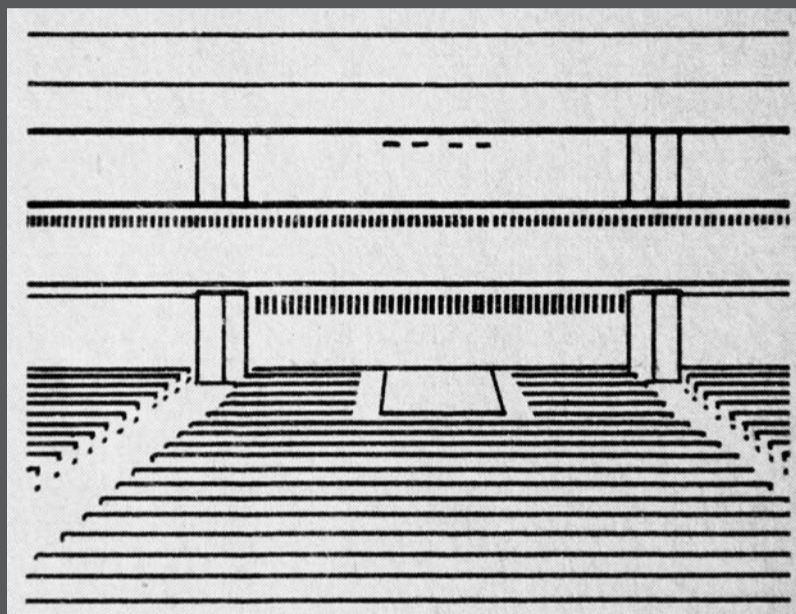


# THEATER OF ACCOMPLICES



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Contributors:

Luis Garcia

Mladen Dolar

Fernanda Carvajal

Keti Chukhrov

Katja Praznik

Ultra-red

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Any relationship between human beings can always be reduced to a simple opposition:

boss/employee  
friend/enemy  
teacher/pupil  
actor/spectator  
class/party  
enlightened/ignorant  
representative/people  
oppressor/oppressed  
man/woman  
rich/poor and so on.

At the same time, it is obvious that the dynamic of a relationship is not described by such static confrontations: any form of participation in relations of production, political and artistic processes or an educational setting involves the participants in complex interactions in which originally fixed roles change and unpredictable situations constantly arise; that is, everything is in a lively state of exchange and transformation. The search for a way of uniting and overcoming articulated oppositions is in fact the basis of political life, because (setting aside certain nuances) the redefinition of equality is always at stake in an analysis of these oppositions.

The difference in approaches to the sublation of contradictions hinges on a single essential detail: some people propose that we adopt an original equality as our premise, while others say that equality is what must be created in the process of overcoming oppositions. Here as well we see a confrontation between two approaches. Is a dialectical synthesis of these approaches possible?

This is the paramount question, and one's entire practice largely depends on how one answers it. The rejection of initial equality – a postulate that masks the material processes that constitute and reproduce inequality (all differences are insignificant in our equality before the "supreme" meaning) – always appears to be a cynical gesture. And all of us are under the moralistic pressure to recognize universal equality as the founding principle of civic life: all people are born equal and free, with the desire for happiness. This rhetorical foundation is undoubtedly one of the summits of humankind's political evolution. At the same time we see quite clearly that in reality this declaration conceals glaring inequality: the powerful, rich, and active always impose the rules of the game in their own favor, rules that enable them to achieve a dominant position amongst "equals." The basis of political struggle is always the revelation and critique of actual inequality, the exposure of the structure of power relations as relations of oppression, subjugation, and exclusion.

On the other hand, an insistence on the recognition of initial inequality with a view to its eventual overcoming deprives us right now of the chance to organize relationships of equals with other equals, which is the premise of any genuinely democratic form of communication. All the endeavors of human thought and creativity revolve around solving this paradoxical problem: how to establish equality in inequality. And this problem is immediately related to theater and art.

Like art in general, theater finds itself at the heart of this conflict of oppositions, and its formal development is largely defined by proposals for resolving this conflict. Beuys's famous assertion that "everyone is an artist" is a lovely slogan, but in reality we see that children's basic creative qualities for discovering and interpreting the world are nipped in the bud. It would be more honest to say that "every child is a creator" who finds herself in a world where the right to participate in cultural life is a privilege enjoyed by the few – that is, a function of inequality. All honest art strives to address society with the demand to restore this generic human capacity for creation and thought. This demand is essentially a political demand.

Many thinkers and practitioners of art (in this issue, we propose that our readers return to the analysis offered by Jacques Rancière in "The Emancipated Spectator") suggest that we should be guided by the principle that the division between actors and spectators is originally false: any spectator is a priori included in the process of co-creation thanks to her presence in the same space as the spectacle. This hypothesis might be workable, but only under certain conditions that must be created by authors coming from a position that establishes an "equality of intelligences." No one gathers together without a particular reason: there are always initiators who propose particular rules of the game that they address to a community of equals. But the community that emerges in this case is inevitably structured by these newly established rules (for example, in the later years of his life, Augusto Boal spent a great deal of time developing the "legislative theater," in which citizens participate in the drafting of new laws and budget allocations via the form of a theatrical play), and the way these rules resonate with the needs of communities largely depends on the precision and political sensitivity of the gesture made by the initiators/directors. In fact, the theater is always a model of a collective (with or without spectators) in search of a balance between improvisation (the spontaneous creativity of each participant based on his individual skills) and structure – an external element introduced into the proceedings (whether a scenario, elementary rules of the game or a focus on a single, concrete situation) that the participants have accepted as a necessary restriction on their practice (time is always the main constraint in theatrical action).

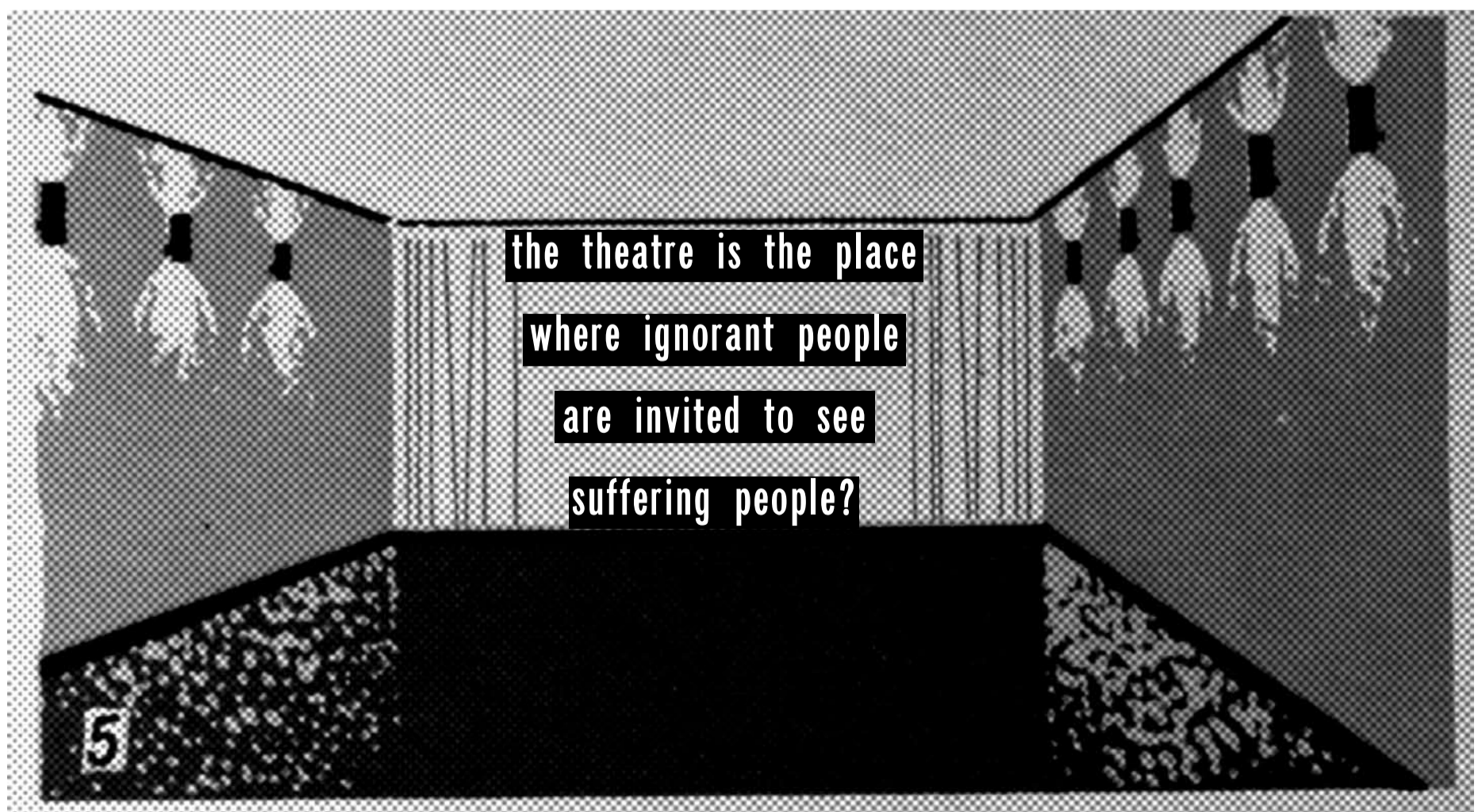
What comes of this is always a mystery: the most radical experiment with equality might prove to be a failure, producing new forms of subjugation, while the quiet recognition of the need for discipline and the delegation of various production functions can stimulate the formation of new, liberated forms of subjectivity. In my opinion, a generalized analysis of the structure of theater and art is incapable of providing us with overall conclusions. We first have to understand what form of presentation manifests initial equality in a concrete time and place, and how it attacks the structures of inequality that inevitably dominate outside this "chronotope" (to borrow Bakhtin's term for spatio-temporal matrices in literary narratives). What matters here is a concrete analysis of concrete theatrical practices – the method of learning plays that Brecht proposed; the development of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed; the empathetic practices of the documentary theater, based on the verbatim technique; political role-playing seminars; models of the invisible theater, the Freedom Theatre in Palestine etc. – that is, all those theatrical practices that do not posit an initial division between spectator and actor, practices in which everyone gathers together to discover themselves as a new collective body for a certain period of time.

In this edition of our newspaper, we offer our readers a number of texts that analyze these experiments and, we hope, will inspire the understanding that the theater is not the domain of professionals but is made by accomplices united by the acute need to decide something for themselves, to experience themselves anew and become others, and return to their previous conditions (outside the play) transformed by this new experience.

And then it is possible to imagine that at some point in history we all will be able to achieve that condition of community in which it will no longer be necessary to resort to theatrical play.

Dmitry Vilensky

translated by Thomas Campbell



# Jacques Ranciere

## The Emancipated Spectator

fragments of public talk at 5th International Summer Academy, Frankfurt, 20 August 2004

...The numerous debates and polemics that had called the theatre into question all along our history can be traced back to a very simple contradiction. Let us call it the paradox of the spectator, a paradox which may prove more crucial than the well-known paradox of the actor. This paradox can be summed up in very simple terms. There is no theatre without spectators... But spectatorship is a bad thing. Being a spectator means looking at a spectacle. And looking is a bad thing, for two reasons. Firstly looking is put as the opposite of knowing. It means being in front of an appearance without knowing the conditions of production of that appearance or the reality which is behind it. Secondly, looking is put as the opposite of acting. He or she who looks at the spectacle remains motionless on his or her seat, without any power of intervention. Being a spectator means being passive. The spectator is separated from the capacity of knowing in the same way as he is separated from the possibility of acting. From that diagnosis it is possible to draw two opposing conclusions. The first one is that theatre in general is a bad thing, that is the stage of illusion and passivity which has to be dismissed in favour of what it forbids: knowledge and action: the action of knowing and the action led by knowledge. This conclusion has been drawn long ago by Plato: the theatre is the place where ignorant people are invited to see suffering people. What takes place on the stage is a pathos, the manifestation of a disease, the disease of desire and pain, which is nothing but the self-division of the subject caused by the lack of knowledge. The "action" of theatre is nothing but the transmission of that disease through another disease, the disease of the empirical vision which looks at shadows. Theatre is the transmission of the ignorance which makes people ill through the medium of ignorance which is optical illusion. Therefore a good community is a community which does not allow the mediation of the theatre, a community whose collective virtues are directly incorporated in the living attitudes of his participants. This seems to be the more logical conclusion of the problem. We know

We acknowledge those two paradigmatic attitudes epitomized by Brecht's epic theatre and Artaud's theatre of cruelty. On the one hand, the spectator has to become more distant, on the other hand he has to lose any distance. On the one hand he has to change his look for a better look, on the other hand he has to leave the very position of the viewer. The project of reforming the theatre ceaselessly wavered between these two poles of distant inquiry and vital embodiment. This means that the presuppositions which underpin the search for a new theatre are the same which underpinned the dismissal of theatre. The reformers of the theatre in fact resumed the terms of Plato's polemics. They only rearranged them by borrowing from the platonician dispositif another idea of the theatre. Plato opposed to the poetic and democratic community of the theatre a "true" community: a choreographic community where nobody remains a motionless spectator, where everybody is moving according to the communitarian rhythm which is determined by the mathematical proportion. The reformers of the theatre restaged the platonic opposition between choreia and theatre as an opposition between the true living essence of the theatre and the simulacrum of the "spectacle". The theatre then became the place where passive spectatorship had to be turned into its contrary: the living body of a community enacting its own principle... It means that "theatre" remains the name for an idea of the community as a living body. It conveys an idea of the community as self-presence opposed to the distance of the representation.

Since German romanticism, the concept of theatre has been associated with that idea of the living community. Theatre appeared as a form of the aesthetic constitution – meaning the sensory constitution - of the community: the community as a way of occupying time and space, as a set of living gestures and attitudes which stands before any kind of political form and institution: community as a performing body instead of an apparatus of forms and rules. In that way theatre was associated with the romantic idea of the aesthetic revolution: the idea of a revolution which would not only change laws and institutions but transform the sensory forms of human experience. The reform of theatre thus meant the restoration of its authenticity as an assembly or a ceremony of the community.

Theatre is an assembly where the people become aware of their situation and discuss their own interests, Brecht will say after Piscator. Theatre is the ceremony where the community is given the possession of its own energies, Artaud will state. If theatre is put as an equivalent of the true community, the living body of the community opposed to the illusion of the mimesis, it comes as no surprise that the attempt at restoring Theatre in its true essence take place on the very background of the critique of the spectacle. What is the essence of the spectacle in Guy Debord's theory? It is externality. The spectacle is the reign of vision. Vision means externality. Now externality means the dispossession of one's own being. "The more man contemplates, the less he is", Debord says. This may sound anti-platonician. Obviously the main source for the critique of the spectacle is Feuerbach's

however that it is not the conclusion that was most often drawn. The most usual conclusion runs as follows: theatre involves spectatorship and spectatorship is a bad thing. Therefore we need a new theatre, a theatre without spectatorship. We need a theatre where the optical relation- implied in the word theatron - is subjected to another relation, implied in the word drama. Drama means action. The theatre is a place where an action is actually performed by living bodies in front of living bodies. The latter may have resigned their power. But this power is resumed in the performance of the former, in the intelligence that builds it, in the energy that it conveys. The true sense of the theatre must be predicated on that acting power. Theatre has to be brought back to its true essence which is the contrary of what is usually known as theatre. What has to be pursued is a theatre without spectators, a theatre where spectators will no longer be spectators, where they will learn things instead of being captured by images and become active participants in a collective performance instead of being passive viewers. This turn has been understood in two ways which are antagonistic in their principle though they have often been mixed in theatrical performance and in its legitimization. On the one hand, the spectator must be released from the passivity of the viewer, who is fascinated by the appearance standing in front of him, and identifies with the characters on the stage. He must be proposed the spectacle of something strange, unusual, which stands as an enigma and demands that he investigate the reason for that strangeness. He must be pressed to switch from the status of the passive viewer to the status of the scientist who observes phenomena and looks for their cause. On the other hand the spectator has to leave the status of a mere observer who remains still and untouched in front of a distant spectacle. He must be dragged away from his delusive mastery, drawn into the magic power of theatrical action where he will exchange the privilege of the rational viewer for the possession of its true vital energies.

critique of religion. It is what sustains that critique, namely the romantic idea of truth as unseparateness. But that idea itself still keeps in line with the platonician disparagement of the mimetic image. The contemplation that Debord denounces is the theatrical or mimetic contemplation, the contemplation of the suffering which is provoked by division. "Separation is the alpha and the omega of the theatre". What man contemplates in this scheme is the activity that has been stolen to him, it is his own essence, torn away from him, turned foreign to him, hostile to him, making for a collective world whose reality is nothing but man's own dispossession.

In such a way there is no contradiction between the search for a theatre achieving its own essence and the critique of the spectacle. The "good" theatre is posited as a theatre that uses its separate reality in order to suppress it, to turn the theatrical form into a form of life of the community. The paradox of the spectator is part of this intellectual dispositif which keeps in line, even in the name of the theatre, with the platonician dismissal of the theatre. This dispositif still sets to work some ground ideas which have to be brought back into question. More precisely what has to be questioned is the very footing on which those ideas are based. It is a whole set of relations, resting on some key equivalences and some key oppositions: equivalence of theatre and community, of seeing and passivity, of externality and separation, mediation and simulacrum; oppositions between collective and individual, image and living reality, activity and passivity, self-possession and alienation.

This set of equivalences and oppositions makes for a rather tricky dramaturgy of guilt and redemption. Theatre is charged with making spectators passive while its very essence is supposed to consist in the self-activity of the community. As a consequence it sets itself the task of reversing its effect and compensating for its own guilt by giving back to the spectators their self-consciousness or self-activity. The theatrical stage and the theatrical performance thus become the vanishing mediation between the evil of the spectacle and the virtue of the true theatre. They propose to the collective audience performances intended to teach the spectators how they can stop to be spectators and become performers of a collective activity. Either, according to the Brechtian paradigm, the theatrical mediation makes them aware of the social situation on which it rests itself and prompts them to act in consequence. Or, according to the Artaudian scheme it makes them leave the position of spectators: instead of being in front of a spectacle, they are surrounded by the performance, dragged into the circle of the action which gives them back their collective energy. In both cases the theatre is a self-suppressing mediation. This is the point where the descriptions and propositions of intellectual emancipation can get into the picture and help us reframe it.

Obviously this idea of a self-suppressing mediation is well-known to us. It is exactly the process which is supposed to take place in the pedagogical relation. In the pedagogical process the role of the schoolmaster is posited as the act of suppressing the distance between his

knowledge and the ignorance of the ignorant. His lessons and exercises are aimed at continuously reducing the gap between knowledge and ignorance. Unfortunately, in order to reduce the gap, he has to reinstate it ceaselessly. In order to replace ignorance by the adequate knowledge, he must always run one step ahead of the ignorant who loses his ignorance. The reason for this is simple: in the pedagogical scheme, the ignorant is not only the one who does not know what he does not know. He is the one who ignores that he does not know what he does not know and ignores how to know it. The master is not only he who exactly knows what remains unknown to the ignorant. He also knows how to make it knowable, at what time and what place, according to what protocol. On the one hand, pedagogy is set up as a process of objective transmission: one part of knowledge after another part: a word after another word, a rule or a theorem after another.

This part of knowledge is supposed to be exactly conveyed from the master's mind or the page of the book into the mind of the pupil. But this equal transmission is predicated on a relation of inequality. The master alone knows the right way, time and place for that "equal" transmission, because he knows something that the ignorant will never know, short of becoming a master himself, something which is more important than the knowledge conveyed. He knows the exact distance between ignorance and knowledge. That pedagogical distance between a determined ignorance and a determined knowledge is in fact a metaphor. It is the metaphor of a radical break between the way of the ignorant and the way of the master, the metaphor of a radical break between two intelligences.

