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Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts is published twice annually. Contributions are particularly welcome from postgraduate researchers, postdoctoral researchers, and early-career academics in theatre and performing arts. We welcome the submission of academic papers, performance responses, photo essays, book reviews, interviews, and new dramatic writing. *Platform* also welcomes practice-based research papers.

Papers should not exceed 4500 words (including notes and references). Practice-based papers should normally include images in JPEG format (300ppi). Reviews should be around 1000 words. Photo essays should not exceed 2000 words and 10 pictures. All contributions should be formatted according to the MLA style guidelines (see Gibaldi's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*) and should include a 200-word abstract of the article submitted as well as the article itself. Authors should also send a 50-word biography with their submission. Submissions should be sent electronically as email attachments to platform-submissions@rhul.ac.uk.

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> What do academics, critics, and reviewers pay attention to when they write? With whom do they collaborate? Whom are they addressing with their writing? To what extent is their critical work financially remunerated? How does their writing achieve a balance between description of artistic productions and their socio-political, economic, historical, and theoretical contextualisation? And should they make it clear whether or not they actually like a performance'?

With these questions we began our investigation into the contemporary practices of doing criticism in summer 2018 when we sent out an interdiciplinary call for papers for a *Platform* symposium. Our inquiry into the current practices of art, theatre, and performance criticism assembled in this issue is built and builds on the work of Anglophone and German-speaking visual art critics, theatre, and performance academics: in the 2000s a whole range of writing on criticism, spanning from literary critic Rónán McDonald (2007), to philosopher and film critic Noël Caroll (2009), to the art historian James Elkins (2003 and 2007), addressed the tension between a mode of descriptive reviewing, on the one hand, and of critical evaluation on the other. McDonald's book *The Death of the Critic* holds on to the critic's distinctive status and argues that:

> [u]navoidably, the critic occupies a hierarchical role: someone who knows more about an artform than we do, whose opinion or interpretation is worthy of special regard […] Evaluation of the arts has been dispersed, beauty emphatically ascribed to the 'eye of the beholder', not the expert critic or the aesthetician. (2007, viii)

Continuing with his work on the state of criticism from 2003, where he claimed that 'descriptive criticism begs the question of what criticism is by making it appear that there is no question' (42), James Elkins recently

observed (2018) that art criticism

> continues to avoid judgement in favour of description; it favors neutrality and praise despite the encroaching market; it imagines itself to be in perpetual crisis or decline; it attaches itself to many media and voices; and it has no central texts, practitioners, or problematics. (10)

Notably, Elkins made these statement before online publishing expanded radically and began to democratise the field of art criticism. A cultural shift that is still ongoing and subject of many of the contributions in this issue, which are thereby expanding the work of Gavin Butt (2004), Duška Radosavljević (2016), and the recent issue of the bilingual art theory/criticism journal *Texte zur Kunst* (published in German and English) entitled 'Performance Evaluation' (June 2018). While Butt explores questions of how art and performance criticism overlap and Radosavljević's edited volume focuses on how online publishing has had an impact on theatre criticism, the *Texte zur Kunst* issue 'Performance Evaluation' focuses on the performative qualities of reviewing practices on online platforms, especially on social media.

We perceive of the socio-political roles of criticism as more than mere translations of works of art and performances into words, which describe and perpetuate the very value systems within which operate. Therefore, we want art criticism to actively challenge pre-existing socio-political and economic moulds, distinctions, and hierarchies. In this view, we organised a one-day symposium at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in November 2018, which assembled scholars and practitioners from the UK. Postgraduate and early-career scholars from the UK, the US, Germany, Austria, Poland, and Canada discussed the politics and technologies of contemporary review writing, considered to what extend reviewing implies *doing* criticism and explored the embodied experiences of performing criticism.

Alongside the paper presentations, the symposium featured a keynote lecture by Sabeth Buchmann, professor of Modern and Contemporary art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, to which Dr

Duška Radosavljević responded by picking up on the tensions between the quantification of critical evaluation and expanded agencies for non-professional audiences. A final roundtable discussion featuring the dancer and choreographer Hetain Patel and dance critic Sanjoy Roy, moderated by Dr Diana Damian Martin, provided a glimpse into the difficulty of navigating an ongoing and personal/professional relationship between critic and artist. This issue reflects the wide-ranging contributions made on this day by emerging academics and practitioners and carries the multiple conversations forward. Additionally, it was also important to us that the printed issue included the voices of those who, due to political or financial reasons, could not attend the symposium in person. This issue of *Platform,* thus, features perspectives on criticism from various countries in Europe and beyond, from scholars and students at various stages in their career.

The articles in this issue travel from personal introspection via critical dialogues between artist and critic to critical practices in and for larger groups or communities. The first two contributions feature historical case studies and offer a way of situating contemporary artistic criticism in larger historical movements and contexts. In the essay 'Theatre as Creative Failure: Simone Weil's *Venise sauvée* Revisited', Thomas Sojer considers what it would mean to develop an individual and introspective critical stance in light of political and journalistic oppression. Against the backdrop of the Third Reich, Weil develops a specific mode of introspection, a closet drama, based in the theology of the early Christian church, which gives Sojer the opportunity to ask where critical reading and writing practices begin and at what point they can legitimately be called criticism. His essay also makes an important contribution to the study of the 'théâtre resistant', a term which was coined after WWII, to warn against historically revisionist narratives of theatre, criticism, and resistance to censorship.

Hannah Bruckmüller's art historical contribution, entitled 'Cli-*je*: Subjectivity and Publicity in Art and Criticism, expands on the question of criticism as an institutional practice. The Letters of Pierre

Restany and Marcel Broodthaers in *Court-Circuit'*, reflects on the entanglements of visual and letter-based artistic and critical production. Reading the exchange of letters between artist Marcel Broodthaers and as critic Pierre Restany, Bruckmüller performatively examines the *clichés* of the artist-critic relationship in the art world of the 1960s. She asks, how such a socially reciprocal relationship between critic and artist can be re-evaluated against the backdrop of the socio-economic mechanisms of the art market.

Transitioning to a more contemporary perspective and broadening the conception of criticism to include a wider public, Sabeth Buchmann's article 'FeedBack! Performance in the Evaluation Society'—a continuation of her contribution in the *Texte zur Kunst* issue (June 2018)—discusses the contemporary evaluation techniques applied on social media. Reading a feedback-based performance practice from the postmodern dance of the 1960s against Anne Imhof's performance *Faust* presented at the 2017 Venice Biennial, Buchmann observes that contemporary art criticism is uncomfortably implicated in the very systems of discipline enforced by the logic of constant evaluation that it seeks to critique and reflect upon.

Similarly, Katharine Kavanagh's article 'Criticism within the Circus Sector: Redressing a Power Imbalance' contemplates the various publics contemporary criticism should strive to reach. Her piece surveys the current relationship between circus practices and their emerging academic and critical discourses. Finding a distinct disconnect between the way circus practitioners reflect on their practice versus how performance and theatre scholars have tended to treat the genre of circus, Kavanagh proposes a system that will enable a more nuanced discussion of circus as an art form and its multiple and complex potentials activating audiences and reaching different publics. She strives for a form of circus criticism, which will not only make the practice of critically writing on circus more relevant to circus performers themselves but illuminate circus's critical relevance to the wider field of performance studies.

Lastly, and with an eye to the future, Heidi Liedke's contribution 'In Appreciation of 'Mis-' and 'Quasi-': Quasi-Experts in the Context of Live Theatre Broadcasting' expands on the label of the artistic critic by considering what she calls 'quasi experts', who attend remote live-screenings of theatrical events and participate in the discourse about them via Twitter. In taking seriously these contributions as critical utterances, Liedke argues for a delimitation of expert in light of a growing lay culture and calls for a more socially inclusive definition and practice of a critic. Her essay puts forward the pressing question whether today's practices of criticism necessarily need to be thought of as a collective undertaking, distributed across various virtual and real-life communities.

The section 'Reports from the Field' brings voices of practicing critics into the scholarly discussion of criticism. Here they comment on what they see as problems in the way criticism is practiced today or offer small glimpses into their own critical interventions. Theatre critic Eylem Ejder provides a feminist insight into the difficulties associated with performing theatre and publishing criticism under the current political atmosphere in her home country Turkey. Showcasing two modes of performing feminist criticism, developed and practised by the author and a group of like-minded friends, Ejder demonstrates creative ways of engaging with different publics and circumventing certain restrictive publishing directives by drawing on fictionalisation and introspection. Ejder uncomfortably echoes Sojer's earlier contribution, which also engages with the realities of performing criticism in politically limiting circumstances.

An excerpt from Meghan Vaughan's zine 'All of the Art I Experienced from 1.11.18 to 8.11.18 (and How it Made me Feel)' features her de-hierarchical approach toward theatre criticism. Parts of it are reprinted here as the zine was distributed as a performative intervention during the day of the 2018 symposium. It features a review of all the cultural events Vaughan attended or consumed in the week leading up to the symposium. The zine's distinct 'Do-It-Yourself'-

character lends the format an informality that is still rare in artistic criticism. Her breezy and relatable tone mirrors her aesthetic choice and showcases a mode of performing criticism that is simultaneously engaging and critiquing, and contrasts inaccessible or elitist forms of writing criticism.

Michael Norton highlights the critical practices at play in programme selection by theatre directors, dramaturgy and curators by introducing his own system for aiding selection committees in embracing a less judgmental, and more vulnerable and open-ended method of selecting work to produce at their venues. Painted against recent programming scandals at the Whitney biennial or the Berliner Volksbühne, and inspired by the feedback giving process at the DAS Theatre school in Amsterdam, Norton proposes a system of evaluation and selection that gives room to minority voices and allows for a more nuanced discussion of the proposed work, which he calls 'Vulnerable Selection'.

Concluding this section is Zofia Cielatkowska's 'Native Speaker: Art Criticism and Its Lingua Franca', which makes a passionate case for a more multi-lingual approach to art and theatre criticism. Pointing out the many instances where English is seen as the lingua franca of the art world and pointing to possible discriminations that art critics from non-English speaking countries face in light of this need to converse in very specialised English, her essay draws attention to the many inequalities and social exclusions at work in the field of art and performance criticism today. She calls for a more reflective treatment of these assumed inevitabilities and revolts against the hegemony of the 'native speaker'.

