

Here dwell the dragons

A popular play inspired by real events, in several episodes

First episode

1917: Victory was in our hands¹

created collectively by **Théâtre du Soleil**
in harmony with **Hélène Cixous**
directed by **Ariane Mnouchkine**

The First episode is created at la Cartoucherie on November 27th 2024

Co-produced by the TNP-Villeurbanne

With the exceptional help of la Région Île-de-France, le ministère de la Culture, la Ville de Paris, on the occasion of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Théâtre du Soleil

With the financial support of le ministère de la Culture, la Région Île-de-France and la Ville de Paris

¹ Eponymous title in the French version of the first volume of Nikolai Sukhanov's *The Russian Revolution, 1917*.

The Théâtre du Soleil

Ariane Mnouchkine, born in 1939, founded the Théâtre du Soleil in 1964 alongside her companions from the ATEP (The Theatre Association of the Students of Paris). In 1970, the Théâtre du Soleil created *1789* at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, where Paolo Grassi warmly welcomed and supported the young troupe. Then the company settled in the Cartoucherie, a former military site, deserted and isolated in the Bois de Vincennes, on the outskirts of Paris. The Cartoucherie helped the Théâtre du Soleil to step outside the traditional notion of theatre as an architectural institution, opting for a haven rather than a theatrical edifice at a time when urban transformations in France were altering the place of man in the city and the position of theatre within it.

Within the Cartoucherie, the Théâtre du Soleil found the necessary tool to create the type of popular yet high-quality theatre that Jean Vilar dreamed of. Even before 1968, its aim was to establish a new relationship with its audience and to distinguish itself from bourgeois theatre in order to create a popular theatre of quality. By the 1970s, the troupe became one of France's major theatre companies, both in terms of the number of artists working in it (over 70 persons a year) and its national and international influence. Committed to the notion of a “theatre troupe”, Ariane Mnouchkine established at the very start the group's ethics in fundamental rules: all professions are treated equally, everyone on the same wage and the entire troupe should take part in the theatre's smooth operation – daily maintenance, welcoming the public during performances.

The adventure of the Théâtre du Soleil has been shaped over the past sixty years by the loyalty and affection of a large audience, both in France and abroad, as well by the endless support of its public partners. Its journey is characterised by a constant questioning of the role and place of theatre in society and its ability to reflect contemporary times. The Théâtre du Soleil's commitment to addressing significant political and human issues from a universal perspective goes hand in hand with its pursuit of grand narrative forms, at the confluence of Eastern and Western arts.

When we invaded la Cartoucherie, with the help of Janine Alexandre-Debray and of Christian Dupavillon in August 1970, we knew that this place would help us live a political, artistic and poetic dream. A magnificent and imperial waste ground as well hidden in the Vincennes wood than Angkor for a thousand years in the Cambodian jungle. We were its invaders, liberators, farmer tenants; we were the ones who were going to “make it better”, us and the people who will join us. It will be us, the disciplined disobedients, who will make this place a palace of wonders, a refuge of theatre and humanity, a laboratory for popular theatre, an endless field of experimentation and learning. A People's paradise. We will be its servants, we will never become its exclusive owners. We have one sacred duty : to make as many people as possible happy; and no ministry in the world could dictate us otherwise. No corporatist egoism in the world would be able to throw us out. At the very end of the performance, the audience who gave us the honour of wanting to spend two, or four, or ten hours with us, seeking theatre, which means seeking humankind. [...] La Cartoucherie was to be left abandoned, while beautiful and pleasant to the audience, it is a waste ground constantly being reconstructed, never finished, looking like nothing else. It will never ever pretend to compete with some cultural fortresses whose work of art sometimes dazzles us, but whose operation mode seemed and still seems not so in favour of happiness and artistic risks. For all of this, for this journey, this epic, this conquest, this fight, this war, this resistance, we needed kind friends, and we got them, we needed allies also, a huge alliance. We needed the public. It came.

The history began.

Ariane Mnouchkine, L'histoire commençait²

² Text published in the special issue of the annual brochure of national celebrations for the 50 years of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 2009.

