

# SISYPHOLIA

*A performance in urban space*

by Natacha Belova and Dorian Chavez



Diffusion file

Diffusion file - Sisypholia

## **Distribution et Mentions**

Staging **Natacha Belova and Dorian Chavez**

Interpretation **Dorian Chavez**

Outside view **Nicole Mossoux and Tita Iacobelli**

Ball design **Natacha Belova**

Making the ball **Nathalie Trouve, Atelier Théâtre de la Cité**

Production **Tchaika Company**

Co-production **International Biennale of Performing Arts Toulouse Occitanie, Théâtre de la Cité, Usine, Arto, Marionnettissimo, Théâtre National de Bruxelles, Namur Festival in May**

Collaboration **achACT – Consumer Worker Actions**

Creation on October 5, 2022 - Public space, as part of La Biennale – Festival International des Arts Vivants Toulouse Occitanie

Duration: 60 minutes

Audience: All audiences - Street performance in urban space

## PERFORMANCE

*Sisypholia* is a performance that takes place in urban consumer spaces, where it evokes a mythological figure in order to establish a poetic disruption at the heart of the commercial movement.

At the center of this installation is an imposing ball of clothing, measuring 2.20 meters in diameter, which wanders through a sales space or along a shopping axis. This mobile sculpture, both strange and fascinating, is loosely inspired by the myth of Sisyphus. Like the figure of the king condemned to eternally roll a rock up a mountain, the ball of clothes engages in an absurd and repetitive quest, which seems endless and meaningless. The environment in which it operates – a commercial frameworkroar, overflowing with commercial channels, often unsuitable for its size and movements – accentuates this impression of discrepancy, creating confusion among the spectators.

Through this performance, *Sisypholia* works to give rise to a series of paradoxes. By deliberately blurring the usual benchmarks, the work invites the public to reflect on the effects of overconsumption and the absurdity of certain human behaviors. The performance does not just disrupt public space; it also seeks to offer a new look at the relationship between the individual and the commercial world that surrounds them. By this staging, *Sisypholia* questions the idea of endless effort, of the illusory quest for “more” which characterizes our modern societies.

## GENESIS AND NOTE OF INTENT

The *Sisypholia* project was born during the 2022 Toulouse Biennale, when Natacha Belova, captivated by public spaces, responded to their call, with the desire to artistically develop this interest by exploring our daily consumer desires.

As a costume designer, the director had traveled extensively along the commercial axis of Rue Neuve, one of the most important shopping streets in Brussels, in search of clothes for her creations. This exhausting process took a unique turn when she was crossing this street when she received the Biennale proposal. It was then that Natacha Belova imagined this immense ball of clothing moving among passers-by, giving birth to the idea of creating this performance in public space.

To support her in this creative process, Natacha Belova teamed up with Dorian Chavez, dancer, poet, philosopher and performer. Much more than a simple performer, Dorian Chavez quickly became the co-author of the work, bringing a poetic dimension to the dance and choreography, while profoundly influencing the final reflection of the project, drawing on his philosophical and methodological research and his relationship to urban space and the public.

The shopping streets are always crowded with people, and passers-by pursue varied objectives, but all follow the same rhythm. Although we are perfectly aware of the futility of this consumer frenzy, we all, inevitably, end up becoming “the potential buyer” at some point. A desire that oscillates between pleasure and guilt. Who can really escape it?

A huge ball of clothes, pushed into a shopping street by an anonymous Sisyphus - free in its interpretation - disturbs understanding and creates a gap, a pause, a discontinuity in the daily flow of this crowd. The objective is not to fall into caricature but rather to create a chaotic and disproportionate object, an ironic creator of disorder, capable of extracting us from this compulsive rhythm which governs our society.

This Sisyphus pushes this giant ball until it falls back to the starting point. Aware of the absurdity of his gesture, he will tirelessly start the same task again, without hope of transcendence, but with implacable discipline and vitality. Like the ancient Sisyphus, he accepts this absurd reality with a form of happiness.



*“The gods had condemned Sisyphus to continually roll a rock to the top of a mountain from where the stone fell by its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no punishment more terrible than useless and hopeless work. At the end of this long effort measured by space without sky and time without depth, the goal is reached. Sisyphus then watches the stone slide down in a few moments towards this lower world from where it will have to be brought back up to the summits. He goes back down to the plain.”*

The Myth of Sisyphus, Albert Camus

## PERFORMANCE

During the performance, which takes place in the form of a stroll, three particular moments punctuate the journey.

The first comes in the middle of the journey, like an unexpected appearance, a sort of parenthesis. A dance where Sisyphus, shirtless, performs a series of gestures and movements for a few minutes, accompanied by *Mother was standing* of Pergolese.