The master cannot ignore that the so-called "ignorant" who is in front of him knows in fact a lot of things, that he has learnt on its own, by looking and listening around him, by figuring out the meaning of what he has seen and heard, repeating what he has heard and known by chance, comparing what he discovers with what he already knew and so on. He cannot ignore that the ignorant has made by this way the apprenticeship which is the condition of any other: the apprenticeship of his mother tongue. But for him this is only the knowledge of the ignorant: the knowledge of the little child who sees and hears at random, compares and guesses by chance and repeats by routine, without understanding the reason for the effects that he observes and reproduces. The role of the master is to break with that process of groping by hit-and-miss. It is to teach the pupil the knowledge of the knowledgeable, in its own way: the way of the progressive method which dismisses all groping and all chance, by explaining items in order, from the simplest to the most complex, according to what the pupil is able of understanding, with respect to its age or its social background and social destination.

The first knowledge that the master owns is the "knowledge of ignorance". It is the presupposition of a radical break between two forms of intelligence. This is also the first knowledge that he transmits to the student: the knowledge that he has to be explained to in order to understand, the knowledge that he cannot understand on his own. It is the knowledge of his incapacity. In that way, progressive instruction is the endless verification of its starting point: inequality. That endless verification of inequality is what Jacotot calls the process of stultification. The opposite of stultification is emancipation. Emancipation is the process of verification of the equality of intelligence. The equality of intelligence is not the equality of all manifestations of intelligence. It is the equality of intelligence in all its manifestations. It means that there is no gap between two forms of intelligence. The human animal learns everything as he has learnt his mother tongue, as he has learnt to venture through the forest of things and signs which surrounds him in order to take his place among his fellow humans: by observing, comparing one thing with another thing, one sign with one fact, one sign with another sign, and repeating the experiences he has first made by chance. If the "ignorant" who does not know how to read, knows only one thing by heart, be it a simple prayer, he can compare this knowledge with something that he still ignores: the words of the same prayer written on a paper. He can learn, sign after sign, the resemblance of what he ignores with what he knows. He can do it if, at each step, he observes what is in front of him, tells what he has seen and verifies what he has told. From this ignorant up to the scientist which builds hypotheses, it is always the same intelligence which is at work: an intelligence which makes figures and comparisons in order to communicate its intellectual adventures and to understand what another intelligence tries to communicate to it in turn. This poetic work of translation is the first condition of any apprenticeship. Intellectual emancipation, as Jacotot conceived of it, means the awareness and the enactment of that equal power of translation and counter-translation. Emancipation entails an idea of distance opposed to the stultifying one. Speaking animals are distant animals who try to communicate through the forest of signs. It is that other

sense of distance that the "ignorant master" – the master who ignores inequality – is teaching. Distance is not an evil that should be abolished. It is the normal condition of any communication. It is not a gap which calls for an expert in the art of suppressing it. The distance that the "ignorant" has to cover is not the gap between his ignorance and the knowledge of the master. It is the way between what he already knows and what he still does not know but can learn by the same process. To help him to cover it, the "ignorant master" needs not be ignorant. He only has to dissociate his knowledge from his mastery. He does not teach his knowledge to the students. He commands them to venture forth in the forest, to tell what they see, what they think of what they have seen, to check it and so on. What he ignores is the gap between two intelligences. It is the linkage between the knowledge of the knowledgeable and the ignorance of the ignorant. Any distance is a casual one. Each intellectual act weaves a casual thread between an ignorance and a knowledge. No kind of social hierarchy can be predicated on that sense of distance. What is the relevance of this story with respect to the question of the spectator? We are no more in the times when the dramaturges wanted to explain to their audience the truth about social relations and the good way to do away with domination. But it is not enough to lose his own illusions. On the contrary it often happens that the loss of their illusions lead the dramaturges or the performers to increase the pressure on the spectator: maybe he will know what has to be done, if the performance changes him, if it sets him apart from his passive attitude and makes him an active participant in the common world. This is the first point that the reformers of the theatre share with the stultifying pedagogues: the idea of the gap between two positions. Even when the dramaturge or the performer does not know what he wants the spectator to do, he knows at least that he has to do something: switching from passivity to activity.

But why not turn things around? Why not think, in this case too, that it is precisely the attempt at suppressing the distance which constitutes the distance itself? Why identify the fact of being seated motionless with inactivity, if not by the presupposition of a radical gap between activity and inactivity? Why identify "looking" with "passivity" if not by the presupposition that looking means looking at the image or the appearance, that it means being separated from the reality which always is behind the image? Why identify hearing with being passive, if not by the presupposition that acting is the opposite of speaking, etc., etc.? All those oppositions – looking/knowing, looking/acting, appearance/reality, activity/passivity are much more than logical oppositions. They are what I can call a partition of the sensible, a distribution of the places and of the capacities or the incapacities attached to those places. Put in other terms, they are allegories of inequality. This is why you can change the values given to each position without changing the meaning of the oppositions themselves. For instance, you can exchange the positions of the superior and the inferior. The spectator is usually disparaged because he does nothing, while the performers on the stage – or the workers outside – do something with their body. But it is easy to turn matters around by stating that they who act, they who work with their body are obviously inferior to those who are able to look: those who can contemplate ideas, foresee the future or take a global view of our world. The positions can be switched but the structure remains the same. What counts in fact is only the statement of the opposition between two categories: there is one population that cannot do what the other population does. There is capacity on one side and incapacity on the other.

Emancipation starts from the opposite principle, the principle of equality. It begins when we dismiss the opposition between looking and acting and understand that the distribution of the visible itself is part of the configuration of domination and subjection. It starts when we realize that looking also is an action which confirms or modifies that distribution, and that "interpreting the world" is already a means of transforming it, of reconfiguring it. The spectator is active, as the student or the scientist: he observes, he selects, compares, interprets. He ties up what he observes with many other things that he has observed on other stages, in other kind of spaces. He makes his poem with the poem that is performed in front of him. She participates in the performance if she is able to tell her own story about the story which is in front of her. This also means if she is able to undo the performance, for instance to deny the corporeal energy that it is supposed to convey here in the present and transform it into a mere image, if she can link it with something that she has read in a book or dreamt about a story, that she has lived or fancied. They are distant viewers and interpreters of what is performed in front of them. They pay attention to the performance to the extent that they are distant.

This is the second key point: the spectators see, feel and understand something to the extent that they make their poem as the poet has done, as the actors, dancers or performers have done. The dramaturge would like them to see this thing,

feel that feeling, understand this lesson of what they see, and get into that action in consequence of what they have seen, felt and understood. He sets in the same presupposition as the stultifying master: the presupposition of an equal, undistorted transmission. The master presupposes that what the student learns is the same thing as what he teaches to him. It is what is involved in the idea of transmission: there is something – a knowledge, a capacity, an energy – which is on one side, in one mind or one body – and that must be transferred onto the other side, into the other's mind or body. The presupposition is that the process of learning is not only the effect of its cause – teaching – but that it is the transmission of the cause: what the student learns is the knowledge of the master. That identity of the cause and the effect is the principle of stultification. On the contrary, the principle of emancipation is the dissociation of the cause and the effect. The paradox of the ignorant master lies there. The student of the ignorant master learns what his master does not know, since his master commands it to look for and to tell everything that he finds out on the way and verifies that he is actually looking for it. The student learns something as an effect of his master's mastery. But he does not learn his master's knowledge. The dramaturge or the performer does not want to "teach" something, indeed. There is some distrust today regarding the idea of using the stage as a way of teaching. They only want to bring about a form of awareness or a force of feeling or action. But they still make the supposition that what will be felt or understood will be what they have put in their own dramaturgy or performance. They presuppose the equality – meaning the homogeneity – of the cause and the effect. As we know, this equality rests on an inequality. It rests on the presupposition that there is a good knowledge and good practice of the "distance" and of the means of suppressing it. Now the distance takes on two forms. There is the distance between the performers and the spectators. But there is also the distance inherent in the performance itself, as it stands as a "spectacle" between the idea of the artist and the feeling and interpretation of the spectator. This spectacle is a third thing, to which both parts can refer but which prevents any kind of "equal" or "undistorted" transmission. It is a mediation between them. That mediation of a third term is crucial in the process of intellectual emancipation. To prevent stultification there must be something between the master and the student.

The same thing which links them must separate them. Jacotot posited the book as that in-between thing. The book is that material thing, foreign to both the master and the student, where they can verify what the student has seen, what he has told about it, what he thinks of what he has told. This means that the paradigm of intellectual emancipation is clearly opposed to another idea of emancipation on which the reform of theatre has often been predicated: the idea of emancipation as the re-appropriation of a self which had been lost in a process of separation. The debordian critique of the spectacle still rests on the feuerbachian thinking of representation as an alienation of the self: the human being puts its human essence out of him by framing a celestial world to which the real human world is submitted. In the same way the essence of human activity is distanced, alienated from men in the exteriority of the spectacle. The mediation of the "third term" thus appears as the instance of separation, dispossession and treachery. An idea of the theatre predicated on that idea of the spectacle conceives the externality of the stage as a kind of transitory state which has to be superseded. The suppression of that exteriority thus becomes the telos of the performance. That program demands that the spectators be on the stage and the performers in the auditorium. It demands that the very difference between the two spaces be abolished, that the performance take place anywhere else than in a theatre. For sure many improvements of the theatrical performance resulted from that breaking of the traditional distribution of the places. But the "redistribution" of the places is one thing, the demand that the theatre achieve, as its essence, the gathering of an unseparated community, is another thing. The first one means the invention of new forms of intellectual adventure, the second means a new form of platonic assignment of the bodies to their good place, their "communal" place.

This presupposition against mediation is connected with a third one: the presupposition that the essence of the theatre is the essence of the community. The spectator is supposed to be redeemed when he is no more an individual, when he is restored to the status of a member of a community, when he is carried in the flood of the collective energy or led to the position of the citizen who acts as a member of the collective. The less the dramaturge knows what the spectators must do as a collective, the more he knows that they must become a collective, turn their addition into the community that they virtually are. It is high time, I think, to bring back into question the idea of the theatre as a specifically communitarian place. It is supposed to be such a place because, on the stage, real living bodies give the performance for people who are physically present together in the same place. In that way it is supposed to provide some unique sense of community, radically different from the situation



of the individuals watching on the TV or the spectators of a movie who are in front of mere projected images. Strange as it may seem, the generalization of the use of the images and of all kinds of media in theatrical performances didn't change the presupposition. Images may take the place of living bodies. But, as long as the spectators are gathered here, the living and communitarian essence of the theatre appears to be saved so that it seems possible to escape the question: what does specifically happen between the spectators of a theatre which would not happen elsewhere? Is there something more interactive, more common to them than to the individuals who look at the same time the same show on their TV? own story and that the actor also is the spectator of the same kind of story. We have not to turn the ignorant into learned

persons, or, according to a mere scheme of overturn, make the student or the ignorant the master of his masters.

I think that this "something" is just the presupposition that the theatre is communitarian by itself. That presupposition of what "theatre" means always runs ahead of the performance and predates its actual effects. But in a theatre, or in front of a performance, just as in a museum, a school or a street, there are only individuals, weaving their own way in the forest of words, acts and things that stand in front of them or around them. The collective power which is common to the spectators is not the status of members of a collective body. Nor is it a peculiar kind of interactivity. It is the power of translating in their own way what they are looking at. It is

the power to connect it with the intellectual adventure which makes any of them similar to any other in so far as his or her way does not look like any other. The common power is the power of the equality of intelligence. This power binds individuals together to the very extent that it keeps them apart from each other, able to weave with the same power their own way. What has to be put to test by our performances – whether it be teaching or performing, speaking, writing, doing art, etc, is not the capacity of aggregation of a collective. It is the capacity of the anonyms, the capacity which makes anybody equal to everybody. This capacity works through unpredictable and irreducible distances. It works through an unpredictable and irreducible play of associations and dissociations.

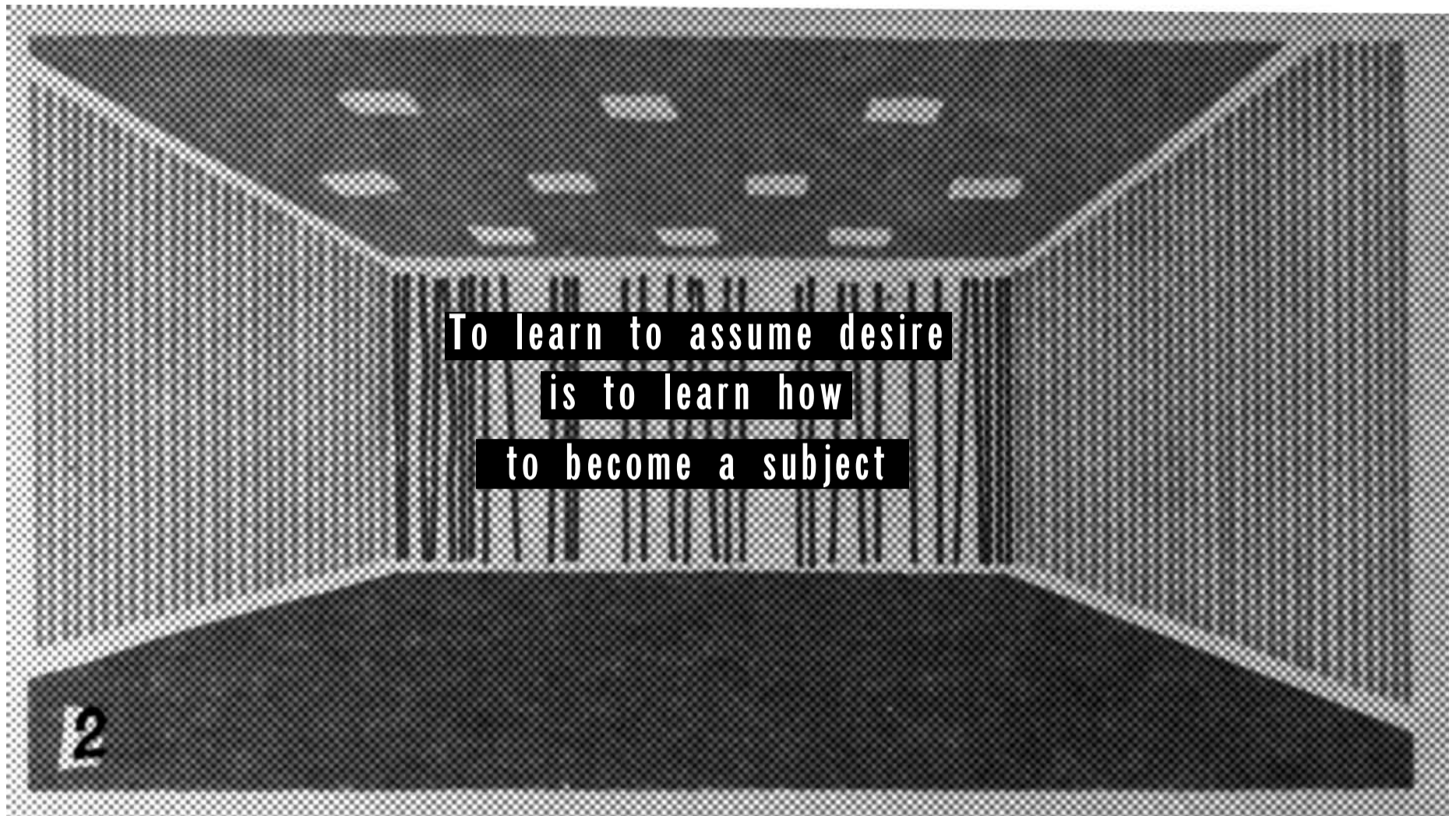
**Associating and dissociating instead of being the privileged medium which conveys the knowledge or the energy that makes people active: this could be the principle of an "emancipation of the spectator" which means the emancipation of any of us as a spectator. Spectatorship is not the passivity has to be turned into activity. It is our normal situation. We learn and teach, we act and know as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamt. There is no privileged medium as there is no privileged starting point. There are everywhere starting points and knot points from which we learn something new, if we dismiss firstly the presupposition of the distance, secondly the distribution of the roles, thirdly the borders between the territories. We have not to turn spectators into actors. We have to acknowledge that any spectator already is an actor of his.... Those issues of crossing the borders and blurring the distribution of the roles come up with the actuality of the theatre and the actuality of contemporary art, where all artistic competences step out of their own field and exchange their places and powers with all others. We have theatre plays without words and dance with words; installations and performances instead of "plastic" works; videoprojections turned into cycles of frescoes; photographs turned into living pictures or history paintings; sculpture which becomes hypermediatic show, etc., etc. Now there are three ways of understanding and practising that confusion of the genres. There is the revival of the Gesamtkunstwerk which is supposed to be the apotheosis of art as a form of life but actually proves to be the apotheosis of some strong artistic egos or the apotheosis of a kind of hyperactivist consumerism, if not both at the same time. There is the idea of a "hybridisation" of the means of art, which would fit in with a new age of mass individualism viewed of as an age of relentless exchange between roles and identities, between reality and virtuality, life and mechanical prostheses, etc. In my view, this second interpretation ultimately leads to the same as the first one. It leads to another kind of hyperactivist consumerism,**

**another kind of stultification, using the crossing of the borders or the confusion of the roles only as a means of increasing the power of the performance without questioning its grounds.**

**The third way – the good way in my view – does not aim for the amplification of the effect but for the transformation of the cause/effect scheme itself, the dismissal of the set of oppositions which grounds the process of stultification. It invalidates the opposition between activity and passivity as well as the scheme of "equal transmission" and the communitarian idea of the theatre that makes it in fact an allegory of inequality. The crossing of the borders and the confusion of the roles should not lead to some sort of "hypertheatre" turning spectatorship into activity by turning representation to presence. On the contrary, it should question the theatrical privilege of living presence and bring the stage back to a level of equality with the telling of a story or the writing and the reading of a book. It should be the institution of a new stage of equality, where the different kinds of performances would be translated into one another. In all those performances in fact, it is a matter of linking what one knows with what one does not know, of being at the same time performers who display their competences and visitors or spectators who are looking for what those competences may produce in a new context, among unknown people. Artists, just as researchers, build the stage where the manifestation and the effect of their competences become dubious as they frame the story of a new adventure in a new idiom. The effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated. It calls for spectators who are active as interpreters, who try to invent their own translation in order to appropriate the story for themselves and make their own story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators.**

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there is a full on-line youtube version of the talk published in 2007*

# Mladen Dolar / BRECHT'S GESTURE



The central theme of *Lehrstücke* is the question of sacrifice, consent and renunciation – precisely the slogans that seem to represent the quintessence of ideology and the very mechanisms of deception it involves. Those slogans function as the firm pillars of ethics and morality, the core of what the ruling ideology imposes as its agenda: sacrifice yourself, renounce, consent. This is what Mr. Keuner, in *Stories of Mr. Keuner*, refers to as the ideology of small fish in relation to sharks: the moral education of small fish consists of inculcating that the highest aim that the fish can achieve is to sacrifice themselves for the interests of the sharks. Religion is thus the conviction that the true life of a fish begins only in the stomach of a shark. [1]

The *Lehrstücke* take a dramatically different path in relation to this line. Their name – ‘the teaching pieces’ – invokes their pedagogical, instructive nature, but the point is not that the theatre should instruct the audience and preach, for ultimately only the participants, the actors, are the ones to be instructed. They should take turns at playing different parts, to assume all the attitudes, try all the angles and stage them. This is in the limit a theatre without an audience, restricted in its teaching aims, an elite theatre which instructs the instructed. But the instruction of participants should not be carried out in such a way that they would endeavour to play their roles in the most convincing manner (let alone, god forbid, to express themselves). Brecht's directions for staging suggest a firm discipline and deindividualization; instead of empathizing and identifying with the roles he recommends reciting, declamation, mechanical peroration as if without understanding, like saying the prayer. If ideology demands of individuals senseless repetition of ritualistic formulas, but in disguise, under the cover of ideas, then Brecht takes this as his own guideline, he stages it and surpasses it, without disguise. One has to take away the appearance of thought and stage the mechanical repetition, not only as the way to debunk ideological illusions and confront them with the ritual at their core, but to treat in the same way one's own ideas, through the mechanical staging rather than understanding. Here Brecht meets Althusser. If ideology in one form or another demands consent, agreement, sacrifice, renouncing the part of subjectivity which is at odds with the imposed reality; if the ideological bottom-line is ultimately ‘do not try to change the world, but transform yourself so as to comply with the given, yield and submit’, then Brecht doesn't oppose this guideline as the ideological maneuver *par excellence*, its flagrant deceit, but actually demands its radicalization: what is called for, as the antidote, is more renunciation. Agreement, *Einverständnis*, becomes the motto of the day:

*It is important above all to learn agreement.  
[Wichtig zu lernen vor allem ist Einverständnis]  
Many say yes, but there is no agreement in it.  
Many are not asked, and many  
Agree with the false. Therefore:  
It is important above all to learn agreement.*

These are the opening lines of *Der Jasager* and *Der Neinsager*. [2] If the paramount thing to learn from the *Lehrstücke* is the agreement, then this is ultimately the agreement with giving up oneself. The red thread which runs through all the ‘teaching pieces’ is Brecht's astounding fascination with the theme of sacrifice. The sublime moment they stage at their center is

precisely the moment of consent of the victim to being sacrificed, the lesson of self-sacrifice. This is the core around which at least four teaching pieces are constructed: two versions of *Der Jasager*, *Der Neinsager*, and the most notorious of them, *Die Massnahme*, *The Measure Taken* (itself extant in five different versions), which is the last transformation from the same nucleus. The nucleus stems from a Japanese ‘no’ play, *Taniko*, *The Valley-Hurling*. [3]

The story is very simple: a boy joins his teacher and others who embark on an expedition across the hills to a town, in the hope to obtain from the scholars there a medicine for his sick mother. On the way, in the midst of the hills, the boy falls ill himself and this is when they tell him that there exists a Great Custom according to which everyone who falls ill on the way has to be thrown into the valley. He is also told that the Custom prescribes that the sick person has to be asked whether they should return for his sake, and the person is supposed to reply according to the Custom that they shouldn't go back and that they should hurl him into the valley as the Custom prescribes. So this is the sublime moment of the victim's consent to his own sacrifice. Meanwhile the choir states clearly that whether he should agree or not they would throw him off anyway. The boy's consent has a purely formal status, that of freely submitting to his cruel fate; he has the formal freedom of saying yes, and so he does. So they hurl him off the cliff, lamenting the sad ways of the world, everybody being sincerely sorry.

