

CAC Brétigny

Playworlds, 2018–2022

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Press file [1–29]

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National Interest
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Switchers

Curator:
Thomas Conchou

Opening
Saturday, October 1st,
2:30–6:30 p.m.

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Adrenalized

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These instituting bodies

For the 2022-23 season, CAC Brétigny will pursue its experiments into uses of its space through different exhibitions that each establish a particular relationship with users, artists, curators or local residents. The individual and collective bodies invited will bring with them their rules, their ways of seeing things, their need for freedom and their constraints, entering into what we call the Institution, and modulating its borders and bounds. From professionalisation of amateurs to attempts at shared governance, passing via different methods of collaboration and pedagogy, “These instituting bodies” (*Ces corps instituants*) will inscribe the stories of their combats and intimate or public desires at the art centre in particular.

Céline Poulin: I started by reading this introduction because it illustrates CAC Brétigny’s programme this year, and in particular your exhibitions, and because it brings up questions that I’d like to discuss with you both today. On the one hand, there’s the issue of representing social struggles within the Institution (risk of social washing, appropriation, commodification...), and on the other, there’s the possibility for these bodies, whether they be social, individual or political, to transform the Institution.

Daisy, the notion of struggle is central to your residency and in the exhibition. How do you articulate your research within an institutional context? How do you think these struggling bodies will be received within an institution?

Daisy Lambert: Looking at subjects of combat and revolt, I quickly came up against a problem of methodology. I wanted to embed myself in the region and go looking in the archives for what could be considered a combat, how the combat was represented, and what was rendered visible. I wanted to connect this with theorist and curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung’s concept of corpoliteracy.¹ He considers the body as a kind of platform, a place that is both a receiver and transmitter, which stores traces within itself and becomes a living archive. While I was looking for these traces, I was faced with a void, because in the archives you find clips from the media, really standardised images of what could be considered a combat. For my residency, I decided to work with artists who are interested in this question in a more sensitive and embodied, and so also more intimate, way. This intimacy manifests itself in different ways: through conversation and exchange in Fanny Souade Sow’s work, through collective bodily experience in Sacha Rey and Johanna Rocard’s work, or through the symbolism that Geneviève Dieng projects in her drawings, for example. These four artistic practices are part of a process of resistance with a strong tension between the visible and the invisible: what we can show of or consent to showing of a struggle, how and to whom, so as not to slip into voyeurism. In other words, in order to host these struggling bodies, we must be conscious of their traumatic experience and of the impossibility of exhibiting some of this violence directly, whether it be police,

medical, domestic, or social violence more broadly. In this particular case, the exhibition cannot simply be a restitution of the workshops held during the residency. It encourages the development of strategies of concealment and codification to preserve the integrity of these bodies.

CP: The CAC Brétigny is a public service that is part of a local government. The combats that interest you involve other French state services, notably the prison system and the police force. Did you consider the possibility that these causes might be exploited by the institution inviting you?

DL: Obviously, because there's always a risk of appropriation. I think our role involves a process of permanent repositioning. bell hooks² said something particularly apt about this. She said repositioning is an act of critical intervention in itself, fostering an attitude of vigilance rather than a denial of the mechanisms at work. For the workshops, choices are made in direct collaboration with the artists I've invited, artists who are constantly asking themselves these questions. On the subject of police violence, with Fanny [Souade Sow], we're trying to conduct work on the ground to look at how local actors recognise how this violence exerts itself in the area, in Essonne. It's quite complicated, because we don't know if there will be a response, if the dialogue will really get going. I think that to avoid this appropriation, we also tried to step outside of the art centre a bit. In a way, the exhibition will conclude work that first took place outside of the institution.

CP: Thomas, in the exhibition you're preparing, the question of social struggles is central, particularly in the texts that Emanuel [Almborg] worked on with the people he met, participants who have gone on to become partners in his project. How do you perceive the way in which he will bring these combats into the Institution through fiction? Has this exhibition, or other projects you've worked on with the New Patrons or around queer activism, at the Maison populaire in Montreuil, nourished your reflections on how exhibitions can deal with social struggles?

Thomas Conchou: At the New Patrons, which works at the intersection between art and social work, we're mediators not curators. This is something that really informs the way in which I consider the function of collective work. I think that the combat also lies in the collective process. With the New Patrons, for me it was about going and finding groups in society that were establishing themselves as custodians of a grievance. There was an ambition to defend a need or a desire for which, as mediators, we could provide both the institutional tools and financial means as well as contact with the creative force of an artist, a designer or a collective. Putting yourself at the service of a common project also means giving up a part of your position as an author. The difficult part is finding a way to

safeguard everybody's right to individual expression, whilst exploring the possibilities of working together. This is a balance that you have to constantly renegotiate. Like you just said Daisy, I think you have to be able to constantly reposition yourself.

My interest in Emanuel [Almborg's] work is a logical continuation of this reflection. He was invited to produce this first film, *The Nth Degree*, with institutional means and support. He sought out participants from Wales and North London, and created an artistic platform that is self-structured and which is now taking on authorship of its own projects. What interests me is seeing how this has repositioned members of the collective, how it works inside an institution and what kind of shift this engenders. During the production period of the exhibition, we realised that this forces us to reinvent methodological territories. We don't typically inherit spaces that take into account, and exhibit properly, collective ways of working. I think there's a historical reason for that. I feel like I've grown up professionally with the Social Turn³ of contemporary art. Obviously, these practices existed before they were theorised, but we're part of a movement where there is a growing desire and more and more space to occupy institutions in this way.

