



Interview

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Interview with Tue Biering, October 2021 and January 2022

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We talk about the theatre's profile, working methods and, not least, what happens to the theatre's artistic expression when the performers, in addition to co-creating a performance, also represent themselves, so to speak. We begin in a slightly different place. Sometimes Tue Biering is a director and employee at, for example, Aalborg Theatre, Aarhus Theatre, The Royal Danish Theatre, Eventministeriet or Mungo Park. There is certainly an artistic overlap, but the different theatres have their own organisational production methods and conditions.

What is the difference between the way FIX&FOXY produces and the performances you work on in various institutional theatres?

Within FIX&FOXY, I feel that I can be 100% consistent. Here, concept, content, form, process, visual identity are integrated, and we can maintain our very own way of doing things, all the way from idea to the last performance. I can't do that anywhere else.

Can you outline your methodology?

I've always said that I don't have a method, that there is a new method for every project. This probably has to do with the fact that I had enough of methods and masterclasses at drama school and since then I have defiantly refused to have a method myself. But despite that, there are still some patterns and routines that recur. It is a method that has gradually become intuitive. Over time, I have also realised that if I want to create something new and leave my own routines behind, I have to be aware of my practice and recognise that there is probably a method. Only when I can map that pattern, can I break it. It's actually incredibly affected to claim that I don't have a method.

Do you make a kind of script for the performances?

We often do a lot of preparation, but at the same time we have to be able to constantly change the concept, because the people and the material we work with is something we only really get to know when we are working with it. We also don't know how reality will react to the concept, so we have to be prepared that everything can change. It feels like we prepare for many versions and scenarios at the same time and end up having created a number of different performances through the process. We are always ready to throw everything up in the air if it doesn't work the way we intended it to.

How do you persuade the participants to take part?

I don't feel I have to persuade anyone. It's more of an invitation into a shared artistic endeavour. It's

about making everyone feel safe. And then each process is very special, and I really have to listen to the people involved, because we can never figure things out from the beginning.

It's often about being ready and prepared to meet another person, and then there has to be transparency in the process and a curious openness to the fact that this person can take you somewhere new.

How does the locality play a role?

It depends very much on the individual performance. First and foremost, I think it should be relevant to the people who see it, and sometimes the performance gains that relevance by being locally anchored. With *Et dukkehjem* (A Doll's House), it has so far worked really well to make different versions that are actually quite similar, whether it is created in northern Norway or in France. But in London, for example, they said that some things could be quite difficult to realise and understand as family structures and the way you invite people home are completely different from what they are in Denmark. I think it's interesting when our Danish version meets a different context and a conversation is created about the Scandinavian view of family that the performance brings. I would say that Ibsen is interesting all over the world because his dramaturgical mechanics unfold and challenge something in all of us.

Is the aim to franchise (sell as a concept and a manual) FIX&FOXY's performances?

Getting other directors to take the performances further is something we are developing, and that's also why we need to be able to describe our processes and methods fairly precisely. It would be fantastic if there was someone who could follow me and then take over the performance when it was about to go out into the world. In the past, actors from the performances have acted as directors in reproductions in other countries. That's really nice. But I believe more and more that we need to have someone who can continuously be the person who takes over the performances and brings them further.

What does your future organisation look like?

It's still hard to say, but we would like to work more internationally and co-produce with international partners in the future. We would like to look out into the world and invite the world into our work. Simply because we love meeting other artists and creating complex stories that challenge our own perspective. We also need to work on becoming financially sustainable and less fragile by structuring our organisation in a way that gives us the support of different types of institutions and foundations. We dream of being able to create performances that can do much more and sometimes have a larger volume than the ones we have done so far. We run very fast in our small organisation, and we dream of having more people running with the many ideas we have.

When you apply, do you have to have the plan and concept ready a long time in advance?

Yes, and it can be quite challenging to have to look far into the future and decide what is relevant at that time. Therefore, you have to be very open and think of the projects as conceptual frameworks that you want to work with. An application is conceived quite loosely because there is a long

time until the idea is to be realised, so you can imagine all sorts of wild ideas and be bold. On the other hand, you are faced with the challenge that you are bound by the application, and it becomes a question of solving the completely crazy and impossible ideas. There's a good energy in that. Concepts are usually best when you don't have to think about realisation and practicalities at the same time. I am incredibly naïve and completely uninhibited at the beginning of the concept development. It is only later that I realise how difficult it is to implement. I really appreciate that naivety, because I can also become very cautious and then it becomes incredibly boring.