Theatre du Soleil timeline

- 1963** Ariane Mnouchkine travels for the first time in Asia.
- 1964** Founding of the THÉÂTRE DU SOLEIL
- 1964** *Petit-bourgeois*, by Maxime Gorki, adapted by Arthur Adamov (Paris).
- 1965** *Capitaine Fracasse*, by Théophile Gautier, adapted by Philippe Léotard (Paris).
- 1967** *The Kitchen*, by Arnold Wesker, adapted by Philippe Léotard (Paris).
- 1968** *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by William Shakespeare, adapted by Philippe Léotard (Paris).
- 1969** *Les Clowns*, a collective creation (Paris, Aubervilliers, Avignon, Milan).
- 1970** August, The Théâtre du Soleil settles in the Cartoucherie.
- 1970** Creation of *1789, La Révolution doit s'arrêter à la perfection du bonheur* [1789: The Revolution must end only with the perfection of happiness], at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan.
- 1972** *1793, La Cité Révolutionnaire est de ce Monde* [The Revolutionary City is of Our Times], a collective creation (Paris - Cartoucherie).
- 1974** *1789*, film version of the play shot by Ariane Mnouchkine.
- 1975** *L'Âge d'Or (A FIRST SKETCH)*, a collective creation (Paris - Cartoucherie, Warsaw, Venice, Louvain-la-Neuve, Milan).
- 1978** *Molière ou la vie d'un honnête homme*, film written and directed by Ariane Mnouchkine.
- 1979** *Méphisto, le roman d'une carrière*, by Klaus Mann, adapted by Ariane Mnouchkine (Paris - Cartoucherie, Avignon, Louvain-la-Neuve, Lyon, Rome, Berlin, Lons-le-Saunier).
- 1980** *Méphisto, le roman d'une carrière*, film shot by Bernard Sobel.
- 1981-84** *Shakespeare's cycle* (Paris - Cartoucherie, Avignon, Munich, Los Angeles, Berlin):
- 1981** *Richard II*, translated by Ariane Mnouchkine.
- 1982** *Twelfth Night*, translated by Ariane Mnouchkine.
- 1984** *Henry IV (PART I)*, translated by Ariane Mnouchkine.
- 1985** *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* [The terrible but unfinished story of Norodom Sihanouk, king of Cambodia], by Hélène Cixous (Paris - Cartoucherie, Amsterdam, Brussels, Madrid, Barcelona).
- 1985** *À la recherche du soleil*, documentary film directed by Werner Schroeter.
- 1987** *l'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves*, by Hélène Cixous (Paris - Cartoucherie, Tel-Aviv).
- 1988** *l'Indiade ou l'Inde de leurs rêves*, film directed by Bernard Sobel.
- 1989** *La Nuit Miraculeuse*, film directed by Ariane Mnouchkine, written by Ariane Mnouchkine and Hélène Cixous.
- 1990-92** *Les Atrides' cycle* (Paris - Cartoucherie, Amsterdam, Essen, Gibellina, Berlin, Lyon, Toulouse, Montpellier, Bradford, Montreal, New York, Vienna - Austria) :
- 1990** *Iphigenia at aulis*, by Euripides, translated by Jean and Mayotte Bollack.
- 1990** *Agamemnon*, by Aeschylus, translated by Ariane Mnouchkine.
- 1991** *Les Choéphores* [The Libation Bearers], by Aeschylus, translated by Ariane Mnouchkine.
- 1992** *Les Euménides* [The Eumenides], by Aeschylus, translated by H. Cixous.
- 1993** *L'Inde, de père en fils, de mère en fille* [India, From Father To Son, From Mother To Daughter] directed by Rajeev Sethi, based on an idea of Ariane Mnouchkine.
- 1994** *La Ville Parjure Ou Le Réveil Des Érinyes* [The Perjured City, or, the Awakening of the Furies], by Hélène Cixous (Paris - Cartoucherie, Liège, Recklinghausen, Vienne, Avignon).
- 1995** *Le Tartuffe*, by Molière (Vienna – Austria, Avignon, Saint-Jean d'Angély, Liège, La Rochelle, Vienne – France, Copenhagen, Berlin, Paris - Cartoucherie).
- 1997** *Et soudain des nuits d'éveil*, a collective creation in harmony with Hélène Cixous (Paris - Cartoucherie, Moscow).

1997 *Au Soleil Même La Nuit* (The Sun shines even at Night), film directed by Éric Darmon and Catherine Vilpoux, in harmony with Ariane Mnouchkine.

1999 *Tambours sur la Digue, sous forme de pièce ancienne pour marionnettes jouée par des acteurs* (The Flood Drummers), by Hélène Cixous (Paris - Cartoucherie, Basel, Antwerp, Lyon, Montreal, Tokyo, Seoul, Sydney).

1999 *D'après La Ville parjure ou le réveil Des Érinyes* [From The Perjured City, or, the Awakening of the Furies] documentary film directed by Catherine Vilpoux.

2002 *Tambours sur la Digue* (The Flood Drummers), film directed by Ariane Mnouchkine.

2003 *Le Dernier Caravansérail (Odysées)*, [The Last Caravansary (Odysseys)], a collective creation (Paris - Cartoucherie, Avignon, Rome, Quimper, Ruhrtriennale, Lyon, Berlin, New York, Melbourne, Athens).

2005 *Un Soleil à Kaboul...ou plutôt deux*, documentary film directed by Duccio Bellugi Vannuccini, Sergio Canto Sabido and Philippe Chevallier.

2006 *Les Éphémères*, a collective creation (Paris - Cartoucherie, Quimper, Athens, Avignon, Buenos Aires, Porto Alegre, São Paulo, Taipei, Vienna - Austria, Saint-Etienne, New York).

2006 *Le Dernier Caravansérail (Odysées)*, film directed by Ariane Mnouchkine.

2008 *Un Cercle de Connaisseurs* [A Circle of Connoisseurs], documentary film directed by Jeanne Dosse.

2009 *Les Éphémères*, film directed by Bernard Zitzermann.

2009 *Ariane Mnouchkine, l'aventure du Théâtre du Soleil*, documentary film directed by Catherine Vilpoux.

2010 *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir (Aurores)* [The Castaways of the Fol Espoir (Sunrises)], collective creation written in part Hélène Cixous (Paris - Cartoucherie, Lyon, Nantes, Athens, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Santiago du Chile, Vienna - Austria, Edinburg, Taipei).

2013 *Les Naufragés du Fol Espoir* [The Castaways of the Fol Espoir], film directed by Ariane Mnouchkine.

2014 *Macbeth*, by William Shakespeare, translated by Ariane Mnouchkine (Paris - Cartoucherie).

2014 The 'First Fifty Years' anniversary of the Théâtre du Soleil.

2015 Creation of l'École nomade (The Travelling School) (2015-2023 sessions : Santiago in Chile, Färö, Oxford, Pondicherry).

2016 *Une chambre en Inde*, [A Room in India] a collective creation, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine in harmony with Hélène Cixous (Paris – Cartoucherie, Montpellier, Lausanne).

2018 *Notre petit Mahabharata*, tribute to our Master and to *A Room in India's* origins (Paris – Cartoucherie).

2019 *Kanata Épisode I – La Controverse*, a Théâtre du Soleil's play directed by Robert Lepage (Paris – Cartoucherie, Naples, Athens).

2021 *L'île d'or, Kanemu-Jima*, [A Golden Island] a collective creation, in harmony with Hélène Cixous, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine (Paris – Cartoucherie, Lyon, Toulouse, Tokyo, Kyoto).

2023 *Notre vie dans l'art* by Richard Nelson, translated by Ariane Mnouchkine, a Théâtre du Soleil's performance directed by Richard Nelson (Paris).

2024 60 years' birthday of the Théâtre du Soleil.

Presentation

The Theatre du Soleil, created in 1964, celebrates its 60th anniversary on this year 2024, in the national colours of South Korea, whose musical traditions have accompanied it for the past 25 years, but first and foremost with its next collective creation, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine, and reuniting about forty actors.

