

Politics and Community Engagement in Doctoral Theatre Research

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Introduction – An Insight into the Political in the Doctoral Theatre Research

This volume offers an insight into the political in the doctoral theatre research as it was presented at the 8th *Conference of Doctoral Studies in Theatre Practice and Theory* organized by the Theatre Faculty of Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in November 2017. This conference was special for multiple reasons. First and foremost, it marked a turning point in the course of the doctoral conferences held by the Theatre Faculty. It was the first conference focused on a particular topic, with politics and community engagement standing in the centre of everyone's interest. In the past, the conferences were open to all theatre students wanting to share their research, which sometimes led to a considerable fragmentation of the research areas. In 2017, the faculty continued to be open for all yearning to learn about the tendencies of contemporary theatre research but prioritized to explore one research area in depth. The decision to explore one specific topic proved to be incredibly stimulating as the conference attracted participants from all over the world, who shared their impressive and inspirational research.

The 2017 conference also marked the beginning of the performative turn in the possibilities of how to present one's research. The introduction of the "performative lecture" format enabled the participants to look for different ways of presenting their research, enriching the conference with the unique artistic dimension of theatre research. The performative element of the conference is hard to capture on paper, but we hope that the monograph reflects the scope of the meaning of political and communal engagement. It is critical to discuss these topics in the contemporary world, where performing arts are often perceived as a pure entertainment, a way of spending one's "free" time, rather than necessity that shapes the environment in which we all live. The political dimension of the monograph is hauntingly relevant even when talking about the events of the past century. The essays in the volume discuss domestic abuse against women in India, Polish participatory theatre, Slovenian independence, theatricality of terror, or immersive theatre. They reflect and analyse different cultural aspects and use diverse methodologies. Yet, most crucially, they all show the importance of the theatre research in understanding the contemporary society and its cultural and other phenomena.

Klára Škrobánková and Naďa Satková

Politics and Community Engagement

Against Theatrical Community: The Theory of the Joker in the Engaged Political Theatre of Augusto Boal—a Dialogue

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What follows is more or less the unadulterated text of our keynote talk given at *Politics and Community Engagement in Doctoral Theatre Research*, 8th Conference of Doctoral Studies in Theatre Practice and Theory. A keynote is no doubt a peculiar literary form, and in our presentation, it was precisely that form that we wished to challenge—principally in the form of a “staged” dialogue. In a sense, we present here a “keynote speech” in the literal sense of two speaking subjects; the difference in the game we play in this text is that those two speakers are to be seen as quite distinct from the authors of the piece. Indeed, we are merely scribes recording the dialogue of two imagined characters! As Thespis famously said to the tyrant Solon, one should not take the words of actor too seriously—after all, they were merely the words of the character he played, not his own! In an ideal reading, perhaps, our keynote would have been read out by actors.¹ The recruitment of the dialogical form also took inspiration from an earlier dialogic form: it refers back to a long tradition within philosophy—that of appropriating a theatrical and discursive mode in order to stage the “event of truth”. Our references here might include Plato, but also, of course, that self-proclaimed new Plato—Alain Badiou, whom we reference in the text that follows.² This text is also the continuation of a previous staged dialogue (“Rehearsing Boal”) that occurred between the same two characters, and which was eventually published in a bilingual volume: *Theater und Subjektkonstitution/Theatre and the Making of Subjects*.³ The initial discussion is taken up here again in a new context—where the original circumstance was the occasion of the death of Augusto Boal. The dialogue that follows occurs several years later, in which the question of what constitutes a political theatre remains critical.

A tree, a country road, evening

Dramatis Personae:

Two characters, A and B.

A: What we would like to present today for you is, in a way, the opposite of a keynote address! In the first place, and self-evidently, there are two of us, and a keynote address might reasonably be thought as the address of one person, someone no doubt rather eminent and respectable in the field, to an assembly, who expect to hear great insights.

1 See: Boal, Augusto. *Legislative Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 65.

2 Badiou, Alain. *Plato's Republic*. Cambridge: Polity, 2015. Translated by Susan Spitzer.

3 Anderson, Joel – Fischer, Tony. “Rehearsing Boal”. Published as the proceedings of the Kongress der Gesellschaft für Theaterwissenschaft, Bielefeld, Germany; transcript, 2012. The conference was held in Mainz, Germany, 2010.

B: When there are two speakers, no doubt, one has already corrupted both the context of the keynote, the authority of the public speaker, and transformed the assembly into an audience; one has—in a word—invoked the theatre, and the ambiguity of the theatre's modes of address. You may think of our presentation, then, not as a keynote speech but as a kind of theatre...

A: The staging of an academic dialogue—one that now appears here on the written page!

B: But if it is a dialogue—and who knows, perhaps someone one day would stage this for themselves!—presumably we have characters, a setting, a *mise en scène*? Who are we playing and where did our characters meet?

A: Now you're talking. If I recall, they first met on a country road, beneath a tree...

B: Just like in the Socratic dialogues then?!

A: Or like Beckett... or just like here... (*looking about the stage*) two characters meet under a tree, on a country road. They stop to have a conversation.

B: About what?

A: The famous Brazilian theatre-maker and influential theorist of radical theatre practice, Augusto Boal, and his "Theatre of the Oppressed"...

B: The title of the book he wrote was *Theatre of the Oppressed*...

A: Indeed, but it was also the name he gave to his overall approach to theatre. He suggested that, hitherto, all theatre had been a "Theatre of the Oppressor"... For Boal, the theatre was, of course, the theatre of class and other forms of domination—a coercive mechanism of hegemonic control.

B: So we have a topic for discussion. But who are our characters? Do they have names?

A: No more than A and B—...

B: Artaud and Brecht?

A: Ha. No, hardly them. And, although they spell Boal's initials, they are not him, either!

B: Are they us?

A: No, not exactly. In fact, the characters are not us; but we will make use of them for dialectical reasons—to test out a few propositions, to stage something of a philosophical interrogation, but also to indulge the audience (or the reader) too—with a bit of light *badinage*—... But fundamentally, what we want to do, is to return to a previous conversation...

B: Do you mean we've done this before?

A: Have you forgotten? Yes, several years ago—just after the death of poor old Augusto in 2009... if you recall... We met then...

B: We did or A and B did?

A: I see you're trying to trick me! No, our two characters did. They met under a tree, where they discussed the nature of theatre and politics in Boal...

B: Yes, I know, on a country road... But surely this idea of a dialogue—of a stage play, whether delivered by actors or simply written on the page—goes against all that Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed stands for, in both spirit and in practice? After all, in Boal's understanding of the theatre, the idea of dialogue is itself coercive: it exists in order to obliterate possibilities—the invitation to the audience to engage in improvisation, and specifically, the kind of improvisation needed to open up a genuine debate: Boal rejects the pre-scripted event.

A: Perhaps—but Boal's remedy, like Brecht's before him, was not to abandon the theatre altogether, even the classical theatre has its place, within certain limits... It's not for nothing that Brecht wrote the *Messingkauf Dialogues* as a play rather than a philosophical treatise... Let us say, quite the opposite is true: without staging something, there is no theatrical situation to expose—and the whole point here is to stage a potential interruption, in order to circumvent the outcome that the traditional theatre has fixed in advance of the theatrical event...

B: I have a question...

A: Are you interrupting me...?

B: My question is—have we already begun?

A: That's your question?

B: That's your answer?

A: A fair point! Well, let us be done with these preliminaries, and begin in earnest, since you insist. Now, I would suggest we first consider the following proposal: that in Boal's system, it is the Joker who begins the proceedings, and they do so precisely by explaining the rules of the game to the audience. Just as we are doing here now.

B: The rule of disobedience?

A: Exactly.

B: I see. If the audience disobeys the rule of disobedience, then hopefully they will be obedient—is that your plan?

A: It is to be hoped for...

B: And so, in this peculiar form—of the philosophical dialogue—what you hope to do is what...?

A: To address the conference themes, which also orient these published proceedings: politics, community, engagement.

B: And to do so, by returning to Augusto Boal?

A: Several years ago, we presented something similar, which might be thought the first part of this dialogue—it was in Mainz, Germany—where it was then published. And indeed, the subject of that dialogue was...

B: I know, you said—Boal... If I recall, what we sought to do was to offer a revised interpretation of Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed," situating it away from the concerns of "Applied Theatre": the field in which it is usually located today, at least in a British context. "Applied Theatre" refers to forms of "socially-engaged"... or "community"... or indeed (as it is popular to say today) "relational" theatre practice.

A: Yes, we aimed to resituate Boal's theatre as a more explicitly adversarial and indeed political theatre, one perhaps at odds with the consensual politics that had tended to define both "applied theatre" and—yes, quite, as you say—"relational" visual arts practices, which were both established figures in the cultural landscape of the period. The "relational" and the "applied" are terms that have dominated cultural production and its discourses, at least since the early 1990s, and perhaps continue to do so up to the present day.

B: But these two figures seem to me to be very distinct, one being rooted in a shift towards participation in curatorial gallery practises, the other a response to policy agendas of inclusion, community cohesion and a firm recasting of art as socially ameliorative...

A: Yes, they are different: one has dominated the visual art world, while the other has become dominant in theatre, at least in the British context... But as we noted previously, both rest upon what the French political philosopher, Jacques Rancière has called an "antipolitics" — "the political suppression of politics".⁴ We sought, in short, and, confronted with such a situation, to return Boal to the context in which his thinking and practice originated—and indeed the highly charged political context that his work claims to assert.

B: Boal's theories emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, didn't they? A period in Brazil of civil unrest, the hopes of a nascent democracy, soon to be crushed, and then the brutalities of a dictatorship, with its torture and tyranny...

4 Rancière, Jacques. *On the Shores of Politics*. London: Verso, 2007, p. 19. Translated by Liz Heron.

A: Precisely. But also, one shouldn't forget that Boal was strongly influenced by Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" as well the Bolivarian national struggle and, perhaps even, "liberation theology".⁵ In addition to taking on Freire's intention to transform the power relations at play in social life, Boal's dramaturgy extends Brecht's praxis.

B: Indeed, that was our argument—to relocate Boal within a Brechtian tradition. Boal can be seen, we claimed, as (I quote) "the continuation of Brecht by other means; although with the following difference: where Brecht extend [ed] the stage to include the auditorium, Boal extend [ed] the auditorium to encompass the stage."

A: In this previous dialogue, we wanted to attack the attackers of Boal, those who would claim he was no longer relevant "today", but more importantly—to defend him against his defenders; those practitioners who had—we argued—misappropriated him. And not least, had misappropriated the central figure within Boal's political theatre...

B: The peculiar dramaturgical figure of the "Joker"? The figure who addresses the audience in Boal's so-called "forum theatre", and lets them know that this is not an ordinary show?

A: Correct. Typically, for contemporary applied theatre practice, the Joker is understood as a "facilitator"—someone who makes a process or action "easier".

B: I can see where you are going with this: Boal's Joker should do precisely the opposite. And I agree. In fact, Boal himself also used a strange word... a neologism, in fact... the "difficilator" to identify the function of the Joker. As a difficil-ator the Joker serves the dramaturgical function not of making things easy, but of complicating things for the audience, making them difficult.

A: Don't forget that for Boal, the audience member is not just a spectator but a participant in the action—a performer too. You are quite right that Boal was fond of neologisms; he coined a term for his auditor—the "spect-actor"—pointing to the fluid, interactional dynamics of his forum theatre, where spectators are enticed by the Joker into replacing "characters" played by actors in order to alter the outcome of a given situation. Indeed, through this method, in forum theatre, everything is focussed on the theatrical situation itself. There is something quite novel here, and not least because in this way, the theatre of the oppressed, perhaps surprisingly, anticipates aspects of the postdramatic theatre which, according to a recent article by Hans-Thies Lehmann, "is a theatre of situation [not of participation]".⁶

B: Wait! That would mean that Boal's theatre and post-dramatic theatre might be seen as responses to Brecht, different ones, but sharing a family resemblance?

5 Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2017. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos.

6 Lehmann, Hans-Thies. "A Future for Tragedy? Remarks on the Political and the Postdramatic". In *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*. Edited by Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 89.

A: Yes and no. Let me quote some Lehmann for you. He suggests that postdramatic theatres “are not necessarily claiming an ideology of participation and equality between spectators and performers, but rather that they seek ways of creating a meeting point and conflict between aesthetic contemplation and its caesura by the intervention of social reality”. This could in some ways be a description of Boal’s forum theatre.

B: And yet, no two theatres could be more different. It’s a joke to say they even share a family resemblance. After all, isn’t Boal’s theatre notoriously didactical? Hardly fashionable in post-dramatic circles...

A: It is true that the didactic dimension is precisely the part of Brecht—essentially the early Brecht of the *Lehrstücke*—that Lehmann seems to be claiming is now inoperative or of no use to us today. Adorno had proclaimed the same thing, of course, many years before Lehmann.

B: In fact, he stated: this is “not the time for political works of art”.⁷

A: Sure. But let’s stick with postdramatic theatre, which could be characterized as Brecht minus the politics. Indeed, in subtracting Brecht’s politics, for Lehmann, the post-dramatic theatre confronts a rather more dispersed and nebulous condition, which he calls the “political”. The political minus politics.

B: All very paradoxical, no doubt! But what, on the other side, was the problem with being didactical? I feel like I should know...

A: Let me put the difficulty this way: nobody who was prepared to watch the didactic theatre would disagree with it; while nobody disagreeing with it would be prepared to watch it!

B: So it is inert?

A: Remember what you were told as a child: didactic theatre is ineffective. Adorno said: it is preaching to the converted. In other words, it fails according to the very standard it sets itself. It changes precisely nothing. But it is also more than inefficacious—and here there is a paradox: didactic theatre is also, from another viewpoint, dangerously coercive.

B: So such theatre either has no effect on the world, or it is too effective?

A: Yes, as we know from Plato—insofar as it is didactic, theatre corrupts its audience. It teaches them all the wrong lessons; it inculcates in the *demos* a taste for democracy...

B: Wasn’t the “Theatre of the Oppressed” responding to Aristotle, not Plato? Isn’t Boal’s theatre the inversion of the oppression inherent, for him, in Aristotelian dramaturgy, and par-

ticularly the classical tragedy? So theatre has always been a tool either of oppression or of emancipation; but in either case, it is always political.

A: Let us not get too far ahead of ourselves... we were suggesting that there is some resemblance and yet a crucial difference between the theatre of the oppressed and postdramatic theatre, and that difference and resemblance can be discerned in their respective understandings of Brecht.

B: I get it: postdramatic theatre sought to do away with all of that didactic stuff... but what do you mean when you say it “subtracts politics” but not the political? That sounds confusing...

A: What postdramatic theatre wishes to do, let us say, is to reclaim for the theatre—indeed for Brechtian theatre—the primacy of the aesthetic, and indeed its autonomy. The new political theatre is not didactic because it refuses to operate under the sign of a “politics”; it refuses to be the vehicle of a message, or the purveyor of propaganda. In this sense, the aesthetic dimension is seen as resisting the “communicative” dimension of politics. Rather than serve that dimension, the postdramatic wishes to disrupt it. In proclaiming the primacy of aesthetics, however, it underestimated the degree to which aesthetics always remains susceptible to being co-opted by social, cultural and economic forces beyond the theatre. Post-dramatic theatre is no doubt radical, but it becomes easily tolerable and indeed eminently fundable, marketable, and consumable. Just like Brecht’s “culinary theatre!”

B: Isn’t that what we said had happened to Boal’s theatre—that it had been co-opted? What’s the difference, then?

A: The difference is this: Boal’s techniques have been appropriated, at the expense of his dramaturgical principles—just in the same way that postdramatic theatre proclaims itself to be post-Brechtian, by abandoning Brecht’s politics. It freezes politics in an aestheticized political space. Whereas the space of the political, in fact—for both Brecht and Boal—is by no means defined by crude notions of communication, propaganda, political messages—but by the antagonism that structures social relations. A political theatre is a theatre that exposes those antagonisms that culture, the state, and economic structures seek—in the name of upholding “consensus”—to conceal or suppress.

B: And if I understand you correctly, Boal is so keen to preserve theatre as a site of antagonism that he invents this figure of the Joker, who is tasked with preventing any easy consensus from taking root. Thus he is hardly a facilitator at all.

A: And that is why we are seeking a return to Boal’s original inscription of the Joker within a political practice. To adapt a phrase from Lehmann, the Joker is the “caesura”, or at least is responsible for “the intervention of social reality” within the space of the theatrical situation.⁸

⁷ Adorno, Theodor W. “Commitment”. In *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 87. Translated by Shierry Weber Nicholson.

⁸ Lehmann (2013), p. 108.

B: The joker is not to be viewed as an “ameliorative” figure, but is to be grasped instead in terms of a specifically political function—as a structural device for developing a political dramaturgy, one that is aimed at discovering the “social functions of the character”—...

A: You’ve got it in one. Just as Brecht aimed to disclose, through the *Gestus* and *Haltung*, the social attitudes portrayed through the action of the play. Boal—I suggest—leaves behind the idea of the Joker as a “character” (even if this is something, he initially implies in his earliest theorizations), and instead proposes the Joker as, to borrow a phrase from psychoanalysis, a *pointe de capiton* (or “quilting point”) within the discursive articulation of the theatre apparatus (*dispositif*).⁹ He extends the dramaturgy to include the entire theatre situation—the ensemble of social relations that constitute the theatre event.

B: In our previous dialogue we identified this already, subverting the usual reading of Boal’s maxim “rehearsal for revolution”, by placing emphasis on the notion of a radical practice of rehearsal as a specifically political tactic, and ended with the proposition that we still needed a theory of the Joker.

A: And that is what we are doing here today—elucidating such a theory, elucidating the dramaturgical “quilting point” that brings a political theatre into existence. Indeed, it is in this context that the title of our dialogue can be understood: to discover a political theatre that exists only insofar as it emerges “against theatrical community”...

B: If I understand you, the theatrical community is the product of the apparatus of the theatre: a space where things are, where anything is, rendered permissible: but where every transgression is forgiven, and every threat to the status quo circumscribed. Theatre produces a community, but always one conforming to the interests of the state, to the status quo. How does the Joker system offer a way out of this thermodynamic setup? How would the Joker be able to be differentiated from any other actor who appears on the stage?

A: You are imagining that communities are inherently coherent, even theatrical ones, that they are not necessarily riven with difference and suppressed conflicts. The function of the Joker is not to create difference, but merely to fracture the mirror. If I may suggest a well-known theatrical example: that of Hamlet. Bear with me... Hamlet is arguably the first Joker. When he recruits the players, we can imagine he is proposing a session of forum theatre as a means of catching the King. When he suggests that the players hold a mirror up to nature, often seen as acting advice, he is positing that social reality is at stake; nature is held up to the mirror, too. In theatre’s mirror, nature is a construction that can be criticized. Of course, it is not that clouds or camels can be criticized, according to Hamlet, but rather the world, possessed as it is by “things rank and gross in nature”. Let us press the analogy further: what is Hamlet doing if not offering advice to his actors? And yet one can go further and argue that more than advice, Hamlet provides us with a demonstration—and what is being demon-

strated is nothing more nor less than the power of the theatre to break free of the shackles of representation. Now, here I would like to draw attention to an important distinction between the structure of representation and that of theatricality in Hamlet. Where representation presents itself as a consciousness of the world as it “seems” to be, the other deploys theatrical distance and proximity in order to reveal the very thing representation conceals: the distinction between seeming and being—it is this distinction that representation covers up in the form of an “ideological” presentation. In other words, Hamlet demonstrates the possibility of the consciousness of the real of the theatre emerging—in which the real cannot be “represented” but can most certainly be demonstrated. Theatre’s mirror does not merely represent the real, it points to it, alludes to it... beyond the stage...

B: This brings to mind something Brecht wrote—if I may read it out from memory:

Story and performance in the Aristotelian theatre are not meant to provide reproductions of incidents in real life, but to bring about the whole theatrical experience as laid down (complete with certain cathartic effects). Admittedly there is a need for action’s recalling real life, and they have to have a certain element of probability to create the illusions without which empathy cannot take place. But there is no need for the causality of the incidents to be brought out; it is enough that it should not give rise to scepticism. It is only the man who is mainly concerned with those real-life incidents on which the theatre bases its playing who finds himself able to treat the incidents on the stage as reproductions of reality and to criticize them as such. In doing so he is stepping out of the realm of art, for art does not see its primary task as the mere provision of reproductions.¹⁰

I wonder if we might paraphrase Brecht here to say that for Boal: “It is [...] the *Joker* who is mainly concerned with those real-life incidents on which the theatre bases its playing who finds himself able to treat the incidents on the stage as reproductions of reality and to criticize them as such?”¹¹

A: In bringing this passage from Brecht to our attention, you bring several interesting points to the fore. First of all, anybody who is concerned with elucidating the *critical* relation of theatre to the state—and that, after all, is what Boal means when he speaks of the “Aristotelian theatre”—would have to be a philosopher, a critic, the director, the dramaturg... maybe even the actor (in short, almost the entire *Messingkauf* cast!). This, I believe, is what Boal has in mind when he says that the Joker occupies or can occupy each of these positions. But I would also like to stress that it would be a mistake to wholly identify the Joker with any position in particular. The Joker expresses, first and foremost, the dramaturgical treatment of the real in the reproduction of the social order as presented by theatrical representation. In this way, the Joker both invokes the state—or what the philosopher Alain Badiou refers to as the “situation of the representation”—and that which breaks with it, ruptures it.¹²

9 For further reference to the idea of the *dispositif*, read: Foucault, Michel. “The Confession of the Flesh”. In *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*. Ed. and trans. by Colin Gordon. Essex: Longman, 1980; and for *quilting point* read: Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses: Book III*. Trans. Russell Grigg. New York: WW Norton, 1997.

10 Brecht, Bertolt. *Messingkauf Dialogues*. Edited and translated by John Willett. London: Methuen, 1965, p. 98.

11 Ibid.

12 Badiou, Alain. *Rhapsody for the Theatre*. London: Verso, 2013, p. 14. Translated by Bruno Bosteels with the assistance of Martin Puchner.

B: Viewed in this way, I guess the Joker can be seen as invoking what Badiou refers to as an “ethics of play”, since you mention him. I imagine you would prefer to think of this in terms of the dramaturgical function of the Joker, so perhaps we should also add—again, borrowing from Badiou—that the Joker transforms the spectacle into a kind of “presentation” and it is this transformation that serves to further provoke the possibility of a rupture with the state of representation. But then I wonder: where does that leave the audience—the spectator or spect-actor?

A: For Badiou, the audience is a kind of vector—for what he calls a “possible support for Truth”.¹³

B: A big word “truth”! I think you’ll have to define that for me first.

A: In Badiou’s terms, and here I am paraphrasing... truth is what pierces sense, where we should understand “sense” in the same way that Kant speaks of the “sensus communis”. It is something that breaks with, or pierces, the existing or accepted “state of affairs”—in short, that which constitutes our “reality” and its mode of appearance.

B: And this, I suspect, brings us back to Boal’s vision of theatre—at least, to what it is that Boal might contribute to a political dramaturgy. I’m thinking of your Hamlet analogy again. There is no way in which communal sense, as you put it, can be ruptured when one is, so to speak, caught up in it; it is Hamlet’s theatrical knowledge that enables him to stage, quite literally, his political intrigue—in which it is the audience who are let in on, and indeed *into*, the game. Theatre serves a political function, then, precisely because it stands in an ambiguous relation to the state—it is *both*, at one and the same time: the state itself and that which reveals the state for what it is, a particular—and indeed contingent historical formation that might have been, and might well be, otherwise. For the bourgeois state, of course, the state is simply and unequivocally the way things are and must be: the state is naturalized. Thus, in the bourgeois theatre, it is only the state that can win the game that theatre stages. But for Boal—and Brecht before him—they understand it differently; they understand precisely the difference that exists between the representation that reproduces reality as “nature” and the presentation that reveals it to be a constituted nature. A political theatre can and must be both: the representation of existing reality, and the presentation of its fundamental contingency.

A: This is all very good and important and why we should distinguish politics from the kind of politics associated with the State... clearly, they’re not the same thing. The usual perception of political theatre, however, would be to see theatre as simply opposed to the state; yet I would like to suggest that such a perception is in error; it leads only to an impossibility—for on what grounds can theatre “oppose” something as monumentally solid as the state... And this is precisely where we get into trouble with the “efficacy” arguments mentioned earlier. It is asking too much, and for nothing at all, since—in fact—the state in this form does not exist. So, I would suggest, rather than this, we might nuance the point, with the following definition: political theatre should be seen in terms of any mode of *presentation* that opposes that which

the state *represents*—not “the state” but its representations; and specifically the mode of its representation, by means of which it reproduces the illusion of the *permanence* of the existing state of affairs. A political theatre, which we might derive from Boal’s Joker system, in other words, is one that is designed to open up an aesthetic distance from the state and its appearances. But equally, we must acknowledge that theatre’s effects can work in the exact opposite direction, so as to reinforce those appearances. In this sense there are not two theatres—but two ways in which the theatre is always orientated by the presence of the State... To speak of the Theatre and the State is to really speak of the enduring relation that exists between the theatrical situation and the state of existing representations—thus, on the one hand, of the possible mobilization of politics by means of the theatre, and on the other, of its immobilization.

B: And that is why, I suppose, the state is always interested in the theatre? As much as it has always been suspicious of the theatre, it necessarily makes use of it... A potentially dangerous game, perhaps, for those seeking to preserve the status quo, and that is why Plato rightly feared the presence of the theatre in the *polis*. For what is theatre if it is not also a place in which to “think”, as Nicholas Ridout puts it, “disruptively”?¹⁴

A: A nice way of putting it. If one were to insist, however, that a political theatre must act disruptively, I would suggest it can only do so—truly—by returning to the lesson of the so-called didactic theatre. I don’t mean, of course, that theatre must return to some kind of agit-prop-styled political proclamations, that it must hoist placards and banners above the heads of the audience, or hector them with sermonizing speeches, but that it must act “as if” it is possible for theatre to create a politics... As Badiou writes: “to seize the human figure in its generic and complete dimension, including political configurations, certainly, but never reducing it to them”.¹⁵ That is all it can do; but perhaps that is more than enough. After all, it is precisely these configurations that demarcate or outline, for us, theatre’s future political subjects. I do not believe this is overstating theatre’s power or potential “efficacy”, but nor, for that matter, does it underestimate it.

B: So it is not that didactic theatre must be judged against the number of its converts...?