How do you plan to incorporate new media?

To me, the digital medium is a really exciting playroom to be in. The digital medium allows you to create stories that can be distributed on all kinds of platforms and that can be incorporated live in the theatre space. I'm currently talking to others who see a huge potential in the combination between the digital medium and theatre. Those of us who work in theatre can create live experiences, and if we can translate that into digital formats, for example, there are a lot of possibilities.

*How can we describe your poetics? Is it about putting yourself in a difficult and vulnerable position, or is it about seeking out what you know nothing about beforehand, what you are blind to? Could you tell us about the *Familieudredning 1* (Family Report, 2013), where you put your whole identity at stake?*

The *Family Report* is not produced by FIX&FOXY, but by Eventministeriet at the Royal Theatre. I made the performance with my girlfriend, Marie Rosendahl Chemnitz, and we asked ourselves: what would be the most difficult and the most unthinkable and transgressive to ourselves? It would be to make a performance with our own parents. Marie and I had written ourselves out of the story, but there is still a lot at stake when you work with people who are such a big part of your own life, and who you will hopefully see and interact with again far into the future. There were crying and protests and conflicts on all sides, and it was a very dramatic process that could have had consequences for the relationships between our parents. It became a generational narrative about some epochs they had all been through, but where each of them had made very different choices. The process ended up being rewarding for everyone in the family, and the performance gave us some common references, and that year we were able to celebrate Christmas with them all for the first time. The family got a new narrative.

*What was the dramaturgy of the *Family Report*?*

It was a simple life dramaturgy: Where do I come from? Who do I meet, and why do new directions appear in a person's life? It turned out that several members of the family had common references and had been in the same places in some historical events. I have realised that I often return to the

1) *Familieudredning* (Family Report) is about coincidences, dreams and expectations of the future, and the amazing things in the lives of ordinary people. The participants are the parents of Biering and Rosendahl Chemnitz, with new and old partners who know little about each other's life stories. They are brought together for the first time, and they talk about the butcher's daughter who regrets that she never became a gogo dancer, the girl from the evangelical home, the man who can prove his own immortality, the dyslexic boy who had a girl in every port and later suffered amnesia, the man who learned to fly by the power of thought, the girl who wanted to see the whole world and the woman who received a letter from Mick Jagger.

fate narrative. I can't get enough of hearing about people's lives. Why do they end up where they do, through this combination of chance and more or less conscious choices? In the process, I had to be completely detached and far more professionally defined than in other cases. I had to say: "In this room we pretend that we don't have a family relationship." In the beginning, they often spoke all at the same time and in all directions, so I had to say: "I'm in charge and when I say 'shut up', that's how it is." It scared them at first. It was a very new relationship for me, but it gave everyone a sense of importance and that we were taking it very seriously, that they were delivering something they hadn't done before and that it could only be done if they let me help them. So I was in charge of my parents and in-laws for a fortnight of rehearsals. That hasn't happened since, I can safely say.

Was it a lot of pressure for them to take part?

One of them told me that she had stage fright and was anxious every day when she stepped in front of her pupils as a school teacher. The worst thing she could imagine was singing in public – so of course she had to sing in the performance – at the Royal Theatre. It was a real struggle to see this person struggling with the real circumstance in the room, and it's something that we can all feel and recognise. I love working with the real struggle on stage, precisely because this is precisely unacted. This applies to both actors and non-actors.

How did you push?

There were many different forms of persuasion. And this time, I have to admit, it was pure persuasion, because it couldn't be anyone else but exactly the people who participated. There were several who initially reluctantly did it just for our sake. But everyone was curious and saw an opportunity to get to know themselves better. Through hours of interviews, they learnt as many new things about themselves as we did.

*What was it like working with the children in *Mod alle Odds* (*Against All Odds*)?*

With the children, it was about something as existential as destiny and the preconditions you have through your upbringing in a society. We wanted to challenge the assumption that we live in a society where everyone has equal opportunities.