This creation, divided into several episodes, depicts a huge historical saga, questioning the 20th century's destructive imperialisms. It will try to provide, especially for the youngest generations, the weapons of empathy and persuasion, to understand and help others understand the 21st century wars.

In co-production with the TNP - Villeurbanne, shaped with the lasting traditional crafts of the Theatre du Soleil (masks, hessian, silks and chassis), in addition to more contemporary technologies (video, surtitles and screening), the first episode of this creation will come to light in the Cartoucherie on November, 27th 2024. We hope to keep operating until the second episode is created the following year.

*There is a painting by Klee called Angelus Novus.
An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance
himself from something which he is staring at.
His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched.
The Angel of History must look just so.
His face is turned towards the past.
Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe,
which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet.
He would like to pause for a moment so fair,
to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed.
But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings
and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them.
The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned,
while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high.
That which we call progress, is this storm.*

Walter Benjamin. *On the concept of history, IX*, (1940), translated by Dennis Redmond, 2005



Decor research – Model, *Here dwell the dragons. First Episode*, June 7th 2024 ©Théâtre du Soleil

Who Are These Dragons?
Hélène Cixous, June 28th 2024
Translated by Éric Prenowitz

We who are the audience of the year 2024, we are dated. When did our History begin? 3000 years ago, yesterday, with a war. History-Legend will always have begun with a war, a revolution, the end of a world, the beginning of a world. The Trojan War and the World War. Which one? The first, the second, the third? An emperor massacres a people. A people rises up, flees. A king is killed. A French king? Or a Russian? Or a Greek? Before. Tomorrow morning.

In your day, Shakespeare, what was it like?

According to Shakespeare, we are flies for the gods. *As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport.* Seen by the Theatre we are pawns on the chessboard of the Gods: soldiers and generals, kings, slaves, prophets, mothers and orphans, ogres and human prey...

History is a nightmare that leaves us on the shore of another dream. Most of the time, thousand-year-old time, this new dream is a nightmare that repeats its scenario of fatalities and resurrections. The continents are bathed in blood. There are always new mythological characters, the masks change, the ferocities are modernised.

Who are these butcher-gods? No, these men who kill to demonstrate their violent divinity are not simply 'wanton boys'. Every day we pronounce their names with terror and stupefaction. Under their mask-names, these screaming Characters, diabolical orators, get drunk on their own incendiary words. Dictators, commanders, totalitarian tyrants, maneaters, blind cyclopes, failed painters, fake poets, great only in their limitless ambition: they have the arms, they are Olympic champions in the practice of the Lie.

Today we call this one Poutine, or that Dragon over there, you know, Trump? Ah, Trump, yes, and what about this other one? Him? That's Hitler.

Do you really believe, Shakespeare, that they only kill us for fun? They want to exterminate us. Efface us from the Earth and from memory. Because these bloody monsters are indeed men, it's incredible. That is why they fascinate us. They are incredible and they are always there, the Great Cruel Ones, the Führers, Lenins, Stalins, -tin, -nin, -lin, -tin. They are mortals and they want us dead! We don't understand why, how, what is the secret of their power. Alone, but surrounded by fascinated people. How can a single man capture so many souls, how can he speak from above while the people below surrender to the master, he who stands beyond good and evil, enchanter, absolute despot, high priest of his own religion, creator of slaughterhouses for human flocks, founder of the poison laboratory, inventor of totalitarianism, swallower of continents,

'When his moustache laughs, it looks like cockroaches'

'Round him a rabble of narrow-necked henchmen – fawning half-men he mocks'

Thus speaks a fly of a poet, a spark, the poet Mandelstam, and immediately they pull off his wings. And meanwhile, in Berlin –

What do they have in common, these dragons? These leaders of hostile nations who share out amongst themselves hate for their neighbour and unpity for their millions of victims?

They have Cruelty.

'Inflicting torture is his delight'

With or without the moustache, it's always the same fanatical beast.

So *all is lost?*

But in every play a miracle unfolds, a little poet stands where the Great Megalomaniacs reign, a soldier of life, a giant of the mind, faithful to the genius of humanity, without fear, without hesitation, the heroes with all-powerful humour, the Churchills and other Unshakeables, and these are the ones who write the true History of the vanquishers of hate. And in the Voice of the Theatre, after the asphyxiation and the poison, their voices ring out.

Interview with Ariane Mnouchkine

Paris, September 15th 2024, Agnès Santi, for *La Terrasse*

What is the genesis of this new creation?

Ariane Mnouchkine: I believe that, like all our creations, this one was born from an emotion and a question that many of us have been deliberating on for the past two years: how in the 21st century does one arrive at the attempted invasion, subjugation, and destruction of an independent country by another power, whose GDP is almost identical to the one in Spain, yet possesses an enormous capacity for harm? What is it that, over the decades, shapes a leader – I would say a man – such as Vladimir Putin? To try to answer this question, we needed to tell, theatrically, the birth of a system that has changed the world. I should say two systems, because the war of 1914 nurtured both Nazism and Bolshevism. Perhaps, with this spectacle, we are, very naively, seeking to set up a sort of theatrical barricade against the various despotisms, totalitarianisms, and ideological stubbornness that today threaten us on multiple fronts. Therefore, we immersed ourselves in history and realised that to recount the events of 24 February 2022, we must trace back to February 1917!

The first episode of this saga which — if the gods of theatre are favourable — will certainly count several, will cover the years 1917-1918. The second, to be created next year, will follow and unfold up to 1945, and so forth. I hope we possess the strength and fortune to continue this epic, this grand saga, until we catch up with our present day. Each part should last approximately 2h15, without an interval.

How did you engage with this historical material?

A.M.: The immense preparatory work of readings we did proved to be both overwhelming and dizzying, a knowledge that demanded further knowledge and so on, ad infinitum. We could almost say that the more we work, the more we realise how little we know! We fed on a multitude of archives and writings from the great protagonists of the time, as well as countless books by historians of all political obedience — dead or very much alive. We owe them a lot, if not everything.

