

**FREIE**  
**REPUBLIK**  
**WIENER**  
**FEST**  
**WOCHEN**



18 June



Pfarrkirche St. Elisabeth

A Tribute to Gisèle Pelicot

# THE PELICOT TRIAL

**Servane Dècle & Milo Rau**

In cooperation with Festival d'Avignon

The Pelicot trial is undoubtedly the most publicised and discussed, and also the most symbolic, of our time. As in a sociological study, it shows that in a perfectly normal Western European city – the small town of Mazan in the south of France, close to Avignon – perfectly ordinary men from all social classes and age groups are capable of perhaps the most extreme crime: the repeated rape of an unconscious woman. “Shame must change sides”: Gisèle Pelicot’s decision to make her trial public made her the symbolic figure of a possible turning point. *THE PELICOT TRIAL* pays tribute to an ordinary woman who became an icon of resistance against the sexual and sexist violences committed by men.

🗣 German  
CC no surtitles  
🕒 9pm – 4am

The reading is broadcast via livestream.

600 trial hours, 51 prosecutors, 20,000 videos and photos shot by Dominique Pelicot, the husband of Gisèle Pelicot, 38 lawyers – to find judgement on more than 200 rapes under chemical submission committed over the course of a decade. It takes a range of sources to allow reflection on what made this possible. Statements, examinations, an investigation file, scholarly commentaries, interviews, video descriptions, collages, pleas, expert opinions, live threads: the audience is led through a mass of material, from dusk until dawn, by several dozen actors. Following the path of collective research, each station enters one aspect of the trial to give voice to what happened from changing perspectives. In the setting of St Elisabeth church, this journey blends history and the present, the life of a perfectly normal family and the world. Over the course of a whole night, dramaturge and activist Servane Dècle and director Milo Rau paint a picture of an entire era.

**In cooperation with** Festival d’Avignon

**Research and dramaturgy** Servane Dècle **Research and direction** Milo Rau **Project dramaturgy** Nastasia Griesse **Dramaturgical collaboration** Manon Chaveau

**Special thanks to** Gisèle Pelicot’s lawyer Stéphane Babonneau and Antoine Camus, the journalists Adèle Bossard (ici Vaucluse), Jean-Philippe Deniau (Radio France), Valérie Manteau, Britta Sandberg (Der Spiegel) and Henri Seckel (Le Monde), the scientists Riwanon Gouez, Perrine Lachenal, Céline Lesourd (Centre Norbert Elias), Solenne Jouanneau, the feminist activist Justine Le Noac’h, the expert Laurent Layet, and the prosecutor Jean-François Mayet

**Read by** Waltraud Barton, Sabine Bouyssy, Zeynep Buyraç, Nadine Abena Cobbina, Maja Karolina Franke, Cosmina Fusu, Manuel Harder, Dorothee Hartinger, Mavie Hörbiger, Oskar Huber, Karin Yoko Jochum, Alla Kiperman, Lola Klamroth, Sebastian Klein, Wilfried Kovárník, Stefan Kutzenberger, Sophie Lenglinger, Rebecca Lindauer, Kaspar Maier, Marc Pierre, Stephan Rehm, Safira Robens, Roberto Romeo, Claus Nicolai Six, Helge Stradner, Laetitia Toursarkissian, Birgit Unterweger, Marcos Valdes Fernandez, Kay Voges, Lili Winderlich

**executed by** the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

## **ACT 1** THE CASE OF MAZAN

### INTRODUCTION

- FRAGMENT 1 DO YOU ACKNOWLEDGE THE ACCUSATIONS?
- FRAGMENT 2 ON THE STREET
- FRAGMENT 3 THE HOUSE IN MAZAN (I)
- FRAGMENT 4 THE HOUSE IN MAZAN (II)
- FRAGMENT 5 FOUR YEARS INVISIBLE
- FRAGMENT 6 THE TRIBUNAL
- FRAGMENT 7 THE INDICTMENT
- FRAGMENT 8 THE SCENARIO OF DOMINIQUE PELICOT
- FRAGMENT 9 GISÈLE PELICOT'S FIRST SPEECH
- FRAGMENT 10 RAPE CULTURE (I)
- FRAGMENT 11 "LET'S MAKE A HELL OF A NOISE"
- FRAGMENT 12 THE FEMINISTS OF AVIGNON
- FRAGMENT 13 THE WIDESPREAD ABUSE
- FRAGMENT 14 CAROLINE DARIAN INTERVIEW
- FRAGMENT 15 BABONNEAU'S PLEA (GISÈLE PELICOT'S LAWYER)
- FRAGMENT 16 "SAINT GISÈLE", THE BIRTH OF AN ICON
- FRAGMENT 17 THE VIDEOS MUST BE SHOWN
- FRAGMENT 18 THE VIDEOS (I)

