



LE VIDE - ESSAI DE CIRQUE / THE VOID - CIRCUS ATTEMPT

Fragan Gehlker, Alexis Auffray, Maroussia Diaz Verbèke

CIRCUS



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L'ASSOCIATION DU VIDE
- May 2019 -

THE VOID - CIRCUS ATTEMPT

Fragan Gehlker, Alexis Auffray, Maroussia Diaz Verbèke

a show written by
Fragan Gehlker, acrobacy on rope
Alexis Auffray, musical creation and stage
management
and **Maroussia Diaz Verbèke**, dramaturgy

based on an original idea by **Fragan Gehlker**

light designs **Clément Bonnin**
costume design **Léa Gadbois-Lamer**
technical management **Adrien Maheux**
bureaology **Roselyne Burger & Anna Tauber**
communication **Nejma Soughayara**

thank you to Aourell Krausse, Bruno Dizien, Arpád
Schilling, Lawrence Williams, Jörn, Xavier, Dom,
Marco

tour management L'Association du Vide
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coproductions La Verrerie, Pôle National des Arts
du Cirque Languedoc-Roussillon, Alès ; Maison
des Arts du Clown et du Cirque, La Cascade, Pôle
National des Arts du Cirque, Bourg-Saint-Andéol ;
Le Cirque Jules Verne, Pôle National des Arts du
Cirque Picardie, Amiens ; Le Centre National des
Arts du Cirque (CNAC), Châlons-en-Champagne.
With the artistic support of the Jeune Théâtre
National

VIDEOS AND LINKS

teasers :

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1B5_LXR34Q

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJSH5tWzpVo>

website : www.levide.fr

Facebook page : @levidefragangehlkeralexisauffray

TOUR

AARAU, SWITZERLAND,
Cirqu'Aarau Festival
31 may - 9 june, 2019

PORTO, PORTUGAL, Teatro
Municipal, Campo Alegre
3 - 6 july, 2019

MADRID, SPAIN, Teatro Circo
Price
4 - 6 october, 2019

SAINT-DENIS, ILE-DE-FRANCE,
Académie Fratellini
10 - 15 november, 2019

time: variable, 60 to 90 minutes
all audiences



THERE WILL NOT REALLY BE ANY

word (the acrobat articulates badly),

orchestra (the musician is alone, and overwhelmed),

animal (they have been eaten),

costume (but no nudity either),

scenery (the theater is indeed naked, sorry).

There will not really be any text of presentation that promises you a «poetic, funny and deep» show.

Or «oneiric, shifted and moving». And even less «carried by grace» or «that stops time».

So many other texts promised you the same thing, how could you believe this one?

There is no false humility either: you must come.

True, there are only some ropes, two types and tape recorders but we think it's worth it.

THE SHOW (1)

AROUND AND WITH THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS BY ALBERT CAMUS

Isn't circus the kingdom of absurd ?
Isn't the place where one comes to see
a man take the liberty to accomplish
a gesture which is willingly absurd,
putting his whole life into it ?
He risks his life : for nothing, like one
takes the risk to live : for nothing.

The parallel with the myth of Sisyphus,
who, punished by the gods, is
condemned to climb a mountain carrying
a rock, which ceaselessly rolls down,
and Sisyphus condemned to start over
again, and this for eternity, seemed
evident. Here the mountain is pushed
to a limit, a pure vertical : a rope.
There's only one thing to do : climb up.
There's only one thing to do : climb down.
And maybe in the midst of it all,
ask ourselves why. And maybe
in the midst of it all, acknowledge
that we don't know why.

« À partir du moment où elle est
reconnue, l'absurdité est une passion, la
plus déchirante de toutes. Mais savoir si
l'on peut vivre avec ses passions, savoir
si l'on peut accepter leur loi profonde
qui est de brûler le cœur que dans le
même temps elles exaltent, voilà toute la
question. » *

It's a man who sees his life
as a transition, like an experience
where everything deserves to be tested.
Nothing can be gotten around.
Thus maybe nothing is important,
as beyond the temptation of death,
there's the desire to stay to see,
to see it all, to try it all.

« L'homme absurde ne peut que tout
épuiser et s'épuiser. L'absurde est sa
tension la plus extrême, celle qu'il
maintient constamment d'un effort
solitaire, car il sait que dans cette



THE SHOW (2)

conscience et dans cette révolte au jour le jour, il témoigne de sa seule vérité qui est le défi. » *

In our work, nothing is acted, all is lived. We could talk about a performance, as it is here not about theater or acting, and if it may still be about circus, it is in its barest simplicity. Explore the limits, understand them and push them back for simplicity, to refine, to understand.

*Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Albert Camus Editions Gallimard, 1942

THERE IS THE CIRCUS MAN

He's someone who keeps on climbing up and climbing down, he's someone who pushes to the end, to see, he's someone who doesn't have a clue, he's someone who holds onto what is going to fall, he's someone who crashes down, he's someone as usual, he's someone looking for vertigo, but vertigo backs away, he's someone whom vertigo escapes, he's someone who steps in the void, he's someone who notes the irony of circus and the irony, maybe stronger, of life.

THERE IS THE OTHER ONE

He instills life to the story, he catches up with the story, he explains that it's everyone's story, he walks with his two feet, and uses everyone's everyday objects: a switch, a knife, a tape recorder, and a violin.



THE SHOW (3)

AND THERE IS THE SPACE

The space is important. It is different every time. It is part of what is there to see, it is a sound box, with besides the ground, besides the stage, the vertical dimension, evolution in the volume.

Thus it is important that the space be present to the spectator. Present to his eyes, to his ears.

The stage will be bare.

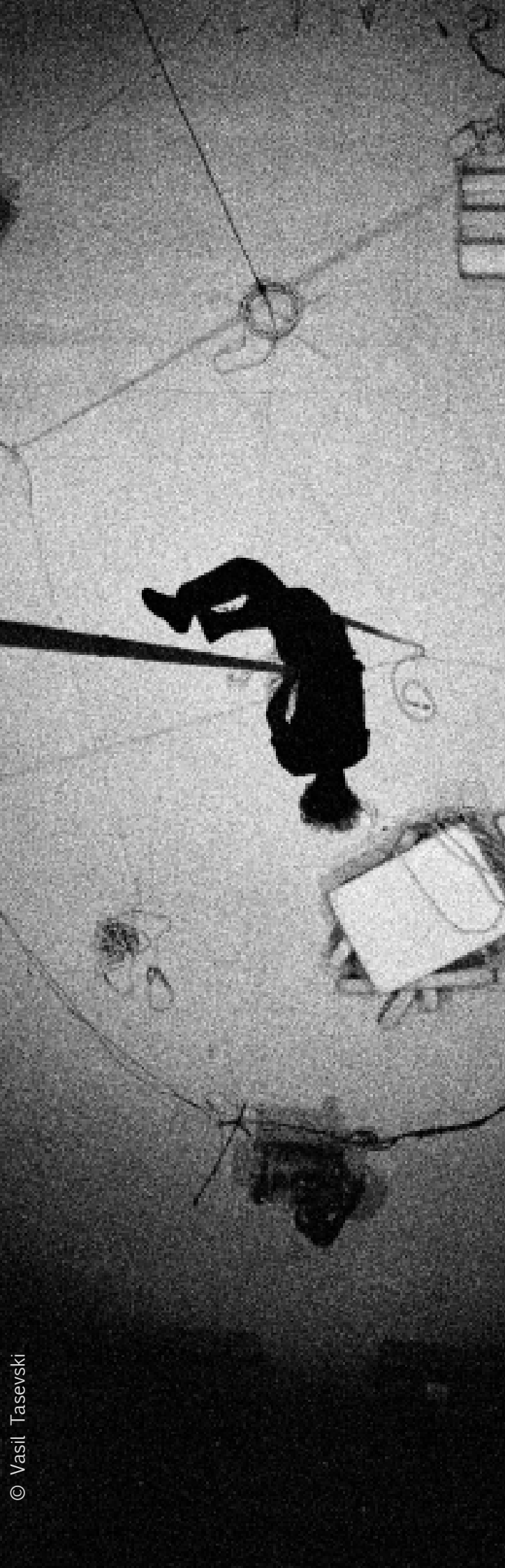
There will be no hidden space, no wings. There will be an entrance and an exit. It will be the same for everyone, the audience will come in by the service entrance. Besides, sometimes, we won't play in the theater. We will play on a seaport or a factory. From the start, there won't be an entrance «for the audience».

The spectator won't look in front of him, there will be no «front». There will be «around», «up», and «somewhere».

The project of *The Void* was at the beginning a form that could be transformed each time it changed places. Each show was called *The Void - Attempt # 1, 2, 3* etc.

Since the 2013-2014 season and the attempt # 6 presented at the Fratellini Academy, the project became *The Void - circus attempt*. We have indeed arrived at a form that reaches the limits of this possibility of permanent renewal, by its «on stage» writing.

The Void - circus attempt will keep a strong dimension of adaptation to the space, but tends towards a stabilization of the dramaturgical writing.



