

# Royaume

Multidisciplinary show



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**Royaume**

Cie\_Avec multidisciplinary show 2017

Design and staging Alexandre Simon et Cosima Weiter

Text and staging Cosima Weiter

Actors Pierre Moure, Claire Deutsch

Sound staging Denis Rollet

Movie Alexandre Simon

Lighting Marc Gaillard

Scenography Cie\_Avec

Administration and distribution Daïkokucho Productions

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## **Synopsis**

A young woman, Ella and a young man Alan. They were born in the same residential estate in England. He was a brilliant student and seducer but he has gradually failed in a life of odd jobs, doing deals and living in the area that the city offers to lost people in this early 21st century. As for herself, by dint of hard studios, she became a lawyer, made a good marriage and started a family. Back in the city of her childhood to help people who were less fortunate than herself, she feels that her activity is futile and endures discouragement.

Ella and Alan meet by chance as each of them is fleeing his own obsessions. Together they leave for a night and a day of wandering, seeking solutions to immediate problems : to cover to sleep in a park, share some food, or more. Their exchanges are made of timid gestures and practical solutions that will allow them to continue their journey : so they cross an imaginary English town.

This fortuitous reunion rekindled memories, forgotten emotions, their word is the expression of their inner voice. Thus resurface memories of poor children, their progress and their questions. Meanwhile, the beautiful light filled them with happiness. Vertigo then on the size of the city and hunger bring them back to their neighborhood. It has been completely emptied and walled. The show ends on a song calling for revolution.



The two characters come from the same neighborhood. They met as they were children and adolescents and went to high school together. They belong to the same generation, born in the early 1980s, both from very poor families hit by the economical crisis in which their parents who were workers spent a long part of their working lives unemployed in increasingly difficult conditions.

Alan was a bright boy, his taste for literature differed from his comrades. His outspokenness and his culture seduced both his teachers and classmates and everyone was betting on his bright future. But after high school, he dropped out, refusing to be part of a hierarchical system, to compromise, rejecting even the program of life that offers society: work, marriage, children, house on credit... He eventually settled in a precarious life made of odd jobs, and small deals.

Alan remains a sort of teenager, optimistic and confident that everything is always possible, and that all perspectives remain open. This faith is expressed by the fact that he plays. He plays when he has a little money even before meeting his basic needs. He loses his money as if he had enough of it. He composes with the fact that he is homeless, living from squats to homes. He also arranges with his conscience and honesty, completing deals and petty crimes to survive. He enrolled himself in the English literary history, seeing himself as a hero of Dickens. Alan has a sort of elegance, whose ultimate expression is probably the way he suggests that it is master of his destiny and that he has somehow chosen his situation. The viewer will gradually understand that it is not so, and that his difficulty in finding a place in society doesn't depend on his free will.

Ella has meanwhile continued her education after high school. Thanks to her hard work, she has succeeded in combining studies and odd jobs to become a lawyer. Today she is married and the mother of two children, her material situation is comfortable. Ella has worked a lot to get out of her social environment, with the idea that once out of the woods, she could help the less fortunate. Her idealism runs into this infinite task. She has the feeling that she's playing a part in a cruel farce in spite of herself. She leaves her home one evening with the feeling that she can no longer fulfill her role, which doesn't mean anything more for her.



### **The dispossessed in the UK**

The United Kingdom is the cradle of liberalism and initiated the industrial revolution, giving birth to a new era. A few generations later, that is to say today, it has already led to the online economy. But industrial decline and monetarism have dramatically reduced the possibilities of traditional working class jobs. Thus the novelty is not poverty itself but the lack of prospects to work, because the knowledge, the skills that an individual has acquired during his training and career have become obsolete. At the same time, unskilled jobs tend to become more and more precarious. In fact, today the UK is probably the European country where the capitalist economy is expressed in the most complete and most violent manner, even producing generations of left behind people. That is why we have chosen to situate our show in United Kingdom though it should have a more universal appeal.

### **The figure of the homeless**

In literary fiction as in films, exclusion, poverty and the figure of the homeless seem to play an important role in the UK. That is the impression we have by reading the works of Charles Dickens, Robert Mac Liam Wilson, Zadie Smith, William Boyd and Ian McEwan, or by viewing the films of Mike Leigh and Ken Loach whose characters appear as figures of dispossession. There is of course a desire to social realism, but certainly an expression of fear, a concern that undermines the collective unconscious of this liberal society. So our characters will be fed of our readings, and most of all Alan who places himself in the tradition of Dickens characters.

### **The residential estate**

Like many European countries, the United Kingdom experienced a severe housing crisis after the Second World War. The solution found to the lack of housing solutions was building residential estates bordering cities, often examples of Brutalist architecture. This dense housing allowed to offer cheap new housing to the growing population of baby boomers.

This solution has sometimes proved to be problematic because these buildings often quickly designed and built contained hardly perfectible gaps. Some of these residential estates, like Hulme Crescents in Manchester, were demolished as early as 1990 to return to more traditional housing. Others, like Edenham and the Trellick Tower in London are still inhabited. Park Hill in Sheffield, has been emptied of its inhabitants and its windows and doors have been walled, it is now being rehabilitated.

We'll meet people who have lived in these residential estates and visit the ones located far from urban centers to try to capture how the fact of living in these residential estates influences their lives.

## **Disappearing**

From the time the social system becomes insufficient, even hostile, because it is not far from poverty to illegality, one can find advantage to disappear, waive his social existence, waive to be a citizen. Alan practice social disappearance, he gave up health insurance, has no phone and no credit card. The only money he has is small change. With no home on his name, he has experimented various forms of housing, from the squat and informal sublets, couches of friends, until emergency shelters and parks, the corridors of the tube, bridges and banks of the Thames. During the preparation of *Royaume*, we will endeavor to find those hidden places in the folds of the city where homelesses take shelter. We will try to understand the practical and psychological implications of such a withdrawal from society.

## **Walking**

Walking is the least expensive mean of transportation, and one that allows you to go in the most inaccessible places. This is the most used mean of transportation by the poor people. For Ella, who has become accustomed to travel by public transport or by car, walking generates awareness of distances, and she is quickly exhausted by exercise. She also discovers that the universe is infinitely larger and more complex than she thought, and they face many more difficulties than she had imagined. Thus the multi-lane highway she usually uses to get to the city center turns to be an obstacle. But she also discovers new places, she was accustomed to cross without seeing them.