The self-referential and reflective qualities of the issue's theme are also reflected in the performance and book reviews. In his review of his experience as an audience-participant and 'jury member' at *Ralegh: The Treason Trial* at the Globe, Alessandro Simari reflects on the critic's complicity in perpetuating a societal status-quo in the theatre, and questions the emancipatory potential of participatory theatre.

Reviewing *The Twilight Zone* at the Almeida Theatre, the theatre-maker Anne-Louise Fortune weaves the economic realities of writing theatre criticism for online outlets into her analysis of the show, tracing the fast-paced, fleeting nature of online culture' in both. The featured book reviews engage with recently published volumes shining light on criticism from literary, pedagogical or theatre-practical perspectives. Amy Borsuk reviews the edited collection, *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now: Criticism and Theory in the 21st Century.* The book comprises essays that cause the reader to understand that we critically engage with our pasts, always in relation to the now. Jaelyn Endris in reviewing *Critique and Postcritique*, an edited collection by Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski that primarily focused on literary critique, suggests the application of these methods to practice-as-research in theatre and performance studies. Bojana Janković engages with the book *Thinking Through Theatre and Performance*, another collection of essays, as a companion for higher education students as an introductory approach to critically engage with the wide range of questions that makers and critics ask in today's climate of performance. The final review by Meg Cunningham, the book reviews section editor, outlines the new versatile critical framework for critical engagement with immersive storytelling as laid out in Alke Gröppel-Wegener and Jenny Kidd's new book *Critical Encounters with Immersive Storytelling*.

What our collective engagement with criticism shows is that many commentators in this issue have identified a certain *precarity of criticism*—both in terms of political uncertainties and in terms of problematic relationships to artistic institution and unstable working conditions. But there are also more hopeful voices as some contributors draw attention to how critical practices are being invigorated by projects that conceive of criticism as a communal practice or bring practitioners into discussions of what constitutes productive criticism. By contemplating new communities of fandom on social media or alternative publication formats, the writers in this issue point to alliances and extended collaborations between artists, critics, and their publics.

We would like to thank the Department of Drama, Theatre, and Dance at Royal Holloway, University of London, for the continued financial and academic support. We also thank the peer-reviewers for generously giving their time, attention, and expertise to the articles in this issue, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama for supplying us with book review copies, and the Royal Central School of Drama and Speech for generously hosting the 2018 symposium. A final word of gratitude and admiration belongs to the authors in this edition, whose continued engagement with and reflections on the politics of criticism have made this issue a poetic and illuminating intervention into the current climate of practicing criticism.

Josephine Leask, Lisa Moravec, and Clio Unger

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Hannah Bruckmüller studied art history at the Universities of Vienna and Basel. Currently she is writing her PhD on the publishing practice of Marcel Broodthaers at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. She has been a Doctoral Fellow at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) since 2016. She is a co-founder and editor at *all-over* (www.allover-magazin.com).

Sabeth Buchmann is an art historian and art critic. She has been Professor of Modern and Postmodern Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna since 2004. She is the co-editor of PolyPen, a book series on art criticism and political theory (b_books/ Berlin). Her recent publications include: *Putting Rehearsals to the Test*; *Practices of Rehearsal in Fine Arts, Film*; *Theater, Theory, and Politics*, co-edited, 2016; *Textile Theorien der Moderne*; *Alois Riegl in der Kunstkritik*, co-edited, 2015; *Hélio Oiticica & Neville D'Almeida, Experiments in Cosmococa*, co-authored, 2013; *Film, Avantgarde Biopolitik*, co-edited, 2009; *Denken gegen das Denken: Produktion, Technologie, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica*, monograph, 2007.

Zofia Cielatkowska is an independent researcher, philosopher, curator, and art writer focusing mostly on social issues in art and culture, as well as on contemporary problems of power, exclusion, and marginalization. She holds a holds a PhD from Jagiellonian University in Krakow (2013). She writes for various magazines (*Kunstkritikk*, *Hyperallergic*, etc.) and is a member of the AICA and The Norwegian Critics' Association (Norsk kritikerlag). She lives in Oslo, Norway. (Her website can be found at zofiacielatkowska.com)

Meg Cunningham is a PhD Candidate at the University of Surrey. Her practice-based PhD explores the intersections between architectural environments, story, and immersive scenography. Holding a Bachelors of Architecture and an MFA in Scenic Design, she was an art director in the themed entertainment industry in Los Angeles and has designed for a variety of theatres in London, Pittsburgh, and Los Angeles.

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Jaelyn Endris is a PhD candidate at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, whose research interests include feminism and performance, critical femininity studies, and practice-based research. Her PhD research examines the critical and practical potential of a reparative femme reading practice for femme and feminist performance.

Anne-Louise Fortune is studying for an MA in World Theatres at Goldsmiths, University of London. As an academic, Anne's research focuses on issues of representation within performance and theatre. Anne is a theatre-maker, and her aim is to bring theatre of international origin to the UK. Anne also writes reviews and articles about theatre and culture for various publications.

Bojana Janković is an artist and writer, currently undertaking a PhD at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, where she is exploring performances of Eastern European identities. Her installations, performances, texts, and non-denominational works have appeared in physical and digital spaces in the UK, Serbia, and internationally.

Katharine Kavanagh has worked independently as a circus writer and researcher since 2013. Visiting lectureships include the National Centre for Circus Arts, London; Circomedia, Bristol; and Dans och Cirkushögskolan, Stockholm. In 2018 she won ESRC funding and is now working towards a PhD in Cardiff University's School of English, Communication and Philosophy.

Heidi Liedke is a Humboldt Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at Queen Mary, University of London with a project on the aesthetics of live theatre broadcasts. In 2016, she obtained her PhD in English philology at the University of Freiburg, Germany. The monograph based on that is published as *The Experience of Idling in Victorian Travel Texts, 1850–1901* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Her research interests are Victorian mentalities, contemporary British drama, performance theory, and new forms of audience response and engagement. Her work has recently appeared in *Performance Matters* and *Volupté*.

Michael Norton is a producer, researcher, and dramaturg, supporting independent performance practices and venues across Europe and the United States. In addition to his freelance work, he works as a producer in Artist Development at Artsadmin. He holds an MFA in Performance Practice as Research from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, where he is now a visiting lecturer.

Alessandro Simari is a doctoral candidate and Teaching Associate in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary, University of London. His current research focuses on the cultural and spatial politics of 'reconstructed' early modern theatres in contemporary Europe. His research on audience interaction in Thomas Ostermeier's *Richard III* has recently been published in *Cahiers Élisabéthains*.

Thomas Sojer investigates the work of Simone Weil and seeks to locate her thought at the intersection of philosophy, literature and history. His emphasis lies on the reception of the New Testament in Weil's critique of ideologies. Thomas is member of the Association pour l'Étude de la Pensée de Simone Weil and co-affiliated as junior researcher both at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies and at the Institute of Classical Studies at the University of Graz.

Megan Vaughan is a writer, project manager, and PhD researcher at Royal Holloway, University of London. For a decade she was a theatre and arts blogger, covering experimental performance and new writing in informal and unusual ways. Her academic research is concerned with the relationship between theatre criticism and fandom. Her first book, *Theatre Blogging: the Emergence of a Critical Culture*, will be published by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama in 2020.

Articles

Theatre as Creative Failure: Simone Weil's *Venise sauvée* Revisited

By Thomas Sojer

Abstract
Simone Weil's dramatic criticism and dramatic writing offer a way of reconceptualising what it means to engage critically under fascist censorship. This essay explores her closet drama *Venise sauvée* as an example of her embrace of writing political resistance in a time when classical theatre criticism was absent and artistic resistance had been made futile. Simone Weil called for an awakening in the audience to acknowledge their responsibility of how they let theatre shape their way of thinking about war. I demonstrate that Weilian theatre theory does not only consider the stage an object to be analysed, but also the very subject through whose lenses one can undertake a critical reshaping of ways to interpret the world. In this dramatic view on WW2 Weil exhibits the artistic voices of resistance in occupied France as caught in its own echo chambers and thus no longer perceptible in society. The essay reads her unfinished historical tragedy *Venise sauvée* and its central motif of the silenced voice of resistance as implicit warning to the contemporary *théâtre resistant* to become the agent of its own irrelevance. I propose that beyond this warning there lies a theory of deconstructing propaganda theatre by unleashing the creative power of theatre's failure, namely via a distortion of the socially synchronized *inner* and *outer* stage of the audience.

Theatre Has Failed

By 1940, writer and philosopher Simone Weil[1] (1909-1943) had become convinced that theatre and theatre criticism in Nazi occupied France had

1 Born as daughter of a Jewish doctor in 1909, Weil completed an elitist education in philosophy in Paris in 1931. She became part of the labor movement and attempted to personally experience the precarious social conditions of the lower classes: In 1934/35, she worked in major French factories, like Renault, and dissected the mechanisms of the contagious power of ideology and class oppression. In the course of the collapse of leftist politics in Europe in the early 1930s, the experiences in the factories and a failed participation in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, Weil turned to religious concepts. Via Casablanca and New York, Weil managed to reach London in 1942 with the intent of serving as a frontline nurse for France Libre. When denied she starved herself and died of heart failure in Ashford in August 1943.

failed. She was aware that performances had become a powerful channel for capturing the public eye and that the traditional 'critical' function of the theatre and theatre criticism had been abandoned. Recognized critics had gone into exile or risked imprisonment and execution, while newly installed conformist 'critics' took over the media landscape of Nazi Germany and its occupied territories. By a 1936 decree of Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels all 'disgraced' critics had been replaced by new conformist 'journalists' called *art-report writers*, who largely wrote in favour of and with the goal of advancing the will of the regime (cf. Goebbels 30). Consequently, Weil detached herself from the contemporary theatre culture of the Fascist regimes and observed developments in (not yet occupied) France tentatively and with great concern (cf. Pétrement 435). One rare example of Weil's sentiment is documented in a letter from her trip to Rome in 1937 (then under fascist rule). Commenting ironically on a performance she attended in the Colosseum, she mused that it was 'a well-acted play, quite good and interesting from the standpoint of the attitude of the regime'[2] (transl. from French Pétrement 426).

