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# Extinction

Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe /  
Volksbühne Am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz

Julien Gosselin

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# Extinction

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texts **Thomas Bernhard,**  
**Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler**  
adaptation and direction **Julien Gosselin**

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in French, German and English, subtitled in French  
duration 4h30 (with two intermissions)  
show not recommended for children under 15

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translation

**Henri Christophe**  
**Philippe Forget**  
**Pierre Galissaires**  
**Gilberte Lambrichs**  
**Anne Pernas**  
**Jean-Claude Schneider**  
**Francesca Spinazzi / Panthéa**

with

**Guillaume Bachelé**  
**Katja Bürkle**  
**Joseph Drouet**  
**Denis Eyriey**  
**Carine Goron**  
**Zarah Kofler**  
**Rosa Lembeck**  
**Marie Rosa Tietjen**  
**Maxence Vandevelde**  
**Max Von Mechow**

cameramen

**Jérémie Bernaert**  
**Baudouin Rencurel**

dramaturgy

**Eddy d'Aranjo**  
**Johanna Höhmann**

set design

**Lisetta Buccellato**

direction assistant

**Sarah Cohen**  
**Max Pross**

musical creation

**Guillaume Bachelé**  
**Maxence Vandevelde**

lighting designer

**Nicolas Joubert**

video designer

**Jérémie Bernaert**  
**Pierre Martin Oriol**

sound designer

**Julien Feryn**

costume designer

**Caroline Tavernier**  
assisted by  
**Marjolaine Mansot**

general and stage management

**Simon Haratyk**  
**Guillaume Lepert**

props

**Lisetta Buccellato**  
**David Ferré**  
**Antoine Hespel**  
**Yvonne Schulz**  
**Carlotta Schuhmann**

color grading

**Laurent Ripoll**

lighting operator

**Zélie Champeau**  
**Manon Meyer**

sound operator

**Manon Poirier**

video operator

**David Dubost**

video surtitles

**Anne Pernas**

video script

**Elsa Revcolevschi**  
or **Simon Anquetil**

with the team of Odéon-Théâtre  
de l'Europe

with the participation of all departments of Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur and Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz

set construction Volksbühne and Workshop Devineau

premiered on June 2, 2023 at Printemps des Comédiens – Montpellier

production  
Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur, Volksbühne Am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz

coproduction  
Printemps des Comédiens – Montpellier, Wiener Festwochen, Le Phénix – scène nationale Valenciennes pôle européen de création, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Festival d'Avignon, Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers, Théâtre de la Ville Paris, Maison de la culture d'Amiens, Théâtres de la ville de Luxembourg, De Singel Anvers

supported by the ministry of culture

with the artistic collaboration of the Jeune théâtre national

supported by Channel de Calais, Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe and l'École du TnS

Thomas Bernhard is represented by L'ARCHE – theatrical agency [www.arche-editeur.com](http://www.arche-editeur.com)

# Statement of intent

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An electro music concert. The action may take place in a courtyard in Rome at night, an awfully hot night. Among dancing people stands a woman, she's dancing too. It's been a long time since she's been dancing. She's been drinking too much. Her life partner is there too, she's trying to find her among the crowd. She tells her someone called from Austria for her. Wolfsegg did.

Then a show is performed. A long, black & white classical show taking place in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Vienna. The texts are Schnitzler's; we talk about Freud, Mahler, we follow women and men seducing each other, being unfaithful to one another. They're unaware they're all going to die. It is a kind of *Melancholia* taking place in old Europe. They're all going to die. At the end of the show, actors and actresses bow to the audience before heading back to the dressing rooms. The dancing woman is there too, her partner stars in the show. Something is wrong. Then, Wolfsegg calls on the phone again.

A lecture. We're in Montpellier, Vienne, Avignon, Berlin, Paris where the action of the show takes place. A woman enters, she's the same woman we saw two hours ago. She could be Ingeborg Bachmann. She talks about literature in the same way she talks about the tragedy. She's now at a loss for words. She leaves to make a phone call. *Parents and Johannes died in an accident.*

She comes back again. This is the beginning of Thomas Bernhard's *Extinction*:

*"Little by little we must reject everything, little by little we must oppose everything, so that we can play our part in the annihilation we envisage, putting an end to the old and finally destroying it in order to make way for the new.*

*The old must be discarded and destroyed so that the new can emerge, even though we don't know what the new will be. All we know is that it has to come, there's no going back. Thinking in this way, we naturally have the old against us, which means that we have everything against us.*

*But this mustn't deflect us from our goal, which is to replace the old by the new that we long for. Ultimately, we have to abandon everything, discard everything, extinguish everything."*

She'll say *Extinction*, then switch off the lights and leave.

