

Sur la limite, vers la fin

(Roberta De Martini)



Jacques Delcuvellerie, founding member and director of the Liège-based multidisciplinary collective Groupov since 1980, has now published a substantial collection of essays entitled *Sur la limite, vers la fin. Repères sur le théâtre dans la société du spectacle à travers l'aventure du Groupov. (roman)*. These writings, which cover more than thirty years of the Groupov's activity, are partly unpublished works and partly essays that previously appeared in various journals. Here they are edited and skillfully organized to outline the plot of what may also be considered (as suggested by the title) as a very peculiar "novel" (*roman*). This composite project perfectly mirrors the multifaceted

role played by Delcuvellerie in his professional life as a director, performer, teacher, and writer. The narration, conducted in Delcuvellerie's leading voice, alternates between the voices of several members of the Groupov (Marie-France Collard, Eric Duyckaerts, Francine Landrain, Benoît Vreux) and those of scholars and colleagues who have tracked this long journey since the very beginning (Georges Banu, Bernard Debroux, Philippe Ivernel, Martin Mégevaud, Jean-Marie Piemme, Claire Ruffin).

The journal «Alternatives théâtrales», directed by Bernard Debroux, has followed the work of the collective since 1984, publishing a considerable number of essays, interviews, and texts on and by the Groupov. Many of these writings are here reunited for the first time in the very unusual (for «Alternatives théâtrales») form of a book. Three different prefaces, by Georges Banu, Jean-Marie Piemme, and Jacques Delcuvellerie, introduce the volume. The materials collected, including several production photographs by Lou Hérion, are carefully arranged within eight chapters, each presenting a thematic title, occasionally followed by a specific reference to the years during which the group was involved in certain issues such as the question of Truthfulness and Reality. A detailed chronology of the Groupov's productions ends the book. Bernard Debroux informs us that the initial project was to release, together with the book, a DVD with photographic and filmed materials of the Groupov, which would be a welcome addition.

The rich selection of writings gathered in this book sheds light on the activity and, more specifically, on the theoretical motivations that drive the members of the collective, offering a set of diverse considerations on their practices and on a

certain number of their works: *visible* performances (shared with the spectators) and *invisible* performances (such as “Les Clairières,” which took place in the woods, without the presence of an audience). The reader, collecting every single tessera of this mosaic-book, is lead to grasp these traces left throughout the pages and reconstruct, little by little, the “plot” of the book in all its complexity. Even if the overall narration tries to follow a chronological line, what really coheres the writings is that peculiar awareness that only the perspective of time can offer. Therefore, with the privilege of retrospect in 2012, Delcuvellerie clearly distinguishes the research phases of the group, always proceeding on the edge (*sur la limite*) of what constitutes the theater and the reality of the present (*hic et nunc*), exploring the unknown, the never heard or experienced before (*inouï*).

The subtitle of the book (*Repères sur le théâtre dans la société du spectacle à travers l'aventure du Grupov*) emphasizes the centrality of Guy Debord's seminal work *La Société du spectacle*, whose main assumption is that nowadays we are part of a kind of society that has completely subverted our perception of reality. The realms of reality and fiction have been merged, generating a substantial inability to make proper distinctions between the two. Hence, Delcuvellerie and the other members of the group attempt to find answers to this fundamental question: what kind of theater is possible today, in this kind of society?

A long section of the book is devoted to documenting the more than ten year process of creating *Rwanda 94*, their best known work and winner of numerous awards, described by Delcuvellerie as a project “at the edge of what is utterable and performable:” the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. This work has toured around the world, notably in Rwanda in 2004, where Marie-France Collard (a member of the group who frequently explores other media such as film and documentary) filmed the documentary *Rwanda. À travers nous, l'humanité...* In 2007, with Patrick Czaplinski she also completed a feature film, *Rwanda 94*, which she shot during the performances of *Rwanda 94*. Even if the various members of the collective have also autonomously created their own works, Delcuvellerie decided to refer to those experiences only in the Chronology chapter.

The last two chapters of the volume, together with the title of the book (...*vers la fin*), and the 2010 performance *Un Uomo Di Meno (Fare Thee Well Tovaritch Homo Sapiens)* convey the idea that the end – be it of the human kind, of an individual life, or even of the Grupov itself... – is inevitably approaching. A hint of nostalgia for a time when Grupov's hope in a new, better kind of human being shaped their creativity leads Delcuvellerie to ask the question: “[...] where are we going?” His answer is: “We don't know.” Maybe it is not the end that is drawing near. Instead, it is just the end of a cycle that will hopefully lead to the opening of a new, better one. Therefore, once more, what is needed is another step through the boundaries (*sur la limite*): the edge and beyond...

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