The piece that Kurt Weill has set to music as a ‘school opera’, intended for school performances, produced scandal at its first production in a school in Neukölln in June 1930. The pupils who participated were revolted. The least one can say is that this is a very peculiar sort of Marxism and a rather astonishing understanding of the left-wing politics. The stumbling-block was what appeared to be the oriental mentality which Brecht was supposed to take over from the Japanese piece: a nonsensical custom, a senseless sacrifice, the erasure of the individual and his freedom, the demand for submission, an unconditional compliance, the prescribed consent. As one critic put it: “The agreement of the boy with his fate may be compelling within the framework of oriental culture, but we [the westerners] do not agree, we cannot agree.” (P. 110) So did Brecht rely too much on the Japanese original and let himself be seduced by the oriental ways? A brief comparison with the Japanese piece (in its original form) holds a big surprise: the supposedly oriental element are not there at all, they are all Brecht's own addition. First the senselessness of the Great Custom: in the Japanese piece the expedition is a pilgrimage inspired by religious motives. The sickness which ‘marks’ the boy on this journey is, according to the doctrine of reincarnation, a deserved consequence of a previous sinful life and therefore a mark of his impurity, endangering the religious enterprise. The Custom is not simply absurd but makes sense within certain religious beliefs. It may seem baffling to us “because the secularized revision has deprived it of its religious context, so that it sticks out as a mythical relict in the enlightened world of the piece.” (Szondi, p. 107) Second, the ritual consent of the victim was simply invented by Brecht, the boy is not asked anything in the Japanese play. And third, the sacrifice is not an irrational loss: the Japanese play doesn't end with the valley-hurling, but with the boy's resurrection. After the boy's death the teacher's pain is so great and his prayers so ardent that the deity takes pity, grants his wishes and restores the boy to life. The bottom-line of the play is thus that the human

*Mladen Dolar, born 1951, teaches at the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. He is the initiator and advising researcher on the project *After Hegel* at Jan van Eyck Academie.*

#### Footnotes:

1. B. Brecht *Gesammelte Werke*, 20 vols, (GW 12, p. 395), Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
2. I am referring to the excellent edition provided by Peter Szondi, *Der Jasager und Der Neinsager. Vorlagen, Fassungen und Materialien*, p. 19, 31, 41; Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp 1973.
3. Brecht only knew the very free English rendition (if it can be counted as one at all) by Arthur Waley, which was in turn translated into German by Elisabeth Hauptmann for his use. The accurate translation (provided by Johannes Sembriski) holds many surprises.

suffering and the devoted prayer can bend the divine will and attain mercy. So the result is this: if the Japanese play seems rather close to Christianity, then Brecht himself is our own Japanese. He invented the Orient himself. – One can find in the bibliography a Japanese translation of *Lehrstücke* in 1967. One may well wonder what the Japanese made of them – one can imagine that they took them as another proof of the weird western mentality, just as the Chinese would be no doubt astounded by Brecht's Chinese wisdom in Me-ti (written on the model of *I Jing*).

The three subsequent versions of this play represent a certain departure from the crude radicalism of the first one. In the second version of *The Yes-sayer* the sacrifice is made plausible and justified. The reason for the expedition over the hills is now the plague for which one should acquire a medicine from the doctors in town. Once the boy has fallen ill they cannot get him over a narrow passage, so they see themselves forced to abandon him. They ask him whether they should return, but he doesn't want them to and asks himself to be thrown into the valley so that he wouldn't wait for his death all alone. What is at stake now is to prevent the spread of the epidemic, so his sacrifice is for the common good.

The No-sayer repeats the situation from the first version, with the senselessness of the Great Custom, but now, when the boy is asked to consent according to the Custom he doesn't give his agreement. The victim says no, he opposes the Great Custom: "The answer I gave was wrong, but your question was more wrong. Who said 'a' doesn't need to say 'b'. He can realize that 'a' was wrong. ... As to the Great Custom, I can see no reason in it. I need a new Great Custom that we must immediately introduce, namely the Custom to deliberate anew in each new situation." (P. 49)

With a single stroke we are transposed from the supposed oriental landscape into the context of Enlightenment. The no-sayer is the autonomous subject who can change the Great Custom whenever necessary, he is placed above it and can question its reasons, he can lay down laws and shape his own fate. He can take the formal freedom as a real freedom, he can transform the forced choice into a real choice, or so it seems. Is this sufficient? Is 'no' the answer? The answer of the subject? The kernel of subjectivity shaping the world, refusing to be constrained? What about the agreement, *das Einverständnis*, the most important lesson to be learned from *Lehrstücke*, the lesson announced in the first line?

The Measure Taken, Die Massnahme, is the last, the best known and the most complex version of this scenario (its five versions testify to Brecht's persistent obsession). [4] It may be seen in a way as an impossible synthesis of the two, the Enlightenment discourse brought to its revolutionary pinnacle, and subscribing to the radical sacrifice. The expedition over the hills has now turned into a mission of four agitators sent by Moscow to promote the cause of revolution in China (the play thus returns in a curious way back to the supposed Orient). The boy is now a young comrade who joins the mission, full of idealism and love for humanity. The agitators wear masks so as not to be tracked down as foreign spies, but at a certain point the young comrade is so overwhelmed by compassion and humanism that he tears off his mask, reveals his face and true identity, crying out:

*"I believe in humanity! I am for freedom! ...  
Now, now, now I tread before them  
As the one who I am and tell them the truth ...  
[He takes off his mask.]  
We have come to help you  
We come from Moscow. (P. 28-9)*

By this gesture everything was put into jeopardy, the mission was endangered, the army was after them and the young comrade, whose identity was disclosed, had to be sacrificed. Again, in the sublime moment, he realized his error, he demanded himself to be erased, and they threw him into quicklime. His attempt to speak as a man, sincerely from heart to heart, threatened the whole revolutionary enterprise. The revolutionary needs to be a man without a face, but the young comrade couldn't renounce his individuality, his sentiments, he couldn't turn into a faceless subject, so he had to be erased, fully, without traces. And he learned, on the verge of death, the lesson of consent and sacrifice.

The bulk of Brecht's Lehrstücke was written in 1929-32, that is, precisely during the time of the ascent of fascism. One has to read them against the backdrop of the massive fact that sacrifice was one of the great slogans of the day, one of the central topics of fascist ideology. Obsession with sacrifice (for the fatherland, for the leader, out of duty, out of honour, ultimately sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice as the attitude of valor) was one of the red threads of all fascist discourse (and indeed one of the pillars of the right wing discourse in general). At the same time there was the enormous ascent of promoting the rationalized version of sacrifice demanded by Stalinism: in the name of the future generations, in the name of progress, of the future which is relegated to more remote future, therefore demanding even more sacrifice. The spectral future justified present need for constant sacrifice into infinity. So with the fascination with the sacrifice and renunciation massively in the air, Brecht focused on something which was greatly and dramatically put into focus by those turbulent times, he took up the general slogan and pushed it to the extreme. Brecht's gesture, in face of the topos of sacrifice, was not that this was merely a deceitful maneuver, a fateful ideological ruse, a ploy of the ruling classes that one would have to expose, not let oneself be duped into believing that sacrifice is a value (thus falling into the trap of the little fish-believers). [5] Brecht's way to oppose this is to espouse sacrifice, renunciation and consent in a form far more radical than any ideology would adopt. If on the one hand he proposed to endorse interest and desire against any sacrifice, then on the other hand his proposal is to search for a lever of desire in sacrifice itself, to see renunciation as a construction of a desire, if only pushed far enough.

There is a radical question implied in this: is there a left discourse on sacrifice? Are not all the slogans of 'teaching pieces' – sacrifice, consent, renunciation – the paramount ideological mechanisms? Wouldn't one have to oppose them in the name of autonomy, integrity, the critique of ideology? Is Brecht's demand for sacrifice in contradiction with debunking all renunciation as ideological? This is where Brecht's gesture appears at the clearest: at the time of the fateful rise of the ideology of sacrifice, with its fatal fascination, the rise that the left was unable to confront and prevent, he didn't fight the central slogans of that ideology, but espoused them as his own. He doesn't take the line of a critical distance or of rational argument against it, but proceeds so to speak in a way more ideological than the ideology. The bottom-line is rather: ideology demands too little sacrifice, it doesn't impose enough renunciation. It demands to give up the part which is at odds with the existing order, in order to keep it going, but one should push this further by the demand to give up also the part which supports it and is in congruence with it, in order to dismantle it and transform it.

*"Consent that everything changes  
The world and the humanity  
... By transforming the world transform yourself!  
Give yourself up!"*

These are the end lines of the choir in *The Baden teaching piece on consent* [6] Only by going far enough in consent can there be transformation. The extreme consent is the dissent, and one can only achieve this by learning to consent to giving oneself up. Consent demands extreme activity, not adapting to the ways of the world. 'Give up more!' is Brecht's slogan in face of the demand for sacrifice: give up individuality, the concerns of the ego, all the imaginary underpinnings of the existing world – in order to become a subject? The product of sacrifice and consent is a subject without a support, an 'empty subject', a subject dispossessed of his ego, and only such a subject can bring about the transformation. By renouncing himself he takes away the imaginary support of reality that he himself has been providing and thus dismantles its illusive consistency.

To learn consent and sacrifice is to learn how to give up one's own face. The young comrade endangered the Cause by taking off the mask in the name of the real face, his true individuality, and the moment is emblematic for Brecht's anti-humanism: the truth is not in the real face, but in being able to erase it. Thus he gave advice to Carola Neher on how to wash: "She has not only learned how to act, but, for example, she learned how to wash herself. Up to then, she had washed so as not to be dirty. That was completely beside the point. I taught her how to wash her face." [7] One has to learn how to wash off one's face, this is the point of washing: not to be rid of dirt, but to become faceless.

There are two strategies in Brecht, two red threads, which seem irreconcilable. On the one hand there is the guideline to disrupt appearance, the masquerade, the subterfuge, the deceit in order to bring to light the true interest which lies behind and masks itself. "Not to appear what one is causes unhappiness for oneself. Appearing what one is not causes unhappiness for others," says Me-ti [8] So the advice seems to be: be what you are, without pretense – but what are you? "Is it right that one is concerned with oneself?" [Keuner:] "He who is concerned with himself is concerned with nothing. He is the servant of nothing and the master over nothing." [9] There is a double movement: on the one hand to bring forth the interest and the desire which reside behind thought and action – so be what you are; on the other hand, to learn to be what one is is to learn to be nothing, to give up any interest in oneself. On the one hand, to push the interest to the point of sheer egoism which precisely through its unadulterated form works toward reversal, toward the point where, through a kind of Hegelian 'cunning of reason', it becomes the lever of change. On the other hand, to come to the point of giving up precisely on that hard kernel which was unearthed underneath the ideological operation, to erase all interest, the ego, the self, to renounce, to consent – consent must be pushed far enough to produce the moment of reversal. There are two steps in counterpoint to each other, elucidated by each other, but which form a sort of (again Hegelian) negation of negation: first, to assume one's own interest, give up on all moral illusions and evasions, on embellishment and rhetorical prevarications, any diverting maneuvers and masks, for there is more to be gained from assuming the selfish interest than from preaching any love for humanity. Second, to give up the selfish interest as the ultimate and the most inveterate illusion and prevarication, the illusive anchorage of all other delusions; to realize that the biggest illusion of all is that one is supposedly free of illusion behind the mask. The selfish interest itself needs delusions, not only to deceive the others, but through deceiving the others it deceives itself. Brecht's negation of negation: the negation of morals and ideology in the name of interest, then the negation of interest itself, its annihilation as the way of transformation and *Bildung*/asceticism – only this double twist can produce change. First the salutary cynicism, then debunking the illusory nature of cynicism itself. Morals deceive by being the mask of interest, but the crude interest itself is based on a deception of oneself and others. – Brecht used the term desire, *der Wunsch*, as the clue to what breeds thought, the hidden spring which propels it, and perhaps desire may be seen as the link between the two. One hang of desire, in its usual acceptance, points to self-interest as its dirty secret which has to be spelled out, while its other hang points to negativity, which, when pushed to the extreme in its logic, is brought to the point of turning against the very self as its anchorage – its spring is not a self but a subject. It is the pivotal point between espousing the self without delusion, and negating and transforming the self itself. To learn to assume desire is to learn how to become a subject.

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#### Footnotes:

4. I refer to the meticulous and rather over-blown edition provided by Reiner Steinweg (*Die Massnahme*, Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp 1972).
5. It would be misguided to see *Die Massnahme* as Brecht's way of adopting the Stalinist version of sacrifice, a criticism which has haunted this piece throughout its history and because of which Brecht actually had to defend himself in front of the Committee for Anti-American Activities. The piece produced a lot of malaise particularly in socialist countries, it carries its logic too far and its anti-humanist assumptions are incompatible with Stalinism.
6. I quote from *Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis ...*, p. 31-2, Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp 1977.
7. Quoted from Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 4 vols, Cambridge (Mass.) & London: Harvard UP, 1998-2005, vol. 2/2, p. 783.
8. B. Brecht *Gesammelte Werke*, 20 vols, GW 12, p. 474, Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp
9. *Ibid.*, p. 413

# Luis Ignacio García

## Bertolt Brecht, ignorant master

*Me-ti said: "Every teacher should learn to stop teaching when the time is due."*

B. Brecht

Right from the outset, discussions around Bertolt Brecht's "learning plays" (*Lehrstücke*) were shot through with a series of mix-ups and misunderstandings that largely determined their reception and subsequent fortune. As Brecht himself pointed out, even their name was unfortunate. In fact, by joining the doctrinaire overtones of the German word "*Lehre*" to the idea of a closed or finished piece that is implicit in "*Stück*", the name "*Lehrstücke*" suggested that the pieces were intended to indoctrinate the public by means of the more or less direct transmission of a moral or political lesson, of content (Marxist theory) that had been defined in advance of the theatrical act. Brecht himself coined the English translation of "Lehrstück" as "learning-plays," a term that puts the emphasis on the *act* of learning rather than on what is learned, and on the process of representation rather than the text or finished work. Although the overtones of the English translation were a more accurate description of what took place in these theatrical practices, the stamp of the German expression *Lehrstücke* was to have a greater influence in their reception. The learning-plays were seen in terms of indoctrinating pedagogy, rather than *learning practices*.

Aside from this original stamp, the learning-plays proved highly controversial because of the austerity of their form and the disconcerting nature of their content. Conceived as a means for collective experimentation, the learning plays set up a laboratory-type situation based on a radical reduction of stage and theatrical resources. Brecht, an admirer of Japanese *no* theater, developed a radical economy of resources that was not primarily intended to express desolation, meaningless or the dehumanization of man (as in Beckett), but rather to set up the conditions that would allow more malleable manipulation of the stage situation. Like scientists engaged in the experimental formulation of a scientific law, the idea is to get rid of incidental details and set up an abstract situation that brings out the elements in their pure forms. This economy of elements seeks to reduce the *exhibition value* and emphasize the *use value* of the piece, to offer up the work as a device that can be manipulated. Brecht said: "The form of the learning-play is stringent, however only so that individual inventions and innovations can be easily adapted into the play." It should be noted that austerity was a way of attacking the "fourth wall," not to *épater le bourgeois*, but to clear the way for a dynamic based on *participatory action*. Nevertheless, the austere style of the learning plays was seen as an extension of the avant-garde principle of alienation, an appendix to the *Verfremdung-effekt* (*estrangement*) of epic theater, rather than as a didactic commitment to opening up to the active collaboration of participants. Brecht's reception saw the avant-garde rather than the revolutionary pedagogy; it saw the formal experimentalism rather than the *research laboratory*.

In any case, the confusion was mostly due to the "content" of the pieces. On one hand, all of the learning-plays grappled with the theme of authority, power and violence, and they did so in an extreme and hyperbolic way: the works have a cruel, even sadistic element that attacks the "values" of the right and also the "political correctness" of the left. They grapple with the problem of human relationships in extreme situations, in such a harsh, radical manner that the *barbaric element* prevails over the enlightenment (liberal or socialist) promise of rational conflict resolution. This "anti-humanism" on its own would have earned him the contempt of the whole political spectrum, but Brecht went further. Some of his learning-plays – the paradigmatic example would be the controversial *Die Massnahme* (*The Measures Taken*) – deal with the issue of sacrifice and self-sacrifice as part of the process of political subjectivation. A self-sacrifice that entails a brutal "deletion" of the individual countenance in line with a collective cause. And to top it off, the cause in *Die Massnahme* is represented by the party. Although Brecht formulated this approach several years before the Soviet purges, it was seen as a kind of advance apologia for Stalin's infamous trials. Nevertheless, this overlooks the fact that Brecht actually sought to represent society and humans as "transformable"; it ignores the fact that what Brecht was interested in was allowing participants to take on the different roles in the play. Referring to *Die Massnahme*, Brecht said: "Each of them [the actors – L.I.G.] must change from one role to the next and take over the figure of for instance the accused, the prosecutor, the witnesses, the judge, in quick succession. Under this condition, each of them will be able to subject themselves to the exercises of discussion and of course gain the knowledge – the practical knowledge of what dialectics actually is." It seems clear that this dynamic that puts the accused in the place of the judge and the pursuer in the place of the pursued, in a carnival of de-hierarchization of roles, is an attack against party logic of any kind. As the core of the Brechtian concept of political subjectivation, sacrifice or self-sacrifice does not have the trivial meaning of the negation of the individual in the interests of the collective. Rather, it recognizes that it is necessary to dismantle an existing conception of the human before a new one can be assembled. Through sacrifice, Brecht inscribes the instance of *desubjectivation* as part of the subjective constitution, as a prerequisite for the constitution of a new conception of the human in which the *anonymous* – baseline of subjectivation – can speak. And in theater practice, this takes the form of the role-swapping exercise: it is not about negating the individual, but about *negating a single fixed role for each individual*, a rejection of a fixed distribution of capacities. In other words, the dissolving of the individual as a static relation between a subjective position and a capacity for action. As such,

free of any obsequiousness to party leaderships, the learning-plays break away from the idea of a pre-constituted political subject: they testify to a conception of the "political subject" as a *collective process of political subjectivation*. Nevertheless, songs like "Praise of the USSR" and "Praise of the Party" proved more powerful. The reception of the learning-plays repudiated the sacrifice of the individual and obsequiousness towards the USSR. The public saw the dissolving of the individual into the party, and overlooked the *active production of the anonymous*.