### INTERMISSION

## **ACT 2** THE PROCESS OF THE FIFTY

### INTRODUCTION

- FRAGMENT 1 THE VIDEOS (II)
- FRAGMENT 2 COMMENTARY ON THE VIDEOS
- FRAGMENT 3 WHAT IS RAPE?
- FRAGMENT 4 CHRISTIAN L.
- FRAGMENT 5 WITNESSES IN THE CASE OF CHRISTIAN L.
- FRAGMENT 6 CHARLY A. AND THE "MILF COMPLEX"

- FRAGMENT 7 BILL THE BLACK
- FRAGMENT 8 JEROME V.
- FRAGMENT 9 TYPOLOGY OF RAPE
- FRAGMENT 10 HISTORY OF CHEMICAL SUBMISSION (SOUMISSION CHIMIQUE)
- FRAGMENT 11 PSYCHIATRIC EVALUATION
- FRAGMENT 12 INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
- FRAGMENT 13 JEAN-PIERRE M.
- FRAGMENT 14 INTERROGATION OF DOMINIQUE PELICOT
- FRAGMENT 15 GISÈLE PELICOT'S FINAL SPEECH

### INTERMISSION

## **ACT 3** THE JUDGEMENTS

### INTRODUCTION

- FRAGMENT 1 THE MEN OF AVIGNON
- FRAGMENT 2 PLEA BY ANTOINE CAMUS
- FRAGMENT 3 THE MAN WHO DIDN'T GO TO PELICOT
- FRAGMENT 4 PLEA BY THE DEFENSE ATTORNEY OF GREGORY S.
- FRAGMENT 5 NICOLAS HÉNIN, VICTIM OF ISIS
- FRAGMENT 6 THE FATHERLESS PATRIARCHY
- FRAGMENT 7 A BRIEF TECHNOLOGICAL HISTORY OF PORNOGRAPHY
- FRAGMENT 8 RAPE CULTURE (II)
- FRAGMENT 9 WHAT IS MALE FEMINISM?
- FRAGMENT 10 THE FINAL DEMONSTRATION
- FRAGMENT 11 MISSED APOLOGIES
- FRAGMENT 12 OUTSIDE THE COURTHOUSE
- FRAGMENT 13 WHAT DO WE DO WITH ALL THE RAPISTS?
- FRAGMENT 14 FINAL WORDS OF GISÈLE PELICOT
- FRAGMENT 15 MONT VENTOUX



# WHO ARE WE REALLY

## SERVANE DÈCLE AND MILO RAU ON THE HIDDEN SIDE OF THE PELICOT CASE

**Natalie Assmann** How did the idea for this evening come about?

**Milo Rau** I have been to the Festival d'Avignon with my work many times. Court cases, trials and processing them in theatre are an essential part of my artistic identity, so I naturally followed the trial closely. After the trial, we realised that no one was addressing this case artistically for the upcoming festival. It just felt wrong to go there in July and not engage with it in any way! So, together with the team of the Wiener Festwochen and the Festival d'Avignon, we decided to make this attempt.

**N.A.** The trial itself lasted for over three months. How did you approach this enormous amount of material? You mentioned that it was not allowed to make audio recordings in the courtroom in Avignon.

**Servane Dècle** We are working with journalists' notes from nearly 600 hours of hearings. The written records of a large number of reporters were a pivotal and extremely important source for us. Then we started having personal conversations: with journalists, a group of researchers at the Centre Norbert Elias, with one of the trial's public prosecutors, with Mrs. Pelicot's lawyers, Antoine Camus and Stéphane Babonneau, as well as with feminists from Avignon who attended the trial and others.

