

Terrassa's TNT Festival: The New, the Usual and the Ugly

The Festival TNT - Terrassa Noves Tendències – is a contemporary performance festival that has been running for nine years in the Catalan city of Terrassa, twenty-eight kilometres north of Barcelona. Boasting of 210,000 inhabitants, Terrassa was one of the chief centers of Catalonia ' s industrial revolution, and remnants of its rich textile history still linger. In fact, the TNT coincided with a denim pop-up festival running along one of the city ' s major streets, and a number of its local stores featured designs produced in the city. The city ' s Teatre Principal, built in 1911 in high modernist style, was extensively renovated in the years leading to its centenary. The ceramic cupola remains as does some of the original tiling and interior columns, but the works have rendered it into a state of the art theatre with 623 seats in its main house. The TNT uses venues across the town including purpose-built theatres – like Alegria and Maria Plans Sala of Barcelona ' s Institut del Teatre, which has a satellite in the town. It also takes on board the jazz club, Nova Jazz Cava, and the Amic de les Arts, as well as a range of outdoor spaces across the town. This year saw thirty-one productions – twenty-one of them sold out – and a new initiative called TNT Kids with a range of children ' s performances across the city including Xirriquiteula Teatre ' s Girafes. Thirteen of the productions were co-productions with Catalan companies, six from the rest of Spain, and five productions were from outside of Spain. The 2016 TNT saw over ninety theatre professionals from the outside of Spain come to sample Catalonia ' s cultural wares, which resulted in a 97% occupancy across the festival ' s four day run.

Rodrigo García opened the TNT at the Teatre Principal with his piece 4, already presented outside of Spain at a number of events including Paris ' s Festival d ' Automne, and the Athens and Epidaurus Festival. The piece continues the poetic vein of his most recent work, and riffs on a certain set of questions and ideas, rather than a clear narrative line or argument. The piece begins with the four performers, Gonzalo Cunill, Núria Lloansi, Juan Lorient and Juan Navarro, who step onto the stage bound together in a web of fine thread that looks like a giant spider ' s web. The four move with tiny steps across the wide stage, scuttling like rodents from side to side while the thread moves with them. Props are in place, which include items that don ' t quite seem to gel such as a giant bar of Marseilles soap that looks like a tombstone, two sleeping bags placed on a chair, a reclining chair, a surveillance light, and a wooden surface where a coyote head-and-skin and a bottle of bourbon sit. The performers move around them to the opposite side of the stage, and the fine web begins to expand, looking more like Christmas tree lights that bind the individuals together, even as they attempt to pull apart. The image is one of interdependence and resentment – of individuals tied to those they cohabit with. When the four finally break apart scattering thread, bells and lights, something explodes. As all four scatter to a different area of the stage, the individual triumphs over the group. 4 is about the need to establish your position in the world no matter the hurt such an generates. In many ways, the short sketches that follow illustrate Walter Benjamin ' s dictum that every document of civilization is equally a document of barbarism.

This is a production about sensations as much as ideas. A tennis match where Juan Lorient hits the back wall produces an echo of pulsating sound each time the ball touches the walled surface. The sound of a woman tennis player grunting as she hits the ball transforms into the sonic embodiment of a kind of pounding pain; the image is similarly disturbing – a cloudscape

mutates into a vagina into which the ball is hit. An innocuous game becomes an image of unspeakable violation. Juan Navarro on the couch personifies passivity, a client of psychoanalysis receiving wisdom. A few seconds later, he is dancing around the stage in tennis whites. On the screen behind him, John McEnroe is delivering a tantrum at a linesman and/or umpire as Loriente takes his place on the couch.

