Angels in America: Performing American Border-Crossing on the French Stage?

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Abstract: By looking at several productions in France of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1992), this contribution explores the meaning of American cross-cultural performance. Considering with Schechner that theater is a "performance text" defined by its context, dramatic traditions, actual performances, reception and repercussions, the essay discusses to what extent Kushner's play blurs the perception of American theater in France by offering a fecund hybrid style. First, it will delineate some epistemological categories framing the French reception of American performance by pointing out how US shows are often filtered through a binary vision of American theater as either psychological realism (Tennessee Williams) or cutting-edge avant-gardism (Robert Wilson). Then, after highlighting the play's postmodern themes and style, the essay will uncover the echoes and limits of this reception model by testing it through the productions of Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman (1994; 1996), Krzysztof Warlikowski (2004), Ivo van Hove (2008) and Aurélie Van Den Daele (2015-18). They all provide historical, political, social and esthetic figurations of America on the European stage. If a number of clues (negative reviews) could suggest a cultural bias toward US drama, the staged play overall complicates the meaning of cultural transfer thanks to the artists' creativity. The success of the play further implies that its "fabulous" epic style could be a measure of a new hybrid American theatricality. The final section focuses on a few tropes (speed, fluidity and queerness) and sheds light on the cross-cultural creative processes of the play's staging. Ultimately, it underlines the potentiality of the anthropological gap yielded by a performance text.

On the contemporary French stage, American theater appears to be a minor influence. Is this merely poetic justice aiming at redressing the US domination on screen and in contemporary art or is it an erroneous perception that needs to be corrected? Upon closer inspection, there is no denying that American plays were staged in France by major artists. It harks back to one of the four most influential interwar French directors,[1] Georges Pitoëff, who produced O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* in 1929. Since then, broadly speaking, American theater in France has been seen through two main lenses: psychological drama (e.g. Tennessee Williams) or experimental performance (e.g. multimedia performances by the Wooster Group). Although these polarities obviously oversimplify both American productions and French reception, they can be helpful to get a general sense of the influence of the American esthetic and culture on the French stage (Bradby and Delgado 232-266). By analyzing the French fate of *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner, this essay offers to reflect upon the complex meaning of theatrical border crossing in the late 20th and early 21st century.

Angels in America, first produced in the US in the early 1990s, has rapidly become a classic performed throughout the United States and Europe. In France, the play has been staged by French female directors Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman (1994, 1996) and Aurélie Van Den Daele (2015, 2017, 2018), but also by famous European directors: the Flemish director Ivo Van Hove (2009, 2014) and the Polish director Krzysztof Warlikowski (2005). This international production history has yielded a varied "performance text" (Schechner 22) that will be explored thanks to an interdisciplinary methodology, in order to reflect on the construction of the role of American theater in France as a complex phenomenon with fluid boundaries. Cultural influences, cross-pollination and esthetic matrixes are difficult to measure as they are indirect, speculative and elusive. They run into many problems including the very *instability* of the meaning of broad terms like "culture", but also "national culture". "American theater" and "French reception" are equally problematic terms homogenizing notions that are anything but monolithic. Yet those notions cannot be entirely done away with as they can prove useful to identify trends in world theat-

rical creations in the tradition of Richard Schechner's *Between Theater and Anthropology*. The collection of clues gathered from theater history, reception theory (reviews), theater practitioners' testimonies, performance analysis, cultural analysis and queer theory can help frame the meaning of contemporary cross-cultural theatricality.

To what extent have themes grounded in an American context (AIDS, homosexuality, and spirituality in the Reagan years) and couched in a postmodern epic style come to embody a new hybrid American theatricality abroad? Can *Angels in America* be a measure of the influence of American performances in France? Or, have we moved beyond cultural differences with the rise of an international theater beyond borders?

Let us first consider briefly the dominant trends in the history of American theater in France to better understand how they frame the contemporary stage. Within that framework, *Angels in America*'s productions and reception in France will be studied through significant themes, showing how artists and critics faced, reproduced or resisted cultural borders. In the end, this essay contends that *Angels in America* through cultural differences productively cross-fertilizes the French stage.

Framing American Theater in France: Cross-cultural Misperceptions?