A: Hardly. It is the least important and most misunderstood part of the didactic theatre. What it invokes is fidelity to a possible subject. And that is what, I suggest, distinguishes—to come back to the task of elucidating a “theory of the Joker”—the possibility of a political theatre. Let me put it this way, a political theatre emerges at precisely the point that the audience understand that they are no longer in the “normal theatre”—and that is, in a word, the function of the Joker. It is also—to return to my previous analogy—a bit like Hamlet. Hamlet is not an actor, as we know—but he acts upon and “within” the play he stages for his own reasons. In doing so, in the staging of the play within the play, what Hamlet does is alert the audience, suddenly and powerfully, to the theatre’s specific efficacy: that it can suspend the order of representation.

¹⁴ Ridout, Nicholas. *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism, and Love*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016, p. 4.

¹⁵ Badiou, Alain. *In Praise of Theatre*. Cambridge: Polity, 2015, p. 72.

¹³ Ibid.

B: And so Hamlet is the actor-non-actor, then, just as is Boal's Joker?

A: Exactly. The Joker is not an actor—but an actant... a social actant... In this sense, the theory of the Joker is not another theory of the actor. The Joker is a technique of disruption: it shows—not the theatre that you are going to passively receive as merely entertaining representation—but the theatre within which you must intervene, if you are to live, and live well. If we are to understand the question of whether theatre can be political, in other words, we need first to remind ourselves of what political actions consists...

B: In terms of political theory, the Joker becomes a kind of vanguard figure, who reminds the audience of their interests, at the same time as they reveal the conditions of the political, under which they exist, providing a point of possible organization for the spectator—a means of transforming themselves from mere spectators into “spect-actors”...¹⁶

A: Exactly, the role of the dramaturg for Boal, and for Brecht, is precisely to enact through the techniques of a living and “live” dramaturgy, the necessary presence of social conflict in the onstage action...

B: And a conflict of sociality in the audience?

A: Yes, insofar as the audience forms itself as a kind of coalition of interests, specifically in relation to the central antagonism that binds it into a possible subject of political action.

B: I believe we are now, at last, able to derive a few principles—upon which to construct a theory of the Joker...

A: Indeed, and this is crucial, in lieu of a political theatre—an actual existing example of political theatre. So, let us specify some axioms that might help us define what such a theatre would do. Let us call them, the “axioms of the Joker”...

B: I think the first axiom is something we have already clearly established. It is that the Joker has the function of making things “difficult”—precisely by revealing that things are already difficult. Hence, we can describe Axiom 1 like this: **The Joker reveals *dissensus*.**

A: Exactly. The Joker is the agent of antagonism. Our second axiom refers to that part of our discussion in which we specify the Joker's peculiar relation to the audience. Unlike the normal theatre, which seeks to coerce the audience, through its rhetorical strategies, to accept the resolution of the social conflict—the Joker instructs the audience not to be instructed! In this sense, Axiom number 2 might be put as follows: **The joker guarantees the autonomy of the audience.**

B: The third Axiom refers to the problem of truth. If the audience is instructed not to be instructed, it is because the Joker is committed not to the representation, but to the theatre, as an apparatus to put that representation to the test. Let us say, then, in Axiom 3: **The joker tests fidelity.**

A: Agreed. The Joker ensures the truth of the theatrical situation in the face of the mimetic closure of representation.

B: Ah, and that leads us to our final and fourth axiom.

A: Indeed it does. The fourth axiom is: **The joker prevents the closure of representation.**

B: And that is because the Joker exposes theatre at the “quilting point”, we said. The Joker is both a “point” of discursive articulation, and the means by which theatre can “point” to the play of discourse in its representative function. It is this ostensive ability of the Joker—to “point” to the seam that binds theatre to representation—that defines his function: it is so that the spect-actor might be encouraged to pull at the threads that stitch the theatre to the given “state” of things.

A: In conclusion: we have tried to address, through the figure of the Joker, the themes of the conference—of politics and community engagement... but by suggesting a different order for the same words: to speak instead of the *politics of engagement* and the *community of dissensus*—in fact, of the commonality that *dissensus* produces—and thus of a possible theatrical commons.

B: To that end, we have begun the work of developing a theory of the Joker—by which we mean to describe the principles of a political theatre.

A: But perhaps we should give the last word to old Augusto, who gives the Joker the task of explaining, contextualizing, and even lecturing, after all: if the Joker ensures the ongoing social and political relevance of the theatre—it is because, as Boal says, the “Joker is a man of our own time and does not belong to the universe of the play but to the universe of the audience”.¹⁷

END

¹⁶ Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto Press, 2008. Translated by Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride and Emily Fryer.

¹⁷ Boal, Augusto. “The Joker System: An Experiment by the Arena Theatre of São Paulo”. *The Drama Review* (TDR), Latin American Theatre, winter 1970, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 93.

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The Political in Studying PhD

The Politics of Theatre Craftsmanship versus the Political Craft of Theatre Research

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Since October 2016, i.e. since the last elections, a very intense social conflict and political crisis has arisen in Poland. The government of the right-wing *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* [Law and Justice] party have made some radical changes. The European Commission has expressed their severe concerns about the erosion of Polish democracy and the freedom of the media. On the wave of a conservative revolution, not only the judicial system, public media, refugee policy, education, women's rights and the environment, but also culture, have now become an area of rapid, undemocratic changes and, as a consequence, constantly escalating political conflict. Theatre, due to its special role in Polish history in keeping up national spirit, on the one hand, and inspiring critical, anti-systemic reflection on the other, has turned into a battlefield, and so has the theatre research community.

A special, double issue of "Polish Theatre Journal" ("PTJ") 1–2, 2017) was recently released. It is a paper published jointly by the Theatre Institute in Warsaw and the National Theatre Academy, where I work. We devoted this issue exclusively to the threats to democracy in Polish theatres today. Among the multitude of topics like the political role of international festivals, structural barriers for cross-disciplinary studies in academia or the marginalization of dance in the public funding system, it also touches upon the most widely debated case of political censorship lately—the production of *The Curse* which premiered in February 2017 at Teatr Powszechny in Warsaw, directed by Oliver Frlić from Croatia.

As "The Guardian" rightly put it, the play "examines the relationship between the Polish Catholic Church and the state, and condemns the authorities for failing to respond to allegations of child abuse by members of the clergy. In the play's most notorious scene, an actress simulates oral sex on a plastic statue of the Polish Pope John Paul II, as a sign reads: *Defender of paedophiles*. In another scene, an actor considers the legality of a fictional speech in which she would—hypothetically—raise money to pay for the assassination of Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of Poland's ruling Law and Justice party (PiS)" (Davies 2017). An Episcopal Declaration proclaimed that the production was blasphemous. Before several of the first showings "members of religious and nationalist groups clashed with police outside the theatre, letting off flares and attempting to block theatregoers from entering" (Davies 2017). *The Curse* revealed how strong the divisions among Poles are.

The Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Piotr Gliniński, urged Warsaw municipal authorities to intervene with immediate censorship. Fortunately, this was ineffective. Despite this political pressure, *The Curse* remains on the theatre's repertoire. The Minister then found another way to show his power. Despite previously signed contracts, Gliniński promised to block funding for the annual international Malta Festival in Poznań, if Olivier Frlić remained the curator of the festival. Also, the international Dialog Festival in Wrocław lost its ministerial grant, due the inclusion of *The Curse* in its program.

Although very few theatre scholars openly supported the government's attempts at censorship, things are happening behind closed doors. I myself am proof of that. When the issue of the "PTJ" came out, my then superior, the editor-in-chief of another theatre magazine I used to work for, suggested that I should choose which side of the political conflict I stand on, according to my ideological preferences, and decide which of the two sides I "serve". I would not subscribe to all the opinions expressed in the mentioned issue of "PTJ", but it didn't matter to him. I was pushed to one side of the conflict, against my will. I soon decided to quit my job.

However, the biggest problem is not that politicians are polarizing society and theatre scholars, but that still too few of us care. As recent opinion polls show, the level of interest in politics is relatively small in Poland and has stayed quite stable over time. According to Public Opinion Research Center [CBOS] surveys from October 2017, half of the respondents declare that their interest in politics is low or non-existent: "[S]treet protests and political demonstrations that took place this year could lead to the conclusion that recently many Poles want to get involved and are interested in political life. However, in general terms, the interest of Poles in politics turns out to be superficial and concerns a relatively small percentage of citizens. According to their own declarations, only 17 % of respondents follow events on the political scene" (CBOS 1).

People working in the field of culture would like citizens to stand up for them and defend their rights to freedom of speech and artistic creation, as well as media freedom. And sometimes they do—as proved the protests against the new director of Teatr Polski in Wrocław, Cezary Morawski, after a politically motivated selection process (see Sharp 2017)—but there are far too few of them. What about the rest? Maybe they do not quite see the value of what we are doing, as they do not see the value in the democratic system that is now being demolished before their very eyes. What they have seen for these nearly 30 years of "freedom", and what they have experienced, is huge unemployment, industrial and rural decline, global corporations buying up industrial firms for pennies, inefficient health care system and judiciary, and somewhere at the end of this list—city theatres, which they can rarely afford to go to.

If you think that I am exaggerating and generalizing, then you would be right. But if we, theatre scholars, now have to explain to the public that we should preserve our public theatres, would we be so sure of it ourselves? Those of us who work in public theatres know that these institutions often have far from democratic values in terms of work ethics, management and social relations. The same goes for many other public institutions in our country. Maybe we should first know more about how our public theatres function today. How they have changed over these 30 years after transformation, what exactly is worth defending and what needs reforming.

With these questions in mind, three years ago I started my qualitative field research, which consists of interviews with over 100 craftsmen employed at publicly funded theatres including dramatic, puppet and musical theatres. This group comprised metalworkers, carpenters, modellers, painters, costume makers, puppet makers, shoemakers, upholsterers, make-up artists and wig makers. Here I present my key observations and conclusions, which I have developed more broadly in an article published in the aforementioned issue of the "Polish Theatre Journal" (see Smolarska 2017).

Firstly, it is worth noting that craftsmen have hardly ever been involved in public discussions on theatre as an institution. Instead, they served as a source of anecdotes about artists seen from backstage or as a vehicle for the "back to the origins" utopia. In the wake of a new

cultural trend manifesting itself in the marketable form of craft beer, craft ice cream or craft crisps, theatres use the romanticized image of a craftsman in promotional films and photo exhibits and present workshop staff as their link with the natural world, in that craftspeople ostensibly come into immediate contact with matter.

In contrast to this approach, I was curious how craftsmen perceive the transformation process that has been going on in Polish public theatres since 1989. A process, let me add, that has been going on quietly in the background—because neither politicians nor theatre managers had a comprehensive vision of the reforms (see Płoski 2015). Nevertheless, as the Polish economy switched to a capitalist model, publicly funded theatres had to somehow adjust to the requirements of the new post-Fordism system—including fragmenting production and outsourcing tasks to reduce staff. What I found is that craftsmen are the ones who paid a very high price for this transformation.

The number of job positions for craftsmen has been consistently reduced over the last 20 years. Instead, managers prefer to outsource and cut labour costs such as insurance. Only two institutions included in the study have been able to keep all of their workshops and a large number of jobs, thanks to the response from trade unions. What is more, there are very few other jobs in theatres as low-paid as craftwork; only cleaning services get less. Whereas average monthly earnings for a craftsman stand at about 420 euros, a well-known stage designer can get 20 times as much for a production. Staff frustration is exacerbated by the ever-widening earnings gap between craftspeople and artists.

Today's common artistic strategies of contemporary theatre, often dictated by low budgets and time pressure, pose another very real threat to the existence of workshops, because theatres can do without highly skilled professionals. Respondent M. notes: "I have the impression that lately we are merely remaking IKEA all the time, because sometimes the furniture comes from IKEA and we just adapt it to suit the new stage, rather than making things from scratch". Craftsmen admit that they have noticeably less work with this "remade" scenery, as well as with the clothes from second-hand shops instead of hand-made costumes or mass-produced items from China instead of handmade props. It is no wonder that "modern theatre", as they call it with an ironic smile, has a bad reputation among them.

These reservations often turn into general resistance towards any experimentation in theatre. Directors then gain another argument for outsourcing the work, so as not to lose time on fighting with ineffective *homini sovietici*. That is how they get into their own trap of neoliberal ideology, which tells them to see everyone dissatisfied with the status quo as inadapted losers. This prejudice towards craftsmen is ingrained in the minds of many artists and artistic directors, who downplay all negative opinions about the working environment expressed by craftsmen, treating them as manifestations of resentment-fuelled attitudes.

Although I cannot accept this tone, it is true that very many craftsmen look back on the past nostalgically. They remember times when set designers used to make precise hand drawings, whereas now, they would rather cut elements from the internet and paste them together into a collage with the help of programmes like Photoshop. As I could see myself, these projects often lack basic information on measurements and materials, and make craftsmen feel disrespected and exploited, because it is often them, who have to remake these drafts into proper projects so that they can start building the set. But these are set designers, who are paid for the copyrights. A carpenter makes an allusion: "When a set designer gets a prize, I sometimes wonder, who really gets it."

There is also a deeper underlying conflict, which mirrors the contemporary clash between “the winners” and “the losers” of the post-socialist transformation. In the current, cognitive, phase of capitalism, immaterial labour is most highly appreciated, together with the abilities of fast, low-cost adaptation and adjustment. Contrary to mobile set designers, who are constantly busy, theatre craftsmen function according to the old model of a full-time, stationary job where material work is still essential. Polish theatre institutions are thus hybrids of two different modes of production, Fordism and post-Fordism, a fact that is causing a severe rupture within theatre environment.

My study proves that theatre ecosystems are disintegrating, and their internal diversity is on the wane. Craftspeople cite several reasons for this: neglect of working conditions; inadequate self-knowledge within the organization; lack of consultation; budget administration which antagonizes staff and corrodes trade-union structures; and, finally, a mindless acceleration of the production processes, which causes a waste of money, materials and human resources.

So why don't craftsmen join forces and stand up against this exploitation?

Firstly, the absence of an organized, shared course of action is the result of an ideological division among craftsmen, which mirrors the nationwide division mentioned earlier. In the theatres included in this study, trade-union membership has shrunk as older members of staff retired, because there is little interest in joining among newcomers. The fact that trade unions have become overly political is usually given as the reason for not joining a union or for terminating membership. In 2015, the Solidarity trade union officially announced it would be supporting the presidential candidate Andrzej Duda, and many union activists were parliamentary candidates from Duda's Law and Justice Party. On the other hand, the new trade union, Citizens' Initiative, has a clearer leftist character. The relationship between those two organizations is so antagonistic that it seems impossible that their members could co-operate.

However, there is a deeper reason for political passivity, and it lies in the “structural opportunism” (term by Kuba Szreder) which craftspeople are forced to display when threatened and struggling for survival. Many craftsmen use theatre workshops for side jobs necessary for economic survival, as very few of them can afford to own or rent a studio. As this is against the regulations, they are then enmeshed in a tacit pact with management who grants them permission. One of the respondents told me: “The people who used to be in charge of our workshop passed this attitude on to me: don't go crazy, don't get out of the line you've been assigned. Obviously, the theatre salary is at the very end, and the [technical director] trusts that if you've got a job on the side, don't report it, I trust you to do that job and [your job here], so I can safely put this or that on the table without causing a row. There is consent.”

Asked whether he was a trade-union member, he replied that he couldn't remember: “I honestly don't know. No, I am, but [the fact that I can't remember] tells you something: I can say that my situation is stable, that so far I didn't need to ask for help, or I didn't need to complain, or go to court—but if that happens, it's good that [the unions] are there.” “That” did happen to his colleague from the same workshop, who was fired from the theatre by new management, although he was a trade-union board member—indeed, he was fired for that reason. He was only reinstated to his post following a court case, in accordance with the law which grants protection to trade-union members sitting on boards. Despite all this, the respondent claims he is happy with the new management.

When I ask them about their political views, my respondents most often say that they are not interested in politics at all. They just want a decent salary and to be treated humanely. I ask myself: How can we reflect politically on a research group when the group itself does not want to be perceived as politically engaged? Can I use their voice in my research in which I will prove a deep crisis of democracy exists within theatres? Can I politicize the words of those who claim to be apolitical? Wouldn't it be pushing them to one side of the conflict, against their will, as my ex-boss did to me? From which position do I speak when I accuse my respondents of a lack of solidarity and political consciousness?

Kirsten Hastrup in “A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory” advises against introducing native voices in anthropological texts, arguing that they merely lend their voice to our theories (Hastrup 1995). While listening about the work abuse done to my interviewees, I could not stay detached. I introduced the craftsmen's voice into my doctoral thesis, because I wanted “them”, who sit up there, to finally hear what the “subaltern” down there, never had the courage to say out loud. In other words, I took the role of a loudspeaker.

After my first articles on craftsmen came out (the articles that had more to do with investigative journalism than with academic papers), I was assured by craftsmen who read them that I have done them a favour by writing “the whole truth” and that I did justice to them. I was also happy to receive these positive comments as it opens new doors for me—craftsmen started to contact me to make an appointment to “fill in the gaps” or to confirm my theories with their experience.

Today, I think it was a bit naïve of me to take their opinions as a methodological direction, but it shows that it was not just a case of me using the interviewees. They had some use of me as well. Not only as a weapon in a fight with their superiors, but also in their own political games. For example, it often happened when I conducted interviews at their workplaces. Sometimes craftsmen would only agree to talk to me during their working hours, because they didn't want to spare their precious free time for my enquiries. We would sit at the workshop and talk, while the other workers, their colleagues, could hear our conversation. This was the moment, when hidden conflicts came out and I felt like a child being sent back and forth from one parent to another with cruel messages, which the child can't quite understand. I could not use these interviews as a source of facts, because “mummies” and “daddies” wouldn't tell me how the transformation process of their institution occurred. They preferred concentrating on who is to blame. I had to take a step back and only use those conversations as material for a discourse analysis—to find out what values my interlocutors share, which they don't, and why.

At first, it was hard for me to take my research into these meta-brackets of discourse analysis. I felt as if I had disarmed the craftsmen by shifting the reader's attention from justifiable demands for economic and social equality to the still waters of narration. I felt disarmed as well. I had to build my strength from scratch, leaving the bipolar worldview behind.

Slavenka Drakulić, a well-known Croatian intellectual and writer, when asked about her view of the crisis in Catalonia, referred to her experience of war in the Balkans. Remembering being punished for her insistent criticism of nationalism, she warned that every military conflict is preceded by silencing mediators: “It is what war does to an individual: it forces you to take sides. By then it is already too late for peacemakers. Peacemakers are usually silenced before a conflict begins, and indeed that is usually an omen of approaching problems” (Drakulić 2017).

Similarly, Michael J. Sandel, an American political philosopher, Professor at Harvard University, the author of “Democracy’s Discontent and Public Philosophy”, has convincingly described polarization as a mechanism destroying democracy in America. Following his thought, Jacek Żakowski, a well-known Polish journalist associated with the weekly “Polityka”, wrote: “In countries where populists have recently managed to impose polarizing discourse (for example, ‘leave’ or ‘stay’ in the case of Brexit), societies make worse decisions. Whereas in France, Austria or the Netherlands, where the policy is multi-polar (multi-party, multi-block), the results are more rational” (Żakowski 2017). Many of us are worried that, nowadays, it is increasingly difficult to maintain the position of a mediator—somebody who does not agree on the division into two tribes, no matter whether it concerns the political scene or research. However, have moral authorities not left these positions too easily? And have we—theatre researchers—done everything in our power to resist the feeling of helplessness and, in spite of the circumstances, participated in creating social discourse by taking the position of translators between different languages of art, politics and the (also increasingly divided) audience? I am not in favour of shutting down disputes or of a conciliatory vision of the community, but in my opinion, we can and should act as intermediaries, similar to the function of an urban architect, as suggested by Krzysztof Nawratek, an urbanist and theoretician of the city: “The architect mediates between what is inside (i.e. the urban community, understood broadly as a community of people and non-humans, also in the long-term perspective, thus taking into account the memory of those who have left and the interests of those who will come) and what is outside. [...] Architects and planners should also learn interior and exterior languages” (Nawratek 2012). Translating his words into the field of theatre research: let us not forget that we are part of research institutions and that we represent their values and hierarchies, but at the same time let us learn the languages and values of the “outside,” to which theatre craftsmen and administrative staff of theatres belong.

In the light of what is going on in Poland and (other parts of Europe) now, how political dialogue and social trust are dying out, to be political as a researcher means to me not to use the collected data for my own political crusade, but to help one group better understand the other—by presenting the other side’s points of view, the aesthetic and social values they prefer, as well as their needs as employees, which are shrinking but still an irreplaceable part of the theatre community. I only hope it doesn’t make their criticism any less significant.

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**Theatricality—Public
Space—Politics**

Theatrical Practices beyond Art and Social Interaction

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Theatricality

The ancient Greek word “*thea*” means presentation. Cities sent each other representatives that took part in the *thea*, the *show*, in the *theatron* and were called *theoroi*, the keeper of the show. Their activity, viewing, was called *theoria*. Consequently, the term *theatre* is closely connected with the activities of viewing and showing. Until the 18th century *theatre* called every prominent place where something was shown or viewed. With the focus of the bourgeois theatre on the performance of drama, other forms of aesthetic performativity have been conceptually separated from *the theatre* by special names such as *Circus*, *Punch-and-Judy show* or *puppet theatre*.

From this point of view, even in many areas of theatre science, a distinction between theatre in the narrow sense and the extended theatrical conceptions result in *theatricality*. While the term *theatre* is robbed of diversity, *theatricality* is a broad and inclusive definition. “Theatricality illuminates connections between life, scenic sequences and theatre” (Kotte 2010: 229). Theatricality describes theatrical situations or cultural performances in general, activities in various social spheres (see Fiebach 1978: 12), so it waives a hierarchizing of theatrical practices. As Brecht described, “one should study the everyday theatre that the individuals perform with no audience, the secret ‘play a role’. In this way, one should include the most elemental expressive need” (Brecht 1940: 204).¹

Theatricality is not experience-based. It is an academic term first used in theatre studies by Elisabeth Burns. Because the concept of theatre is historically and culturally determined, theatricality cannot be defined as a particular type of behaviour or expression. The experience of theatricality, as Burns describes, is “determined by a particular viewpoint” (Burns 1972: 13). Theatricality is constituted in the factors that determine and shape the perception of social conventions and deviations. On the other hand, the concept of theatricality by its etymological origin is characterized by interaction of showing and spectating (see Fiebach 1978: 13). The consciously executed emphasis aims at being perceived by someone who becomes a spectator in this context. The actor consciously uses *highlighting* to be perceived in an intended way by others who became spectators through this reference. Josette Féral describes the constitution of theatricality by observing: “Theatricality cannot, it must be for someone. In other words, it is for the Other” (Féral 1982: 178).

Féral defines theatricality as a twofold splitting of the gaze: by the spectator’s view, a process becomes the object of observation. The subject viewed will be an observed person who realizes that in this moment it represents something for someone. This mental presence of the performer in the consciousness of the spectator is based on knowledge and awareness of a required presence, equally to physical presence. Those two ways of simultaneous production and reception results in a break with the parameter of history of theatre par excellence:

¹ Translation Justus Wenke.

it gives up the physical co-presence (see Fischer-Lichte 2010: 25 ff.) of actors and spectators as specific media characteristic of *staging*. The gradual behavioural difference between actors and spectators results from highlighting. Kotte first defines highlighting by different notable physical actions and visible attributes as a category of theatre studies (see Kotte 1988). Highlighting by staging, space or things is the condition of the perception of the theatricality, creates a theatrical distinction and a relationship with everyday life.

Interlacing theatricalities

In 1989, Rudolf Münz developed a model from four areas related to the theatre to connect and mark theatrical practices in different social areas (Münz 1989: 69 f.). The *interlacing theatricalities* result from the relationship of four significant cultural archetypes. Because the Münz-descriptions “*theatre*,” *theatre* and “*theatre*” could not be differentiated in spoken language, Stefan Hulfeld renamed them later (Hulfeld 2000: 399 f.). Starting from practices of acting in *art theatre* Münz explores a relationship to different *methods of public representation*, renamed by Hulfeld as *life theatre*. In opposite Münz connected “*theatre*” in the tradition of Commedia dell’arte, travesty or carnival—Hulfeld renamed it as *a theatrical play*—which fluctuates with playful and reflexive impulses the public space and criticized, remixes and reorganizes art and social interaction. These three *theatricalities* are related to the so-called *non-theatre*, a general challenge against any theatrical isms in art and in everyday life and the covering of any theatrical practice with the ideal of the realization of identity with the background that theatricality is classified as *unnatural*, and therefore will be rejected, denied or banned.

The concept of interlacing theatricalities contains an open perspective: it marks areas but does not separate them from each other’s influence. A separation of theatrical practices in art theatre and other social areas makes no sense. According to Fiebach, “theatrical action is an overriding, general activity that can happen in different social spheres” (Fiebach 1978: 12 f.) and includes society-constituting “operations of socio-cultural and political communication, for which performing activities play an essential role” (Fiebach 1995: 183). In the interaction of the four areas of the interlacing theatricalities, theatrical practices as instruments of social interaction change, constitute, and evolve the practice of society. Art theatre is also a social institution and contributes to the destabilization and renewing of society. The interlacing theatricalities describe theatricality beyond the separation of art and life, following the historical theatrical avant-garde such as Edward Gordon Craig (see Craig 1905), which is also connected to the independence of theatre science beyond the exploration of literary forms.

Theatrical social interactions

An interaction is a social relationship in which people relate to each other, are in proximity or influenced by action or expectation of the other. Every interaction is relational: it exists only in connection with one or more persons. *Social interaction* refers to the interrelated actions or the influencing of persons or groups, the happening between persons who react, interact and control each other. According to this, interrelationship or reference between the actors is the criterion for social interaction. In the face of the new communication technologies and the mediatization of life world communication, the duality of presence and absence is today being

discussed in favour of gradual forms of sensual and perceptible connectedness of interaction partners.

The different forms of the staging in society characterize the social interaction and subject models: “The *figure* is a physically example of a specific subject ideal, [...] the practice of the performance itself, [...] becomes a constitutive field of training of subjectivity in the interaction of cultural and media practises” (Otto 2014: 259 f.).² The practice of the staging today is adapted to various forms of indirect interaction. Among other things, this is shown by the mode of feedback, through which postmodern creative subjects appears, for example on the internet.

Theatricality of terror

One of the most interesting theatrical social interactions is the theatricality of terror. Terror is a theatrical practice, a staging in the context of war or political crisis with the aim of an effect on society by the spread of dramatic images and through symbolic actions, not by a military victory. The word *terror* does not mark a movement (fanatical) like-minded or a violent act, but its effect and theatricality, the spreading of fear in a population group and potential fame among peers, which are to be achieved primarily by the staging of dramatic images. Terror describes what individuals and groups do to achieve their goals in certain circumstances, including the frightening counter-reactions of governments. So not the actual number of deaths in an attack is the critical factor. The staging of images of the attack determines the success of the perpetrators and is aimed to shake the population and hereby the decomposition of the political support of the opponent. Since the spectator remains physically undisturbed by sight of the images, the sublime feeling of fear is quickly imparted.