This first episode, subtitled “Victory was in our hands,” after the first volume’s title of *The Russian Revolution, 1917*³ by Nikolai Sukhanov, one of the founders of the Petrograd Soviet, seems to me a final gasp of the French Revolution, illustrating how history regurgitates its monsters. So many scars remain from the historical lies engraved from generation to generation. We use the facts, the writings, the speeches that were actually delivered. It is our task to transform these into theatre, true theatre. We cannot compete with cinema or even the numerous admirable documentaries that nourish us. Theatre possesses its own languages. It knows and can narrate everything. It is up to us to put into practice our art in order to honour History.

Everything the characters say has indeed been spoken or written. Some, like Lenin, are globally renowned; others — who were nonetheless significant — have been erased. We wish to resurrect them — some for their humanity, others for their demonic nature.

What theatrical filter have you conceived to tell the Russian Revolution?

A.M.: The form. A narrative that sometimes seems to come down to fierce and murderous battles of ideas requires very strong forms for the *epic embodiment* to emerge. Yes, I know, it appears a contradiction, but I like confronting this contradiction. It is the art and pleasure of theatre. We have established small laboratories. It is an endless hard work. In the beginning, we were extremely ignorant.

³ *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record* by N.N. Sukhanov, translated by Joel Carmichael

Our ambition is to successfully enact the mechanisms of history. This is only possible by recognising the importance of human passion in why things are the way they are. Some characters believe they can explain their decisions, their attitudes, their mad cruelty, through necessity, yet interpret this necessity in a manner intrinsically linked to their passion for power, possessing such an image of themselves that there is no room for doubt or for listening to others who equally passionately think otherwise. This is how a handful of men manage to transform their country, and then the world, into hell.

Why this generic title: Here dwell the dragons?

A.M.: “*Hic sunt dracones*”: this phrase appears in mediaeval cartography and indicates places that were still unconquered at the time, thought to be uninhabited and dangerous. It was common to depict monsters or mythical creatures in these unknown areas. I find this truly beautiful, and I can assure you that in this *terra incognita* we are exploring, through the 20th and 21st centuries, the dragons are indeed present!



Rehearsals, *Here dwell the dragons. First Episode*, September 2024 © Lucile Cocito – Archives of Théâtre du Soleil

In any great work, there are always at least two plots, much like in Shakespeare... I believe we will have at least two, if not more. First and foremost, there is the war—the war of imperialism from any empire, whether they seek to expand their territories or consolidate power. Totalitarian empires that desire to govern the world—religiously, politically, financially... This inevitably leads to wars. Then, there is another war unfolding: an internal and latent struggle between those who wish to fight, who refuse to be subjugated, who uphold their values—freedom, a bit of equality—even if that equality never includes women—and do everything to reach fraternity. And those who, particularly at this moment, do everything in their power to allow the ogre to progress. Pacifism, pacification, so many words used, justifications, convenient excuses, fear, and so on, to permit the ogres to progress. “Above all, do not oppose.” They use very gentle and reasonable arguments: peace, peace at any cost! Yet we are well aware that peace at all costs translates to war at all costs.

Throughout this period of the 20th century that we are about to explore, there is this other war. I sensed it without understanding it. I often wondered why the Americans took so long to enter the war, but I was unaware of the extent to which isolationism and fascism were at play, even in England. You will discover that the battle Churchill fought was not only against the Germans, but also against his own far-right factions, the pro-Nazi British aristocracy, including King Edward VIII himself, and a pacifist far-left. Orwell speaks very well of this. [...]

It must be acknowledged that if Japan did not attack the United States, the outcome would have remained uncertain. In any case, England would have been invaded, despite Roosevelt’s efforts to send ships and supplies. Roosevelt was both clever and courageous [...] and it is even suggested that he may have provoked Japan, encouraging them to attack to justify America’s entry into the war.

You will also understand that Henry Ford wrote a book⁴ that inspired Hitler in writing Mein Kampf. This is very revealing. While Hitler might have written without Ford, that book influenced him. Other characters will emerge, such as Lindbergh, the first man to fly across the Atlantic, known as the most photographed man in the world – read his speech delivered in Des Moines – who argued vehemently against American involvement in the war, claiming it was not America’s affair, that an ocean separated it from Europe for protection, and asserting that, in any case, the Jews were behind it all.

We are not only telling the why of today; we are also telling the how.

Trump was already on the scene in 1933 and 1936. It was Lindbergh who started the slogan “America First” which Trump later echoed with “Make America Great Again.” Just as today, these events were already unfolding in the 20th century: “Let the ogre be, put the ogre to sleep; the ogre will not come for us, there is a sea, an ocean, a river, history, and besides, he won’t do that...” Yet, he does.

There is an ignorance that compels us to tell History. We will employ all pedagogical means to convey it, putting ourselves on stage, perhaps even staging others... There will be masks, possibly marionettes of different sizes, or miniatures [...]. Therefore, our creation is to tell stories without hesitation in explaining. We will explore how to explain theatrically and where to infuse poetry. How can we be moving, overwhelming? Through humour, awareness, or tragedy?

Like the Iliad. Like Homer. You are all Homers, and there will likely be moments that are truly Homeric. I see Thomas Mann, from America, sending insulting messages to Germany as it descended into error and abjection. I find myself wishing to see an actor enter with a small lamp, microphone in hand, delivering this text in German with subtitles. Even if he utters only two or three lines... because he spoke to them throughout the war, without it changing anything, of course. He insulted them, he urged them like a prophet, just like Jesus with the merchants.

You have everything at your disposal. [...] We must simply resist the banalisation, clichés, and doublespeak that will serve as our greatest enemies...