Despite the American cultural omnipresence in Europe, theater has remained modest in its influence. As a study of French international theater programs[2] and especially French theater history books (Viala, Biet et Triau, Neveux) suggest, German, Polish or British theaters have been more significant on the French stage, creating a stronger sense of European cultural commonality. Does it mean that there is a resistance to or an impossibility of cultural transfer from the United States to Europe? By looking at the reception of a few American plays, we can try to identify some matrixes of cultural transfer.

Paradoxically, the fate of Tennessee Williams's most famous play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, can provide some background to the reluctance of welcoming American theater in France as a serious theatrical innovation. Indeed, the 1951 film adaptation especially magnified psychological realism through the Actor's Studio acting method, thus contributing to a melodramatic vision of the play that plagued the later versions of the play and of American theater in general. Despite the fact that the film shared with the 1947 Broadway production the same director (Elia Kazan) and male lead (Marlon Brando), it lost some of the more innovative qualities of Williams's work and Kazan's staging, such as its symbolic and magic realism (Lemoine 2011: 28-31). Something similar occurred with the transfer of the play to France, mixing cinematic and theatrical worlds but also American and French esthetics between mainstream and avant-garde stages. As early as 1949, an avant-garde French version adapted by Jean Cocteau and starring French actress Arletty as Blanche introduced the American playwright in Paris. But quickly thereafter, many of Williams's plays would be billed in France with a "boulevard" seal of approval in the privately owned theaters such as Théâtre Edouard VII (Kerjan 104-109). A more mainstream and commercial production environment recast Williams and American theater in general, as less artistic and especially steeped in a conventional psychological realism.

This reductive vision of Tennessee Williams has started to change, complicating the meaning of American theater in France. Indeed, recently, Williams has attracted public theater productions more frequently breaking away from the bourgeois stigmata of private theaters.[3] Tellingly, in 2011, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was the first American play to be added to the famous "répertoire" of the venerable *Comédie-Française*[4] thanks to a production directed by the historical figure in American experimental theater, Lee Breuer at the *Salle Richelieu*. This official integration of American theater on the public French stage was dampened by mixed reviews (Savran 263). Yet, the radical potential of Williams's work, also renewed by the recent scholarly studies in the United States (Savran), was confirmed by the

experimental staging by European directors like Frank Castorf in 2000 and Krzysztof Warlikowski in 2010 (Maurin 2001; Lemoine 2014). This trend to rekindle the potential of established American theater extends to other classical American playwrights such as Arthur Miller with the productions of *The Crucible* (Théâtre de la Ville, 2019 and 2020) and the noted Ivo van Hove staging of *A View from the Bridge* (Odéon, 2015 and 2017). This trend points at the other way American theater has been perceived in France, that is to say, as a token of avant-gardism.

In short, American productions since the early 1960s have also been considered as a measure of experimental art, starting with the "Nancy Festival" (Festival Mondial de Théâtre founded in 1963) and amplified in the 1970s by the "Paris Fall Festival" (Festival d'Automne). Michel Guy, its founder, highlighted the creative potential of cultural exchanges by promoting many American artists (Bradby and Delgado 232-247). This presence of the American postmodern avant-garde in France became highly visible with the Living Theater in the 1960s when they stormed Avignon in 1968 (Jouve; Jacquot; Pasquier). Other American artists have been regularly invited to the Nancy Festival and Paris Fall Festival since the 1970s, most famously, Robert Wilson (over 20 times since 1972) imposing his groundbreaking Theater of The Image. In the 1990s, the "Exit Festival" at Maison des Arts de Créteil was a new international multimedia performance festival, reinforcing the construction of American theater as experimental by bringing over troops like the queer multimedia Big Art Group. In addition to the productions supported by French theaters (Théâtre de la Ville, T2G etc.) and festivals, the French critics (be they academics or otherwise)[5] also shaped this dual perception of American theater. Ultimately, this polarity does not reveal so much what American theater is as it points at *how* Americanness was constructed on the French stage, furthering the question of contemporary American transfers. At best, it suggests a genealogy of the reception necessary to unpack the meaning of *Angels in America* in France and its potential contributions to the discussion of cultural crisscrossing.

Angels in America: Americanness and Border Control?