The dynamics of the reception of *staging images of terror* Charlotte Klonk describes: “In order to restore the sense of security in society after a terrorist attack, the production of enemy images is set in motion. Even before the perpetrators are caught, the horror gets a face and the diffuse fear becomes a form which one can already symbolically humiliate and settle one that in fact is not caught” (Klonk 2017: 12).³ The staging of the pictures anticipates a *social action*. The fight with weapons only acts as a driving wheel for the real battle with images (see Münkler 2002: 197). Pointed and formulated with internal resistance: The *gradually in consequences reduced* attack will be intensified by the images, at the same time their staging creates facts.

The *staged reality* determines according to Judith Butler the moral and emotional relationship of the recipient to the actual event (see Butler 2009). The *framing* as a pre-structuring element places individual images at the centre and excludes simultaneously parts of the visual field. The theatrical dynamics of the imagery of the terror is even better explained with the term *pattern*: different templates for representations within a certain field, which are repeatedly realized, such as the styling of images from the terrorist attack by the dramaturgy of shock effect. Aby Warburg described the archaic emotions such as fear, revenge and fame as a “pathos formula” (see Hurlttig). Emotional tensions and affects are regulated by recourse to already established image patterns. Above all, through the repetition, the constant sequence

² Translation and emphasis Justus Wenke.

³ Translation Justus Wenke.

of images and counter-images in a well-known good-evil or friend-enemy scheme, arises a calming civilizing effect.

The theatrical practices of the staging of terror are the visual contrast between normality and the event, the creation of a series of images: creating pictures as close as possible to the deed, leaving traces to be identified with the act and famed as a hero will help the personification of the inconceivable horror and at the same time signal that the security services have not lost control. The struggle with images triggered by acts of terror is more than a reaction provoked by violentists, the execution or the capture of them should demonstrate the regained sovereignty of the government.

The assassination of Tsar Alexander II on March 1, 1881, by revolutionary organization *Narodnaya Volya*⁴ did not end the Tsarist regime, the government mediated fearlessness with the coronation ceremony of Tsar Alexander III and two *Narodnaya Volya* activists were executed as a sign of repression. The published pictures of the assassination and its consequences (figure 1, figure 2) established a model in image reporting, which is still valid today: First dramatic visualizations of the attack—a staging of the destruction of strong symbolic spaces as well as the helplessness of the security services. The comparison with images of incidents from the recent past like the attack at the Christmas market on Berlin Memorial Church 2016 (figure 3, or the attack in New York on 31 October 2017 [figure 3b]) shows the continuity. Direct *counter staging* such as barriers around public buildings and squares later should suggest additional security, and stricter laws create spatial boundaries to negate the possibility of new terror staging or to prevent it. Second images of the mourning population—to demonstrate the resilience of the attacked community. Finally, pictures of the perpetrators caught or of the public execution to manifest regained sovereignty. Under the impression of the images of the destroyed public spaces the need for the security of observers increases.

The staging of the images of the attack on Russian Ambassador Andrey Karlov in Ankara at the end of December 2016 reveal the mechanism of terror as image production and shows at the same time the responsibility of image distribution. The images show the assassin as a hero after the act in the gallery in which the assassination took place (figure 4). Knowing that there will be recordings, he justified why he did the deed. The object of the images of the self-portraying of the perpetrator is understandable only in the knowledge of their context. The armed assailant, who, standing in a suit and tie behind Karlov as he speaks at the gallery, initiates the assassination like a ritual (figure 5). By the publication of the images, the disturbance of the audience of this terror performance was staged, in the face of the people that crouch in a corner of the gallery after Karlov was shot (figure 6).

To locate the theatrical practices of the staging of terror precisely it may be necessary to extend the interlacing theatricalities with an extended perspective on Brecht's *everyday theatre*, which considers the increasing staging character of today's societies.

Staging of the PhD student

We change the social field and will have a look on the *staging* of the *PhD student*. The Doctor of Philosophy⁵ is the highest academic degree awarded by universities. During the studies

that lead to the degree, the candidate is called a *doctoral student* or *PhD candidate* what means "All but dissertation". All these definitions are restrictive and define a person about a defect and a performance that is still to be accomplished for a full value, through the completion of the thesis and finalizing PhD procedures as a proof of scientific abilities for being perceived as a scientist. The aim of this is membership.

According to Bruno Latour (see Laux 2016) science becomes recognizable through a particular mode of existence as well by codes that make scientific existence visible. The theatrical practices of the PhD student have the goal to eliminate the defect which also includes a compelling presentation of their research. For example, the liturgy of the recognition includes the staging of a scientific lecture and public defence that have to be performed. The *staging of the scientific lecture* establishes evidence of knowledge by showing and telling. In presentation of the research the interaction with the audience gets an important meaning on its significance. The evidence decides in the eye of the spectator. The lecture combines scientific and non-scientific factors: style, habitus, the handling of media arrangements, forms of embodiment and aspects of lecturing art. Nevertheless, scientific practice negates this staging as *non-theatre* and declares the presentation of knowledge as secondary opposite to research. Lyotard predicted the scientific performance (Lyotard 1979) that does not legitimize itself through the processes of knowledge production, but through the efficiency of its use as a presentation resource, perhaps through its permanent representation in online portals such as *academia.edu*. Knowledge becomes reality by a good performance of the lecture.

Young scientists should be dressed in muted colours, a colleague described to me as a professor's recommendation; some press offices of university recommend female professors to customize themselves such as chief secretaries. Habitus and professional culture are based on performance, customizing or staging. The staged figure appearing here is collectively configurable. The self-presentation as a scientist should appear self-evident or better *naturally*. Therefore the implementation according to the rules of adequacy, of reasonableness, everything else would irritate the credo of concealing of the staging. The staging of self allows a self-experience as a personalized subject (see Reckwitz 2006: 168) and the constitution of self by a feedback loop (see Illouz 2004). The staging of the naturalness of habitus obscures its staging. To take over the behaviours of other scientists is the prerequisite for the self-becoming of the individual and first phase of socialization to the scientist. The only requirement for embedding the alien *Other* is that it does not appear to be too alien. The second is, that education of milieus-specific similarities becomes obvious. The avoidance of conventions must fail, to overcome the convention is only possible by a movement from the narrow and limited society in a more comprehensive structure (see Schmitt 2010: 129 ff.). To cross the limits of the ordinary is to rely on potential conspirators across the border.

The theatrical practices applied in the case of the PhD student are characterized by masking or hiding the visualization of the emphasis strategies and the widespread strategy to avoid the self-manipulation of the scientist: they are trying to make the adaptation practises to the recognition as a scientist invisible. Furthermore, the staging of the scientist can therefore be judged as a form of *non-theatre*. But what is the role of the observer for the observed thing in view of an object which *obscures its highlighting*? Especially in some cases the theatricality of *non-theatre* is even a result of unconscious presentation. Consequently, the perception of *non-theatricality* is a matter of scientific classification or interpretation. The topic *non-theatre* leads to the very fundamental question: in which situations can we speak of *non-theatricality*

⁴ *Народная воля*, English: *People's Will*.

⁵ New Latin: *philosophiae doctor*.

at all? I can only hint mention a few distinct cases: physical failure, such as an epileptic attack, or the deep touch and mutual knowledge between people in intimate relationships. In most other interactions, *theatricality* is obligatory, or, metaphorically, the settling of the mask by exaggeration is a taboo. For example, in a scientific lecture, the genesis of knowledge is the focus and not their negation by exploration of the questions gained at work. This *frame* of research distinguishes the scientific presentation, for example, from the presentation in art that focuses the irritation and the raising of questions instead of the formulation of knowledge.

Conclusion

The interaction between showing and viewing is the fundamental condition of theatricality. *Highlighting* creates the theatrical distinction, but in relationship with everyday non-theatrical behaviours. As a type of social interaction, *theatrical practices* also arise through interaction: By using *highlighting* with the aim to be perceived in an intended way by others, who became *spectators* through this reference. The *highlighting of social interactions* focuses a *meaning intention* by using a *pattern*, and is simultaneously *gradually reduced in their consequences*. In other words, the *theatrical practice* points out beyond itself. *Theatrical practices* organize the interaction between its *participants*. Because this includes the generation of meaning, the aim of a theatrical practice in a socio-cultural context could only be understood with the knowledge of their background. In order to locate *theatrical social interactions* in the transition between life and art theatre, it may be necessary to complete the *interlacing theatricalities* with an extensive perspective, which has to account the increasing staging character of today's societies, without separation between *theatricality* and *social interaction*.



Figure 1: The assassination of Alexander II, 1881

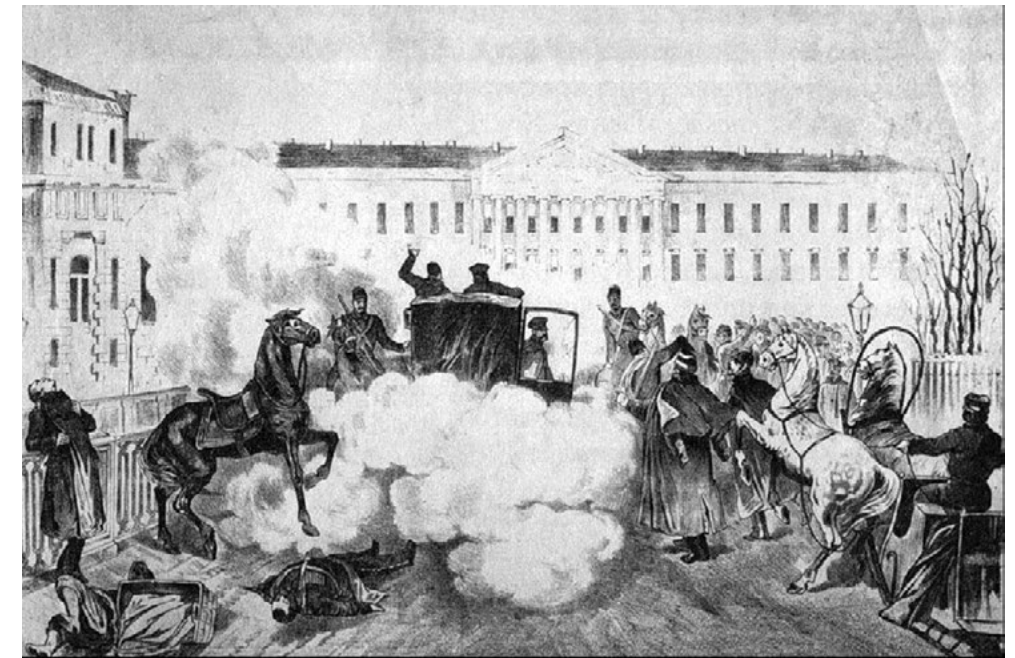


Figure 2: The explosion killed one of the Cossacks and wounded the driver, 1880s



Figure 3: Berlin Weihnachtsmarkt, seattlegeekweek.com



Figure 3b: *Terror in New York*, Chang W. Lee / The New York Times, 2. 11. 2017



Figure 4: *A photographer's instinct*, Reuters / Sozcu Newspaper



Figure 5: The armed assailant stands behind the Russian ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov as he speaks at a gallery in Ankara moments before the attack on Monday, AP



Figure 6: People crouch in a corner after Andrei Karlov, the Russian ambassador to Turkey, was shot at a photo gallery in Ankara, Turkey on Dec. 19, 2016, AP / Burhan Ozbilici

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Figure credits

Figure 1: *The Assassination of Alexander II*, drawing by G. Broling, 1881.

Available from: http://www.dhm.de/lemo/objekte/pict/zb20_1881_1_262/index.html (archived: from *Illustrierte Zeitung Bd.*, 76 (1881), p. 262).

Figure 2: *The explosion killed one of the Cossacks and wounded the driver*, anonymous

Russian painter (1670s–1917), 1880s, public domain image.

Available from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_II_of_Russia%27s_murder_02.jpg.

Figure 3: *Berlin Weihnachtsmarkt*, seattlegeekweek.com.

Available from: <http://seattlegeekweek.com/berlin-weihnachtsmarkt.html>

Figure 3b: *Terror in New York*, Chang W. Lee / The New York Times, 2. 11. 2017.

See also: *A man who drove a Home Depot truck down a bike path in New York City, killing at least six people, was shot by police after he aimed fake guns at them, police said.*

Available from: <https://www.adn.com/nation-world/2017/10/31/multiple-deaths-reported-in-manhattan-as-vehicle-careens-down-bike-path/#8675>.

Figure 4: *The armed assailant stands behind the Russian ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov as he speaks at a gallery in Ankara moments before the attack on Monday*, © AP. Available from: <http://www.siyaaso.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/safiirka1.jpg>.

Figure 5: *A photographer's instinct*, Reuters / Sozcu Newspaper.

Available from: <https://qzprod.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/turkey-russian-ambassador-shot-to-death-2-e1482200058226.jpg?quality=80&strip=all&w=5506>.

Figure 6: *People crouch in a corner after Andrei Karlov, the Russian ambassador to Turkey, was shot at a photo gallery in Ankara, Turkey on Dec. 19, 2016*, AP / Burhan Ozbilici.

Available from: <https://qz.com/867541/world-press-photo-russian-ambassador-andrei-karlov-assassination-caught-on-camera-by-the-ap/>.

Politics of Images: From the Brechtian Experience to Contemporary Arts

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Bertolt Brecht's photographic archive had extensive influence on his work as a playwright and as a theatre director. This article analyses a number of photographs that represent his political positions against the Third Reich. Brecht collected the pictures from mass media magazines and newspapers, which were the raw material for *Kriegsfibel*¹ (*War Primer*) and for the *Journals 1934–1955*² in the 1930s and 1940s. This article analyses Brecht's *War Primer* and *Journals* regarding his creative process. Furthermore, three examples from contemporary artistic scenery relate my hypothesis to a recent aesthetic experience. Overall, these cases support the hypothesis that the politics of images and creative theatrical process are interrelated.

Brecht's exile started right after the Reichstag fire in February 1933, when he travelled by train to Prague with Helene Weigel, leaving behind not only his children but also his manuscripts in safety with friends and family. For six years, Brecht lived in Denmark with his family; then, finally, in 1939 they fled to the USA. While waiting for their American visas they lived in Stockholm and Finland, where Brecht wrote the play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (*Der Aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui*), with plans of staging it in America. However, the play was not staged until 1958, two years after Brecht's death.

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui satirizes Hitler's rise to power in Germany and portrays the National Socialist state as a case study of the correlations between photography and Brechtian playwriting and stage direction. The play was written in three weeks with Margarete Steffin's collaboration, and it is based on an unfinished story called *Giacomo Ui*, a satirical allegory of National Socialism that Brecht wrote some years earlier in Denmark. It becomes clear that Brecht was inspired by an iconographic collection, mostly organized in the play's *Research Books*, to define the *social gestus* of the scenes.

Those *Research Books* (named *Inspizierbuch* and *Soufflierbuch*) contain thousands of pictures portraying Hitler's and Nazi officers' gestures and behaviour. Brecht converted the gestures from the pictures into dialectical *social gestus*. Some of the pictures with the four-lined ironic epigrams also appear in Brecht's *Journals*, which most likely were his source of inspiration for *War Primer*.

War Primer combines a new kind of war poetry expressed by epigrams from the lapidary tradition with photographs from the mass-circulation press. It presents eighty-five pictures on a grey background and an epigram for each one written by Brecht. After enduring terrible critiques, censorship and resistance, in his *Anti-War Book* Brecht illustrates his view of the Second World War with humour and cruelty.

In the following example (figure 1) the only difference between *War Primer* (Plate 26) and *Journals* (15 October 1940) is the epigram.

1 *Kriegsfibel* was published in 1955 in Germany, and it was translated and published in English by Libris in 1998, entitled *War Primer*.

2 *Arbeitsjournal* was published by Suhrkamp Verlag in 1973, and the English version was published in 1993 by Methuen London.



Figure 1: *War Primer*, by Brecht, London: Libris, 1998. Plate 26; *Journals 1934–1955*, by Brecht, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 107 (*War Primer*)

You see me here, eating a simple stew
Me, slave to no desire, except for one:
World conquest. That is all I want. From you I have but one request: give me your sons.
(*Journals*)
How cheerfully I eat such simple fare
I who abominate all sensual desire.
Except to rule the world. That's my one care.
Your children's lives—they're all that I require.

Brecht's portrait of a *simple man* who wishes to conquer the world with the help of *our children's lives* was the inspiration for *War Primer 2*, published in 2011 by Broomberg and Chanarin. Here, the authors were motivated by Brecht's *War Primer*, and they dedicated their discussion to the recent *War on Terror*. Using the original photographs and epigrams from the *Second World War* as background, they overlaid the black and white originals with images from 9/11, Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. The following example (figure 2) shows Plate 26—*War Primer* as a background for a picture of George Bush serving a Thanksgiving turkey to US troops in Baghdad in 2003.³

3 Photo by Tim Sloan.

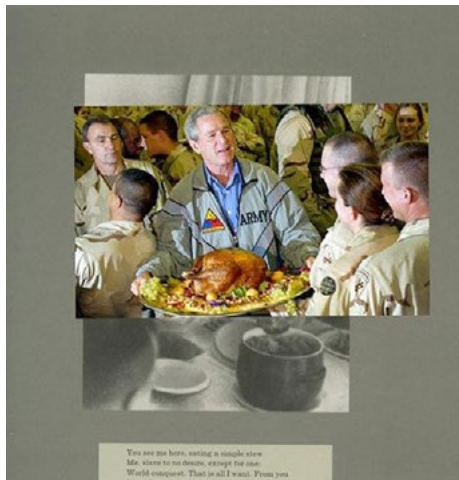


Figure 2: War Primer 2

Available from: www.mackbooks.co.uk/books/12-War_Primer_2.html

There are remarkable similarities between *War Primer* and *War Primer 2*. Both photographs portray political leaders and their meals. In the same way, the epigram says that “our children’s lives” is the only request, building an image of metaphorical cannibalism.

The second example of the link between photography and a theatrical creative process is in the epigram of Plate 81, showing Hitler discoursing at an official ceremony. Similarly, it is almost identical to the last four lines of the epilogue to Brecht’s play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. Besides, Plate 81 is also *Kriegsfibel*’s epilogue.

War Primer, Plate 81

That’s how the world was going to be run!
The other nations mastered him, except (In case you think the battle has been won)
The womb is fertile still from which that crept.

Ui’s Epilogue

The world was almost won by such an ape!
The nations put him where his kind belongs.
But don’t rejoice too soon at your scape
The womb he crawled from still is going strong.

The concreteness of the play appears in the extensive research performed on the images, reaffirming Brecht’s motto: *Truth is concrete* (*Die Wahrheit ist konkret*), which worked as a reminder or admonishment against which he would measure his writing—all his writing: dramatic, theoretical, fiction, poetry. He looked up at it and asked himself, “Have I realized the truth concretely enough?” As a dramatist his chief interest was to externalize on stage the elements of the—most often contradictory and conflictual—situations his characters were in (Constantine 2013: 9).

At last, in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*’s prologue, the announcer says: “But everything you’ll see tonight is true. Nothing’s invented, nothing’s new or made to order just for you. The gangster play that we present is known to our whole continent” (Brecht 1998: 119).

Great similarities can be seen between Hitler’s rehearsal sequence taken by Hitler’s personal photographer Heinrich Hoffmann in 1925 (figure 3) and Ui’s famous scene six where he has acting lessons and rehearses in front of a large standing mirror with the help of a renowned actor.



Figure 3: Hitler’s rehearsal while listening to his own discourses on the gramophone (Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-10460/Hoffman, Heinrich/CC-BY-SA 3.0) and Martin Wuttke as Arturo Ui in Berliner Ensemble (Available from: artsalive.ca/en/thf/aujourdhui/comediensdaujourd'hui.asp)

Ui says that “It looks like I’m going to have to say a word or two at certain occasions, especially when I get into politics, so I’ve decided to have lessons. The gestures too” (156). Hoffman’s sequence appears neither in Brecht’s *War Primer* nor in the *Journal*, but the similarity of the images cannot be discarded in this study.

The following part of this paper reflects on contemporary theatre. In which way do the *politics of images* interfere in the modern theatrical scene? In which way do they differ from Brecht’s times? Although I do not have the answer to these questions, I present three artistic examples and share their recent performances. They are Swiss theatre director Milo Rau, Lebanese visual artist Rabih Mroué and Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar.

Recently, the *Syrian War* shocked the world with an appalling photograph. The image of Aylan Kurdi's dead body has become the *Zeitgeist* of the European negligence of refugees. Although thousands of people are being killed, the photograph of a three-year-old boy is unbearable to look at. The little body with a red t-shirt lying on a beach led the most influential newspapers worldwide, such as *The Independent*, *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* to declare that it is the most dreadful symbol of the Mediterranean crisis. Along with other pictures, Aylan's can be seen in Milo Rau's last play called *Mitleid. Die Geschichte des Maschinengewehrs* where actress Ursina Lardi shows it to the audience while reporting on field research she undertook with Rau to Turkey, Greece and Macedonia.

During the performance, Rau shows several photographs, also reflecting on the role of the mediatization of images. The photographs are usually shown printed and projected on the big screen at the back of the stage. They come both from the private sphere and from mass media circulation press.

Another example is Rabin Mroué's recent work dealing with photography which triggers political engagement. In *So Little Time* (figure 4) actress Lina Majdalanie proposes an intelligent game by associating dramaturgy and the photographs being developed live on stage. During this performance, the actress addresses the existence of war martyrs and relives them through pictures.



Figure 4: Lina Majdalanie in *So Little Time* by Rabin Mroué
(Available from: www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/programm/spielplan/rabih-mroue-so-little-time/)

What are the ethical issues related to photography nowadays? Some years ago, the photographer Kevin Carter took the iconic photo of a vulture preying on a Sudanese toddler who was barely alive (figure 5).

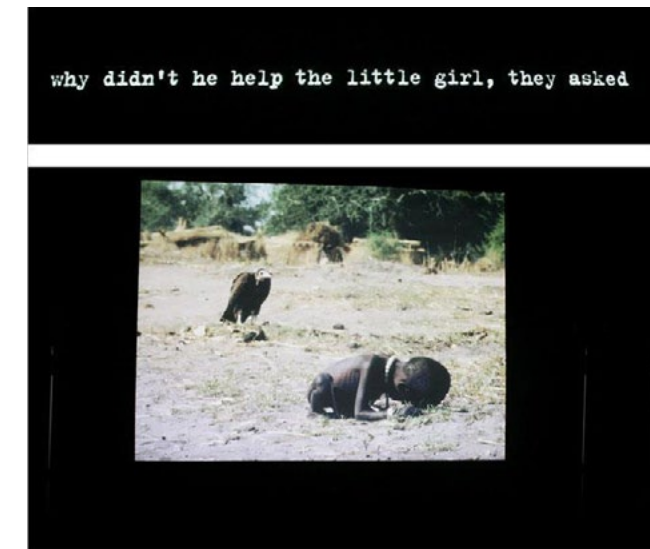


Figure 5: *The Sound of Silence* by Alfred Jaar
(Available from: www.nytimes.com/2009/04/15/arts/design/15jaar.html)

It was published in the *New York Times* and instantaneously caused a mass reaction against the photographer, who was accused of *just* taking pictures instead of helping the baby. Carter, who was 33 years old at the time, won the Pulitzer Prize for this photo, but he was consumed by the horrors he had witnessed and was later persecuted for ethical matters. As a result, he committed suicide two months later, leaving a suicide note saying, "I'm really, really sorry".

Alfredo Jaar's eight-minute film installation "The Sound of Silence" immortalized Carter's story and finishes the film saying: kevin/kevin/kevin carter is survived by his daughter megan/this photograph is owned by/the megan patricia carter trust/the rights of this photograph/are managed by corbis/corbis is owned by bill gates/corbis is the largest photo agency in the world/corbis controls close to 100 million photographs/the reference number of this photograph/is corbis 0000295711-001/no one knows what happened to the child/the end. Why are some photographs more compelling and ultimately become part of history while others are not? Is it the choice of one individual or just mass media manipulation? Was Susan Sonntag right in her article for the *New York Times Magazine*, *Regarding the Torture of Others*, when she questioned whether today *events are in part designed to be photographed*. And if *the grin is a grin for the camera*? (Sontag 2004). If this is true, photography has become the cause of an event and not a consequence of it anymore. What is indeed the politics of images?

The Epic Theatre was grounded on the V-Effekt. The concepts of interruption and social *gestus* led Brecht to build an art that valued the relation between images and the theatrical creative process. Photography was as concrete as the Brechtian anti-illusionist theatre. Brecht found those concepts—and social *gestus*—in each photograph in his archives.

The contemporary theatre does not need photography to bring reality to the stage. Quite the opposite, in a digitalized society, illusion and reality coexist in the photographic territory. The question, then, is not only what is the politics of images? But also, how do photographs enrich the contemporary theatre? This article proposes the assumption that neither theatre

nor photographs have changed after so many decades. What has changed is the way we see the images.

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Strategies of Mobilisation and Resistance

The Strategies for Mobilization of the Spectator Before and After Slovenian Independence (From NSK to *Manifest K.*)

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This contribution will focus on different approaches and strategies for spectator management in the field of performing arts' practices in terms of dependency of these practices on the socio-political and economic context. Or to put it differently: I would like to explore how different political systems of government and different forms of socio-economic organization changed the ways of (political) addressing, manipulation with as well as mobilization of the viewer in performing arts in different periods. The research will be based on the analysis of art practises in the territory of Slovenia, which offers an ideal platform for investigating the socio-political changes and their correlation to artistic practices, since Slovenia experienced several socio-political turns in a relatively short period of time—the most important probably being its independence and the secession from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1991. This constituted a political transition from the Socialist self-management system to the political system of multi-party parliamentary democracy. The example of performing arts in the Republic of Slovenia should serve as a paradigmatic example for the illumination of processes in the broader international context.

The demonstration will focus mostly on two examples of performing Arts practices from different periods of Slovenian history. The first is the “poster affair” caused by New Collectivism (Neue Slowenische Kunst: NSK). The scandal happened in 1987 as a part of preparation for the Youth Day, which used to be a Yugoslavian celebration of President Tito's birthday. The incident happened when the lifelong president was already deceased and when the apparent signs of decay of Yugoslavia were already apparent. The second art example I use is *Manifest K.* (2010), a participatory art practice that happened in an already independent democratic country of Slovenia. The *Manifest K.* was based on the *Communist Manifesto* and premiered after the global financial and economic crisis (2009) had already begun.