CP: That's really optimistic!

DL: I agree with you Thomas, and at the same time, I think French institutions could learn a lot from what's being done elsewhere. This was my experience when I worked at Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. They had "constituencies" within the museum, meaning activist groups of which the uses weren't always linked to what we might consider to be an institutional artistic practice. The Queer Constituency, for example, was formed in order to propose a new form of mediation and went on to become autonomous and propose events outside of the framework of the exhibitions. This created an exchange with visitors, between people rather than around the works. I think that it's through these openings that bridges can be built between a non-institutional artistic practice and a circulation of the spaces' uses. I have the impression that while this idea is making its way into French mentality a bit, it still manifests itself only very exceptionally.

CP: There's La Semeuse at the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers. At first, it was the artist Marjetica Potrč's project, but it later became an independent not-for-profit organisation working outside of the site. At CAC, we've tried to develop something akin to it through the project l'École⁴, with the constraint of being a public service, within a building that belongs to a local authority, unlike the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers which is a not-for-profit organisation, for example. To begin with, we had thought about l'École in terms of questions

3 See Claire Bishop, "The social turn: Collaboration and its discontents", *Artforum*, VOL. 44, NO. 6 February 2006 ; and Maria Lind's response, "The Collaborative Turn" in Johanna Billing, Maria Lind, Lars Nilsson, *Taking the Matter Into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007.

4 L'École is a group dedicated to experimenting in knowledge and practices in the visual arts. It brings together people from diverse walks of life who all share a desire to learn and to do things differently. It is a nebulous group of which the composition varies according to the season, the desire and the availability of each person.

around transmission, but when we began using it, we realised that it could also be a space for a different kind of dialogue about the way the art centre could function.

You've both talked about a permanent repositioning of approaches and of an ever-reflective position in terms of the way we work. Could this be considered as a method for avoiding processes of commodification?

TC: I think that the question of the mutability of processes in collective work is really dependant on something else: a deferment of hierarchical positions. In a way, if we try to make modes of expression horizontal and be as transparent as possible in these spaces of collective, radical pedagogical practices, it's in order to create spaces in which we can detach ourselves from hierarchisation or assigned roles that can sometimes make the places or roles we occupy in society oppressive, rigid, and very limiting. The creation of floating pedagogical spaces also enables us to be constantly surprised by what we are able to invent there.

There's a really strong theoretical foundation to Emanuel [Almborg's] work, around Soviet pedagogy from the beginning of the 20th century, for example, schools for blind or deaf people, and what experiments in these places were able to produce in terms of ways of learning or teaching. At the same time, there is a constant confrontation between a principle of reality and experimentation in reality, because from this he draws methods that are implemented in the projects. I think this also raises the issue of generosity, because to make room for these practices is to consider them in the way we consider artistic practices in general.

At the Maison populaire, for example, we organised a collective creation and transmission project with Lou Masduraud around ceramics with adults and children. Sometimes, the children took on the role of instructors for the sessions, because some of them had been doing pottery for years while the adults were just starting out. I think the fact that the outcome of these workshops was displayed at the heart of the exhibition, and so at the heart of the art centre, created a real change in the way the people interacted with each other. Members of the Maison populaire, who come first and foremost for the amateur workshops and then, perhaps, for the exhibitions, really felt like they connected with the art centre in a new way.

CP: Yes, that raises the question of recognition. We worked a lot on the question of deferring status with Marie Preston, we also experimented around this with Fanny Lallart as part of the ELGER⁵ project and, through l'École, we experienced first-hand the changes in relationships it produces. Transparency, as you mentioned, is important. A deferment

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ELGER is pronounced *Elles gèrent*, meaning 'women handling it' and spells *règle* (a word meaning both 'rule' and 'menstrual period') backwards. It is a research-action project around collective transmission between female artists and amateurs curated by Fanny Lallart and Céline Poulin. A cross between popular education and contemporary art, ELGER draws on methods of self-determination formulated by the various waves of feminism since the 1970s. It has resulted in several artistic workshops organised by six artists (Laura Burucoa, Juliette Beau Denès, Morgane Brien-Hamdane, Pauline Lecerf, Vinciane Mandrin and Zoé Philibert) with groups of local people in Essonne over the course of two years.

of statuses doesn't hide power relations, but it's important to be conscious of them. For example, when I speak, I have to make it clear that I'm just giving my opinion and it's not an instruction, because as a member of management, my speech is performative. It's quite complex, but really interesting, to unpick the status from the speech.

TC: We spoke about the margin for flexibility in an institution. This is a tricky point, because institutions have difficulty translating the heterogeneity of the spaces and venues where artistic discourses and practices are expressed. It's no coincidence that it's within art centres, spaces that are regional and often more collective, that this kind of project has become part of institutional life. It's not the case in the bigger organisations. Daisy, you spoke about a museum in the Netherlands, and it's true that in France we're still far behind.

DL: Exactly. In France, you can find a more developed sense of collaboration in art centres between visitors and amateur practices, but the museum as an institution is still very cut off and very exclusive.

CP: It's true that there's more room for flexibility within art centres.

TC: Yes, and I wouldn't have wanted to do the project I did at the Maison populaire anywhere else. I wouldn't have been at all interested in spotlighting queer artistic practices in some Parisian white cube in which there can be instances of "pink-washing" or where practices that are experienced and particular to a certain location appear out-of-context.

CP: We can see the discrepancy in certain organisations between that which is presented and the reality of daily working life there. From the outside, it's difficult to differentiate between an honourable institution well placed to take on certain subjects and one that is not.