## **On alert**

In *Royaume*, when Ella is tired, she gives way to despair and exhaustion, Alan on the contrary, expresses little emotion. The experience of poverty has forged his character and sharpened his senses. It is useless to cry : poverty is commonplace and does not arouse compassion. For a resident of the street, a moment of inattention can lead to the disaster of arrest or assault. Less dramatically, the slightest relaxation can mean a missed opportunity for a good meal, a cigarette or coffee. Alan is extremely aware of this fact. So that he can no longer fall totally asleep, and remains on alert at all time.

As for our previous shows Funkhaus, Marzahn, Highway and Angels, our work starts with research and an immersion in a culture. For Royaume, we will scout locations and interview people of various cities in the UK. We will turn the film sequences that will be projected in the show. With these elements, we can create a theatrical form related with what we discover.

### **Preparatory work**

Starting in February 2013, we have conducted preparatory work in England : Leeds, Bradford, Manchester, London at first and then Liverpool and Sheffield in order to understand the structure of cities and their evolution since the sixties. Alexandre completed a first serie of shots, which already gives us ideas for the set design, light and the general visual form of the show. For her part, Cosima recorded sound climates in cities.

### **Residences in the UK**

In our next residences in the UK we are going to shoot the video sequences and will record the sounds that will be used in the show. Furthermore, we wish to meet and interview people on the spot. Inhabitants of residential estates in London as well as people who lived in Park Hill behind Sheffield Station. Our questions will focus on their daily lives and the kind of sociability that thrives in these estates.

We also project to speak to the "dispossessed". We want to ask them which solutions they find to survive everyday. How do they respond to such basic questions as : how to find shelter, food, clothing, medicine when money is missing. All these meetings will be recorded so that Cosima can refer to them to write the text. Alexander will film to document these meetings.

### **Writing the script of the show**

Images, interviews and lived experiences constitute a material on which we will base to specify the personalities of Alan and Ella and build them a biography, personal and shared memories. At this point, we will be able to build the scenario of the show. This scenario will determine the meaning and definitive articulation of different elements, text, film sequences, stage design and projection space, music, light and staging.

### **Testing integration in the sequences of the film**

We will use the preparatory film before shooting the final sequences that will be projected in the stage area and will integrate the actors in the picture. This will allow us to determine the directions of tracking shots, scaling and framing plans to shoot.

### **Turning film sequences**

We will shoot the film sequences based on the basis of the scenario and the integration tests with the help of an assistant on the spot. Concrete sounds can be added later, but they won't be direct sounds.

### **Writing the text**

The writing of the text will begin during our residences in the UK. It will be based on notes and observations made during our experiences and our meetings. The interviews will be an amount of valuable informations and a writing source. After the last residence in the United Kingdom, Cosima Weiter will have all the elements needed to write the text.

### **Composition of musical elements**

The musician will perform sounds taken in the English cities, he will compose sound modules from which we can build a coherent sound background.

### **Choice of 45 turns discs**

We will perform a selection of songs of the English pop, rock and punk music in order to make integration tests in the global structure of the show and sound modules.

### **Creation and final plan of scenography**

Alexandre Simon will select film sequences that will form a large part of the scenography. In collaboration with the manufacturer, he will define their projection space. With Cosima Weiter, he will decide which accessories to leave on the stage to be used by the actors. The set design will be built before the start of rehearsals.

### **Rehearsals**

We will favor rehearsals with all the elements that make up the show because all are interdependent.

Cie\_avec



After Funkhaus in 2009, Marzahn and Highway in 2012, and then Angels in 2015, Royaume is the fifth show to be put on by cie\_avec, founded in 2009 by Alexandre Simon and Cosima Weiter. Together they have developed a creative process that is based on an immersion into a geographic and cultural territory. The text is partially made up of interviews, it's written simultaneously with video images, the music and the scenography.

The relationship between architecture and power, and traces from the past that are perceived by attentively observing the present are their main interests.

[www.avec-productions.com](http://www.avec-productions.com)

## **Biographies**

### **Alexandre Simon – Stage direction and video creation**

Video artist Alexandre Simon was born in Geneva in 1963. His experience with multidisciplinary performance started in 1986 with the group Ka, which continued up to 1992. They made 5 shows together. In 1993, he focused on creating sets for video projections on stage for dance, music, and theater. He has notably collaborated with Fabienne Abramovich, Carlo Brandt, Gabriel Scotti, Barbara Nicolier, Orélie Fuchs, Maya Boesch, Noemi Lapzeson, The Young Gods.

As a video artist he makes installations, films, and video mixes in collaboration with Marcello Silvio Busato, Gabriel Scotti, Vincent Haenni, Jacques Demierre, Gérard Burger, A.L.S.O. melodie and authors Françoise Ascal and Cosima Weiter. His work has been shown in Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, South America, and Japan, in institutional theaters such as the Théâtre de la Colline à Paris, the Festival d'Avignon, Théâtre Vidy Lausanne, the Comédie de Genève. as well as alternative theaters such as the Galpon, the Cave 12 in Geneva, the Lichtblick Kino in Berlin, the Superdeluxe in Tokyo. Since 2009 he has been working on shows with other artists: Blanc with Jacques Demierre and Isabelle Duthoit, Funkhaus, Marzahn, Highway and Angels with Cosima Weiter.

### **Cosima Weiter – Stage direction and text**

Cosima Weiter was born in Lyon in 1973. She specialized in literature studies, and continued her education at the ENM in Villeurbanne studying electroacoustic composition with Bernard Fort. Simultaneously she worked on her sound poetry mixing recorded sound and live voice on stage. She writes in French and German, and has invented a language in between these two languages. She often gives readings of her sound poetry in France, Switzerland, Germany, and Luxembourg in such places as the Instants chavirés in Montreuil, the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, at the Villa Gillet and Subsistances in Lyon, at the Cave 12 in Geneva and the French Institute in Berlin. Since 2009, she has been writing pieces and staging them with Alexandre Simon within the Cie\_Avec. She recently coauthored Funkhaus, Marzahn, Highway and Angels.

# Dans «Angels», l'immigration approchée par la sensation

> **Scènes** Au Grütli, à Genève, un spectacle restitue la parole des immigrés de L.A.