Although not a theatre critic herself, Weil regularly attended performances in Paris and other European cities, like Berlin, Rome, or Zurich. She also wrote many private reviews of theatrical and operatic performances throughout her life, which she sent frequently to family and friends. One of the few still existing reviews is a letter she wrote to the Swiss doctor and connoisseur of the Parisian art scene Jean Posternak after visiting a performance in Paris in 1937. In a cynical tone she writes about her regret of not having a theatrical career herself:

> You will have noticed that the Electra of Giraudoux is *not* my Electra. (Yet who will give birth to her?) … Why don't I have countless existences that I needed to dedicate this one to theatre?[3] (transl. from French Pétrement 435-6, emphasis in original)

2 'Pièce bien jouée, assez bonne (et intéressante du point de vue de l'esprit du régime)'
3 'Comme vous le remarquez, l'Électre de Giraudoux n'est pas la mienne. (Celle-là, qui la mettra au jour ?) ... Que n'ai-je les n existences qu'il me faudrait pour en consacrer une au théâtre !'

These lines exemplarily illustrate how discontented Weil was with current forms of European theatre and how she was playing with the thought of getting involved as a dramaturg herself. Yet taken as a whole, her reviews show that she did not so much direct her disapproval against the individual performances. Rather her reviews speak of her general discomfort with the growing political instrumentalisation of European theatre by the totalitarian regimes of Franco, Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. But to her, theatre was not just an innocent victim of fascist politics but theatre itself was complicit in the current situation of fear and censorship. In particular, she noted a growing vanity and narcissism in the art scene becoming the driving force of the artist-celebrities, which risked sacrificing political vigilance to personal ego (1957, 18):

> Precisely the artists and writers who are most inclined to look at their art as spread of their personal exceptionality are in fact the most subject to the public's appetite. […] The collective opinion of the specialists is almost sovereign over each of them.[4] (transl. from French ibid.)

She reasoned that the obsession of artists to please and to satisfy the public appetites subjugated art to the despotism of whomever had the most power and influence at any moment. In this context she considered the newly 'installed' critics, whom she mockingly called 'spécialistes', only a logical consequence to a political process of appropriation and censorship of an already corrupt and fragile theatre system. In Weil's eyes, these artists and critics were complicit in the crimes perpetuated by the regime, and she strove to formulate an alternative to this bending to pubic will in her own literary practice.

Confronted with the absence of theatre criticism Weil felt the need to develop a theatre of failure that demasks the actual failure of propaganda theatre. Weil identifies this *failure* of theatre as hidden reproduction of the regime's logic of delusion and oppression. This

4 'Par exemple, ce sont précisément les artistes et écrivains les plus enclins à regarder leur art comme l'épanouissement de leur personne qui sont en fait les plus soumis au goût du public. […] L'opinion collective des spécialistes est presque souveraine sur chacun d'eux.'

essay analyses Weil's closet drama *Venise sauvée* as a theatre of failure and argues that Weil applied an implicit theory of theatre perception that offers the audience the possibility to deconstruct what happens on stage and to gain the interpretive authority.

Her concept of failure follows her reading of *The Iliad*, in which she identified the actual agent and true subject of war as force. It does not matter if someone suffers force or executes it, it is always force which remains the sole supremacy (cf. Doering 58). However, the enslavement of those who appropriate the delusion to control force and execute it weighs heavier than of those who are innocently subjected to it. The latter had retained inner freedom which for Weil was the highest moral good. Here, an intentional and evident *failure* of theatre that self-deconstructs had the possibility to provide 'a new interface between politics and performance and foregrounds urgent questions about how those struggling against an apparatus of political violence can avoid reproducing that apparatus's own logics' (Irwin 170). Consequently, Weil's play aimed to reveal the promise of force as a dangerous lie.

Theatre Must Fail

Weil began writing her play as political resistance, when theatre had already become an instrument of modern warfare. She imagined *Venise sauvée* as fighting against the collective delusion of war. The concept of the play was driven by the idea that force was the actual agent and author of war, not any individual human being. If force were to be applied onto theatre aiming to synchronise spectators' minds into one large collective stage of the 'Social' global mass delusion would ensue. Ultimately, *Venise sauvée* must be read as Weil's attempts to staging and disrupt propaganda theatre as failure and develop modes of private resistance to it.

In order to understand Weil's engagement with this failure, it is important to understand Weil's distinction between the inner and outer reader, and by extinction the inner and outer theatre audience. Weil never explicitly elaborated her own theory of theatre perception. However, *Venise sauvée's* text and stage directions contain repeated allusions to her

philosophical theory of perception which serves as theoretical blueprint of her play: According to Weil's *notion of reading* the human subject believed that its own thoughts constitute the way it interpreted the world and that the way it felt originated in its *inner* being. However, Weil claims that thoughts, in fact, come to us from *outside* while the subject *read* them from our environment. She explains this with her observation that the human self unconsciously and constantly imitates the way it reads the outer world. This *earthly part of our soul*, as Weil called it, was nothing other than a mimetic mirror cabinet of the world. Consequently, every form of social interaction, according to Weil, is in its essence an attempt to influence other's reading of the environment, controlling the way of perceiving their 'outside' and thus their 'inside' (1946, 14). The mutually co-dependent dimensions of *internal* and *external* necessities can be traced back to the theatre discourses of Saint Augustine. As bishop he urged his faithful 'not to destroy the desire for theatre but transform it' ('voluptatem spectandi non perdat sed mutet', Berns 27) With this, Augustine claimed that the worldly *outer* theatre of sin must not spoil the *inner* theatre in the Christian soul, but a hermeneutic filter must be interposed that deconstructs the sinful temptations on stage as morally disgraceful. There is no definite reference in how far Weil was aware of the Augustinian dichotomy of inner and outer stage, although Weil had studied ancient theatre culture and Augustine extensively. Notwithstanding this, I adapt this dichotomy in terms of *Venise sauvée*, because in my opinion it represents the direct application of Weil's *notion of lecture*, of *reading* the world around us, to the world of theatre; consecutively I refer to the dichotomy of inner and outer theatre as Weil's *implicit* theory of theatre perception.

The simultaneously subversive and subjugating power behind this dichotomy of outer and inner stage lies in the idea that parallel ~~to~~ what is happening on stage, unconsciously an inner theatre is at work in the heart of every spectator. This inner stage translates and adapts what is perceived on the outer stage and integrates it with the viewer's own existence. In this framework, Weil's concept of theatre does not

regard the stage merely as an object of reflection. The inner stage itself becomes the acting subject. Under certain circumstances, the 'Empire. The Social without roots' (2019, 50), as Weil calls it, is able to short-circuit outer and inner theatre in such a way that what is performed on the outer stage is likewise mentally performed on the inner stage and is thus appropriated by the spectator as one's own.

To reflect this influence from the outer stage on the inner stages the audience must be granted the possibility to invert the process in a way that the motions on the inner stage *deconstruct* the imaginary world of the outer stage. To do so, Weil insisted that 'theatre must manifest both internal and external necessities' (2019, 57). *Necessity* here signifies something like a higher will and plan at work in the universe, metaphorically speaking the play's script, that dictate what the performance must adhere to. Facing the determination by the 'script' of Fascist supremacy, i.e. its mass propaganda, she reminded her readers of one's 'inner necessity […] where [one feels one] cannot withdraw from it without becoming unfaithful to [oneself]. If this inner necessity is joined by an outer necessity what power does it not acquire?'[5] (transl. from French Pétrement 578). Due to a *suggestive realism* inherent to theatre, it can create the illusion of an imaginary external necessity of a situation, e.g. when Nazi Germany presented war as external necessity on the stage and on the screen. Here, an inner stage's deconstruction of 'the great international drama'[6] (transl. from French Pétrement 435), by which she means international politics, becomes a powerful instrument of critique that allows the audience to distinguish between imaginary external necessities and the *naked* or '*real*' external necessities of a situation which she considered as good.

Weil subsequently aims to penetrate the inner stage with the imaginary of the outer stage of *Venise sauvée* in such a way that the consciousness of the inner stage's autonomy becomes manifest.

5 'Une nécessité intérieure […] à laquelle je sens que je ne puis me soustraire sans me trahir moi-même. Quant à cette nécessité intérieure une nécessité extérieure s'ajoute, quelle puissance n'acquiert-elle pas?'

6 'Mais je souhaite que les dieux n'en profitent pas pour commencer la représentation du grand drame international.'

Therefore, I propose to read *Venise sauvée* as a theatre of *creative failure*. This term describes theatre reproducing the regime's delusion (failure) but in a way it self-deconstructs which then opens up for the possibility to look out for the 'actual' outer necessities – which can be found best, as we will see, in the human milieu marked by its vulnerability.

The concept of *creative failure* expressed in Weil's remark that *Venise sauvée* offers a μεταξύ [the gap in between] (Weil 2019, 52). Appropriated from Plato, Weil used the concept of μεταξύ to describe the existence or production of a hermeneutical 'gap'. This gap of interpretation and authority between the outer stage and the audience enables the *inner* stage to revaluate the *outer* stage asking for the actual outer necessities of a situation. For her, the best criterion to evaluate a situation's true outer necessity 'is not what is social; it is a human milieu of which we are no more conscious than the air we breathe' (Weil 2019, 52). The sharp distinction between the Social and the human milieu builds the very heart of Weil's implicit theory of theatre perception: The Social is the *abstract* collective manifest in the univocal will that eradicates all individuality and strives for complete domination of the audience to implant its imaginary outer necessity. This *metaxical* human milieu on the other hand are the concrete persons sitting next to you with their vulnerability, needs and fragility, in other words the *naked* outer necessities of a concrete situation that reveals the needs and duties between you and them. Via a close reading of *Venise sauvée* I demonstrate how the imaginative outer necessity of the play aims to enable a new awareness of a *metaxical* human milieu in means of Weil's imperative to dramaturgically distort the short-circuit between the audience's inner and outer theatre. Ultimately, the play is an attempt to unmask the theatrical imaginary to become a member of the powerful as failure.

How Theatre Can Fail (Creatively)

Venise sauvée is an unfinished historical tragedy Weil wrote from 1938 until her death in 1943. It tells the story of a forsaken Venetian commander Jaffier who inevitably is forced to commit a crime regardless

of which decision he makes.