Ariane Mnouchkine, Notes to actors, first day of rehearsals, 2nd of april 2024

⁴ *The international Jew : the World’s problem* by Henry Ford published in May, 22nd 1920 Dearborn Independant newspaper he owned

Fragments of a work diary

Notes to actors in rehearsal, April-September 2024



Rehearsals, *Here dwell the dragons. First Episode*, September 2024 © Lucile Cocito – Archives Théâtre du Soleil

Crucial battle

Is it too presumptuous to think that we, the wandering performers, will create a work that might be considered urgent? Do we dare to conceive it and bring to life this necessary and urgent spectacle? Will we have the courage, the devotion, and the awareness of the threats facing us, to conduct it to the breathless rhythm of a crucial battle upon which the fate of other crucial battles also depends? *That is the question.* ~ February, 6th

Erecting a barricade

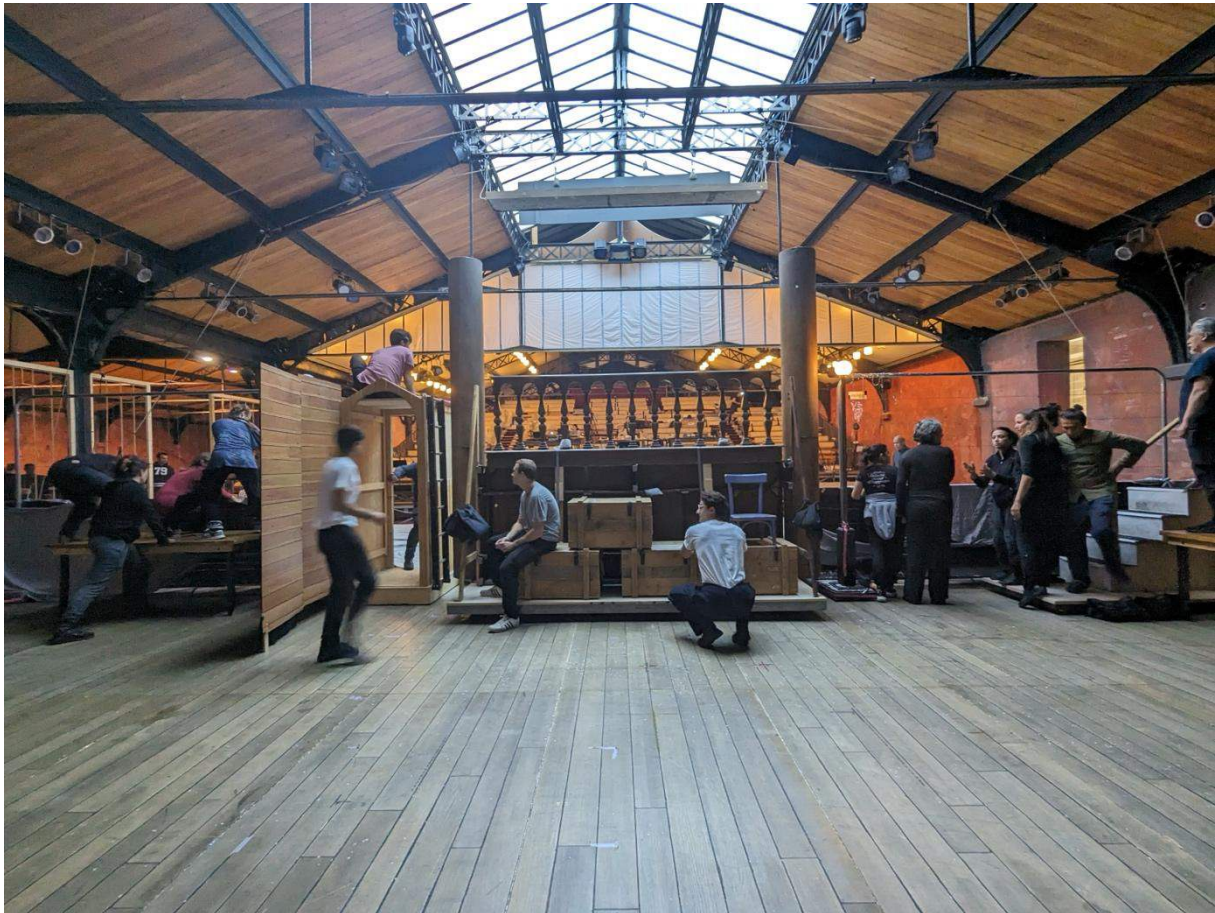
If we can have as our fuel what I am telling you, that is, to erect a barricade—at least a defensive one, if not an offensive one—against the despotisms that are aligning today, and the ideological stubbornness that pave their way, then I believe we will find our inspirations. One of the traps to avoid is caricature. Because a caricature is like a small, premature victory. ~ February, 22nd

Imprint

Indeed, masks are among the necessary conditions, at least at the core — even if, as I mentioned, they sometimes concede to unmasked actors. In fact, they leave only after they have left their imprint. But this time, I sincerely hope they will not leave. Not only will they give us the imprints, but they will remain. ~ March, 13th interview with Guy Freixe

Ogres

History vomits ogres that it seems to re-devour, yet, with our fervent complicity, it regurgitates them a few decades later. ~ March, 25th



Rehearsals, *Here dwell the dragons. First Episode*, September 2024 © Sibylle Pavageau – Archives Théâtre du Soleil

The Stylus

Can we say that we work with the precision of a figurine? With a very pure drawing, a rhythm, a refinement of gestures. The photograph should not be blurred. We must hear the nib of the artist scratching the paper. ~ April, 5th

Mortiferous Greed

I was lacking this dimension. Those fleeting moments in which we grasp the greed of empires, their struggle — even if they are already kneeling in the mud, losing hundreds of thousands of their men — they persist... ~ April, 12th

"Fire Warning"

We must achieve a spectacle balanced between humour, which is a great strength, a display of intelligence and humanity — we need humorous, mischievous moments — and moments where horror is made by this handful of men, concocting this venom, this laboratory of poisons, prisons, terror, this laboratory of racial hatred that hatches [...], all these venoms still dripping here and there, flowing in many places; we must raise awareness of the horror and terror it has provoked. It is even more through the multitude of sufferings than through the number of deaths—unnecessary, unchosen sufferings [...] More than ever, the notion of the barricade emerges, built more than ever from 'warning' truths [...] We have the right to present an atrocious vision if we can transform it into theatre, so that it serves a purpose, so that it warns. That it is not merely a crushing of the past. That it warns someone who might head in any form of radicalisation. ~ May, 13th