As a turning point, I am taking the act of Slovenian independence in 1991. It triggered two global processes: “the conversion of the capitalist mode of accumulation from the Fordist (industrial) to the post-Fordist (post-industrial) and the rise of the neoliberal governmentality” (Praznik 2016: 172). Besides ideological and political, there are also economic and market changes running “from the system of self-management and social control”, the so-called “market socialism”, to the “economic management” (Fabbri 2016, *The Slovenia Times*) and affecting primarily the altered relations of production and social relations in which artists create.

There is also an underlying thesis that I would like to explore: the changes in strategies of addressing the viewers in the contemporary performing arts are not affected only by the changes in the socio-political context but by the changed market and production circumstances as well. I am interested in the changes that occurred with the phenomenon described with the Margaret Thatcher's famous saying: “There is no such thing as society” and in what happened after the post-socialist dissolution of the welfare state in “neoliberal government” (Michel Foucault), when everybody “was forced to become a capitalist” (Berardi-Bifo 2016: 44). What

I have in mind is mostly the question of how the strategies for addressing the spectator are affected by the shift towards unstable, precarious working conditions in performing arts in the era of democracy and neoliberalism, when the art and the culture are much more affected by (mass) market orientation and consumerism. There is also a question of a shift in the complex network of professional and personal interrelations that appears after the radicalization of competitiveness and individualism in capitalist hyper-production in the field of culture—or, more precisely, in cultural and creative industries. The subversive political artistic tactics interest me mostly from the point of their effectiveness, the impact they have on spectators, and their reception or interpretation in different socio-political contexts.

History/Prestory

In the first years of independence, i.e. in the early nineties, the field of performing arts in Slovenia shows a colourful coexistence of different aesthetic practices and different socially as well as politically critical approaches. Right before the “Poster affair” happened in 1987, we can, roughly speaking, by observation made by Eda Čufer, discern two different orientations on the generational basis: while politically committed and text-based, literary theatre is typical of one (previous) generation, concept is typical of the other generation, namely the one that the NSK group were the members of. The political theatre in the territory of former Yugoslavia in the 1980s can be described as “politically committed theatre addressing major themes of the late Socialist society, its traumas, political resentments originating from the Second World War and the immediate post-war period, with gulags, repression of dissidents” and the like (Milohnić 2006: 134). However, as Aldo Milohnić further observes: “This theatre was no longer capable of overcoming the declarative political dimension and programmed taunting of the political elite of the time” (Milohnić 2006: 135). What happened with the appearance of the NSK group was the following: “The grunting of dissidents was suddenly replaced by ‘subversive affirmation’ and ‘over-identification’, artistic procedures that are markedly conceptual as well as political” (Milohnić 2006: 135). In Slovenia, these conceptual procedures were most radically introduced by the controversial art collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) established in 1984 by music band Laibach (1980), visual section IRWIN (1983) and Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (1983–87).

This generation, which was established especially after the independence but active already before it, “effected a radical turn in the political optics where the subversive nature of artistic practice no longer originates from parables, from ‘reading between the lines’, from ‘social anomalies’ presented with ‘ludicrous’ or realistic means, but from uncompromising persistence with the concept of experimental theatre and from the demand for the construction of the new historical and political context on the stage no longer subjected to the diktat of the literary and political word” (Milohnić 2006: 135).

The first shift that can be observed in addressing the recipient is the shift from the word and the content, from reading between the lines, from an almost semiotic analysis of theatre performances, from “reading theatre” (Anne Ubersfeld), where the impact is on dramatic text, to the “authorial theatre”, the concept, performative, as well as theatrical tactics of director’s theatre. I state the following: the tactics of over-identification have a thoroughly different effect from the tactics of the so-called politically committed literary or “dissident” theatre of the previous phase or generation. To detect these tactics, the political optics of literary theatre

of a viewer or user must be radically reversed. As Arns and Sasse realize, the following suddenly happens in this case: “it is the recipient to whom the full responsibility is being transferred” (Arns and Sasse 2006). Let us take a closer look at the example of the “poster affair” to see in what ways this happens.

1. Subversive Affirmation and Over-Identification

POSTER AFFAIR EXAMPLE

The approach of the collective NSK raised the greatest political controversy in 1987 with the so-called “poster affair” accompanying the celebration of the Youth Day, also a celebration of the birthday of Josip Broz—Tito, the lifelong president of Yugoslavia (died in 1980). There was a contest for the visual presentation of the Youth Day, which New Collectivism (the design section of the NSK) won. The aesthetics of Socialist Realism with a young hero oriented forwards, towards the future, thrilled the committee because it “expressed the highest ideals of the Yugoslav state” (quoted from Arns and Sasse 2006). But what was not known at that point, the New Collectivism won with the image actually adopted from Nazi German artist Richard Klein: *Das dritte Reich. Allegorie des Heldentums* (*The Third Reich. Allegory of Heroism*, 1936). In their typical application of the principle of retrogardism and provocation, the NSK replaced the Nazi symbols in the image—torch, swastika and German eagle—by a relay stick, Yugoslav flag and the white dove of peace. When the “origin” of the image was revealed, causing a considerable political unrest, the poster was interpreted as plagiarism and withdrawn “at the right time”.

As it can be learnt from the documentary film about the incident *The Fine Art of Mirroring, Day of Youth, 1987*, the responses that the poster affair produced were very diverse, triggering the most unexpected, mostly contradictory reactions. These ranged from relaxed responses in the semi-private sphere coming mostly from the younger generation, which was amused by the event, to serious feelings of resentment because of offending the ruling nomenclature of politicians and constitutional symbols of the state and its ongoing ideology. When the socialist revolutionary hero was displaced with the Nazi figure, this could also be understood as a sign of attacking the Partisan liberation movement. But at the same time, it could also be understood as its affirmation, since the Partisans actually used the same tactics in liberated territories when erasing Nazi symbols and replacing them with the red star, etc. The authors, NSK members, deliberately avoided making the interpretation of the poster affair any easier. Their defence included tricky remarks such as: “The young man, the only remaining element of the controversial poster, [is] therefore liberated from all the dark forces of Fascism, Stalinism, dogmatism that oppressed our past generations” (quoted after Trampuž 2007, *Mladina*). But as newspaper articles written *post factum* interpret the event, the action was not as much about the comparison of two regimes, “the Nazi and the Communist/Titoist” than it was about the “criticism of the very ritual of the Youth Day, the stadium celebration of a cult of personality” (Leiler 2015, *Delo*),

This diverse collection of public responses is a reaction typical of the strategies of subversive affirmation and over-identification that were deliberately and cleverly manipulated by New Collectivism / the NSK group. “The tactic of the NSK did not formulate itself in an openly critical discourse about the state and its ideology; nor did it distance itself from the

ideology through irony or ironic negation. On the contrary, it was about the repetition, the appropriation of components and elements of the ruling ideology, a play with these 'ready mates', 'an adoption of existing ruling codes in order to'—according to Laibach—'answer these languages with themselves' (Arns and Sasse 2006: 10). To quote directly from one of the ten points of the Laibach covenant: 'All art is subject to political manipulation [...], except for that which speaks the language of this same manipulation' (NSK 18). Or as Branislav Jakovljević establishes: The NSK became a litmus test of tolerance for Yugoslav socialism, as federal and republican reactions to the group were consistent with their responses to the crisis" (Jakovljević 2016, alienation 267).

The emphasis that I want to make lies elsewhere. It is already implied in the statement of the NSK. The artists/NSK themselves state in the documentary film that the "poster scandal" is "following a rather unique series of events provoked by artists in a specific social climate. Such a combination of circumstances is now impossible to recreate as it happened during Communism in the former Yugoslavia." The film also mentions that the offence of the NSK collective that produced reasons to ridicule the ruling nomenclature and its ideology was punishable by 5 to 12 years of prison. But charges were later dropped due to the complexity of the situation that was, nevertheless, brought upon authorities by themselves when they (unconsciously) confirmed and revealed the fascist, Nazi identification process lying in the very core of their own political ideology.

By making the position of artists deliberately elusive and misleading, these "invisible tactics" (Arns and Sasse 2006) can be easily misinterpreted. The finding is confirmed by the initially enthusiastic reaction of the committee as well as by the mere existence of theoretical reflections on the matter and the NSK, such as that by Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek: "Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?" The fact that the artists did not end in prison speaks in favour of the theory of shifting the responsibility for the interpretation of the action from the artist to the recipient.

Subversive Affirmation Today

Sasse and Arns go even further than this in their interpretation of the event. When emphasizing the unique socio-political conditions for producing art in Yugoslavia, Sasse and Arns find that the tactics of over-identification and subversive affirmation as so-called invisible tactics—in the way used by the NSK (both of the authors point out the "poster affair" in particular)—are now, or since the 1990s, massively integrated in approaches in the western art or in the media activism (they mention for instance authors such as Heath Bunting, The Yes Man, Christoph Schlingensiefel, ubermorgen.com, etoy.corporation and 0100101110101101.org): "These tactics provide [...] possibly the most effective contemporary method of subversion" (Arns and Sasse 2016: 276), insofar as they are, we may add, recognized as critical by users and the object of criticism is successfully subverted by the excessive fascination in over-identification.

But the fact is that these practices find their predecessors already in the Russian avant-garde of the 1930s, developed "in the Socialist countries of the Eastern Europe since the 1960s" (Arns and Sasse 2016: 5), although this role of the "Eastern import" is not explicitly problematized anywhere. We can legitimately ask the following question with Sasse and Arns: "So, why then, [one could ask,] are these tactics that have developed in one, openly repressive context,

today becoming important again, in a different—political, social, economic—context that is supposedly more liberal?" (Arns and Sasse 2016: 5).

Sasse and Arns provide an answer and find that the new "totality of the market" with the system of "the dominant political and economic capitalist system" is, after all, different from the "totality of totalitarianism", although they both fully integrate all aspects of criticism in their system: this is therefore about the "appropriation of critical viewpoints" in which "the concept of critical distance" becomes completely ineffective (Arns and Sasse 2016: 5). But the basic question pointed out—that about the origin of the tactics of over-identification in totalitarianism and that of the nowadays politically most effective tactics being born out of totalitarianism—is still pending.

From the argumentation presented so far, we can observe that there has been a considerable switch in addressing the viewer in the Slovenian theatre from the literary, political, even "dissident" theatre to the conceptual phase, from the power of the word to performative and theatrical strategies that happened already in socialism.¹

The tactics of subversive affirmation, on the other hand, have been used both, in the era of socialism as well as in the era of parliamentary democracy. There are, however, some considerable differences, as interpreted above by Arns and Sasse (such as the difference between the "totality of market" and the "totality of totalitarianism"), between the reasons for using the same tactics and their effect in different socio-political circumstances. Nevertheless, the tactics of subversive affirmation, as demonstrated, (critically and politically) function in both systems.

2. Participatory Art Practices

THE EXAMPLE OF MANIFEST K.

I would like to continue by examining another aesthetic format and model of successful political subversion that also relies on specific Slovenian socio-political and historical conditions. I take as an example *Manifest K.* (2010), a participatory art performance. According to Claire Bishop, participatory art practises that are known under different names², "connote the involvement of many people [...]" and avoid the ambiguities of 'social engagement'" (Bishop 2012: 7). Bishop therefore uses this term for "a definition of participation in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance" (Bishop 2012: 7). The *differentia specifica* of participatory arts is that they foresee not only heightened responsibility of the viewer or participant but also his/hers (physical) participation in the performance.

Participatory art with its socially committed and communitarian methods of integrating people in the cooperation in an artwork were politically favoured especially after the victory of the new labour in Great Britain. In Slovenia, its share of representation in this contemporary form has been rather small, limited to a few rare but resounding projects, so we cannot yet talk about a similar trend of the "the surge of artistic interest in participation

¹ We need to emphasize, however, that this shift does not mean that the political, literary theatre ceased to exist at that point. The paper merely demonstrates the changing effect and effectiveness of politically subversive tactics.

² "[S]ocially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, interventionist art, participatory art, collaborative art, contextual art and (most recently) social practice" (Bishop 2012: 7).

and collaboration that has taken place since the early 1990s” (Bishop 2012: 1) as abroad. In this case, the application goes in the opposite direction than in the case of “poster affair”, since the tactics used in *Manifest K.* are a mixture of over-identification (its development and modern adaptation) and the participatory art, namely the format that was imported to Slovenian context from successful examples abroad, especially from Western Europe and Great Britain.

I argue that *Manifest K.* develops some effective subversive tactics that challenge the widespread doubt in the political or subversive effectiveness of participatory arts that has appeared after the initial enthusiasm about participatory art practises. But let us first look into the aforementioned (international) criticism of possibility of political potency of theatrical strategies of participatory performances via the perspective of addressing the viewers.

Politicality of Participatory Arts

The question of what prompted this surge of interest in participatory arts about which Bishop talks can be answered with the help of Bojana Kunst. Kunst notices the following: “There exists a specific inclination, an affective tendency at work in contemporary institutionalized production of art that has to prove, in one way or another, that the audience [NL] has been reached, awoken and somehow shaken. This should happen either through social models of inclusion or working with the communities and through making art available for many different ways of experience that all go against traditional modes of observation” (Kunst 2013: 7). She continues as follows: “We can, of course, think about this need from many different perspectives: one reason could be the troubles with political participation in general and the deep problems with emancipatory political and cultural practices that we have today” (Kunst 2013: 7).

Bishop stresses that favouring of participatory art is ambiguous because the dominant political model, by instrumentalizing art, obscures the critical deviation of art from economic and market models; furthermore, it obscures the actual situation of social inequalities and promotes individualism and autonomy. An abuse of the Beuysian principle where (same as in the participatory art) everyone is an artist occurs for the purposes of the so-called creative industry: “[C]reativity” was one of the major buzzwords in the ‘new economy’” (Bishop 2012: 14), and an artist becomes a convenient economic model of an ideal, flexible, mobile and constantly available, precarious worker, a solitary trader always capable of taking care of him—or herself. This leaves the resolution of systemic irregularities, the disintegration of the welfare state and public goods, to the efforts of individuals, as Bishop interprets Ulrich Beck (Bishop 2012: 14).

A different aspect than that of the political abuse of participatory arts is pointed out by Bojana Kunst, who, however, doubts the alternative and socially critical potential of participatory arts. Her criticism is centred around the phenomenon of the “normalization of precarity” (the concept by Isabelle Lorey) now applying to all segments of activities and found in the foundations of the production of contemporary precarious subjectivity. Kunst underlines the production side of art and derives economic precarity from ontological. We now witness the obscuring of the ontological fact that we are all exposed to the state of fear, isolation and vulnerability, and especially that our situation is the same as that of others; in consequence, we

are (existentially) dependent on them. Instead, the immunization and isolation of self against the competing other are prominent.

Isolation is in the foundation of our socialized isolation of today, concludes Kunst via Isabelle Lorey. This is also the foundation of Kunst’s criticism. According to Kunst, institutions presenting themselves as alternative spaces for fostering democratic processes through participatory practices are, in terms of production, governed by the same mechanisms and relations of precarity and exploitation.³ Therefore they merely reproduce the given production conditions while attempting to counter them at the level of aesthetics and contents.

Manifest K.

Manifest K., a piece based on Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto*, makes an impression of resolving the mentioned critical points. The project was made on the non-institutional, non-governmental or so-called independent scene that does not reproduce classic hierarchical nor procedural institutional relations. It does not declare itself as a “delegated performance” that could establish its artistic institution and authorial promotion on the basis of exploiting collective, communitarian collaboration or precarious labour or artistic force. All its creators are collectively signed in the colophon as “creators of a theatre situation”.⁴

Manifest K. converts the introductory fictitious theatre agreement of bourgeois theatre that everything would be “as if” true into a transactional relation between creators and viewers that does not pretend that artists are precarious workers expected to produce quality art products (in economically measurable units). The financial and transactional operation of the project is agreed in advance and becomes fully transparent when a viewer signs a contract. By signing the contract, “the employee (or the participant of the performance) undertakes to cooperate as a precarious worker in an ‘authorial theatre’ project entitled Manifest K”.⁵ until the end of the show, for which he or she will receive a wage in the one-off amount of 7 euro (price of one ticket). The classical economic and debt relationship between viewers and creators is reversed; instead of investing in tickets in exchange for an art product, they are now participants in the debtor-employee relationship of offering their services and production force in exchange for a wage (viewers physically actually receive an amount that they can use to take part in an auction during the show or spend outside the theatre in the so-called real life). Viewers or participants thus become professional, ergo paid, labour force or, in other words, they themselves become a living artwork in progress.

Manifest K. adopts the mild (and humorous) approach of over-identification with capitalist rituals; the creators are costumed as capitalists in suits and fur coats that become foremen of the artistic production belt. Its performing structure makes *Manifest K.* a staging of theatre situations that practically simulate the customs, habits and Fordistic method of work from the era of socialism. At a certain moment, the scene changes into an actual manufacture,

3 What needs to be emphasized here, however, is, that Kunst has in mind mostly institutionalized participatory practices.

4 In opposite to *Manifest K.* artistic team, which is nevertheless listed in the colophon with the names of all the authors, one of the crucial strategies that the NSK used was that they continued to appear in public as an anonymous collective. Thus Jakovljević sums up their unique contribution: “No alternative group or movement in Yugoslavia has ever even considered contesting the state’s monopoly on violence. Neither did the NSK; however, it was the first group to challenge the state’s monopoly on secrecy” (Jakovljević 2016: 267).

5 Quoted directly from the contract used in *Manifest K.*

a sandwich production facility, and participants change into workers who can purchase and consume their products with their wage while following a cultural, ideologically coloured programme. The performance takes one step back from the post-Fordistic to a smaller, more simplified and transparent system of Fordistic production that demonstrates a model of production in manageable, transparent and controllable terms, which can be therefore changed. *Manifest K.* can be understood as an artistic process of de-alienation, of re-appropriation of the production process and its, or one's own, products.

The study or the working material of the performance is the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Each of the participants receives one copy of the text at the entrance of the work (art) facility. There is a scene in the performance with the abolition or destruction of private property and money in which the private property of the participants is destroyed or put on the auction. The participants are asked to (voluntarily) hand over only those belongings to which they are emotionally attached (to make the process really work).

The adoption of the communist practices (abolishment of private property, Fordistic process of work, pledge to fellow participants) is used by a significant implementation of the model that means, in practice, a revision of the notion of communism and a verification of the possibility of its revitalization as a realistic alternative to capitalism. When Bojana Kunst writes about Boris Buden's point on the function of art as "production of sociality" (Boris Buden) in the times of lost sociality, she establishes: "Art institutions, therefore, become places for the exposure of forgotten political and social practices—a place for their nostalgic remembrance and musicalization" (Kunst 2013: 7). *Manifest K.* can be seen in this context not as much as musicalization, but more as a (participatory) practice of sociality in a laboratory, a theatrical situation.

The participatory practice in *Manifest K.* is not as much about the black and white logic of the activation of the presumably passive consumer that, ad 1), is susceptible to the abuse by the ruling political and economic models, and ad 2), does not consider the pre-existing emancipation of the viewer. *Manifest K.* constitutes awareness-raising and the return to the "visibility" of the subversive tactics, the collective broadening of the action of complicity happening in the field of art. However, it adds to the subversive process of over-identification that is missing in the times of neoliberalism and capitalism: the utopian potential of art. Neither the artistic quality nor the subversive quality of work remains invisible here. What is fully left to the viewer is the possibility of further use of its subversive tactics. In this lies the utopian potential of *Manifest K.*, which symptomatically ends with collective singing of the song *Imagine* by John Lennon.

In lieu of conclusion: the development of effective subversive performing tactics for addressing the viewer in Slovenia reaches from the "safe" discerning of subversive meanings in the literary, dissident and socially committed theatre (in the times of socialism) to invisible tactics of subversive affirmation, i.e. the dangerous "shifting" of the responsibility for the interpretation and artistic quality of work to viewers. This is also dangerous for the recipient, who may suffer consequences if publicly affirming the subversive potential of practices (in the case of Yugoslav socialism and more precisely "poster affair"). The responsibility here lies fully with the recipient. In the last chapter of representative democracy and neoliberalism, the subversive strategies are accompanied by utopian potential and the inclusion of a viewer in an artwork in participatory projects when building a common future, alternative to capitalism, in a joint community of artists and participants. When talking about the subversive potential

of art, it can be said, however, that there is still a strong presence of the influence of subversive affirmation strategies in (Slovenian) performing arts practices.

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Testimony as an Act of Political Resistance

Political Meaning of the Mime's Plays according to Etienne Decroux

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In a series of interviews conducted by Thomas Leabhart between 1968 and 1987 with Etienne Decroux, the creator of corporeal mime recalls the determining influence of his father on his political ideal. He says:

“My father’s political opinion was close to what is called Fourier’s phalanstery. The descriptions he made were fascinating and they had a decisive influence on me. Thanks to him, for me, there is nothing above the political meaning. If I believed in God, I would still understand it in a political way” (Pézin 2003: 57).

Fourierist and republican, Decroux’s father spoke to his son about the love of humanity, he communicated to him the hope of a better world and reminded him to be wary of enrolment in a party. Decroux practiced many manual professions very early, evolved in the labourer’s world and served as a nursing assistant during the First World War. In order to learn the acting profession, he entered the school Le Vieux Colombier in 1923. He was involved into libertarian circles and engaged in militant actions. In 1931 (between 1925 and 1932 he was a student at Charles Dullin’s Atelier), he founded a theatrical troupe called “A seed” and for seven years he devoted himself, as he wrote, “to the speaking chorus and the theatre half acts, half-spoken”. The group, whose ideology was declared anti-capitalist was occurring in the celebrations of the leftist movements. In 1937, he founded a new group called “1787” which also presents some pieces of mime, *The Carpenter* and *The Machine*.

I would like to ask, what “political meaning” does Decroux give to his mime’s play?

As he leaves out words in his stage creations, Decroux abandons what he calls “story” i.e. the ability to say, “what was, what we wish for, where we come from or where we are going, what is happening some place else, whether far away or just behind the wall, what we think of what is done to us...”. Mime is a “sequence of present actions, actions here and now” and therefore is incapable of telling a story. “Corporeal mime’s so-called stories are merely developments: its plot unfolds just like the week unfolds, its actions unspool the same way seasons succeed to each other, just like sequenced operations in a factory...” (Decroux 1985: 103). It is therefore impossible in a mime play to stage a conflict and to present its happy outcome through an ideologically orientated debate. However, the chosen theme of his plays, denotes his ideological choices: in *The Primitive Life* (1930) he represents the life of a man struggling for his survival, in the play called *The Carpenter* (1931), he glorifies the manual and artisanal work, in the piece *The Factory* (1946) he deals, without criticism, with the mechanization of the bodies, and at least, in the eminently metaphorical piece *The Trees* (1946) we may observe humans in an organic interdependence.

We could notice that the choice of the subjects treated or evoked in mime plays manifests clearly the political commitment of their author. But Decroux proposes another answer. According to him, mime is not merely a positive portrait of human work, but the portrait of humanity, in all possible situations, represented only with the efforts and dynamics of work.

“When I say that mime portrays work, I am speaking about muscular movement, not about the subject treated” (Decroux 1985: 56). The body of the mime is always in conflict, always inhabited by contrary forces, by the efforts engaged in the struggle and the work. Laban calls these motion’s patterns “the inner impulse to move”, and Decroux, “qualities of dynamics” or “dynamo-rhythms” according to the technical term he invented. More generally, he speaks about “manner/form” or about “style”. Manners/form are for Him, the essence of the art of the actor. By looking into the dynamic’s qualities chosen by Decroux through Laban’s exhaustive classification of “possible attitudes towards the Motion Factors” (Laban 2011: 20), we find out that Decroux essentially works with the struggling and resisting qualities of movement, rather than with qualities related to abandonment and letting go: he develops modes of strong, sudden, direct and bound movements. This is the reason why he vehemently distinguishes his work from dance in general, which, according to him, builds his mode of expression, first of all, on movements characterized as light, sustained, indirect and free. For this reason, dance seems to him more like a dream world without conflict that has nothing to do with the world in which we struggle and act in order to transform it.

For Decroux the choice of those attitudes is political. He declares:

“I do not believe that the mime has the special function of staging that socialism is better than capitalism and that the best way to achieve socialism is to follow the Bakunin method or the Marxist method. All this does not interest me. Of course, I am for Trotsky when he is dismissed by Stalin. But if Trotsky would take the governance, I would be against him. No, I think about something else, I speak about the political breath, the Promethean breath. When a man is lying on the ground in shorts, in underpants, that’s very simple, I see people who are lying down and slowly revive. (...) I see Humanity counting only on itself: that’s a Promethean art. Such mime is exemplary, he pushes you to do like him, he makes you want to get up” (Pézin 2003: 81).

What Decroux’s remarks emphasize is the political meaning of both aesthetic and kinaesthetic choices. He points out that his plays are not politically engaged because they would support a thesis, and not essentially because one theme is chosen over another, but because bodies share an aesthetic and kinaesthetic qualities, which suggests, encourages, invites to a type of action in the world.

Allow me here a remark: I do not ask if our political convictions have their origin in the bodily practices we have or if the political choices dictate bodily practices. What I want to emphasize is the deep connexion that unites them. This is why, in theatre schools, physical training of the actors is such a sensitive issue. Will we promote a physical practice mainly through gymnastics or acrobatics? Will we prefer the bearing of classical dance or the release of postmodern dance? etc. We touch at the same time something intimate and political and at the same time something singular and something connected with a collective project.

But, back to Decroux. What did he discover or invent: there is a hidden theme in the poetics of a moving body (of a body involved in a corporeal technique). He could spend hours observing an improvising student or collaborator, as immersed in a kinetic meditation, and patiently released the theme that emerges from this singular stylistic coherence. The theme is not first set down, but latently present in the movement: the chore is to reveal the theme and to develop it. Moreover, the theme is not necessarily named, determined and unique: it can be a theme that the choreographer perceives but does not name to the creator-performer, or a thematic constellation or an “atmosphere” (Decroux uses this term) or a constellation of

themes. The creators—the performer/creator (the dancer, the actor or the mime) and the observer (the choreographer or the director)—and the spectators, are requested to perceive this thematic coherence in the body, what I have called “the singular stylistic coherence”.