This series of misunderstandings meant that the "learning-plays" were seen as mere works of political agitation, theoretical works that sought to activate the public by means of transmitting a revolutionary doctrine. The crucial re-reading that Reiner Steinweg started formulation in the seventies [1] made it possible to begin questioning this way of thinking about the learning plays. At the core of Steinweg's interpretation lies a conviction that "the learning-play does *not contain any instruction*, it does not teach 'Marxism' or another philosophy or social theory." [2] So what are these learning-plays that do not teach anything? What do they teach, and how, if they do not transmit any social theory? "The learning-play instructs by being acted, not by being witnessed", Brecht explained. This did not just entail a complete shake-up of the system of actor-spectator oppositions, but also undermined the very status of an "artwork": as Walter Benjamin saw, we should not talk about "artworks" but about apparatus, instruments, or better still, *laboratories*. The learning-plays do not teach anything because they are not didactic works, they are artifacts for self-learning, *experimental devices for collective learning and research*.

Jacques Rancière is the theorist who has most consistently probed the connections between art and politics in recent years by questioning the meaning of the pedagogical relationship. It thus seems odd that the learning-plays do not play a prominent role in his reflections, and odder still that Brecht's production ends up in a rather uncomfortable position in Rancière's system of references. In the last few years, Rancière has focused on developing a leftist critique of the cultural policies of the left. In his recent book *The Emancipated Spectator*, [3] he sets out to explore this problem through the paradigmatic case of theater, and it is here that his critique of "critical art" becomes most radical and provocative. The core of his critique throws doubt on what many consider to be at the heart of all critical art: *the activation of the receiver*. Or, in the case of theater, the conviction that *political theater means theater that transforms spectators into actors*. Although he does not lose his belief in critical art, Rancière nevertheless suspends this belief that has traditionally legitimated critical art. This being so, it is understandable that Brecht should appear in this book as a paradigmatic example of the conception of critical art that Rancière wants to move away from.

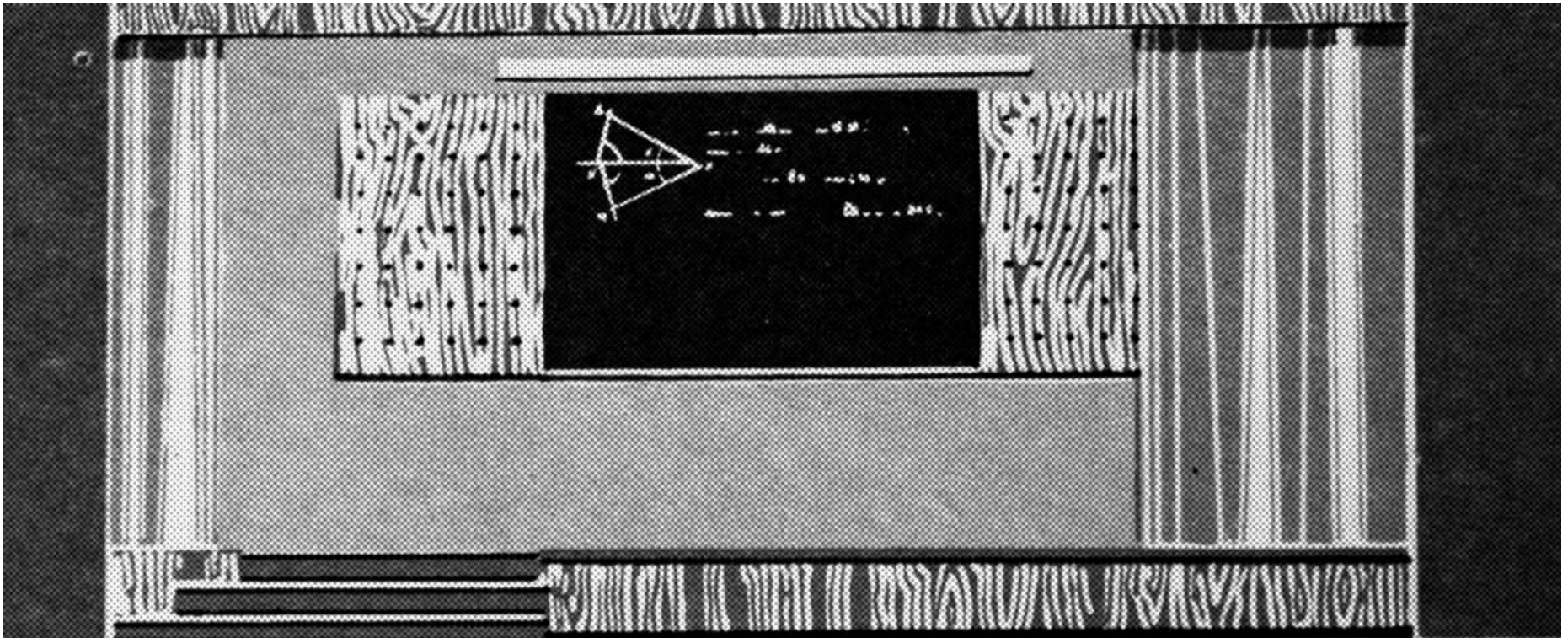
Rancière claims that the problem of "critical art" is not about accepting and using the relationships between art and politics, for the simple reason that art and politics have always been connected. In fact, in Rancière's work "aesthetics" does not refer to the "theory of art" but – more in line with the Greek sense of the term – "the distribution of the sensible." [4] In other words, the ordering of the forms of sensibility and experience of an age, the modes of distribution of the visible and the sayable, the sharing out of capacities and functions in the *sensorium* of a community. As such, aesthetics is immediately political. Even *l'art pour l'art* would have its own way of charting this distribution of forms of sensibility. In this sense, all art is "political".

In view of this, the boundaries shift. The thing that makes an aesthetic practice "critical art" is not just its link to politics, but its specific way of inscribing that inescapable relationship between art and politics. *Critical art is not art that is "committed," but art that establishes an equal distribution of the sensible, of capacities and functions.* This allows Rancière to criticize forms of art that had thought themselves "critical" simply by virtue of their links to social or political emancipatory struggles. This kind of art is certainly "political art" – all art is –, but it is not, by default, "critical art." "Critical" art is art that has the capacity to disrupt the hierarchical forms of the "distribution of the sensible." And this is something that the kind of "committed" art that has traditionally been considered "political" and "critical" has been unable to do. The left has misunderstood the crux of the discussion: the problem is not the relationship between art and politics, but the way in which *aesthetic politics* either reproduce or disrupt the configuration of the *sensorium*. And by misunderstanding the debate, it has been unable to adopt the strategies that would allow it to break free from hierarchical forms of distribution. As a rule, when we approach "leftist" aesthetic practices, Rancière tells us, we find oppressive, "police-like" [5] forms of distribution of the sensible (*one function for each, each in his place*) reproduced in the name of the liberation of the oppressed.

### Footnotes:

1. Steinweg, R., *Das Lehrstück. Brechts Theorie einer politisch-ästhetischen Erziehung*, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1972.
2. In Steinweg, R., "Two Chapters from 'Learning Play and Epic Theater'", available in [www.bgxmag.com](http://www.bgxmag.com) (author's emphasis).
3. Rancière, J., *El espectador emancipado* [2008], Bs. As., Manantial, 2010 (*The Emancipated Spectator*, 2010).





This approach is based on an anti-authoritarian critique of the theory and militancy of the sixties and seventies, which Rancière has been developing since the eighties. During this period, Rancière writes, there was a distribution of the sensible that countered inert matter with an active principle that prevailed over it: the practice of militancy (political or aesthetic) presupposed that there was a truth that was available to some people, who had to transmit it to those that did not have it, a form that had to shape a matter. The relationship between intellectuals and the lower classes was conceived on the basis of this matrix, of this unequal “distribution” of the visible and the sayable, in which one group or another took turns at playing the active or passive roles. But the hierarchical distribution of capacities was never broken. The principle that requires the *activation of the spectator* was a legacy of this militant logic, and was thus burdened with a hierarchical division of the sensible. Hence the need to “emancipate” the spectator.

The mode of efficacy of this emancipatory art is taken directly from the principle of “intellectual emancipation” that Rancière developed in his 1987 book *The Ignorant Master*. [6] In it, he reconstructs the eccentric educational practices of the French professor Joseph Jacotot who, in the early nineteenth century, asserted that an ignorant person could teach another ignorant person what he did not know himself, proclaiming the equality of intelligences, and calling for “intellectual emancipation” against the accepted ideas concerning the instruction of the lower classes. Like freedom, learning is not something you give, it is something you take. From this point of view, equality is not the ultimate purpose of teaching, it is its point of departure. As such, teaching does not assume that there is a preexisting inequality that has to be reduced –that is, the initial inequality between the teacher’s knowledge and the student’s ignorance, which is reproduced every time learning takes place–, but rather an *equality to be verified* each time: the equality of the intelligences of the teacher and the ignorant student. The ignorant master, says Rancière, “does not teach his pupils his knowledge, but asks them into the forest of things and signs, to say what they have seen and what they think of what they have seen, to verify it and have it verified.” [7] The ignorant master suspends the presumed difference of intelligences, thus countering “the logic of the stultifying master: the logic of the direct transmission of the equal.” [9] Rancière suggests that the political efficacy of “critical art” must be based on this pedagogical presupposition of intellectual emancipation, that is, the equality of intelligences. “We don’t need to turn spectators into actors. We do need to acknowledge the knowledge acting in the ignorant, and the activity peculiar of the spectator.” [8]

This brings us to the question: Does Brecht’s proposed aesthetic-political pedagogy fall apart under this critique, as Rancière himself suggests? And so we return to the heart of the first part of this text: if we simply take the conventional reading into account, Brecht would certainly be just another “stultifying master.” But if we accept that his learning plays *do not teach anything*, shouldn’t we see Brecht as an “ignorant master”? Assuming that the learning-plays were not conceived as thesis pieces but as *laboratories for experimental experimentation*, aren’t they an attack on “the logic of the direct transmission of the equal”? Don’t they invite “pupils” to “say what they have seen and what they think of what they have seen, to verify it and have it verified”? Isn’t Joseph Jacotot’s maxim “teach what you don’t know” another way of putting what Brecht beautifully expressed as “the art of thinking in other people’s heads”?

Rancière also insists that suspending the assumption of the inequality of intelligence also entails suspending a notion of the *efficacy of political art understood in terms of an indisputable resolution from a cause to an effect*. The fact that the effects of art are *indeterminate* is part of Rancière’s concept of emancipatory art. This indeterminacy, in turn, affects the subject that, according to Rancière, is the target of this emancipatory art: the *anonymous* subject. But didn’t Brecht’s notion of sacrifice lead us along similar paths? Isn’t the indeterminacy of the aesthetic effect at the core of the “abstract” or “sober” nature of the learning plays?

The critique that Rancière develops is a pertinent and effective means to question some of the stereotypes that the leftist often falls into: didacticism, indoctrination, effectism, etc. But this does not mean we should reject the avant-garde experience *en bloc*. We have seen that it is inappropriate to compare Brecht’s learning-plays to the “stultifying pedagogy” that is reproduced by the “critical” model as conceptualized by Rancière, and that the learning-plays are based precisely on a presupposition of the “equality of intelligences.” Above all, they are devices for the verification of the equality of intelligences. In Brecht we find the *ignorance of the master*, the master who teaches what he does not know by abandoning the creation of “works” and choosing instead to design *devices*. But we also find the *suspension of causality*, that is, the effects of the learning-plays are not determined in advance in their dramatic construction, but only in their actual performance. In Brecht, the *activation of the spectator* does not mean the reproduction of a hierarchical “distribution of the sensible”, but, on the contrary, the staging of “the knowledge acting in the ignorant”.

What is at stake here is the problem of tradition, not simply the defense of a pantheon for the cultural left. Firstly, because Rancière’s approach leaves very little margin for reception of the experience of the avant-gardes – even if it is a totally renewed reception– and veers closer to conservative readings that question an original *hybris* in the avant-gardes, the very own logic of which led to the authoritarian practices of the left in the twentieth century. And in addition, because if we approach the shift from artwork to *laboratory* from the point of view of the problem of tradition, cultural legacy is no longer an accumulation of the “cultural assets” or “masterpieces” of the past, but a *public reservoir of socially accessible resources and experiences*, which can be reactivated in different struggles in order to transform protest into a creative action, and creative practices into acts of resistance. The learning-plays are not just an example of these resources, but also a way of conceiving art that empowers this way of thinking of history as an archive of resources that can be “functionally transformed” (“*umfunktioniert*”) for future struggles.

Translated by Nuria Rodriguez

*Luis Ignacio García (Argentina, 1978) is philosopher, university professor and researcher. He focuses his interest on the relation of aesthetics and politics in the twentieth century, with special attention to Latin America. He lives in Córdoba, Argentina.*

Footnotes:

4. See Rancière, J., *El reparto de lo sensible. Estética y política* [2000], Santiago de Chile, LOM, 2009 (*The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, 2004).
5. For the difference between “politics” and “police”, see Rancière, J., *El desacuerdo. Política y filosofía* [1995], Bs. As., Nueva Visión, 1996 (*Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy*, 1998).
6. Rancière, J., *El maestro ignorante. Cinco lecciones sobre la emancipación intelectual* [1987], Bs. As., Laertes, 2003 (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five Lessons on Intellectual Emancipation*, 1991)
7. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

# Keti Chukhrov

## The Nomadic Theater of the Communist: A Manifesto

Recently I understood clearly that art couldn't help but be communist. This is not at all a manifestation of ideology, as it would seem to some. Nor is it dogma. It is just that suddenly it became obvious that all art – from Ancient Greece to the present day; that art which has overcome the egoism and conceit in itself – contained the potential to be communist. Regardless of its pessimism or optimism, such art is dedicated not to some social group but to one and all. This is not some kind of propaganda trick. That's what happens with an artist whose art is not afraid of people. Often art is either afraid of losing itself in the crowd or, the other extreme, it attempts to be artificially populist so it isn't suspected of being refined or subtle, or is addressed to an in-crowd of discerning connoisseurs and experts.

When I say communist of course I have in mind not membership in a party but a worldview. It is this breadth of worldview, which exceeds the boundaries of a single state, nation, class, artistic school, and the private or even spiritual interests of a specific individual, that predetermines the communist potential in a work of art.

This means that the artist has the strength to be not just one person, but many – the strength to not merely observe life and the multitude of living beings but to be or become them by means of art.

This mode of art where the artist can be “many” exists. Dostoevsky was able to be many people at once. Shakespeare, Beethoven, Vvedensky, Khlebnikov, Brecht, Mozart, Mayakovsky, Platonov and Beckett are other examples. The mode of art I'm speaking of is the so-called theater. I certainly don't mean repertory or genre theater. Ninety-nine percent of repertory theater is just cultural entertainment. What I call theater is a kind of anthropological and political mode that arises as the capacity to artistically *perform* the transformation itself.

For me, this inevitable shift to the theater occurred on the one hand from poetry and, on the other, from contemporary art. The limiting factor in poetry was its monologism, the fact that it condemned one in a way to acmeism and lyricism, i.e., to in the end being preoccupied all the time with oneself even when one speaks of the world, and often to castrating the heritage of both the avant-garde and modernism. Contemporary art is in a certain sense the direct opposite of poetry. It is not psychological nor is it subjective. By and large, it continues to operate according to the modernist canon of reducing the world to its own artistic idioms.

However, contemporary art's constant reference to its own territory and innovations in technique had already exhausted itself in the seventies and was forced to either dwell on the reproduction of languages, concepts and commentaries, or on eternally reproducing estranged spaces as modes of the optical unconscious. In any event, even when contemporary art attempts to come close to the event, it doesn't succeed in doing this because it immediately negates its attempt. Contemporary art's spaces of representation, exposition and commentary are organized in such a way that no matter what contemporary art concerns itself with, it is inevitably and in the final analysis concerned with itself and its own boundaries.

Even performance (or actions), despite its procedural nature and its unfolding in real time, is essentially the installation of a concept in space and time. It is a static, exhibited art object. It is forced to be this way.

Theater, on the contrary, is dynamic. It represents the experience of *performing*, not performance. In the mode of action that has not yet become but is becoming, it appeals to that which does not yet exist, whether in society, life or art. It not only lives through time, but *performs* time, i.e., it is capable of dealing with the present as if it were the future.

Exhibition spaces, even when they thematize certain social or political issues, remain bound by the politics of *things and spaces*. The theater presupposes politicization between *people*. The theater is experience that leaves things behind. It is the experience of consciousness becoming immaterial. If in contemporary-art performance the participant a priori conceptualizes themselves as a performer, then in the theatrical performance becoming-performer occurs thanks to the fact that the performer (actor) becomes a person and that person's political destiny. In other words, the performer becomes an artist thanks to the fact that he performs a human being in the play.

The theater is a space for humans, not a space for artists. But the paradox is that becoming-human needs to be performed, while the artist must naturalistically and physiologically inhabit the conceptual art-space of the performance while remaining an estranged individual. Even when it is a monologue, theater is a dialogue and starts with the number two.

The theater is capable of speaking and acting out an idea without reducing it to bare form or neutralized concept. This is because, in the theater, the idea is acted out as the living substance of relationships, in the mode of unreduced multi-humanity and polyphony.