Jaffier and his troops dream of supremacy and force. In a nocturnal attack they intend to seize Venice, the last free bastion against the Spanish royal house. Their plan is to proceed as brutally as possible: 'The victor lives *his* dream; the vanquished lives another's dream. All the men of Venice who life through the next night and day will spend the rest of their lives wondering if they wake or dream. But, as of tomorrow, their city, their liberty and their power will seem to them to be more unreal than a dream. Arms make a dream stronger than reality' (Weil 2019, 74). However, at the last instant Jaffier is struck internally and realizes his dream of force as illusion and crime. With the promise of a pardon on his soldiers he surrenders to the Venetians. These break their word and Jaffier witnesses the massacre of his people.

Janet Patricia Little argues that

> until this moment of realization, Jaffier has been unable to comprehend the reality of Venice's existence, because he has been blinded by 'le social' […] By reading in the beauty of Venice its reality, Jaffier has made it impossible for himself to continue with the plans for its destruction. (Little 303-304)

However, when the Venetian army applied the same brute violence that Jaffier just renounced, when he then witnessed how those he rescued were acting in return, he realized the actual *failure* that lies in the hidden reproduction of a violent logic. Weil's insight was that when external and internal stages are merged, collective delusion interprets criticism of violence as hostility, and criticism of violence becomes the origin of violence: 'Those whom I have saved by my pity, having robbed me of honour, ban me' (Weil 2019, 104-5).

The play is based on the novel 'The Conspiracy of the Spaniards against the Republic of Venice, in the year 1618' by César Vichard de Saint-Réal, published in 1674, which Weil decided to re-adapt as she saw in it a fit subject to perform and simultaneously reveal the power of one's inner stage to distinguish imaginary and real outer necessity of a situation. Because of her sudden death in 1943 the unfinished drama

remained a fragment until Albert Camus published the script and an extensive apparatus drawn from her private notebooks in form of a closet drama in 1955. Weil's central reading of the novel relies on the idea of the human milieu as the only true outer necessity, which she felt was lacking from previous adaptations by Thomas Otway's tragic melodrama *Venice Preserv'd* from 1682 and Hugo Von Hofmannsthal's *Das gerettete Venedig* from 1905:

> Otway and others had not understood the nobility of the motive that, according to Saint-Réal, led Jaffier [the protagonist] to denounce a plot against the city of Venice: it was pity for the beautiful innocence of that city. An emotion so rare must have seemed impossible to them, so in fact they had invented other motives.[7] (transl. from French Pétrement 500)

During her visits in Germany Weil was present when totalitarian forces started to merge external and internal necessities in the minds of the people. Collectively following only their one Führer, Adolf Hitler, the regime banned most forms of individualism from the stages and screens (Annuß 15). Directors and dramaturges reinterpreted classical subjects within the new ideological fashion of National Socialism, omitting the press and the public any possibility for critical evaluation (Fischer-Lichte 126). What was seen on stage or screen produced by means of polysensual immersion emotional fantasies of supremacy within the audience (Grau, 85). In this atmosphere, Weil observed an ideologically deluded theatre culture that reproduced the regime's imaginary outer necessities, i.e. an imperative of war and violence. She witnessed that the individual conscience was replaced with collective spirit.[8]

7 'qu'Otway et d'autres n'avaient pas compris la noblesse du motif qui, d'après Saint-Réal, porta Jaffier à dénoncer le complot : la pitié pour la ville. Un sentiment si rare avait dû leur paraître impossible, si bien qu'ils avaient inventé d'autres motifs'.

8 The aim of Fascist theatre and film became a preparation to sacrifice ones live for Führer, Volk, and nation. David Barnett describes that especially 'Goebbels was inspired by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and their ideas of a mystical socialism in which a reinterpretation of the Bible would deliver working men from their exploited lot […] through sacrifice' (Barnett, 167). Goebbels' aim was 'a dramaturgy of collectivism and universalism [where] the egocentricity of the oppressor is confronted with the collective identity of the representative figures on stage' (ibid).

Weil's option to compose *Venise sauvée* as historical drama, a genre out of fashion in France at her time (cf. Nevin 168) is only at first glance a critique of Otway and Hofmannsthal. With this unpopular choice she deliberately mimicked the Nazis' inclination to prefer historical subjects of drama, something she had witnessed herself in Germany. The influential Nazi theatre theorist Rainer Schlösser for instance had asked his readers in 1934 whether there is 'any historic material which would not be given a totally new face when advanced into the light of our natural and legitimate myth of blood and honor?' (Gadberry 97). Accordingly, *Venise sauvée*'s mise en scene did not turn out to be a 17th century Venice but was, in fact, Paris in the early 1940s:

> A city isolated before a mighty and despotic foe it is a mirror image of Paris in the spring of 1940. The conspiracy's strategist, Renaud, rationalizes that betrayal of Venice will unite all of Europe against Turkey, the Eastern menace. Embodying a will to universal domination that characterizes what Weil calls evil's illimitability, Renaud seems a transparent caricature of the slavophobic Hitler seeking to unify Europe against Bolshevism. (Nevin 168)

This commentary on the deal with the Nazi theatre culture is also relevant when situating Weil's play in the context of the theatre resistant, especially in occupied Paris. The term theatre resistant refers to a group of playwrights and other artists that Charles De Gaulle retroactively stylized as artist for his French resistance. They hold a great place in French national memory and some of them, like Sartre and Camus, profited from this status as resistance fighters after the war, giving their plays a popular appeal. Weil's notion of inner and outer reality on stage and in reading, however, prompts us to reconsider. In the light of Weil's implicit theory of theatre perception, we have to reconsider the *théâtre resistant* as implication in resistance politics and accept that it often 'reproduced' in its own way the idea of the supremacy. Rather than model the vulnerability and fragility of the human milieu, which Weil strove to do, prominent members of the theatre resistant became complicit in fascist aesthetics.

Theatre Will Fail

One priority of the German occupying forces in France was to maintain public peace and order. Therefore, Nazi cultural representatives publicly endorsed literary plays by Jean Anouilh, Paul Claudel, Jean Giraudoux, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus up to a certain extent, who had a reputation as 'unpolitical' writers, aiming to create an impression of German generosity and intellectual freedom among the occupied French people (Engel 227). However, recent historical research shows that the cultural memory of a vivid *théâtre résistant* in Paris had in fact never existed the way French history books describe it (Engel 230). A famous example was Jean Paul Sartre's *Les Mouches* [The Flies], which was performed in Paris in 1943. After the war Sartre remembered the play as (hidden) resistance against the invaders. However, back in 1943 both critics and the audience regarded his performance as ideologically pale and without any political meaning (Engel 229). Zoë Ghyselinck collected official and non-official reviews of Sartre's debut as a dramaturge and concludes:

> The bulk of the official press in the capital, saw the play as superficial and dismissed the dramatic and aesthetic form. […] This group almost completely left any philosophical, moral or political interpretation undisturbed. (Ghyselinck 367)

Like the *théâtre résistant*, Weil used the framework of classical Greek tragedy. By doing so Weil alluded to the intellectual Parisian theatre culture, the background of the *théâtre resistant* similar to the way she alluded to Nazi theatre culture with the historical content. However, in contrast to Ancient Greek tragedy and the *théâtre resistant* fashion Weil emphasized not an alternative form of supremacy of the tragic hero, but the exposure any supremacy's failure in the end (Brueck 124). Considering these circumstances, the central motif of Jaffier's silenced voice not only stands for the most tragic form of individual fate but also resembles the dangerous cul-de-sac of the *théâtre resistant*: The unheard voice of Jaffier, just before he was silenced, alludes to the silent call of the *théâtre resistant*. I argue that *Venise sauvée* can be read as exposing

the futility of the *théâtre resistant* by addressing the critical audience as someone 'who is absent and so, who cannot respond as such, but whose presence is nonetheless reanimated in the form of his absence' (Cha 83). A *theatre of failure* is therefore always 'speaking from the point at which it can say nothing' (Cha 80). For Weil it was evident that not only theatre culture was at risk here, but that the events in WW2 were so intensified that it must no longer be indifferent to what happens on stage. For her theatre was no longer a political question and criticism no longer a sheer intellectual activity. When Weil composed *Venise sauvée* and with it combatted the perils of WW2 everything was at stake for her. Consequently, *Venise sauvée*'s outstanding difference to the *théâtre resistant* consists in a *metaphysical dimension* beyond all political messages underlying the way how to *read* theatre. She did not only consider the stage an object to be analysed and performed on, but also the very agent through whose lenses the spectator undertakes a reshaping of ways to interpret the world. Here, creative failure aims to dethrone not only *one* form of supremacy but *all* forms of supremacy.

Weil was driven to break the vicious circle of false power imaginations, whether on the part of the Nazi propaganda or on the part of the resistance. At the end, what does this tell about Simone Weil's understanding of criticism? For her, criticism was in danger of adopting a position of false power that it did not possess and illegitimately claimed by mimicry. Through this claim to power, criticism, analogous to propaganda, mirrored false external necessities. The only remedy she saw lied in an individual who was able to discover the true external necessities from the inside and respond accordingly, like Jaffier. Perhaps it is legitimate to identify *Venise sauvée* and its ambition to shift the final authority to the human being's inner self, as a form of post-criticism as it is currently made strong once again by Laurent de Sutter and others. They claim that criticism must be aware of its own weakness and not insinuate false power. Criticism must emerge from powerlessness not from force. For only then criticism is authentic (cf. Sutter 7).

Contemporary Failings

If today the situation of theatre critics is getting more and more precarious, Simone Weil stands as a reminder and a warning sign that theatre criticism must fulfil this task of deconstructing imaginary outer necessities and their promises of gaining power. As Silvia Panizza and Philip Wilson point out in their commentary of the first English translation of *Venise sauvée*: 'It is an urgent call to recognize and respond to the moral and spiritual perils that history has presented again and again' (Weil 2019, 20). Back then and today, it is this failure that harbours a creative moment: Revealing the failure makes it possible to generate the recognition of failure it needs so that the human milieu can be authentically present as a category of critical re-evaluation of outer necessities. Theatre criticism is there to remind the audience that in the end, they are the reader of the stage, even if and especially when their readings remain a fragile endeavour.

