 2013, *Memento Mori*.

Is the creative process different between a drama play and a dance play?

These are quite different areas for me. In the elaboration of a drama play, there is a written structure beforehand, whereas for dance plays what is exciting is to arrive in the studio without knowing what will come out of the work; Even if I have in mind the different modules, I prepare the minimum and enjoy inventing directly on the dancers' bodies.

Memento Mori is your fourth dance play, you have had no training as a dancer, you are not a dancer, Do you feel entitled to create a dance play?

I have no legitimacy and this is precisely the reason why I like it. A kind of second life, as with my films. As I am generally against all sorts of 'specialists', it suits me to be free enough to imagine I can tackle such new subjects. There is no rule stipulating that you must have an experience as a dancer, anyone can do what suits them, so I am part of this anonymous crowd and I choose to take the freedom to think about this field which is so far unknown to me.

You say that Memento Mori has no other subject than movement in itself, but there is always a starting point, something which urges you to create a play. What is it this time?

There are two things. First, I have been feeling for some time that I need to evolve from a 'space of slowness' to a 'space of swiftness'. *Libido Sciendi* was rather slow, I tried to accelerate with Tamara Bacci in *'Knocking on heaven's door'*, but it didn't fit in with the state of extreme tension I expected her to play. I wanted to force myself to be faster, but also to show what comes before movement, and the very start from stillness to movement. I am a young choreographer, I am still in quest of what happens at the very beginning, even before bodies start moving. This is hardly possible, you cannot ask a body which has been shaped to forget completely its corporeal imprint, you cannot say "forget everything and move as if you had never moved before", but I was dreaming of this moment every choreographer is craving for at some stage, I am sure. As I am of a slow nature and find it hard to see what is happening inside the bodies, I need to observe them calmly and at length to get to understand how they break into movement.

Once I have understood, I can proceed to the next step, from balbutiating movement to a quicker pace. I have just read again Nietzsche and the pre-Socratic philosophers, I have seen Herzog's documentary *'la grotte des rêves'* (the cave of dreams), I have studied the most remotely old times. With Gilgamesh's epic poem, I had gone back to 5000BC. For *Memento Mori*, I want to go back to even more remote times, even as far as the Aurignacian period, to the Paleolithic, and to conjure up naked bodies out of the light, as in Masaccio's breathtaking fresco *'Adam and Eve expelled from Eden'*. It is a wonderful period, I am just discovering it but I am fascinated.

When I worked with Antoine Vitez, I remember an exercise for which he said: "Here, there is a bad king who says: since you are an actor, play Hamlet for me" we answered that we didn't know the text, but what Antoine meant was that we all have this faculty, deep inside, to say "To be or not to be", and this inner power is what attracts me. With *Memento Mori*, I want to dig up the 'we', our common roots dating back to 30 or 40,000 years, what our bodies and unconscious have retained of those times.

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Once I heard that if you make old vases, vases dating back to the bronze age, ,if you turn very fast, as on a record player, you can hear the potter's hammer at work. It sounds mad, but it is like a record.sound particles are preserved in the raw material, which means that one can hear a sound which has been here for 10000years. If this is possible, I presume that I too, as an apprentice choreographer, can try to bring back this moment to life.

Memento Mori,' remember that you will die', why have you chosen this title?

Like everyone, I have my territory. Before, I was not aware of it, but I am starting to realize it. There remain blank areas, I don't understand everything yet, but I recently noticed that my plays are often related to time: After/before, 'the beginning of Love', 'When we were punk,' 'first anniversary'... fifty minutes... and also the performance I will stage for Kate Moran at the 'hivernales' and at 'La menagerie de verre ' in 2012. All these titles are connected to important moments or in relation with an important moment. For Memento Mori, I want to focus on a time of Panick, the moment when one loses one's balance, firm soil vanishing under one's feet; four recent events, among them Fukushima, have made me feel the wing or the breath of death . It could have been me, and indeed this is something I have always lived with: "Do not forget that you will die"and this will be one of the developments of the play.

Concerning Memento Mori, you say: "before the fault", "prelapsary" it sounds like genesis, original sin. You talk about Dionysus, the god of drink and excess. Will the play waver between the sacred and the pagan world?

When I discovered the word prelapsary, which means before the fall, I said to myself: it is sublime, it is the perfect word. But my sujet here is not the sacred. Before the fall is a time indication. Memento Mori is a pagan play, a dyonisiac play. I remember Nietzsche's "The birth of tragedy" a book I had loved so much when I was twenty and a beginner in the drama field. Nietzsche emphasizes the fight between the Dyoynisiac and the Apollonian .On the one hand the handsome body, on the other hand the grotesque, sperm, huge penises, fruit, wine. Contrary to the hyper clean minimalist plays I have been doing for some time, I want to create an overflowing play, with each scene overlapping on the next one. Nakedness, slowness will generate pleasure, and pleasure will trigger a moment of trouble, of worry, which will finally subside into a moment of serenity.