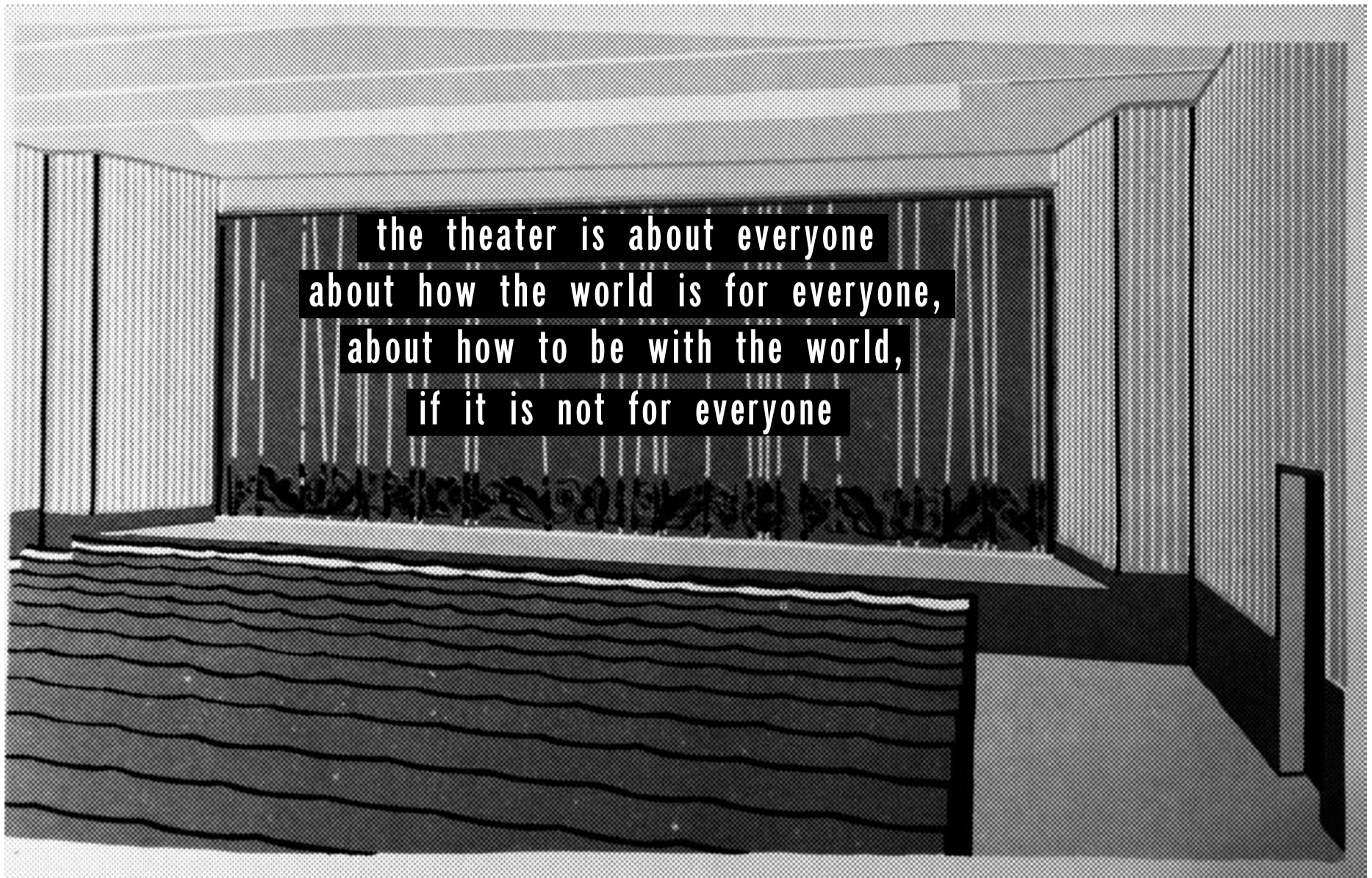
In poetry, for example, it is difficult to overcome being fettered in the habitat of self. There's nothing bad about the habitat of self. There's also nothing bad in observing the subject beyond reality, beyond people, beyond society. But this is the perspective of a single point of view, a single consciousness.

Vsevolod Meyerhold coined the term *cabotinage*, which he considered one of the most important features of the theater. *Cabotains* are *nomadic* players who perform anywhere. In other words, they are not bound to a room, space or time, but create both space and time out of their *performance* of worlds, ideas, people, and so forth.

Theater is implicitly public, but often the concept of being public is identified with the audience who watches the spectacle, i.e., the contemplation of action as entertainment. But the fact that it is public means that the theater has the potential to be about everyone, about how the world is for everyone, about how to be with the world, if it is not for everyone; and what to do with those who for one reason or another have been left without a world. The theater assumes that it will no longer wait for money, prosperity, education or beauty, but it turns waiting itself into action, as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

In this sense, the theater's capacity to deal with politics exceeds the capacity of the idioms of contemporary art, no matter how numerous they may be, and even the capacity of poetry, no matter how existentially profound or socially critical it may be. This is because in the theater the political is not a theme or an issue, but *is clarified* between people when those people are not just documented objects or observed characters, but speaking political subjects. The essence of dramatization is that it is never reduced to the representation of a single idea; rather, many ideas or ideas/people come into conflict with one another in such a way that the solution or conclusion to that conflict flows from the action itself without being predetermined.

The voices and discourses of theater are not just the sounds, opinions and narratives typical of many video works and documentations within contemporary art. They are not interviews with victims who recount how they suffered or accounts of an event. The theater treats suffering differently than do the media, contemporary art, literature or poetry. It incorporates a *performance of this* role by the victim themselves or the so-called oppressed person (an awful word that is humiliating and degrading) that would be a (artistic) *performance* of their own victory over circumstances. Herein lie the political, aesthetic and communist potentialities of theater.



To be able to learn to speak not only for oneself but (as in the case of the author and the actor) to speak *instead* of many others: this has to be done if only to understand or clarify *what* happened or is happening among us, in our country, in our state, in the world; in order to understand how to go on living within it. (Isn't that Hamlet's purpose in launching his "theater"?).

The hardest thing is to imagine not only one's own development and self-improvement, even if it achieves great heights in viewing the world, but to discern the development and self-improvement of others. In other words, to understand the universal dynamically, multitudinously, as an action that happens "alongside" (one), rather than conically, spiritually.

I rely on one assumption: artistic achievements don't count, and the spiritual quest for the transcendental is not worth anything if they occur only because they don't take into account the great majority of people on this earth, who have neither time nor place nor elementary living conditions, the freedom of existence that makes it possible to think, create, love and live. No personal connection to the sublime counts if we do not understand that all people, no matter who they might be, are potentially artists, scientists, engineers, philosophers, interlocutors, comrades in arms, and just people. Without them it is impossible to achieve the fullness of the world and life. And potentially they are also capable of thinking the same way. Nothing more. This is the communist assumption in simple terms.

Actually, there is no communism and there never was, but there is the project of communism. It cannot help being just as humans can't help being as long as they are, as long as people exist in their multitude. Many resist the communist in themselves, in reality, in art and in history. This is out of fear for oneself, for one's well-being, for what little power one has; for one's success, and, finally, for one's education and culture, acquired through such long, hard work. Everyone without exception has this fear. It is a bodily fear. But so what? It can be overcome. It is quite possible to think of oneself as if you were thinking about others, as if you were not thinking about yourself. This is very difficult, but it becomes easy when these thoughts take on flesh in the situation of artistic performance.

The nomadic theater of the communist is in a certain sense the opportunity to temporarily (artistic time is temporary, although it lays claim to immortality) create the relations of political Eros using the means available now, to introduce (albeit temporarily) this artistic communist space into the existing environment in spite of the circumstances. As

many people as want and are able to do it right now do this, in the place they have found for it now and for those who are ready for such an encounter now.

In this case, the theater is not a genre but a method of emergence for the territory of the "artistic." Here the "artistic" borders on the poetic, and poetry emerges in the performance of an impossible situation, not in writing. The artistic becomes human and the human becomes artistic, because the entire person is engaged in the process of performance: her body, mind, thoughts, desire, and not just individual capacities or qualifications.

This doesn't at all mean that such "theater" presumes nothing more than creative improvisation, that it happens somewhere, somehow and is about something, in a spontaneous situation among spontaneous participants. It is also not an illustration of some story or plot on the theme of communism or the political struggle.

The nomadic theater of the communist is connected with a special type of metanoia that doesn't just beget a desire to create, but requires the world and other people in this world. This metanoia is an event and it presumes a desire for the universal and universality, making the person as it were a "communist" and an artist at one and the same time. It makes them an artist because it must repeat, "rehearse" this inescapable event of metanoia, which is realized in the repetitive practice of performance. And it makes them a communist because each time the performance makes it possible to experience, understand or create a co-presence with others, to examine the bases of such co-presence, and to perform the fulfillment of the universal.

# Katja Praznik /// Theatre, Emancipation and political Power: Two Cases From the Past

The emancipatory function of theater in the territory of ex-Yugoslavia has some specific traits. Since the falling apart of Yugoslavia, or better, of self-managing socialism, things have taken a turn. However, let me first dwell in the past in order to make my argument.

While the official culture and the network of institutional theatres in Slovenia (one of the six republics of the ex-Yugoslavia) had the role of mirroring the political and social values of the Yugoslav self-managing socialism [1], there were a number of professionals who organized themselves outside the context of the official culture [2]. Theatre institutions, along with the Academy for Theater, Film, Radio and Television, represented the dominant structure in control of the production, distribution and education of theatre in the Slovenia, in which theatre was predominantly understood as drama theatre and where the literary text played the starring role. This was not at all a coincidence, as language and literature were the bearers of national identity; therefore, the theatres were one of the main fortresses enforcing this identity. Despite the monopoly over theater culture, this system had a certain amount of tolerance, which allowed deviations in order to sustain the image of tolerance. Between the late 1950s and the 1990s, we therefore witnessed the emergence of a number of experimental groups and alternative theater and dance groups in Slovenia [3].

I will focus here on few specific theater cases that emerged in the 1980s. They arose from the secular space of the streets and their bearers were the students. "The identity of these groups depended on the creation of a completely new, underground system of culture and currency of communication." [4] These experimental or alternative culture groups also took a decisive and active role in the rising political and social upheavals that led to the breaking apart of Yugoslavia in 1991. "The organization of this new cultural space was a complex process that deeply inflected the meaning of the term 'alternative culture' and grew into one of the most potent cultural and political democratizing forces of the decade." [5]

The specificity of the emancipatory function that these theatre groups (as well as others – music, visual arts, etc.) performed lies not only in the fact that the practices were trans-nationally oriented, but also that they produced a special social sphere that was critical to self-managing socialism as well as to the bourgeoisie and to capitalism. Its main stance was not anti-socialist but rather fighting for a different practice and definition of social relations and organization. They were, on the one hand, trying to create alternative spaces of difference outside dominant structures; or, as Nikolai Jeffs puts it: "The issue was not socialism or capitalism, but rather the possibility of developing a cultural production – and above all, a society – that would transcend both formations." [6] On the other hand, they were producing visions that encouraged a reform of the rigid models of socialism, their improvement, modernization and democratization, and were rehabilitating the culture of the avant-garde and other suppressed aesthetic and discursive practices in order to establish parallel institutions; or, in the words of Miran Mohar: "It is important to stress that our position from the beginning has not been to operate against existing institutions, or outside these institutions, but to create a parallel institution." [7]

*Katja Praznik holds an MA in Sociology of Culture and works as a theorist, writer and dramaturge in the field of arts and culture. From 2007 to 2009, she was the editor-in-chief of the performing arts journal Maska. Currently, she manages various projects related to cultural policy issues in her work at Asociacija, Association of Arts and Culture NGOs and Freelancers in Ljubljana. She published the book "Cronotopographies of Dance: Two Inquiries" (Transition Series, EMANAT), together with Eda Čufer.*

## Case One: The FV 112/15 Theater

FV 112/15, a group of artists, performers, musicians and club-organizers, was one of the main avant-garde movements in Slovenia whose influence reached all over ex-Yugoslavia. The group comprised the heart of Ljubljana's counterculture and alternative youth culture in the 1980s. The group started as the FV 112/15 Theater; however, the scope of its activities soon included further activities, such as organizing club events, concerts, video screenings, conferences, visual art, video production and documentation and the music and performance art of the group Boghesia, as well as producing records and audio cassettes through the music label FV Založba. [8] For the purposes of my argument, I will only focus here briefly on the theatre activities of the group, which was founded in the 1980 and chose the very particular, coded name of FV 112/15 Theater. The name refers to France Verbinc's (FV) local, frequently used *Dictionary of Foreign Terms*, page 112, entry 15, where we find the following: *C'est la guerre – This is war, that's how it is in war*. We can interpret the name in the light of the extremity of the social situation at that time.

The FV 112/15 Theatre did not have any direct connections to the mainstream theatre circles; therefore, they were deliberately operating on the margin, or outside the institutions. However, "[t]he members of FV 112/15 sought to create a theater that would perform in urbane clubs and thus transcend the limits of standard theater in terms of its topography, concerts, aesthetics, and target audience." [9]

Despite the fact that the FV 112/15 Theatre was not interested in entering the mainstream theatre circles, they left a mark on theatre; yet even more importantly, they influenced the emancipation of social life that took place through art by propelling such ideas as autonomous creativity, demilitarization, sexual emancipation and gay & lesbian rights. "As the creators or producers of various spaces and events, the members of FV encouraged changes in private everyday lives that bridged the gulf and alienation between private life and public life. /.../ The appropriation of public space (through clubs, posters, and so on) and artistic engagement (in theatre, video, and the music group Boghesia, among other things) affirmed the right to difference. All this made an important contribution to the democratization of forms of sociability, art and politics." [10]

Through their theatre work, the group was practicing "expanded consciousness" sessions. There, the group members were studying and discussing different sources that were inspiring their work, from the avant-garde to the American beatniks to Partisan films. These sources would then be integrated in their performance compositions based on collective authorship and collage. "These performances were assembled by combining autonomous scenes, each of which was staged in a different style following the rehearsals of the 'expanded consciousness' sessions." [11]

Their first performance was in March 1981, under the title *FV-112/15*, and was soon followed by the next three: *The Big May Show* (in May), *Nothing Should Surprise Us* (in June) and *Life Acts* (in November). In 1982, they made two performances, *Monopolies* (in April) and *It Smelled Like Spring* (in June), while the performance *Who Turned Out the Light* (in June 1983) was not performed live but by FV Video and Borghesia. Their shows were characterized by a collage of autonomous scenes staged in different styles, while the scenes consisted of quotes from the sources of recent history of art as well as to dialogues from Chekhov imitating the naturalistic theatre style. "The very precisely composed soundtracks of music and speech and the highly designed lighting gave the actors an opportunity to move between distinct and formally separate audiovisual layers." [12] In 1982, the FV 112/15 Theater took over the organization of Tuesday evenings/nights in the student discotheque, where they continued to practice theatre through other means. [13]

"In the autumn, the group requested and received a weekly night on which it could present its theater shows at the disco; these shows were based on a demand for totality between the space, the action, and the public. The public had to enter the action itself, to come onto the stage, so to speak, and the stage was the entire club." [14]

What was specific for the FV 112/15 was the tactical combination and subsequent transcendence of the specialized and separated domains of economy and aesthetics, in which they combined activism and art. "FV members fought for sexual, cultural, and political emancipation. The group neither isolated themselves socially, as sometimes happens with countercultural phenomena, nor were they instrumentalized or assimilated by the ruling structures and ideologies. In the dilemma of whether to do only activism or only art, FV combined both: they were a form of 'utopian activism'. The group never in any way stressed national identity as a productive intersection or necessary intermediate stage between local and global identity. FV represented an alternative both to party structures and to bourgeois politics." [15]

## Footnotes:

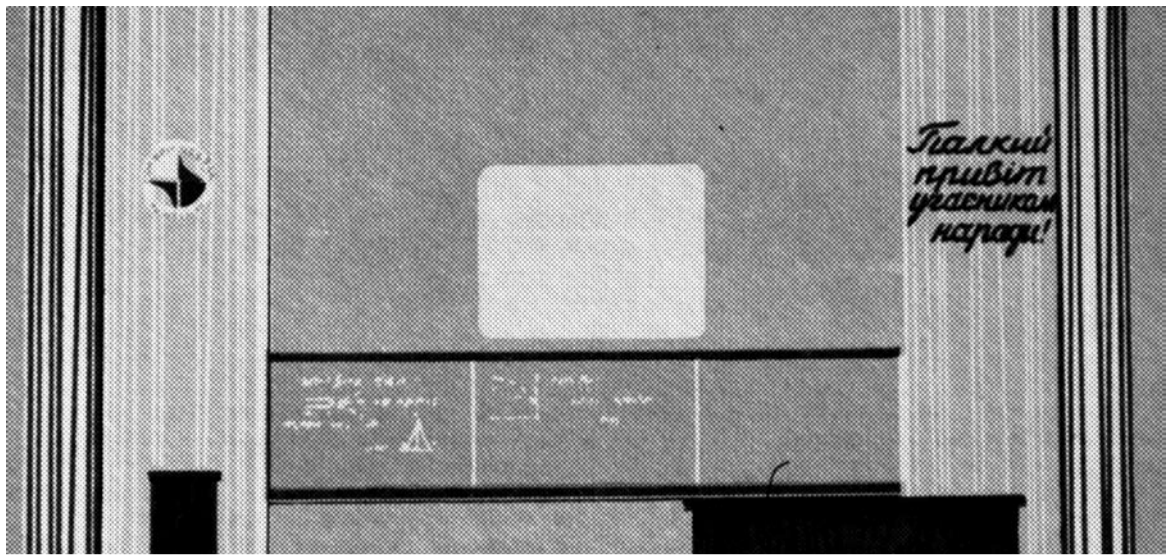
1. Eda Čufer, "Behind the Curtains", *Impossible Histories*, Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003, p. 378.
2. In this text, I will focus on the territory of Slovenia
3. For the context of dance, see Katja Praznik, "Between the Avant-garde, Modernism and Amateurism: A Fragmentary History of Contemporary Dance in Ljubljana in the 1960s and 1970s", *Maska*, pp. 68–85.
4. Eda Čufer, "Behind the Curtains", *Impossible Histories*, Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003, p. 385.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 385.
6. Nikolai Jeffs, "FV and the 'Third Scene', 1980–1990", *FV Alternativa osemdestih/ Alternative Scene of the Eighties*, Lilijana Stepančič, Breda Škrjanec (eds.), Mednarodni grafični likovni center, Ljubljana 2008, p. 394.
7. "NSK 2000?", Irwin and Eda Čufer interviewed by Joanne Richardson, <http://subsol.c3.hu/AlternativeSceneoftheEighties>, Lilijana Stepančič, Breda Škrjanec (eds.), Mednarodni grafični likovni center, Ljubljana 2008, pp. 352–353.
8. Nikolai Jeffs, "FV and the 'Third Scene', 1980 – 1990", *FV Alternativa osemdestih/ Alternative Scene of the Eighties*, Lilijana Stepančič, Breda Škrjanec (eds.), Mednarodni grafični likovni center, Ljubljana 2008, pp. 352–353.
9. For more extensive and elaborate information on the work of FV and the socio-historical context, see the anthology *FV: alternativa Breda Škrjanec* (eds.), Mednarodni grafični likovni center, Ljubljana 2008, pp. 324.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 394.
11. Eda Čufer, "Behind the Curtains", *Impossible Histories*, Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003, p. 389.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 390.
13. As the founding members Zimir Alajbegović and Neven Korda describe it. Cited after Eda Čufer, "Behind the Curtains", *Impossible Histories*, Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003, p. 390.
14. Neven Korda, "Alternative Dawns", *FV Alternativa osemdestih/ Alternative Scene of the Eighties*, Lilijana Stepančič, Breda Škrjanec (eds.), Mednarodni grafični likovni center, Ljubljana 2008, p. 324.
15. Nikolai Jeffs, "FV and the 'Third Scene', 1980–1990", *FV Alternativa osemdestih/ Alternative Scene of the Eighties*, Lilijana Stepančič, Breda Škrjanec (eds.), Mednarodni grafični likovni center, Ljubljana 2008, p. 394.