In my professional practice, I am interested in collective knowledge in order to capture the complexity of the issues. Of course, the first thing that stands out are the extraordinary aspects of this case, but we are also interested in its quieter, more inconspicuous facets. We might not be able to fully reconstruct the Pelicot trial, but our goal is to give voice to what happened. As many as four books had already been published a mere three months after the verdict. There is obviously an urge to talk about it. We want to keep alive the story told by this trial. So the reading is a way of establishing continuity. Dramaturgically, we are taking a concise and analytical approach to uncover the deeper causes of these acts.

**N.A.** So, would you describe this as an attempt to reconstruct the case in its entirety – which in itself would already be a political act of remembrance?

**M.R.** Exactly! In a way, we are taking the case out of the collective memory and reassembling it for Avignon and Vienna. We decided to stage the reading in a sacred space, as an allegory to the Stations of the Cross, reading the events 'from dusk till dawn'. We deliberately chose a simple format for this evening because in my experience that is the most convincing way to tell this story. It's about disentangling the story from the couple Gisèle and Dominique Pelicot – turning it into a



story that belongs to all of us and at the same time to none of us.

**N.A.** What does the figure of Gisèle Pelicot mean for the feminist movement in France and for you personally, Servane?

**S.D.** By bringing the trial into the public eye, Gisèle Pelicot achieved an unbelievable shift: 'making shame change sides', making the perpetrators accountable. In many trials since then (such as the trial against the ISIS prison guards in France), victims have mentioned how much her courage inspired them. We want to pay tribute to her. But like many other feminists, we do not want to put her on a pedestal. What does a constant emphasis on her exemplary courage mean for those who are affected but unable to speak out publicly? Gisèle Pelicot's lifestyle was frequently described as 'impeccable', essentially using the phrase to distance her from the humiliations she endured. But what if she had not been considered 'impeccable' – if, for example, she had preferred unconventional sexual practices? What if she had not been the 'good victim'? Would that have made the crimes committed against her any less cruel? I want to question our disturbing need for 'innocence' when it comes to feeling empathy.

**N.A.** Our judicial system is built on patriarchal power structures. In practice, this means that gender affects not only verdicts but also the credibility of witnesses and public perception. How do you incorporate this into your work?

**S.D.** Countless sexual and sexist stereotypes were reproduced in the courtroom and in media coverage. Even in the face of

video footage, many of the accused denied having raped Gisèle Pelicot. I think it is crucial to acknowledge the sheer banality of these crimes and to shed light on the culture that enables these acts. Many in France demanded that this trial be seen as a symbolic case against 'the patriarchy'. However, the justice system cannot pass sentence on an entire society. These men are responsible for their own actions, not for all the sexist and sexual violence committed by men on a daily basis. In the end, it was just a trial against 51 men within the patriarchy.

**M.R.** From a sociological or philosophical perspective, this case is like an unintentional empirical study on the omnipresence of the patriarchy and rape culture that infiltrates all of our lives – despite decades of awareness campaigns, increasingly strict laws and the success of #MeToo amplifying the voices of victims. It's as if we are saying, well, we have now shed light on this part, but there is still another part – one that remains completely hidden. And that part remains unchanged.

**S.D.** Yes, the Pelicot trial is not just a marginal footnote. In one of her articles in *Le Monde*, the journalist Hélène Devynck quoted Virginia Woolf likening patriarchy in the home to fascism in the world. Obviously, the patriarchy does not remain confined to the home. It operates in the world and within the self – even in men who suffer from self-destructive masculinity. It is therefore a fundamental part of our domestic structure. Given the rapid rise of neo-fascism in the world, this statement serves as my compass for this work. Today, masculinism and neo-fascism are growing hand in hand – the continuity is apparent. As long as the patriarchy con-

tinues to destroy lives, as long as men seek power through domination, fascism will grow. I don't believe that the patriarchy is any easier or simpler to combat than fascism, but as an artist, activist and woman, I feel that the contemplation on the Pelicot trial points to a core issue of our time.

**N.A.** To demonstrate that sexual violence is not an isolated incident, Virginie Despentes describes how she became a victim of gang rape at the age of 17 in *King King Theory*. Pelicot made her case public for similar reasons. From a feminist perspective, the question arises whether speaking about rape invites sensationalism or voyeurism – and to what extent it can unintentionally be retraumatizing. How do you handle the partly very explicit and detailed descriptions of the rapes in this work?