DL: That is exactly where the responsibility of an institution lies, in the need to be aware of its own practices. It's up to an institution to determine whether what it chooses to show is coherent with the way in which it develops over the long term.

TC: I think that at the same time as this work of rendering practices and struggles visible, there has to be work done from within institutions, for which we are all jointly responsible as workers within the cultural sector. This is a political and historical responsibility, which starts with an awareness of who makes up the selection and management committees and other parts of the organisation that operate in relative opacity. We always come back to discussing our individual positions on these questions, but we don't have any figures or methodological proposals that could go on to be followed by institutions. We need an

observatory dedicated to these issues, to ethics and the make-up of all of the chains of hierarchy in institutions.

CP: As freelancers, do either of you feel like you could change an institution from within? Do you get a sense of a malleability that allows you to put your own work processes in place?

DL: It's more the weight of the collective, or an ecosystem of supportive actors, that makes it possible to instil change. I don't think we can bring about change from the inside on an individual scale. For example, Céline, you put your season together with Thomas' and my work in mind. We ourselves have invited artists who create zones of friction between the art centre's institutionalised space and their work approaches and methods. So the permanent repositioning that we've spoken about also manifests itself through the invitations we extend, in the space we afford less established proposals while being conscious of the limits at play.

TC: I often think about a project by the artist Maria Eichhorn at the Chisenhale Gallery in London⁶. For her solo exhibition in 2016, she closed the space and gave the whole team a month's holiday. This raises the question of what degree of flexibility an institution has, although this project has to be looked at within the context of the Chisenhale, an art centre that has patrons but is not publicly accountable. It would be impossible for you to do that Céline, given your duties to public service and to providing educational activities.

CP: Yes, and because CAC Brétigny is one of the only visual arts actors in the whole area, so that would really restrict access to contemporary art. We're quite far out, it's different accommodating that kind of project in Brétigny compared to London, where there is an extensive offer in terms of visual arts and experiences.

TC: As for this question about whether freelancers can bring about change within institutions, I feel like I have often sought out spaces where a conversation about the way I think about my work was happening. I've never worked with an institution that first came across as hostile, that I could then try to change.

CP: When Daisy and I met, we immediately saw eye-to-eye about how to work the Institution. I think all three of us share this position, which brings together theoretical conception with a pragmatic, structural incarnation of projects. This helps us find the right positions.

DL: Céline, I think that this year is the first time that the three exhibitions at CAC have been planned by three different people. In this process of repositioning, how, as director of an art centre, do you manage to maintain coherence across this kind of proposal?

CP: I don't do seasons around themes but issues, they're built successively out of other exhibitions, at a kind of meta level. The idea for "These instituting bodies" came after I invited you both. In my project, there are these issues that run through all of the exhibitions, but it's important for me that each proposal be different in terms of aesthetics, artistic execution and atmosphere. We're not from the same generation, we aren't necessarily looking at the same things, so your projects are going to be different from what I would have proposed, and that's really important to me. I'm not looking for something univocal, I want there to be a certain polyphony. I love rediscovering the space in a different way, and I build the programme like spaces for experimentation, for testing ideas. Each time, it nourishes my thinking, it helps me move forward personally and collectively with the team. What interests me is building things together, without knowing exactly where we might end up.

TC: That's also what we learn from collaboration: to expect a certain level of diversity in the propositions, and complexity in the forms and organisation. We have everything to gain from cultivating a diversity of practices and everything to lose from locking ourselves into certain aesthetic lines.

CP: Yes, but it's true that it's more complicated, in terms of budget and proposal writing, for example. Accommodating different people, each with their own desires, way of seeing things and vision, can cause friction. The fact that there is no standard way of working is really complicated at every level, because each artist, each curator has their own methods, so we have to try and find common ground.

TC: This all raises the question of failure too. Methods ensure that projects come to something, because there are standardised processes of working geared towards efficiency. I think it's important to consider failure of projects as a question of point of view and temporality. The failure to arrive at a certain outcome, the trial and error, the delays, etc. are parts of working that help us learn a huge amount⁷.

CP: Marie Preston and I talk about this a lot in terms of working methods for co-creation⁸, but it doesn't work as well with exhibitions. That's actually why we've decided that the project *l'École* won't do any exhibitions. We wanted it to be able to fail, to go in diverse and varied directions... So we've chosen instead to invite artists who could host *l'École*'s experiments.

Retranscription and editing: Anne-Charlotte Michaut

7 For more on this subject, read Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2011.

8 For more on this subject, see Céline Poulin and Marie Preston, with Stéphanie Airaud (dir.), *Co-Creation*, Éditions Empire and CAC Brétigny, 2019 and Céline Poulin and Marie Preston (dir.), Marie Preston, *Inventer l'école, penser la co-création*, CAC Brétigny and Tombolo Presses, 2021.

“Playworlds, 2018-2022” Switchers

A survey of film, theatre, art and pedagogical projects.

Curator: Thomas Conchou

Works by Emanuel Almborg, Ksenia Pedan, Jamie Baker, Merlyn Hawthorne, Ellis Holt, Ruth Oshunkoya, Prince Owusu, Caitlin Williams, Mary Yekini in collaboration with; Buck Blake, Valentina Coley, Rhos Lapworth, Doridan Nahoum Bavangila, Priscila Siboko Bohe, Brandon Thorne, Liam Tooze, Edmund Wozencraft; from Paris/Brétigny: Agathe Barre, Sara Bouazzaoui, Loïc Hornecker, Yasmine Kicha, Shveta Lebonheur and Arsène Roy; from William Tyndale School, London: Eloise Alexander, Alfie Brennan, Sara Checchi, Gabi Constantine, Davide Diana, Julia Galassini, Theo Grinberg, Valentina Hernandez-Leonor.