A Mafia

This handful of men who transform the world into hell, this is what we narrate. ~ May, 13th

Symptomatic

Actors are 'symptomatiicians'. Charged with expressing the symptoms of the characters' souls. We must find the symptoms of their passions. The mask compels you to reveal the passion of this moment. ~ May, 16th

Premonition

Martov is still among humans, that is to say, fallible, accessible to doubts, while simultaneously possessing a vision of the cataclysm that is unfolding and of the abduction of the revolution by a handful of Bolsheviks. So it must be more engaging. He calls for a coalition. He is overwhelmed. It is more violent than that. He foresees the collapse of the entire democratic project. ~ June, 21st

The Music

As for the music, each time, it is like a new character entering: terror, strength, martial law, and so on. ~ June, 27th

Seeking the small to find the great

The theatre, for these vast historical scenes, is not cinema, and must always enter through the small door. We find greatness in the minuscule. ~ July, 5th

Friendly Agreement

It is true that I wish to succeed in entering the spectacle through this small preamble in a trench. In France, moreover! With an Englishman and a Frenchman from the Empire. And for Winston, the Empire is very important. ~ July, 8th



Decor research – video, *Here dwell the dragons. First Episode*, September 2024 © Archives Théâtre du Soleil

Disarray

We who are supposed to work with meaning, the world sometimes places us in dreadful states. I would regret the absence of a personification of this disarray that is ours. And which is not only ours, but that of all persons of goodwill working in the craft of theatre, etc. I would like it to be represented; the difficulties of Cornélia and the challenges I face in assisting her through this hardship—I want us to overcome them. ~ July, 15th

Burlesque

I do not despise the disproportion of bodies, but I do not want it to lead me away from seriousness. It

should not be burlesque. I am somewhat anxious about the fate of the burlesque in this spectacle. ~ July, 16th

Laughter

When we laugh, we love a little. This is why one must truly be brilliant to make people laugh without softening. I do not want to love them; I want to love the theatre that represents them. ~ September, 10th

Transposition

Form is content, Victor Hugo said, and for this spectacle more than ever. The more we rely on the mask, the drawing of marionettes, the grotesque for some elements, the more we will feel that your hands are masked too... Everything will help in the understanding and theatrical pleasure of one of the most austere texts we have ever attempted to produce. ~ September, 18th

Embodying

All these abstractions, these ideas, these convictions, which emerge like napalm from the mouths of some of our protagonists, should become fascinating and concrete by the characters and by the form. Through this feeling they inspire in us immediately: fascination, terror... occasionally hatred. [...] When there are words, they must be daggers, knives, poisons, ropes, and garrottes [...] ~ September, 18th

Complexity

There are moments when theatre will have to portray the inexplicable. We need to accept that. It is not our role to explain. We are here to tell and to play. And to clarify. ~ September, 18th

Power and Responsibility

Their hand shivers as they touch History. Montesquieu said, "One must touch the laws with a shivering hand." They touch here the Constitution, and they do so with trembling hands because tragedy is present at every moment, because the catastrophe could be immeasurable. There is questioning in each of their gestures and words. ~ September, 22nd



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Little subjective timelines

Right! So here we are! To get started, and to give everyone the chance to gradually familiarise themselves with our tools, I have temporarily selected a few events—some indispensable, others less so—that we should begin to try to understand, to tell, to enact from the month of April. Each of these events will unfold into one, two, three, four scenes, or perhaps more. They may be undeniably collective or excessively detailed. All these events, in their own way, predict others. Some are realised today. History vomits ogres that it seems to re-devour, yet, with our fervent complicity, it regurgitates them a few decades later.

No need to panic. It's simply Macbeth + Hamlet + Antony and Cleopatra + Arturo Ui + The Iliad and The Odyssey + War and Peace + The Mahabharata + AND SO ON. It's straightforward! And yes, of course, I know., there are millions of important things missing! That's why I say a few! Naturally, all your suggestions are awaited with great hope and impatience! Speeches or writings from Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, Adolf Hitler and his clique, Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh, and so on, alongside prominent intellectual and artistic figures will appear, summoned or not. Alone or accompanied. They have so much to tell us. So many warnings to send. They are giants : George Orwell, Anna Akhmatova, Isaac Babel, Mikhail Bulgakov, Osip Mandelstam, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Vasily Grossman, Boris Pasternak, Anna Politkovskaya, Stefan Zweig, Thomas Man, Klaus Mann, Georges Bernanos...

Ariane Mnouchkine, "To get started", notes to actors, 25th of March 2024



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Five days have passed since the capital of the revolution has been under the boot of a handful of bold conspirators. [...] It was not a workers' uprising that brought Lenin and Trotsky to their fleeting power. It was not an uprising at all. [...] It was a plot, in every sense of the word. It was not even a plot of armed workers. It was a military conspiracy carried out by Bolshevik Praetorians from the idle, debauched, and rotted garrison of Petrograd.

Boris Kritchovski, correspondent for *L'Humanité*, on the seizure of the Winter Palace, Letters from Petrograd, October 1917 - February 1918 (*Vers la catastrophe russe*, Ed De Fallois, 2018)

Originally, the year 1917

Based on the chronology compiled by the Smolny editorial collective in its 2024 edition of Nikolai Sukhanov's *The Russian Revolution, 1917*.

The dates are given according to the Julian calendar, which was in use in the Russian Empire, meaning they are thirteen days "behind" the Gregorian calendar that the Bolshevik government adopted on the 1st of February 1918.

30th Dec. (1916) Assassination of Rasputin.

14th February Convocation of the Duma — Tensions regarding the supply of the capital.

18th February Demand for a general wage increase by workers from the Putilov factory. Refusal by the executive office.

20th February Rumours of bread rationing cause panic.

21st February Closure of the Putilov factory due to lack of supplies, leaving thousands of workers on technical unemployment.