So this play is composed of three movements, isn't it?

Yes, with three phases of approximately 20 minutes each. It will start with naked bodies partly visible, then completely exposed, then in clusters which will start moving. Once the dancers have come out of the dark, the pagan festival will start, with fruit in plenty, bananas as big as wart-hog getting in contact with the boby orifices, and grapes violently crushed under buttocks. This oniric state of the body freed from cultural restraint will be followed by a phase of panick which is at the core of Memento Mori. After the moment of wonderful grace, as often in life, there will be a sort of panick, and I want to show this fear. What I want to do, actually, is to talk about the human condition, as in all my plays. Panick will subside though, into a moment of soothing. It is the final part, which I call cleansing, care. The dancers will come to a rest, tidying up and cleaning the stage and licking one another as a dog licks a bone clean. This last picture will be like the closing of the iris .There stands the play.

In 'The epic of Gilgamesh 'you address the subject of the origins of writing in an almost archeological way. 'Memento Mori' refers to an even older period, when there were gestures but no words yet. So, will it be a silent play?

I have not decided yet. I would like all the dancers to sing. There must be some kind of presence of the spoken word, but I don't know yet how...

The players will be naked all along the play why have you made this choice?

For the feeling of human skin under the light. Nothing else. I really think there is nothing as beautiful. Everytime I undress the bodies and put them under the light, it is splendid, and it is even more

beautiful in daylight. In 'Libido sciendi', the bodies were vanishing in the light of dusk, in 'Memento Mori' it will be the opposite.

There will be five dancers on stage: how have you chosen them? For their temperaments, their technical skills or for their physical appearance?

I have not chosen them yet, but I need performers who enjoy stillness, nakedness and, who will be ready to create movement with a taste for dionysiac joy and sensual fantasy, a taste for extreme physical performance, running, jumping, enduring, until they reach a state of real good tiredness, performers with a taste of one another's skins, who will not recoil from the taboo contact, namely, licking each other.

You are working again with the Composer Alexandre Meyer. Have you already got a precise idea of the musical atmosphere of the play?

I think it is the first time we will have music all along the play. I have said to Alexandre: "Here, we have 60 minutes, to be organized in three sequences, 20 minutes each, with each sequence opening on to the next one, now you are free to do what you want"

It is your first collaboration with Yves Godin, you are not used to working with light conceptors. The technical entry mentions no scenographer; does it mean that the light will replace the scenography?

Exactly. I have said to Yves as to Alexandre: "Here you have a 10 over 10 meter space, go on, build something in it. You know it must come out of the dark, you set up your appliances and I fill up the space". I have already experienced this principle, Starting from complete darkness and working on the retinian perception in 'De mes propres mains'. But this time I really need the help of an artist because in this play the appearance of the bodies depends completely on the quality of the light. The human skin coming out of the dark, the stillness and movement of the bodies, all is conditioned by the light.

Memento Mori will be created for the Hivernales in January 2013, the theme will be The Mediterranean. What links have you kept with the landscapes of your childhood? And what are the links between the theme and this play?

The link is the solar world. Memento Mori is a solar play. In the art gallery of Antibes, there is a painting by Picasso entitled 'La joie de vivre'. This is it, this is the South, the body emerging from darkness to light, and a free body, liberated from the original sin. It is what I am looking for in this play, a Mediterranean body, a body under the sun, the body of a naturist, in the state of nature. Memento Mori stages an idyllic moment, rediscovering one's genuine nature. The paintings of the nineteenth century, in the Aesthetic movement, and Whistler particularly, present these Geek bodies in long robes, and wearing laurel wreaths, under the sun, painted in a dream-like Athens.

Naturally while rediscovering ancient Greece, these painters were dreaming, recreating, reinventing a world gone. I am doing the same, trying to bring back to life what I believe to be buried deep in ourselves, and which is at the core of our human nature, and I say to myself: I am sure that there remains in you, in me, some lingering trace of these gestures, that they are still present deep inside us. Nakedness, light, dancing, traces dating back to 30000 years and still present in ourselves. This is what Memento Mori is about.

Interview by Mélanie Alves de Sousa

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Biography of Pascal Rambert

Pascal Rambert is a French writer, choreographer, and director for the stage and screen. He was born in 1962. In 2016 he receives the “ Grand prix de l’Académie Française pour l’ensemble de son oeuvre” / “Theater Prize from Académie Française for his entire body of work”.

From January 2017 he has been the partner artist at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris, at El Pavón Teatro Kamikaz from September 2017 and from 2014 the partner playwright at the National Theatre of Strasbourg.