The exhibition “Playworlds, 2018-2022” presents a series of works drawn from Switchers, a collaborative framework that combines visual arts, theatre, video and pedagogy, developed through worldbuilding and play. Switchers comprises an evolving network of artists, performers and young people from Hackney, London and Mid Powys, Wales. The group addresses social struggles, ownership, racism, issues faced by young people, using collective imagination to connect city and country. Switchers was first initiated by artist Emanuel Almborg as a youth theatre exchange in 2018 and has since developed into a series of extended and shifting artistic collaborations, generating new projects and works.

“Playworlds, 2018-2022” presents two new videos—one directed by Jamie Baker and produced by Almanac, London/Turin, another by Prince Owusu with young amateur artists from Brétigny, produced by CAC Brétigny—alongside collectively authored *Acorn* (2021) and Almborg’s *The Nth Degree* (2018). These films are installed within a scenographic installation created by the artist Ksenia Pedan, who previously produced set design for *Acorn*. The exhibition will also travel to Almanac Inn’s spaces in Turin in 2023.

The Nth Degree (2018) documents the initial youth theatre experiment that brought together young people from London and Wales. Convening to create theatre, the participants studied two historic moments: the peasant “Rebecca Riots” against land enclosure in 1840s in Wales and the 2011 London riots. The resulting film tackles issues of political violence and the distribution of wealth, reflecting on differences in class, race and access to property.

Acorn (2021) is a filmed play, devised by the same young people who took part in *The Nth Degree*. This project marked a shift in the group: the participants became Switchers, a collective in its own right. *Acorn*’s script was developed using a method inspired by the “playworld” pedagogy of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, driven by improvisation and emotional experience. The film’s world and characters are borrowed from the novel *Parable of the Talents* by African American writer Octavia Butler set in a dystopian near future.

Acorn recounts the experience of a small, rural community trying to survive by imagining new forms of collectivity in a world stricken by authoritarian rule and ecological crisis. The film is presented within Pedan's installation, reminiscent of *Acorn's* collective farm.

Remnants, directed by Jamie Baker, who first joined Switchers as an actor in *The Nth Degree* and *Acorn*, departs from the latter's storyline in a collaboration with school children from London. In a future United Kingdom, several children develop a gift for "hyper-empathy" and can communicate emotions speechlessly through telepathy and movement. The film will present the hyper-empathetic choreographies and dance devised by Baker and the project's participants.

Finally, as part of "Playworlds, 2018-2022", Prince Owusu from Switchers, an actor in *The Nth Degree* and *Acorn*, will work with Sara Bouazzaoui, Loïc Hornecker, Yasmine Kicha and Shveta Lebonheur, students from Brétigny, to produce action-theatre workshops that will culminate in a new film. Participants of the workshops will be invited to reappropriate a monologue that Owusu performs in *The Nth Degree* describing the lived experience of a peasant in an oppressive feudal system.

The long duration of the Switchers project has enabled roles to change and progress. Through a shared learning experience, Almborg, the initiator, has moved from the role of artist to facilitator, with several of the young people that joined as actors now directing works.

Endowed with critical education tools and co-creation techniques, Switchers experiments with new ways of articulating the political questions of its members, addressing the need to produce futures that do not merely reproduce the present.

Biographies

Emanuel Almborg is an artist based in Stockholm and London. His practice is primarily moving image-based and has developed through an engagement with pedagogy, psychology and drama. His films often draw on research into the history of schools and institutions that grapple with relations between theory and practice. He finished a PhD at The Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm (KKH), 2021, with the dissertation; *Towards a Pedagogy of the Utopian Image*. He was a Whitney Independent Study program fellow in New York, 2015. His work has recently been shown at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Whitechapel Gallery, London and Kunstverein München.

Jamie Baker is a performing artist from London. He featured in *The Nth Degree* (2018) and *Acorn* (2021) and co-authored the latter as a member of Switchers. He produced the movement material together with children at William Tyndale school for the film *Remnants* (2022), which he also directed.

Agathe Barre is a filmmaker and cinematographer. She works within film production in Paris. She was a cinematographer on *The Nth Degree* (2018). She filmed and edited *Scélérat-es* (2022) in collaboration with Prince Owusu.

Sara Bouazzaoui, Loïc Hornecker, Yasmine Kicha and Shveta Lebonheur are young residents of the Cœur d'Essonne Agglomération area. Regular users of CAC Brétigny, they collaborated on Laura Burucoa's exhibition "While waiting for the flying cars" (*En attendant les voitures volantes*), which brought together paintings by Sara Bouazzaoui, Yasmine Kicha and Shveta Lebonheur. For this event, Loïc Hornecker also wrote the text "High dose overdose" (*Overdose à haute dose*), which has since been published in CAC Brétigny's online publication *Revue*. All four of them responded to Switchers' call for young people to take on one of the monologues from *The Nth Degree* and are thus the actors of *Scélérat-es* (2022), which was produced for the "Playworlds, 2018-2022" exhibition and directed by Prince Owusu.