Angels in America fulfilled the promise of a new generation of US playwrights in the early 1990s. Developed in San Francisco (Eureka Theatre) and Los Angeles (Mark Taper Forum), it was acclaimed on Broadway in April 1993 as the savior of a gloomy Broadway season (Butler and Kois 4-167; 170-218). In that sense, it epitomizes contemporary American drama.[6] The play took a scathing look at the 1980s through the plight of two dysfunctional couples: one torn apart by AIDS, as Louis abandons his sick lover Prior Walter; the other, Harper and Joe, crumbling when the veil of rigorous Mormon traditions is torn away by valium pills and homosexuality. The failure of love, politics, and spirituality also produces an entertaining, moving and innovative show. The play has been praised for its hybrid style mixing realism, TV series, and symbolism in a Brechtian epic structure (Geis and Kruger 3). Kushner called his work the "theater of the Fabulous", claiming a queer genealogy:

> If the great antecedent form of gay theater was theater of the ridiculous, then the new theater that … all of us who are lesbian and gay and working in the theater now are creating is something that I'm calling "theater of the fabulous." (Vorlicky, 74)

This collective label is a way to assert queer existence through a multilayered style. Kushner elaborated on this style with a food metaphor, comparing playwriting to baking lasagna:

> A good play, like a good lasagna, should be overstuffed: It has pomposity, […] It is pretentious food. […] Pretentiousness, overstatement, rhetoric and histrionics, grandiosity and portentousness are […] American tropes […]" (Kushner 1995: 61-62)

Interestingly, the Italian food metaphor connects Americanness to an esthetic of excess rooted in cross-cultural perspectives. *Angels in America* is defined by it layers of cultural references, which becomes in and of itself a palimpsest for transnational possibilities, in other words, it is an open text ready to welcome crisscrossing with other cultures.

In France, *Angels in America* was first staged by famed actress and director Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman[7] at the Festival d'Avignon in 1994 to finally get full production in November 1996 in Paris at the Théâtre de la Commune.[8] Overall reviews were good (*Avant-Scène*), marking it as an innovative piece presented in prestigious venues. Yet there were tensions about whether it belonged to the avant-garde trend of American drama in France or fed the realistic drama branch. Enthusiastic reception of the play was not shared by all; for *Le Nouvel Observateur* Jaques failed to deal convincingly with the unique style of the play: "Brigitte Jaques is ill-at-ease with the mixing of the marvelous and the social satire. Her staging fails to move beyond naturalism and, at times, is stuck in the rut of well-made melodrama (…)[9] (Quirot). Interestingly, the interpretation of American theater as overly traditionally "naturalist" is transferred here to the staging of Jaques as a sense of failure –even if the critic praised the way Jaques directed the actors. A less subtle rejection of the play and American theater at large was the 1996 editorial in the theater paper *Cassandre*, in which a theater scholar considered American theater as a mere echo of Hollywood domination and commodification of the world, referring more specifically to Robert Wilson, Peter Sellars and Tony Kushner. *Angels in America* and the work of Regnault and Jaques are reviled as a mere catalogue of archetypes under the domination of neoliberal American ideology. Besides the alienation of theater by cinema, Deshoulières denounces the play for its superficiality, identity politics, political correctness, cheap moralism, and psychological realism (Deshoulières 11-12). All these recriminations operate as a disparaging stereotype that only needs to be alluded to (especially here "psychological realism") in order to debunk American theater.

This same mechanism will unexpectedly be used with the next major production of *Angels in America* in France staged by Polish director Krzysztof Warlikowski in Avignon in July 2007 and in Paris in May 2008 at the Théâtre du Rond Point. In an interview for the Avignon website, the interviewer's last question seems to worry about too much realism: "The play's dramaturgy is mostly grounded in a very realistic tradition. Did you keep that realistic approach?"[10] (Perrier).

The question is all the more surprising as Warlikowsky's *mise en scène* freely translated *Angels in America* into his experimental style. This was well received by the French audience in Avignon and by many critics (Solis; *Le Monde*) despite some disappointments (Gapp). This success seemed to confirm the transferability of the American play both in time and space as it yielded powerful images about homophobia, politics and the rise of extreme conservatism in Poland, as Warlikowsky underlined in his interview (Perrier). In Warlikowsky's staging of scene 6, Roy Cohn, Martin Heller, and Joe Pit (Kushner 1993: 63-69) wear gorilla and monkey masks moving around with simian gestures, conveying the Reaganite political and legal corruption but also revealing the transnational law of the jungle that presides over human minds and bodies. The director manages to conjure up the hybrid political, social and theatrical bodies, in keeping with Cohn's early line "I wish I was an octopus, a fucking octopus." (Kushner 1993: 11) and visually question human nature across cultures. Cultural policing, then, seemed to collapse thanks to theatrical creativity.