22nd February Putilov factory executive office announces an indefinite lockout. — Tsar Nicholas II departs for the Supreme Headquarters (Stavka) at Mogilev.

23rd February International Women's Day — Large demonstration by female textile workers, joined by metalworkers. Over 80,000 strikers reported.

24th February Proclamation by Khabalov minimising shortages of bread and flour — New day of demonstrations, they grow in scale and social reach. First slogans include "Down with the government" and "Down with the war" — Cossacks display significant passivity.

25th February General strike — Demonstrations take on a political tone; red flags are raised, Cossacks refuse to fire, and acts of mutiny escalate — Commissar Krilov is killed by a Cossack in Znamenskaia Square — Brief and final session of the Imperial Duma — Around 6 PM, dragoons of the 9th regiment fire on protesters near the municipal Duma — Meeting of leftist factions at lawyer Sokolov's office.

26th February New demonstrations and targeted attacks on police stations — Soldiers from the Volynski regiment fire on the crowd, killing 40 — A company of the Pavlovski regiment mutinies.

27th February General insurrection — The garrison mutinies, starting with the Volynski regiment — Seizure of the Arsenal, Winter Palace, and Peter and Paul Fortress — The Provisional Committee of the State Duma positions itself as the guarantor of power — First meeting of a Provisional Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, which calls for its convocation.

28th February Elections in factories and garrisons for delegates to the Soviet — First plenary session of the Soviet — The imperial train is diverted to Pskov.

1st March Publication of *Prikaz No. 1*, the Soviet's agenda to the army, recognising soldiers' political rights.

2nd March Abdication of Nicholas II in favour of his brother, Grand Duke Mikhail — Prince Lvov is called to lead a provisional government — A Soviet forms in Kiev (Ukraine).

3rd March Grand Duke Mikhail also renounces the throne — Creation of the first provisional government — Kerensky becomes Minister of Justice.

4th March	Publication of the Tsar's abdication manifesto — Dissolution of the Okhrana, the Tsarist secret police.
5th March	Republication of <i>Pravda</i> , a Bolshevik organ.
7th March	Establishment of the Contact Commission of the Executive Committee of the Soviet to monitor the activities of the Provisional Government — Arrest of Nicholas II and his family, placed under house arrest in Tsarskoe Selo.
8th March	Publication of the decree for a general amnesty — Arrest of Nicholas II.
9th March	The United States recognises the Provisional Government.
12th March	Return of Kamenev and Stalin — Abolition of the death penalty.
14th March	Call "To the Peoples of the World" by the Soviet.
16th March	Abdication of Michael II, brother of Nicholas II — End of Tsarism.
18th March	Return of Gotz and Tseretelli.
19th March	Women's demonstration for equal political rights, which they achieve that very evening.
23rd March	Funeral ceremonies for the victims of the February days.
27th March	Declaration by the Provisional Government on war aims, resulting from negotiations and compromise with the Executive Committee of the Soviet.
29th March	Opening of the first all-Russian Soviet conference.
31st March	Return of Plekhanov, with the support from Great Britain, accompanied by six socialist delegates from the Allies.
3rd April	Arrival of Lenin at Finland Station.
4th April	Lenin presents his "April Theses" at a joint conference of all social democrats: Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and non-faction members at the Tauride Palace.
7th April	Publication of Lenin's "April Theses" in <i>Pravda</i> .
8th April	Return of Chernov, Avksentiev, and Savinkov.
18th April	May Day demonstrations — Note from Miliukov, Foreign Minister, assuring the Allies of Russia's support "until final victory."
19-20th April	"April Days" in response to Miliukov's note, with demonstrations by workers and soldiers against the government's foreign policy.
24th April	The 7th All-Russian Bolshevik Conference adopts Lenin's "April Theses."
30th April	Resignation of Cadet Guchkov, Minister of War.
1st May	The Central Executive Committee allows Soviet members to participate in the Provisional Government.
3rd May	Resignation of Cadet Miliukov, Foreign Minister, replaced by Tereshchenko.

- 4th May** Return of Trotsky, who joins the inter-district organisation (Mezhrayontsy, liaison committee between the districts of the capital, promoting unity between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks) — Opening of the All-Russian Peasant Congress.
- 5th May** Creation of the first coalition government, including six socialist ministers — Kerensky becomes Minister of War.
- 7th May** Conference of inter-district representatives in Petrograd.
- 9th May** Return of Martov — All-Russian Menshevik Conference that supports the coalition government.
- 3-12th June** First Congress of the Soviets — "All power to the Soviets!"
- 10th June** First *Universal* (decree according to Cossack tradition) of the Rada proclaims the autonomy of Ukraine — The Bolsheviks cancel the demonstration they had called, which is banned by the Central Executive Committee.
- 16th June** Agenda issued to the army and navy by Kerensky in preparation for a general offensive on the front.
- 18th June** Beginning of the Russian offensive in Galicia — A day of support for the Provisional Government, called by the Central Executive Committee, turns into a show of force by the Bolsheviks, whose slogans dominate the demonstrations.
- 29th June** Lenin seeks refuge in Finland, where he remains until the 4th of July.
- 3-7th July** Unrest breaks out in Petrograd as soldiers and workers loyal to the Bolsheviks revolt against the Provisional Government. The movement fails, resulting in a wave of repression against the Bolsheviks.
- 3rd July** The second *universal* of the Ukrainian Rada establishes a general secretariat of the Central Rada, "acting as an organ of the Provisional Government in the sphere of state administration."
- 6-8th July** The German breakthrough towards Tarnopol marks the failure of Kerensky's offensive, although the General Staff only realises this late and continues its assaults elsewhere. Start of the Austro-German counter-offensive.
- 11th July** Declaration by Tseretelli, Minister of the Interior, who disseminates repressive measures — Tarnopol is definitively evacuated.
- 12th July** Reinstatement of the death penalty by gunshot to the front.
- 14th July** Closure of Bolshevik newspapers.
- 15th July** Grand spectacle of the funerals for the Cossacks who died during the July Days.
- 16-23rd July** The Russian front collapses — Austro-German troops, facing little resistance, advance through Galicia and Ukraine.
- 18th July** Kerensky, abandoning the Mariinsky Palace, chooses to relocate the government to the Winter Palace — Start of the transfer of the Soviet to the Smolny Institute.
- 21st July** False resignation of Kerensky and his ministers.