LE SPECTACLE (4)

From the beginning of *The Void*, we made sure that the venue is present in front of the spectator, to keep this link to the real. We do not want to play in a «non-place».

We play without curtain, naked, with a space illuminated in every corner, audience included. The architecture of a theater, a circus, or any other place, is often something fascinating, that the theater technique is used to mask to focus attention on the stage.

We decided to take the opposite direction, taking advantage also of the exploitation of the airspace so that the public can discover the whole space.



ARTISTARIUM

THE VOID - CIRCUS ATTEMPT

The Void was born in Chalons, in 2009, based on the daily life Fragan lives in the National Center of Circus Arts where he practices every day with a radically simple apparatus: a rope. The idea is to show the absurdity of labor and the way to free oneself from it, echoing Albert Camus' book *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In 2011, the project gets bigger, now including Alexis as stage technician, sound engineer and violin player. Together, Fragan and him perform *The Void* as a series of numbered «essais» (the french word, untranslatable, means both «attempt» and « essay »). In each venue, a new attempt. In 2012, after «Essai #4», Maroussia feels the call of *The Void* and helps with the writing of the show. At «Essai #6», the writing is done. *The Void* bought itself some rollerskates, got longer and its name is now *The Void - a circus «essai»*. Since, it sets into different venues, trying to use their specificities each time. Building and unbuilding the settings along the tour echoes the very message of the show itself.

FRAGAN GEHLKER - ROPE

At a very young age, Fragan participated in his parents' shows and he follows his father to work on the rope in the companies he works with: les Oiseaux Fous, Cirque Bidon, Cahin-Caha. Then, he makes it into the ENACR, in Rosny-sous-Bois, where he takes on sedentary life for the first time, then at the CNAC in Châlons-en-Champagne. He participated in the graduation show of the 21st class of CNAC, *Urban Rabbits* directed by Árpád Schilling. This was a very important encounter and they

worked again together on his French creation *Noéplanète*, created in Chaillot National Theater in 2012 and his Hungarian creation *The Party*, in 2014. He also worked on different projects by the Porte 27 collective and worked as an interpreter in *Augures* by Emmanuelle Huynh. In parallel he created *Le Vide (The Void)* (born in his every day life in the CNAC and developed after he graduated) which, in its actual form on tour, has been written with Alexis Auffray and Maroussia Diaz Verbèke.

ALEXIS AUFFRAY - VIOLIN, SOUND

He grew up with a violin in his hands. Playing this instrument immersed him durably in classical music, which left a mark in the rest of his musical activities. Today, before being a musician, he works with sound. Meaning, an instrument, which is made to produce music, also produces sound. *The Void* is the combination of both, classical music and sound, in the simplest way possible.

A little composition, a little borrowing, real attention to the music as being part of the story as a whole. And the absence of music, silence. He first came to study sound at BTS Audiovisuel des Arènes de Toulouse (technical formation), then at ENSATT to specialise in live arts. He discovered circus arts while working with Árpád Schilling on the graduation show of CNAC's 21st class, *Urban Rabbits*. He also works with theater and circus companies, Les Endimanchés/Alexis Forestier and Porte 27, collective which carries multiple projects. He also worked on Arpád Schilling's *Noéplanète* created in Chaillot National Theater in 2012.

MAROUSSIA DIAZ VERBÈKE - CIRCASSIAN, DRAMATIST

As a child, Maroussia makes her first show without realizing it in the smallest circus tent on earth. After a scientific school moment, she enters in the National Circus School of Rosny-Sous-Bois and then at the CNAC (French National Center of Circus Art) where she studies cloud swing and flexible wire (...). Almost out of school, she co-founds the Ivan Mosjoukine collective with who she creates with passion the show *De nos jours [Notes On The Circus]* in october 2011. From 2013 she works with Fragan Gehlker & Alexis Auffray on the writing of the show *Le Vide*. In parallel, she organises meetings-conferences around the dramaturgy of circus at the 104 (Paris) as part of the performances of *De nos jours [Notes On The Circus]*. In 2014, she begins different working times; each around a single form of circus, others around a collective project assisted by the new method of collective governance. In 2015, she co-founds with Anna Tauber *Le Troisième Cirque* and continues today her personal and collective

projects that seek how the circus can be a language in itself.

L'ASSOCIATION DU VIDE - PRODUCER OF THE VOID

The association saw the daylight in february 2015, as its mission to distribute the show *Le Vide – essai de cirque*.

Now the show forms a small society, with strong human relationships.

Together they question artistic visions, the way of working together and imagining the future, creating connections with a territory and with other people.