**S.D.** During the trial, it was apparent that most of the accused were unable to view a woman as a subject, not an object. They made no distinction between sex, sexualized violence and rape. They constantly justified and defended themselves during questioning. Therefore, I believe it is very important not to omit these statements, as they reveal attitudes held by so many people in our society. Gisèle Pelicot is not just a victim but also a survivor of patriarchal violence.

**N.A.** From an activist perspective, it is often criticized that the depiction of violence normalizes the actual act of violence for a privileged audience. How do you respond to this criticism?

**M.R.** The depiction of real events has always been somewhat problematic. This concerns not just the depiction of sexualized violence, however, but of violence and trauma in general. There are questions that inevitably arise when violence is brought to the stage: Why is violence being portrayed? Who watches it? And for what reason?

I've made pieces with children about paedophilia, and of course there was a concern there that there are paedophiles in the audience who are there to see the children. It's a paradox: by speaking about pornography, we are simultaneously producing pornography. In the specific case of Pelicot, however, there was so much support from the family and the people involved – more than I've ever experienced in any of my previous works. So, politically, I think we are doing the right thing. Psychologically, it is certainly challenging.

**N.A.** Since the Pelicot case, there have been discussions about changing the legal definition of rape in French law so that the absence of the victim's consent becomes the central criterion. According to what is known as the 'Only Yes Means Yes' principle, sexualized violence would be considered to have occurred if any participant did not explicitly give their consent. What is your view on these discussions?

**S.D.** What we saw in the Pelicot case is historic in its own way. 51 out of 80 men were indicted and held accountable. The underlying issues, such as male dominance, rape culture and patriarchy, were not addressed. It is an exceptional case that unfortunately turns out to be quite ordinary. Scholars call this type of crime

‘ordinary opportunity rape’. The perpetrators all live within fifty kilometres of the Pelicots’ home. Just think about it: this happened within such a small radius. Many of them didn’t even know the definition of consent. I think the modification of the law you describe has some advantages but also carries risks that I don’t want to go into here. What the story of Gisèle Pelicot clearly shows is that while it is important to tighten laws, that does not suffice to drive societal change.

**M.R.** Essentially, this brings us back to our Congresses this year. It is always problematic for a society when it attempts to address structural issues only through the installation of laws. So while we are dealing with criminal law here, we are in fact facing an anthropological question: Who are we really? Can we ever become human on this planet – can we ever be humane? This makes me think of Peter Weiss’s oratorio *The Investigation*, which is essentially about demystifying the Holocaust. He described ordinary people doing things they knew were wrong, but doing them anyway. In that, I see a parallel to the Pelicot case.

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Servane Dècle** is a performing arts graduate from the Conservatoire de Nantes. She has been working for several years as a dramaturge in the field of documentary theatre with Milo Rau, Simon Roth and Cie Supernovae. She sometimes works in set design, too. She likes to build bridges between worlds and is involved in social change in diverse ways. Dècle also works as an actress and writes her own plays, such as a monologue to be directed by Clara Hédouin.

**Milo Rau**, born 1977 in Bern, is the artistic director of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna. The director and author has published over 100 plays, films, books and actions. His theatre productions have been shown at all major international festivals, including the Berlin Theatertreffen, the Festival d’Avignon, the Venice Biennale, the Vienna Festival and the Kunstenfestivaldesarts in Brussels, and have been touring in over 30 countries worldwide. From 2018 to 2024 Milo Rau was artistic director of NTGent (Belgium).

### PUBLICATION DETAILS

**Owner, Editor and Publisher** Wiener Festwochen GesmbH, Lehárgasse 11/1/6, 1060 Wien T + 43 1 589 22 0  
festwochen@festwochen.at | www.festwochen.at **General Management** Milo Rau, Artemis Vakianis **Artistic Direction** (responsible for content) Milo Rau (Artistic Director) **Picture Credit** Cover © SIRENE Studio, p. 6 © AFP **Translation** Nadezda Müngersdorff, wordsmithery **Produced by** Print Alliance HAV Produktions GmbH (Bad Vöslau) **Design** SIRENE Studio **Layout** Valerie Eccli

MAIN SPONSORS



PUBLIC FUNDING BODY



PRESENTING PARTNER



HOTEL PARTNER

MAX BROWN  
HOTELS

MEDIA PARTNER

DERSTANDARD

Vis for love!



16 MAY  
- 22 JUNE 2025