We started casting a year before we were going to do the performance. We got a whole school class of 12-year-olds in for a workshop. I did some different choreographies with the class that illustrated who and how many of them slept badly at night, had divorced parents, what different socio-economic backgrounds they came from, etc. It worked well with that age group and number of children, and those workshops became the basis for the ongoing process.

How did you find the children?

We had many castings. The cast had to be statistically representative of the Danish population of children, and that proved to be very challenging. It was obvious that it was generally the same group of children with culturally orientated parents and with a social advantage from home who turned up for our castings, and what you would previously call the 'underclass' was always missing. It made sense that the group that didn't have the same level of support from home didn't show up

for the casting, and since the performance also had to shed light on personal things like economic and social background, it's a much more vulnerable position to be in than for the other children. For a long time, we had half a cast. We were missing those from the lower classes. The concept and planning of the performance had taken three years, and I didn't want to do the performance without them being represented. We rehearsed with the children who had already been chosen, and in the meantime, we were working on finding the rest of the cast, in collaboration with many different casting directors, consultants and people who work with children from different backgrounds. Sometimes we managed to engage some children, but we had to get the consent of the parents, and the parents had to understand the project, and sometimes that seemed close to impossible. We were genuinely close to not being able to realise the performance, and we found the last participants three weeks before the premiere, when we could finally start the actual work on the performance.

*What is your interest in children and young people and how did you work on the performance *Ungdom (Youth)*?*

Tue: I haven't really had a dream of working specifically with children or young people. In a way, it is a natural necessity in connection with some conceptual ideas. But that's really how it is with casting in all our productions.

In the case of *Youth* (2015), it started with us wanting to do something with big emotions, and when you are young, everything is existentially on the edge, emotions are magnified, and you face some of life's big fundamental considerations and decisions. We wanted to recreate some of those moments with the audience. The best cast for that performance would of course be young people.

The premise was that for this to be possible, it would have to be a very long process.

The work on *Youth* took six months of rehearsals, but an even longer period of preparation. The young people were in school and could only rehearse after normal working hours and not continuously. For the first couple of months, they went to rehearsals once a week, then twice a week, then three times a week. Then there was a run-up for two weeks, and the last three days we took them out of school. It was crucial that we had that much time together, to get to know each other, to get brave together, so they could develop themselves and the performance. At rehearsals, we sometimes let them watch each other's actions. We realised that it meant a lot to everyone to experience each other's stories. It was interesting to hear others talk about sexuality, about anxiety, about loneliness. All of a sudden, it was really moving and they built each other up. We discovered that they could facilitate each other by being an audience for each other. I don't think I direct, but I can tell people what works. I don't tell them what *doesn't* work, but I say: "That thing that you're doing right there, that's good". And when everyone hears that, they will also try to work in that direction. Because who doesn't want to do things well?

Is that generally part of your rehearsal method?

I quite rarely have what I would call rehearsals when I work with actors. I'd rather do run-throughs from day one. So it's usually just run-throughs and notes every day for many weeks. This allows the actors to work freely and try out many different things. Actors are often much smarter about situations and physical presence than I am, and it allows me to see their potentials and ideas and personal style. I wouldn't be able to do that if I asked them to do something I had planned beforehand. After each run-through, I can say: "I thought it was quite exciting when you did

that. But do something else tomorrow". Then something often emerges that is totally organic and feels right. I interrupt as little as possible until the last two or three weeks. Because by then we've developed a language and a sense of the performance. Only then do I go in and cut and rewrite, and then we suddenly get really busy. But the important thing is to get to the point where it has become the actors' own. "You can also say something other than what I've written", I usually say. However, they often end up saying what was originally written but which they have now made their own. Now, I don't want it to sound like it works every time, it doesn't.

Do you jump straight to the material without a reading rehearsal to make the actors co-creators?

I think that at reading rehearsals you often sit around a table and talk and expect to hear a lot of clever words. But I think there is a great quality in getting on the floor right away and trying some things out. Just the fact that you have created a space, a conceptual framework and decided that this particular group of actors will be the ones to create it, is a very concrete framework and premises that set a direction in the rehearsal room. I remember clearly from the first rehearsals of Youth that I said: "It has to come from you, because it is going to be about you. You're the ones who are experiencing being young right now, something the rest of us have forgotten, so you're the ones who have to deliver it.