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Cli-*je*: Subjectivity and Publicity in Art and Criticism The Letters of Pierre Restany and Marcel Broodthaers in *Court-Circuit*

By Hannah Bruckmüller

Abstract

This essay focuses on the increasingly short-circuited relationship between art, criticism and publicity in French-speaking countries in the 1960s. Zooming in on the case study of the exhibition catalogue to Marcel Broodthaers' solo-show *Court-Circuit* (1967) reveals the electrified entanglement of letters—written and published between artist and critic—and letters of the alphabet, which form words, stencils to be re-used, namely clichés. Following the performativity of typography, this essay takes into account questions of subjectivity and canonization. In 1972, Leo Steinberg attested that the critic's words intend to be repeated and to perform *clichés*. In 1967, art critic Pierre Restany describes Broodthaers' art object—a muffled telephone—as a 'cliché of our civilization'. His text reads like a letter to the artist, in which Restany uses big bold capitalized letters to mask individuals who might have attended the opening of the exhibition: **A, B, C**. Artist Marcel Broodthaers responds in the same manner repeating the critic's alphabet. Reading the exhibition catalogue becomes an experimental enterprise: How do critic and artist write to each other? Apparently, *clichés* are set to play in this publication: *clichés* are employed in the use of language as well as in the graphic design of the catalogue page, which is also based on a *cliché*. Investigating *short-circuits* and following terminological *clichés*, my reading of Broodthaers and Restany is accompanied by Avital Ronell and her media-theoretical, techno-philosophical approach coming from literary criticism. Reading Ronell's thoughts on the electrifications of speech published in her book *Telephone Book*, which itself stages a telephone book, supports this essay's strive to 'take the call' of typography with its performative capacities and its onomatopoetic dimensions. The letters of Marcel Broodthaers and Pierre Restany, this is my hypothesis, enact a coded play of letters, words and initials, infused by technology. Dealing with the printed letter while continuously employing the printed letter in my own writing, causes a terminologico-typhographical culmination in the most common *cliché*: cli-*je*.

> Art and literature […] which of the moon's faces is hidden? And how many clouds and fleeting visions there are…
> (Broodthaers 1975)

When Marcel Broodthaers wonders in retrospect about the relations of art and literature, his question can be read programmatically: 'Which of the moon's faces is hidden?' The artworks that the poet exhibited in between 1964 and 1978 were vividly entangled with literature, incorporating text(s) and language. Broodthaers' œuvre—produced in the historical context of the 1960s and 1970s—is often discussed under conceptual, critical and literary premises. Yet, there are 'many clouds and fleeting visions' from the other sides of the moon. Reading Broodthaers' exhibition catalogue of the 1967 solo-show *Court-Circuit* (Short-Circuit) at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, prompts questions about the letter and its publication: What is made public by whom in this species of publication called 'exhibition catalogue'? In *Court-Circuit's* exhibition catalogue, art critic Pierre Restany and artist Marcel Broodthaers published their letters: What is this literary correspondence about? The electrified entanglement of their letters enacts a coded play of letters, words and initials, infused by technology and involved with the public: visitors, readers, recipients. Which faces of the alphabet appear in the increasingly short-circuited exchange between art, criticism and publicity in French-speaking countries in the 1960s? This essay sets out to a close, loud and cross-reading of *Court-Circuit*'s exhibition catalogue, taking into account the performativity of printed letters and their relation to subjectivity.

A B C, Art, Literature and the Letter: 'Which of the moon's faces is hidden?'

At the core of this essay are letters: Letters of the alphabet constitute words like alphabet, art and criticism. Letters are shaped by font, size and style: **A B C**. At the same time, alphabets, art and criticism are constituted *by* letters: written words. But letters are also to be written,

for example from the art critic to the artist. To be sent *and* to be written the letter always implies a manifold semantic *charge*. The experienced reader—who is used to read—does not *see* the letter anymore, being all focused on reading the word. Paraphrasing Broodthaers, one could ask: Which side of the letter is hidden? The letter of the alphabet, or the letter constituting the word?

Initially, letters of the alphabet form *clichés*, they build stencils to be employed. Letters can start to circulate, relate and spread the news when being published; letters come with a repetition-intention, and thus they are to be investigated carefully. Dealing with the printed letter thus always demands to ask: 'How?' and requires a rigid testing. In her media-theoretical, literary and philosophical writings on the test and the telephone, Avital Ronell sets out to take this question as a call. In *Telephone Book*, she elaborates on the history of the telephone and the electrified communication prompted and facilitated by this technological object, which always comes as a pair, *doubled*. In its typographical layout, Ronell's book stages a telephone book: the publication and its research object—the telephone(-book)—enter an echo chamber, in which content and form are in constant oscillation. Accompanied by Ronell's media theory, this essay strives to take the call of typography with its performative capacities and the onomatopoetic—*read out loud!*—capacities of the letter. Quite fittingly, the telephone appears in Broodthaers's *Court-Circuit* as a work of art, as a literary figure, *and* as an object of communication. *How to call you?* Consequently, this text—written by 'me' and read by 'you', both 'I'—is informed by Michal B. Ron. Ron's reading puts emphasis to Hegel's observation that everyone, you and I, says 'I': the same 'I', but always different. Spoken out loud or written down, my 'I' looks and sounds like your 'I'. 'I' take that call: Who answered the phone? The difference of subjectivity is obliterated in pronunciation and writing: it is erased by language. Paul de Man interpreted this generalizing function of the 'I' in the realm of literary criticism. Writing about and reading with the poet Marcel Broodthaers, who wrote the poem *Ma Rhétorique*—'Me

I say I Me I say I […]' (Moure 2012, 158)—'Moi Je dis Je Moi Je dis […]' (Broodthaers 1966), Ron consequently repeated the 'I' once more and trenchantly wrote that it 'transforms the singular 'I' into a general subject'. Regarding Broodthaers' continuous repetition of 'I' and 'me', Ron discussed the mold provided by *every* 'I', which turns the artist, the individual, me and you into a *general* 'I'. We all say 'I': the most common *cliché*. Ron follows the 'I' of the artist to the 'I' of the other artist, from the 'I' of literature to the 'I' of art, from your 'I' to my 'I'. Working with the short-circuit of Restany and Broodthaers, 'I' am always waiting for 'you' to call.

Véritablement

In *Court-Circuit*, Broodthaers presented eggshells, bottles, crates—empty vessels, forms, containers. While the historical viewer visited the show and probably read the catalogue afterwards, the (art) historian today starts out with the catalogue. Although the exhibition was documented by a film and a few installation shots, the exhibition catalogue remains as a document *from* the exhibition. According to a definition by Jean-François Chevrier and Philippe Roussin, the document is circumstantial and closely related to and intertwined with its context: 'The document neither exhausts itself nor is it closed: it is contingent on its situation.' (translation by the author)[1]. This integrity of printed matter is crucial to Broodthaers' artistic approach: being busy with writing, reading and reciting, he was not only highly aware of the value of the exhibition catalogue, but also *used* it artistically and integrated his publications in his artworks and installations. Broodthaers' exhibition catalogues frequently resemble the exhibited objects as well as the exhibitions, oftentimes they bear the same title, sometimes the exhibition catalogue is re-exhibited in the same or a forthcoming exhibition. For example, in 1974 Broodthaers published the artist book *Un Jardin d'Hiver*, which he presented in a showcase

1 'Le document n'est jamais suffisant ni fermé sur lui-même: il est circonstanciel' (Chevrier/Roussin 2006, 6).

in the second iteration of the installation 'Un Jardin d'Hiver' in 1975. Such homonymies are to be conceived as consequent extensions of the singularity of a work of art into the publication or exhibition space. Although Broodthaers did not employ the homonymic structure in *Court-Circuit's* exhibition catalogue, the empty vessels, forms and containers presented in the exhibition space keep re-appearing typographically, semantically and formally throughout the publication.

Figure 1: Front Cover of the exhibition catalogue, *Marcel Broodthaers. Court Circuit*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 13.–25. April 1967. Copyright: Palais des Beaux-Arts Brussels.

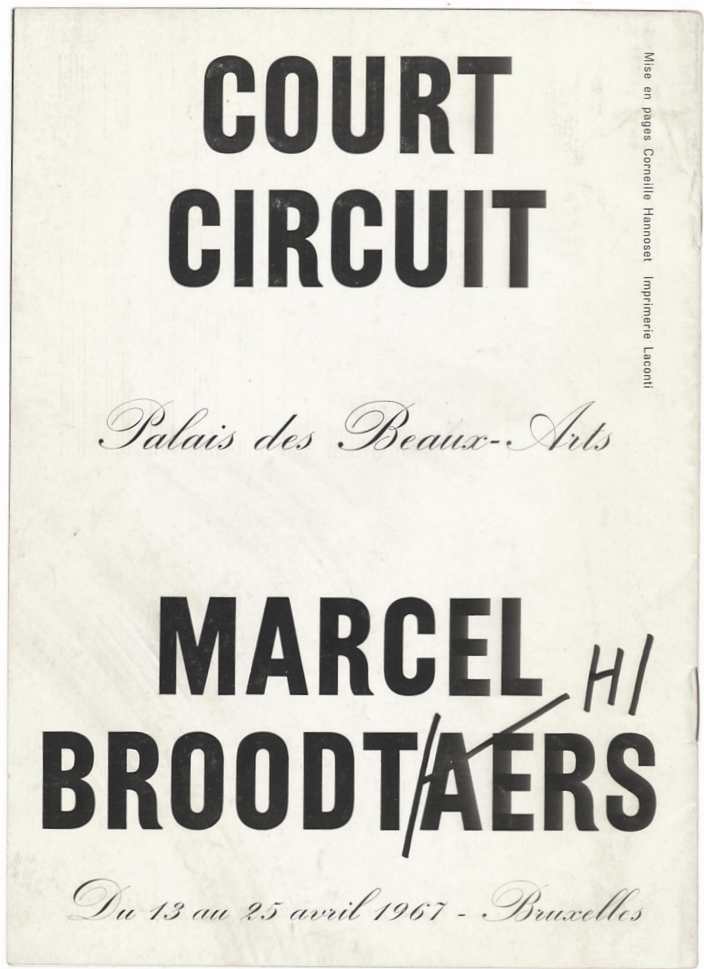


Figure 2: Back Cover of the exhibition catalogue, *Marcel Broodthaers. Court Circuit,* Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 13.–25. April 1967. Copyright: Palais des Beaux-Arts Brussels.