L'Association du Vide offers a place to think about all these questions and to try them out in real life situations. Gathered initially around Fragan Gehlker, the members who compose the group are from different horizons depending on the project, the moment and the desire. Even if the way of defining the group stays in movement, unstable and alive, we can still say that the core of this variable collective is the Circus !



PRESS CORNER

THE SHOW MUST... ANSWER

These questions come from an archive of 1963: the interview of young artists at Annie Fratellini circus school, opened little before. The reporter is interested in this unprecedented experience of a circus school where for the very first time children of circus families meet students from other horizons. In the show, we used some questions from this journalist by cutting the answers of the students interviewed. Here, Fragan answers.

HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU THINK YOU NEED ?

I dreamed, as often in the Circassian tradition, to play this act throughout my life as an artist, by modifying it according to my artistic desires and physical abilities. A recent conflict within our team has led us to decide to stop playing this show at the end of the year 2019.

THIS ACT OF ROPE, HOW MANY YEARS HAS IT BEEN THAT YOU PRESENT IT?

The form of *The Void* that is currently presented to the public was born in 2013. But the show was first created in 2011. There have been a lot of steps, that's why we speak of « attempts ». At the time, his name was *The Void - Attempt # 1*, then *The Void - Attempt # 2*, and so on. Whenever we worked in one place we numbered the test, we completely changed the writing and that until the attempt # 6.

IS IT READY NOW ?

Between 2011 and 2013, we did two tests per year and in October 2013, the attempt # 6 seemed to be the most finished. We could not change the writing of the show without having the feeling of 'losing' more than winning something; it was not the initial project but we liked this shape and we wanted to continue presenting it. We kept the notion of test in the title *The Void - circus attempt* because there is always a part of the writing that fits the place but there is a very stable writing base. The place is part of the show he's like a third character, and since he changes, he imposes adjustments every time.

YOU ARE FROM A CIRCUS FAMILY; IN SUM, YOU HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THERE?

Yes, kind of. I'm not at all from a «circus family» such as we can hear it traditionally. My mother was a dancer. My father was a dancer and then he went to the circus. It was also rope in companies of circus and I followed him on tour and started the rope myself very young. I hanged myself for the first time to a rope at the age of 6, but child, I practiced a little bit, just to « laugh », and from 13 years old I have clung to it and never stopped since.

My father is part of the first contemporary circus generation. I am part of the generation that no longer has to fight for the recognition of the circus as an art, the generation before did this job. I feel like I'm fighting today rather to return to a certain essentiality of the circus because these last 20-30 years the circus borrowed a lot from the theater and dance and got a little lost in its specificity.

BUT YOU WENT TO SCHOOL ANYWAY ?

Very little. As a child, I went to school « at home » or rather « in the truck ». I stopped everything when I was 14 years old to dedicate myself entirely to circus. Then, I entered at the Circus School of Rosny-sous-Bois when I was 17 and then at the CNAC (the french national circus arts center) in Châlons-en-Champagne.

BUT APPART FROM THAT WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

I almost never train on the rope, I climb, and practice others sports. I am also going to create a circus act (where we are 2 on rope), so I approach a little more of the essence of the circus.

YOU HAVE NEVER CONSIDERED DOING ANOTHER JOB INSTEAD OF CIRCUS?

Child, I wanted to be an acrobat on horseback, then work in the circus technical staff, set up big tops... Today, I start giving classes in circus schools. In short, I do not think I have already seriously considered to do another job instead of circus.

But when I think of the future, I tell myself that I would like to change it one day, to keep fresh my circus love and because it seems to me that a lot of things deserve to be done in life!

LE COIN PRESSE (SUITE)

**THIS JOB, ALL THE SAME, IS A DANGEROUS JOB?
WELL, YOU'D BE SHORTHAND TYPIST, IT WOULD NOT PRESENT
SO MUCH DANGER?**

The danger is real yes. Moreover, it is a show that deals with reality, for me the circus draws its strength from its relation to reality conveyed mainly by the reality of the vital risks that are taken. In *The Void*, the audience is in full view of everyone, it is lit with a full wash, so it experiences the show in a relation to reality which is rare. We wanted to bare, to talk about the truth of the circus.

AND BEFORE THIS ACT WHAT WERE YOU DOING ?

I have been a performer in other projects, in parallel of *The Void* writing: in the CNAC's 21st promotion show, *Urban Rabbits* by Árpád Schilling, in the French creation of Árpád Schilling *Noéplanète* presented at the Théâtre National de Chaillot in October 2012 and his Hungarian creation *The Party* in 2014. I also played in the show *Augures*, choreographed by Emmanuelle Huynh and I participated in various projects of Porte 27, a circus collective.