A similarly successful cultural crossing characterized Aurélie Van Den Daele's adaptation at the Théâtre de l'Aquarium in the fall of 2015. Thanks to good reviews, it toured France in 2016 and 2017 (Lyon, Toulouse, Creil and Montluçon) and was performed in Paris again in October 2018 at the Théâtre Montfort. Daele first thought of getting rid of the US context of the play but she realized that it should be worked in:

> At first, I hoped to produce an "allegorical version", which would have allowed us to go beyond the contextual elements of the play. […]. But the references to American culture were so numerous that they kept resurfacing: Mormons, New York Jews, the lexicon, the political allusions… So, we finally chose to espouse the American context without overemphazing it but taking on the American references that touched upon our collective consciousness (a Coca cola can, the choice of the soundtrack)…[11] (Lemoine 2018)

Daele's approach was full of simple but highly operative solutions to infuse the stage with its original theatricality. Symbolic of this was the use of a small rectangular screen displaying various messages. One

read: "this is not America" aptly questioning the American identity of the play itself and the limits of staging it in France. While humorously stating the obvious for the French audience, it also smartly echoed the line uttered at the opening of the play: "You do not live in America. No such place exists" (Kushner 1993: 10). Conversely, Jaques' sets displayed a series of American flags on top of the massive brick wall, which sealed off the horizon upstage, over-determining the Americanness of the play and its heavy-handed effort to guide the spectator through a forest of American signs.

This excessive attempt to grapple with the Americanness was also apparent in the 1994 23-page program providing the audience with a lexicon (Lichtenstein *et al.*). Interestingly, there was a glossary in the London program, showing that this strategy was more about culture than language (Butler and Kois 104). The effort is commendable but betrayed a certain level of anxiety that the New York gay Jewish wit assailing the Reaganite *doxa* would not transfer well. A quick glance at the lexicon of the 1994 program offers a crash course in Americana, featuring US politics ("Supreme Court"), historical figures ("Rosenbergs", "McCarthy"), American History landmarks ("Mayflower", the "melting pot"), local politics ("Ed Koch"), Jewish culture (5 Yiddish terms), and religion ("Mormons"). Gay culture is emphasized by a playful non-definition as the word "gay" refers to "homosexual" and "homosexual" to "gay" (Lichtenstein *et al.* 1994: 8), suggesting that no translation is needed here as the American term has already pervaded French culture but also offering an ironic meta-comment on the limits of a glossary to access a whole culture. Furthermore, this lexicon can be understood as a symptom of the difficulties of transferring a play from one culture to another.

This defensive glossary did not shield the play from being attacked for its poor script, which was reminiscent of the way Tennessee Williams's work was often treated (Savran 2014: 264-5). An online review of Van Den Daele's show berated the play in the following terms:

> The problem resides in the play itself despite the fact that it was shortened. Tony Kushner works on stereotypes in order to establish a behavioral

> typology. But the confrontation of flat characters sometimes yields boredom for the audience. We can only regret that the play was not abridged further.[12] (Cassou-Noguès)

Daele, like Warlikowski before her, found many echoes linking Reagan, Trump, and the rise of nationalism in Europe in the play (Lemoine 2018). Clearly, European directors do not seem to find limitations in the script but rather a powerful poetic springboard for a wide reflection on our contemporary world. The resistance to Kushner's text by French journalists and scholars revives the tactics used to reject American influence (Neveux 52-56) but it mostly underscores the friction that comes from crossing borders. On a cultural political level, theater scholar David Savran, discussing Williams's presence on the French and German stages in the 2010s, sees this tension as a form of resentment towards American hegemony and "an attempt by Europeans to reassert the universality and health of their own culture" (Savran 2014: 272). For Savran, these kinds of international cultural skirmishes support a strategic rejection of American drama in France as a result of Cold War politics, explaining the limited portent of American playwrights.

American Theatrical Vitality and Queerness: Blurring Borders?

Such an ideological split could be nuanced by cultural history itself where many cultural bridges were built by the US government through the CIA during the Cold War (Quessard) and, then, by theater history showing the constant flow of American work onto the French stage. Thus the circulation of *Angels in America* could symbolize how cultural globalization erodes nationalistic models without systematically denying differences and variations. The play must be inscribed in the tradition of American and European theatrical exchanges, as exemplified in the 1970s by Grotowski's "Theatre of Sources" that attracted major theater practitioners (Schechner 254).