- 22nd July** Arrest of Kamenev, Lunacharsky, and Trotsky.
- 23rd July** Creation of the third coalition.
- 4th August** Release of Kamenev.
- 8th August** Release of Lunacharsky.
- 25 Aug.-1 Sept.** Kornilov putsch: initially called upon by Kerensky to provide him with reliable troops, he is ultimately disowned by Kerensky, who calls for a united front of socialist organisations against the counter-revolution — Release of Bolsheviks, regularisation of the Red Guards.
- 31st August** First resolution of the Soviet in favour of Soviet power, a common slogan for internationalist Mensheviks and Bolsheviks.
- 2nd September** Release of Trotsky.
- 8th September** Bolsheviks who fled after July return to political life.
- 14-22nd Sept.** Democratic Conference held.
- 23rd Sept.** Opening of the Pre-Parliament — Trotsky elected president of the Petrograd Soviet.
- 25th Sept.** Creation of the third coalition government.
- 1st October** Lenin: Will the Bolsheviks keep the power?
- 7th October** The Bolshevik group leaves the Pre-Parliament.
- 9th October** The Executive Committee of the Soviet decides to create a Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC).
- 10th October** A clandestine meeting of the Bolshevik Central Committee in Sukhanov's apartment decides on insurrection by a vote of ten to two, those against being Kamenev and Zinoviev.
- 16th October** The Bolshevik Central Committee confirms its decision of the 10th of October, with the same reservations from Kamenev and Zinoviev.
- 17th October** The TSIK postpones the opening of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets to the 25th of October. — Open letter from Kamenev to *Novaya Jizn*. — Lenin's public response, "A Letter to the Comrades" is published in *Rabotchiy Pout* dated on the 19, 20, and 21st October.
- 21st October** The Petrograd garrison recognises the Military Revolutionary Committee as the sole effective military authority.
- 24th October** The government initiates legal proceedings against the MRC and seals the main printing house of the Bolsheviks, who blow the seals up. This marks the formal beginning of the insurrection.
- 25-26th Oct.** Seizure of the Winter Palace. The insurrection is led by the Military Revolutionary Committee, which declares by anticipation the fall of the Provisional Government at 10 a.m. — Opening of the second All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

26th October Formation of the Sovnarkom, Council of People's Commissars, the new revolutionary government. — Adoption of the "Decree on Peace" and the "Decree on Land."

27th October First session of the Council of People's Commissars. — Hasty enactment of the "Decree on the Press," which bans bourgeois newspapers.

29th October Voting begins for the elections to the All Russian Constituent Assembly.

30-31st Oct. Defeat at Pulkovo of the counter-revolutionary forces commanded by General Krasnov.

7th November While awaiting the election results, Lenin takes the lead in *Pravda* to assert the primacy of the Bolshevik party.

18th Nov. The Sovnarkom bans nine newspapers that had published the call to the people from the former Provisional Government and announced the convening of the Constituent Assembly.

25th November Lenin dissolves the K.D. party.

8th December Establishment of the Cheka.

12th December Lenin declares that Ukraine is a Soviet Republic. Theses on the Constituent Assembly.

24-27th Dec. Lenin: how to organise the emulation?

When one feels that things are heading towards the worst, one cannot simply rely on the established routines, postures, and platforms. When 'the hour of accuracy strikes,' as Marc Bloch [1886-1944] said, it is necessary to say the right word, 'capable of accurately outlining the contours of facts without ambiguity or uncertainty.'

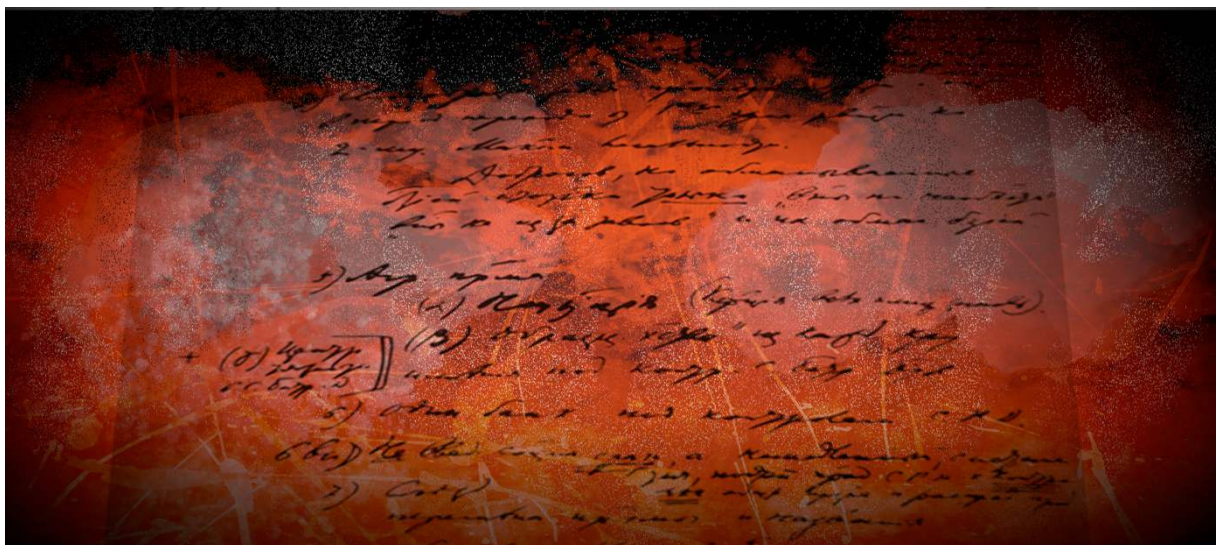
Patrick Boucheron. *Le temps impose parfois à l'historien d'entrer dans la mêlée*, Le Monde, 3 nov. 2003



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