Creating without a theme in this sense, what does it imply? This means that both spectator and creator-performer are invited to deal with their “deep memory”, not with the intellectual psychic memory (identified personal memories) but with the memory of the body and the soul, memory at the same time individual and collective. It also means that the imagination is requested to deal with analogies and correspondences based on the inter-sensoriality and energy equivalences at work in gesture, movement and diction (the “dynamo—rhythms” according to Decroux, “inner impulse to move” according to Laban or “the movement’s qualities” as we usually say today). These inner impulses to move (for example, to pull, to tear, to carry, to hit, to reach...)—are the fertile ground in which the most subtle semantic abstractions are rooted. So Decroux speaks about “reversed metaphor” (Pézin 2003: 105): we do not start from the idea or the concept to find equivalences in the moving body, but we start from the body in motion to root again, the ideas, the concepts—ideas of justice, of holiness... for example—.

By following the reflexion of Decroux on his art, he who constantly declared at the acting school *Vieux Colombier* that “politics is superior to art”, we discover, well before the practices and performances of postmodern dance, that “style” and “manners” are not a matter of stylization, design or mannerism, but reflect political choices. Pasolini in *Scritti corsari* (1975) pointed out how much what he calls “*mimica*” (the kinaesthetic signature), fundamental in the cinematographic image, carries ideology. According to him the kinaesthetic signature of TV presenters who copy the gestures of American presenters is one of the most powerful ideological instruments.

But what is the status of these choices and this practicing of certain movement’s qualities in scenic art? In art those qualities are not only the product of an acculturation but become signs which are constructed and voluntarily acquired and developed. Decroux says that his mime is “exemplary” in the sense that it encourages the spectator to copy and follow its energy and to act in the world in the same way. But what about the manifestation of this energy, the sign itself? I would rather say that the sign testifies. It does not figure, it does not represent, but testifies to a willingness working in the body on stage. And this psycho-physical testimony produced by a conscious practice can become, according to Decroux, an act of political resistance.

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Voicing Domestic Abuse Against Women in India through Digitized Theatre

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Introduction

“The meaning of the figure is undecidable, and yet we must attempt to dis-figure it, read the logic of metaphor. We know that the figure can and will be literalized in yet other ways. All around us is the clamor of rational destruction of figure, the demand of not clarity but immediate comprehensibility by the ideological average. This destroys the force of literature as a cultural good” (Spivak 2003: 71).

Western theories and theatre practice have influenced and shaped the contemporary Indian performance practice through several centuries, since the British colonial rule. The post-independent India has witnessed a massive cultural shift from “colonial modernism” to “indigenous modernity”, which is an attempt to explore the local Indian intellectual traditions and artistic practices. As a result, there is a rigorous search for an Indian political and cultural identity since India’s independence that creates a paradigm shift in conceiving modern Indian theatre by utilizing the traditional Indian performance knowledge. Any discussion on contemporary Indian theatre, in this way, addresses the wider context of issues related to tradition, identity and modernity.¹ As Spivak observes, this is the cultural condition that demands “clarity” than meeting “immediate comprehensibility” by the ideological average, eventually contributing to a “cultural good”.

In this background, to study the Indian theatre, it is vital to investigate the ways in which the fusion of tradition and modernity worked in the cultural sphere of India since post-independence. Is modernity, in Indian context, a complete negation of indigenous traditions or is it finding new ways to accommodate new cultural strategies to create new synergies? What issues may arise if indigenous cultural traditions are integrated into Indian contemporary theatre practice without taking a critical approach to the meaning and/or the context of those practices?

Do we need a different critical lens to reinvestigate what classical Indian theories can contribute to the current debate of gender, subjectivity and representation in Indian theatre? Utilizing the performance knowledge of digitization, can a new paradigm of theory of feminist performance practice be developed to offer a better understanding of contemporary Indian political—feminist theatre? These are the fundamental questions that I address in the following sections in the chapter.

The aim of the research project is to develop a conceptual framework to study Indian political—feminist theatre by addressing both Western feminist perspectives and also investigating non—Western critical perspectives that can offer a more accurate critical alternative

to Indian feminist performance practice considering the cultural and political background of the country. Nevertheless, it is not the intention of the chapter to offer a comparative study of Western and Eastern feminist perspectives. But, rather, the investigative framework is clearly focused on examining traditional paradigms, the ways in which they contribute to the development of a new theoretical perspective combining digitization and contemporary Indian feminist theatre.

First, I present a case study of *Nirbhaya* rape case, a predominant issue that sparked outrage all over India and a performance that is considered to be a reaction to *Nirbhaya* case. It’s a solo street performance, devised and performed by Maya Krishna Rao, a renowned activist and a theatre practitioner. The primary aim of this analysis is to open the discussion about how traditional resources can be used in voicing contemporary women’s issues. Secondly, I study the modernist discourse of Indian political—feminist theatre to problematize the current debates on how women are represented in the modern stage. Thirdly, I focus on how the digitization can address female representation and subjectivity in contemporary theatre. In the fourth section, I intend to develop a new paradigm of feminist theory based on the digitization using a subaltern approach to utilize local sensibilities and performance practises to formulate a “global understanding”.

1. Incident: The Nirbhaya Rape Case

The *Nirbhaya*² gang rape case shook India and caught the nation off guard on 16 December 2012. This incident proved to be a climactic point for re-apprehension of the laws of sexual assault against women in the Indian judiciary system. It challenged the limitations of the Indian government in respect to the security of women. A twenty-three-year-old female, Jyoti Singh Pandey (titled as “*Nirbhaya*” by the press³) was abused, gang raped and tortured in a private transport bus by five assaulters, including a minor during the busy hours of night in the suburbs of South Delhi. The physical damage also indicated a blunt object, suspected to be an iron rod that was used for penetration and the rod was described to be a rusted, wheel jack by the police authorities (Athani 2012). Eleven days after the assault, *Nirbhaya* was transferred to a hospital in Singapore but two days later, she succumbed to her injuries (Press Trust of India).

This was an incident that questioned the authorities and the Indian judiciary system for their responsibility towards women. The implications of that incident are voiced through Rao’s street theatre performance. Being in response to the gang rape, it is open for interaction as the audience gathers around in solidarity to find answers to a sole question of why the “daughters of India” are not safe anymore on the streets of their own country? Since it is performed in a public space, audiences are allowed to clap and make comments in sync of her performance, when Rao takes a pause in her dialogues.

1 The word “modern”, in India has a different meaning that states, something that is “not traditional”. Modern is something that differentiates “tradition” from contemporary life. Apparently, anything modern has a Western link with a post-colonial connection.

2 *Nirbhaya* is translated as “The fearless one”, because as per the Indian laws, the name of rape victim is not publicized in the press and media till a verdict is reached or it progresses from a basic stage.

3 Jyoti Singh Pandey will be referred as “*Nirbhaya*” in this chapter.

1.1 Performance

In the busy hours of a typical Delhi evening, and amidst the bustling crowds of *Jantar Mantar* streets, Maya Krishna Rao (born 1953), an acclaimed *Kathakali*⁴ performer and director, in the wake of *Nirbhaya* rape case, performed “Walk”⁵ on 21 February 2013. “Walk” is presented in the Hindi and English languages. “Walk” opens with a dialogue, “Walk... walk... not only by 5, 6, 7, 10, but even at 12:00 in the night, I will walk in the streets of Delhi, I need the whole night to think, to walk.”⁶

“Walk” also gives the statistics on 634 pending cases of sexual violence and informs about only one having a verdict. In the performance, on behalf of women involved in 634 cases, Rao demands for a law to curb sexual violence. The special feature about “Walk” is, when Rao walks onstage, her eye, leg movements and “*mudras*”⁷ follow the patterns of a *Kathakali* performance. Even though the dialogues and statistics are not poetic, they are embedded in a rhythm and performed in a folk form of “*Sawaal Jawaab*” (Question—Answer), an age-old Marathi⁸ “*tamasha*”⁹ tradition where the performer questions the people on social issues. *Walk* experiments with folk, stylized classical traditions and entrenches the same in the aesthetics of street theatre by including the audience to interact on the issue. The audience claps, hoots and responds at an instance to Rao’s dialogues in the *Walk*.

1.2 Observations

In Rao’s *Walk*, the politics of sexuality in theatre is represented as an interplay between the concepts of oppression and confrontation of gender. Rao uses a traditional classic performance form of *Kathakali* to develop the aesthetics and practice of her street theatre performance. In this process, she locates the performance within the public sphere, expressing her political anxieties about gender bias through finding an artistic synthesis between traditional performance forms and contemporary political issues. Rao uses a range of classical performance vocabulary such as codified hand gestures (*mudras*), stylized movement choreography and *Rasa*¹⁰ to communicate the instances of how *Nirbhaya* walked the Delhi streets, raped and murdered. She articulates agitation through adapting performance idioms of *Kathakali* and narrates the incident in free verse in English and Hindi. Rao’s work proves that the thematic intervention initiated by devising traditional idioms to express a contemporary political issue is possible as opposed to the general understanding that the traditional theatre to be of rigid in nature.

4 Kathakali is a stylized classical Indian dance drama. It has originated from Kerala state of India in the 17th century.

5 Shankar, U. (2013). Walk—Maya Krishna Rao. New Delhi: YouTube. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkTyvOKUZ4E>. [Accessed on 24 October 2016].

6 Rao, M. (2013). *Walk* [performance] Maya Krishna Rao (dir.). New Delhi: Jantar Mantar, 21 February.

7 Mudras are the symbolic hand gestures that are used in classical and traditional Indian dances. It forms a wide area of research of Indian performance practice.

8 Marathi is the language of Maharashtra state of India and is recognized as one of the official languages of the country.

9 Tamasha is a traditional form of Marathi theatre, widely performed by local travelling groups. It includes singing and dancing. It comprises of “Sawaal–Jawaab” form.

10 The Aesthetic theory of “*Rasa*”, proffered by the *Natyashastra* has influenced the rich theatre tradition, Indian aesthetic theory and practice since two thousand years. The “*Rasa*” theory is a theory of emoting a dominant emotional composition in relation to the human senses during performance.

The *Nirbhaya* rape case opens a discussion on understanding and interpreting the public and private spheres, not only in the context of everyday life but also of theatrical representation. It raises an important question concerning to art and life: the question of how a modern Indian woman is historically valued and represented on the basis of her involvement in a domestic sphere? It is equally important to notice the ways in which Rao develops a performance idiom that infuses traditional performance vocabulary of *Kathakali* to address a contemporary political issue and devise a performance. She rejects the conventional binary between any formalistic classifications such as “tradition” and “modernity”. Can “tradition” be used to develop alternative narratives on what we call “modernity”? If yes, how can Indian political-feminist theatre utilize the rich repository of classical Indian theories and performance resources to create a new Indian political theatre, which is “local” and also addresses the universal concerns? These questions will inform the discussion of public and private spheres and the paradigms of Indian feminist theatre in the following sections of this chapter.

2. Modern Indian Feminist Theatre: A Discursive Background

The contemporary Indian theatre functions at more than one level: Sanskrit theories always uphold a superior position in the aesthetic debates in India due to their classical origin. Tamil language theories come from an entirely different epistemological background that questions the basic foundations of Sanskrit language theories. Similarly, the socio-political history of each region in India influenced the development of individual performance forms locally, reflecting back to the same socio-political stratification that creates the performance forms. Moreover, Western influence in theatre theory and practice brings a further layer of complexity in the entire spectrum of political debate in Indian theatre. Against this background, Indian theatre cannot isolate itself from a tradition that is a living phenomenon, which engages people’s art and life since more than two thousand years. One of the consequences of its conflict between indigenous traditions and Western influence practice is a complete estrangement between urban theatrical practices where modern, Western-oriented theatre prevails and classical theatrical practises, where tradition holds the ground. The stylized classical drama forms like, *Koodiyattam*¹¹, *Kathakali* and dance forms like the *Bharatanatyam*¹² still adhere to the traditions of the *Natyashastra*¹³, whereas the modern Indian theatre, while not devoid of traditions, explores and experiments with Western theatre theories. A heavy dilemma persists between “modern” and “traditional” when attaining a definite identity as Indian theatre. In this setting of conflict between Western influence and indigenous traditions, where does modern Indian feminist theatre stand? In order to answer this question, I will now analyse pre—independence and post—independence feminist theatre in India.

11 Koodiyattam signifies Sanskrit drama presented in the traditional styles in temple theatres of India. It is the only surviving specimen of Sanskrit theatre and has an attested history of two thousand years.

12 Bharatanatyam is a classical dance form that hails from the period of the 1st Millennium CE. The theoretical foundations of Bharatanatyam are traced in the *Natyashastra*.

13 The text of the *Natyashastra* is ascribed to Sage Bharata and its exact composition is debated to between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Authored in Sanskrit language. The *Natyashastra* contains 6,000 verse stanzas and integrated in 36 chapters.

(A). Pre—Independence

In a critical survey of Indian theatre history and historiography, Solomon studies three initial stages for the genealogy of modern Indian theatre:

- a) The earliest, as the Colonial/Orientalist, beginning in the late 18th century.
- b) Colonial nationalist in the 1920s.
- c) Post colonialist from 1947 onwards since India's independence of 15 August 1947 (Solomon 2010: 111–27).

Indian theatre is historicized and it is the periodic dispersion of these historical categories that have led to its modernization. British colonial dominance is recognized as one of the phenomena that has initiated the modernization in Indian theatre cultures, but the colonial collapse has not taken out modernization from Indian theatre and neither it has dissolved the traditions of pre—colonial cultural practices. Indian theatre of past fifty years is not a mere extension of either pre-colonial or post-colonial but a product of new theoretical, textual, material, institutional, and cultural conditions created by the experience of political independence, cultural autonomy, and new nationhood (Dharwadker 2005: 9–14). If the modern Indian theatre is a product of experiences conditioned by the political independence then how does one describe the modernity of Indian theatre in the context of studying feminism? Can it be only defined through, how the political circumstances have dominated the nation? Bhatia states:

It is pertinent to study the historical contexts from which theatrical practices emerged through colonization, socio-political suppression, appropriation and intercultural transformations brought about by the impact of colonial forces, and acute critical engagement with socio-political issues brought about by the hopes and failures of Independence (Bhatia 2004: 96–110).

In 1920, the power of the vote was first proffered to women in Cochin and Travancore regions of Kerala and in 1921 in the Madras presidency of Tamil Nadu. This was a beginning of proffering political rights to women (Singh 2009: 150). Anti-colonial politics became the core preoccupation and balance of interest shifted from social intervention to political intervention. The social reformist theatre adhered to the concept of nationalism, but it articulated nationalism through practicing social reforms for an idealist nation building. This reformed articulation of nationalism was depicted in theatre by inculcating the values of “bringing out a change” on moral grounds. Women issues were discussed by the male playwrights and dramatists from the perspective of, how it ethically affected the value system of the society and not through interpreting “her” individual rights. The “elites”, with the support of the British legal system, turned against the practice of childhood marriages, revolted against the practice of *sati*¹⁴ resulting in its abolishment and some favoured education for women. Against the background of the establishment of the National Council of Women in 1921, the All India Women's Conference protested against the feudal forces that subjugated Indian women, from 1927–1930.

14 Sati was a Hindu funeral custom where a widow immolates herself on her husband's pyre or commits suicide immediately after her husband's death.

Post 1930s, the production of plays dealing with women's issues increased as the Indian was exposed to minor glimpses of individualism. Issues like girl child marriage, prohibition of education to the girl child did feature, but plays dealing with sexual equality and feminism were rare phenomena (Sathe 2015: 27–33). It was after 1940s that the women's issues began to be informally referred. The plays were not totally progressive towards the concept of feminism and addressing to feminist issues was restrictive. This restriction was opposed by male reformist theatre practitioners and playwrights but the disapproval was secretive rather than being overt. For example, Bal Gandharva (1888–1967)¹⁵ used to cross dress as a female actor but the women's issues that Gandharva addressed were in accordance to the problems of what the male protagonist was undergoing. A female character was always a counterpart of a male character. This proves that the existence of feminism in theatre of pre-independent India was supported by male actors and dramatists but this support was ambivalent.

(B). Post—Independence

In the early post-independence period, the plays pretending to be radically feminist also addressed the core values of an established moral value system, where a wife was supposed to be a “cultured wife” who respects the family she is married into and a mother to be morally correct. All these ideas of core value systems collided with minor ideas of rebellion (Rangnekar 2003: 3). The concept of female rebellion was populist and was a commercialized approach of conceiving feminism as it aimed at pulling crowds rather than producing genuine feminist plays. The plays were not feminist but supported the process of voicing women's issues. This effort of articulating women's issues can be considered as an instigation point of producing feminist plays. A woman's questions and issues of identity continued to substantiate in the leftist politics of post-independence India (Gunawardana 1970: 232). Dutt states:

The larger political agitation of the 1970s saw mass struggles that brought middle and working-class women together, but after this struggle, the divisions of class and caste remained. Male playwrights hailing from the educated middle class led an autonomous women's movement (Dutt 2012: 77–79).

The social issues of dowry, bride burning, domestic abuse and rape were voiced by an independent, modern generation of India. A significant paradigm shift can be observed from the pre- to post-independence Indian political theatre in representation of women's issues. Firstly, from depicting issues emerging from an objective of welfare to the concept of empowerment, and then advancing to the notion of individual liberty. Concerning to the objective of women empowerment, it is observed by Singh that a “silent feminist” (Singh 2009: 151–53) movement was initiated in India during the period of 1975–1980 by objectively aggressive male playwrights. Spivak defines the concept of “woman” as a term that rests on the word “man”, and as she also states, defining the word “woman” as resting on the word “man” can be a reactionary position (Spivak 2012: 103). According to Spivak, no rigorous definition of anything is ultimately possible: if one wanted to, one could go on deconstructing the opposition between a man and woman and finally come to the conclusion that it is eventually

15 Bal Gandharva was one of the greatest Marathi singers and a male stage actor who was renowned for playing roles of female characters since women were not allowed to act onstage in Marathi theatre during the 1900s. He is considered as a stage thespian of the Indian musical drama (*sangeet natak*).

a binary opposition that displaces itself. One of the most controversial plays from the “silent feminist” movement was *Sakharam Binder* (1972) (see Tendulkar 1996), written by a socialist playwright, Vijay Tendulkar (1928–2008) and performed by an acclaimed socialist actor, Nilu Phule (1931–2009).

The play revolves around the male protagonist, *Sakharam*, a bookbinder by profession. He has developed his own philosophy on disregarding the conventional Maharashtrian¹⁶ culture, class values and the social system. He considers this disregard to be fitting as long as he is truthful to the reality. *Sakharam* supports other men’s discarded women and castoff wives who are anyway liable to be castoff from society. He takes them as his domestic servants and sex partners. The women are free to leave as *Sakharam* keeps stating in the play that “he is no husband to forget common decency”.¹⁷ *Sakharam Binder* was penned as a feminist play from a modern heterosexual male perspective and reflected one of the most relevant issues of social status of women been defined by marriage.

The “silent feminist” movement dissolved due to a paradigm shift of representing women’s general anxieties to definite domestic anxieties. The Indian feminist theatre is an upshot of an interface between postcolonial debates about language, interpellation, subject formation, representation and forms of resistance (Gokhale 2000: 23–29). The feminist theatre portrayed the claustrophobia of freedom being “offered” to women by men of moral values and feeble embrace of liberty of thought. The urbanized feminist theatre intervened thematically but it also reflected the domestic disillusionment caused by the women’s struggle for attaining liberty of thought. Elkunchwar’s (born 1939) *Garbo* (1970) and Tendulkar’s *Kamala* (1981) (Phadke 2005: 25–30) depicted the domestic settlements or more private spaces of home, addressing this struggle. As the urban feminist theatre is inclined to the portrayal of the domestic sphere, the urban women’s theatre movement signifies a problematic conflict of deriving the concept of feminism in the process of gender, construction of identities, roles and social relations based on sexual differences. There is a drastic need to penetrate the conventional values of gender-oriented diversity by studying the elements that conceptualize the formation of feminine identity in India.

3. Alternative Indian Feminist Theatre—An Investigation

The proposal for an alternative framework is not a binary position taken between the West and India. Nevertheless, it is a political position informed by indigenous traditions and performance practises. I am equally aware of the danger of any hegemonic positions on culture that leads to “cultural puritanism” and narrow “national sentimentalism”. Jain, for instance, proposes that, the Indian view of life, the purpose of drama and theatre was to create a feeling of pleasure or bliss (*rasa*) by delineating different situations and human sentiments; in contrast, the purpose of the Western drama was to reveal struggles of life in their various forms (Jain 2005: 62). Jain’s position is problematic as it reflects a dichotomy of ideas that are lacking reference to the political context of the *Natyashastra* and Sanskrit dramas. His argument is

flawed in view of the study of a political Sanskrit drama like “*Mricchakatika*” (a little clay cart) that mounts on the very idea of reflecting the socio-political conditions and struggles.

Geeta Kapur (born 1943) defines “modern” as a state of freedom that is a set of historical and social conditions. Kapur argues that “the characteristic feature of Indian modernism, as perhaps of many post-colonial modernisms is manifestly social and historical”, rather than being posited as in the West as a “hypostasis of new” (Kapur 2000: 298). Based on Kapur’s statement and the analysis of emerging paradigms of feminism, it is imperative that a core methodology that addresses an alternative Indian modernity is developed to address the issues of contemporary feminist theatre in India.

3.1 Digitization

In “The Futuristic Synthetic Theatre”, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti articulates on certain dimensions of dynamisms concerned to future theatre. “1). It’s stupid not to rebel against the prejudice of theatricality when life itself is for the most part anti theatrical. 2). It is stupid to pander to the primitivism of the crowd, which in the last analysis wants to see the bad guy lose and the good guy, win! 3). It is stupid to allow one’s talent to be burdened with the weight of a technique that anyone can acquire by study, practice and patience. 4). It’s stupid to renounce the dynamic leap into the void of total creation, beyond the range of territory previously explored” (see Brandt 1998).

3.2 Tejomaya (Enlightenment)—A Case Study

The *Tejomaya* (Enlightenment) model is currently under development in India and it works widely with female victims of domestic abuse. I have been developing this model since two years. The model is adapted from the Boal’s concept of “Forum Theatre”¹⁸ but it is perceived in the context of Indian sensibilities and a digital medium is included in synthesizing a performance from it.

a) The Procedure: The process begins with collaborating with a certified counsellor that is working on the case of domestic abuse. If the victim is comfortable with video recording, the testimony is recorded with the counsellor. The room is not compromised with the crew, only a camera is positioned accordingly and the whole session is recorded. The session is then transcribed. The victim is kept anonymous in this entire process. The incident, described by the victim is then scripted and discussed with actors specializing in improvisational theatre. The actors then put up a performance of only the highlighting points of the event that have triggered the abuse. These conjunctures are recorded again as the actors perform. The viewers of this performance are then shortlisted from the professional spheres of lawyers, medical advisors that deal with abuse and psychologists. The performance is discussed with the counsellor that worked as a collaborator. If the victim is comfortable in attending the performance, she is allowed to view it as her anonymity is maintained.

¹⁶ Defining “Maharashtrian” is an individual that has been raised in the traditional value system of Maharashtra state of India.

¹⁷ Tendulkar, V. *Sakharam Binder* [performance]. Sandesh Kulkarni (dir.). Mumbai: Shivaji Mandir, 21 October 2013.

¹⁸ Forum Theatre is a theatre created by Augusto Boal as a part of “Theatre of the Oppressed”. In Forum Theatre, the actors or audience members are able to stop a performance in which a character is portrayed to be oppressed. The audience then suggest a different action for the actors to improvise onstage in an attempt to change the outcome of what they are viewing or experiencing.

b) The Performance: Firstly, the recorded video of the actors performing the sensitive conjunctures is exhibited for the duration of maximum 8–10 minutes. The actors then enter onstage and begin the performance, establishing the history, background of the victim and as the performance progresses, if any member from the audience, hailing from the legal, medical and psychology field feels that the victim is now oppressed in this situation; he/she stops the performance, suggests a solution to the problem. The actors then improvise on the spot, undertaking the solution provided by the member of the audience and instigate the performance again. The limit of performance is one hour maximum, in this one hour, most of the solutions are undertaken by the actors and performed. This whole performance is an “in-camera” experience. The performances are recorded for the counsellor’s archive that is liaised with previously so that he/she is made aware of how this issue can be dealt with, from a range of social perspectives and the victim is advised to view it, if she is comfortable viewing it as a video. If she is not, the counsellor discusses the performance and suggestions in detail with her.

c) Outcome: This whole experience is meant to make her aware of her legal rights as a victim, abuse and how she can fight it through this model and its contributors. In India, domestic abuse, although being a horrendous crime is not quite articulated within the communities because firstly, it is a patriarchal society, hence males dominate most of the domestic settings. Abuse is considered to be a taboo and is not supposed to be expressed even when a woman is undergoing it daily and its articulation is never quite comprehended practically hence this *Tejomaya* (Enlighten) model aims at breaching these gaps of articulation within the communities in India and hopes to continue by widening its spectrum of practice.

According to the “Bandmann Circuit” (Blame 2015: 25–26), “Mediators” are the transporters of meaning that “transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry. Concepts such as ‘mediators’ carry major epistemological implications.” A digitized approach of conceiving theatre can be termed as a “mediator” of theatrical conversation and currently, the epistemology of it still has to be evolved hence it would be tedious to compare the philosophy of digitization with the philosophy of Indian theatre. One of the distinct features of digitized theatre is, the motive of building collective and uniformed knowledge about theatrical concepts can be attained through digitizing the physicality of performance. For an instance, traditional theatre Interaction could be modified into being a participatory theatre, if the digitized mediums like immersive virtual reality, web-based, mobile-based installations are used during the performance. So does it mean that, the digitized period for theatre is claiming to be a “dehumanizing” one? Will digitization condense the effect of physical performance on the audience? The first and foremost faction of digitization is, it should be understood as a process of stimulating the reality of performance. If we take the “body culture” in the account, a body culture represents subjectivity of the performer but the body culture is subject to a change, it can modify or adapt as the social subjectivity changes, same is the case with digitized theatre. The digitized theatrical space is highly flexible and as its epistemology is not yet rigid, the “digitized” theatre culture could be easily modified as the subjectivity of it alters. There are no traditional theatrical models for digitized theatre to be studied, it remains unaffected by the historical baggage of Indian theatre and comparison and it is “foreign” to majority of theatre cultures. All that can really influence the Indian digitized theatre is, the Future. As Walter Benjamin rightfully states, “A Brechtian Maxim: don’t build on the good old days, but the bad new ones” (Bharucha 1998: 1–2).

Digitized theatre has maximum potential of being termed as a “Secular Theatre” because as digitization has not evolved from any religion, political ideology, any folklore, any specific country or any Indian performance tradition. It doesn’t follow any sociological hierarchy, if the medium is to be used, it could be used by anyone for interaction or discussion on anything. There is no classification of it being, “communist”, or “traditionalist” or “feminist”, it is what it is, a space that still needs to be explored and employed for performance. Digitization also doesn’t reserve itself from blending with other theatrical forms. A digitized space of expression can be adapted to the traditional art form of “Kathakali” and it can also be adapted for Experimental theatre. This proves that, executing digitization in theatre could be termed as a beginning of secular intervention of Indian avant-garde theatre.

