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IDIOMATIC : a poly-idiomatic (*multi-linguistic*) show by Marie Henry and Transquinquennal. A tongue-twisting entertainment on the tip of one's tongue, turning on mother tongues and other tongues in a post-Babel performance that got lost in Google Translate.

The show is brought forth by the meeting of the actors itself, and by their impossibility to share a common tongue. It is a show without a «mother» tongue, designed to go everywhere, to meet all audiences. It is an internationalist show, not a globalist one. Not one word of «globish» will be pronounced, each actor/actress will keep his/her language and identity on stage.

The actors try to elaborate a common communication tool in order to execute the show the audience has come to see. The dynamics of the show are structured by incomprehension and cultural differences. It is a participatory show in which the spectators find themselves in the same position than those who are making it. They understand nothing, or *not everything* what is being said, but they can use their smartphones. If, at the start of the show, they will have been asked to shut them off, the actors, in their desperation, will ask them to turn them on again, to find, with the help of their apps or surfing on the web, a translation, the one that will save the situation.

Like all learning processes, **IDIOMATIC** adapts and modifies itself by trial and error. The participation of the audience and the progress of each actor in the elaboration of comprehension will modify the show in real time. From a potentially frightening starting point («*We don't understand each other, it's awful !*»), the show will evolve toward a more optimistic statement. The need for communication is rooted in human nature. The absence of a common language is not an obstacle. The desire to communicate and to meet others is far more fundamental.

STAGE SIZE : 10m x 10m - **SET UP** : 2 services
ESTIMATED TEAM : 5 actors, 2 technicians on tour
ESTIMATED DURATION : 90 min

CREATION : SEASON 2017/2018

PRODUCTION : TRANSQUINQUENNAL, THÉÂTRE DE LIÈGE, THÉÂTRE-CINÉMA PAUL ÉLUARD DE CHOISY-LE-ROI (SCÈNE CONVENTIONNÉE POUR LA DIVERSITÉ LINGUISTIQUE).
WITH THE SUPPORT OF FÉDÉRATION WALLONIE-BRUXELLES

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TRYING TO MAKING YOURSELF UNDERSTOOD – WHAT A PIPE DREAM.

The language I speak, my mother tongue, is not a perfect tool for communication. First of all, it's not a tool since a tool is an object, and in the preceding sentence 'tool' is used as a metaphor. You see, my tongue can't transform raw material into a manufactured object (having said that, I have to add that I know nothing about the digestive process). I use it for a purpose, and that's why I said it was a tool. In fact, my mother tongue – not my mother's tongue – is not my tongue. The tongue is not mine, I speak one tongue and the other is in my mouth, but when I use the tongue in my mouth to speak the tongue my mother speaks – her tongue – I'm using my mother tongue, not my mother's tongue. What's my mother got to do with all this anyway? And there – I mean here – thank heavens I'm not speaking but writing, since otherwise you'd be wondering whether my mother's stung. So, to clear up any possible confusion, let me repeat:

– My mother tongue, and neither my mother's tongue nor my mother's stung!

Anyway, to get back to my mother, and her tongue, I often tell myself that if I can explain the show to her and she gets it, then I'm good to go.

– Mum, IDIOMATIC will be about... It centres on ... It develops towards ... It will grow around ... The theme of the show is ...

Our tongue is our tongue. We can switch from one to another, but we can't rid ourselves completely of the first one (or ones) we learned.

IDIOMATIC will be unlike any other show you've ever seen – and even those you haven't. If we didn't have this shared vehicle, language, you wouldn't even realize what makes us so original.

- So, what's the show about?*
- It opens with two actors who don't speak the same language.*
- Do we understand what they're saying?*
- You can understand one of them. Or else we'll use an interpreter. A man, or a woman, who speaks three languages, the languages of the two actors and our own tongue.*
- OK, or else you can use two of them, two actors who speak the same language. So that at least they understand each other.*

– Right. Like English, for instance. And if no one speaks English, then we'll try to come up with another possible lingua franca. And if there's none, we'll use sign language. Or we'll make up a language.

– So what are these two actors talking about?