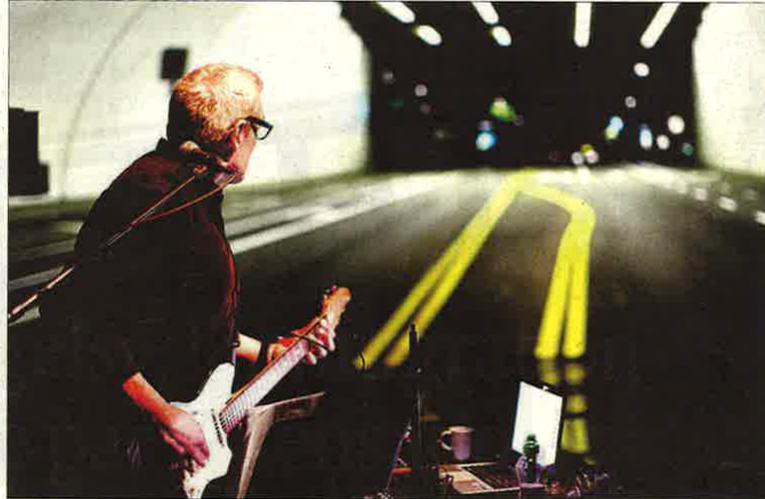
> **Musique et images**, cette plongée agit comme une matrice

Marie-Pierre Genecand

Les spectacles de Cosima Weiter et d'Alexandre Simon sont des matrices. Des espaces clos, homogènes, cohérents qui plongent le spectateur dans un état second et permettent une réception basée sur les sensations. Cosima écrit, Alexandre tient la caméra. Tous deux voyagent accompagnés de leur enfant. En Allemagne d'abord, à Berlin, sur les décombres du communisme, le regard tourné vers le passé. Puis aux Etats-Unis, du côté de l'avenir et de la croissance effrénée. *Angels*, quatrième création du duo, dresse le portrait de migrants venus à Los Angeles en quête de prospérité. Dans la peau du narrateur, Pierre-Isaïe Duc œuvre tout en douceur.

Soporifique? De fait, *Angels* est, à l'exception de quelques riffs endiablés de Blaine Reiningger, musicien en live, moins rock et moins dense que le précédent *Highway*, opus sur les vastes espaces américains, griffé par les sombres accents de la musique de Franz Treichler et la colère rentrée du narrateur Pierre-Félix Gravière (LT du 25.09.2012). A côté de cette charge à la fois sourde et intense, *Angels* fait office de paisible traversée.

Mais cette douceur a un avantage: mettre en pleine lumière les immigrants que le couple de créateurs a rencontrés. Dans *Highway*, le portrait de l'Amérique relevait du puzzle, de la diversité des chocs esthétiques, du brouillage de pistes. La matière était cryptée. Ici, le souci de Cosima Weiter et d'Alexandre Simon est de bien faire entendre la parole des immigrés. Le récit d'Eduardo, transsexuel mexicain dont les parents ont dû payer le «coyote» pour passer de l'autre côté; les peurs d'Ali, chauffeur de taxi bengali qui hésite à dire qu'il est musulman depuis le 11 septembre 2001; le sort de Rubal, jeune Indien qui souhaitait devenir biologiste, mais qui a dû reprendre l'épicerie familiale et se console en écrivant des romans d'anticipation. Ou encore le scepticisme de Jason, jeune Coréen qui ne connaît son pays d'origine qu'à travers quelques re-



Angels, les immigrants entre fuite, dépaysement et solitude mis en scène au Grütli. GENÈVE, 13 AVRIL 2015

cettes de cuisine... Chaque migrant a sa propre histoire et le mérite d'*Angels* est de restituer cette singularité avec beaucoup d'attention et de respect.

La douceur a un avantage: mettre en pleine lumière les immigrés que le couple a rencontrés

Le procédé? Chaque migrant apparaît d'abord sur grand écran dans un plan fixe, silencieux, presque immobile. La séquence dure long-

temps. Ensuite, Pierre-Isaïe Duc prend la pose du sujet et restitue sa parole. «Il n'y a pas de justice. Rien que de la chance ou de la malchance», dit le comédien, jambes écartées, porte-voix d'Arnaldo, flic à moto. «Dieu m'est témoin, j'ai menti. Quand on me demandait, je disais que j'étais chrétien», déclare le comédien au doux sourire sur les traces d'Ali, le chauffeur de taxi. Tantôt, c'est la ville qui parle. Et le verbe de Cosima Weiter est ample, lyrique: «Ils viennent, j'étends mes bras. J'ai de la place. Sous mon ciel, sur mes trottoirs, dans mes rues borgnes, sur mes plages, mes collines, au bord des piscines: de la place. Une vie meilleure c'est moi. Pour ceux qui savent jouer des coudes,

qui veulent en découdre. J'ouvre mes bras. Je suis à eux, ils sont à moi, je suis leur voix.» Un flot poétique sur des images d'Alexandre Simon – de banlieue, de logements, de route – qui défilent cette fois.

Mais tout cela ne serait rien sans la partition obsédante et mélodieuse de Blaine Reiningger. On sent le songwriter chez cet Américain né en 1953 dans le Colorado. Ses envolées au violon, ses grondements à la guitare ouvrent des horizons. Sa voix accroche. Présent sur scène, le compositeur est un élément moteur de la matrice.

*Angels*, jusqu'au 3 mai, Théâtre du Grütli, Genève, 022 888 44 84, [www.grutli.ch](http://www.grutli.ch)

## Angels

In « Angels », immigration approached through sensation  
Scene : At the Grütli, Geneva, a show renders the L.A. migrants words.

Music and images this dive works as a matrix.

Cosima Weiter and Alexandre Simon's shows are matrices. Coherent, homogeneous closed spaces which plunge the audience in a daze which allows a reception based on sensations. Cosima writes and Alexandre holds the camera. They travelled together along with their child. First to Germany in Berlin (...). Then to United States looking towards the future and the unbridled growth. Angels, the fourth creation of the couple, paints the portrait of migrants who came to Los Angeles looking for prosperity. Pierre-Isaïe Duc works as a quiet narrator.

Soporific ? As a matter of fact, except for a few of Blaine Reininger's furious riffs, (...) Angels acts as a peaceful trail. But this softness has one advantage : put the migrants whom the couple met in bright light. (...). Here, Cosima Weiter and Alexandre Simon's intention is to have the migrants' voices heard. The story of Eduardo, a Mexican transexual, whose parents had to pay el coyote to cross the border. The fear of Ali, a Bengali taxi driver is afraid to tell that he's Muslim since september 11th 2001 ; the destiny of Rubal, who wanted to become a biologist but had to take over the the family's liquor store and seeks solace writing a science-fiction novel. Or the scepticism of Jason, a young Korean guy who only knows his country through a few cooking recipes... Each migrant has his own story and the merit of Angels is to render this singularity with careful consideration and respect.