In contemporary India, “CinePlay”¹⁹ is founded by Subodh Maskara and co-founded by Nandita Das, an acclaimed actor, winner of Indian national award and a social activist. It is one such organization that breaks the limitations of economy, geography, language and accessibility of theatre. CinePlay has developed a self-sustaining financial model that curbs the constraints of economical challenges possessed by theatre. It archives iconic plays and these plays are filmed as they are performed onstage but the process of editing is theatrical hence when one views the play, it is in the format of a video, edited and shot like a telefilm but it is still a play. These plays are available online for a minimal cost of ₹5 and that’s how CinePlay functions on a nominal budget. This is a revolutionary step taken by CinePlay for digitally shooting and archiving the plays in India and if this model does prove to be successful then a range of theatre practitioners, enthusiasts, critics, students can get access to perform and study new plays regardless of where they are based and what school of theatre they follow. It is indeed a secular step taken for Indian theatre and it needs to be developed for a wider outreach.

In contemporary political theatre, the avenues have intensified due to the use of digitized medium of interaction. It is attempting to go beyond the explored areas of theatrical expressions. Digitized space can also be employed to connect “think tanks” across the country that are involved in the practice of political theatre and also to invent models for archiving, increasing accessibility and enriching the theatrical experience. Digitization opens a new space of experimenting with theatrical expression and it is the only way and hope to invent a new branch of Indian theatre for future generations of theatre practitioners.

4. A Subaltern Intervention of Feminism

Subaltern studies in India aim at liberating history from the hierarchical control of “elites” and to explore theories or social modifications initiated by the margins of history. The history of the identification of Indian nationalism has been monopolized by elitism and colonial elitism respectively, i.e. elitist colonial intrusion in Indian historiography facilitates the intervention of British historians and writers as core dominators, the methodology that has been imitated by Indian historians later on during the post-independence era. The colonialist and neocolonialist historiographies, in this way, define Indian nationalism as a function of stimulus and response (Guha 2012: 2). In this context, India’s independence and the historiography of British colonial rule were stimuli that were countered by an elitist response. The nationalist representation in Indian theatre has been one of the core attributes of the process

¹⁹ CinePlay. Cineplay, 2015, Mumbai. Available from: <http://www.cineplay.com/>. [Accessed on 14 October 2015].

of “response—stimuli” but as per the subaltern theory, this nationalist sentiment itself is conditioned by elitist historiographies.

As per the previous observations in the chapter, when practices of *sati*²⁰ were abolished, girl child marriage was resisted and education for women was advocated during the British colonial rule; these ideas were propagated by “elitist” social thinkers and philosophers like, Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1883), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891), Gopal Agarkar (1856–1895), Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842–1901) and Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858–1962) (Gokulsing 2004: 38–40). They were foremost social reformists in India hailing from elite classes that worked towards addressing women’s issues and worked with the British government in order to establish a legal protocol to ban the severe practices and propagate the ideas of widow remarriage and women’s education. The narrative of India’s independence and nationalism is derived from an elitist practice; hence, the core motive of subaltern study is to establish a narrative for Indian independence from a “non-elitist” perspective. The known narrative of Indian independence is not only “elitist” but also of a highly patriarchal nature and the local struggle of working class fails to be addressed. In this political context, pre-independence Indian political theatre naturally tends to be of a nationalist value and post-independence political theatre struggles to develop its separate identity by being informed by the colonial, Western interventions of theatre aesthetics.

Thus, as a non-elitist narrative on the Indian historiography, the concept of “margin” is juxtaposed within the structure of the subaltern critique. As Prakash states, “the history becomes possible in the structure of marginalized others” (Prakash 2012: 236); i.e. the narrative can be formulated through a feminine perspective that evidently tends to hail from a marginalized sector. The case study of *Mricchakatika* and the development of the public sphere through a courtesan’s perspective can be understood as a marginalized interpretation enabling to lay the foundations of Indian feminist theory and theatre practice. In reference to feminism and the subalterns, Spivak states that, “the new location of subalternity also requires a revision of feminist theory” (Spivak 2012: 327). In the case study of the Maya Krishna Rao’s “Walk”, the act of employing stylized classical techniques of *Kathakali* and street performance for addressing a contemporary political issue of rape proves that the representation of contemporary women’s issues can be portrayed through traditional forms of Indian theatre. Here, an elite performance form of *Kathakali* has been brought into the street to address a political issue through a subaltern approach. This hybrid nature of “Walk” infuses traditional performance vocabulary in the public sphere of the street as a political protest that rejects any such boundaries between elite and popular and between tradition and modernity.

Apparently, the approach is strong enough to offer possibilities of developing a new theoretical framework to study Indian political/feminist theatre using indigenous resources. However, there are still issues of using subaltern theoretical approach to study contemporary Indian feminist theatre as Spivak observes the works of Susie Tharu (born 1943), a women’s activist, Ranajit Guha (born 1922) and Partha Chatterjee (born 1947), both Subaltern scholars and stating that:

Except in the works of Susie Tharu, a relatively new member of the collective, Subaltern Studies is not informed by feminist theory as such. “Chandra’s Death”, an exquisite piece by Ranajit Guha,

20 As was said above, *sati* was a Hindu funeral custom where a widow immolates herself on her husband’s pyre or commits suicide immediately after her husband’s death.

still resonates with patriarchal benevolence and critique.²¹ Chatterjee’s scrupulous consideration of gender as one of the nation’s fragments reads women’s testimony as evidence of face value.²² Thus “Subaltern Studies”, though not inimical to a feminist politics, is not immediately useful for it (Spivak 2012: 325).

Spivak here rightly points out that “Subaltern Studies” are not informed by feminist theory and that there is a need for an alternative theorization within the current methodological debate. Based on Spivak’s observation, I argue that the subaltern studies demand modifications, although it remains as a suitable methodology for an alternative feminist theory. According to Spivak, subaltern study is not inimical to feminist politics; therefore, a subaltern interpretation can be proposed as suitable in this instance. I propose the following diagram to demonstrate my approach to develop the next phase of a gender—based subaltern criticism that will better explain contemporary feminist theatre practice in India.

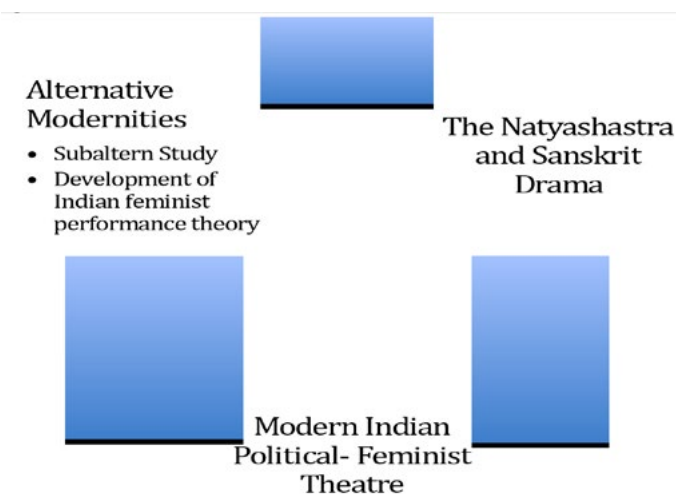


Figure 1: Deriving Alternative Modernity

Conclusion

The traditional Indian theatre informs the theoretical discourses of political—feminist theatre of post-independence India in number of meaningful ways. The contemporary feminist theatre practice in India has been developed from combining post-colonial aspects with an age-old theatre culture rooted in the *Natyashastra*. While it is vital to study the *Natyashastra* perspective on the expression of the politics of feminism in the art form of theatre, it is also necessary to explore alternatives to forge a critical paradigm for understanding and explaining feminist theatre practice in India today. To summarize the main point:

1. The discourse of modernist feminist theatre in India and its positioning within the contemporary framework lays the foundation of advancing towards exploring new paradigms of feminist study.

21 See Guha 1987: 135–165.

22 See Chatterjee 1993: 135–157.

2. There is a clear location of consistency of the public sphere in the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Natyashastra* that clarifies the existence of feminist thoughts in ancient India.
3. The case study of “Walk”, exemplifies that even the ancient traditional forms of Indian theatre can be deconstructed and meaningfully used in the contexts of voicing contemporary women’s issues.
4. The need for developing an alternative theoretical approach to study Indian feminist theatre that is supported by an altered subaltern theory and can be implemented as a methodology. This will inaugurate a new paradigm shift in the current scholarship. The subaltern study also offers a precise structure that can be undertaken in relation to the process of identifying women as “margins” and advancing in development of an alternative narrative of evolving Indian feminist theory.

To conclude, a different critical lens to reinvestigate the classical Indian theories can contribute to the current debates on gender subjectivity and their representation in Indian theatre.

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Stimulating Communities

A Message from the Actors with an Extra (Chromosomes)

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1. From politics to art. Or from art to the politics?

One of the most famous creators of political theatre, Erwin Piscator, said in his book *Political theatre*:

“I put the theatre with all its apparatus to the service of revolutionary movement and (...) gave it a new shape in accord with its purpose. In the course of the process, it became clear that this approach offers new, purely theatrical ways for staging” (Piscator 1962: 66).¹

Theatre ALDENTE, which works with both handicapped and non-handicapped actors and in which I participate, has not raised any similar manifesto. Art is the priority there, not political statements. It could be surprising, but though we are not trying to do political theatre, ideological issues appeared in the course of work. Maybe we are walking the same line with Piscator, only from the opposite side: he discovered new theatre possibilities through politics. We did not strive to do political theatre at the beginning, but there are ideological issues in the lives of our actors with an extra chromosome (that is, actors with Down syndrome²) which demand to be pronounced. They appeared spontaneously during our rehearsals and meetings without any special effort.

Theatre played by handicapped actors has intrinsic political power, though. Let us discover how to liberate and make use of this power, using as an example the Theatre ALDENTE production, called *Who am I?*.

2. Who am I?

Theatre ALDENTE has been working with people with Down syndrome for three years. The production *Who am I?* which was directed by myself is the third project of this type.

For us, rehearsing was a real adventure. We meet each other on a regular basis, and the path to creation of the performance was also the path to becoming real friends.

We started the rehearsals at a workshop at a cottage in the village of Neslovice. We were four professional theatre makers (two actors, one dancer and me as a director and actor) and six young actors with Down syndrome (five girls at the age of 11, 12 and 13, and one boy at the age of 18) and a photographer. There were neither parents nor assistants present. We handled normal daily duties as a part of the program, like cooking, washing the dishes, and so on. It was a little difficult and it cost a lot of energy, but it was not wasting time, after all: because

¹ Translation of the extract: Eliška Poláčková.

² Down syndrome is a genetic disorder characterized by intellectual disability, particular facial features, retardation of physical growth and other.

we spent a lot of time together, we gradually became familiar with the everyday struggles of a child or a young person with Down syndrome, and started to understand them a little.³

We also talked much with their parents before the beginning of rehearsals. They told us a lot of details and life stories about their children, especially about their integration in ordinary schools.

The parents' stories along with our own experiences with children with Down syndrome created a number of topics which we transformed into a performance. I would like to describe a few of them now.

2.1 Marta: a misunderstood hero

Let me introduce one of the most talented actresses of our company: Martina Trusková. She is one of the most complicated persons in the cast, too. Children with Down syndrome can often be quite stubborn. They do what they want, not what they ought to do. Martina Trusková is twelve years old. Despite her complicated nature and the fact that her speech is hardly understandable, she can go to an ordinary school.

At first glance, she might not seem to be the most suitable person for doing theatre: she cannot speak comprehensibly, she does not respect instructions (for example where to stand, what to do, what to say during the performance, and so on). She often ignores the course of the rehearsal and does not engage in it. On the other hand, she is perfectly alert when watching other actors as they rehearse and she, thus, knows the production very well in the end. During the performance, she constantly violates the stage directions, but by violating the rules, she, in fact, often discovers new situations and new possibilities in the production.

I would also highlight that her gestures and expressions are full of true emotions. The fact that she does not always ponder her looks, as many actresses do, is also her big advantage. Martina can also be completely and unconditionally present on the stage and completely immersed in the performance—but only if she chooses to.

I have known Marta for a few years and I appreciate especially one feature of hers: she has a good understanding of anti-heroes. When she is watching a story, she likes the negative characters more than the positive ones and she hopes and persuades the others that this negative person is not so evil after all. She always hopes that the evil one will become good at the end. I believe, sometimes she thinks she is a negative person herself (or she feels other people might see her like that). As she creates her own rules quite often in real life, she is used to hearing: "You cannot do this, why did you do that? You must do this," and so on. She feels unable to meet the requirements of society. But she hopes that society will accept her as a right person one day.

I connected my own experience with Marta with one story her mother had told me: One day during a school break Marta was playing that she was a goddess named Te Ka and was throwing fireballs around the class. In reality, they were not fireballs but cherry tomatoes. From the artistic point of view, I cannot but appreciate her ability to think metaphorically (red tomatoes are apparently quite similar to red fireballs) and to create a meaningful performative

act. During her performance, she was lying on the ground in front of the blackboard, so that everyone could see her. Finally, she picked the tomatoes from the floor and ate them. Some of her schoolmates were watching, of course, because it was so disgusting and, at the same time, so attractive! I think every performer would agree this is a really good idea for a short, clown-like performance. The school staff had a different opinion, of course. Marta got a note for her parents that behaviour like that is absolutely unacceptable.

Who is the goddess named Te Ka? This was the last piece of information I needed in order to understand Marta's performance completely. I learned, finally, that goddess Te Ka is the name of a negative character from Marta's favourite fairy tale *Vaiana*. Although Te Ka is a negative character, at the end of the story she turns into the goddess Te Fiti, a powerful goddess who creates life and who is the salvation of the whole world. Marta can also be a great person and salvation for the whole world—unfortunately the world does not know about it yet. For now, she is considered bad—at least by certain people—because she is throwing tomatoes on the floor and doing all sorts of "strange" things.

Marta's story was converted into a performance in the following way: On the right side of the stage, there is a screen showing an extract from the fairy tale with "real" Te Ka throwing the fireballs. On the left, there is another screen, showing a video of Marta throwing tomatoes. Between the two screens, there is Marta on a boat. She is telling a story about great danger and she is considering how to save the world. The scene is interrupted by a teacher who angrily writes the note to her parents.

This scene, in my opinion, brings a clear message to the spectators: there are many misunderstandings between people with Down syndrome and the rest of society—and it would be beneficial for the majority to try and bridge the gap, for their own sake.

2.2 Orders and commands

We realized that the lives of children with Down syndrome are full of commands and prohibitions. They have crazy ideas and they are often punished for them (as Marta was). Moreover, each easy common daily duty is more difficult for them and so they do not do everything perfectly all the time. This fact was transformed into the performance in the following scene:

There are two strict ladies who are shouting commands in many languages: "Wake up! Clean your teeth, properly! Eat! Bite! Breathe! Chew! Swallow! Think! Don't think!" And so on. Later the ladies start to test the other actors. It begins with quite normal questions: "What's the capital of the Czech Republic?" But it turns to questions really hard to answer: "Which came first? The chicken or the egg? Does a god exist? Why?"

This short situation was originally meant to express the metaphor of the lives of children with Down syndrome. However, many spectators told us that they also felt that they had been ordered around and punished frequently in their lives, and that the scene had been really strong for them in this respect. It seems that our world can be difficult and demanding for everyone, regardless of the number of chromosomes. This idea appeared in another scene called Diagnosis.

³ We will never completely understand people with a mental handicap, it is impossible. We can switch off the lights for a few hours or maybe days and find out how it feels to be blind. But we cannot switch off our brains to see how it feels to be mentally handicapped.

2.3 Diagnosis

Children with Down syndrome often need medical and psychological reports, especially when they are accepted to schools. Unfortunately, psychologists in the Czech Republic usually do not have much time to examine the child properly. The parents of our actors told us a few examples of what the psychologists wrote about their children. We were surprised, because our experience with the children was often quite different. We could see many good characteristics and talents in the children which the psychologists could not. I see two possible reasons for it: the first reason is the fact that we spent a few whole days with the children, while the psychologists only a few minutes, maybe hours. The second reason: the characteristics we appreciate in the children are not always the subject matter of psychology. This is apparent, for example, in the story about Marťa and the cherry tomatoes: I appreciated her imagination, but a psychologist would say she does not understand the rules of social behaviour. It is true, but not completely. The real person with their unique and valuable personality is often lost in the medical examination, and there is only a piece of paper with the written diagnosis left.

This fact was converted into the performance like this: there is a lady in a pink dress. She interrupts the children in the game and says in a sweet voice: “Don’t worry, I am your good aunt.” Then she asks everybody a question and after a few seconds she tells them their diagnosis. For example:

Psychologist: “Can you sing like a cat?”
Child: “Yes, I can. Miaow, miaow, miaow...”
Psychologist: “OK, it is the cat’s cry syndrome⁴ for sure!”

Or the lady asks a boy: “Can you move your leg like this?” The boy answers: “Yes!” And he moves his leg. The psychologist announces her report immediately: “Hyperactivity!”⁵

In the end, every actor and also a few spectators have their diagnoses written with big letters on a paper glued to their chests.

This scene articulates one of the problems of the contemporary world: everything needs to be sorted out, named, put in order and understood.

Jan Motal, in his book *Dialog through art* speaks about “the informative nature of modern knowledge that makes us define all the individual elements of one’s own identity. Individual people, thus, become papers and encyclopaedic entries, beautiful works of art turn into dull representatives of periods, genres and styles; the life and matter are lost for the *de-biologized* structure of signs, data, evidence, facts and meanings” (Motal 2016: 18).⁶

Persons are not unique, mysterious and enigmatic personalities anymore, they are reduced to a mere diagnosis. This affects everyone, not just the handicapped, but their struggles can serve as an illustrative example of the (post) modern inability of people to understand each

other. Thus, it seems that actors with Down syndrome perform only about themselves, but in fact they perform about all of us and the world we live in. This is the special power of theatre with handicapped actors in general.

3. The three levels of a message delivered by the actors with more (Chromosomes)

Theatre with handicapped actors does have the potential to deliver a strong political message which can (but does not necessarily need to) be used. I will now demonstrate the three layers of meaning which can be found in the performance *Who am I?*.

3.1 First level: experiencing freedom

Each performance by actors with Down syndrome has a special atmosphere, since there are no rules that cannot be broken in the course of the performance. No rules about how to move, how to speak, how to express your emotions. Our actors know what they ought to do, but sometimes they feel like doing something different: say something else, start to sing, go to a spectator and speak to him, and so on. It is not undesirable—we consider it an opportunity for something new and valuable to be created by luck.

I think this creative freedom must be felt by the audience too. In discussions after performances, they often talk about the children’s spontaneity and the joy of performing as they experienced it. Spectators see actors who cannot pronounce perfectly, but who speak with enthusiasm; whose walk is stony, but who have such huge, energetic potential in them; who cannot always follow the rules of “classical” theatre; but who can nevertheless become a success; who can forget what to do and what to say without anybody feeling embarrassed about it. This is very liberating even for the majority of spectators. Moreover, there are no strict rules for the audience either: neither breastfeeding nor going to the stage is prohibited and our spectators take advantage of this freedom.

The borderline between the audience and the stage is missing as a natural consequence of the presence of people (children) with Down syndrome on the stage. In the language of Erika Fischer Lichte, we can speak about the physical co-presence of actors and spectators (Fischer-Lichte 2011). The spectators co-exist in one environment with the disabled people here and now, experiencing the situations together. As a result, every performance is very different from the others—each performance is a unique event, not a solid arte—fact. The presence of the actor (as Hans Thies Lehmann describes it) is one of the most important aspects of the described performance (Lehmann 2005: 57).

Last but not least: in everyday life, meeting the disabled can be frustrating for both sides. A disabled person can feel stigmatized by a majority, while the majority can feel bad about watching, with curiosity, something which should not be observed. During the performance *Who am I?* these embarrassing feelings disappear: spectators are WELCOME to watch the actors and the actors are HAPPY that they are watched. The stigma is gone. Both sides can feel free.

⁴ Cat’s cry syndrome (Cri du chat syndrome) is a rare genetic disorder due to chromosome deletion on chromosome 5. Its name is a French term (*cat-cry* or *call of the cat*) referring to the characteristic cat-like cry of affected children. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cri_du_chat).

⁵ Unfortunately, we heard a very similar story: a boy was sitting on the rotating chair during the examination, and, of course, he used the opportunity to turn around. The psychologist labelled him a hyperactive only because of this sole fact... However, many children with no diagnosis would do the same thing if you put them on the rotating chair.

⁶ Translation of the extract: Eliška Poláčková.

3.2 Second level: Community and the docu-theater

There are many real stories and collected materials behind the concept of *Who am I?* (for example, a politician's speech about the handicapped from a television interview, photos of plastic bottle caps from households of people who collected them to help the handicapped, real stories of children with Down syndrome and so on). This production has the character of documentary theatre. This was not originally intended, but was achieved naturally in the course of rehearsal.

I presume every theatre production casting disabled actors represents a kind of community event, even if no collective materials and stories are used. These productions convey a message about a minority, a message that this minority does exist, in the first place. Every spectator is, thus, confronted with the question of what his attitude to these people is, and what the attitude of the majority towards them is.

As Justyna Lipko-Konieczna writes:

“Theatre as a public space par excellence can become a locus of visibility and audibility for people with disabilities, who by the force of cultural beliefs and a specific configuration of space were pushed into a sphere of political silence and invisibility. What seems to be crucial here is, first of all, the right to recognize one's own voice as meaningful, the right to recognize one's speech as socially important and, in consequence, being recognized as an entity capable of formulating an autonomous artistic message, which is at the same time a political message” (Godlewska-Bylniak 2016: 6).⁷

3.3 Third level: a mirror of the world

As we could see, the actors sent us not only a message about themselves and about a group of handicapped people, but also about us. They show us a mirror. It is not an ordinary mirror; it is a mirror with a magnifying glass. It is a mirror in which we can see ourselves from the side we do not usually see ourselves from. The world appears to be busy, loud and crazy for the disabled people. But is it not the same for us? The world wants to sort and name everything and it is not interested in deeper understanding of persons with their originality. But do we not do the same?

This is the greatest power of this kind of theatre—it can give a message about the world in a way classical theatre cannot. Actors with an extra chromosome are able to fulfil Hamlet's requirement, even though they cannot speak fluently and naturally:

(...) the purpose of playing (...) was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. *Hamlet* III.2. (Shakespeare 2011: 298).

Epilogue

Let me tell you a short story. In the previous production at our theatre, there was an adult actress without hair who needed to wear a wig. One day, our handicapped actress Marťa took

the wig off the adult actress's head and threw it into a rubbish bin. The actress was shocked: “What are you doing Marťa? I am playing a mother, I cannot be bald!” The answer was: “You can. You are.”

Marťa wants people to show themselves as they are. Let us put away our wigs, let us listen to the message of the actors with an extra chromosome and let us enrich ourselves with their specific way of thinking.

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⁷ Translated by Karolina Sofulak.

Documentary Theatre as (Politically Inclined) Community Theatre

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When we hear the word politics, expressions like state, power, power structures, competition, conflict between interest groups, societal control, and the distribution of positions of power tend to spring to mind, since today, we solely understand this word as referring to the world of politics and political activities—activities that all aim at protecting interests and obtaining power (Bihari 2009: 65). Let us now consider two theatrical examples: can the definition of politics be applied to a performance made by elementary school students about problems of farms in the country, the scarcity of drinking water, the financial limitations on well boring, and community cooperation trying to solve them?¹ Can it be applied to our other example, a performance in which the elderly and the youth of a village think together about the generation gap, problems of communication, differences in values between the two age groups, the preservation of traditions and the identity of people in the country while starting a dialogue with the audience?² In my view, the answer is yes in both cases, so the question of what we mean by politics emerges again.

The central elements of the basic definition of politics play an important role in defining what theatre actually is. The meaning of action implies the meaning of “to act” in the basic definition of theatre (Kiss 2017); moreover—as Erika Fischer-Lichte writes in *The Aesthetics of the Performative* (Fischer-Lichte 2009: 57)—every performance is a social event, and it is always about the changing or the consolidation of positions and relationships. In fact, it is always about power structures. We can draw a parallel between political activities determined by interests and oriented at realizing specific goals, and between those theatrical intentions, which aim to create a state of mind in the audience—Victor Turner calls “liminality”—in which it becomes possible to change the audience members’ core ideas or identity. The key question is thus whether the performance focuses on how to realize this change, or on defining the content of its goal.

Erwin Piscator’s Proletarian Theatre becomes political not through representing left-wing ideology, but through turning away from the illusion of bourgeois theatre, which allows the change of how and from where it is possible to witness a performance (Kricsfalusi 2011: 84). As Lehmann stated (Lehmann 2009: 223), theatre doesn’t become political through the content of a given piece, but through its representational system. The politics of theatre is the politics of perception, determined by how the theatre handles taboos and problems (Lehmann 2009: 223–24), questions and identities rendered invisible.

“Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak”—declares Jacques Rancière (Rancière 2009: 10) who says that, the distribution of the sensible determines those who are actual members of the community, who are visible in the common space and who have the chance to make their voice

heard regarding public matters. The politics of theatre appears in the demand to redistribute visibility and social space and in the intention to rebuild the community.

The communal nature of theatre was already highlighted by Aristotle in his *Politics*. He defines humans as *zoon politikons*, beings destined to live in a state, able to realize their individual and common goals only while living in a city state. According to Aristotle, the essence of politics is participation in social relations and in the life and the governance of the polis or city state, which is obligatory for each and every intelligent human. Politics is not only the rational reconciliation of interests, but also a fight for the individuals’ right to voice their opinions. However, presenting politically oppressed people and political questions in the form of thesis-antithesis on stage does not suffice as the one necessary condition of the politics of theatre any more. The sending-receiving relationship has to disappear between the creator and the viewers of the performance; the audience should not get a message, but they have to be faced with a problem which makes it difficult for him/her to decide what opinions to formulate (Lehmann 2009: 224, 226). Thus, we are bound to make a distinction between the representation of a political position (theatre with a political agenda) and the politics of representation (politically inclined theatre).³

Politically inclined theatre is then realized as a social event where the participants exist as active subjects and members of a community. Its purpose is neither to expose social controversies, nor to find a solution to public issues the majority deems acceptable, but to display competing alternatives, to redistribute social space and visibility, to break taboos, to open the closed structure of theatrical representation, and to redefine the relationships between stage and auditorium, director and actor, and performance and play.