## Case Two: The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre

The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (SNST) was founded in 1983 by three students – Eda Čufer (dramaturg), Dragan Živadinov (director) and Miran Mohar (set designer) – but their names were not publicly known until the self-abolishment of the theatre in 1987. The work of the group was strongly connected to critique of the national(istic) drama/text-based theatre and the rigid system of institutions that represented the official theatre culture. Therefore, their name is not a coincidence; it was inspired by a reference in Antonin Artaud's essay "Theatre and the Plague" to Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica Corculum, a Roman magistrate who issued an order calling for the destruction of all Roman theatres. The theatre announced at the beginning that its existence would be limited in duration – until the theatre fulfilled its mission. This mission was presented in the Scipion Nasice Sisters' founding manifesto, where it was proclaimed that the SNST "has no Stage" and that its aim therefore was to renew the art of theatre. The existence of SNST would be limited to four years and the last action of the SNST would be self-abolishment. The SNST program would be organized on two levels, the external, which would consist of manifestos, and the internal, which would be creative. The first consisted in its appearance, resurrection and self-abolishment; Underground, Exorcism and Retro-classics comprised the second level. Besides the founding manifesto, the SNST also published a series of manifestos (called Sisters Letters) as well as one-minute dramas that supported their theatre actions and events. One of the more telling documents was "The First Sisters Letter" (1983), which was published before the first performance – "Retro-garde Event Hinkeman" (1984) – and in which the SNST made an equation between the theater and the State, defining this relation as the key aesthetic issue. "Theater does not exist between the *Spectator* and the *Actor*", rather the "Theater is a *State*." [16] If, in the modern State, the subsystems become segmented and perform their different functions, where the sphere of art is usually subordinate, here we have a radically different position, where a theatre movement re-appropriates the State. [17] Similar to the ideas of the FV 112/15 Theater, in SNST, we are again confronted with the idea of theatre transcending its confined space/domain, not only on the level of spectator and actor but on the level of theater and general social organization as well. Although, the crucial difference here is that the SNST – which, in 1984, co-established the larger art collective Neue Slovenische Kunst (NSK) – was engaged in building a parallel social structure (the State) through artistic practices. They did not oppose the idea of a State, but were engaged in the utopian idea of a different kind of State.

"Retro-garde Event Hinkeman" took place in the private apartment of Igor Šmid in Ljubljana, and the 37 invited participants were taken to the site of the event by a nun, a priest and a Yugoslav Army (JLA) officer. The second performance – "Retro-garde Event Marija Nablocka" (1985) – took place in an abandoned studio in a bourgeois house in Ljubljana, again with a small number of participants. Before the performance, the "Second Sisters Letter" was published, where the theatre took on the role of a State as the SNST stated that "it was expelling religion and ideology into 'the mirror image of the arts, thereby abolishing them'" [18] and thus embraced a totalitarian position. The third and last performance, "Retro-garde Event Baptism Under Triglav" (1986), took place in the newly built institution, the Cultural and Congress Center Cankarjev dom, on its biggest stage, in front of an audience of 2,000 spectators. In the "Third Sisters Letter", yet another turn took place as the SNST developed the idea of "re-baptizing", which, in their view, was inherent to all history, where re-baptizing takes place not only in the domain of religions, but can be perceived in all epochs of history, where one system of values is ever transformed into another.

The sources of inspiration for the SNST were closely related to the utopian potential of the historical avant-gardes; they were reading Brecht, Artaud, Appia, Craig and Meyerhold. Regardless of the fact that SNST was defined by the mode of its existence, which was expressed as an aesthetic vision, the group sought to create a social platform where the current political and social organization would be critically assessed by the means of creative stage practice. This stage practice was trying to perform the living experience of the conflict between tradition and the avant-garde. "The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater regards the utopian instinct as an innate, but not acquired, value that exists in man in the form of a desire for a unity with the *Cosmic, Aesthetic and Moral* elements. That is why the creation of the *style* of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater cannot originate in the *Actor, Space, or Staging*, but only in *Culture and Civilization*, renewed and recurrently traumatized in the retro-production of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater." [19] The last performance of the SNST, with which the group completed its mission of establishing a new kind of theatre that would "migrate from its marginal position to the central stage of the city," [20] produced a rupture and an extensive public discussion because it was treating the sacred national symbols in a subversive way where the national heroes became empty ideological monuments/signs that were used in a "completely nonliterary, nondramatic, and purely linear event." [21] Here again, the common social codes and patterns were attacked through the field of art, the aim of which was nothing less than to cause the reformation of the social status quo as well as the static and rigid perception of art itself.



## Back to the Present, or, What We Talk About When We Talk About Emancipation

When we talk about these historical cases of theatre and their emancipation power, we have to acknowledge that they were relating in a true sense to the utopian avant-gardistic ideas of art and the theatre as a community of living bodies that establishes its own principles or rules of social organization. In the case of FV 112/15, the theatre became a living experience in a disco that was not there in order to entertain the masses but was, in fact, a liberated zone of sexual (gay & lesbian rights, the creation of one's one life and not of the life of others), political (they were not interested in fighting for the ruling position in a dominant structure) and cultural (creating areas in which the dominant laws do not apply, and where the abolition or substitution of these laws is not the issue) emancipation. [22]

In the case of SNST, art was trying to appropriate the status of the State; they defined theatre as a State, pointing to the relation between the State's tendency toward stability and power and its basic disorganization on the level of content as being the key aesthetic issue. [23] The SNST not only violated the central paradigm of text-based theater, re-baptizing the theater with a new visual discourse, but also violated the national identity by profaning the sacred national cultural symbols, thereby (again) re-baptizing those symbols, hitting a nerve in the Slovene national self-image, all by its authority as the (self-proclaimed) State. This "re-baptizing" had its real effect, causing "a real drama in the auditorium and on the broader public stage" [24], thereby, for a brief moment in time, actualizing SNST's radical proposition.

All these things were happening in a very specific historical context of social turbulence when the political system of self-managing socialism was about to fall apart and where it was not yet clear that the neo-liberal capitalistic social organization would prevail, a context that offered the space in which the ideas and visions of a new social order were being proposed. The visions that came out of this new space, and the attempts to enact these visions, were not primarily focusing on the issues of spectatorship (trying to emancipate the audience); this is because the visions of a new society were coming out of the common struggle of both the artists as well as the participants (or, spectators, if you like). The question was what kind of society or social organization did we want after socialism; and the alternative culture in Slovenia managed to connect its aesthetic production with social engagement.

Things have taken a turn since those times and that is because the context has changed – it has been re-baptized by (neo-liberal) capitalism. The issue now is not so much that there are no longer any radical gestures similar to the ones by FV 112/15 or SNST, but rather that, in the new social order, the radical gestures are being neutralized or fetishized. Whereas Rancière [25] believes spectatorship is at issue, I believe that the issue is the position of art in the social organization.

The issue of spectatorship cannot be put at a strategic cross point in the discussion of the relationship between art and politics, especially in the geopolitical context, where neo-liberal capitalism is the dominant principle of social organization. In the age of neo-liberal capitalism, which is also the age of mass media, the theatre is secondary in terms of mass impact and, therefore, of politics. Theatre, as well as art in general, in most cases, has become a commodity. This is because art in neo-liberal capitalism is being faced with a quickly disappearing public sphere [26] as well as a radically alienated state of affairs on both the collective and personal levels. [27] What we need to discuss, therefore, is not so much the relations within arts or the theatre, but rather the new forms of social organization and the possible positions of art within those forms. Even if this would require "a cultural revolution, to begin with." [28]

### Footnotes:

16. Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater, "The First Sisters Letter", in: *Impossible Histories*, p. 575.
17. Jela Krečič, "Dan mladosti 1987", www.krstopodtriglavom.org (accessed May 13, 2011)
18. Ibid.
19. Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater, "The First Sisters Letter", in: *Impossible Histories*, Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003, p. 575.
20. Eda Čufer, "Behind the Curtains", *Impossible Histories*, Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003, p. 392.
21. Ibid., p. 394.
22. Neven Korda, "Alternative Dawns", "FV and the 'Third Scene', 1980 – 1990", *FV Alternativa osemdestih/Alternative Scene of the Eighties*, Lilijana Stepančič, Breda Škrjanec (eds.), Mednarodni grafični likovni center, Ljubljana 2008, p. 312.
23. Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater, "The First Sisters Letter", in: *Impossible Histories*, Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (eds.), MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2003, p. 575.
24. Ibid., p. 394.
25. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Verso, 2009.
26. For these issues see also Boris Buden, "Art After the End of Society", *Maska*, no. 121–122 (Re-projecting Radical Futures), vol. XXIV, spring 2009, pp. 90–96.
27. Katja Praznik, "The Cucial Question Seems to Me How is Democracy Institutionalized ... – A Conversation with Darko Suvin", www.bifc-hub.eu (13.5. 2011)
28. Ibid.

# Fernanda Carvajal

## Public Theater: educational pieces to assemble

During the long and still unfinished post-dictatorship in Chile, in which four governments from a social democratic coalition provide consistency and continuity to the knotting between modernization, neoliberalism and progress forged by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, the Chilean theater undergoes major transformations. In the period from 1990 to 2010, a professional kind of theater is strengthened, retreated into a rather self-referential practice, mainly funded by the state competitive funding system which limits its scope to academic spaces and independent theaters with a restricted public, tending to form a system that closes up upon itself. This tendency has contributed to relegate to the margins, to invisibility or silence, other theatrical experiences that seek to open out different paths from the theater towards other areas of the social or political. Still, the last few years, and perhaps underpinned by the strong rejection to the recent victory of a rightist government in the country, these previously dispersed experiences, have leaned to congregate and strengthen. They are theater companies that come from different cities of the country – Teatro Público (Public Theater) and Teatro Versión Oficial (Official Version Theater) in Santiago, Teatro La Peste (The Plague Theater) in Valparaíso, Teatropello in Talca, to name a few- which, coming in and out of the professional theater circuit, have joined different social and political groups simultaneously, and have been involved in specific social conflicts and struggles. They are still incipient but decisive gestures that re-build bridges between theater and politics. In this context, this text seeks to problematize the relationships between pedagogy and political emancipation put in practice by the Public Theater collective [1]. It is still a very recent experience, so we cannot yet discern its effects and continuities; however, we think this text as a contribution to the discussion and support of these initiatives.

Public Theater already introduces a shift of the most widespread trends in Chilean Theatre with the premiere of its first play in 2007, *Desdicha Obrera*. Una tijera clavada en el corazón (Workmen Despair. Scissors stuck in the heart) (2007), an adaptation of a didactic piece written by Luis Emilio Recabarren, the founder of the Chilean Communist Party, in 1921. This initial gesture, which sets forth the genealogy of activist theater opened in Chile by Recabarren and anarchist theater in the early twentieth century, insists on the term proletariat, as a way to give voice to a word that has remained silent, empty, to move it and confer a new meaning along with the rising of new social subjects who introduce new conflicts in the political arena –such as the school students in the ‘penguin movement’ protests and manifestations in 2006 and 2007; the subcontract workers; or the housing debtors- and claiming a theater that can explicitly take an ideological position, which does not hesitate in defining itself as leftist. Early on, the Public Theatre activity is not confined only to the creative field, but was open to collaborative action with other companies and groups. Thus arises in early 2009, *Todos Trabajando* (Everybody Working), a platform for thought and collective stance that seeks to intervene both in political and artistic spaces [2]. Along with this platform, Public Theater organizes the 1st and 2nd Meeting of Artists towards a Constituent Assembly, held in March and September/October 2010, respectively

Why a meeting towards a Constituent Assembly? It should be recalled that in Chile the 1980 Constitution remains in force, imposed by the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet which lays the foundation for the neoliberal model, erecting the market as the privileged regulator of social relations. It’s not until 2005, during the government of Ricardo Lagos and without the participation of the citizenry, amendments are made to the charter that are obviously insufficient as they leave intact its fundamental bases. It is notorious how the repeal of the 1980 Constitution, seen as an undemocratic and neoliberal enclave, appears as an overarching objective to different subjects and social struggles, as a unifying core of antagonisms, in an era ruled by consensus and political conformism. Hence, in recent years, the growing popular unrest has begun to organize around the proposal to form a Constituent Assembly [3].

In this frame of reference, the First Meeting of Artists towards a Constituent Assembly is held at the cultural center Casa Matriz (Home Office) as a self-managed activity, convening entities until that time dispersed, autonomous artistic and political groups along with people related to unofficial media [4], who came to “discuss and settle the need to organize and act”. Conceived as a political self-education space for different theatrical and political groups, the Meeting was understood as a place to discuss the history and origins of the 1980 charter and the scope that it currently presents on the political and cultural life, to argue “some of the guidelines that should make all organized sectors of society to initiate, through a Constituent Assembly, a profound process of social change” [5]. The discussion and sharing device didn’t match the usual structure of both political assembly and theatrical shows, seeking to prompt a dialogue between roundtables and theatrical interventions. While in the roundtables the main discussion was about the cultural policies of the Concertación [6] governments and the political and legal foundations of the 1980 Constitution, among the theatrical performances were plays that had been exhibited in the commercial-professional circuit, such as ‘C (Civil)’ inspired on surveys about public discontent, that discussed the civil disobedience to counteract the political-economic system of the country, along with performances which had intervened specific situations, such as ‘Sin Editar’ (No Editing), which had been part of the event ‘Emergency Dramaturgies’ as an immediate response made to the school students- Manifestations in 2007 [7].

In the balance of the Meeting, some of the conclusions were: “Artistic expressions can become a means of propaganda, without departing from the formal or aesthetic needs of each artist or group of creators” and that “Artists and art workers and culture are also citizens and we must exercise our responsibility as such, actively reaching out to the country’s political life, participating in marches, actions and public events’ [8]. This program lines resonate in the creative process of *Celebración* (Celebration), the play in which Public Theater works simultaneously as they develop the Meetings. In this way, although *Celebración* emerges as a performance to be displayed theater rooms, its creative process involved finding a pedagogic communication device that reinforced its crossing from professional theater to non-theatrical spaces.

Celebración is a show that, at the occasion of the Bicentennial festivity, questions the historical narrative that converges into the commemoration of 200 years of the independence of Chile. Based on the close linkage between historical memory and educational institution, Public Theatre questions the linear narratives of history that we have received and read from our early school years, transmitting a compact idea of Chile, a non-confrontational idea of homeland. According to the thesis on the philosophy of history by Walter Benjamin, *Celebración* offers a fragmentary reading of history, highlighting the different temporalities that conflict with the righteousness of linear history, trying to give visibility to actors that have been cut out from the official account, to the antagonisms and social upheavals so far ruled out, for thus postulating the idea that there isn’t a single story or a single homeland. As *Celebración* interrogates the ways in which official history is transmitted throughout education, the play undoubtedly establishes a reflection about educational devices to the point that some critics pointed out that the play “stages a theatricality of education”. Indeed, the teaching statement is present in the play (and preponderantly), but in such way that it does not only operate carrying clear meanings to conscience, which would rather belong to the order of the macropolitical discourse (the rhetoric of argument exposure, the denunciation and the questions that circulate in the play), but it also occurs in the order of sensitivity and perception (as it happens, as will be seen below, with the relationship between the bodies of the actors and the use of blackboards in the play), in a micropolitical level, the experience of a specific status of reality in one’s own body .

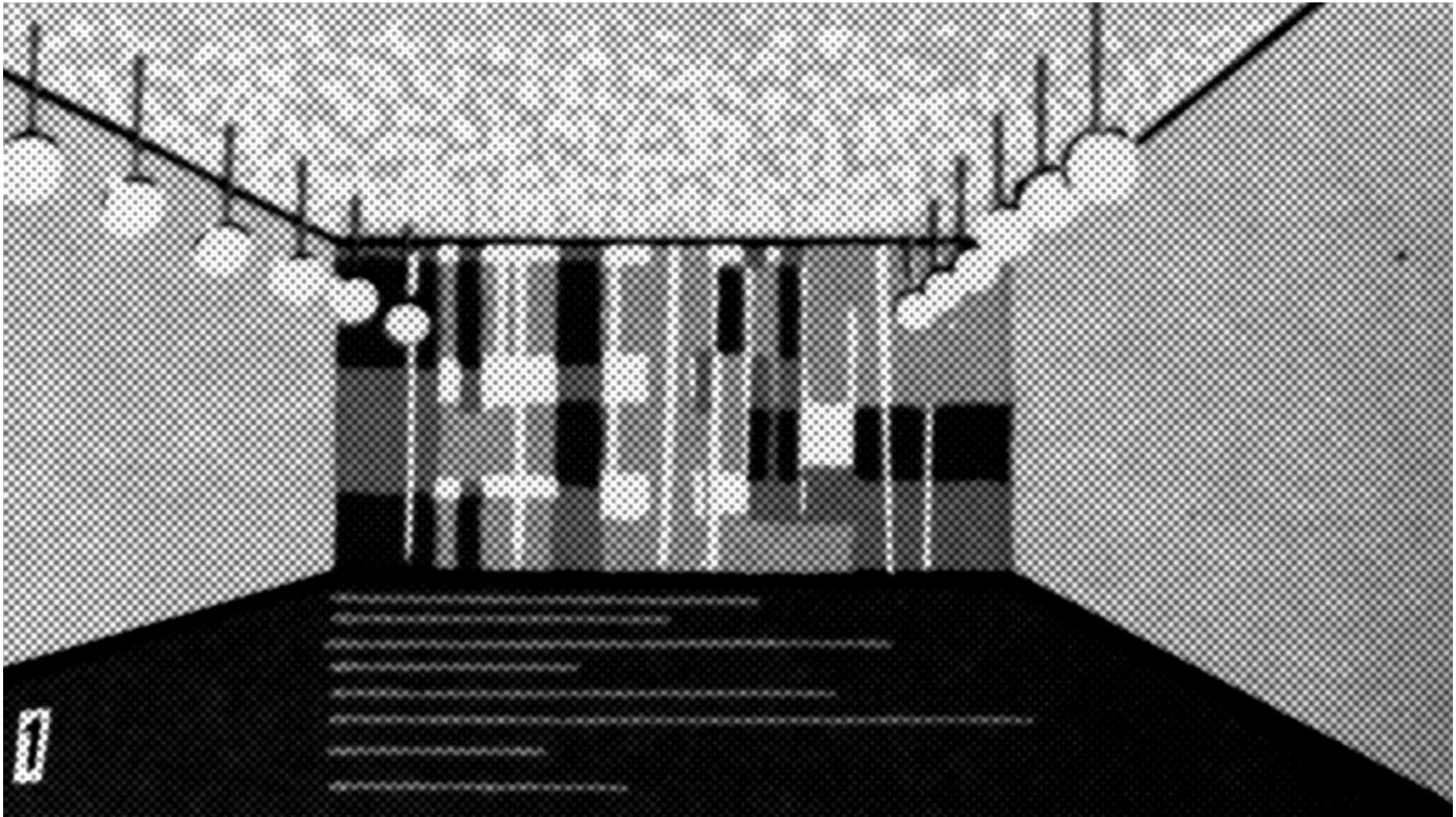
It is conceivable to think that when the theatrical discourse is directed exclusively towards a pedagogical conception of art, it becomes problematic, as it would tend to repeat a model of communicative effectiveness related to an ideal of transparency which can only reveal a mark of power. In that model of communication, spectators may be located in the place of “passive consumers of meanings that are self-evident”, or as “specular receivers of the purposes of the speaker”[9]. The use of blackboards certainly stands out from the fiction of direct transmission of slogans or issues. At first glance, the blackboards take the role of the Brechtian sign, of the device that pretends to transmit ideally sharp direct contents. But the board appears not only as a writing or drawing surface suitable for a unilateral kind of receiving, collective and immediate, which is also commonly used in the traditional pedagogical transmission. The boards also articulate spaces, assemble objects, activate situations. The ‘board sign’ acquires mobility, so that the boards operate at the same time containing and denying the truth claim of pedagogy. The same ‘transmitter’ device of the pedagogical communication, the surface through which the official historical narrative is passed on to us as truth, is denaturalized. The board is ripped out of the architectural immobility of the classroom, and thus the layout and convention of the classroom learning system, to fragment it, manipulate it, and use it to create new shapes on stage.

It is precisely in the stage fragment about the student movement, those social actors who refer more directly to education, where the boards are no longer used as a writing surface (its main function in the educational area), moving to shape scenic situations. Thus, when referring to the high school student movement in the years of dictatorship, the slates as scenery and graphic support, indicate both as structure and as drawing, the barricades and police forces water cannons. In turn, the slogan ‘NO +’ on one of the boards at the back of the stage, appears as a statement quotation made in 1983 by the Colectivo de Acciones de Arte (C.A.D.A.) (Art Actions Collective) [10]. The slogan ‘NO +’ arises from the need to renew the slogans of the left, as a participatory device that operates as a sign that articulates desires rather than as a discursive and ideological conjugation of a political slogan. That street ‘NO’, rebellious, activating, is subsequently transferred to the context of the 1988 plebiscite that puts an end, at least in factual terms, to the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, as a sign of disappointment and turn back to the social movement by those who knotted the covenants of democratic transition.