Do you use a particular interview technique to elicit the personal material of the participants?

I have to admit that sometimes it's super banal. It's often something like asking "what's the worst thing you've experienced, and what's the most beautiful thing you've experienced, what's the hardest decision of your life", and if you can talk about the most beautiful and the worst and everything in between, you've gone a long way towards getting to know another person. Then you can quickly talk about turning points and dramatic moments. There's much more to it, of course, but it can be a very good kick starter and we all like to talk about those moments because they define who we are. Even very introvert people are happy to share those things when they are in a safe space. The most important thing is to create that space.

What's the most transgressive thing you've done?

The quick answer would probably be Pretty Woman A/S (Pretty Woman Ltd.), because at that time we had absolutely no experience with this kind of work, which we have practised many times since then. When we did Pretty Woman Ltd. in 2008, we had to cast prostitutes, and that was definitely transgressive. We had to meet people that I had no idea how to relate to. But what I learnt then are still some of the things we draw on. To understand that the greatest crime is to deprive people of the opportunity to be seen or to be heard. When you talk to some of the so-called "vulnerable", they often want to be on stage. But they never get the opportunity, they are stopped by a pedagogue, a doctor or other well-meaning people because they are not allowed to let themselves be "exposed". But in Pretty Woman A/S, there were some strong women who said: "Every day I have to make some pretty big decisions about some clients, so acting and being on stage, I can actually do that".

Another thing we also learnt was to bring in consultants to help us. Jeppe and I had a meeting with the manager of Reden, which is a shelter for prostitutes, and she said, "try talking to Tiller, here's her number". I guess she thought: "Then Tiller can say: "It won't work, boys". But Tiller, who

was a former drug prostitute, was simply fantastic. She understood what we wanted and thought it was the greatest idea in the world to do the performance. So she put her heart and soul into it and started contacting the women who worked as prostitutes near Halmtorvet. Here we realised how important it was to have a person with us who could guarantee that the people involved are doing well and that we are not going to do anything wrong. And if we do something wrong, we will be told. She said: "Listen boys, you have to look them in the eye, and you have to talk to them. They're just ordinary people." It was really cool because the worst thing you can do is talk to people as if they're not real people. So the most transgressive experience was *Pretty Woman A/S*, and at the same time it was the one that taught us that the boundaries are not as narrow as you think.

Can you say your production has an ethical perspective?

I'm not so keen on that. What do you mean by ethics?

Some might define it as a certain humane attitude. Others might say that the ethics lie in giving the stage to prostitutes, for example? It's not just a question of whether it's good or bad to be a prostitute.

In *Pretty Woman Ltd.*, we had a communications advisor who said that it was absolutely crucial that we didn't show our colours. If we described our personal intentions, it would be too easy to read and we would lose the potential for discussion. It is important to stay neutral and never be moral. We never take sides, but our concepts are sometimes staged as a kind of transgression, which brings an ethical discussion into play.

*Is there also a kind of transgression in *My Deer Hunter* (2020)?*

Putting people with PTSD on a stage with bright lights, loud noises and a lot of people watching is definitely a transgression. But it was crucial in order to show what they struggle with every day. But it starts somewhere else. *My Deer Hunter* was about making a time machine and asking the question: Can you go back in time to a point in life before an extremely transgressive and life-changing moment in a person's life and recreate it? We thought that one of the most life-changing things is being at war. That when you get a rifle in your hand, loaded with live ammunition, and you see people around you dying, it challenges something fundamentally human, and something will change in you. That's why a group of war veterans were involved, and that's why the inspiration for our time machine became the film, *Deer Hunter*.

It may also be a transgression to put the children in *Against all Odds* on stage with their own statistical destinies. To have a child say: "I'm going to kill myself when I'm 29" is pretty cruel. You just can't do that, but for us it's not so much about the fact that it's a transgression, but about creating experiences of consequence. But it's also important to say that we don't want to be provocative or transgressive as a starting point. That's not interesting, but I thought it was interesting when someone said we couldn't justify doing theatre with prostitutes when society allows prostitutes to be bought by men who put them in their car and drive them under Dybbøl Bridge, beat them up, don't pay them, and then throw them out of the car?