Thomas Conchou is a curator, co-founder of the curatorial collective Le Syndicat Magnifique (with Anna Frera, Victorine Grataloup and Carin Klonowski), member of the Curatorial Hotline collective and an art facilitator approved by the Fondation de France for the implementation of the New Patrons program. In 2020, he was a curator in residency at the art center Maison Populaire (Montreuil, France), an association for popular education and amateur practice, where he led a two-year cycle of exhibitions and events on queer artistic practices and relationships. In 2021, he was commissioner for the AWARE prize where he presented the work of Gaëlle Choisine, who won. In 2022, he joined the jury of the Utopi-e prize for queer artists, the selection committee of the Salon de Montrouge, and he is the guest curator for the first edition of The Kooples Art Prize. He is the recipient of the Textwork writing grant from the Pernod Ricard Corporate Foundation, and curates

exhibitions for the Sissi Club (Marseille, France) and the CAC Brétigny (Brétigny, France). He is appointed as the new director of the CAC de La Ferme du Buisson in July 2022.

Prince Owusu is an actor. He is currently studying acting at The Guildhall school of Music and Drama, where he plans on pursuing a career in the theatre and film industry. He featured in *The Nth Degree* (2018) and performed and co-authored *Acorn* (2021) as a member of Switchers. He directed *Scélérat-es* (2022) currently on display at CAC Brétigny.

Ksenia Pedan (b. Kharkiv, Ukraine) is an artist currently living in Stockholm. Previous projects include *Meditations on Living in the Present*, Framför vid under, Varberg Konsthall, Varberg; *Fen Glut*, Forde, Geneva; *Baltic Triennial 13*, Kim?, Riga; *Cloist gulch*, Raven Row, London; *Victoria Deepwater Terminal Estate Gallery*, Jerwood Space, London; *Golf Musk*, Dortmunder Kunstverein, Dortmund. Forthcoming solo exhibitions will take place at Cell Projects and Leech, London, in 2023.

Switchers is a theatre/film group composed of a network of artists, performers and young people from Hackney, London and Mid Powys, Wales, initiated as a youth theatre exchange in 2018 by artist Emanuel Almborg. It seeks to link city and countryside through issues that young people face. It has since developed in to an extended and shifting collaborative framework for artistic production based on *playworlds*. A *playworld* is a creative pedagogy that combines drama, narrative and play, based on a shared world of collectively created fiction. A world and characters are drawn from an existing source, such as a book or newspaper article. In this framework, groups and individuals can create and experiment with artistic production through a common space of imagination.

It is not utopian to declare that the emancipation of humanity from the chains which its historic past has forged will only be complete when the antithesis between town and country has been abolished; the utopia begins when one undertakes “from existing conditions” to prescribe the form in which this or any other of the antithesis of present day society is to be solved.

—Friedrich Engels, “The Housing Question”

On a rural compound in Wales, a young woman, played by Caitlin Williams, shucking corn in a heavy parka asks her roommates how long a newly arrived and injured guest will be staying. Food is scarce, and by the look of everyone’s mended, grease-stained work clothes and the patchwork wallpaper lining the common area, so is everything else barring social interaction. The presence of another hungry mouth has forced the question of the group’s medium-term survival; whether Acorn, the semi-religious farming community formed in the aftermath of a great war and ecological disaster, needs to institute a work requirement for residents; whether new members can join the cooperative professing that “God is change. All touch you change. All you change changes you. The only lasting truth is change.”

Amid general social collapse, extreme weather events have caused damage to the roof and the tractor is in need of new parts. Being cash poor, low on food, and short on hands for replanting the fields, they have only their home, a squat on the outskirts of a town whose population regards them with suspicion. A woman in a wool-lined vest, played by Mary Yekini, brings the debate to a close with an ethical argument: “We can grow or we can wither, but we will grow as equals.” Despite the hardship that will ensue from adding another member to their failing utopian cooperative, the democratic principle prevails. The ultimate problem confronting Acorn is how to do politics in an era of barbarism, water shortages and corrupt governments—when neither reform nor revolution is on the table.

Acorn, 2021, is the second production from Switchers, a theatre and film group born of Emanuel Almborg’s *The Nth Degree*, 2018, a self-reflective film about the production of a theatre piece collaboratively devised by young people hailing from Mid Powys, Wales, and Hackney, London. The work had a consciousness-raising, pedagogical dimension, consisting of meetings with community activists such as Stafford Scott, co-founder of the Broadwater Defence Campaign and drew parallels between the Welsh Rebecca Riots of the 1840s, and the 2011 England Riots: coded white and black, respectively.

The work established a dramatic continuum between the moral economy of the nineteenth century crowd and the racialised mob of today. It was created through the collaboration of regional community youth arts nonprofits, MPYT and Immediate theatre, with the goal of bringing rural and urban adolescents together to discover forms of solidarity

in a post-Brexit political climate by exploring historical commonalities and social forces beyond demography. The political education applied not only to the making of the work, but to the form of the group itself. Midway through this production they transformed their erstwhile extracurricular amateur dramatics group into an artists' collective, resolving to split any profits evenly.

Like Alexander Medvedkin's *Cinetrain*, Switchers seek to adapt the tools of collaborative theatre-making for film production. Time-intensive play gave rise to the script: once Switchers decided on a general premise (squatters after a disaster), and gathered their influences into a workbook (Octavia Butler's 1998 novel *Parable of the Talents*, widely revisited in the Trump-era for its themes of populist demagoguery and right-wing vigilantes, as well as the Yellow Vests movement and eviction defence battles at ZAD de Notre-Dame-des-Landes in 2018), each actor created a character refined through months of improvisation and reflection. Almborg recorded and transcribed the sessions and returned the texts to the group to be workshopped. The performers identified the strongest elements of each scenario, developing them until they cohered into a full-length production, at which point the script was handed to a dramaturg for finishing touches. The screenplay was performed live four times before three cameras. Almborg edited the footage, which was discussed and revised again before post-production. This method is an adaptation of "playworld" exercises developed by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, and broadens his Marxist application of Konstantin Stanislavsky's *perezhivanie* (in psychology: lived, emotional experience), extending it into the realm of political imagination.