Four chickens are brought on stage by Loriente, Lloansi, and two nine-year old girls. All play with the poultry gently, caressing and stroking them until they fall asleep in the half-light then Juan Navarro takes the girls off stage. At first it is an atmosphere of gameplay but this soon shifts into something more ominous and unpleasant. The back-wall projects images of the girls being made up in an overtly sexualized manner along with vamp-like make-up, and swept up hair that looks inappropriately grown up, while the onstage action shows the chickens being similarly abused – one is swung by one of the men, a second is placed down his trousers. The images are shocking – all the more so because abuses are being conducted both onstage and in an offstage, onscreen space. When the girls are next seen on stage, they parade up and down in skimpy, satin dresses and high heel shoes. The girls appear to have been repackaged for consumption, and like animated dolls they parade and dance, swing and boogie. The chickens have been similarly mistreated, placed in trainers that constrain their movement and keep them rooted. It may look cute for a split second but García asks the audience to consider the ethics of looking cool and cute, of how we process and package, brand and sell. Is anything sacred?

A drone flies above the stage, an image of bright lights hovering. The drone watches and waits, dancing to the sound of Beethoven ' s Fourth Symphony. Juan Navarro plays the guitar, his coyote headdress links him back to the chickens. This is a production about abuse and excess, about ways of seeing and the politics of embodied experience, about complicity and guilt. Spectators are coerced into acting without knowing what exactly they are doing or why they are doing it.

Indeed, as the young girls dance, the performers lead audience members onto the stage to join the festivities. By joining in, we are made to feel complicit in the abuse. An audience member is invited to undertake a conversation with Lloansi. Both are placed in sleeping bags which are closed up – one in red, and another in blue – after which, they embark on a banal conversation about likes and dislikes, food and love. We laugh from the space of the audience – another situation of abuse in which we are made to feel complicit. Lloansi mentions that she doesn ' t like using audience members in this way, but is made to do so. Perhaps ultimately, the whole of the production examines the relationship between coercion and participation, and where the lines of abuse fall across this fine line. The two performers may not be entirely aware of the positions into which they have been placed – in one case, there is a simulation of sex which refers to that of numerous porn films. Participatory entertainment may give the impression of emancipation, but 4 offers a vision of five-minutes-of-fame where respect and privacy have no place. Everything and anything can be packaged for public consumption.

4 enacts a series of abuses that disturb and unsettle. The young girls are given cocktails to drink. The chickens are roughly treated. Cunill, dressed absurdly as a Samurai warrior, delivers his own monologue about the abuses enacted on him. It is the sharpest writing in the production

and is something that is genuinely unnerving, illustrating how an act that might at first appear innocuous can mutate into something more disturbing.

An embrace between Lloansi and Navarro on the bar of the Marseille soap turns into a gentle wrestle. The body language becomes increasingly more aggressive and disquieting. The soap lathers to impede their movement and keep them rooted to it, slipping and sliding on the giant tomlike structure. Eventually, they tumble off the soap and continue writhing and wriggling, slipping in and out of each other ' s grasp. Holding on is far more difficult than at first it might appear.



Combat on the Marseille Soap - a Scene from 4, directed by Rodrigo García, 2016. Photo Courtesy: Festival TNT.

Instinct is a funny thing, hard to control and harness. The carnivorous plants that are brought on the onstage video screen, clamp their predatory leaves around a worm placed in front of them. It ' s an image of harm and abuse but also of survival, of resplendent green leaves with piranha-like teeth grasping for their prey. At some point in the performance, all four performers become the prey – but they are also predators characterized by a savagery that disarms and dismays.

Not all of the show works – the tennis scenes begin brilliantly but then seem rather overextended. While 4 points to the abuses contained within the mundane and the accepted,

within that which is presented as habitual or inoffensive, there is a fine line between representing abuse and enacting it -- with the treatment of the chickens bordering on the cruel. Perhaps in the end, García ' s show is there to test our limits and the ways in which we undermine our own principles. Who am I to criticize the treatment of the chickens, when I am perfectly happy to tuck into a roast chicken without asking too many questions? 4 asks the questions – the answers may not be as comfortable as the audience may wish.