Kushner's work triggered similar circulations, as theater critic of the left-leaning daily *Libération*, René Solis went to New York as a special reporter to review *Angels in America Part I* in 1993. His article lauded

the writing despite his lukewarm review of George C. Wolfe's staging, stating: "*Angels in America*'s success relies indeed on an exceptional script: funny and poetic, epic and direct, fantastic and simple"[13] (Solis 1993: 37-38). All the productions of *Angels in America* discussed so far,[14] interrogate the effect of cultural transfer and seem to suggest that a potential momentum over the very foreignness of the material can emerge. Maybe this is merely due to the anthropological gap brought by an external gaze; as artistic director of the New York Theatre Workshop puts it: "There's something about someone from outside the culture looking in. They can see the metaphor better than we can (…)" (Butler and Kois 104).

This anthropological and theatrical circulation, destabilizing cultures through otherness and esthetics is at the heart of Ivo van Hove's work. He produced about fifteen American plays, including *Angels in America* in 2008. His staging of the play, which influenced Daele (Lemoine 2018), featured a bare stage with few obvious references to America (Maurin 219). Yet, according to theater scholar Maurin, van Hove is fascinated by New York as a site of infinite potentialities, boasting the supreme value of modernism: speed ("New York is the stage of quicksilver", Maurin 2016: 234). Indeed, abundance, fluidity, and speed could define the esthetic structure of *Angels in America* adopted in many European productions. The recurrence of the term "speed" in the press file of Jaques' first Avignon staging (*Avant-Scène*) illustrates how the play's subject matter and unique style is perceived as emerging from the quicksilver of (post)modernity. One of the translators, Gérard Wajcman, praised the combination of high and low culture and mentioned enthusiastically the interpolation of Shakespeare, Corneille, Benjamin, Brecht, musicals, TV series, melodrama, sex and street slang. But, for him, that list coalesced thanks to the play's vitality in the face of death: "*Angels in America* is probably the most vital voice we are given to hear in contemporary theater today"[15] (Wajcman). This forceful presentation certainly explains why Jaques picked the script both for its sense of urgency and for its epic scope mixing intimacy and History (Biet 2017: 15).

Daele's staging praised for its visual impact, its fluidity and its moving quality supported by superb acting captured the postmodern sense of rhythm required by the many "split scenes" and registers of the play. Potentially complex scenes, such as Harper's valium-induced journey to a snowy Arctic, were met with inventive solutions such as the use of ping-pong balls flooding the floor. Such ideas allowed to convey the fluidity of the play, which is key, as Declan Donnellan insisted when he staged the London opening: "I kept the scenes fluid and overlapping", finally winning over Kushner who admitted "he made it dance" (Butler and Kois 103). So *Angels in America* contributes to blurring the distinction between high and low art, realism and avant-garde. It thematically, stylistically, and structurally performs postmodern hybridity to go beyond fixed representational categories and challenge narrow nationalistic perceptions through troubling potentialities such as queerness.

The queer perspective of the play, as an aspect of the American postmodern zeitgeist, also explains Kushner's success and influence in France. Overall, since the 1960s American theater has tackled gay identity politics with greater visibility than French drama, building a legacy mobilized in *Angels in America* through camp acting (i.e. "fabulousness"), drag queen acts, and historical references to earlier gay plays. Theater historian John Clum asserts: "More than anyone before him, Kushner has linked in a positive way the traditions and conventions of classic American drama with those of gay theater" (Clum 313). In the 1990s, AIDS definitely made homosexuality a pressing issue in the United States widely addressed by theater (Roman) while in France it rarely reached the stage.[16] Indeed, French productions about homosexuality have been confined to intimate, personal visions or abstract poetic visions. The Argentinian performer and playwright Copi was one of the exceptions with *Une visite inopportune*, (1988); Olivier Py and a few others could constitute a French trend.[17] Yet, other major French contemporary gay playwrights in a universalist tradition, including Jean-Luc Lagarce or Bernard-Marie Koltès,[18] mainly refused to provide an esthetic discourse that directly addressed gay and lesbian issues. The significance of queer issues, however, has grad-

ually become more visible on the French stage, avoiding the quick dismissal that often collapsed queerness into didactic/activist art. *Angels in America,* by making visible an unabashed LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer) consciousness, captured by the ironic yet explicit outdoor sex scene (Kushner 1993: 52-58), has contributed to an articulation between queer imagination and political action on the French stage.