Thus, besides articulating situations, the board as pedagogic device is detached and denaturalized: by highlighting its ability to produce, convene and displace signs, to construct reality, its status as neutral device for communication and education, is stressed. On the other hand, the board surface, also tells us something about memory, as it is a writing support that allows thinking about the faculties of reception, storage and selection that make up the memory. The board, whose flat or virginal surface can be always reconstituted by erasing the drawing lines, doesn’t keep hold of the traces: it’s a memory device that receives stimuli but does not retain them permanently. Thus, the repetition of the act of writing, wiping and rewriting on slates throughout the play, appears as a repetition of the traumatic

### Footnotes:

1. Public Theater is a theater company that started its activities in 2006. It’s formed by the director Patricia Artes, the playwright Cristian Aravena and actors Javiera Zeme, Martín Muñoz, Cristian Lagreze, Cecilia Acuña, Marcela Gueny, David Gonzalez and Alejandro Miranda. Among its plays are *Workmen Despair* (2007) and *Mericrismas Peñi* (2008).
2. For more information see: <http://todostrabajando2009.blogspot.com/>
3. On July 21st, 2007 the movement ‘Citizens for a Constituent Assembly’ was publicly presented in Santiago of Chile, led by human rights lawyer Roberto Garretón and sociologist Gustavo Ruz.
4. Among which we mention the Valparaíso Cultural Park ExCarcel, the Movement for a Constituent Assembly, Proletarian Action Party members, and members of the editorial board of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, among others.
5. ‘Reflections from the First Meeting of Artists for a Constituent Assembly’, Working Paper, unpublished, 2010.
6. We refer to the *Concertación de Partidos Por la Democracia* (Coalition of Parties for Democracy), formed by the Christian Democrats, the Radical Party, the Party for Democracy and the Socialist Party.
7. The student demonstrations in 2006 and 2007 led to an intensive cycle of struggles, not exempt of complexities, which among other things, led to the repeal of the Constitutional Law of Education (LOCE). However, education reform that resulted there, did not correspond to the radical demands of the students.
8. ‘Reflections from the First Meeting of Artists for a Constituent Assembly’.
9. Vindel, Jaime. ‘About [the memory] of political art’, in: *Ramona 98*, Buenos Aires, 2010, pp. 39-47, p.45.
10. Interdisciplinary collective emerged in 1979, made up by visual artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo, writer Diamela Eltit, poet Raúl Zurita, and Fernando Balcells who made a series of public artistic interventions in the dictatorship context, between 1979 and 1985.
11. Thayer, Willy. ‘Criticism, nihilism and disruption. The advanced after Margins and Institutions’. In: *Art and Politics*. Santiago of Chile: Universidad Arcis: Universidad de Chile, Faculty of Arts, 2005, pp.47-63, p.57.
12. Expósito, Marcelo. ‘Getting in and out of the institution: self-empowerment and assembly in contemporary art’, 2006. Electronic resource. Available In: [http://marceloexposito.net/pdf/exposito\\_autovalorizacion\\_es.pdf](http://marceloexposito.net/pdf/exposito_autovalorizacion_es.pdf)
13. Personal communication with Patricia Artés, May 13, 2011.



gesture: the erasure. The erasure of the crime evidence, the fading of the evidence that “progress as a historical rule constitutes the euphemization of violence as a historical rule” [11].

This device becomes particularly significant in the passage that begins with the quotation of Carlos Droguet, ‘I’ll utter one blood, how much blood shed’ (C), as a title. As we hear the tic-tac of a clock, which will mark exactly one minute, each one of the five actors leaning against one of the boards located in the center of the stage, begins to write, erase and rewrite pressured by the clock, crimes of political state violence, so that we see passing before our eyes in one minute, an event that passed in a whole century. In a counterpoint between the individual and the collective, we see names of martyrs, killings, kidnappings and political assassinations pass: Ramona Parra 1946, Slaughter Forrahue 1912, Workers’ Compensation 1938, Ranquil 1934, Rodrigo Rojas de Negri 1986, Matías Catrileo 2008, San Gregorio 1921, Valparaíso 1957, Iquique 1907, Beheaded Case 1985, and Claudia López 1998 The sequence produces a time-intensive experience in the impossible task of withholding the sequence of names that are written, erased and rewritten. The materiality of the letter written on the board excels then, which trace vanishes in the chalk dust. The names that we see appear/disappear become this way as uncatchable as the historical catastrophe which they refer to, and that is repeated throughout the century. “A minute does not contain as much blood” (C), with that sentence the scene closes, pointing out how it is impossible to retain in one image, in one representation, those milestones of violence that tear the chronology, cracking the continuum of the historical narrative. That physical experience of a time-intensive, saturated of conflictivities and uncatchable events, actualizes in one’s body the sensitive mark of impotence before the erasure, of the truncated, of the violence of a society that has repressed (in the sense of embody through denial) part of its history. In this way, Celebration brings into play a micropolitics of the form that disengages the conventional mechanism of unidirectional pedagogical communication, faces the spectator to an intensive memory fragility.

The historical view from the discontinuity and disruption, finds resonance in the own structure of the play, which selects from the staging’s own resources, understood ‘not as a style composition that folds on itself, but as building shapes and discursive practice, as a tool for thinking critically, in the same line as certain avant-garde artists have exercised’ [12]. With minimal scenery props – boards, a couple of chairs, carton posters- and using citations to historical documents, political speeches, radio audio files, press releases, public figures statements citations, Celebration constructs effective pieces of counter-information, as historical micro-thesis. These micro-thesis are structured on contradictions between the official/unofficial versions on different events, on tensions within the popular movement itself, or on complicities between economic discourse and political discourse articulated by the dominant bloc, setting 15 scenic fragments. Each one of them, works autonomously as small ‘educational pieces to assemble’, so that the play may, according to their contexts of exhibition, break apart or fragment, and rearrange its structure. Thus, Public Theater finds an effective communicational/didactic theatrical model for educational policy which reads: “to create political awareness, bringing memory from a critical perspective, questioning our historical becoming” [13].

It should be noted that during the seasons in theaters, the play was exhibited conventionally. Interestingly, its success in the commercial and professional circuit, being selected for one of the most legitimating instances of Chilean theater environment: the national sample at the

2011 Santiago a Mil International Festival. Notable is that the group accepts to participate by negotiating the establishment of “popular prices” (reasonable prices) to access the play, cracking the stratified system of tickets and passes provided by the organization of the festival, which orders and segments their audiences. But Celebration also has circulated strictly non-theatrical spaces: public and private schools, municipal cultural centers, neighborhood councils, political rallies. It is in these scenarios that the structure of the play can be modified and adapted to precise situations. This happens, for instance, in the 1st Meeting of Libertarian Theater [14] held at the USACH and organized to raise funds in support of the young men and women charged by the so-called ‘Bombs Case’, processed according to the antiterrorism law, passed just under the purview of the 1980 Constitution. In this space some of the fragments of the play are exhibited, precisely those that most directly problematize the charter, such as the picture where we see three actors playing “La Gran Capital” (Monopoly), a board game that can be seen as a playful reiteration of the behaviors and values of the capitalist world, and that in the scene is used for problematizing the “change in the game rules” as a possibility of changing the laws governing the social order, an indirect reference to the relationship between the 1980 Constitution and the penetration of neoliberalism in Chilean society.

In these non-theatrical contexts, the play loses the contours of a finished product. It thus becomes an interventional device, either in collaboration with other artistic groups or as a means of political communication. Exhibited in heterodox spaces and under whatever format, the play encourages situations within popular education: dialogic situations, micro-assemblies. The dialogues allow bearing witness that spectators can gain knowledge that members of Public Theater ignored, and this reverses the power marks of the pedagogical relationship and enriches the political discussion. These dialogues become part of that experience that arises between actors and audiences, as it ‘collectivizes what each one collects from the play, and within socializing the opinion is subject once again to a process of modification’ [15].

The process that Public Theatre has experienced with Celebration is an incipient process, where interventions in non-theatrical spaces seem to still be marked by a certain one-sidedness, whether because the political practice is still being conceived predominantly in terms of political awareness or because the dialogues held after the show still assume Public Theater’s role as “master of ceremony”. However, the discovery of a didactic communication device, which can be assembled or disassembled, and that can be transformed according to different situations, and with a disruptive and meticulous work on micropolitical sensitive forms, put already into practice a political theatrical imagination. Suggesting is that in one of Celebration’s exhibitions at a municipal cultural center at El Bosque, a leader of the women’s organization in the district, who during the years of dictatorship had been part of the working class villages social movements, speaks, and referring to the weakening of popular movements in the last years, said: “We do not yet have believed the story, we are not part of the play yet” [16]. These words give a glimpse on how the play not only operates at the level of awareness of the official history omissions and its monolithic construction of ‘Fatherland’, but it also enables de-identification effects that affect the spectator, altering their status as such, to be placed on an equal footing with those political actors evoked by the play. Maybe there lies the possibility for this play to enable political subjectivation devices.

*Fernanda Carvajal (Santiago de Chile, 1982). Sociologist, Master on Communication and Culture from the University of Buenos Aires, is co-author of the book “Nomadism and assemblies. Theater companies in Chile 1990-2008” and member of the Red de Conceptualismos del sur (South Conceptualisms Network).*

#### Footnotes:

14. Event dedicated to raising funds for the defense of those accused of the so-called ‘Bombs case’ where they were arrested 14 youths, members of squatter houses related to anarchism, accused of installing explosives exploded in various public buildings in Santiago of Chile between 2005 and 2010, and being members of a terrorist organization.

15. Personal communication with Patricia Artés, May 13th, 2011.

16. Audio record of the conversation after the play held in El Bosque district on April 15th, 2011.

# Ultra-red

## Art, Collectivity, and Pedagogy: Changing the World in which we Live



The art world is going through a period of intense fascination with collectives. This is often combined with an enthusiastic interest in pedagogy. Curators, critics and institutions champion collectivity and pedagogy as, among other things, an alternative or corrective, if you will, to the art-star economy of the 1990s and its spectacular demise. These recent interests have benefited from the enormous influence of the French philosopher, Jacques Rancière. Seeking an explicitly political inflection in the terms of pedagogy and collectivity, many have turned to Rancière's writings on spectatorship and the emancipatory potential in art. This appropriation in the visual art context has tended to ignore the extent to which Rancière's own thinking occurs within a nexus of pedagogy and the collectivities that occur in performance. Returning to that nexus affords us the opportunity to tease out some of the implications in this shift from the image as teleology to a performative scene of reception.

As we move through yet another financial collapse, we find the focus on collectivity and pedagogy also playing out against the very real politics of a so-called "crisis in education." This is not only about money. The changes governments are making to curriculums, staffing and financial-support programs signal fundamental shifts in understanding of the social function of education. The long-standing alliance between the art world and the education system, underscored in state policy, bureaucracy and funding mechanisms, means the crisis in education is also a crisis for the arts. Recent waves of protest against cuts to arts and education programs further underscore this alliance. The meeting point between education and art remains a site for democratic struggle. But what are the terms and methods of that struggle now? It is certainly worth taking the time to investigate whether there is something in the conjunction of collectivity and pedagogy in the art world that can help us navigate, perhaps even inform, the changes being made to this world in which we live. These brief notes are a modest contribution to that investigation.

One way to navigate through the current "crisis" is to monetize creativity. This is precisely the approach taken in Britain as part of the conservative coalition government's "Big Society" policies. Volunteerism, concern for ones neighborhood and creativity are now incorporated into neoliberal economic policies. Everyone is invited to participate as both producers and consumers. Social services once provided by the state are being shifted to community volunteers who develop and run art programs that double as care settings for children and the elderly. Artists are also invited to forge or participate in entrepreneurial collectives that help foster creative ventures beneficial to business. And they are encouraged, and in some cases even commissioned, to create work or organize programs celebrating specific cases of volunteerism that will inspire and instruct others in how to contribute to their communities [1]. Through these initiatives, artist collectives and educators experience mounting pressure to effectively repurpose themselves to meet the needs of neoliberalism. Artists are no strangers to entrepreneurship. It is the measure of the artist's position among the middle classes. That measure then gets distributed throughout a

complex of institutions that produce subjects as artists. For example, the preparation of individual young artists for the market is a primary function of art schools. Design programs and entire courses of study continue producing workers for culture industries, particularly the rapidly expanding media, gaming and internet markets. Almost schizophrenically, just as art schools and museums participate in the production of individualized artists they espouse sincere investments in radical politics based on participation. As a way of reconciling this contradiction, the forms of participation generally promoted in academic settings and supported by state and private sponsors of the arts has a lot to do with collectivity and education. Consistently, the artist defines the terms for shared transformative experiences. The claim is then made that collective experience, to the extent that it counters the alienating fictions of the modern world and points to the possibility of new experiences, is inherently political. Of course, among the fictions to be countered, is the authority of the art world. However, at the same time that collectivity exposes the rise of an art world hegemony over cultural terms, the terms of reception still remain safely within the expert purview of the artist.

What then is the ideological assumption of this conundrum? Having learned that authority over reception remains the sole domain of the artist, the art spectator is better prepared to function politically. The neoliberal maneuvers described above, threaten to make the claims about collectivity and pedagogy nothing less than cynical shibboleths of liberalism. Only naïvely can we continue presuming something inherently radical, or anti-capitalist, about collectivity and believe that it would somehow remain immune to commodification. These latest maneuvers in participatory or relational practice join a long list of conundrums concerning the relationship between the art world and its publics. The concept of performativity, for example, once emphasized the contingent status and the unpredictable force of art regardless of discipline. The performative analysis of art objects and images meant that objecthood is actually constructed through the encounters spectators have with the work. For some, this implied that the object mediates between the intention of the artist and the experience of the spectator. For others, performativity sets the intention of the artist adrift in an ocean of signification. In this reading, the point-of-view of the audiences provides the only certain coordinate. "Relational aesthetics" proposed to carry these projects forward. Yet, the great debates about relational art have now moved from the pages of art magazines and journals to sit docilely alongside other terms in art schools (such as performance) that once threatened to dismantle the very assumptions of aesthetic judgment and its author functions [2]. Similarly, questions regarding spectatorship brought the politics of feminism, anti-racism, post-colonial struggle, class struggle and anti-fascism, and many other concerns into art schools and other art institutions. Artists and activists, often one in the same, formed strong alliances and articulated robust and influential projects for the emancipation of the oppressed. What art brought to these struggles was the recognition of the critical importance of practices of representation as sites for democratic struggle.

*Ultra-red members Robert Sember (New York) and Dont Rhine (Los Angeles) prepared this text in consultation with other members of Ultra-red. Ultra-red (founded 1994) is an art collaboration consisting of various members who are also involved in activist movements. The group sets up exchanges between art and political organizing around constituencies involved in migrant rights, the AIDS crisis, fair housing, and anti-racism. Their work consists mainly of sound art, presented in workshops, installations, broadcasts, performances, and via their online record label Public Record.*

### Footnotes:

1. The unabashed instrumentalizing of artists in the service of politics and business is clearly apparent in this description of "The Creative Challenge," one of the project highlighted on the Big Society website:

The project aims to involve Britain's finest creative minds, from the arts, advertising, design, music, film and digital to help people tell their Big Society stories. We think that the best way to get people excited and involved in the Big Society is to help the countless amazing people and communities around the UK tell their own stories, rather than publicise it through a big marketing campaign. To do that, we wanted to involve Britain's finest creative minds, from the arts, advertising, design, music, film and digital. We started by bringing together an amazing group of people to think about how we do that in practice. We're going to be developing some of the ideas that emerged from the session into what we're calling 'creative ventures'. We'd like to connect those ideas to sources of funding, where we can see benefit to both businesses and the ventures in doing so. It's a great opportunity to build the Business society. We really hope that those ventures will go a long way to building a stronger, more creative big society. ([www.thebigsociety.co.uk](http://www.thebigsociety.co.uk))

2. The cannon on relationality to which students are exposed — most likely texts by Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop or Grant Kester—mostly preserves or, rather, conserves, the stability of the positions of the artist and the audience. Writing in the 1990s amidst the early boom of artist entrepreneurship, Bourriaud talks about the convivial relation between audience members as mediated by the artist-authored object. By the time of the years of George Bush and Tony Blair, Bishop introduces the slightest adjustment by replacing conviviality with antagonism. Both writers leave intact a linear trajectory that begins with the artist and ends with (and, among) the audience. In other words, there is never any danger of a reversed flow along the same channel, from audience to artist. One of the most striking instances of this conserving of the status quo appears in Bourriaud's collection of exhibition essays, *Relational Aesthetics*. In the first essay, titled "Relational Form", Bourriaud claims to attribute relational aesthetics to Althusser's notion of Aleatory Materialism, a formulation that appears in the posthumously published text, "The Underground Current of the Philosophy of the Encounter." The encounter of interest for Althusser is that political conjunction around an investment or demand that endures to constitute a movement. Some might call this political organizing. Bourriaud transforms the encounter into an open field without stakes and purged of investments. He outlines a series of relational forms that serve as a neutral field on which the desires of the artist has the potential to meet those of the public. For Althusser, of course, the concept of the encounter had a very determined stake. Namely, it served as a final attempt on his part to explain a materialism for a communist movement soon to slip into the historical irrelevance of Eurocommunism and Democratic Socialism.



Among these projects of liberation, we find repeated calls and strategies for what Rancière (2007) terms “the emancipated spectator.” Anxious that the distance between the active performer and the passive spectator constitutes an oppressive inequality, the artist demands that the spectator participate in the action. This collaboration is proffered as a resolution to the conundrums of performativity, in that it circumvents the separation between producer and spectator resulting from the mediation of spectacle, art object or commodity. This is the great romance of collectivity. Yet, as Rancière observes, it is the artist who inevitably determines the terms of participation. Paradoxically, then, the project to have performer and spectator come together as a community of equals actually re-inscribes the very terms of inequality that constitute their difference. This inequality manifests the very class distinctions that often condition the artist and the others she hopes to emancipate. To proffer an alternate to the emancipation of the spectator, Rancière considers what art may learn from the concept of intellectual emancipation proposed by Joseph Jacotot, the 19<sup>th</sup> century pedagogue. Jacotot worked against the prevailing notion that education involved the unmediated transmission of knowledge from the mind of the master to the mind of the student. A century-and-a-half later the Brazilian pedagogue, Paulo Freire, would describe this as the “banking model” of education [3]. Jacotot suggested as an alternative, the equality of intelligences, which recognizes that teachers and students both have something to learn and something to teach. Equality is based more on procedure than content. The master does not “teach *his* knowledge to the students, [rather] he commands them to venture forth in the forest, to report what they see, what they think of what they have seen, to verify it, and so on” (2007: 275). Thus, the collaborative venture suggested by Rancière by way of Jacotot, is predicated on the differently productive labors of teachers and student, artists and spectators. It is only because of their different pathways through the forest, a metaphor of course for the world, including the world of art, that collaborative learning is possible on the part of both master and student. As we understand it, Rancière’s suggestion is that rather than working to change or redeem art through collectivity, collectivity is constituted in the encounters we have following our emergence from the spectacle of art. His emphasis is also not on what art has to teach but what artists might learn from those who teach, which is the shift between a kind of absorptive creativity and verification. Thus, in his distant stillness, his venture into the forest of the spectacle, the viewer is a poet. “He makes his poem with the poem that is performed in front of him. She participates in the performance if she is able to tell her own story about the story that is in front of her” (2007: 280). Participation is interpretation and creation, the weaving of what is witnessed, known and recollected into a new story of learning. Elsewhere, he describes this intertwining as, “a new fabric of common experience, a new scenery of the visible and a new dramaturgy of the intelligible. It creates new modes of individuality and new connections between those modes, new forms of perception of the given and new plots of temporality” (2010: 141). The stress on the “new” in these formulations is formidable—new stories, new individualities, new visions, new intelligence. Rancière’s conclusion that “words, stories and performances can help us change something in the world in which we live” (2007: 280) suggests that it is around the exchange of the new that art and politics are aligned. Is this proposition fundamentally different from the many earlier claims that art’s power is located in originality and experience, and that its politics consist of the shaking of certainty, the posing of questions? If we wish to articulate specific, collective political demands, must we leave art for activism? Refusing that dichotomy makes it possible to locate a political demand in the way in which we share, as spectators, our encounters with the world in which we live.