– Before they can talk about anything, they're going to try to understand one another.

– Understand what?

– What they're telling each other.

– We're going around in circles.

– You mean that by always turning in the same direction we end up forming a circle.

– Yes.

– At the same time, in car parks with a helical ramp we keep going around in the same direction without turning around in circles – we go up...

– ... or down.

As Deleuze said (in 'A Thousand Plateaus'), roughly in these terms:

– 'We suffer not so much from incommunicability as from the obligation of always having something to say.'

Words that look or sound the same don't necessarily mean the same thing. If you're 'constipado' in Spanish, you're not suffering from any digestive trouble, but you do have a cold. A 'douche' [doosh] in French is a shower, not a liquid used for medicinal purposes as in English. In Canadian French, when a Quebecois uses 'gosses' [goss], he means testicles – not quite the same as the French 'gosses' ('kids'). The Japanese use 'Tasukete' [tas-kay-tay] to call for help, but Walloons use it to mean that something is broken ('T'as skété le verre' – 'You've broken the glass') while Flemings will think they're being offered a cup of tea ('Taske tee?' – 'Cup of tea?').

The essence of what we want to evoke in this project will weave itself in between the words, between the languages.

The lingering question is this: 'Is it possible to say everything about language in words?'

There must be a limit somewhere, surely. It's a bit like trying to see your own eyes with your own eyes. So we have to try to find the spot where language doesn't work and stay there long enough to see what happens.

– You see what I mean? Mum?

WHY DO WE ALL SPEAK DIFFERENT LANGUAGES?

We use language to make ourselves understood, to communicate (with others as much as with ourselves). It's how we create our own world, it's how we analyze it and describe it in the language we share with our fellow native-speakers. It's much more than a language, it's a more or less specific world view, with its own particular variations besides: French spoken in Belgium is subtly different from French spoken in France, Switzerland, Quebec or Africa. When we go beyond these borders, we feel we are expressing our difference, that regardless of the content of what we are saying we are conveying a lot more, often without realizing that we are doing so. So we also use language to differentiate ourselves, to stand out, and we can't dispense with these 'borders', these differences in the various regions of the world that are our ways of speaking our shared language.

But we are at a particular loss when we leave this shared space and are confronted with the unknown world of other languages. We are so different that we can no longer even say so, and the other no longer even perceives it. In the best of cases, we can rely on a potentially common other territory, another language, English for instance, which we grope our way around. It is the communication tool that becomes the stake of this conversation reduced to its bare essentials. It's a question of learning to speak again – we are forced to rebuild a new language, to start from scratch. Gesturing, gesticulating, repeating a word so often that it might just transcend borders and resonate with the other. That is how pidgin languages emerge and other lingua franca, for the sake of 'commerce', understood in the broad sense of 'communication', of 'relation'.

It is out of this discomfort zone that we want to create the structure underlying **IDIOMATIC**. Between what is most intimate and what is most remote, to experiment what languages tell us, from the patois and most vernacular tongues to the languages like Japanese, Finnish and Inuit.

But that's not all. Language is not only a means of communication and a carrier of identity. Besides the transmission of

content, besides the cultural logic and references it induces, language is also a reservoir of opacity, an instrument of deceit and power, a space of dissimulation, a propaganda tool, a vehicle of persuasion, sometimes even a lethal weapon: in any case, it shapes reality, giving it the appearance we want it to have.

It harms and categorizes those who fail to master it, or speak it with the wrong accent. It technocratizes and jargonizes itself to good account. It indicates that you belong to an economic class, a social group, an ethnicity, and when we master several of them, it's an advantage, and not only a cultural one.

But it is also, via a boomerang effect, a vehicle of decolonization, through an act of appropriation of the colonizer's language, like French in Africa or English in India, and it emancipates, it stimulates the imagination, incites exchanges and participation, evolution, change, progress, the thrill of being together.

Many idioms, therefore, and many peoples who use them.

Many contact areas and many conflict zones.

Many difficulties inherent in each language, many turns of mind, many pronunciations, many possibilities and impossibilities of understanding and misunderstanding one another.

A fascinating playing field.