This political and social angle of Kushner's work was illustrated by the two French productions of *Angels in America* that were associated with fund-raising or social awareness events. In the 1996 program, a brief paragraph (Lichtenstein *et al*. 1996: 2) explains that 5 francs of all purchased tickets will be donated to AIDS associations (SIDA Info Service and Sida Solidarité Spectacle). Similarly, Daele's 2017 production was associated with a month of events around queer issues marketed as "A Queer Month around *Angels in America*." The cast and the director came to several events at the theater through conventional Q&A sessions, but also to gay cultural places such as the Gay and Lesbian bookstore in the Marais (Les Mots à la bouche). The cultural scope of the play underlines the resonance of the work in everyday life. This exemplifies how theater can trouble the strict division between art and society by constituting a productive exchange between the two, as Van Den Daele asserts: "It's the idea that, yes, maybe, theater can lead to action, but it is also the idea that theater must feed off other crafts to grow"[19] (Lemoine 2018). Indeed, in turn, this social involvement underlines the power of the play to raise many questions across the Atlantic favoring reverberations and intercultural performance knowledge.

Conclusion

Olivier Py, the director of the Festival d'Avignon, explained how, in the 1990s, French theater practitioners resisted new trends, especially the German postdramatic, by focusing on a new poetic playwriting (Lagarce, Gabily, Rambert) and by rejecting the previous domination of Brecht, Claudel, Beckett and Genet. Tellingly, Py fails to point to the American performance art tradition established since the 1960s

(Py 55-56), which is acknowledged by Thies-Lehmann as a source of influence for postdramatic innovations. So Kushner's work could be the ideal candidate to bridge these trends in a way that helps suggest a theater that can create esthetic and cultural cross-overs.

Angels in America offers a hybrid theatrical genre (politically and esthetically) which appeals to spectators and theatrical practitioners, connecting to the two-pronged presence of American theater in France: the experimental and the mainstream. The European productions of the play explored a variety of styles, from the dramatic and symbolic staging of Jaques-Wajeman and Daele to the international (post)dramatic esthetics of van Hove and Warlikowski. The rise of an international experimental trend could turn out to be a limitation of American theater in the framework of the French contemporary stage, failing to bridge the chasm between different groups of theatergoers and reinforcing a sophisticated global theater pitted against a local poetic drama.

Yet, this whole "performance sequence" (Schechner 16), from the Euro-American dramatic matrix to the performance repercussions ("aftermath" Schechner 19) reveals the creative potential derived from border crossing. The global anthropological and theatrical circulations can seep through French theater (Py) and society, but more importantly can connect varied cultural practices of representation with the productive energy of the performance. *Angels in America*, ends on a call for diversity, "interconnectedness" and "More Life" (Kushner 1994: 148), a forward thrust that celebrates history and the paradoxes of cross-cultural performance.

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1 "the 'Cartel' of four directors: Louis Jouvet, Gaston Baty, Charles Dullin and Georges Pitoëff" (Bradby and Delgado 3)

2 A complete program of Festival d'Automne can be accessed at https://www.festival-automne.com/archive. A scholarly analysis is to be found in Bradby and Delgado.

3 *La nuit de l'iguane*, Georges Lavaudant, MC 93 Bobigny and MC2, Grenoble, 2009 ; *Ménagerie de verre*, Daniel Jannetau, La Colline, 31 Mars au 29 Avril 2016 etc.

4 Out of 2,662 plays registered since 1680 Williams is the first American and non-European playwright included in the Répertoire. "*Un tramway nommé désir* : Le répertoire de la Comédie-Française", Agathe Sanjuan, conservateur-archiviste de la Comédie-Française, Comédie-Française Press file, 12 janvier 2011 PDF. https://www.comedie-francaise.fr/fr/evenements/un-tramway-nomme-desir10-11 (accessed Oct 5, 2018) He will be followed in 2012 by Naomi Wallace and her play *One Flea Spare*.

5 In the 1970s Jotterand (1970) and Pasquier (1978) highlighted experimental theater. More recently in overviews of theater, like *Qu'est-ce que le théâtre*, 2006 (Biet and Triau 66; 71) or more specific essays (Neveux) exemplify the quasi absence of reference to American productions. If the influential German publication *Postdramatic Theater* by Thies-Lehmann relies widely on Robert Wilson as a major post-dramatic influence on the world stage, he maintains this dichotomy by only considering American productions deemed experimental.