In Anarchy, presented at the Amic de les Arts, Societat Doctor Alonso certainly purports to ask a series of worthy questions about anarchy and agency, about collectivity and community, about what it means to operate between chaos and order. Only here, the piece lacks the imaginative energy and the technical discipline that mark Rodrigo ' s García ' s work. Yugoslav performer Semolina Tomic is positioned on the floor in a crouched position, arms outstretched. The audience take their seats and are invited to pick up one of the white electric guitars that are resting on their chairs. An extended monologue is played – reflections on anarchy and connectivity, with historical examples taking the audience back to the Civil War and the internal squabbles between the different factions of the Left that Orwell chronicled in *Homage to Catalonia*. The audience are encouraged to provide their own soundtrack to the action with the electric guitars. When Semolina rises from her frozen position, she shakes herself up, back combs her hair, and begins jogging and jumping up and down on the spot, wiggling and wriggling, with burps and other bodily eruptions, while the guitars keep strumming.

There ' s a lot of energy here from Semolina Tomic, but it is never harnessed within a tight enough dramaturgical structure. It ' s all well and good to say that this is a piece about chaos and order, but the framework seems too flaccid to carry the ideas forward in anything but a perfunctory manner. For a local audience, Tomic is a reference point within the alternative theatre scene, but those unfamiliar with her history will be less forgiving of her lack of technique. On rising from the floor for the first time, she adjusts her navy-blue shorts; the performance feels loose and lax, with her arms flapping like a chicken, resembling some drunken dancing in a sad and sorry disco. Tomic lacks the technical precision to keep the spectator engaged. The commentary appears to be pieced together from Wikipedia entries on anarchy and Orwell, and lacks the sophistication of García ' s ruminations i4. “ Everyone can play punk music, ” Tomic pronounces – yes, but not all can play it well. The Clash were a great punk band, that ' s why they serve as a point of reference for a movement and a musical style that came to embody something of the idea of chaos with order that underpins this show; that ' s why we remember the statements they made through their music. Many others have now faded into oblivion. Tomic, working with Societat Doctor Alonso ' s directors Sofía Asencio and Tomàs Aragay, may speak of the need to make a statement. However, the production just lacked the rigor, the technical precision and the dramaturgical focus to allow the statement to resonate.

Labuena Compañía is made up of David Franch and Arantza López who both perform and direct a two-hander called *A Placer* – a piece about pleasure and its contents and discontents, presented in Sala Cupula, the studio space of the Teatre Principal. The show is inspired by Plutarch ' s comment, “ Enjoying all pleasures is imprudent; avoiding them is insensitive. ” The piece evolves on a bare stage where the two performers manage the sound desk and props, which they bring on as necessary. López dances wildly in front of a large industrial fan with her hair flying as in a fashion shoot; a giant eye watches from the screen above with the video

having been designed by Abel Cunillera. On a green rug evoking a pastoral Eden, each character dreams aloud – she is reckless and impulsive; he is more cautious and careful. Each conjures the other, each observes and watches. The microphone allows their thoughts to echo around the space; each directs the other into particular positions associated with desire and its realization, including classic sex poses that have a whiff of pornography 's commercialization of lovemaking. Franch 's Ry Cooder-like riffs on his guitar provide a soundtrack to the action as López crawls along the floor, semi-naked like a contorted crab. At the end of the piece, Franch accompanies López, both now formally dressed in elegant evening wear and heels, as she sings of the whole of Europe becoming Auschwitz.



A New Take on the Tale of Adam and Eve - a Scene from A Placer, directed by David Franch and Arantza López, 2016. Photo Courtesy: Festival TNT.

A Placer seemed very much a work in progress – sketches in search of a tighter structure that would link them more closely together. The dependence on what appeared to be scripts for the longer textual recitals suggested that the show was not quite as “ ready ” as the other productions at the Festival. The scenes needed shaving and a more focused sense of purpose, and I am not talking here of political or thematic purpose, but rather a dramaturgical or performative purpose. López is an attractive performer and Franch knows how to hold an audience ’ s attention, but in the end, this is not enough when the material doesn ’ t feel sufficiently worked through.