On the front cover of the catalogue the word *Véritablement* flaunts in big, bold, capital letters (Fig. 1), while the exhibition title is only mentioned on the back cover: *Court-Circuit*. (Fig. 2) What, then, is the title of this publication? The reader might choose between *Véritablement* and *Court-Circuit*. *Véritablement,* meaning 'truly', 'really', 'actually', accedes with a heavy semantical load, opening boxes containing questions of truth, reality and presence. *Court-Circuit*, French

for 'short-circuit', meanwhile comes with implications of technology, failure and connection. While the visitor might remember the *Court-Circuit*, the contemporary reader will probably stick with *Véritablement*, which is—still—to be read on the cover. The catalogue starts with a text written by French art critic Pierre Restany, who was a key figure in the Parisian art scene in the 1960s. Restany's text reads like a letter addressed to the artist and ends with the prompt 'I'm looking forward to your call, Marcel!'. His request simultaneously figures as the title of the text. The final sentence and the first sentences are homonomies, the end equals the beginning, the text becomes a closed circuit. (Fig. 3/4). Meanwhile, the short circuit plays a central role in Restany's text, which can already be *seen* in the bold font style of the text: **court-circuit**. In regard of this echo of text and image in typography, the publication, and essentially the printed letter, provides a crucial site for the encounter of art and criticism, being highly contingent on publicity, the *condition of being public*.

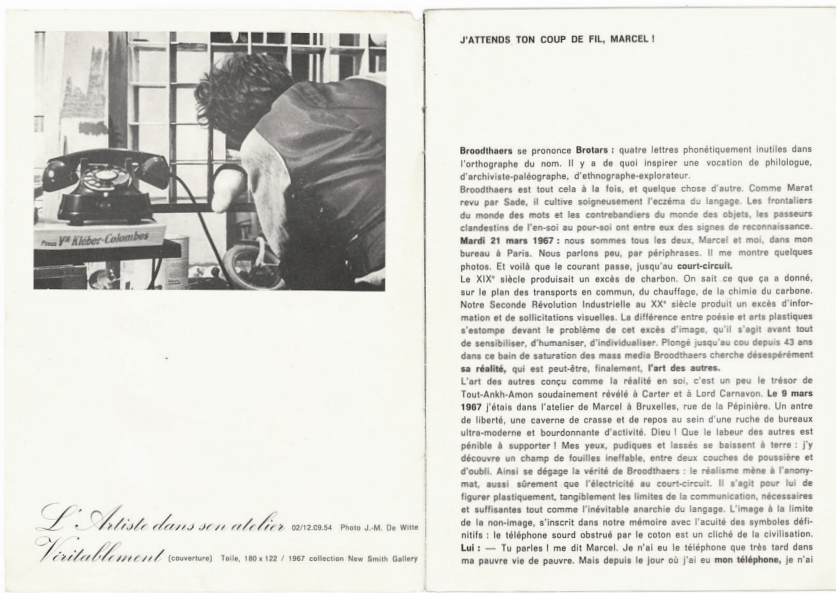


Figure 3: *J'attends ton coup de fil, Marcel!* Text by art critic Pierre Restany, page 1/2, in: *Marcel Broodthaers. Court Circuit*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 13.–25. April 1967. Copyright: Palais des Beaux-Arts Brussels.

'I am waiting for your call, Marcel!'

Under this title, the influential art critic recalls Broodthaers's visit to his office on Tuesday, 21 March 1967 (Fig. 3). The artist came to show him some photos and then they 'speak a little bit, mainly in circumlocutions'. (Museum of Modern Art 2016, 120)[2] Originally written in French, the text reads: 'Nous parlons peu, par périphrases' (Restany 1967). *Périphrase* already implies that their communication was rerouted, haunted by a kind of *détournement*. The text continues: 'And then, electricity succeded, just until the short-circuit' (MoMA 2016, 120). Restany's French words, which are difficult to translate, read: 'Et voilà, le courant passe, jusqu'au **court-circuit**' (Restany 1967). Obviously, electricity interfered in the conversation of the two men and caused a fault in the professional exchange. This incidental interruption, which was formatted bold and thus highlighted in the original publication, became eponymous for the artist's solo-show (Fig. 3). The electrical failure in the critic's office—Restany recounts a short-circuit in his text—emerged to an institutional heading: the exhibition was titled *Court-Circuit* (Fig. 2). Was this a *real* electrical error, or is Restany writing in metaphors? An English translation of Restany's French sentence, published posthumously in 2016, reveals the polyphonic and multilayered meaning of *court-circuit*: 'And click, we have connected, all the way to short-circuiting' (MoMA 2016, 120). This astonishingly technical, or more specific: electrical vocabulary attached to *court-circuit* demands for etymological inquiry. According to the lexical definition, *court-circuit* primarily translates to an electrical incident, but it also comes with a medical meaning, designating a conversation, between two bodily vessels. Both translations are closely bound to the general means and matters of communication. While the first connotation of *court-circuit* addresses a connection essentially supported by technology,

2 The original French texts by Restany and Broodthaers, which are discussed in this essay, can be read on the images (Fig. 3/4/5). The English translation of both texts is cited from the exhibition catalogue to 'Marcel Broodthaers. A Retrospective', edited by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and published in 2016. Hereafter, this translation is referred to as 'MoMA 2016'.

the second one is loaded with medical implications. (Larousse 2019) Navigating the crucial instance of diagnosis, both meanings are highly dependent on connectivity, built on the communication between spatially separated elements. When short-circuiting, the medical as well as the electrical orbit are subject to unexpected interruptions. *Court-circuit* terms and terminates points of (dis-)connection and essentially involves the question of success and failure: a short-circuited conversation is often a failed one. It is a communication which came to an (abrupt) end. Connectivity and its dysfunctionalities are decisive for the meeting of the artist and the critic. 'Did you click?' essentially programs the aftermath of their encounter: 'Was it successful?'

In 1967, when the text in Broodthaers' catalogue was published, Restany was already a successful and influential art critic, writing for magazines like *Art International* or *Studio International*. Andy Warhol called him 'a myth' (Bourriaud 2003, 31) and Nicolas Bourriaud wrote that Restany 'was at once a champion of artists and an entrepreneur of concepts, which he defended with all the power of his conviction' (Bourriaud 2003, 31). Bourriaud concludes his obituary with an imperative followed by a prediction: 'Let's bring his [Restany's] books back into print and make a date for later this century—a century sure to be more Restanian than the one before' (Bourriaud 2003, 31). Restany's legacy is, in a large part, a terminological one. In 1960, Restany coined the term and movement *Nouveau Réalisme*, including artists such as Yves Klein, Daniel Spoerri and Raymond Hains. In the movement's manifesto, Restany stated that 'The New Realists have become conscious of their collective identity; New Realism = new perceptions of the real'. After the art critic first mentioned 'Nouveau Realism' in the printed manifesto, the term circulated widely and enjoyed popularity among the artists affiliated with the movement. Soon, *Nouveau Réalisme* received remarkable public attention and international recognition, followed by various institutional exhibitions. *Nouveau Réalisme* quickly emerged as European counterpart to *Pop Art* and became a historical moment. In this regard, it stands exemplary for

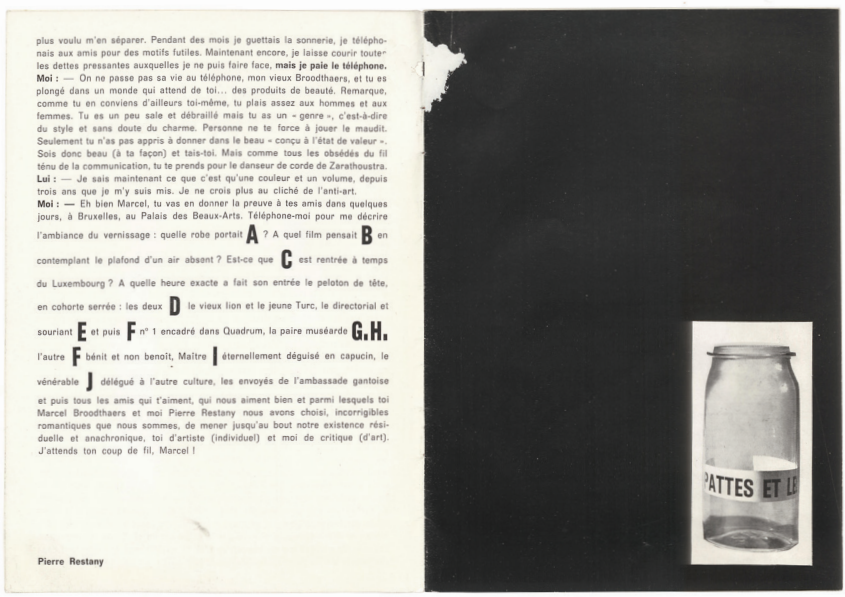
the substantial historiographical capacity of the text-production by art critics and their successful detection of names. According to Benjamin Buchloh, this formation of an avant-garde movement is a result of Restany 'recognizing the public-relations value to be gained from organizing artists into a group operating under the banner of a single name' (Buchloh 2004, 472). Buchloh's 'public-relations value' points to the efficacy of naming and art's public-relations, which the art critic needs to manoeuvre. Writing about art adds visibility to any artist's œuvre and generates a surplus of intellectual, public and economical value. Buchloh targets the capacity of publicity and emphasizes the value—generating function of writing, curating and art criticism. Seen from this point of view, Restany somehow figured as a brand-manager of *Nouveau Réalism*, coining the 'banner of a single name', which is repeated by the artists, the public and eventually by art history. This calls in mind Leo Steinberg's definition that it is 'in the character of the critic, to say no more in his best moments than what everyone in the following season repeats; he is the generator of the cliché' (Steinberg 1972, 23). Steinberg's influential definition, recently also drawn upon by Hal Foster, can be read as an interpretation of the art critic as a man of printed letters, who writes in relation *to* and *for* a certain public. Although Buchloh critically referred to the 'public-relation value' of 'the banner of a single name' and rather calls for a 'responsible responsiveness' (Ronell 1989, 106) of the art critic's tasks, Steinberg seems to detect a similar structure or a rather delicate threshold, when he describes the art critic as a 'generator of the cliché' (Steinberg 1972, 23). According to Steinberg, the critic's choice of words is relevantly programmed by repeatability and recognizability. After reading the critic's letters, words and texts, the readers should have something in mind and at their hand: a statement to repeat, an argument to refer to, an opinion to reiterate. Steinberg's *cliché* addresses this specific semantical layer of the word: *cliché* denotes a 'phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought' (Oxford Dictionary 2019). Thus, *cliché* is programmed by the common and the conventional.