Can we talk about Dark Noon (2019) and the process from Western, to text and dramaturgy with the different spaces and your work with the actors?

Dark Noon began wanting to explore a huge blind spot we had in terms of Africa. Africa as a phenomenon has been a big part of our lives since we were kids. The perpetual guilt and powerlessness that has become a narrative and a dehumanisation of a huge continent in the world. Because Africa has often been made out to be a place where people are always starving, and where people are almost walking around with no clothes on. How could we try to explore this and bring it onto a stage? For a long time I had this idea that it was going to be about migration, and I was going to cast some people from Nigeria, who were potential immigrants, and they were going to talk about their own lives in a Western setting. But I could see where that performance was going. It would be a reproduction of a power relation, where I would direct the actors' story of Africa to satisfy my curious gaze. The performers would be ready-mades and good at playing themselves, but not particularly good at acting. It would be a predictable tale of poverty and people wanting to go to Europe. After a lot of deliberation, we decided that this was not what we were going to do. Instead, we wanted to find some good actors. I had no prerequisites for casting in Africa, but I started talking to people who had worked in different African countries and was advised to look for actors in South Africa. As luck would have it, I became a host for some international residencies organised by Metropolis. On the list of participants, I could see that there was one person from South Africa and I had a meeting with her. She told me that she knew a South African choreographer and dancer, Nhlanhla Malangu, who would be very compatible with the way I was working. When I contacted him, he was on tour with a performance and would be in Germany for a week. So I went to Germany, saw the performance and met with him the next day. Shortly after our meeting started, he opened his diary and asked: "when is it?" He got the dates. "That's fine" he said and made a mark in the diary. It was pretty crazy that it happened so quickly, and I'm usually very slow to make big and important decisions, but I could feel that it was the right thing to do. A few months later, I travelled to South Africa with our producer Annette Max Hansen and had a casting in Johannesburg with a whole bunch of actors and dancers. All sorts of people turned up for the casting, who were extremely talented. We wanted to find our own ensemble to get as much diversity in the group as possible, and we got a cast of personalities who were not just great performers, but who really brought their own stories.

How did the text come about?

I had struggled a lot with figuring out how to do this. It was a great concept in the application, but how was it to be realised? I had a great cast from South Africa, I knew there was something interesting in the Western setting, but I didn't have any material. Jokum Rohde gave us a lecture, because he's a total connoisseur of Westerns, but it was totally confusing with the incredible number of subcategories within Western films. I sat at home and watched all the sheriff films, stagecoach films, southern films, Indian films, etc. The deadline was approaching and I had no material and I was pretty desperate. I just watched more Westerns and made tons of notes, but I was missing some substance and some meaning.

With a rather thin concept and very loose ideas, I travelled to Johannesburg again with various themes that corresponded with the history of South Africa. These were themes and classical Western scenarios in different spaces such as saloon, gold mine, bank, railway and the like. I had written

the themes down on slips of paper and asked the players in turn to take one each and play a scene based on that theme. It was very playful and I encouraged the actors to integrate something from their own history. There were stories of alcoholism, poverty and violence and after a few rehearsals we all thought it was too stereotypical. It would become a reproduction of an old-fashioned Africa narrative, created by me sitting there with my big white hat and ivory cane. So I suggested we did it in a different way. I suggested that the players should represent me and my European migration story.

