



PROJECT PROPOSAL

**A performance about cohabitation of radical opposites.
A piece for a couple: Kristien de Proost and Josse de Pauw.**

Premiere: 17 May 2025 at Wiener Festwochen

Produced by: Studio Julian Hetzel in collaboration with Wiener Festwochen, Schauspiel Leipzig and De Balie Amsterdam as research partner.

I LOVE TO HATE YOU, I HATE TO LOVE YOU

Three Times Left is Right is a performance about the challenge of cohabitation between radical opposites under the same roof. A family portrait that explores the relationship between the populist right-wing and the liberal Left. A black box theatre performance for two actors and a large video split screen.

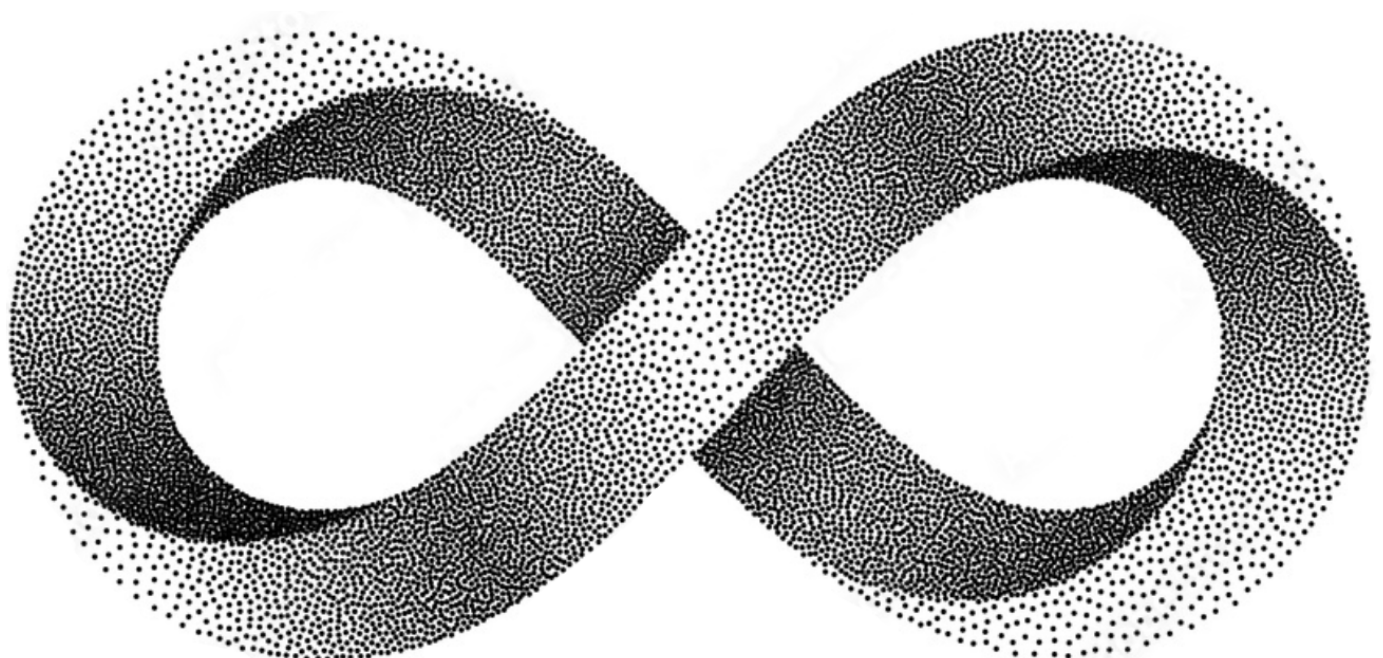
The performance is inspired by the Vienna-based household Sommerfeld & Lethen. Helmut Lethen is a German left-wing sociologist and theoretician currently working as an author and university professor. Caroline Sommerfeld (his former student) has become a leading intellectual of the new right movement as well as the identitarian movement in Austria and Germany. The couple has three children and negotiates seemingly incompatible positions at the kitchen table. Daily, they are having the conversation their country is not.

In a time of increasing polarisation and the rise of radically right-wing, nationalistic political movements, Studio Julian Hetzel asks what it means to truly live together while embracing radically conflicting ideologies. What can we learn from Sommerfeld & Lethen? Where does totalitarianism intersect with both left and right? How can we live together with people whose beliefs are diametrically opposed to our own?

Three Times Left is Right is a project about the proximity of hate and love. Actress Kristien de Proost and her real-life partner, the Flemish actor and author Josse de Pauw agreed to work on this project and to embody a couple that is inspired by Sommerfeld & Lethen. They have a similar age gap (and at least de Pauw shares a past as an active member of the extreme left movement in Belgium). They enter an artistic world that is loosely inspired by the one of Sommerfeld & Lethen.

A source of inspiration for the project are the writings of both Sommerfeld and Lethen, including the controversial book *Living with the Left* by Caroline Sommerfeld and her co-author Martin Lichtmesz (a journalist and activist of the New Right in Austria).