Rancière continues with the image of a journey into the forest as analogous to Jacotot’s notion of intellectual emancipation. Just as one makes his or her way through the forest, an emancipatory encounter with art entails processes of “observing, comparing one thing with another thing, one sign with one fact, one sign with another sign . . .” (2007: 275). The repetition of the word “one” in this case echoes his many other representations of this process as a solitary, even subjective experience. Yet, what might we make of that part of Jacotot’s parable where, as a collective, they “report what they see, what they think of what they have seen, to verify it”? We are reminded of that other allegory of adventure in the forest found in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, with its account of inversions and disruptions, possibilities and new selves in the Forest of Arden. In the end, the new must face the discipline of the law. The potentially liberating announcement that “all the world’s a stage” issued by the melancholic aristocrat Jaques who insists on remaining outside of the world, gets tempered by the observation that death is the punctuation to every drama. Likewise, the play with genders and sexualities found in the forest is ultimately resolved by conforming to the legal terms of marriage. Neither the institutions of nobility nor marriage suffer any alteration. Our worlds are conditioned by the particularities of this time with its particular partitions of space.

How *do* we change this world? Rancière’s critique of projects to emancipate spectators is not a defense of passivity. Rather, his adjustment draws attention to the active characteristics of spectatorship. Within the context of the theater, the site Rancière selects for his discussion, this adjustment distinguishes clearly between active participation and the action of the performance itself. When the two are confused, when spectators are considered active only if they are in the action, radical interventions are limited to those based on presence, on how we are together rather than what happens when we are together. Yet, as described by Rancière, the spectator works beyond the present time of the performance, the actors or the venue. She situates the theater within the world of memory and desire constituted by experience. What remains to be determined is how that process is organized by and what it returns to the moment of the encounter between text, action and spectatorship in the performance?

Every theater has its politics. These politics exist in the narratives of the stage as well as in the transactions that take place between performers and actors. Cultural materialist and new historicist scholarship place these domains, the world of the play and the world of the theater, in a dialectical relationship. The result is that spectatorship is historicized. The reception of a performance cannot be read from the text of the performance alone but must be related to the other social text of the moments in which it was acted. Jaques’s metaphor, “All the world’s a stage,” assumes a chiasmic reflection, “A stage is all the world.” Indeed, the configuration of spectatorship in Elizabethan theater ran parallel to that of the social order. Different social classes literally had different vantage points on the action, each of which was configured around the privileged point-of-view of the monarch. Also, theater performances were but one of many spectacles of the state available to citizens. Just a few miles from the theater, for example, in the village of Tyburn, public executions shared many of the conventions of spectacle used in the theater. The embodiment of spectatorship within the physical and social architecture of the Elizabethan theater was balanced against the address of the actors as they worked to exploit the antagonisms between these points of view and associations to wring from their lines the poetry of innuendo and paradox. The performance was an orchestration of the different spectatorships present in that moment. Contemporary accounts suggest that what has become buried in the work of the spectator was more immediate and public in these events.

Rancière suggestion that there may be radical possibilities in theater’s encounter with pedagogy specifies a particular pedagogical orientation. He does not address the profound differences between theatrical conventions or acknowledge the archive of such encounters that already exists as a result of bringing art and pedagogy together. The radical aesthetics in these histories teach us how we might use this moment of crisis in both education and the arts to develop practices and build institutions that subvert the neoliberal appropriations of teaching, learning and poetry or, more ambitiously, world-making. In the 1960s, for example, a broad arena of practices that extended from militant inquiry to popular education, from the pedagogy of the oppressed to the theatre of the oppressed, from Third Cinema to participatory action research, and from the Freedom Schools to experiments in participatory democracy, perceived another work as possible in both art and education.

A number of extraordinary examples of the interplay between art, education and radical politics may be found in the anti-colonial and post-colonial struggles in the global south. Augusto Boal’s “Theater of the Oppressed,” rooted in Paulo Freire’s pedagogical innovations, is a well-known example. Another is the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o undertaken in the mid-1970s with the residents of Kamiruthu Village located in the forests in Kenya’s Limuru district. The residents of the village included workers from a Canadian-owned shoe factory, farm laborers from tea and coffee plantations, and those who worked in the service sector. Many had been members of the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army (Mau Mau). The invitation for him to come and teach arose from the contradiction between the promise of the anti-colonial struggle and conditions post-independence. As recounted by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, the project was an exercise in his emancipation from the role of bourgeois intellectual to participant in the post-colonial struggle: “the process . . . was one of continuous learning. Learning of our history. Learning of what obtains in factories. Learning of what goes on in farms and plantations. Learning our language, for the peasants were essentially the guardians of the language through years of use. And learning anew the elements of form of the African Theatre” (45). The shift in language from English to Gikũyũ amounted to an “epistemological break” for him and his collaborators and established the possibility for performers and spectators in the village to engage in discussions about the proletarianisation of the peasantry in the area. Under these conditions, artistic considerations are not limited to the solitary

#### Footnotes:

3. We are by no means the first to comment on the similarity between the notion of “intellectual emancipation” and the “banking model” of education. We have noted with some curiosity, however, the efforts to which commentators like Bingham and Biesta (2010) have gone to distinguish between the terms of emancipation proposed by Rancière and Freire respectively. Their claim is that Freire proposed a psychological emancipation of the pupil whereas Rancière’s emancipation is political. It is an interesting dichotomy that even Rancière’s writings on pedagogy resist. In the process of making this argument Bingham and Biesta repeat the very de-politicizing of Freire that made his work palatable in North America. This de-politicizing is accomplished, in part, by de-historicizing Freire’s work. Freire was writing at the point when many anti-colonial and national struggles in the global south had shifted to wrestling with the ideological conditions of development. The phrase, “banking model” underscores the significance of discussions regarding the terms by which social and economic evaluations of education and other social institutions would be determined. These discussions were connected to bass organizing across the continent around the issues of the poor, exemplified in movements informed by liberation theology, which drew clear lines of antagonism between the struggles of the poor and the development agendas of governments sympathetic too or held hostage by the U.S. its European partners. At the very least, Freire deserves recognition for placing the so-called “psychological” emancipation in a dialectical relation with political projects of emancipation. Much like the refusal to engage with the resonances between Rancière and Althusser’s work as a result of Rancière’s early critique of early Althusser, so we stand to lose many significant lessons from a sincere engagement between the work of Freire and Rancière.

process of “observing, comparing one thing with another thing, one sign with one fact, one sign with another sign.” This theater inhabits its world quite differently. To begin with, the performances function as part of a much longer encounter between performers and spectators, affording opportunities for each to share what it is that they have seen and heard. Thus, in addition to an encounter between artist and publics, a radical aesthetic attends to the choreography of reception. In these scenes spectators encounter each other and, dialogically, inhabit shared processes of reflection, analysis and action.

Over the past few years we have met many students, teachers and curators who claim collectivity and pedagogy as critical alternatives to mainstream practices. Despite those aspirations, there is the risk that both will simply function like an art medium. They will become sites for an obsessive scramble for the new. Even under the rubric of “social practice”, participation has become a venue for the production of authorships or art practices that can circulate within the conventional economies of the art world without radical consequence. The relational is easily affirmed as scored, scripted, and staged by the artist and the status quo is preserved. Sure, we can treat these spectacles of participation as yet another opportunity for the kinds of processes Rancière outlines, fashioning our stories from what we see of other’s lives. If we do not address our conditions of production, however, we should not be surprised that we constantly find ourselves returning to the same conundrum, which is to say, the problem of the relationship between artist and spectator [4]. The problem is not the presence or absence of collectivity or relational practices. Rather, it is a question of what is at stake in that relation. Without clarifying what it is exactly that binds us in our relation, collectivity is easily repurposed for use by the status quo. Within the global north, at least, this is a status quo that believes that the entrepreneur, and not brutal monopoly, acts as the primary motor of capitalism. The artist as producer is happily accommodated as an entrepreneur and the stake in this accommodation justifies the very neoliberal revisions that are advancing within both the educational sphere and the art world. Liberal economics holds that the entrepreneur is the subject of economic competition, the creative force of capitalism. From this belief, the state claims to organize itself around the interests of the small-business owner [5]. Artists are welcome to participate in this role of small-business owners, the so-called “engines of the economy.” The various apparatus of the state convince workers that their precarity makes them dependent upon the health of the entrepreneurs. To accommodate innovations by the entrepreneurial class, workers are encouraged to learn new skills, which is the primary role assigned to the education system. Educators, in turn, are required to correlate every aspect of their curriculum with the needs of the labor market. This is a pedagogy of the market. Thus, when the neoliberal state touts the artist as an entrepreneurial innovator, they are hailing the very political subject that aligns contemporary politics under capitalism. The entrepreneur plays the part of the ideological hero in capitalism. However, it is in fact the logic of accumulation that composes the whole mise-en-scène. Given these conditions, it is hard not to wonder at what point collectivity will be fully subsumed by the demand for (start-up) companies. As noted earlier, we can no longer assume a direct link between radical politics and working collectively. We were taught this lesson in the 1990s if we care to remember, when the early rush of new technology art co-operatives quickly cashed in their claims of a radical new creative culture to form small businesses. Echoes of this betrayal may perhaps be found in the correlation between the “over-production” of young artists with advanced degrees and the respectability of collectivity. As art school graduates expand the ranks of unemployed youth, so-called new practices in collectivity and pedagogy substitute self-sufficiency for any entitlement to public services. This is not to say that one resolves the problematic of collectivity by turning to “the political” or, by doing “political critique.” It is nothing less than ironic that when the political appears in art discourse it often signifies a considerable distance separating the art practitioner from the organization of political movements in their tumultuous collectivity. For this reason, the unsettled relationship between the two fields of practice underscores the problematic itself and, as such, a theme to be investigated rather than an argument to be settled. How one goes about such an investigation would benefit from a discipline of deliberate recounting of experience, of sharing what was heard and seen or thought to be heard or seen in the dense forests of art and political activity.

#### Footnotes:

4. The process by which the art work mediates the encounters between spectators is central to Freire’s procedure of “thematic investigation.” The political poetics of this mediation as a form of world-making carries through the political possibilities of art identified by Rancière. In contrast to Rancière’s emphasis on the solitary spectators wandering through the play of ideas produced from the meeting of spectacle and memory, Freire focuses on the encounter between spectators. At every point in the four stages of co-investigation outlined by Freire, the investigatory team (an interdisciplinary collective including the full-participation of members of the very population whose practices are being investigated) return the analysis to the collective, not to inform the population what they think (or, worse, what they should think), but to present lived contractions in object form. Riddled with irresolution and discursive complexity, the object ignites further problematics generative of further reflection and the refinement of terms. Thus, the object of the investigation is not what the population thinks but the very mechanisms of thought. This presents knowledge at the level of dialogical epistemology rather than as some ontological idealist category. If the dialogic becomes a condition of both the form and the content of the investigation, then an analysis is not the function of producing a single author but is the process by which a collective constitutes itself. The discursive site of the investigation shifts from a given to an effect of the investigation.

5. Liberal bourgeois economics holds that the entrepreneur is the creative force of capital and the subject of economic competition. Thus, bourgeois economics will claim to organize the entire state apparatus around the interests of the small-business owner. Liberal politicians on both the left and the right argue that current high rates of unemployment will only be solved by growth in small businesses. To underscore the dependency of workers on small businesses, this rhetoric is accompanied by aggressive attacks on organized labor, particularly public sector workers, and the poor, immigrant working class. As discussed by Foster, J.B., McChesney, R.W. and Jonna, R.J. (2011), however, competition is a fiction and the small entrepreneur is a capitalist fantasy, like a superhero the saves the day only in comic books and Hollywood movies produced by a handful of global media conglomerates. The state, in fact, is organized around and by monopoly. Here monopoly means simply the power of a few corporate giants to control the state apparatus.

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## **<http://www.spunk.org/texts/art/sp000338.html>**

### THE THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED IMAGE THEATER TECHNIQUES: RASHOMON

Inspired by filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's study in multiple perspectives, Rashomon is an improvisatory technique that highlights the role of perception in the creation of the "Other." Rashomon is specifically designed for the study of the rigid patterns of perception that create a negatively-charged Other, in an oppressive, closed, recurring situation; as such, it is particularly suited for exploring the role of individual perception in generating biases and hate.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE TECHNIQUE

1) Workshop members are asked to volunteer to tell the story of an incident of oppression that has happened to them, and that is likely to recur. The situation must involve well-established, antagonistic relations with others. The oppression is experienced by the narrator, or protagonist, as an impasse; it results from the objective interaction of people situated in a circular, conflictual social setting.

2) When all the stories have been heard, the group votes and chooses the story that has evoked the greatest collective resonance. The protagonist of the featured story then chooses fellow participants to play the other characters of the story, and together they improvise the scene.

3) Next, the protagonist makes an exaggerated image, involving the whole body, of how he/she felt and saw each of the other characters during the preceding scene, and gives them their corresponding image. They, in turn, take it, wear it, and freeze. The protagonist finally makes an image of how he/she felt and saw him/herself, and freezes. Keeping their images as masks, the characters then begin to improvise the same story, repeating the same dialogues and interactions.

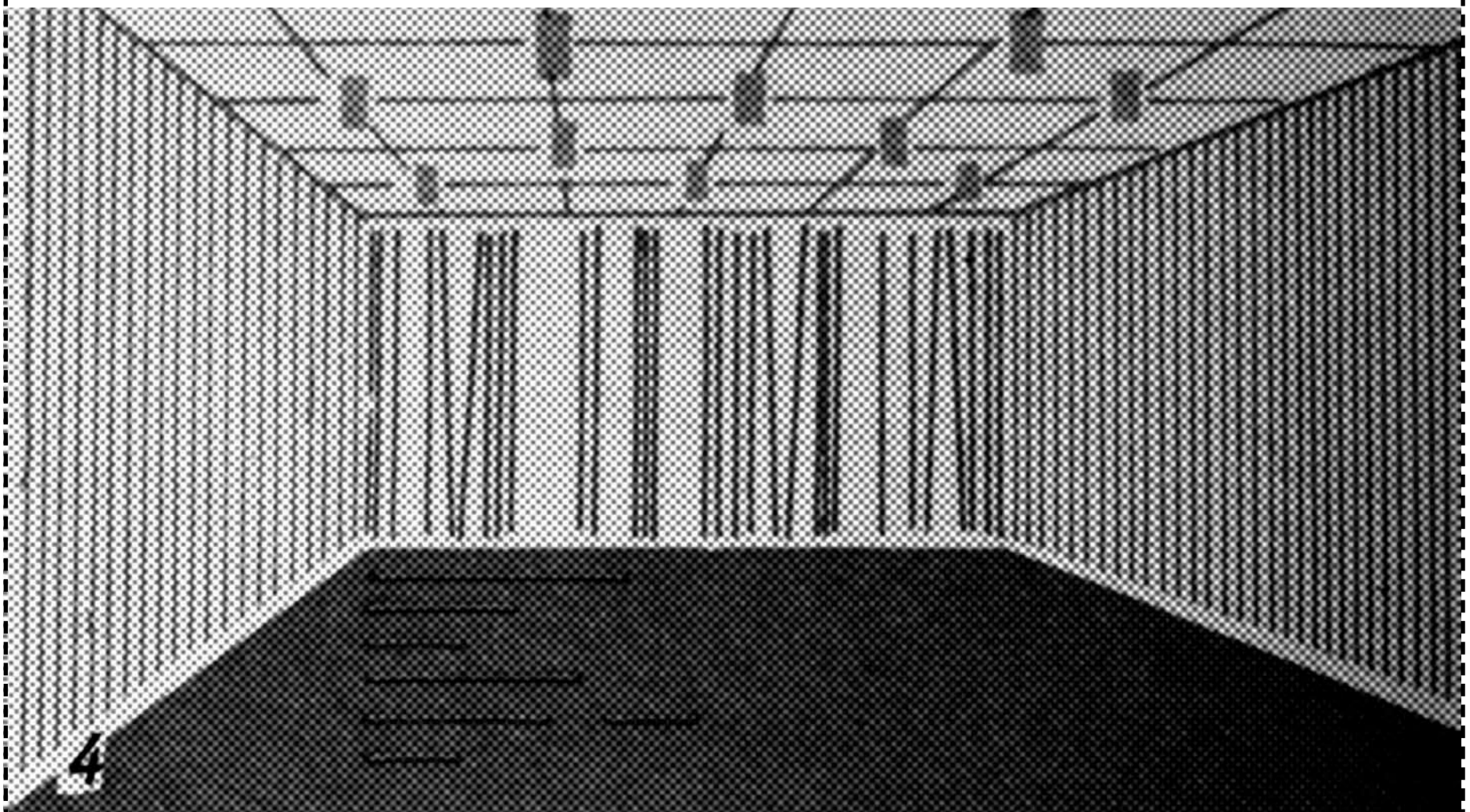
4) Each of the other characters then gets to create a set of images that all will wear during successive improvisations. Each time, the dialogue and the interactions are filtered by the masks. The number of improvisations depends on the number of characters.

5) When all the images have been generated, the scene is improvised once more. This time, however, the characters can alternate between the masks that they have worn; they can choose at any given moment the one that feels most comfortable to them or that best helps them to obtain what they want.

6) At this point, the study of a circular, closed situation ends, and there begins a new moment: attempts to transform the situation itself. The Rashomon technique now expands into a lightning forum. The characters shed all masks and improvise the scene one last time. But now, members of the audience become "spect-actors." They can yell Stop and intervene in the action at any given moment by replacing the protagonist in order to show him/her alternatives to the behavior illustrated in the scene, alternatives that they feel are more empowering.

Rashomon is based on the premise that our perception of the Other is a social construct mediated by stereotypes. It also posits that, within the context of the "spect-actor" relation, the use of living body imagery in a three-dimensional space to explore patterns of perception that give rise to deformed, incomplete, or mistaken impressions offers the opportunity to develop a unique critical perspective. Rashomon is a powerful critical tool that can be used to collectively challenge stereotypes and promote greater understanding of empathy with others.

From the documents of the Theater of the Oppressed Laboratory in New York which has initiated and organized seven intensive workshops led by Augusto Boal in New York City through the auspices of The Brecht Forum--the latest held at The Brecht Forum in March 1993



...the theater is a weapon.  
A very efficient weapon.  
For this reason one must fight for it.  
For this reason  
the ruling classes strive to take  
permanent hold of the theater  
and utilize it as a tool for domination.  
In so doing,  
they change the very concept  
of what 'theater' is.  
But the theater can also be  
a weapon for liberation.  
For that, it is necessary  
to create appropriate theatrical forms.  
Change is imperative.

Augusto Boal. Theater of the oppressed.  
Preface to the 1974 edition

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Платформа «Что Делать?» - это коллективный проект, создающий пространство взаимодействия между теорией, искусством и активизмом. Работа платформы осуществляется через сеть коллективных инициатив и их диалог с интернациональным контекстом.

Founded in early 2003 in Petersburg, the platform "Chto delat?" is a collective initiative that is aimed at creation and developing a dialogue between theory, art, and activism and about the place of art and poetics in this process.

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