I suggested that they put white make-up on their faces, and in a way, it was at the same time a kind of exploration of representation. The difference between representing minorities and being at the top of the food chain, and then being someone who is used to being at the bottom and having to be represented by the others. We all got quite excited about that idea, and now I maybe had a concept with some substance that could help me create the material. A long time ago, I had bought a book about the history of the United States, which I have been reading on and off and keeping on my bookshelf. When I came home from Johannesburg, I took it out and realised that it was the manuscript. The whole manuscript was in the American history. Once I realised that, I put these Westerns aside and dived into the stories of European migration to the land of opportunity. We would still use the Western genre, but more as an aesthetic reference and a theatrical device. There was still a long way to go, because now I could visualise the dramaturgy, but in terms of scenography, we were still fumbling. We were very preoccupied with perspective. Should you look at or be inside the scenography? I sat with the scenographer Johan Kølckjær and moved all sorts of small set pieces around in a model, and we couldn't decide. We tore down and built new models of all sorts of Western towns, and suddenly it made sense. The whole American narrative is about building, it moves from the horizontal flat uninhabited landscape to the vertical, in taller and taller sky-scraping buildings. We cleared the stage, because of course it begins with an empty space, a flat, barren, unconquered land to be occupied. In that way, *Dark Noon* is, on another metaphorical level, about world building.

How do you approach representation today?

My view is that we need to talk about the potentials of representation, and it's been exciting to work in Sweden on a project I call *At Repräsentere En Anden* (Representing Another). The idea is to shift the conversation so that it's about potentials and not limitations. 99% of what we do is representations, so we need to examine representations and try to reclaim this dilemma-filled field. An actor can represent children, animals, fantasy creatures and anything else. Where do you draw the line? Maybe you have to be careful not to draw the line too close, because there might be people who actually need you to represent them. I sometimes ask people if they prefer to represent themselves or let an actor do it, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religious preference, etc. Then suddenly a constructive conversation starts to be established. My experience tells me that there is something interesting in seeing yourself represented by someone else, and often by someone who is not at all like me, but who is trying to capture the essence of who I am. I have to say, though, that I think it's a field that is very difficult to navigate in, and it's much more complex. I think that the problems with representation are sometimes about power and bad experiences with some representations that can be characterised more as bullying. The crucial thing is that we have become aware of what representation means. That it has a significant impact on "who and how". I have

become more aware of the power associated with representation and who is on stage and who is telling the story.

Was representation also what Viljens Triumph (Triumph of the Will, 2012) was about?

It was first and foremost about staging, seduction and beauty. Jeppe made the suggestion that we should recreate Leni Riefenstahl's infamous Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*, and to me it sounded crazy enough that we should do it. It was originally supposed to have four actors, but then three of the actors dropped out, and in the end, we were left with actor Anders Mossling and had to figure out how on earth we were going to tell the story of the world's greatest film, which originally had a cast of over a million people, with one actor. It turned out to be a blessing, because now there was a single, helpless person on stage that the audience wanted to help. The impossibility of the project turned out to be the best key to getting the audience to want to participate. The audience ended up representing and recreating the film scene by scene with Anders. That film is one big seduction and we were able to reproduce the seduction in this way. We were all seduced into making the Nazi salute, marching and loving the special community that the film shows from the 1934 Nurnberg Congress. And in that sense, you could say that the film is also about representation.

Is there a kind of self-representation in your work?

Well, in the beginning it was about reality reclaiming the representations of fiction. In other words, the way prostitutes were represented in the film *Pretty Woman* had to be re-appropriated by the people it was about. This has been an ongoing project for us, when we put the people on stage that the film is actually about. But I can feel that I now increasingly want to recapture the theatrical representation of reality. To renegotiate the theatre's aesthetics and approach. It's challenging in a dangerous, exciting and indeterminate way.

Do you sometimes find that your ideas are perceived differently than they are intended?

I have recently experienced this quite specifically in Germany, where I did my own adaptation of *Hamlet*, and where there was a lot of discussion about a scene in which Ophelia was to be drowned. I had decided that she should be drowned on stage instead of someone coming in and saying: "Have you heard that Ophelia has drowned?" I wanted it to be articulated that the woman was to be drowned. Shakespeare's plays were written in a pre-democratic, violently patriarchal time. It is problematic if we are not aware that we are reproducing those structures without commenting on it. I wanted Ophelia to say that and refuse to be drowned, and the other actors on stage should recognise that – and then drown her afterwards anyway. Some of the actors had a hard time with that at first. Many of the female staff at the theatre were furious with me for doing that scene. They asked me to remove the scene or let Ophelia leave the stage, but I thought that we would be telling a lie about the fact that there are no longer structures that precisely keep parts of society stuck in old structures. The scene was very uncomfortable for all of us, but I think it's important that the scene started a discussion. If we had let her go, it would have been feel good, and the performance would have been harmless and morally correct entertainment. Instead, it became a performance where audience members regularly went up on stage to stop that particular scene in protest, and I

think the theatre and the cast subsequently understood that it was important and good conflictual conversations that arose between the audience during the performance and afterwards.