IS THIS THE FIRST ACT YOU WORK ON ?

Yes.

**IF I UNDERSTAND WELL: TO PREPARE AN ACT IT'S QUITE
LONG ?**

Yes, to create circus performances takes time, but they can live for a long time too. *The Void* will be on tour until 2019. It has a rare longevity. Today the world of art is subjected to a strong pressure of creation which one can deplore the effects. To have financial supports, there is an incitement to the creation and that brings very often to produce shows of lower quality for lack of time.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS KIND OF ACT ?

Because I think that an artist can only talk about what he knows and I do not know something better than the rope. Because by being forced to ask me questions about my relationship to the rope I needed to work on it to be able to answer it. There was also the notion of « emptiness (*vide in french*) » as an intuition of the only space where something can be created. How going through the « emptiness » one can do something, something extraordinary. There is the quest

for a sense of why should I keep doing rope. Make *The Void* to be able to decide to continue or not this practice.

WHY ? WHY ? WHY ? WHY ?

Because life is incomprehensible. Because the world is insane. Because circus is absurd, it hurts the body, it can kill, it does not make rich, it's often boring. Because I'm so happy to live all of this.

AND YOU ALEXIS, HOW OLD ARE YOU ?

Hmm, I will answer for him, he is 33.

HE HAS BEEN WORKING WITH YOU FOR A LONG TIME?

Alexis started working with me on this project from 2010, he is my first coworker.

**THIS ACT OF ROLLER-SKATES, YOU REPEAT IT FOR HOW LONG?
IT'S READY NOW?**

Alexis repeats very regularly «le roulage de patins» (*in french, roller-skates and french kiss have the same meanings*).

**HAVE YOU NEVER HAD A FEELING OF DISCOURAGEMENT,
WHAT DISCOURAGED YOU SOMETIMES?**

On the rope, we climb up, then we climb down to make figures. And once down, we go back up. It's a repetition. It is very painful and very lonely. In school, we practice our apparatus at least three hours per day.

And when in addition these actions are difficult, it necessarily questions the meaning because there is something deeply absurd in it. It is on this questioning that *The Void* has developed.

PRESS CORNER (AND THE END)

(OTHER) QUICK ANSWERS

These questions come from different journalists met during the travels of The Void. We have selected the most recurrent ones and among them, those whose answers complete the previous interview. Fragan also answers.

CAN YOU INTRODUCE YOURSELF?

YOUR NAME, YOUR AGE, YOUR JOB?

My name is Fragan Gehlker, I am 30, I am acrobat on rope.

WHEN WE COME TO SEE THE VOID WHAT DO WE SEE ON STAGE?

A circle in which I evolve with 9 ropes. Around this circle there is a second space around, a ring, in which Alexis evolves. Alexis is a technician and he plays his own role as a technician. It is him who changes the action, watched by the public, which is all around him as the last ring around the circle. Alexis has tables, machines, that allow him to act on the space where I am. He plays the violin, turns on the tape recorders and does a lot of other things. Depending on the space, we use a part of the normal seats that we complete on stage or we completely build kind of a circus stage.

IS IT CIRCUS OR THEATER? DOES IT TELL US A STORY ?

It's circus with a writing. I mean that the course of actions is very written, and we often want to call theater what is «written», which «tells us something». It does not tell a story as such but the story of this character anyway that is fluent enough to follow. It is circus according to me because we do not use the tools of the theater to tell this story (acting, direct speech, fiction, etc.), we use the tools of the circus (physical actions, reality of the actions, taking risks) to search for a writing, a dramaturgy.

IS THIS A SHOW FOR ALL? A CHILD CAN COME?

Yes it's a show for all. There are three poles, let's say: risk, fear on one hand, humor, laughter, on another hand, and finally reflection. What is interesting is that the children react differently, they laugh more in general facing the risky situations at stake; and actually they calm down the rest of the audience.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE SHOW TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO COME SEE IT?

If one of them comes to the theater box office with a tape recorder (which has a functional tape player) and want to give it to us, we reserve him an invitation for the representation of his choice!

YOU CAN DOWNLOAD THE PRESS REVIEW HERE (IT'S IN FRENCH):

[HTTPS://WWW.DROPBOX.COM/S/B95AH1S2U5IEZEZ/3-REVUE_DE_PRESSE_LE_VIDE.PDF?DL=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/B95AH1S2U5IEZEZ/3-REVUE_DE_PRESSE_LE_VIDE.PDF?DL=0)

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