In this dance, the gestures are inspired by the path of the crowd moving around him, a choreography forming in the incessant mobility of the world. And yet, around him, so-called models seem frozen, immobile, spectators of a scene that goes beyond them, contrasting sharply with this agitation. This inappropriate dance at the heart of such a movement reminds us of the rupture between the individual and the crowd, between the act of dancing and the imperative of everyday life. A dance out of its time, like a tear in reality, a moment of introspection in the apparent chaos.

But very quickly, this dance freezes, like lightning that goes out. Sisyphus, like an automaton, returns to his inevitable task. He resumes his role, constrained by the reality of his existence, an endless cycle of movements.

The second arrives at the end of the journey when the performer enters what we call the “alcove”, a space sheltered from outside eyes. There, Sisyphus, followed by the public, reveals himself. It is a vulnerable character that the spectators then discover. Emotionally charged by everything he experienced during the performance, the performer offers a glimpse of his experience, like a fragment of eternity revealed. But Sisyphus cannot stay out of the sight of the gods for long: he leaves, blends into the crowd and thus concludes the performance.

Finally, one of the key elements of *Sisypholia* is what we call the “flashmob”: a conscious and voluntary flattening of part of the crowd. We found that the visual effect of having someone “crushed” by the ball is very striking, while being perfectly harmless for the people who are in the trajectory. We So let's bring in a group of accomplice participants who voluntarily place themselves in the path of the ball to let themselves be crushed one after the other. The number of participants varies between 5 and 10, depending on the size of the street, and this scene requires prior rehearsal.

> Video made by Erik Damiano at the Biennale of Toulouse 2022 : <https://vimeo.com/782863029>

## AROUND PERFORMANCE

Besides the performance itself, the project *Sisypholia* develops around two important centers of action:

> **workshops** meeting with adolescents or young adults around the themes of the project;

> the **diffusion** on social networks of performances and workshop images.

The objectives of the project are multiple: on the one hand, it is to raise awareness among young people of the environmental and social issues linked to Fast Fashion, and on the other hand, to explore the act of performing in the urban space by highlighting absurd behaviors, between suitable and unsuitable ideas.

To achieve these objectives, **workshops** and meeting times are organized, mainly for young adults aged 14 to 18. These moments make them aware of the theme of performance while actively involving them. Several actions have already taken place, and the young people have been able to take part effectively in the performance: workshops, choreography or participation during the performance, speaking following it, so many ways imagined to fully engage them in the project.

The main objective of the workshops is to raise participants' awareness of the environmental and social issues of **Fast Fashion**, by highlighting the impacts of this industry on the planet and on working conditions. Through discussions and practical activities, young people learn to adopt more responsible consumption practices, such as recycling or buying second-hand.

Another essential axis is to develop a **critical thinking regarding contemporary myths** linked to fashion, particularly those which link appearance to social success. The workshops thus offer

reflection on the way in which clothing standards can be redefined according to more personal and ethical values.

Participants are also invited to **create** from used clothing, promoting personal and collective expression. This creative work not only allows you to develop practical skills, but also to question and reinvent social codes through fashion.

Finally, the project seeks to encourage **meetings between students from different backgrounds**, using work on clothing as a medium for exchange and collaboration. This helps create an inclusive environment, conducive to openness and mutual understanding.

*For more information on the workshops, we invite you to consult the Educational Performance Project.*



## HISTORICALLY

> January - February 2022: Ball research laboratory in Toulouse

> 5 > October 8, 2022: Premiere at the Biennale Internationale des Arts Vivants Toulouse Occitanie (France)

**Workshops with DNMADE costume designer students from the Lycée Gabriel Péri show in Toulouse**

> April 2023: National Theater Wallonia-Brussels (Belgium)

**Workshops in Brussels, carried out with 7 different schools, around the establishment of a small alternative clothing store co-constructed by 150 young people.**

> 16 > 17 May 2023 : Théâtre Pannon Castle Theatre, Veszprém (Hungary)

> 19 > 20 May 2023: Namur Festival in May (Belgium)

> February 23, 2024: Les Brigittines, Brussels (Belgium)

**Six workshops for Marolles students in preparation for the event at Brigittines**

> April 27, 2024: Ghent Fair Fashion Festival, Ghent (Belgium)

> May 9, 2024: Sortilèges Festival, Rue & Vous!, Ath (Belgium)

> September 4, 2024: Liège (Belgium) **as part of a day of reflection on “textile” production and consumption methods led by a group of Liège citizens**

> September 13, 2024: Brussels, in collaboration with ECLOSIO (Belgium) **as part of the “The future we want” event, a transnational caravan made up of 45 young Europeans who are crossing Europe with the idea of giving young people a place to defend a sustainable and viable social project for the coming years.**

> November 29, 2024: Louvain-la-Neuve in collaboration with Ach’ACT (Belgium) **as part of the day of action and awareness around “Black Friday non-merci” clothing**

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