The process ? Each migrant first appears on a large screen in a static shot. silent, almost at a standstill. The sequence lasts in time. Then Pierre-Isaïe Duc literally poses as the character and renders his words. "there's no justice. Only good luck. Or bad luck." says the actor, standing legs apart, the spokesperson of Arnaldo, a motorbike-riding cop. "God be my witness, I lied. when asked, I said I was a Christian", states the actor with a soft smile, impersonating Ali, the taxi driver. Sometimes, the city speaks, and Cosima Weiter's words becomes wide, lyrical : « They're coming, and I reach out with open arms, I have room. Under my sky. On my sidewalks, in my shady streets, on my beaches, my hills, by the pools : room. A better life is what I am. For those who know how to elbow their way through, those eager for battle. I reach out with open arms. I'm theirs, they're mine. I'm their voice. » A poetic stream on Alexandre Simon's pictures of suburbs, houses and roads flashing by.

But it would be nothing without Blaine Reininger's haunting and tuneful score. we can feel the songwriter in this American born in Colorado in 1953. His musing violin, his roaring guitar open horizons. His voice catches us. Present on the stage, the composer is a driving force of the matrix.

Le Temps, 24 avril 2015, Marie-Pierre Genecand



# Des anges sans ailes

GENÈVE • Première pour «*Angels*» de Cosima Weiter et Alexandre Simon au Théâtre du Grütli, humble mémorial dédié à Los Angeles et à ses éternels nouveaux habitants.

NICOLA DEMARCHI

Il paraît qu'ils furent 44 esclaves à fonder la ville de Los Angeles. Une cohue de renégats en déroute aux origines disparates. Qui cherchant la liberté par la mer, qui la paix au-delà des frontières, qui la richesse. Arrivés à l'océan, ne pouvant aller plus à l'ouest, ils plantèrent alors leur camp de base et le nommèrent Los Angeles. Depuis ce jour, le flux vers la cité des anges n'a jamais connu de répit. Et à chaque nouvelle vague migratoire, un double dénominateur commun semble s'imposer telle une condition, voire un laissez-passer: l'espoir d'une vie meilleure accompagné d'une égale envie d'oublier le passé, origines comprises.

C'est entre autres de cela que parle *Angels*, ultime création du tandem Cosima Weiter et Alexandre Simon dédiée à la mégapole californienne, à voir jusqu'au 3 mai au Théâtre Grütli à Genève: «Des arbres qui poussent loin de leurs racines.» Si le sujet est on ne peut plus vaste (à savoir tracer la topographie humaine que dessinent ces nouveaux arrivés dans une ville comme Los Angeles), le traitement, à l'image des précédents spectacles du duo, ne saurait être plus sobre et frontal.

## Sans passé

Voici donc des images tournées dans ce décor urbain unique, projetées dès le début à même le fond de la scène façon cinémascope. Los Angeles s'y présente d'emblée sous ses traits les plus banals: des boyaux d'autoroutes percés par des phares de voitures; une bouche de métro d'où sortent de tardifs usagers; un taxi campé devant le magasin d'un concessionnaire automobile. De cette toile de fond, avec laquelle il se confond parfois, se détache un comédien (Pierre-Isaïe Duc). Il sera le porteparole de cette humanité déracinée, qui tente de se frayer un chemin de survie ou de prospérité à L.A. Il sera ainsi tantôt un chauffeur de taxi bengali cachant sa religion musulmane par peur de représailles, tantôt un latino qui ignore ses origines, et parfois Simon Rodia: ce pauvre immigré italien qui construisait autrefois, dans le



La silhouette de Pierre-Isaïe Duc, en errance dans le décor urbain projeté de Los Angeles. CHRISTIAN LUTZ

quartier de Watts, un monument aussi démesuré que l'absurdité de la vie et de certains destins, pour reprendre, sitôt son œuvre accomplie, le chemin du retour vers son pays.

Mais loin de l'humble exemple d'un Simon Rodia, cette nouvelle humanité 100 % angeline, aveuglée par la fuite en avant, oubliée au passage non seulement ses origines, mais aussi son statut social. «Si tu travailles, tu peux t'en sortir», s'encourage l'un. «Je ne sais pas vraiment d'où je viens, mais je sais que mes enfants seront américains», assène un autre. «Partir d'ici!», ricane un dernier, «partir pour moi, ce serait aller vivre à West Hollywood (*quartier chic de la ville, ndr*)».

L.A., peut-être plus qu'aucune autre ville au monde, c'est donc aussi cela: une fierté acquise. En amont, un rêve. Souvent rien de plus. L'évoca-

tion du passage de ces «anges» sur les dalles de la cité (fruit d'un travail d'enquête et de témoignage mené sur place par l'équipe des mois durant), se fait dès lors par métonymie du menu quotidien de ses habitants. Fragments et bribes de monologues qui iront se fondre dans l'âme de la ville, à laquelle les textes de Cosima Weiter et le phrasé de Pierre-Isaïe Duc donnent voix et sens. Par vagues successives, entre plans vidéo, monologues et musiques jouées sur scène par Blaine Reininger, nous voilà transportés dans le cœur creux de L.A. où vibre cette lueur de lyrisme: «Ils viennent, ils viennent, mais ils oublient d'où.»

## Un «théâtrescope»

A n'en point douter, on est ici bien loin des rythmes trépidants et des outrances spectaculaires d'Hollywood.

Sobriété et lenteur des plans font bon ménage. Une cadence qui donne à la pièce une allure aussi rigoureuse que respectueuse, et parfois celle d'un mémorial. Mais attention: un monument qui serait horizontal, comme un travelling, sans apogée, dénouement ni intrigues, plutôt traversé de différents degrés d'intensité. Un «théâtrescope», alors. Peut-être bien parce que lorsqu'il s'agit de Los Angeles, en définitive, il est avant tout question d'images. Et encore, 24 par seconde s'il vous plaît. |

*Angels*, jusqu'au 3 mai, ma, je et sa 19h, me et ve 20h, di 18h, Théâtre du Grütli, 16 rue Général-Dufour, Genève, rés. ☎ 022 888 44 88, réservation@grutli.ch, www.grutli.ch

Je 30 avril, à l'issue de la représentation, «Amarrage: les émotions de la voix», rencontre avec la neuroscientifique Alessia Pannese.

## Wingless angels

Geneva – Cosima Weiter and Alexandre Simon's Angels premieres today at the Grütli theater, a humble tribute to Los Angeles and its ever-new inhabitants.

They say that 44 slaves founded the city of Los Angeles. A bunch of routed renegades of disparate origins. Some seeking freedom at sea, some peace beyond the borders, some wealth. As they reached the ocean and couldn't go further west, they pitched their tents and named it Los Angeles. Since that very day, the influx into the city never ceased. And to each wave of new migrants a double common denominator seems to impose itself as a condition, a *laissez-passer*. That is the hope for a better life and a desire just as strong to forget the past, origins included.