*Extinction* is the result of two recent experiences: working on *Le Passé* with actors from *Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur* and working on *Sturm und Drang*, first part of *Histoire de la littérature allemande* with actors from the Volksbühne. First, there was *Le Passé*, the urge to keep exploring our past, to remember the dead before us, to talk about literature as well as the end of the world. Then came the German show, meeting the troupe and experiencing the Volksbühne state of mind in this East Berlin theatre.

*Extinction* is the result of the meeting of these two worlds.

The show is performed by French and German actors and actresses, in both languages. It will be a triptych.

First performed an electro music concert performed by Guillaume Bachelé and Maxence Vandeveldé. A powerful organic piece devoid of any text, an expression of pure rage and joy. Then, a film will be performed live, or a show will be filmed live. A great classical story telling the end of the world in scenes set up before the audience. Neuf French and German actors and actresses will perform a saga inspired by Arthur Schnitzler's work and the 1910s Vienna.

Then will come a monologue of pure rage, the heart of the show – *Extinction* performed by an actress from the Volksbühne, Rosa Lembeck. The show will be a reflection on theatre as a sunken art, as well as a space where one questions the difference between nihilism and negativity.

In the second part, with Schnitzler, the end of the world seems inescapable. Collective failure, people giving up, defeated, waiting for doomsday.

With Thomas Bernhard, rage, aversion, negative thoughts are aroused by some tremendous power: the idea that one person may fight the silliness and cowardice of the world. This show is about us all, it is undoubtedly full of hope. We will watch ourselves heading for disaster, aware that our salvation can only ensue from one collective wrath.

One collective uprising.

“I have not given up, I told myself. I've already something new in mind. It might be called *Extinction*, I thought. It will be a way to wipe out what's in my mind. Everything that will be written in *Extinction* will be wiped out. I liked this title; it totally captivated me. Where it came from, I can't remember.”

# Dramaturgical perspective

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After *Le Passé* and *Sturm und Drang*, Julien Gosselin and Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur carry on exploring Europe's modernity and twilight. The second part of *Histoire de la littérature allemande* created last year at the Volksbuehne is now about Austria drown in the tragedy. The seeming frivolity of the declining Austro-Hungarian empire depicted by Arthur Schnitzler on World War I eve moves on to Thomas Bernhard's aversion and extreme disenchantment, as he looked over a century of horrors and dishonourable behaviour. Meanwhile, the two World Wars and decolonisation destroyed Europe's belief in its moral superiority and dignity. Likewise, literature and theatre were suddenly deprived of the convictions attributing spiritual and social dimensions to them.

Three years ago, the company took some distance from contemporary literature to turn to the past. Its perception though, was that ancient literature should be considered what it is – dead literature. We weren't referring to it as a way to learn more about ourselves, nor did we consider it modern or relevant to enlighten our present time. On the contrary, we were referring to it in light of its utterly uncontemporary aspect, the feelings as well as the social state that were lost in it. We were interested by everything we were unable to understand or feel. Through drama, these lost worlds could be found again, with the melancholic and ironic awareness of an unescapable gap. As if theatrical art, equally dying and uncontemporary, was the perfect way to reconnect with these outdated societies, summon the old Europe spirits and bring the dead back to life.

One should study this European modernity like one would visit the Pompeii ruins, disinter bodies cast in stone to try to understand what these lives were about – the passions, beliefs, illusions, violence and love they held. Thus, we may perceive lost civilisations as archaeologists, ethnologists or entomologists rather than heirs.

As we read Arthur Schnitzler, a gripping feeling of sadness overwhelmed us. Witnessing this lost world, one thinks: And yet, each one of these characters believes they're someone. They all believe themselves as individuals, unconscious as they are of the destruction at work.

Vienna's society as described by Schnitzler indeed appears as a hive of modern individualism and liberalism. The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> inflexible hierarchy moved on to relative democratization, made possible by the economic and cultural alliance between the aristocracy and the new bourgeoisie. New ambitions arose, such as love and sexual freedom. Such atmosphere of freedom was illustrated in the artistic world with new sociality, where the art of sophisticated conversation grew some unprecedented importance. Parallely arose an unseen figure – the modern artist, a cursed, lonesome annuitant living apart from traditional values as well as politics and economics.

The co-occurrence between relative erotic and love liberation and cultural niceties lays the scene of Schnitzler's novels and plays – where the youth's dreams of emancipation encounter society's inertia. What appears as the most striking aspect of Schnitzler's books is that a high level of complexity, almost refinement coexists with deep gnawing violence continuously at work beneath the social dialogue, deep down the human psyche. Misogyny and anti-Semitism pervade everything. Crimes of passion like pogrom never seem very far.