One of the highlights of the festival was Atresbandes ’ All In – a witty, provocative coproduction with Manchester ’ s Home, which was seen at the Edinburgh Fringe in the summer of 2016. Atresbandes are one of Catalonia ’ s smartest fringe theatre companies, merging precise movement work with droll dialogue. Their first production, Solfatara, offered an original take on the “ guess who is coming to dinner ” scenario, where the different pairings enacted that which so often remains unarticulated in awkward situations. The horrors were embodied in fastmoving sketches with the cast of three performing the different pairings with skill, pace and panache. Their second production, Locus Amoenus, was similarly absurdist in tone, merging clown with incisive dialogue. It concerned three individuals on a train who don ’ t realize that they are on a journey destined to end with an accident that will kill them all – a fact that was marked by a digital clock metaphorically ticking away the little time the characters have left. The humorous bilingual conversations, the all too understandable irritations, the fumbling and fiddling of the characters who are not sure of their own sense of purpose and destiny, all realized with an understated sense of humour, confirmed Atresbandes as much more than a one-hit wonder. Their third show, All In, brings their incisive eye to the subject of the group and how you remain a part of it or are ostracized from it.

The company ’ s founders Mònica Almirall, Miquel Segovia, and Albert Pérez Hidalgo are here joined by Melcior Casals. Interestingly, Casals is positioned in the role of the outsider, the group member who is increasingly ostracized by the other colleagues as the scenarios develop. The piece begins with a discussion of the Arirang gymnastics festival in North Korea; images show the games – tens of thousands of participants in perfect coordination performing as a single entity. The individual only functions as a part of the collective picture – the human face solely viewed in the close up at the end of the performance as the faces of the children who flip the placards from one side to another are shown. All In effectively flips a situation to show what happens when we see the other side of the argument – usually from the point of view of s/he who is left out. What does it mean to create a group? And are groups always, eventually, about those who are out as much as in?

Two figures dressed entirely in black, with faces blacked out with black cloth and wearing black wigs, face each other; they are friends of sorts – although the boundary between a friend and an acquaintance is another of the piece ’ s themes. The wigs identify one figure as male and the other as female although facial features are masked by the black stocking-like cloth that clings to their faces. The discussion is droll and deadpan, moving from the virtues of life coaches to the penchant for renting storage spaces. The woman is advising the male to downsize, to get rid

of the clutter in his life because it doesn't create a favorable impression. She tells him in no uncertain terms to conform.

The couple bookends the piece, returning at the end as she delivers further observations, gleaned from self-help books and press articles, on the kind of hoarder he is – she delivers her message with little concern for his feelings. He is not a collector or a dreamer – the latter involves hoarding objects to enable the dreamer to create a parallel life that he or she enjoys. Neither is he a nostalgic, who enjoys the objects he hoards for their sentimental or nostalgic value, but rather is someone to be pitied, hoarding objects in a perpetual purgatory. In an era where the perils of dislocation, divorce and death have led to a surge in rental storage spaces, his pain and sense of disorientation is abused by a “friend” who values her own smug knowledge, gleaned from sources she never questions or queries, over the feelings of a chum.

The piece's central scene – and its funniest – concerns four friends all speaking in English as an acquired second language. Each wears a wig that presents them as a clownish creation. Their conversations appear to be taken from a language manual – questions about how you are, what your likes and dislikes are, as well as the need for balanced, healthy meals. The foursome all end up at Albert's flat where they pool their energies to create a meal for four; only Melcior doesn't share the trio's tastes and is gradually pushed to one side by the others as they party together. When Melcior is sick on the roast chicken they have collectively prepared, things get nasty, with tensions rising further after there is vomiting on the pizza that they had to have delivered after the chicken was rendered inedible. The fast and furious mopping up of the sick, the removal of Albert's vomit-ridden trousers and the increasingly drunken antics, all create a razor-sharp climate. As in *Lord of the Flies*, Melcior is snubbed to the point of bullying; he begins reciting “Ode to Joy” in German to find his place in the world, but even this gesture is misinterpreted by the trio, who become even more keen to disassociate themselves from him.