This could actually be the very definition of *community theatre*, since community theatre strives to give participants a communal experience, often while making a marginal group visible, strengthening their individual and communal identity, improving their ability to realize their interests, boosting their confidence, their self-restraint, and their critical thinking skills (Boehm 2017). The activities of community theatre serve social aims like community building, the advancement of dialogue between social layers, the handling of emerging conflicts, and the organization of the community’s social and cultural life (Cziboly 2017: 155). By easing the rigid structure of representation, this type of theatre makes the relationship between play and performance, actor and director, performance and audience—so to say—dynamic. The pre-written text is replaced by personal stories emerging through improvisation, which become materials for the final text. The role of the director is taken over by such a group leader—social worker or drama teacher—who is mainly responsible for the creation of the community, the solving of emerging conflicts, and ensures the existence of the kind of safe atmosphere that allows honest self-expression to happen and creativity to thrive. During the coexistence and several month-long cooperation of participants, those features of the genre become prominent, which aid the strengthening of the community and the improvement of individual competences. The main task of the performance is to ensure that the problems and common concerns that emerge during the creation process are put into a wider context so that they are also relevant to other social groups, and to start a dialogue with the audience, transforming viewers into participants. Community theatre is then politically inclined, for it offers its participants—creators and audience—the opportunity to participate and act, to re-

¹ Káva Kulturális Műhely: *Windmills* (project), *The Well* (performance).

² MU Theatre: *MU, the Island of Culture* (project), *Women and Fate* (performance).

³ Gabriella Kiss, retrieved from: <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00002/00102/kiss.html>.

organize social space and relations, and to discuss common concerns in a dialogical manner.

Documentary theatre appeared roughly at the same time as theatre with a political agenda: in the monumental spectacles of Piscator's Proletarian Theatre the fictitious stage events were mixed with genuine footages of current public and political events (Irmer 2012: 2). The footages were the factual proof, supposed to aid the performances (events) in uncovering the economic and political incentives of World War I, and in highlighting the revolutionary force of the fight against capitalism (Fiebach 2012: 4). The historical events of the 1960s—the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Soviet invasion of Prague in '68—revitalize the genre (Fiebach 2012: 4), which then begins to critically explore the current social and political conflicts. The playwrights⁴ of the time become historians, who create texts that use the events of the recent past, and try to consciously investigate and understand them. As opposed to this, the documentary plays of the 1990s leave the written form behind: the playwright-director works in small collectives, and creates performances which focus on the present rather than the past. The emphasis is not on understanding and learning about the past, but on how everyday people relate to it (Irmer 2012: 2). The performance often focuses on the viewpoint of “the expert of every day”, who shares his/her opinions with the audience, while the latter become active participants as well. The documentary forms—called by Carol Martin the theatre of the real (Martin 2011: 147)—are characterized by subjectivity and a multiplicity of perspectives. Following the Schillerian paradigm, the intention of the theatre of the real—which includes documentary drama, verbatim theatre, reality-based theatre, the theatre of facts, theatre based on eyewitness testimonies, simulation video games, and (auto) biographical theatre—is to make the theatre a moral institution once again, eliminate the borders of fiction and reality, and induce changes in society (Müller 2012: 6). While being reality-bound in its topic and materials, it wants us to have something to do with what we see, to reflect on our lives, our environment and current events, to recognize our role in our communities, and to turn us into more active citizens. In this sense, community theatre is also a form of the theatre of the real (Gáspár 2017). I will now explore the similarities between the two genres through one particular performance, Kristóf Kelemen's *Miközben ezt a címet olvassák, mi magukról beszélünk* (*While you are reading this title, we are talking about you*) [2016].

The documentary theatre performance of Kristóf Kelemen is based on an acting exam from 1969, in which the students performed Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience*. The Head of Department of the University of Theatre and Film Arts, Ottó Ádám left in the middle of the performance, outraged, and the young actors believed it was over both for their studies and their acting careers. The world premiere in Frankfurt was similarly scandalous: during the second performance on Experimenta, the audience didn't only enter into dialogue with the actors, but many of them actually went up the stage, which took the author, the director and the actors completely by surprise. Three years later, during the above-mentioned Hungarian performance, no such dialogue happened between performers and audience, and the reason for that—according (Imre 2017) to Zoltán Imre—was that the Hungarian audience, and especially Ottó Ádám, understood the problem as a question of authority, proving that they had completely different ideas about what art and theatre were than the people of Frankfurt. “The one interrupted performance of Handke's play, and the lack of any further attempts

seems to show that the Hungarian audience does not regard theatre as an open social forum” (Imre 2017). Thus, Kristóf Kelemen's performance does not evoke only an interrupted acting exam, but also the failure of an attempt to create dialogue. What happened in 1969 with Handke's play serves as a tool for the performers to talk about the problems of the present generation, and to find out what the audience thinks of the role of theatre now: can a dialogue be realized? Is the audience willing to become *zoon politikon*, and participate in the discussion of matters important to the public?

The performers share personal stories from the time they spent at the University of Theatre and Film Arts, and from their first years as actors; they offer concrete examples instead of general ideas, and the people who appear in these stories—their teachers, directors and theatre directors—are mentioned by their real names. “The more factual and the more human moments the group's story contains, the more people it may reach”—says Kristóf Kelemen (Kelemen 2017). The personal tone does not mean, however, that the actors would only complain. By showing how problematic it is to re-enact the 1969 acting exam, the performers prove that they are aware that their viewpoint is only one from many, and make the audience aware of this fact as well. The witness testimonies about what happened in '69, shown in the first part of the performance, wildly contradict each other, which clearly reflects the fact that there is no viewpoint that would be everyone's truth; every personal story has its own version of the truth. So when the actors start telling their own stories about the present, we observe the problems not only from their point of view, but from the supposed perspective of everyone else in the story, too. The personal tone and the presence of self-reflection contribute to the personal stories' ability to express problems on a systematic level: what rights does a student have against a teacher, and how can he/she act within these rights? What are the chances of a newly graduated actor on the job market? How can we act in our own self-interest appropriately? What is the one central value we are not willing to let go? What leads to the burnout syndrome? What is more important: career or personal life? How can we start a dialogue to induce change? The reminiscence of the legendary acting exam and the personal stories of the performers are just a springboard for them to talk about general problems—the difficulties of starting their career, the educational system, financial troubles, the generation gap—and also to bring up questions which trigger the audience to seek answers as well, regardless of their age and field of work. The “we talk about you” part in the title is what the play is all about—about us, all of us, as it should be in community theatre.

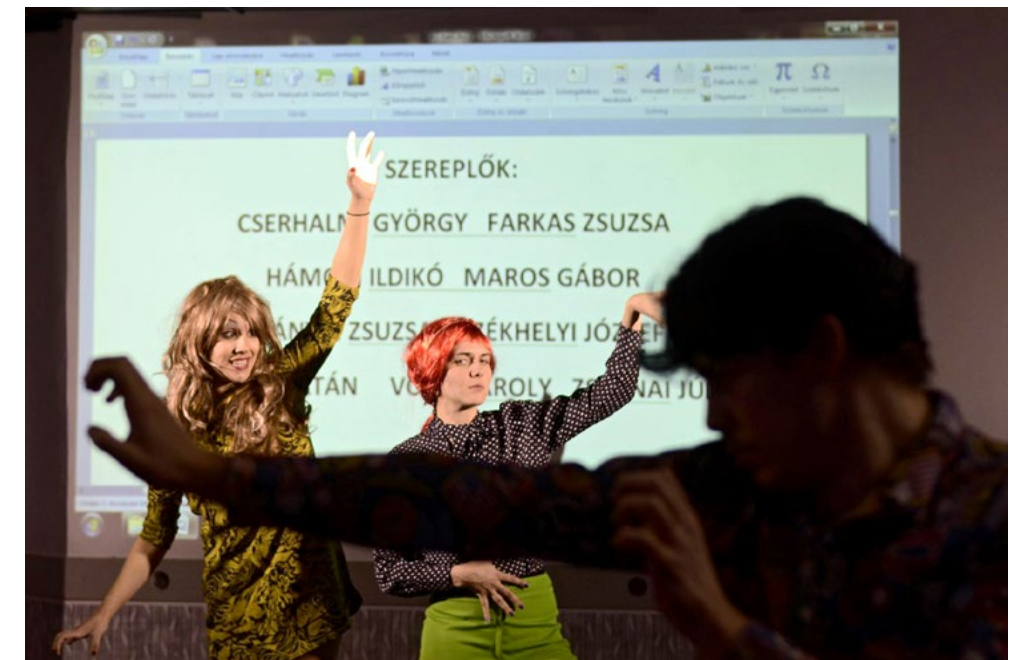
The creation process of this performance is very similar to that of community theatre performances; for Kristóf Kelemen, the first step was also the collection of materials; then he made interviews with the creators and witnesses of the '69 performance, and the participants of his own performance as well. Apart from re-enacting the original acting exam, the performers are also present on stage as “experts of the every day”, ordinary people, just like in a community theatre performance. They share with the audience what happened to them and their thoughts on these events; their presence is what matters, and not their acting. Because not all of the performers had known each other before, the first stage of the rehearsal process was about getting to know each other and establishing trust—again, just like in community theatre. Following the game-like questions the director asked and the tasks he assigned, the actors started to talk more and more honestly and openly about themselves. According to the creators, these sessions actually became kind of therapy-like: it often happened that problems the actors had hidden even from themselves emerged, and they got the chance to talk about

4 E.g. Rolf Hochhuth *The Deputy*, Heinar Kipphardt *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, Peter Weiss *The Investigation*.

things they had never managed to discuss before. Kristóf Kelemen also gave them the difficult task of tying up loose ends: for example, Judit Tarr finally decided to call her former home-room teacher she had been avoiding for a long time, because she had been embarrassed that her contract at Vig Theatre was not extended. By the end of the rehearsal process, the actors became a community; moreover, they got rid of a lot of fears and weaknesses, their self-confidence grew, their ability to realize their self-interests improved, and last but not least, a dialogue was started—a dialogue that was missing in connection with the '69 performance—which reached its final conclusion in the performance itself.

Although the performance does have a script, only the interviews telling about the past events and the order of the scenes are given in it, and the actors can tell their stories in their own words, freely. Similarly, in community theatre, the participants can tell their stories however they like, preserving a natural way of speaking. This spontaneity makes the stories even more personal, and makes the audience feel like the actors are making these confessions right now, only for them. At one time, a member of the audience actually asked during the performance, whether the actors see the questions on the projector's screen for the first time. This exemplifies that—thanks to the personal nature of the actors' presence and the questions behind the personal stories that were relevant to everyone—they managed to create the sort of atmosphere which allows for the audience to become active participants during the performance. After the performance, the dialogue always continues in an informal manner, where—similarly to community theatre—they do not focus on finding solutions, but try to create an open forum where unspoken thoughts can finally be put into words, public matters rendered invisible may become visible, and alternatives with the potential of generating change can be shown. This is the intention behind those events as well where Kristóf Kelemen met and talked to some important people from the University of Theatre and Film Arts, the former president of the student body, and former and current teachers.

In conclusion, we can say that the actors of *Miközben...* became a community during the rehearsals, which strengthened both their personal and communal identities. The central intentions of the performance were starting social dialogue, organizing the community's life, and transforming the audience into active participants. As a community theatre performance, *Miközben...* manages to create a social event, where the audience takes part in discussing public matters as a true *zoon politikon*, that is, performs political action.





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Power and Participatory Theatre Practices

Beyond Ideology? Critical Approaches in Theatre Studies

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In studies of theatre performances, it is common to work with terms, trying to objectify theatre practises as political. One method that has commonly been used for this purpose is to identify aesthetic practices with political ideologies. It's a method which objectifies, to some extent, the subject matter as a political one and considers it in a critical way. This method describes the various elements of a performance as an ideological subject. Currently, we find such ide-ology-critical approaches being used in the analysis of pieces which are labelled as "immersive theatre".

In this article, I would try to define some of the main aspects of immersive theatre in order to analyse the thesis of Adam Alston, who claimed that immersive theatre implies a form of "entrepreneurial participation". It is the relations between ideology and normativity in this argument, which has a long history in Marxian debates. This history mirrors the possibilities and problems of this approach also for analysing theatre practises.

In recent years, interest in so-called immersive theatre has increased in the public sphere as well as in the academic community. However, there is not a common characterization for the term immersive theatre. Instead, there are various concepts of theatrical performances which are designated as immersive theatre. Marvin Carlson pointed out that previously immersive theatre was often titled as "site-specific theatre" or "environmental theatre", and this kind of theatre has existed in the long-term within projects of the avant-garde.

"Ever since the 1960s, this audience arrangement has normally been referred to not as 'immersive' but as 'environmental', a term popularized by Richard Schechner, although he had been preceded in such work by Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Stein, and several early twentieth-century Russian directors seeking a more intimate audience/performance relationship" (Carlson 2012: 20).

All these different terms emphasize a certain development that is associated with immersive theatre: it is the forced participation of the spectator during the actual performance. And critique on this particular aspect of the performance objectifies it as a political subject. Among others, the impressive study by Adam Alston "Beyond immersive theatre" proposes this form of critique, when he expresses the suspicion, that "even in the absence of an announced political agenda, there is still a politics to the aesthetics of productive participation that this book looks to theorize and critique" (Alston 2016: 11).

One of the remarkable things on this study is to develop tools to analyse the often articulated attempt—not only in Marxian approaches—that immersive aesthetic practices are able to follow a hidden political agenda. Alston tries to give these "hermeneutics of suspicion", which are often used in performance analyses a methodical basement, in order to examine the aesthetic practices of immersive theatre and their correlations to a neoliberal ideology. Therefore he defines immersive theatre in the following way:

“Pinpointing just what constitutes ‘immersive theatre’ is a difficult task, but it may be broadly identified as theatre that surrounds audiences within an aesthetic space in which they are frequently, but not always, free to move and/or participate” (Alston 2013: 128).

This forced participation is realized by a set of certain expectations for the audience in an immersive theatre environment:

“Audiences might roam freely through spaces, interact and/or dialogue with performers and/or other audience members, or physically engage with a performance environment that surrounds them completely. They are expected to be alert, engaged, involved and prepared for invigoration. And they are expected to put their psychological and physiological capabilities to work, either through some form of physical exertion, or through an intimate involvement in performance that enlivens the affective possibilities of an uncertain future” (Alston 2016: 3).

Alston defines immersive theatre as a practice of audience integration via participatory or interactive strategies. The boundaries between audience and performer are meant to vanish in order to integrate the audience into the performance.

To give an example for this, I summarize my experience with the piece “Neon Palace” produced by a small theatre in Leipzig—the “Westflügel”. In “Neon Palace”, the audience was also addressed as participants. Every spectator got kind of a formal role that was assigned as a guest of a fictional nightclub. In this role we were encouraged to explore the nightclub, a huge stage installation, which was stretched over several floors. The spectators were encouraged to explore the scenery in an individual way, make contacts to the performers, who were playing the employees of the nightclub, solve problems between the story’s different characters, or embrace the various entertaining offers of the nightclub. In order to learn more about the background of the scenery, or even about the development of the plot, the spectators were always asked to participate.

Alston calls this kind of audience engagement an “entrepreneurial participation” (Alston 2016: 11). And with this term he challenges these aesthetics of participation as a form of (neoliberal) ideology. The main idea is: when we consider the claim of immersive theatre to capture the audience completely, the aesthetic process itself gets political. Because in the context of immersion, a neoliberal normativity reproduces itself.

“This is especially evident in the ways that many immersive theatre performances resource audiences as productive participants, either as immaterially productive subjects, or as physically productive subjects who embrace risk, take the entrepreneurial initiative of pursuing an individual journey of discovery by seeking out moments of performance within an immersive world, and accept personal responsibility for their activity or docility” (Alston 2016: 222).

Alston understands “entrepreneurial participation” as a practice based on the combination of specific values like as risk-taking, individualism and personal responsibility. These values correspond to the neoliberal ideology of entrepreneurialism. In other words, Alston assumes that immersive theatre, with its distinctive mechanisms to animate the audience, is a kind of invocation of an entrepreneurial subjectivity by a practice called “entrepreneurial participation”.

Furthermore, this practice is also a kind of requirement in immersive theatre. Neoliberal normativity means that the audience is expected to act in an entrepreneurial mode (see Alston 2013: 133).

“Entrepreneurial participation is also the participatory mode expected [emphasized by Alston] of audiences, for without exercising at least a degree of entrepreneurialism, the participant is likely to reduce, probably inadvertently, the number of opportunities that are available to them” (Alston 2016: 133).

What interested me most in Alston’s approach is this certain normativity and its relationship to ideology. Because I think here lies the methodological clue of the argumentation and the problem likewise.

It is not clear in the argumentation whether it is a neoliberal ideology that forms a practice or is it the practice that forms the ideology. Therefore, in one way a special practice based on special values constitutes a neoliberal ideology and the other way around a neoliberal ideology constitutes special values, which are the base of a certain practice. The tautological argumentation lies in the idea of ideology critique itself. The idea of ideology in this form of critique is based on a Marxian concept. We find different definitions of ideology in Karl Marx philosophy. But in general, it means to have a “false consciousness” about social relations.

We find this meaning articulated in the section about the fetish-like character of the commodity in Marx’s book *The Capital. Critique of Political Economy* (Marx 1998). In this section, Marx claims, that in the context of the free enterprise economy, social conditions appear as conditions of commodities. That makes it so difficult to recognize these relations as social relations.

“What is mysterious about the commodity form is therefore simply that the social characteristics of men’s own labour are reflected back to them as objective characteristics inherent in the products of their labour, as quasi-physical properties of these things, and that therefore also the social relation of the producers to the aggregate labour is reflected as a social relation of objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers [translation by me]” (Marx 1998: 3426).

Axel Honneth interpreted ideology critique saying that in capitalism people make “categorical mistake” which they are making permanently (Honneth 2005: 24). The adjective “permanent” is important here to emphasize. Because it refers to the nature of the concept of ideology, which is to declare categories as subjective as well as objective at the same time. Subjectively, ideology appears as a category mistake. Objectively, it is not possible to avoid this mistake, because it is inherent of a practice or even constitutive for this practice.

It describes the same problem with the term “entrepreneurial participation” by Alston. It also indicates this double connotation of analysing a practice: on the one hand, it’s an aesthetic practice that produces an ideology, and on the other hand, an ideology produces this practice. This ambiguity also applies to the ideology critique itself. Jürgen Habermas called it the “totalizing critique” (Habermas and Lawrence 2007: 119). And he adds that normativity in ideology critique is always an operation of immanence, because the criticism criticizes a practice, from which it obtains its claims of validity. The concept of ideology critique

“(…) set out from the fact that the potentiality for reason expressed in ‘bourgeois’ ideals” and sedimented in the “objective meaning of institutions” manifests a double face: On the one side, it offers a starting point for an immanent critique or structures that elevate to the status of the general interest what actually only serves the dominant part of society. [Classical] ideology critique deciphered in such misused ideas a piece of extant reason hidden from itself (...) (Habermas and Lawrence 2007: 117).

Ideology critique depends on an immanent approach of criticism. For sure, it is also working to perform an ideology critique without justifying the perspective of critique. But that leads in a more categorical problem. Because there is no position—also not a position of aesthetic experience—outside the ideological frame, which could justify the perspective of critique. That is why Habermas claims the critique of ideology is always the victim of own immanence: It must suspect itself to be even ideological too. The alternative is only to claim a special knowledge, which is paternalistic or dogmatically addressed to the subjects of the criticism. That is why an approach of ideology critique is forced to justify its claims of validity.

The Marxist Rahel Jaeggi emphasizes that this procedure of justifying its claims of validity can be part of the criticizing process itself. In her essay “What is the critique of ideology” (Jaeggi 2009), she claims, contrary to a structuralist position of ideology as a necessary given false consciousness, the criticism of ideology is an approach to analyse conflicting relations in normative orders.

Was does this mean? Jaeggi refers to Marx’s analysis of civil contracts in the civil society. According to Marx, the civil contract suggests a trade between equal free partners. In fact, one side—the side of the proletarian—is forced to engage in this trade. Formally, the civil contract is a trade between equals, but in reality, the practice of trade constitutes a dependency relationship (Jaeggi 2009: 282). Jaeggi calls this an immanent operation of critique, because a given practice is criticized by its own normative implications. Regarding this, the critique of ideology is a tool to analyse the constitutive function of normativity in social practices. Jaeggi reconstructs the criticism of ideology as an analysis of normative suppositions, which form the basis of a given practice. She claims, critique of ideology is a “procedure to establish links” between conflicting values in practices and the conditions of their constitution (Jaeggi 2009: 292).

Maybe these reflections are also helpful for a methodical reflection of a criticism of ideology in performance analyses. I think it is problematic to identify normative values with the ideology itself, like in some ways Alston’s approach is in danger to do so. Because Alton tends to identify normative values like risk taking, or individual responsibility with neoliberal ideology, and that’s why he is forced to do this performative contradiction in bringing ideology in a tautological relation to a certain practice. Therefore it is not really possible to avoid a totalizing critique, which is not able to integrate subversive effects of immersive theatre into the arguments.¹

The thing is: even if the participation is entrepreneurial, that means it is based on risk or taking responsibility or other “neoliberal” values, we are not determined to be affirmative to a certain ideology. This objection touches the idea of Jacques Rancière’s essay about “The Emancipated Spectator”, which presents a critique of the attempt of the avant-garde from the 20th century to activate an audience that is always addressed as a passive one (Rancière 2008: 22). These attempts are not only in danger to “unrecognize” inherent activity of an audience, they also deny their freedom to judge for themselves. And therefore it loses the interests in the specific reasons for a spectator to be part of a performance.

Does it mean we should avoid a criticism of ideology in performance analyses? I think it is important not to focus on the values itself instead to focus on the reasons of the spectator to take part on a theatre show. And regarding this, it would be interesting if there are contradic-

tions between reasons to be part of a practice and their consequences. For example, in analysing in which way we are losing freedom when we think to gain freedom from participation in a theatre play. And maybe these contradictions will show something like a neoliberal index. By the way: In the best parts of his study, Alston is doing exactly this operation. In a practice-theoretical perspective of ideology, there are no normative ideas, which are caused by a specific politic or aesthetic. Rather, neoliberal ideology is not causing the given normative ideals, it just appeals to them to enforce a special interest. But therefore we should admit that there is no ideology critique beyond ideology.

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¹ The subversive subjectivity in Alston’s approach is only identified as “a frustrated consumer” (Alston 2016: 165).

Participatory Theatre: Possibilities of Division

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Created during each performance, the relationship between actor and viewer creates the possibility of conversation, discussion or even confrontation between people on the stage and in the audience. We can observe strong relationship between drama stage and social drama. Victor Turner, for example, wrote that drama stage is always a comment—overt or covert, intentional or accidental—to major social dramas of its time and that social drama affects the form and contents of a drama stage (Turner 1982). We can understand that each theatre affects people and influences reality.

But the creators of participatory theatre have very special opportunity to influence human life—not only by talking about particular topics on the stage, but also by engaging people in theatrical activities and allowing them to create their own stage statement.

Participatory theatre involves the participation and creative activities of amateurs, representatives of various social groups. It is inclusive, engaging, and community oriented. Activities from the field of participatory theatre are close to the ideas of emancipation through art. Participatory theatre is a strategy of socially engaged art, which consists of collective co-deciding about the artistic and social form of works or activities. Its essence is a creative activity of a group of people, artists and amateurs invited to act together.

Producing participatory theatre activities has become surprisingly popular in Poland in recent years. Its popularity is connected with the growing interest in social and civic participation. At least until recently, participatory activities fit very well with the efforts made to develop civil society in Poland and it was quite easy to obtain funding for them. As Przemysław Sadura and Joanna Erbel wrote: “Participation is trendy! If the titles of issued publications and financed grants are treated as an indicator of the popularity of the phenomenon, today we have a real participatory boom in Poland” (Sadura, Erbel 2012: 6). With the growing interest in participatory activities, a critical trend towards them has also developed. Today, there is quite a large group of people who respond with criticism just to the sound of the word “participation”. Critics either subscribe to Markus Miessen’s *The Nightmare of Participation* general statement that sometimes it is better to avoid democracy (Miessen 2010), to the words of Sherry R. Arnstein, that “there is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process” (Arnstein 1969: 216), or they express conviction about dishonesty, utopia, manipulation and even oppression contained in the very concept.

It is hard to disagree that—as I will write later in the text—there are many activities, also from the field of the theatre, which the creators and organizers only call participative, often being completely wrong, sometimes even unconsciously. False participation is a kind of manipulation and as such should be stigmatized and eliminated from social life. However, it is worth remembering that despite the huge number of negative examples, there are also many activities—from different fields of social reality, also from the field of artistic activities—created with an attitude towards real participation of the participants of the activity. These are activities that democratize the field of art, make different people subjective and engage groups

at risk of social exclusion. I will now list a few of them, also showing how big their diversity is and how various this phenomenon is.

One of the most important examples of contemporary Polish participatory theatre, which became an inspiration for many similar activities, is the spectacle of the *Sejny Chronicles* by Bożena Szroeder from “Borderland” foundation. It premiered in 1999. It consisted of work with the local memory of the inhabitants of Sejny—a small town close to the border with Lithuania, whose multicultural community was broken down due to numerous 20th century conflicts. In a book published in 2001, summarizing the current work as part of the *Sejny Chronicles*, we read that:

“Center ‘Borderland—of arts, cultures, nations’ for many years has been working with children on discovering the multicultural heritage of their region. In the ‘Memory of the old series’ the following projects were carried out: ‘Home’, ‘Nest’ and ‘Temple’. Their continuation is the ‘Sejny Chronicles’ created since 1998 in the children’s theatre directed by Bożena Szroeder. A group of Polish, Lithuanian and Old Believers¹ children from Sejny firstly created a map of their city, then the city’s clay model and eventually a theatre performance based on their own scenario” (Szroeder 2001: 191).

The first performance of the *Sejny Chronicles*, as well as each subsequent performance prepared by the next participants of the action, arose from the compilation of a story about Sejny collected by young people from their grandparents and from other elderly inhabitants of the town. The actors presented them in a staged, theatrical way, embellished with traditional songs of many cultures from which actors originated. The peers were learning songs from each other. The stories were passed with the Sejny model of clay created by children. And in the company of angels formed on their initiative to watch over the city. As they later declared: “At the beginning—it was not supposed to be angels, but Sejny monuments. But that was not what our town needed. We wanted the angels watching over our city” (Szroeder 2001: 175). The *Sejny Chronicles* showed the multicultural story of Sejny, imagined and interpreted by the youngest generation of its inhabitants.