After Nietzsche and Marx, psychoanalysis disrupted the Vienna intellectual landscape and stopped disturbing the humanist theory of the classic subject's stability. Yet the most striking aspect of Schnitzler's dialogues is how easily these extreme theories are accepted and negated by the social and intellectual game. The society of "tolerance" and "freethinking" welcomes negativity and the subconscious's power of destruction, before taming them through the art of conversation.

This very tension between the most refined sophistication and the most brutal violence will be the heart of the next show. Hermann Broch used to talk about a "cheerful apocalypse" when referring to the last years of the Austro-Hungarian empire – the last perfect lap of honour of a decaying world. Somewhere between *the Leopard* by Visconti and *Melancholia* by Von Trier. Through poetic synthesis, the show presents the encounter between a society ignoring its own death and a cosmic catastrophe. Facing its own fate, the social game yet goes on even more, surviving the knowledge of

its own upcoming death. Despite inevitable death, the illusion remains. Political scheme carries on, witticism bursts forth. The games of seduction and jealousy appear all the more intense and radical.

Facing finiteness obviously reminds our current situation, however the objective will be to delve deeper into the feeling of loss instead of referring to the urgency to save ourselves. On many levels, the objective could mirror the asubha meditation – the meditation of the corpse. It is about looking, as from the heavens, the rotting bodies to reach higher consciousness of our own condition, welcome sadness and maybe find peace at last.

However, at the very moment when death contemplation and the utmost beauty agree, the show seems to swing round. The nihilist temptation and the aesthetic pessimism give way to something else – some energy, an uprising. This is the moment when Ingeborg Bachmann and Thomas Bernhard, combined into one female character, enter. Here lies an assumption: what if the alternative to nihilism and the bare resignation to disaster was rage, what if literature and art attempt to find a way, a language able to speak drastic opposition and refusal.

So, the form wouldn't intend to lessen the work of destruction, on the contrary it'd aggravate it until the unbearable point where it's become cruel, laughable and total. This cathartic magnification reaches its most violent level in Thomas Bernhard's. As such, if Schnitzler's language is the conversation, Bernhard's truth lies in monologue, isolation, breach and gap. If each of Schnitzler's heroes wishes to be someone, Extinction's narrator who's reached the utmost solitude, knows he is no longer someone. The modern individual has turned against himself and given way to an empty subject. Scarred by history, freed from the illusion of virtue, he can praise wrath and clairvoyance. He may now find his true reversed negative greatness, and reconnect with beauty freed from false cultural finery.



# Julien Gosselin

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Julien Gosselin studied at the EPSAD college of performing arts in Lille, run by Stuart Seide. Along with six other actors from his year group, he formed *Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur* (literally, "If you could lick my heart"), or SVPLMC, in 2009, and directed Fausto Paravidino's *Gènes 01* at the Théâtre du Nord in 2010. The following year, he directed the original production of the French version of *Tristesse Animal Noir* by Anja Hilling at the Théâtre de Vanves, before taking it on tour in 2012. In July 2013, he directed Michel Houellebecq's *Les Particules élémentaires* at the Avignon Festival, *Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur's* third production, and in March 2014 he directed *Je ne vous ai jamais aimés*, a short-form production based on a text by Pascal Bouaziz from the group Mendelson, at the Théâtre National in Brussels. In the autumn of 2015 he was back with *Le Père* by Stéphanie Chaillou at the Théâtre National in Toulouse, and that same season, at the Avignon Festival, directed *2666*, adapted from Roberto Bolaño's ground-breaking saga, before it went on tour around France and the rest of the world. At the 2017 Festival de Marseille he directed *1993*, based on a text by Aurélien Bellanger, with students from the Théâtre National in Strasbourg's year group 43. For the 2018 edition of the Avignon Festival, he adapted and directed three novels by American author Don DeLillo, namely *Players*, *Mao II* and *The Names*. The following year, at the invitation of the Internationaal Theater Amsterdam, he continued his work with Don DeLillo by adapting *Falling Man* (*Vallende Man*) with the actors of the ITA ensemble, in March 2019.

As part of the *Printemps des Comédiens* festival in Montpellier, he directed another Don DeLillo creation in the form of *Hammer and Sickle*.

In February 2021, Julien Gosselin and the Théâtre National de Strasbourg's 45 group created an adaptation of Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Dekalog*.

The director returned to the Théâtre National de Strasbourg with *Le Passé*, an adaptation of texts by Russian author Léonid Andreev, that autumn.

In the spring of 2022, he directed *Sturm und Drang*, the first instalment in the History of German Literature series, at the Berlin Volksbühne.

In 2023, he directed Thomas Bernhard and Arthur Schnitzler's *Extinction*, starring actors from both *Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur* and the Volksbühne, at the *Printemps des Comédiens* festival in Montpellier, before taking it to the Avignon Festival, Berlin, Antwerp and Paris (Théâtre de la Ville).

Since 15 July 2024, he has been director of the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe.



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# Contact

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