Schiller's “Ode to Joy” appears throughout the piece like a running motif along with the choral finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, which has acquired legendary status. Mao permitted it, both the Allies and Axis forces used it to political ends, and it has sometimes been seen as the anthem of Europe (although a voiceover notes that it is not technically the EU anthem). Written by Schiller in 1785, the poem was allegedly kept by Beethoven as an inspiration; a voice tells Melcior to do the same and he does it, bringing it out of his pocket with his long, lithe fingers as a gesture of defiance. If the vomiting is his way of trying to reassert his presence within the group, the recital becomes a further gesture of defiance. In the end, however, as the trio dance around him at the disco where they are continuing their party, he cuts an increasingly forlorn figure, a prop on which a drink is placed. The clubbers boogying down in a synchronized style cannot help but resemble the mass spectacle of the Arirang Games that bookend the piece. The will to conform is perhaps more pervasive than we may wish to recognize.

The physical work on *All In* is precise and disarming – whether it's the opening and closing of the fridge or the chopping of vegetables undertaken by the group for dinner, or the semi-chat show positions of the two black-clad figure that appear early and late on in the show. The performers are able to use their elastic faces to potent effect, with the wigs they each sport offering a clowning dimension to the proceedings – they are at once human but also types, and the fact that the performers refer to each other by their given name suggests an uneasy

equation between actor and role. In an instant, Miquel moves from being a part of the trio clowning around the flat to become a pizza delivery man who takes offence at one of Melchior ' s comments. It ' s almost a Jekyll and Hyde moment – the performers stepping in and out of roles as the situation demands. Melchior is increasingly positioned at the peripheries of quartet group sketches – his tall, angular body and lean face further distinguishing him from the more compact Albert, Mònica and Miquel.



The Individual on Display - a Scene from All In, directed by Atresbandes Theatre Company, 2016. Photo Courtesy: Festival TNT.

Seen in the context of Brexit, and the attacks on “ others ” witnessed in the aftermath of the June 23 referendum on leaving the EU, All In becomes a piece on the fine line between the individual and the mass. When does a group become a mass? When is individual identity erased in the name of conforming? In each of the sketches, there is a moment when the individual is told to conform in some way, to become part of a majority. When is individuality erased? Melchior cannot assert his “ difference, ” (i.e. his veganism), because the trio finds it easier to go with their own likes as carnivores. The children who hold up the giant cards at the Arirang Mass Games are only revealed at the show ' s end as the camera focuses in on their vulnerable faces swamped behind the cards. The mass is always made up of individuals, even if we don ' t want to or can ' t immediately see them All In has a unity of theme that brings the different sketches together – allowing for a jazz riff of sorts on a theme that moves beyond the “ them ” and “ us ”

characterizing so much of the polarized discourse of contemporary politics.

