

PERFORMANCE WORLD PREMIERE COPRODUCTION

DOPPELGÄNGER/ DOPPELGANGER

GOB SQUAD



FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

18 – 21 June
Halle G
MuseumsQuartier

Where do we begin? Literally where do we, the thing that we think of as us, and the thing that you think of as you, where does that begin?

Doppelgänger/Doppelganger is a journey down the rabbit hole into a hall of mirrors where everything we believe ourselves to be – unique and unmistakable – starts to unravel and multiply. In a world of duplication and projection, of forgetting and remembering, and of eternal self-mythologising, the performers of Gob Squad find themselves stuck in a seemingly endless party. But no one seems to remember what exactly there is to celebrate. Wasn't it someone's birthday? There's cake and balloons, and everything is captured on camera: someone has taken a photograph, and it looks like they're having a good time.

Trapped in a party loop, Gob Squad turns to the audience for reasons to celebrate, searching for possible doppelgangers, to expand themselves, to confront themselves, to switch themselves off entirely or to dissolve into many. The dance with the self begins but who is leading whom here, and through whose story? And who decides what happens next?

The party tips over into a surreal vision full of unexpected twists, in which different identities and voices fight relentlessly to be heard, and our shared responsibility for something that is greater than ourselves strikes us as a utopian déjà vu.

Languages
German, English

Duration
approx. 90 mins


barrier-free access

Q & A
19 June, following
the performance

‘No one makes
themselves. (...)
We all make
and unmake one
another.’

NAOMI KLEIN (*DOPPELGÄNGER*)

Concept Gob Squad **Devised and performed by** Johanna Freiburg, Sean Patten, Tatiana Saphir, Sharon Smith, Berit Stumpf, Sarah Thom, Bastian Trost, Simon Will **Sound design** Sebastian Bark, Julio Zúñiga **Video design** Miles Chalcraft **Set and costume design** Nina von Mechow, Amir Baltić **Light design and technical management** Chris Umney **Dramaturgy and production management** Christina Runge **Dramaturgical advisor** Pauli Patinen **Artistic collaboration** Katharina Joy Book, Ben Goldby, Simon Kernen **Assistance set and costume design** Tina Hübner **Company management** Heleen De Boever, Caroline Gentz, Talea Schuré, Grischa Schwiegl

Production Gob Squad **Coproduction** Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna, HAU Hebbel am Ufer Berlin, &Espoo Theatre **Supported by** Hauptstadtkulturfonds (Germany)

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

World Premiere June 2026, Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna

THE INDIVIDUAL VERSUS THE COLLECTIVE

INTERVIEW WITH BERIT STUMPF AND SIMON WILL,
TWO MEMBERS OF GOB SQUAD

Looking at your work, much of it is based on improvisation and the unexpected. But all your shows have a very strong signature – you can always feel it’s a Gob Squad work. How do you manage this combination of the unexpected and a form that speaks the language of Gob Squad?

SIMON WILL Well, it’s all made by the same people who have been together for such a long time now.

BERIT STUMPF Over 30 years.

S.W. And what happens when you’re together for that long is that you develop a language together. We literally give nicknames to things when we’re making stuff. We reference previous works as a kind of shorthand – that’s very much happening in *Doppelgänger/Doppelganger* – we’re referencing a lot of past Gob Squad works. The audience won’t need to know that, but for us it’s pleasurable to remix different techniques and frames of reference from past work.

B.S. And on the side of the unexpected: we like to challenge ourselves continuously. With every new project we try to

enter new territory, something we haven’t done before in that way. We don’t like to get bored. After all this time together, it’s very important to keep taking risks. And that very often comes through a form of interaction – may it be with the public outside in the street or with guests. In *Is Anybody Home?*, for example, you don’t really know what the special guest (for one night only) will bring every night. In *Doppelgänger/Doppelganger*, it’ll be the audience – this unexpected element of risk and the reality they bring with them, is fueling whatever we make and say each night.

Where did this interest in interaction start? It’s been there from very early on.

B.S. Our early work wasn’t even based in the theatre. We come from a site-specific background – we made pieces in shopping centres, train stations, houses, offices, hotel rooms, city streets. There, you’re always faced with a reality you have to react to. What’s going on around you becomes part of it. You’re not in a dark room without a connection to the outside world – you are within this world. So now, even when we are in a black box, we try to bring in these elements of the

outside world. We often say we use the site or the situation as a script, like a text that we read. And in the theatre, the audience can provide that material.