For 10 years, 2007-2016, he served as the Director of TG2-Théâtre de Gennevilliers, which he has transformed into a national dramatic center for contemporary creation, exclusively devoted to living artists (theater, dance, opera, contemporary art, film, and philosophy).

Rambert’s theatre plays and choreographies have been produced by *structure*, supported by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication, and staged in Europe, North America, Asia, Russia, South America, Middle East.

His writing (theater, stories, and poetry) is published in France with the press Solitaires Intempestifs and has been translated, published, and staged in many languages: English, Russian, Italian, German, Japanese, Chinese, Croatian, Slovenian, Polish, Portuguese (From Portugal and from Brazil), Spanish (Mexican and Argentinian), Castilian, Catalan, Dutch, Czech, Thai, Dansk and Greek.

His dance pieces, including the most recent, *Memento Mori*, created in 2013 with the lighting designer Yves Godin, have been performed at major festivals and contemporary dance festivals: Montpellier, Avignon, Utrecht, Berlin, and Hamburg as well as New York, Tokyo and Los Angeles.

Pascal Rambert has directed several operas in France and in the United States. The short films he has directed have been selected and awarded at festivals in Pantin, Locarno, Miami, and Paris.

His play *Clôture de l’amour (Love’s End)*, created at the 65th Festival d’Avignon in 2011 with Audrey Bonnet and Stanislas Nordey, was an international success. The script won the prize for public theater in the Theater 2013 – Dithea competition, the prize for best new French-language play from the Syndicat de la Critique (Critics’ Union) in 2012, and the Grand Prize for dramatic literature from the Centre national du théâtre (National Theater Center) in October, 2012. In 2017, *Clôture de l’amour* was staged more than 180 times in France and much more all over the world, and translated in 23 languages. Pascal Rambert has adapted *Clôture de l’amour* into ten languages: for the Moscow Art Theatre; in New York, Zagreb, Modena, and Rome, and at Milan’s Piccolo Teatro; in Shizuoka, Osaka, and Yokohama; in Berlin and at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg; in Barcelona at the Grec Festival and in Madrid at the Festival de Otoño; and in Copenhagen, Aalborg, Aarhus, and Odense, in Mandarin in China in Beijing, in Arabic in Cairo in Egypt.

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Rambert created *Une (micro) histoire économique du monde, dansée* (*A (micro) history of world economics, danced*) at T2G, Théâtre de Gennevilliers, in 2010. After its French tour, Rambert has adapted the work for further performances in Japan; in Hamburg and Karlsruhe, Germany; in the United States in New York, Los Angeles and Pittsburgh; and in Cairo, Egypt.

His play *Avignon à vie* (*Avignon for Life*), read by Denis Podalydès, was first staged at the 2013 67th Festival d'Avignon in the Cour d'Honneur du Palais des Papes.

His most recent play, *Répétition* (*Rehearsal*), written for Emmanuelle Béart, Audrey Bonnet, Denis Podalydès of the Comédie Française, Stanislas Nordey, and Claire Zeller, premiered December 12, 2014 at T2G, Théâtre de Gennevilliers- national dramatic center for contemporary creation as part of Festival d'Automne in Paris. It was afterward performed in Lyon and toured nationally and internationally in the fall of 2015.

At the end of 2016, he will direct the Italian version of the play, *Prova*, at the Teatro Arena del Sole de Bologna and at the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, and in 2017 *Ensayo* the Spanish version in Madrid. For *Répétition* (*Rehearsal*) Pascal Rambert was awarded from the French Academy with the annual prize 2015 of literature and philosophy.

In June, 2015, in the bare space of the Bouffes du Nord Theater in Paris, Rambert will present five of his plays: *Memento Mori*, *Clôture de l'amour* (*Love's end*), *Avignon à vie* (*Avignon for life*), *De mes propres mains* (*With My Own Hands*) and *Libido Sciendi*.

In January, 2016, he did premier his play *Argument*, written for Laurent Poitrenaux and Marie-Sophie Ferdane, at the CDN (National Theater Center) Orléans / Loiret / Centre, then present it at La Comédie in Reims and at T2G, Théâtre de Gennevilliers - national dramatic center for contemporary creation

He has recently written *Actrice* (*Actress*) which he will create on December 12nd 2017 at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris, starred for the main roles by Audrey Bonnet and Marina Hands, which will tour in France from January to March 2018..

Currently he is writing *GHOSTs* for some Taiwanese actors, he will direct it for the opening of the Performing Art Festival in Taipei in August 2017.

In May 2017 at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombiers in Paris, he will direct the text *Une vie* (*A life*) that he wrote for the actors of the Comédie-Française in Paris.