There is a very good piece inside Txalo Toloza 's *Pacífico #3: Extraños mares arden/Peaceful #3: Strange Seas Burn*, but it hasn ' t yet quite found its form or shape, and feels like a rather baggy and repetitive piece of work. Chilean performer Txalo Toloza-Fernández, a regular collaborator of Roger Bernat, here shares the stage with Laida Azkona Goñi, offering an intelligent contemplation of the relationship between mining interests in Chile, and capitalism and art. The narrative is woven around his family ' s history and presence in terms of labor for the mining industry, as well as the wider capitalist interest of the Guggenheim family and their control of major nitrate mining companies in Chile. The stage is converted through the layering of different colored sheets into a landscape that evokes the Atacama Desert – the fabric is folded to create tent-like structures and then stretched out like the layers of soil that are penetrated by the drills that modernity brought to these Chilean outposts. The story that is narrated is compelling – a boom and bust economy of corrupt capitalist deals where industrialists and the politicians that supported the mining industry made obscene amounts of money at the expense of those who labored in appalling working conditions. The philanthropy that now defines the Guggenheim brand is thus positioned within a wider history of monetary acquisition where only 3% of the artworks are ever on show for public exhibition. *Pacífico #3* is a fascinating tale where the personal and political are expertly interwoven – Toloza ' s father and grandfather are linked to the Edwards family of diplomats and politicians, and the owners of *El Mercurio* with strong media interests, including the control of *El Mercurio* and *La Segunda*, Chile ' s two leading daily newspapers. It is a piece that recognizes the different intersections that mark the political economy of a nation, the interdependence of First and Third World commerce, and the relationship between barbarism and civilization where philanthropy occupies an uneasy position.

The two performers – dressed in silver-colored outfits that speak to the metallic interests that drive the Guggenheim ' s business – never manage to vary the tone. As such, the production feels overlong and repetitive. The tone is too contemplative, too drawn out and lacks variations in pace. Azkona Goñi seemed unsure of her lines at times. The Atacama Desert, as in Patricio Guzmán ' s 2010 film *Nostalgia for the Light*, is a space where the corpses of the abuses of the industries handled in the piece, including mining, arms, finance and art, rest. The relationship between mining and art is well chronicled, that of arms and finance, less so. A process of elimination, stripping away to get to the kernel of the piece, as well as a more varied performance vocabulary, might render *Pacífico #3* as persuasive a piece of theatre-making as it is in terms of political storytelling.

The Mexican company *Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol* (the title translates as “ lizards lying in the sun ”) has offered a potent model for a dynamic political theatre where lived experience is folded into a broader socio-economic landscape. In Veracruz. *Nos estamos deforestando/Veracruz. We are deforesting*, co-founder Luisa Pardo presents a performed essay, a public lecture on her home state of Veracruz that offers a contemplation of sorts on the context that engendered the conditions leading to the brutal execution of activist Nadia Vera and photojournalist Rubén Espinosa in 2015 – the latter was the fourteenth journalist murdered since Javier Duarte became the governor of the province in 2010. Through slides, video footage of interviews with residents of the state, factual information on deforestation, organized crime, and the area ' s

colonial heritage, Pardo weaves a compelling tale of political interests and financial exploitation, of drug-trafficking and corruption. The gaps between political rhetoric and the day to day realities of the population become ever more evident through the factual details that she presents; they are unembellished and unadorned. The numbers speak for themselves.

It is the simplicity of the presentation that proves most persuasive, like Simon McBurney ' s recent piece called *The Encounter*, this is storytelling where issues of ethics, sustainability and transparency counter the political jargon of the politicians Pardo cites. As she weaves her tale of historical colonization, deforestation and drug cartels, individual tales of courage and resilience emerge. Pardo does not profess to speak for Vera or Espinosa but simply with her microphone and lecture notes, props and visual aids, maps the evolution of a culture of intimidation, fear and ecological damage – she makes visible that which hovers menacingly in the margins; she articulates the casualties of the unholy alliance of legitimate state authorities and illegitimate cartels that bypass legislation and laws. Veracruz makes visible the gaps between what is said and what is done; Pardo ' s acts of remembrance are about creating a visual stage landscape of trees and candles and textiles, photographs and trinkets that recall the lives and deaths of those that Duarte has sought to erase through brutal, unlawful assassination.



A Scene from the Political Storytelling Piece Veracruz, featuring Luisa Pardo, presented by Lagartijas Tiradas al Sol, 2016. Photo Courtesy: Lydia Cazorla.