That is one of the topics of Angels, the last creation of the Cosima Weiter – Alexandre Simon tandem, dedicated to the Sprawling Californian city, playing until May 3rd at the Grütli Theater in Geneva. « Trees growing away from their roots ». If the subject, a sketch of the human topography drawn by the newcomers to a city like Los Angeles, is quite vast, its treatment is all but understated and head-on, much like the pair's previous shows.

## Without a past

Here are images filmed in this unique urban environment, projected on the stage background, cinemascope-style. Immediately, Los Angeles' most mundane traits are displayed. Highways as guts pierced by the cars headlights, late commuters spilling out of a subway station, a taxi settled in front of a car dealership. Against this backdrop, an actor, Pierre-Isaïe Duc, stands out and sometimes blends in. He will be the spokesperson of this uprooted humanity fighting its way to survival or prosperity in L.A. He will at times be a taxi driver concealing his Muslim faith by fear of reprisal, at times a Latino unaware of his origins, and at times Simon Rodia, a poor Italian immigrant who, long ago, in the Watts district, built a monument as disproportionately absurd as life and the fate of some, before returning to his home country once his work was done.

But beyond the humble example of a Simon Rodia, these new, 100%-Angeleno human beings, blinded in their headlong rush, forget their social status along with their origins on the way. « If you work hard, you can make it » says one, as if to encourage himself, « I don't really know where I'm from, but I do know my kids will be Americans », another affirms, « leave this place ? », a last one asks mockingly, for me leaving means going to live in West Hollywood »

L.A., probably more than any city on Earth also stands for this : an acquired sense of pride, after having been a dream. Generally nothing more. The mention of these Angels' passage on the city's sidewalk (the result of months-long on-site investigations and testimony-gathering by the team), is made through a metonymy of the inhabitants daily diet. Fragments and snippets of monologues that will blend into the soul of the city, with Cosima Weiter's texts and Pierre-Isaïe Duc's phrasing giving it a voice and meaning. In successive waves, between video shots, monologues and the music played live by Blaine Reininger, the audience is transported into the hollow heart of L.A., where a glimmer of lyricism quivers « They come, they keep coming, but they forget wherefrom ».

## A « theatroscope »

We are without a doubt miles away from the frantic rhythms and showy excesses of Hollywood. The simplicity and slow shots work well together. This pace gives the play a both rigorous and respectful stance, sometimes resembling a monument. But a horizontal monument, like a travelling shot, without an apex, without unwinding or intrigues, rather with various degrees of intensity. Some sort of « theatroscope », as a matter of fact. Maybe because when it comes to Los Angeles, it always comes down to images, and still, there will be 24 of them per second.

Nicola Demarchi, Le Courier, 24 avril 2015

Los Angeles put on stage by Alexandre Simon and Cosima Weiter  
The city of hobos and well-groomed dogs

After *Marzahn*, a play inspired by Berlin, Cosima Weiter and Alexandre Simon immersed themselves in Los Angeles, the so-called « City at the end of the road », the legendary Route 66, where all American dreams are born and crushed.

The two artists walked the deserted sidewalks of the high-tech districts and the ghettos swarming with raw misery, went bar-crawling on Sunset Boulevard, « among the women dressed as if for a high-society event, polo-wearing men and well-groomed dogs », and solved the world's problems with old hobos tanned by the sun under which everything is possible.

The Geneva artists tell their experience of America through migrants' voices. The result is *Angels*, a movie and multidisciplinary play as unlikely as this thousand-faced megalopolis.

A video artist, Alexandre Simon explores the edges of his art through setups and devices of image creation overlapping all disciplines. Writing in a playful, hybrid language, mixing recorded sounds and live voices, Cosima Weiter excels in sound poetry. This versatility is the driving force in the work of the pair, who under the auspices of the Cie\_Avec, establishes itself through an original creation process. Each play scrutinizes ageographical and cultural area where text, image and scenography resonate with interviews made there.

L'Express - L'Impartial, April 25th 2015, CFA

Los Angeles against the tide of all Hollywood's clichés

At the TPR, the Cie\_Avec offered a portrait of Los Angeles with a quite uncommon setup : against the backdrop of a panoramic screen displaying video artist Alexandre Simon's images, actor Pierre-Isaïe Duc interacts on stage, performing a text by Cosima Weiter based on interviews of L.A. Residents. Blaine Reininger (of Californian band Tuxedomoon) handles the sound illustration playing the electric guitar and violin in turns.

After the nighttime landing maneuvers on the megalopolis and a toponymic incantation, and once they reached the sidewalk, the audience meets a few of its 4 million inhabitants : an Italian mason building towers in the style of the *facteur Cheval*, a Bangladeshi grocer indifferent to traditions, a Mexican accountant turning into a drag queen at night...

Each character, a fragment of kaleidoscope, is displayed in a static shot before their performed words evoke their origins and destiny.

Far from the Hollywood canons and the travel guide, little is to be seen of the city of Angels but streets, warehouses and the ever-present cars. The ethnographic point of view is overriding so that through this panel, L.A. Finally gets its voice heard.

Against the tide of ideas of speed and violence (except for one seismic riff), the play lauds slowness. Chris Marker, the movie director who captured individual memories colliding with history, and his documentaries come to mind. Refusing to be showy, by letting words override the image, the duo demonstrates some ascetic sobriety. For those who favor thrill over meditation, there is still the 24 series or plane tickets to L.A.

L'Express - L'Impartial, May 9th 2015, Didier Delacroix

A journey in L.A. At the Grütli

A contemplative portrait of angels

The Grütli stage is entirely laminated, glistening like an wet sidewalk. Somehow that of Los Angeles, which the couple of the Geneva-based Avec\_Productions company walked up and down looking for angels to interview. After Highway, also presented at the Grütli in 2012, their fourth play takes us elsewhere real. In Los Angeles, by the end of 2013, Alexandre Simon and Cosima Weiter met, interviewed and filmed migrants from various communities, often Latinos, to grasp the essence of their exile. « Los Angeles attracts migrants from the whole world, enticed by the American dream and sustained by the feeling that over there everything is possible » is how they explain their starting point.

The result is Angels, currently playing in the Geneva theatre. On stage, actor Pierre-Isaïe Duc, in a long monologue, lends his voice to the people encountered by the co-directors. A teacher of Mexican origin married to an Afro-American lady, the Sikh manager of a nighttime grocery store who hangs out with gang members while writing a science-fiction novel, a young woman Latino gang member from a Latino gang, a drag queen and an important architect... The range of characters is wide, but you will never see the actor embody the words and stances of each character that come across the screen in the background. Alexandre Simon and Cosima Weiter affirm their choice of a more contemplative form of theatre, even if it means unsettling the audience.