You are making a performance about China?

The performance is called Imperiets Tropper (Imperial Troopers) and the basic idea is to make a performance that addresses the fears and this narrative that is exponentially increasing around China. For better or worse, there is a demonisation of a large area of the world. It's a huge blind spot for me. I'm not around any Chinese people myself. In high school, I was in the same class as a girl of Chinese background, but I never spoke to her, and her father owned a fast-food place. The only relationship I've had with Chinese people is the Chinese fast-food place close to where I lived as a child, and where I spent a large part of my youth eating jumbo burgers and playing arcade games. But that's a poor, stereotypical idea of what Chinese people are like. So, I would really like to do a performance with only Chinese people on stage, because their representation is so absent on stage in this country, in complete contrast to how much China is exposed in the media.

Representation is a necessary process in a democracy, but does representing the audience also help to create understanding and empathy?

I think that audience representation is interesting. We often talk about audience participation and it is crucial for me to consider the people sitting in the theatre. It's always easiest to point to those who are not in the theatre, those who are far away and whom it is safe to laugh at, but what if I point to those who are in the theatre and who most likely are a lot like me? Childishly, I want to leave scars on the audience. Something they remember. It's fine if they are provoked by the performances.

How do you avoid creating a moral compass that divides people in a kind of dramaturgy of polarities?

I think that the world we live in right now is quite overwhelming. And I think it's absolutely crucial that we become better at dealing with much more complex stories. But I myself am mentally limited, and even though I know I should embrace complexity, I can be very doubtful about whether I really want to dissolve the binary dramaturgies. Because you lose control when you dissolve the clear markers. At the moment, what threatens our coexistence is driven by some extremely powerful binary dramaturgies. I can be ever so open minded, but storytelling in clear, easy-to-understand dramaturgies is a very powerful weapon, and if I don't use it, what do I have to offer? In a moment, the world may be polarised to an extent where I will have to choose side. I want to tell myself and everyone else that I'm better than that, but it's naive to think that I won't also want to choose the simple narrative. That scares me.

Do you have any ethical doubts when you ask people to be themselves and be vulnerable?

I can see myself accused of being the artist who exploits other people's fragility and tragedy for personal gain. "Those poor people are destroyed by being on stage and exposing themselves." I think this is worth discussing, and now I can say with great certainty that the opposite is happening. On the contrary, we are going to hide some people who want stage space. Because we protect them so much, but they're not really interested in that, because most of them are super strong. I now have

15 years of experience in dealing with the ethical considerations and making sure that I have people employed who are incredibly good at handling the different tasks involved in a performance. But I can always ask myself if I'm doing the right thing and I spend quite a lot of time scrutinising myself.

How are you as a leader?

I'm actually an anti-democrat, because I don't believe in democracy within my own practice. I'm very fascinated by, for example, a group like the German Gob Squad, who work with a flat structure. I've tried it, but the result is never really good because what I do often requires some kind of management. My principal task is to be a curator and manager for a whole bunch of talents and at the same time make sure that it doesn't become a mess of all kinds of directions and voices. I have to curate and edit all the time. There should be no doubt that at the end of the day, I am the one who makes a decision. And if I get it wrong, that's also my responsibility.

But at the same time, you're pretty good at distributing management as a directing tool?

I certainly hope that everyone has the experience of being involved in the process. I would find it boring if it was only my words that counted. But having said that, I am also aware that I have very clear views on aesthetics, text, dramaturgy, and I also say no quite a lot. It would be wrong to tell anyone that it's a flat structure because I think I work best myself when someone is in control. I think it makes people calmer in a room, and I try to avoid saying that I'm in charge. Because then it won't be very pleasant for anyone. But if everyone knows that's how it is, then it's my responsibility to create the best framework so that everyone can collaborate creatively, and everyone can feel that they are being heard and used. And then it's fun.

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Sex and Violence. Photo Rebecca Arthy