In times when populists like Georgia Meloni, Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen or Alice Weidel sit at the table of European governments, Studio Julian Hetzel decided to create a family portrait that functions as a magnifying glass for society. **Three Times Left is Right** scales this seemingly-impossible family construction up to a national, european and even global level.





HELMUT LETHEN AND CAROLINE SOMMERFELD. PHOTO: NEW YORK TIMES



KRISTIEN DE PROOST AND JOSSE DE PAUW

DIALOGUE AS A STRATEGY

For this project, Studio Julian Hetzel embarks on a delicate experiment by working with a text of extreme right wing authors. The controversial book *Living With The Left*, was announced as a compilation of “survival strategies in a polarised society” from the perspective of the Right; a manual to fend for themselves against the Left’s claim for moral authority.

What is striking in Sommerfeld and Lichtmesz’s book is the realisation that the political right has successfully managed to claim and appropriate the vocabulary and the revolutionary attitude of the Left; while the Left is experiencing an identity crisis. With this performance, Studio Julian Hetzel traces the ideological changes leading to the equation: three times left is right.

Julian Hetzel about his motivation and his research:

“I was interested to understand the conflict and the rupture in communication and the impossibility to bridge the gap. That was when I decided to stop reading texts by progressive authors about the Right and to start reading texts that are directly written by representatives of the Right to understand what is happening. It was a revelation to realise how much material from the Left is being appropriated. Yet, the extreme Right is not at all interested in a dialogue, but rather pushing to abort all communication in order to eventually change the system. This means that the “cordon sanitaire” is a counterproductive strategy that only benefits the ambition of the Right. This project is an attempt to break this divide and establish a dialogue by directly working with this text.”

CORDON SANITAIRE

In healthcare, a “cordon sanitaire” describes the restriction of movement of people during an epidemic to stop the spread of infectious diseases. The term is also used in political discourse to refer to attempts to prevent the spread of an ideology deemed unacceptable, extremist and even dangerous. In this case, a “cordon sanitaire” means the refusal of one political party to cooperate with another, opposed party. In the past years the “cordon sanitaire” was a strategy in political debate, by progressive parties to “keep out” right-wing populists with a nationalistic and racist agenda. Embraced from both sides, this “no collaboration, no dialogue” strategy has been the rule. However, it seems to have led only to more polarisation and to the further rise of far-right movements.

APPROPRIATION AND CANNIBALISM

Three Times Left is Right explores how the Right appropriates strategies and discourses from the Left, twisting them to fit their own agenda. For instance, consider how terms like “popular sovereignty” are used to justify xenophobic policies, distorting the original meaning of equality.

In this context, we explore cannibalism as a provocative metaphor for this process of assimilation and appropriation. Throughout history, there have been peoples or tribes that sometimes consume their enemies to acquire their strength and knowledge. Just as in the act of cannibalizing an opponent, political adversaries can also adopt and adapt their ideas and tactics for their own use. Feeding, digesting, and assimilating are crucial terms in this metabolic process.

To explore the imagery of cannibalism and appropriation, we aim to collaborate with silicone artist Carly Heathcote to create realistic limbs and body parts for *Three Times Left is Right*. We have previously worked with Heathcote for the mask in the production *SPAfrica*.

“Eating the things of the world, [...] or eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, all belong to one obvious and crucial mode of world-appropriation — [...] the most direct way of becoming one with the things of the world in their tangible presence.”

**— Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht,
Production of Presence (2003)**

SPLIT SCREEN: VIDEO

A crucial element on stage consists of large split-screen video. Hetzel will collaborate with Berlin based video artist Bahadır Hamdemir.

Bahadır Hamdemir, like Julian Hetzel, studied media design at the Bauhaus University Weimar and they know each other from their studies. Hamdemir is an internationally operating video artist with extensive experience in theatre and club culture.

Together, Hamdemir and Hetzel will create moving images in a split-screen installation based on the principle of juxtaposition. The video combines documentary footage, live, and pre-recorded images. In this way, the video concept explores the various perspectives that come together and coexist in *Three Times Left is Right*. By using different cameras on stage, the screens show two different perspectives on the same objects, making visible how the same reality can lead to two opposing worldviews.

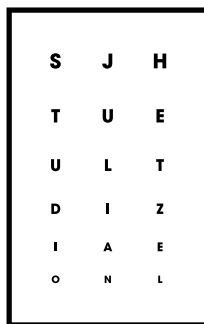
LIGHT

Bahadır Hamdemir is also known for his innovative use of laser light to define spaces. We are exploring how we can apply this concept in the scenography for *Three Times Left is Right*. By combining video and laser, one can create moving partitions of light. These light walls connect the content of the performance with the spatial design: an exploration of the concept of a “cordon sanitaire,” an attempt to visually separate ideologies.



DETAIL FROM: MICHAËL BORREMANS,
FIRE FROM THE SUN (2017)

CONTACT & INFO



Saskia Reynolds

Business manager

+31 6 41 39 41 55

saskia@julian-hetzel.com

Julian Hetzel

Artistic director

mail@julian-hetzel.com

www.julian-hetzel.com