Far from the world of Hollywood

An excerpt was shown during the presentation of the play to the press. The high-quality video images, takes you away. This new American horizon, mostly filmed in wide shots, unveils a « City of Angels » miles away from the stereotypes spread by Hollywood. The pace is slow, the spaces that you discover mostly empty. « It is absolutely not documentary therter, Alexandre Simon warns us straightaway, , we recorded images that resemble a documentary reality, and made a movie out of them, Angels\_L.A. Diary... However, on stage, these images become our raw material, just like the text, the lighting, the music etc. All elements convey the meaning of the show. In short it is a genuinely pluridisciplinary show : the tools of theater and cinema act together to bring out this contemplative piece which seems to invent itself in front of the audience. Blaine Reininger plays the score live on stage, wielding an electric guitar and a violin, fiddling with a computer along the rhythm of the images...

The general atmosphere fluctuates, between melancholy, violence and stillness. « We wanted to guide the actor toward this kind of performance, as if the voices of all eight characters were in his head. The fates of these people are somehow interwoven ». Cosima Weiter explains. For example, Simon Rodia, an Italian immigrant appears several times. After crossing the United States from East to West, he settled in Watts, south Los Angeles, and built towers out of waste materials there. This naïve architecture creation, both a symbol of the migrants' hopes and the expression of an aspiration to go back to their roots, is his life's greatest project. He is a parent of Facteur Cheval somehow...

Cosima Weiter wrote drafts based on the testimonies they gathered. On stage, the topics intertwine, the concerns reemerge through the various life experiences : dreams, faith, work, lies, exile... The themes and style of acting invented by the actor come and go all along the show.

« Angels is set from dusk to dawn and made of three parts, Cosima Weiter explains, first the origins, where the characters, young and old, hail from, why they went into exile. Then a second part poses the question « what am I doing here ? ». Eventually, the third section focuses on the future : what does it hold ? What solutions can one find to subsist ? » In this melting pot, no one hails from the White community, which according to the co-directors, reflect the nationalities that come across each other in Los Angeles. « It occurred to us that the inhabitants' roots are a vague thing. There is a majority of Latino communities in Los Angeles, which indeed reflects the founding of the city, where a single European was present ! »

Le Programme.ch, April 2015, Cécile Gavlak

## Highway

The long journey of Alexandre and Cosima

... seldom has a show so aptly conveyed the power of the great American outdoors, this idea that random, unplanned movement can uncover pivotal truths. Highway, a work of uncommon homogeneity by Alexandre Simon - images, Cosima Weiter - text, and Franz Treichler -soundtrack...

... Highway invites the public to an immersive experience where play, images and music move forward in perfect harmony.

Initially, Cosima Weiter and Alexandre Simon, Genevan artists who lived in Berlin, set out - with their little girl but without a car - on a quest to discover this huge country, which seems to die and start anew every day. They recreate their wondrous quest through a poetic proposal where an actor, Pierre-Félix Gravière, describes various US scenarios on a background of frozen pictures - of buildings, vast plains - and ad hoc clips. Armed with a guitar and a computer, Franz Treichler develops this aesthetic shock approach by mixing melancholic hues with overtly aggressive electrical or electronic scores.

Pierre-Félix Gravière regularly collaborates with Alain Françon, a French director who favors dance over trance. This trait unmistakably shows through his solid yet soft stance, his hasteless questioning, which goes well with the stupor induced by never-ending roads. Initially, the actor is lying on a carpet of golden aluminum blankets. It utters fragments of sentences, sometimes just words, "I am the only son", "I am the fifth of eight." Behind him, on a titled screen, a road goes by. All the sudden, the picture freezes on three buildings fronts which eventually merge into an abstract pattern.

This time, standing at the microphone, the actor's speech becomes clearer. Snippets of sentences become portraits of pseudo-average American characters. "I prepare cheeseburgers at Spider Grill." A basketball star and the director of Nature Conservancy follow. One seems to recognize the characters of *Freedom*, the last story on American baby-boomers' by the gifted Jonathan Franzen. Cosima Weiter confirmed. Indeed, she read it and drew a few ideas for this road-poem.

Later on, before the picture of a run-down factory, probably abandoned, Pierre-Félix Gravière recollects. It is all about pushing the boundaries, building guns, going to war. The theme is chanted but devoid of any ostentation, as if facing an unavoidable fatality. Next, there is sequence where a citizen, down on his luck, leaves his family behind. On the screen, you see a desolate town while the actor delivers a poignant speech: "I am leaving, I will be a farmer, gold prospector, or buffalo runner". In the midst of it all, the frenzy of this future of freedom is illustrated by a devilish highway interchange, as those nurturing Los Angeles with newcomers.

Simon Alexandre and Cosima Weiter are not stuck in today's America anyway. They travel back to its origins. On an organic background - a night vision camera searching the bushes - the actor describes the rise and fall of the worlds as a seamless whole. Cosmogony, eschatology, and always this idea of ends butting, crashing against each other. However, no violence erupts on stage, rather, the opposite is true. All is revealed and lived sparingly, with a keen sense of poetic moment. The one which swallowed the monster whole and turned it into a near-mythological creature.

Le Temps, 25 September 2012, Marie-Pierre Genecand

# Le long voyage d'Alexandre et Cosima

> Scène Au Grütli, visite impressionniste de l'Amérique

> «Highway» ouvre de larges espaces de lucidité au public

Marie-Pierre Genecand

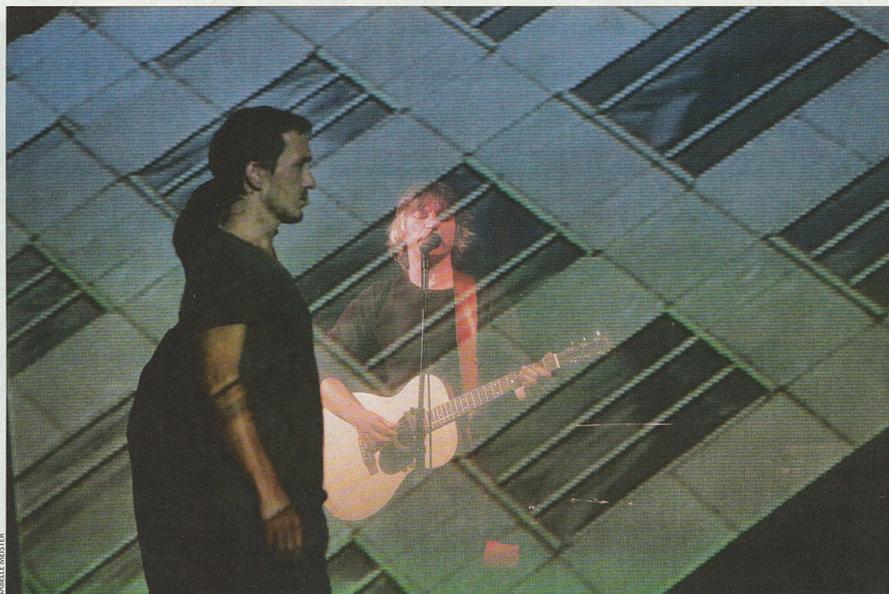
On pourrait parler d'un voyage en Amérique. Ou d'un trip (made) in USA. Ou de la démonstration que la route, parfois, n'est pas seulement un moyen, mais aussi une fin. Le mouvement choisi et non subi. La droite qui file, comme moteur de vie.