Answers to intractable social problems are convincingly met, if not resolved, by the instinctual needs of each improvised scene, which are reflected upon in relation to the dramatic requirements of the work as a whole. The more effectively plausible the formal solutions, the greater political purchase they seem to have. Hard questions are met with harsh compromises. When a plan is proposed for taking in vagabonds on the run from slavers and seeking work in exchange for a small wage plus room and board, a resident herself an ex-slave, played by Ruth Oshunkoya, takes offence. "Exploiting people when they're vulnerable and desperate" goes against the purpose of Acorn. "Starving is not what this community is about either," a man in a navy jumpsuit, played by Jamie Baker, shoots back. They compromise and adopt a two-tier wage system. Surplus-value extraction and the nuclear family reimpose themselves on the group despite its sincere commitment to a new social order—there are no fugitives from real subsumption. Despite Acorn's capitulation in the end, it survives as a critical model. Their fraught, hopeful answers to the housing question are, in the end, "no less utopian than the abolition of the antithesis between capitalists and wage workers."



Still from *Acorn*, a filmed play by Switchers, 40 min, 4K video, 2021. Courtesy of the artists.



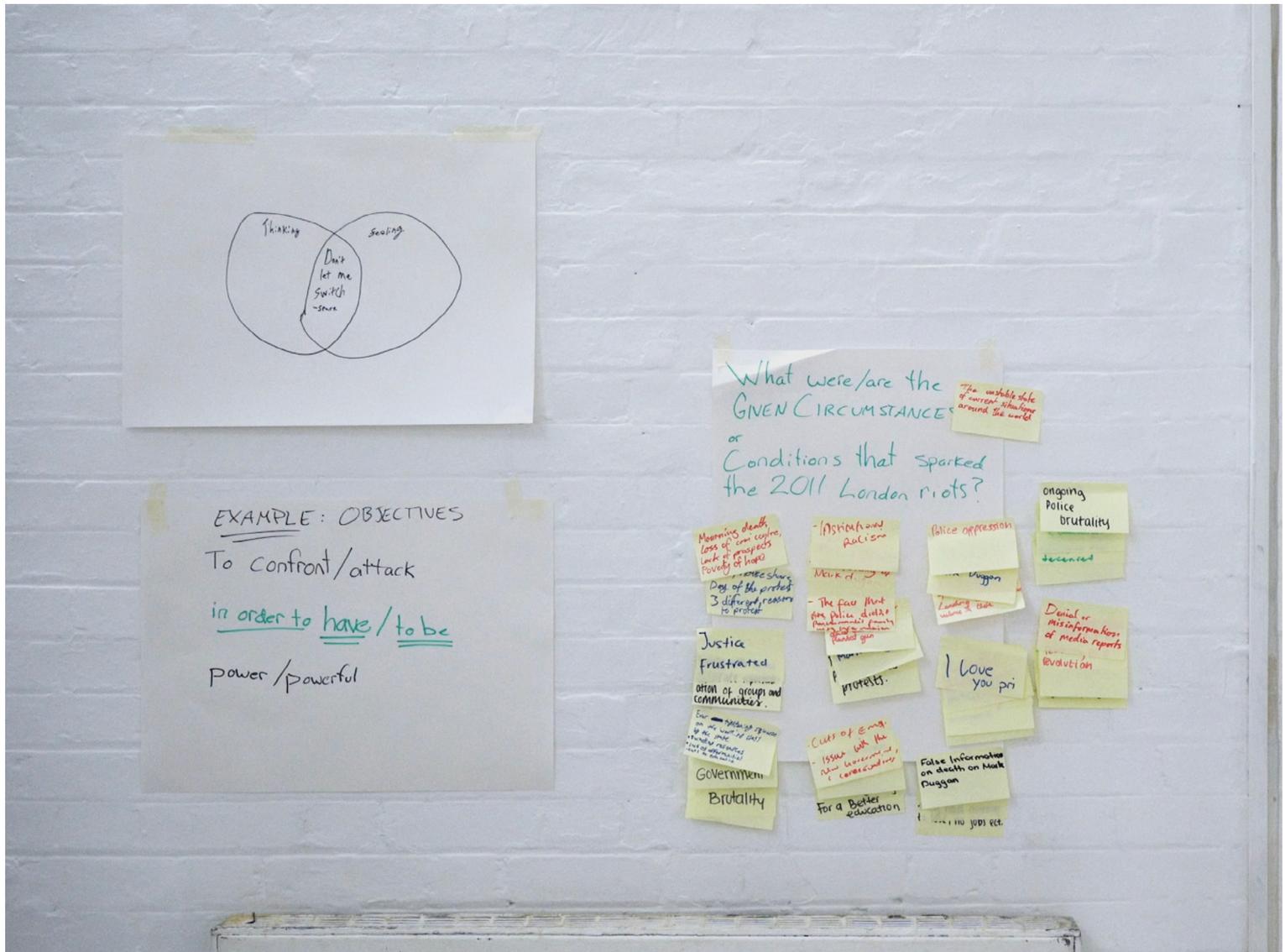
Still from *Acorn*, a filmed play by Switchers, 40 min, 4K video, 2021. Courtesy of the artists.



Still from *The Nth Degree*, Emanuel Almborg, 51min, HD video, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.