S.W. One key rehearsal point in our history is a work from 2001 called *The Great Outdoors*, where Johanna and Berit went out onto Alexanderplatz in Berlin and just started talking to people, asking simple questions. They brought this material back and we were all very drawn to it, because I think we are all drawn to the basic idea of the encounter – what a lot of people call interaction in theatre, but for us it's about an encounter. It was significant because it was the first time we really started thinking about how encounters can happen between people as a performance. It's about finding some kind of intimacy, often in Gob Squad world mediated through a screen or technology, but between a couple of strangers who start to build stories together.

Did your interest in encounters evolve over time?

B.S. In our early theatre projects, we couldn't even look at the audience – we always had a screen between us and them. Being on a stage was very alien to us. So when we first went into the theatre itself with a piece called *Close Enough To Kiss*, we went with a mirrored box; so we couldn't see the audience looking in on us, just our own reflections. Then we developed that in various ways with other forms of screens and video filters between us and the audience. The first piece where we actually embraced being

in the same space as the audience, in a massive tent, was *Say It Like You Mean It* in 2000. – The scenario was like the world had ended and we had to rebuild it together with the audience. We weren't elevated as performers. We were all in the same situation, which seemed radical and also scary, because we lost any separation. I remember a moment when us performers all met outside the tent while the audience was inside getting really involved, and we said: we could just leave. They could carry on without us. Since then, we work with two forms of interaction: either superimposing another reality or frame over a situation where we invite someone into, or really sharing a spacial situation where the audience is part of the picture – turning it into the „we“. It's an ongoing desire to expand the collective, thinking of a bigger „we“ sharing this time and space and making this relevant and alive.

What kind of encounters are you looking for in *Doppelgänger/Doppelganger*?

S.W. We're thinking very much about the individual – what it means to be an individual – and what happens when you multiply or filter it. The encounters muse around the idea of the individual versus the collective.

What were the inspirations at the start of *Doppelgänger/Doppelganger*?

B.S. For Gob Squad it's never just one thing as the initial source or reference – it's always a whole surrounding culture ...

S.W. Of course there was Naomi Klein's book *Doppelgänger*. It's an *Alice in Wonderland* journey into what she calls the mirror universe of diagonal politics, led by the fact that she keeps getting mixed up with Naomi Wolf. Both are critical theorists who unpack power structures – they resemble each other – but then they drift apart politically. And then of course there's the technological layer: we're all slowly creating a double of ourselves through devices, giving our texts, photographs, thoughts and feelings to the cloud. Now my Gob Squad account's AI offers to write emails for me in my own style. We're all in the process of having a digital double.

B.S. From Naomi Klein, what's very important for this piece is her quote: "No one makes themselves; we all make and unmake one another." It's the core of the idea – the doppelgänger is not just the other that you can point at. It's never just about them; it's always also about us. And that's what we try to engage the audience with: figuring out this shared responsibility for what's going on.

Your work has always been very open towards technology. With *Doppelgänger/Doppelganger* you hint at technology becoming quite spooky. How has your relationship to technology evolved?

S.W. You'd get seven different answers from each of us – we all have very different relations to technology. Some people are really drawn to it, some still prefer analogue notebooks. At the moment there's definitely a feeling that technology is taking over – it's assumed everyone has a mobile phone, and soon you won't be able to get on a flight without one. That's where it becomes questionable. But generally our approach is very domestic – it's things we think everyone can do. Very hands-on, very basic.

B.S. We have always worked with technology because it surrounds us – it's part of our material. The same things that enable connections make us very isolated and lonely. So it's a love-hate thing, and that often reflects in our pieces.

BIOGRAPHY

Gob Squad is a multinational collective of artists based in Berlin. Founded in Nottingham (England) by students from Nottingham Trent University and the Department of Applied Theatre Studies in Giessen, the collective has been working since 1994 at the intersection of theatre, art, media and everyday life.

In their search for beauty in the mundane, they stage their works not only in theatres and galleries but also in the heart of the urban environment – for example, in houses, shops, on underground tracks, in car parks, in hotels or right on the street. Gob Squad blur the boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary, deliberately setting everyday life and fantasy, banality and utopia, reality and entertainment on a collision course. Driven by a desire for collective experience and cultural participation, Gob Squad seek encounters with local guests, audience members and passers-by beyond the barriers of language, age, class and culture.

In 2009, Gob Squad were guests at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) with *Saving The World*.

Their productions have been staged on every continent in the world, except for Antarctica. They have been invited to the Berlin Theatertreffen on several occasions, most recently in 2020 with *Show Me A Good Time*. In 2020, they received the Friedrich Luft Prize and the Tabori Prize from Fonds Darstellende Künste. In 2024, they were awarded the Silver Lion at the Venice Theatre Biennale.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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