Car, rarement, spectacle a aussi bien traduit la vertu des grands espaces américains, cette idée que bouger sans forcément penser peut déboucher sur de profondes vérités. *Highway*, travail d'une rare homogénéité signé Alexandre Simon aux images, Cosima Weiter aux textes et Franz Treichler à la musique, offre un début de saison en beauté à Frédéric Polier, nouveau directeur du Théâtre du Grütli. Et, ironie du sort, un début décloisonné où chaque discipline semble au mieux de ses capacités.

Tout est montré avec un sens aigu du moment poétique. Celui qui donne une aura de mythologie

Frédéric Polier au Théâtre du Grütli, à Genève, c'est le retour du théâtre texto-centré, du jeu plus classique après la programmation expérimentale des deux précédentes directrices. Ce sera sans doute vrai des autres spectacles. Pour l'instant, *Highway* convie le public à une suite atmosphérique où jeu, images et musique, avancent en parfaite cohérence.

Au départ, Cosima Weiter et Alexandre Simon, artistes genevois qui ont vécu à Berlin, sont allés – avec leur petite fille, mais sans voiture – prendre le pouls de



Pierre-Félix Gravière devant l'écran, Franz Treichler derrière. Tous deux portent ce spectacle de Cosima Weiter et Alexandre Simon avec la même force tranquille, la même densité intérieure. ARCHIVES

ce pays gigantesque qui semble mourir et renaître chaque jour. Cette pulsation des extrêmes, ils la restituent dans une proposition poétique où un comédien, Pierre-Félix Gravière, raconte l'Amérique en pièces détachées devant un écran qui accueille photos figées – des bâtiments, de vastes plaines – et films défilant. Guitare au corps, ordinateur à portée, Franz Treichler épouse cette idée de chocs esthétiques en mêlant blues mélancoliques et propositions électriques ou électroniques nettement plus musclées.

Pierre-Félix Gravière joue beaucoup chez Alain François, metteur en scène français qui privilégie le dense sur la transe. On retrouve ce trait dans sa présence compacte et douce, dans son questionnement sans hâte, qui va bien avec l'hébé-tude que procurent les kilomètres

avalés. Au début, le comédien est couché sur un tapis de couvertures en aluminium doré. Il lâche des bribes de phrases, parfois juste des mots. «Je suis le fils unique.» «Je suis le 5e de huit.» Derrière lui, sur l'écran incliné, une route défile. Puis l'image se fige sur un montage de trois façades de bâtiments qui, ainsi côte à côte, finissent par se fondre en un tissage abstrait.

Cette fois debout, au micro, le comédien précise le tir. Les bribes de phrases deviennent des portraits d'Américains plus ou moins moyens. «Je prépare des cheeseburgers au Spider grill.» Suivent une star de basket-ball, le directeur de Nature Conservancy. On croit reconnaître les personnages de *Freedom*, dernier pavé sur l'Amérique des baby-boomers du surdoudé Jonathan Franzen. Co-

sima Weiter confirme. Elle l'a lu et puisé quelques impulsions pour ce *road-poem*.

Ensuite, devant la photo d'une usine aux carreaux cassés sans doute abandonnée, Pierre-Félix Gravière se rassemble. Il s'agit de repousser les frontières, de construire des fusils, de partir à la guerre. Le propos devient psalmodié, mais sans ostentation, comme une fatalité. Puis cette séquence où un citoyen au seuil de sa vie quitte sa famille. Sur l'écran, on voit une bourgade désolée tandis que le comédien assène: «Je pars, je serai fermier, chercheur d'or, coureur de bisons.» Et là, la frénésie de ce futur en liberté est illustrée par un échangeur routier infernal comme ceux qui abreuvent Los Angeles.

Mais Cosima Weiter et Alexandre Simon ne se figent pas dans

l'Amérique d'aujourd'hui. Ils retournent aussi aux origines. Sur des fonds organiques – une caméra nocturne qui fouille des buissons –, le comédien raconte la naissance des mondes puis, dans la même foulée, leur destruction. Cosmogonie, eschatologie, toujours ce principe d'extrêmes choqués les uns contre les autres. Mais la violence ne s'affiche pas sur la scène, au contraire. Tout est montré, vécu avec parcimonie, un sens aigu du moment poétique. Celui qui a digéré le monstre et lui donne un air, une aura de mythologie.

**Highway**, Théâtre du Grütli, à Genève, jusqu'au 30 sept., 022 888 44 84, [www.grutli.ch](http://www.grutli.ch). Puis du 4 au 6 oct., au Théâtre Les Halles, à Sierre, 027 452 09 97, [www.theatre-les-halles.ch](http://www.theatre-les-halles.ch)

Le Temps, 25 September 2012, Marie-Pierre Genecand

Choral for eye, ear and tongue

The press release reports that *Highway*, the third work of Compagnie\_Avec, by adopting the point of view of a *bougillon* named Kearney, retraces US history back to their original guilt vis-à-vis the American Indians. The video images mixed by Alexandre Simon, breathing sounds and pulses served by Franz Treichler, and the text written by Cosima Weiter, drawing inspiration from Ginsberg, Dylan or Harrison, compose an impressionist portrait of the mythological continent. In any case, *Highway* is much more than that. This show of barely an hour delivers a raw, rare and intact sensory experience. Multidisciplinarity makes it an extraordinary and bright exercise. The intersection of the tire walls erected in the yard and garden, the iridescent film covering the stage, and the tilted, semi-transparent screen at the back marks the ideal coalescence of sound, image and script. The solo-voice of the actor, a superconductor Pierre-Félix Gravière, blends in so seamlessly with Treichler's guitar (staging by Bertrand Siffert) that notes seem to convey the meaning of words and chords that of syllables. Music, in turn, seems to generate dollies and light spots by itself, which soon exude their own harmonics. Lastly, images, which never repeat the text, magically materialize the freely associated strata. In the end, the road infuses its truth: "You can always go further..."