Still from *The Nth Degree*, Emanuel Almborg, 51min, HD video, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.



Still from *The Nth Degree*, Emanuel Almborg, 51min, HD video, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.



Acorn, a filmed play by Switchers, 40 min, 4K video, 2021. View of the exhibition "Bildningar" by Emanuel Almborg, Mint, 2021. Scenographic installation by Ksenia Pedan. Courtesy of the artists.



View of the exhibition "Bildningar" by Emanuel Almborg, Mint, 2021. Scenographic installation by Ksenia Pedan. Courtesy of the artists.

Agenda

Saturday, October 1st 2022, 2:30-6:30 p.m.
Opening

Open to all. Free entrance. Refreshments and snacks will be offered.

Free shuttle Paris-Brétigny available: Pick-up at 1:45 pm at 104 avenue de France, 75013 Paris (the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand metro stop). Request at reservation@cacbretigny.com

The return of the shuttle will be followed by a guided tour of the exhibition "Énergies" by Judith Hopf presented at Bétonsalon from September, 22nd to December, 11th. The team of the centre for art and research, located a few steps away, will welcome you there.

Thursday, October 6th 2022, 5-7 p.m.
Educational visit

You are invited to discover the activities that we offer to groups and the school public through a visit of the exhibition "Playworlds, 2018-2022".

For kindergarten, elementary and secondary school teachers, animators, educators, and associations. Registration: reservation@cacbretigny.com or +33 (0)1 60 85 20 76.

Saturday 15th October and 3th December, 3:00-4:30 pm
Artistic workshop for families
"Roots"

Drawing on the questions around ecology and collaboration raised by the Switchers pieces, participants will have the opportunity to collectively design a miniature garden. Together they will decide on the layout of their kitchen garden, its décor and the vegetables to be planted in it. Families will be able to take the results of their collaboration away with them and watch their plants grow at home.

3 years + Registration: reservation@cacbretigny.com or +33 (0)1 60 85 20 76.

Thursday 27th October 3:00-4:30 pm
Artistic workshop
"Community"

During a round of a game inspired by the Switchers pieces, participants will take on the roles of members of a community struggling to survive in the face of constant attacks. Together, they will discuss what methods they could adopt in order to defend themselves but also thrive. Cultivation of the land, education for all, construction of shelters: the list of

essentials is long! It's about finding solutions collectively, while also mobilising the talents of individuals...

8 years + Registration: reservation@cacbretigny.com or +33 (0)1 60 85 20 76.

Wednesday 16th November and 7th December, 4:30-6:00 pm
Artistic workshop
"Scales"

During the visit, the children will observe the elements and accessories that make up the exhibition's scenography and the set design of the videos produced by Switchers. They will produce their own sets from a model and personalise them using pieces of wallpaper, coloured pencils, glue and fabric. Their architectural models will then be put together to build a city to the same scale as the little figurines that will populate it!

3 years + Registration: reservation@cacbretigny.com or +33 (0)1 60 85 20 76.

Monday 21th November, 12:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.
Visite ados
"CAC, tomatoes, onions"

Specially addressed to middle and highschoolers, "CAC, tomatoes, onions" is a visit taking place during the lunch break, between two lessons. After a tour of the exhibition accompanied by the mediation team, participants are invited to share their impressions over a snack.

Free admission.

Tuesday 4th October
Les rendez-vous de l'École

École is an experimental group of practices and knowledge in the visual arts made up of people from the fields of art, associations and civil society, which meets monthly at the CAC Brétigny. Do not hesitate to contact us if you want to know more about it: info@cacbretigny.com

The ABCC of CACB, Charles Mazé & Coline Sunier

The series of 15 symbols accompanying the exhibition “Playworlds, 2018-2022” by Switchers comes from material that contributed to the production of the play Switch in 2018. In response to the question “How did it feel to be part of the ACTION of the RIOTS?”, the actors’ states of mind seem to us to echo the current mood:

“Adrenalized, Anxious, Confused, Energetic, Frustrated, Insecure, Kinda relieved [sic], Nervous, On edge, Overwhelmed, Panic, Proud, Pumped, Relieved [sic], Scared”

Written on yellow Post-it notes in English, these messages incorporate the font LARA into the Memo emoji , both a short note to help remember something and a tool for collaborative work that can be moved around. In its form as much as its contents, this source brings to mind the work of the writer Octavia E. Butler—an important reference for Switchers—and more specifically her working and motivational notes to self:

“Tell Stories Filled with Facts. Make People Touch and Taste and KNOW. Make People FEEL! FEEL! FEEL!”

Throughout their residency at CAC Brétigny, Charles Mazé & Coline Sunier are in charge of the art center’s visual identity, which is conceived as a long-term research. The ABCC of CACB is a collection of letters, signs, and symbols made in Brétigny-sur-Orge and the department of Essonne, or selected in relation to the art center, its program, and the artists invited to exhibit their work. This corpus is now embodied in a new typeface called LARA, activated one letter at a time on communication materials, which are all considered as spaces for publication and distribution of the collection. By associating multiple voices within the same typeface whose glyphs continue to grow in number, with writings that are alternately vernacular, institutional, personal, and public, The ABCC of CACB is an attempt to edit the geographic, political and artistic context in which CAC Brétigny is found. The alphabet is [available online](#).

“hmm hmm”

sophie rogg invites Cecil Serres, Fatma Cheffi, Milana Gabriel, Nastassia Kotava and Rafael Moreno.