Meeting the needs of publicity, a *cliché* is designed to be spread. And it seems that it is the art critic generating *clichés* for artists, artworks and exhibitions to circulate. Then, the critique is absent, and the critic-turned-promoter—in charge of art's public-relations—inherits the job to write about art. In 1969, Restany published his definition of 'art criticism', which seems to almost predict Steinberg's characterization. Restany clearly states that promoting artistic ideas is a task of the critic: 'Thus, faced with the collapse of an anachronistic commercial system and the growing socialization of art, will the critic in an effective way play the role of the promotor of new ideas and forms' (translation by the author).[3] With *Nouveau Réalisme*, he certainly achieved a success in this regard and generated a terminological *cliché*, which artists as well as the public, including the historians and historiographers, 'everyone', as Steinberg put it, repeated. This coming-about of the *cliché* is essentially facilitated by its mediation: the art critic is not only writing letters to be printed, he is working for the publishing industry. The critic's words and letters are to be read, to be spread, to be published. Although Steinberg draws upon the notion of promotion and repeatability—the semantical layer of the (over-)use—*cliché* also serves as a typographical term. *Cliché* forms a stencil to be re-used: it defines the form of the publication and is used in the graphic designer's vocabulary to denote the typography and design of the page. In this regard, *cliché* is vividly entangled with the printed letter and its form: the publication.

Investigating species of the public figure, Jean-François Chevrier proposed that 'Broodthaers reinvented the artist as a man of letters'. 'The man of letters makes a trade of writing; he draws letters and has them printed' (Chevrier 2016, 24). Chevrier's etymologically informed conception of the *homme de lettres* involves his entanglement with knowledge, being a well-educated intellectual, acquainted with letters. In order to 'justify his status', the *homme de lettres* has to publish:

3 'Ainsi, devant la faillite d'un circuit commercial anachronique et la croissante socialisation de l'art le critique jouera-t-il de manière effective le role de promoteur des idées et des formes nouvelles qui est le sien' (Cabanne/Restany 1969, 167).

'He is a public figure' (Chevrier 2016, 24). Here, 'letter' is to be read in its polyphonic meanings: the letter of the alphabet (*écriture*), the letter as a personal message (*correspondance*) and the letter as a specific form of knowledge (*science humaines*). With Chevrier, the 'man of printed letters', a term proposed by Broodthaers himself in the edition of *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, can be conceived as a species of this public figure. The add-on adjective 'printed' ('imprimées') involves an aesthetic dimension: typography and narratology converge in the medium of the publication, which becomes a crucial instance for artistic *and* critical practice in the 1960s. Instead of giving Restany a call, Broodthaers consequently responded with a letter to the critic, published in the same exhibition catalogue. Thus, he took up the public role of the *homme de lettres imprimées*, professionalising the business of the letters. This artist's œuvre is essentially configured by letters: highly aware about their publicity function, this artist produced and dealt with letters.



plus voulu m'en séparer. Pendant des mois je guettais la sonnerie, je téléphonais aux amis pour des motifs futiles. Maintenant encore, je laisse courir toutes les dettes pressantes auxquelles je ne puis faire face, **mais je paie le téléphone.**
Moi : — On ne passe pas sa vie au téléphone, mon vieux Broodthaers, et tu es plongé dans un monde qui attend de toi... des produits de beauté. Remarque, comme tu en conviens d'ailleurs toi-même, tu plais assez aux hommes et aux femmes. Tu es un peu sale et débraillé mais tu as un « genre », c'est-à-dire du style et sans doute du charme. Personne ne te force à jouer le maudit. Seulement tu n'as pas appris à donner dans le beau « conçu à l'état de valeur ». Sois donc beau (à ta façon) et tais-toi. Mais comme tous les obsédés du fil ténu de la communication, tu te prends pour le danseur de corde de Zarathoustra.
Lui : — Je sais maintenant ce que c'est qu'une couleur et un volume, depuis trois ans que je m'y suis mis. Je ne crois plus au cliché de l'anti-art.
Moi : — Eh bien Marcel, tu vas en donner la preuve à tes amis dans quelques jours, à Bruxelles, au Palais des Beaux-Arts. Téléphone-moi pour me décrire l'ambiance du vernissage : quelle robe portait **A** ? A quel film pensait **B** en contemplant le plafond d'un air absent ? Est-ce que **C** est rentrée à temps du Luxembourg ? A quelle heure exacte a fait son entrée le peloton de tête, en cohorte serrée : les deux **D** le vieux lion et le jeune Turc, le directorial et souriant **E** et puis **F** n° 1 encadré dans Quadrum, la paire muséarde **G.H.** l'autre **F** bénit et non benoît, Maître **I** éternellement déguisé en capucin, le vénérable **J** délégué à l'autre culture, les envoyés de l'ambassade gantoise et puis tous les amis qui t'aiment, qui nous aiment bien et parmi lesquels toi Marcel Broodthaers et moi Pierre Restany nous avons choisi, incorrigibles romantiques que nous sommes, de mener jusqu'au bout notre existence résiduelle et anachronique, toi d'artiste (individuel) et moi de critique (d'art). J'attends ton coup de fil, Marcel !

Pierre Restany

Figure 4: *J'attends ton coup de fil, Marcel!* Text by art critic Pierre Restany, page 2/2, in: *Marcel Broodthaers. Court Circuit*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 13.–25. April 1967. Copyright: Palais des Beaux-Arts Brussels.

Visiting the Artist's Studio: 'God! The toil of *others* is hard to bear!'

On 9 March 1967, when the critic Restany visited the artist Broodthaers's studio, he encountered a 'lair of liberty, this filthy cavern of repose in the heart of a hive of ultra-modern offices buzzing with activity' (MoMA 2016, 120). Hence, the studio is characterized as an antipole to the office. While the atelier is almost a world on its own, the office must be this other space, worldly entangled with the buzzing activities of mass-media, haunted by electricity. Emphasizing on the disparity of the two working spaces not only strengthens specific notions of labour, it reiterates the narrative of the artist's studio as a solitary manufactory. Two *othered* spaces build the initial backdrop for Restany's text: the critic's bureau as the site of an electrical misfiring, and the artist's atelier as a site of artistic production. 'God! The toil of others is hard to bear!', writes Restany (MoMA 2016, 120). His characterization of the two different workspaces draws upon an already well-established notion of the artist's studio and the critic's bureau and thus contributes to solidifying clichés of the respective workspaces.

When visiting the artist's studio, 'this filthy cavern', as Pierre Restany called it, he found an 'image on the verge of the non-image', which 'etches itself in our memories with the acuteness of definitive symbols: the deaf telephone muffled by cotton wool is a cliché of our civilization' (MoMA 2016, 120). The implied *objet d'art* (Fig. 5) is reproduced on the page between the critic's text and the artist's response. The reader can see a photo of this 'image on the verge of the non-image': It consists of a black wooden box, split in half by a vertical shelf. The right half accommodates a black telephone, surrounded by white cotton, while the telephone wire draws a connection to the left half, which is horizontally divided in three equally tall compartments. The upper cell contains two glasses stuffed with white cotton, the middle one hosts the receiver, while the telephone wire coming from the telephone in the right half passes through the lower cell. All compartments are stuffed with white cotton, providing a high-contrasted background for the black telephone, which appears disconnected from the power supply. It

cannot ring or be heard. Stuffed in white cotton, the black telephone is silenced: it remains quiet.

This disconnected, disabled, and short-circuited telephone recalls one of the artist's first objects: *Pense-Bête* consists of 'a bundle of fifty copies of a book called *Pense-Bête*', published by the same author, Marcel Broodthaers. The black books of poetry were half wrapped in white plaster, like the black telephone muffled in white cotton. The stark contrast of black and white, of which *Pense-Bête* is the earliest example, is crucial to Broodthaers' œuvre. His engagement with Stephane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés* influences the application of monochrome black or white background in his later works. As discussed by Jean-François Chevrier, the series of works called *Le Corbeau et le Renard* (1968) is probably the most relevant reference for his extensive use of black and white in relation to words and printed letters. At the same time, these formal aspects also involve the usage of the objects: Broodthaers' vessels and texts are occupied with a specific function. *Pense-Bête* was published as a book and transferred to an artwork. 'Here you cannot read the book without destroying its sculptural aspect', Broodthaers explained in 1974 (Broodthaers 1987, 44).[4] The prohibition was forwarded to the viewer, who had to decide whether to destroy the sculpture and read the book or accept the prohibition and just *look at* the 'books in plaster'. The object *Pense-Bête* bereaved the book *Pense-Bête* from its essential function, which was *to be read*. In favor of becoming a 'sculpture', the artist defunctionalized his own book. Seen from this point of view, *Pense-Bête* initially stages a *short-circuit*. It is a figure of failure, like the deaf telephone. Broodthaers stated that he was surprised about the art public's approval: 'Everyone so far, no matter who, has perceived the object either as an artistic expression or as a curiosity' (Broodthaers 1987, 44).[5] He interpreted the public's acceptance as disinterest. When his books are exhibited as a work of art, they are turned into a singular object at which people only looked.

4 'On ne peut, ici, lire le livre sans détruire l'aspect plastique' (Broodthaers 1974, 66).
5 'Quel qu'il fût, jusqu'à présent, il perçut l'objet ou comme une expression artistique ou comme une curiosité' (Broodthaers 1974, 66).