Tribune de Genève, 22 September 2012, Katia Berger

## Marzahn

Marzahn, the other face of Berlin

Marzahn, terminal! Marzahn is a neighborhood in the former East Berlin, a city built in the late 1970s to the glory of triumphant communism. Here, where the unemployment rate is 40% of the population, the effervescence of the German capital is but a distant rumble. Sound poet Cosima Weiter and filmmaker Alexandre Simon, artistic interns of ABC cultural center at La Chaux-de-Fonds, began to question in text and images the architectural heritage of this city, brutally scarred by totalitarian regimes.

Specializing in the creation of image projection devices for dance, music, and theater, Alexandre Simon designs his own performances since 2009. He lives between Geneva and Berlin. For her part, Cosima Weiter explores the world of sound poetry. A native of Lyon of Berliner adoption, she kneads and pummels the words into an inventive paste, punctuating the French language with her own German slang. They are accompanied by Marc Gaillard, responsible for lighting. Pierre-Félix Gravière, regularly appearing in plays by Robert Cantarella, Joel Jouanneau, Alain Françon and more recently in the feature film "The Monk" by Dominik Moll, leads this performance combining acting and video projections. A first version of this work will be presented tonight at the ABC. Throughout the week, residents worked on the raw material brought from Berlin by Simon Alexandre and Cosima Weiter.

Both artists have surveyed the Marzahn neighborhood for months, photographing huge apartment buildings and small shops in utter decay. They watched the children on the trampoline and listened to punk girls playing music. In the cemetery, they unsuccessfully sought the traces of the camp where Roma families gathered before their deportation to Auschwitz. While Cosima Weiter and Alexandre Simon managed to speak with the neighborhood designers, their attempts to engage with the locals were met with the silence of some and the hostile indifference of others. It is precisely this pervasive uneasiness which serves to frame the work reported daily in a journal available on their website [www.avec-productions.com](http://www.avec-productions.com). Immersion between poetry and ethnology in a Kafkaesque universe, removed, worlds apart from the trendy Berlin we've come to know, the temple of techno, clubbing and of the so-called "underground" culture. A thousand miles from the futuristic buildings of Adlershof, Potsdamerplatz and other landmarks of the former GDR, where the weight of the past has been erased in a joyous explosion of all-daring architecture.

L'Express - L'impartial, 20 August 2011, Catherine Favre

## Funkhaus

An eclectic chamber opera revived at the Théâtre de l'Usine a symbol of the former East Germany. Experimental. The program of Funkhaus, a creation of Simon Alexandre and Cosima Weiter, on at the Théâtre de l'Usine until 22 November, stated exhaustively: "Chamber opera for video, sound poetry and percussion." Now, what do these seemingly apart genera have in common? The answer lies in the title itself. Indeed, Funkhaus Nalepastrasse, home to the former East Germany radio and showcase of the State's media power, is the true scope of this work. Today, only the ghostly walls of this small town of 135,000 m<sup>2</sup> remain in place. Fortunately, both show creators (joined en route by the musician Marcello Silvio Busato) do not share that fate: they build their work on the remnants of Funkhaus Nalepastrasse's daily paper. Thus, the Funkhaus becomes the symbol of a story without witnesses, which was written by researching material on site. The chamber opera, as its name suggests, is a minor opera genre. Taking into account its qualities as a minor genre, Funkhaus further reduced its seductive elements. Fake concrete panels stand on stage and, as the performance starts, Alexandre Simon projects onto them a decoration of hallways and empty rooms. A voice says: "My steps in my footsteps, I advance in these corridors of the past." A voice, because Cosima Weiter's body vanishes among the projected, black and gray decorations. Marcello Silvio Busato, his back to the audience, hands on the wall, makes sounds and starts a duet. Cosima Weiter's face shortly emerges and retreats, accurately following an invisible path in a maze we can only guess. Cosima Weiter's speech transfers to this wall. A jerky speech, made or disturbances caused by severed coils or noisy radio frequencies. Not surprisingly. Indeed, these are the remnants of programs, information, interviews collected by the artist and sound poet from Funkhaus' files and accumulated as lists. Through this syntax, as fragmented as memory, we can guess a storyline. The evocation of a *gagged* newspaper, of someone in charge of weeding out the real, troubling stories through the former GDR's censorship. "I cut the tape", "my words do not mean anything", "it is not the truth I am after." Souvenir photos are projected. A face covers Cosima Weiter's. As the voice resurfaces, the "I" becomes plural, identifying the people of the former GDR, uprooted and fooled by history. Even if the "I" identifies with all these ill-fated souls for a moment, we are still a far cry from the "ostalgie" and other soothing readings of the past. At that point, the pace becomes steadier. The musician returns to his wall and hits, scratches, makes squealing sounds and "plays" it. A range of unexpected sounds, performed by Claire Davy (scenographer) and Marcello Silvio Busato. Funkhaus is a work of meaningful and ingenious discoveries.

Le Courier, 19 November 2009, Nicola de Marchi

"Am I more by myself with the door open or closed?" Since the fall of the Wall, Cosima Weiter lives in Berlin with Genevan videographer Alexandre Simon. Sense of belonging, propaganda, freedom, loss of identity... All these topics subtly permeate Funkhaus, a chamber opera for voice, images and percussion that evokes, in an impressionist manner, the Funkhaus Nalepastrasse, the Radio house of the former GDR and authentic political and cultural helmsman, which was abandoned after reunification. On stage, four walls showing images of damaged walls, cracked doors and dark corridors. The Funkhaus, or the remnants thereof. Without transition, snapshots of chubby children of the 1960s, pampered by an attentive mother, raised by a strict father. The symbol seems obvious. One day, a long time ago, the former GDR believed in a bright future. Throughout those golden years, the Radio house spread this idea of progress. At the forefront, Cosima Weiter says her own words. Words that skim such historical turnaround without documenting it. It is about the "storm on the sea", the "Road to the Future". Further, the author adds: "Better watch your words, the enemy is not far away." And then: "A wall as nothing and its shadow to live on. This is more like it." She is not alone on the stage. With this back to the audience, the percussionist Marcello Silvio Busato hits the musical wall with his sticks. Banging, scratching, breaking, caressing sounds. A gentle voice, says: "My country moves to the West, my country wanes." On one of the walls, an old-time child smiles.

Le Temps, 21 November 2009, Marie-Pierre Genecand