16.09—10.12.22

Exhibition at Théâtre Brétigny

As part of “What are we waiting for?” (Qu’est-ce qu’on attend ?) cycle (September-December)

A Saturday in July 2022

The sun is shining. On three tables placed sensibly under the trees in the shade, Sophie sets out vegetables and jars. Neighbours of the Cheptainville library join us with produce from their gardens. Everybody together, we grate, we chop and we talk. Witches come to tell us tales that unfold at nighttime, in vegetable patches or the forest. While they recount the adventures of Nasreddin, a loveable rascal, our carrot monsters come to life.

July 2022 (still)

The heat is overwhelming. With Alaïs, Aymeric, Chloé, Ewen, Lola, Pauline, Karell and Sandy, we invent nocturnal characters, then a story. It begins with a party in the forest in La Tuilerie, near Breuillet, and ends in several bloody deaths. At around one in the morning, guided through the darkness by Nicolas, we meet ghosts and creatures that appear from behind bushes. Screams ring out through the woods. Trembling and whispering, we turn back. The moon keeps watch. Wrapped up in our sleeping bags, we share marshmallows and watch a teen horror film.

An evening in August 2022

Sophie invites me to hers for dinner. It is there that I meet Cecil, Fatma and Natassia. Milana finished work too late to join us. They make up the team chosen by Sophie to go and try to survive in the forest. During the evening, we discuss this invitation as if it were a call for artists to help and support each other. In response to Théâtre Brétigny’s themed cycled “What are we waiting for?” (Qu’est-ce qu’on attend ?), this group exhibition expresses a desire to actually do something and for collection action. I sense that there is an appetite for doing things together. For experimenting. For seeing how, in the moment, one person’s work can offer the other reciprocal strength. And I can feel that Sophie wants to be accompanied in deciding between being happy and/or spicing things up.

The next day

Sophie calls me. She wants to ask Rafael to join the group. Sophie has lots of intuitions like that. I trust her. I add these few sentences to my text in the night.

For September 2022

After a summer in Essonne that was inspired by the narrative force of nights and teenage laziness, the exhibition “hmm hmm” is taking shape like a dream. Waking up, we only remember images, and from these fragments, we reconstitute the strange story we

dreamt. In the Phare room, voices echo with “Skrr” or “Skuu”, deformed bodies twist, bean monsters rot, pencil drawings are eaten, Coke cans are strewn about.

**Camille Martin,
Curator of the exhibition**

Camille Martin was born in 1995 and grew up in Corbeil-Essonnes. She lives and works in Ivry-sur-Seine.

Cecil Serres was born in 1991 in Yvelines. They live and work in Paris region.

Fatma Cheffi was born in 1987 in Tunis. She lives and works between Tunis and the Paris region.

Milana Gabriel was born in 1995 in Makhachkala. She lives and works in Paris.

Nastassia Kotava was born in 1990 in Minsk, Belarus. She lives and works in Paris.

Rafael Moreno was born in 1993 in Colombia. They live and work in the Paris region.

sophie rogg was born in 1989 in Geneva, Switzerland. She lives and works in Seine-Saint-Denis.

General information

CAC Brétigny
Contemporary Art Center of National Interest
Cœur d'Essonne Agglomération
Rue Henri Douard
91220 Brétigny-sur-Orge
+33 (0)1 60 85 20 76
info@cacbrétigny.com
cacbrétigny.com

Free admission. Open from Tuesday to Saturday, 2pm–6pm.
Openings during evening and Sunday performances at Théâtre Brétigny.
Closed on the 11th of October.

By RER C:

Brétigny stop. From Paris, train BALI, DEBA, DEBO, ELBA direction Dourdan, Saint-Martin d'Étampes. From Dourdan and Saint-Martin d'Étampes, trains LARA, PARI, DEBO direction Saint-Quentin en Yvelines, Gare d'Austerlitz, Invalides.

From Brétigny station, follow the direction of Espace Jules Verne, take boulevard de la République, continue on Pl. Chevrier, take slightly to the right on rue Danielle Casanova, and at the rotary take left to rue Henri Douard.

By car:

From Paris, A6 direction Lyon, exit Viry-Châtillon, Fleury-Mérogis, then Brétigny center. From Évry, Francilienne direction Versailles, exit 39B direction Brétigny. From Versailles, Francilienne direction Evry, exit Brétigny center. From Étampes, RN20 direction Paris, exit Arpajon-Égly-Brétigny-sur-Orge-Saint-Vrain.

For car-sharing, join the group [BLABLACAC\(B\)](#) on Facebook

The exhibition “Playworlds, 2018-2022” is supported by the Swedish Institute and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee. The work *Remnants* was produced in partnership with Almanac Projects (London) and Almanac Inn (Turin) with the support of Arts Council England, Fondazione CRT and Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo.

“hmm hmm” is part of the “Contrat d’Éducation Artistique et Culturelle” (CTEAC) of Cœur d’Essonne Agglomération with the DRAC Île-de-France and the Academy of Versailles. It benefits from the support of the program “Création en Essonne”, of the DRAC Île-de-France and the Essonne department. “hmm hmm” encompasses actions led by Sophie Rogg in collaboration with the Médiathèque de Cheptainville and the centre de loisirs Oxy’Jeunes of Breuillet.

The CAC Brétigny is a cultural establishment of Cœur d’Essonne Agglomération. Labeled as a Contemporary Art Center of National Interest, it benefits from the support of the Ministère de la Culture—DRAC Île-de-France, Région Île-de-France and Conseil départemental de l’Essonne, with the complicity of the Brétigny-sur-Orge’s municipality. CAC Brétigny is a member of TRAM and d.c.a.