I have long been an admirer of Philippe Quesne ' s Vivarium Studio. Founded in 2003, it has offered a remarkable meeting ground for visual and performance artists. I caught his *La mélancolie des Dragons*, first seen in 2008, last year, which is a droll commentary on storytelling focusing on a group of heavy metal rockers who are stranded in the middle of nowhere when their Citroen car breaks down. The entertainment park they create to divert and regale the woman who has come to repair their car is a sheer delight – a miscellany of different tricks and illusions that come from a wide range of cultural forms that celebrates the artisan qualities of theatrical endeavour. Quesne, artistic director of Paris ' s Nanterre-Amandiers Théâtre, began as a set designer and his productions have an exquisite attention to scenic landscapes, and an economy of scale where each and every objective has a purpose and position within the broader frame of the performance.

Quesne ' s *Effete de Serge* first seen in 2007, has now been seen in over sixteen countries and proved a popular addition to the TNT program. As is the case with all Quesne ' s pieces, the first scene is the final scene of his last show *D ' Après Nature/From Life* with a spaceman appearing at the glass door of a bungalow. This is Serge who removes his space helmet and begins to show the audience around his low-rise apartment. There ' s a table tennis table, a television set and speakers, a DVD player, a music system, a remote-controlled car and other clutter against the walls. Serge, as played by Gaëtan Vourc ' h, somewhat resembles a silent movie actor; his deadpan Buster Keaton-ish face has an enigmatic blankness to it that makes it hard to read. There is little context, so it ' s hard to decipher his motivations or intentions, or what he does beyond entertain his friends with a series of low-tech tricks each and every Sunday. The tricks last no longer than three minutes and have wonderfully succinct titles; each one is generally observed by a single spectator – an elderly man on a bicycle, a woman who appears to have something of a crush on Serge, or a couple who turns up in their car. Serge is perfunctory in his hospitality; each spectator or group are offered a drink and a seat, and they then watch the short show before swiftly being dispatched back home.



A Scene depicting Gaëtan Vourc ' h preparing his Tricks in ' effete de Serge directed by Philippe Quesne, 2016. Photo Courtesy: Martin Argyroglo.

Time passes – the move from Sunday to Sunday signaled by Serge self-consciously changing a shirt. Serge orders a pizza, plays with his remote-controlled car and hits the table tennis balls around the room. The visitors come and go, expressing admiration for the light and sound shows that he creates. Wagner ' s “ Ride of the Valkyries ” is used with smoke and flashing headlights to amusing effect; a laser show with John Cage ' s music functions as a testament to minimalism; Vic Chester ' s music accompanies the pyrotechnic display that Serge coordinates with his feet. The shows are a testament to human creativity, the need to entertain and be entertained, to make theatre from the most innocuous of everyday objects. The guests that come are as monosyllabic as Serge, but they express wonder and praise for his mini-performances. In the final scene, one of the guests arrives late and misses the show, but the others strive to conjure the piece for her. The need to share stories is profound, a way of communicating and reinforcing our sense of self in relation to those around us. Serge may not be able to realize that one of his guests appears to be attracted to him, lingering after each of the performances she attends, but he does recognize that something as simple as a play of light and sound can delight and animate. There is something almost Beckettian in the simplicity of the scenario, in the bare bones of the poetry, and Serge ' s lean conversations with the audience and his guests. The production produces some lovely interplay around the artifice of the situation – a car drives up outside the sliding glass doors to Serge ' s home; a bicycle pulls up

and the rider is invited to go round to the main door, rather than slip easily in through the sliding doors. There are unexplained incongruities, absurdisms, and actions within the piece, but the message seems to be, “ Hey, that ’ s life! ” Not all things can be tied up neatly or wholly explained. L ’ effete de Serge reminds the audience of what it means to be human, and, in our high-tech world, of the pleasures involved in the simplest of theatrical effects.

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16. [What Happens to Heroes: Heinrich von Kleist ' s Prinz Friedrich von Homburg at Schauspiel Frankfurt](#) by Katrin Hilbe
17. [Krystian Lupa and Thomas Bernard in Paris, Fall, 2016](#) by Manuel García Martínez

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