6 The rave reviews of the 2018 New York (and London) production underlines its continuous significance:"flat-out fabulous revival of Tony Kushner's '*Angels in America*,'" Ben Brentley, "Review: An '*Angels in America*' That Soars on the

Breath of Life", *The New York Times*, March 25, 2018. See equally enthusiastic reviews: "Broadway Review: '*Angels in America*' With Andrew Garfield, Nathan Lane," Marilyn Stasio, *Variety*, March 25, 2018.

7 In 1976, Brigitte Jaques-Wajeman co-founded with François Regnault the Pandora theatre Company. Between 1991 and 1997, they headed the Centre dramatique national d'Aubervilliers : Théâtre de la Commune. Tellingly, she had previously staged *The Night of the Iguana* in 1991 at the Théâtre Les Célestins in Lyon. https://www.lesarchivesduspectacle.net/?IDX_Spectacle=31964. (Féral)

8 The exact sequence was : "Millenium Approaches » July 10 1994, Festival d'Avignon (Cloître des Carmes) ; September 27 - October 19 1994 at théâtre de la Communauté française de Belgique ; November 4 – December 31 1994 at Théâtre de la Commune/Pandora ; April 16 1996 – January 1st 1997 at Comédie de Genève ; November 13 - 22 1996 at Théâtre de la Commune/Pandora. Information available at https://www.compagniepandora.com/site/spectacles/angels-in-america/ (accessed Oct 5, 2018)

9 Original text: "Brigitte Jaques est mal à l'aise avec ce métissage du merveilleux et de la satire sociale. Son spectacle ne parvient pas à décoller du naturalisme, il s'empâte parfois dans le bon boulevard bien ficelé. Mais le metteur en scène sait diriger les acteurs (…)"

10 Original text: "La forme dramaturgique de la pièce s'inscrit souvent dans un très grand réalisme. L'avez-vous conservé ?"

11 Original text: "A l'origine du projet, je souhaitai livrer une "version fable" qui permettrait de toucher au-delà du côté contextuel de la pièce. (…). Mais les références extrêmement nombreuses et particulières nous rattrapaient sans cesse : les mormons, les juifs new yorkais, le vocabulaire, les allusions politiques... Nous avons donc choisi d'épouser la question américaine, de ne pas la surligner mais de l'assumer avec des clins d'œil à l'inconscient collectif (canettes de cocas, choix de la BO...)"

12 Original text: "La difficulté tient à la pièce elle-même, pourtant écourtée. Tony Kushner travaille sur les stéréotypes afin de faire une sorte de typologie des comportements. Mais à faire s'affronter des personnages sans nuances, on ennuie parfois le spectateur. On peut regretter qu'il n'y ait pas plus de coupes dans la pièce."

13 Original text : "Le succès d'*Angels in America* repose bien sur un texte d'une qualité hors du commun : à la fois poétique et drôle, direct et épique, simple et fantastique."

14 We could also add Peter Eötvös who transformed the play into an Opera, performed in Paris in November 2004, or the school project version of an acting student Armel Roussel in Brussels (June 2012).

[15] Original text: "*Angels in America* c'est peut-être la voix la plus vivante qu'on puisse entendre dans le théâtre d'aujourd'hui."

[16] Elizabeth Taylor's line in Christophe Honoré's play *Les Idoles* conjuring up famous gay playwrights who had died of AIDS, reproaching them for their lack of political commitment in the 1990s is spot-on. *Les Idoles* by Christophe Honoré at the Odéon Théâtre, as witnessed by the author on January 29, 2019.

[17] The French publication of a catalogue around AIDS plays includes Copi's play and *Le jeu du veuf* by Olivier Py under the heading dramatic scritps (another section was dedicated to didactic plays) *Catalogue des outils de prévention : théâtre*, CRIPS, 2, septembre 1995.

[18] "Il prétendit ne rien avoir à écrire à propos d'homosexualité – motif peu présent dans son œuvre –, allant jusqu'à reprocher à Patrice Chéreau d'avoir donné, en 1987, une version aux connotations trop directement sexuelles de sa pièce *Dans la solitude des champs de coton* (1986)" (Renouard 278.)

[19] Original text : "C'est l'idée que le théâtre peut se prolonger en action oui, mais aussi que le théâtre doit se nourrir d'autres corps de métiers pour s'enrichir."