An interesting example of contemporary Polish participatory practices are expeditions organized by Węgajty Theatre. The group was founded in 1986 by the Polish-German couple Erdmute and Wacław Sobaszek. It operates in the village of Węgajty (north-eastern part of Poland, close to Olsztyn). Popular folk customs and rituals, songs, oratorios and performative actions have been important for the artists from Węgajty since the beginning of their Theatre. Initially, the members of the Theatre collected them because of their interest in Folkism. Then, the expeditions were continued in the form of carolling (the folk ritual practiced mainly in agricultural and pastoral cultures, consisting in groups of carol singers visiting particular farms with wishes of prosperity in the New Year), to the areas from which these customs originated. In recent years, they have taken on an extremely interesting form of participatory theatre activities.

Expeditions are now organized to the villages of Dziadówek and Nowica as part of the Other Theatre School—an alternative to the state form of theatre education in Węgajty. The workshop is attended by people interested in theatre, folk theatre forms, cultural animation and socio-artistic work with various groups. However, attenders do not come from plac-

¹ Part of the Orthodox Church, which has raised in the 17th century.

es where these customs are. Like the founders of Węgajty Theatre, they had to learn them through a specific, theatrical training.

Artists became carollers. Setting off on the expedition, they initiated the reoccurrence of customs in the places from which they originated. Because they have not grown up with the habit of carolling, they learned it only through specific theatrical training, the expedition became the theatre. Members of the group learn rituals only by cultural intermediaries, they are able to realize their theatrical version—based on their own knowledge and imagination. Carolling expeditions become theatrical rites and can happen only if viewers become participants. The task of the actors, who direct the performance together, is to activate the audience, to persuade them to dance, to talk and sing songs with them. Most of meaning of carols is revealed only when its original viewer becomes co-creator. In all those senses, this performance has participatory character.

Another example of contemporary Polish practices of the participatory theatre are performances of Theatre 21. The group was founded by Justyna Sobczyk—the director of most of the group's performances—in 2005. The majority of actors in Theatre 21 are people with Down syndrome and autism. Theatre 21 has grown considerably and professionalized itself over these thirteen years of its existence. As we read on the website of Theatre 21: "From the game, theatre has turned into a job for which a salary is received." Nowadays, apart from the actors and director, a team of Theatre 21 consists of people of all the necessary theatrical professions (from the producer, through the playwright and the lighting engineer). Theatre 21 is currently the best-known Polish theatre group consisting of people with disabilities and at the same time it is a great example of participatory theatre.

Most of the performances of Theatre 21 (such as *Falls. Episode 2* and *Klauni or about the family. Episode 3*) arise as a result of collective improvisation on the theme proposed by the director. The actors of the Theatre 21 rehearse subsequent texts, movements, plot and action elements, which are later written down and compiled by the director and playwright—Justyna Lipko-Konieczna. The final effect—the performance—is thus an activity created by the collaboration of the whole group and has a character of collective statement.

Yet another example of contemporary Polish activities of a participatory character are some of the theatrical activities by Rafał Urbacki. Many of them deal with Upper Silesia—a region in Poland and its imagined identity, which is shown through the form of a choreo-documentary. An example of this is *The Shape of Things. On Coal and Porcelain* from 2015.

In this action Rafał Urbacki focused on stories about women who worked in the coal mines in Katowice and in Bogucicka porcelain factory. The artist, assuming that in the narratives about industrial Upper Silesia women are presented in an inadequate way, was interested in women who worked physically. His work on the performance began by doing research, gaining knowledge about working in the plants he was interested in. Then he found and invited people who, through their biographical experiences, became the representatives of the identity of many women living in Upper Silesia. He was interested in their stories, and as a choreographer in the way in which they used their bodies. As he said, "drinking countless teas at veterans' meetings and at meetings of the elderly, mainly in the Municipal Cultural Center Bogucice, we managed to reach three ladies who worked in the mine. After interviews, it became clear that Mrs. Irma would be one of our heroines, because she worked for 26 years in the sorting plant. As for the ladies who worked in a porcelain factory, there were

many more of them. Eventually, we decided on Mrs. Basia, who worked in Bogucice porcelain factory for 16 years."

Performance *The Shape of Things. About Coal and Porcelain* consists of projection and choreography. A professional dancer, Kaya Kołodziejczyk, dances on the stage. On both sides of the stage are two screens, where the projection of the film, in which the factory employees talk about their work, specifically using their own body, is shown. Kaya Kołodziejczyk, together with the audience, watches the recorded films. Her dance is becoming the answer, the dialogue with the stories seen.

There is no doubt that the performance *The Shape of Things. The story of Coal and Porcelain* was based on biographical experiences of both women from Upper Silesia and as a result the subject of the show tackled the identity of Upper Silesia. On the other hand, it was very much just about the history of both women involved in work. Their personal stories became the canvas of the spectacle. The director inviting them to participate, asked them to prepare their statements themselves and they knew what the statements would be used for. Former employees of Upper Silesian enterprises became in this way, to some extent, the co-authors of the show.

The research methodology of participatory theatre is comprehensive, which is caused by the fact that in this case both the process of theatrical preparations and the final enactments are of equal importance. Therefore the analysis should deal with the process and the effect equally.

When studying participatory theatre, the researcher should at first watch the performances and analyse them in a critical way, paying attention to what is the piece telling and how. Secondly, the researcher should do research about the social and cultural context of the performance. In particular, the researcher should be interested in the social reception of the show as well as in how its creators—both the initiators and the rest of the team talk about it, how they present their activity. Thirdly, the researcher should try to get as close as possible to the process of producing the show. This can be done through interviews with creators, in which it is worth noting what they say, what they do not say and also how they say it. But the best, most perfect, most complete way to gain knowledge about the process of producing a spectacle is to observe the participant in the process, and it is best to follow the process by the "participant observation", which is very difficult for example because of the lack of time.

When we observe participatory theatre or participatory art, we are rarely able to meet the methodological requirements that it poses to us. This is a methodological complication, being reported by some of the well-known researchers in the field of participatory art such as Claire Bishop:

"Very few observers are in a position to take such an overview of long-term participatory projects: students and researchers are usually reliant on accounts provided by the artist, the curator, a handful of assistants, and if they are lucky, maybe some of the participants" (Bishop 2012: 10).

To sum up the methodological questions, one should point out that the research of participatory theatre has a qualitative nature. It is worth adding that the correct, full and complete study of a particular activity in the area of participatory theatre requires the research to be done in the "participant observation" method. It means that it requires becoming a participant in the creative community that is being observed. The researcher of the participatory

theatre should be engaged in the activities of the community that she or he studies, becoming a member of the community itself.

Three general features of the participatory theatre that derive from its specificity can be distinguished. Based on this, participatory theatre can be divided into categories.

Let us return to the idea that in the case of activities in the area of participatory theatre, both the process of work and the result are very important. The effect and quality of it cannot be forgotten if one wants to be part of the field of art and enjoy the benefits of this field. To forget about the aesthetic values of the process is to exclude it from the field of art as Francois Matarasso writes:

“Participatory arts are about making art though this evident point is sometimes forgotten. When it is, projects risk becoming a form of adult education for people who do not attend adult education classes, focused on individual progress, notably through the acquisition of skills and confidence” (Matarasso 2013: 9).

Taking into account the result of the action, we can divide the participatory theatre into categories, used to analyse performing arts. We can distinguish between comedies and tragedies, monodramas and those with great cast, performances in public space and in space traditionally regarded as theatrical, productions, in which acting is psychological and where it is distanced, in which the timelines of their duration are strictly defined and those that melt in non-theatrical reality, performances in which the viewer remains passive and in which the audience is invited to act and many others.

The second and presumably more important feature of participatory theatre is its political force. Around this feature we can also build the division. There is no doubt that each participatory theatre is political. Referring to French philosopher Jacques Rancière, art is very close to politics, because politics is connected with, for example, the exclusion of specific groups from public discourse by removing them from the field of perception or moving them within this field:

“The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed. Having a particular ‘occupation’ thereby determines the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a common space (...). If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense—re-examined perhaps by Foucault—as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience” (Rancière 2004: 11–12).

Politics makes certain narratives, histories, events, and activities visible or invisible. Politics is about deciding what should or should not exist in social life. It is also very political to decide how it should exist. In that sense, almost all art is political or can be politically understood and interpreted. And participatory theatre is especially political because every time it makes a group of people take part in public debate. Or it speaks at a forum until the group in question becomes visible. For that reason, the reason of visibility, participatory theatre is very political.

On the other hand, when observing some participatory performance, it becomes obvious that they are not politically engaged to the same degree, for example some of them take part in public debate to a greater extent than others.

The theory of Polish philosopher Paweł Mościcki is based on Rancière understanding of politics, but focuses mainly on the distinction between para-politics, politic and meta-politics.

Para-politics is the fight for gaining and maintaining political power, understood as statecraft in the certain way. It is the fight between politicians and their support groups. Para-politics can also be understood as demonstrations against acts of law, debates about constitution or concrete political decisions. It is a very narrow area of life, understood as a struggle for power in certain system structures.

Politics means much more; it is understood as the worldviews about social life and vision of public life. It is everything which is connected with life in society, with public space, civil rights and obligations, with the continually changing rules of social life. It is the “sphere of tension between holistic worldviews and visions of social life” (Mościcki 2008: 16).

Meta-politics, operating on the border between the personal and the public sphere, has a symbolic meaning: “It is a silent sphere and often unconscious assumptions and judgements concerning the basic categories” (Mościcki 2008: 16). Meta-politics reveals itself every time when one makes decisions about private life, but it later has a profound impact on public life. It is everything which is unsaid, common, obvious, concerning everyday life and what people do not always consider public life.

Concerning Paweł Mościcki’s division of politics, meta-politics and para-politics, we can say that all performances (including participatory theatre) might be para-political, political or meta-political.

Para-politically engaged participatory theatre is represented for example by actions prepared by Augusto Boal, which were named Theatre of The Oppressed. Augusto Boal was looking for a way to use theatre in the political struggle. His activities were developed in opposition to the reality of social inequality and injustice, focusing on the need to make social change. Purpose of Theatre of the Oppressed was clearly para-political, based on the need to activate the representatives of the working class, showing them their strength, creating the training to fight for their goods for them, while fostering their reflection and agitating discussion and collective behaviour.

Later Augusto Boal’s theatre has evolved and lost its para-political character. Forum Theatre produced nowadays in Poland, by numerous artists inspired by the work of Boal, functions more as a part of therapy, as it is used to work with groups with risk of social exclusion and take more personal issues. But the original Forum Theatre, produced by Boal at the beginning of his experiments with this form, definitely had the para-political character.

An example of participatory theatre, whose commitment can be regarded as political are Barbers by Odin Teatret. Barbers were performed in many places in the world, in very different communities, cultural contexts and political systems. The group performed among others in Peru in 1978 during the political crisis when public gatherings were banned. However, majority of barbers did not discuss strictly political topics relating to the specific power or specific regulations. Barbers’ ambitions were different. Their aim was to invite people to act within the framework of theatre, breaking their passivity, indicating that as a community they are strong. Their goal was to encourage interaction and collaborative nature of activity in the pub-

lic space. The participants of the actions were not forced to embrace a certain para-political vision. The only thing they were encouraged to do was public and social activity.

The above mentioned carolling by Theatre Węajty might be seen as a meta-political participatory theatre. It is an example of participatory theatre, where openness is both “strategy” and the content. The interest in visited people, their lives, beliefs and experience, results in the performance in which they participate. In the presentation with the atmosphere of openness. Moreover, representatives of different cultures and nationalities attend the carolling, whom villagers can rarely meet. Meta-political commitment of carolling thrives in the area of questioning certain beliefs about foreigners. Carolling is a piece about openness and tolerance and about interest in all the villagers, regardless of their social status.

The last significant feature of the participatory theatre is the degree of participation of participants in the process of the production performance. On this feature it is also possible to build the division.

The first thing that comes to mind when it comes to the topic of gradualization of participation is Sherry Arnstein’s classic text “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” (Arnstein 1969). Arnstein in this text, starting from the idea that what is called participation, is often not participation at all, shows that participation is in fact about sharing power. Depending on how many people, who manage the project, will give the power and how much of that power will be accepted by new people, so high on the ladder of participation is the action in question.

There are eight levels, with the lowest being called “manipulation”, then “therapy”, “informing”, “consultation”, “placation”, “partnership”, “delegated power” and most notably “citizen control”.

At the very bottom of the “participation ladder” is “manipulation” and “therapy”. As Arnstein points out, these levels should include activities that, in fact, do not have a participatory character, although they assume participants’ participation. They are there, however, only to fulfil the plans of power, and as part of the action they are “educated” or “cured”. “Manipulation” is, for example, an action where citizens are persuaded, educated to sign the implementation of the urban development plan, not being able to influence its shape or even often not realizing why they are beginning doing it. On the other hand, “therapy” will be an action designed to adapt the behaviour and decisions of the inhabitants, so it is an activity that directs social group, and does not allow them to manage social issues.

“Informing”, “consultation” and “placation” are in Arnstein’s opinion “apparent actions”. “Informing” means transferring knowledge about action plans but leaves no space for answers or negotiations on the part of the citizens. “Consultation” is a request for opinions, yet the consultation does not mean that the opinions will be taken into account. “Placation” is instead admission to action, enabling decision-making and taking responsibility, but to a very limited extent—for example in matters of little importance.

At the top of the “participation ladder” is “partnership”, “delegated power” and “civic control” (i.e., means of socialization of power). “Partnership” is a real division of power between citizens and rulers, but it works most effectively when the community is well organized. “Delegated power” means that citizens take power over certain specific city programmes and implement them themselves. “Citizens’ control” equals the fact that residents have control over specific institutions such as schools or housing estates. They can manage their programmes, be responsible for their policies, content-related and administrative decisions, and negotiate the conditions under which they operate.

Participation ladder is a fairly easy tool that can be used to analyse any participatory action. Although it originates from the reflection on social participation, one can use it as a model to look at the actors from the field of arts. But it is quite a dangerous decision, because firstly, the field of art is governed by other laws, and the redistribution of power in the field is different. Secondly, when assessing the work of participatory art, one should not only look at the participation of its participants, since it is only one of its elements. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that what Sherry Arnstein teaches is that participation can have a false character; second, that it is gradual and third is that to share the power means that somebody has to give some part of power, but also someone has to accept it. Having power means having both rights and obligations. In the result: If you have power, there is always additional work to do within the activity in which you participate.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that participatory theatre is a phenomenon that should be researched through participatory observation, which results in entering the community preparing the spectacle and becoming part of it for some time. In the case of participatory theatre, both the process of the production of the performance and the effect of the activity are important. While looking at this effect, participation theatre can be divided into the appropriate categories used for the analysis of the work of art. Each participatory theatre is political, and the participation of participants in the performance is graduated.

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Biographies of the authors¹

JOEL ANDERSON

I studied at Queen Mary University of London and Université Paris VIII, and trained at the École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq. I worked with Augusto Boal and later in numerous French theatre companies, including multiple projects with Théâtre de l'Opprimé in Paris, which also led to further ventures across Europe, Africa, and South America. In addition to theatre, I have worked in the fields of film, television, and photography. I have previously taught at Kingston University, Queen Mary University of London, HM Prison Pentonville, Brunel University London, and at several schools in France. I have in recent years given doctoral seminars in Germany, and lectures in China, and have served as Visiting Professor at the University of London Institute Paris.

I have presented research at international academic conferences, and have been an invited speaker, most recently in Korea and France. In addition to sharing research at conferences and symposia, I have given public talks, most recently at Asia House, London. I was a member of the executive committee of TaPRA from 2005–2010. I have served as an external examiner at Goldsmiths and LASALLE College of the Arts, and as a PhD examiner for Lincoln University. I have previously received funding from the AHRC, the University of London Central Research Fund, and from the European Cultural Foundation, for a project with UN RWA in Jordan.

KLAUDIA ANTAL

Klaudia Antal (born 1990 in Budapest) graduated in Theatre Studies; she is currently pursuing her PhD studies at University of Pécs, Faculty of Literature. The topic of her doctoral research concerns the political aspects of participatory theatre. From this point of view, she examines the genre of community theatre, theatre in education programmes, documentary theatre, and board game theatre. Since 2013, she has been working at the Jurányi House and writing criticism (among others) for *Theatre Magazine*.

TONY FISHER

I am a theatre academic and researcher but also have a highly interdisciplinary background—first having trained in fine art then filmmaking, before going on to study philosophy, writing my doctoral thesis on problems of history and phenomenology in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. I also worked as a scriptwriter for several years in the UK film industry and have an ongoing interest in making experimental documentary films.

Having grown up in Newcastle-upon-Tyne during the dark days of Thatcherism, I sought refuge in the Tyneside Cinema where I first developed a love for European cinema. I went on to study fine art before moving to New York, where I studied with some extraordinary teachers at the Whitney Museum of American Art's prestigious Independent Study Programme, such as Hal Foster, Yvonne Rainer and Ron Clark. It was during my time in New York that

I encountered theatre and performance for the first time—particularly through the work of the Wooster Group. Returning to the UK, I became involved in filmmaking before returning to higher education, eventually going on to complete a PhD in philosophy at the University of Essex. I first began teaching as a visiting tutor at Northumbria University and Middlesex in their fine art departments, then as a sessional lecturer teaching philosophy at Birkbeck before taking up a full-time post at Central in 2007. At Central, I teach MA students dramatic writing, dramaturgy, and theatre history as well as, for the PhD programme, research skills and methods.

As a researcher, I am particularly involved with the Theatre, Performance and Philosophy working group at TaPRA where, until recently, I was a co-convenor, as well as the Performance Philosophy network. I have published work in various journals that explores intersections of philosophy, performance and theatre history. I have recently completed a monograph that examines—in the form of a “critical history” or genealogy—the long and profound influence that government had on the development of the modern European stage. I am co-editor of a 2016 collection, *Performing Antagonism: Theatre, Performance and Radical Democracy* that looks at problems of political performance by drawing on the insights of post-Marxist political philosophy and the theory of agonistic democracy. Two further edited collections are in the pipeline: one of the ways in which Michel Foucault continues to influence theatre and performance scholarship; and the other on performance and failure.

NIVEDITA GOKHALE

Nivedita Gokhale is currently pursuing a PhD in Drama from the University of Lincoln, the UK on contemporary Indian political theatre. As theatre is an art form, its viability thrives on reflecting the social realities and also on instrumenting a “real” change within the system. Political Theatre is one of the key strands of Indian Theatre as it is used as a tool for raising socio-political awareness and community development and redefining notions of Indian social concepts. Based on the theory of conscientization, political theatre has always been responsible for influencing, forming the political opinions of the masses, and devising activism through performance. Tradition represents a vital approach in conceiving political theatre in India; it draws upon the dynamism of Indian culture and engages constantly with it to create regenerative institutional forms.

This includes learning from traditional contexts and formulating the learning to reconstruct the structural representation of theatre. From the pre-independent era of initiating movements against the British rule through theatre, the post-independent era of establishing a connection with the liberated nation, promoting political theories that were more oriented towards building people's new political identity, to the contemporary political theatre that concentrates on socio-political awareness, Indian political theatre has been an intersection of art, realism, and social relevance. Hence, it has been observed that the traditional forms of theatre have been constantly reconstructed over the period of time. Therefore, it is necessary to study the ways in which these reconstructions are instigated by analysing the progression of Indian political theatre and activism within the context of the new age of “digitization” by establishing channels of relatable interpretations and by inventing theatre models that enhance the experience of digital apprehension of political theatre.

¹ Biographies of the authors were completed in 2018.

JOANNA KOCEMBA

Joanna Kocemba is a graduate in Cultural Studies and Theatre Studies from the Institute of Contemporary Culture at the University of Łódź, a PhD candidate at the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw, and also a member of the Culture Animation Team and the Postgraduate Studies of Theatre Pedagogy Team. In the years 2011–2014 she was a contributor to the culture section in the newspaper *Dziennik Łódzki*. She currently collaborates with the Węgajty Theater, the Topographie Association, For Contrast Portal, Humanities of the XXI Century Research Group, Ochota Theatre, and Melpomena Amateur Theatre Competition. She published, among others, in *Reflections*, *Contemporary Culture*, *Folk Literature*, *Didaskalia*, and *Teatr*. Her fields of interest are theatre for social change, socially engaged theatre, alternative and independent theatre, amateur theatre movement, participatory theatre, participatory art, and cultural animation. She is developing a PhD thesis on participatory theatre. She is currently collecting material and formulates the opening chapters.

NIKA LESKOVŠEK

Nika Leskovšek graduated in Philosophy and Comparative Literature and Literary Theory from the Faculty of Arts (University of Ljubljana); the title of her thesis was *Beckett and Berkeley: In the Light of Perception*. In 2013, she also graduated in Dramaturgy from Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television with a thesis titled *Chance or the Essay about Moving the Rules*. In 2014, Nika Leskovšek received the Taras Kermanner Foundation Fellowship as a young researcher of Slovenian drama. She regularly conducts research in the field of contemporary drama for the literary and cultural magazine *Sodobnost*, writes analyses of performing arts for the performing arts journal *Maska* and for *Dialogi*, a magazine for culture and society. She has worked in different capacities such as a researcher, theatre critic, theatre dramaturge, and moderator of symposia and round tables involving experts from the field of performing arts. She is a member of the Association of Theatre Critics and Researchers of Slovenia (DGKTS) and of the editorial board of the aforementioned *Maska* journal. She was a jury member at the Week of Slovenian Drama Festival in 2016 and 2017 and at the Days of Comedy Festival in 2017. Since 2016, she has been working as a junior researcher at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television (University of Ljubljana). In the same year, she enrolled in the Performing Arts Studies PhD programme at the Academy. The working title of her doctoral thesis is *Spectator, Community, Mobilization: The Transformative Power of Performing Arts After the Performative Turn*, in which she is investigating the potential of performing arts to induce social engagement in the spectator.

ALEXANDRA MARINHO OLIVEIRA

Alexandra Marinho Oliveira is a Brazilian actress and director holding an MA in Visual Arts (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro) with a research on theatre and photography related to her staging of Peter Handke's *Self Accusation*. She graduated in English Literature (Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro) and post-graduated in Theatre Education (CEFET/Ceará). She is currently a DAAD's Scholarship holder at Goethe University in Frankfurt, conducting her studies as a PhD candidate since 2015 with the dissertation topic *Bertolt Brecht and Theatre Photography: Aesthetic and Political Involvement*. The dissertation, supervised by Professor Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, investigates the background of the creative processes that influenced the theatrical productions of the playwright and director Bertolt Brecht through

the photographic medium. As a member of International Brecht Society, Alexandra presented a paper titled *Brecht and Photography* at the 15th Symposium of International Brecht Society in Oxford, 2016.

PIERRE NADAUD

Pierre Nadaud is a dancer, actor, and director, but also a teacher. After finishing his master's study of Philosophy at Paris VIII University, he moved to the Czech Republic in 1997. Due to his keen interest in theatre and body poetic, he enrolled in the Department of Non-verbal Theatre at HAMU in Prague, where he graduated several years later. He is currently the Director of the Department of Physical Theatre at the Theatre Faculty of JAMU in Brno.

ZOFIA SMOLARSKA

Zofia Smolarska is a theatre critic and an Assistant Professor at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, where she graduated in 2014; she is the author of the book *Rimini Protokoll. Blind Alleys in Documentary Theatre*, an editorial-board member of the monthly *Teatr* and the academic on-line magazine *Polish Theatre Journal*, and a vice-president of the Polish Society for Theatre Research (PTBT). As a dramaturge and assistant director, Smolarska has collaborated, among others, with Edit Kaldor (Amsterdam) and Rimini Protokoll (Berlin) on their participatory theatre projects. Her PhD thesis is focused on craftsmanship in the context of the organizational dysfunction in Polish state theatres after the political transformation.

MATTHIAS STERBA

Matthias Sterba studied Philosophy and Historical Research at the University of Leipzig. He is a member of the collective devised theatre gruppe tag and carried out a variety of performances and pieces often related to socio-cultural contexts. Subsequent to his graduation he worked at the Leipzig Dance Archive and at the Institute for Theatre Studies in Leipzig. Since 2016 he has been conducting his PhD research of political practices in contemporary theatre under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Patrick Primavesi. The focus of the research is on the specific strategies of creating utopian projections in performing the political.

JITKA VRBKOVÁ

Jitka Vrbková was born in 1984 in Brno, Czech Republic. She studied Directing and Dramaturgy at the Department of Dramatic Theatre at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Theatre Faculty (receiving her bachelor's degree in 2008), and Theatre Dramaturgy at Theatre Faculty, Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno (graduating with a master's degree in 2010). She was also teaching script-writing at JAMU and dramaturgy at JAMU's Theatre and Education Department (2012–2014). She has been enrolled in the PhD program at JAMU since 2014.

In 2008 she founded Theatre Aldente, which started as an independent student artistic group, creating site-specific projects, poem theatre, and devised performances. A change came in 2013 when her daughter was born with Down syndrome. As a result, the dramaturgy changed from "site specific" to "actor specific", specializing in theatre with actors with Down syndrome. This is also the reason why she began her PhD studies. The topic of her doctoral thesis is theatre with actors with a mental handicap. She develops performances with these

actors (as a form of artistic research) and she also visits other similar theatres to familiarize herself with their methods. Her aim is to show that theatre performed by handicapped actors is not worse than the “common one”; on the contrary, it can discover new dimensions of theatre in general and of the actor’s performance in particular.

JUSTUS WENKE

Justus Wenke studied Dramaturgy at the University of Music and Theatre in Leipzig until 2005. He has worked as a dramaturge in various fields, focusing on contemporary drama, authoring performance and participatory projects; most recently he was a dramaturge at Schlosstheater Moers. He currently works as a concept developer, copywriter, and dramaturge. He is also involved in artistic research. Since 2016 he has been developing his PhD thesis about audience concepts in the context of theatrical practices. He also participates on the colloquium with Prof. Patrick Primavesi at the Institute of Theatre Studies, University of Leipzig.

Editors’ note

This volume offers an insight into the political in the doctoral theatre research as it was presented at the 8th *Conference of Doctoral Studies in Theatre Practice and Theory* organized by the Theatre Faculty of Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in November 2017. The author of the idea of the whole conference was Radka Kunderová, who prepared the conference from winter 2016. In summer 2017 Klára Škrobánková took over the responsibility for the conference and in spring 2021 Naďa Satková took over the responsibility for the proceedings. The proceedings include those papers presented at the conference whose authors responded to the editing process. The aim of editors and the proofreader was to balance requirements regarding academic soundness and language comprehensibility on the one hand, while preserving the plurality of mindsets and discourses mirrored by the articles on the other.

Politics and Community Engagement in Doctoral Theatre Research

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