Broodthaers concluded that he 'suddenly […] had a real audience' as opposed to his situation before, when he 'had lived practically isolated from all communication, since I had a fictitious audience' (Broodthaers 1987, 44).[6] Writing books of poetry seems to equal a fictitious audience, while making art objects means facing a real audience. Who then, was the artist's, the public figure's, the man of the printed letters's, Marcel Broodthaers's audience? This leads to…

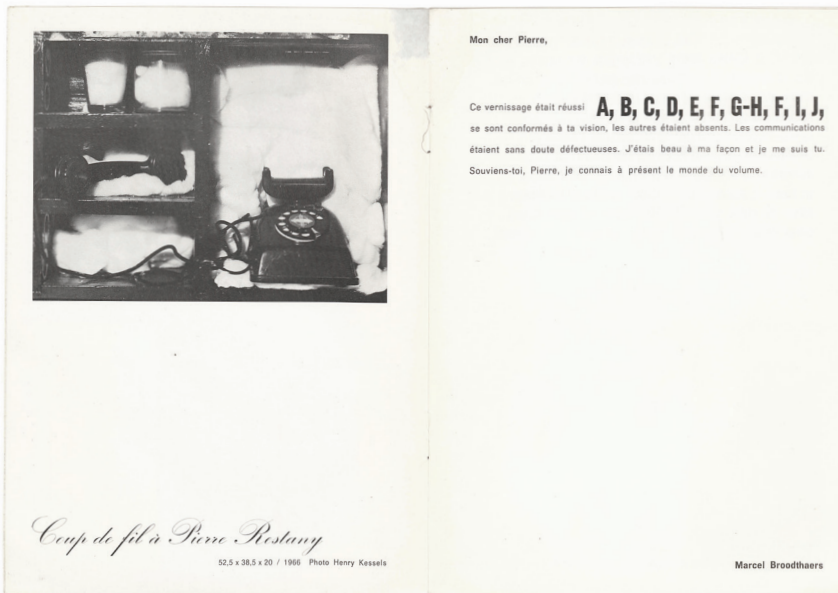


Figure 5: *Mon cher Pierre,* Text by the artist Marcel Broodthaers, in: *Marcel Broodthaers. Court Circuit*, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 13.–25. April 1967. Copyright: Palais des Beaux-Arts Brussels.

The Critic's Question: 'Have *they* been there?'

Restany's eponymous request for a call—'I'm waiting for your call, Marcel!'—is motivated by his interest in the public that attended *the* opening. The purpose of this telephone call from the artist to the critic was to get to know more about the 'who is who' at the opening. He

6 'Jusqu'à ce moment, je vivais pratiquement isolé du point de vue de la communication, mon public étant fictif. Soudain il devint réel, à ce niveau où il est question d'espace et de conquête' (Broodthaers 1974, 66).

wants the artist to report back about the 'atmosphere at the opening', in order to get to know *who* attended the opening. 'What dress was **A** wearing? What film was **B** thinking about while he was looking up at the ceiling with a distracted air? Did **C** get back from Luxembourg in time?' (MoMA 2016, 120) Restany uses the alphabetical letters for schematization: the individual is anonymized by a single letter. Every individual letter in Restany's envisioned public is annotated with specific attributions, suggesting that the critic had specific individuals in mind. Every person in this public is veiled by a *cliché* in its typographical sense. In the jargon of printmaking, *cliché* denotes a template or a stencil. Restany covers the individuals at the opening with big, bold, capital letters which interrupt the continuous text: they are formatted differently, and at the same time they anonymize the individuals that they cover. This public is generated by the system of the alphabet and the individuals of this public are called **A B C D E F G-H F I J**. I would like to call this public, that the critic asked about, the 'ABC art public' since it is constituted by the first 10 letters of the alphabet and heavily relies on their aesthetic appearance. Each letter of the alphabet is printed in an enlarged bold font; each letter is visually different from the continuous text; and each letter replaces the name of the individual. If the reader *looks at* the text page, these first ten letters of the alphabet, dispersed across Restany's text, strike the eye (Fig. 4). They are big, they are bold, they are capitalized: **A B C D E F G-H F I J**. The first ten letters of the alphabet act as figures within the continuous text. In view of the reciprocal echoes between meaning and typeset this public is visible and appears prominently, although being highly anonymized. **A B C D E F G-H F I J** become equally narrational, structural *and* aesthetic figures. This visual emphasis on the single letter draws attention to typography and the graphic design of the publication, realized by Corneille Hannoset. According to the caption on the back cover, Hannoset, who frequently worked as a graphic designer for the Palais des Beaux-Arts, designed the *mise-en-page*. (Fig. 2) In this publication, the typeset—the visuals of the letter,

its form, text, and the content and semantic charge of the letter—are vividly entangled.

The Artist's Response: '*They* were there'

'**A, B, C, D, E, F, G-H, F, I, J** complied with your vision, the others were not there' (MOMA 2016, 120). In his response to the critic, the artist Broodthaers uses the critic's alphabet as a template and repeats it *exactly*. (Fig. 5) He even repeats what could be a mistake in Restany's alphabet: the double mention of the letter F. The reader encounters this as an echo chamber: The *cliché* generated by the critic is reiterated by the artist. The artist here becomes the first one to repeat the critic's cliché, he is the first of 'everybody', who repeats, according to Steinberg, the critic. Why did Broodthaers repeat Restany's '**A, B, C, D, E, F, G-H, F, I, J**'? Maybe, Broodthaers was able to decipher Restany's letter-code. It probably refers to initials of friends they had in common, maybe Restany and Broodthaers were communicating about individuals in their shared social network of the art scene. This interpretation calls upon the question of friendship of these two men, who address each other with their prenames and address each other with the French informal 'tu'. 'Tu' as opposed to the formal address 'vous': the French language hosts a polite form of address between professionals, which is conjugated as plural form of 'you', whereas friends call each other with their first names and in the singular 'tu'. After all, Broodthaers addresses Restany with 'Mon cher Pierre'. What does it mean to call each other by the *first* name? Analysing Marguerite Duras, Avital Ronell elaborates on the crucial threshold shared by numbers and names. 'If she does not give her number, she gives her name, giving it like the first letter of a number, in fact. […] What she gives is a phony, coded name, therefore, a "prename" ' (Ronell 1989, 356). Meanwhile, Marcel Broodthaers does publish his name *and* his number: *Court-Circuit* opens with a photo showing 'the artist in his atelier', and the caption continues '02/12.09.54'—the artist's landline number. 'Giving her his telephone number, he makes a gift of his audial address. […] He now

becomes what he is; in service of the telephone, he is on permanent call' (Ronell 1989, 355). Like the name of a person, every telephone comes with a number you may call. The telephone number identifies *your* telephone, and when you owned a telephone, you can have your number registered and published in the telephone book. Then, the one who wants to call can easily find you and your number by looking up your name. In order to be easy to access, the telephone book is organized in alphabetical order: A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-I-J-K-L-M-N-O-P-Q-R-S-T-U-V-W-X-Y-Z. Containing an alphabetical list of telephone owners, this species of publication provides the 'ABC telephone public' and publishes a telephonically available public, which is about to expand by each re-publication of the book. The 'ABC art public' in Restany's text is indeed organized alphabetically, but restricted to a specific amount of people at a specific date, place and time: '**A, B, C, D, E, F, G-H, F, I, J**'. (Fig. 4/5) This art public counts 10 letters, while 2 letters are added through different operations of doubling: F is mentioned twice, and D is called 'les deux D' in the text. This results in 12 letters, who attended the opening, while 'the others were not there'. *They*, 'the others', were absent.

While these mysterious others stayed absent, the critic requested the artist's voice to remain. Absent in the specific way of remaining silent, Restany advised Broodthaers' to '[…] be beautiful (in your own way) and keep quiet' (MoMA 2016, 120). At the public event of his own opening, the artist, who is "quite attractive to women and men" (MoMA 2016, 120), should remain silent and beautiful: to be *looked at*, like his unreadable *Pense-Bêtes*. Silent like the muffled telephone, which is called *Coup de fil à Pierre Restany*. After enumerating his ABC, Broodthaers reassures the critic that he followed his advice: 'I was handsome in my own way and I remained silent' (MoMA 2016, 120). Broodthaers kept quiet: like his deaf telephone, like his sculptured books, like four useless letters in his name. In his letter to Pierre, Marcel concluded that 'communication was doubtlessly faulty' (MoMA 2016, 120). *Court-circuit*, it seems, now comes full circle. In a section on electric portraits, Avital Ronell writes that 'some of these

sounds were incapable of phonetic representation with our alphabet' (Ronell 1989, 317). She describes a few friends visiting Alexander Graham Bell, who challenged the inventor of the telephone by giving him 'the most peculiar and difficult sounds we could think of' (Ronell 1989, 317) to be reproduced in his 'Visible Speech' (Ronell 1989, 317). Reading about Bell's 'Visible Speech' calls to mind the 'peculiar sound' of a specific Belgian name, which is particularly susceptible for typographical errors: Marcel Broodthaers. Difficult to spell, this artist's name is constantly written wrongly. The artist himself even made use of this his name and its orthographic error-proneness, when he turned the misspelling of his name into the edition *Mea Culpa* (1964). Obviously, also the critic Restany was aware of the typographical trap that the artist's name installs. At the very beginning of his text, the art critic warns his reader: 'Broodthaers is pronounced Brotars: four useless letters in the spelling of the name. It's enough to inspire in one the vocation to become a philologist, a paleographic archivist, and explorer-ethnographer. Broodthaers is all of these things at once, and more besides' (MoMA 2016, 120).

Epilogue

In 1969, Broodthaers produced a series of vacuum-formed plastic signs, known as *Signalisations Industrielles*. In black letters on a black background, one of these industrial poems reads: 'Je suis un signal. Je suis fait pour enregistrer les signaux. Je Je Je Je […]' -- four white telephones are the only white symbols on an all-black poem-object. Broodthaers' apparently endless repetition of 'I' is absorbed by the black of the background *and* the same black of the foreground. This calls to mind the exhibition catalogue of his first solo-show *Moules Œufs Frites Pots Charbon* at Wide White Space Gallery, in which Broodthaers published a poem entitled *Ma Rhétorique* (Aupetitallot 1995, 230). It starts: 'Me I say I Me I say I […]' – 'Moi Je dis Je Moi Je dis […]' – and continues with the multiple meanings, puns, and onomatopoetic confusions of French words such as 'je' ('I'), 'dire' ('say'), 'moule' ('mussel'/'form'). Restany started his text with a phonetic analysis of Broodthaers' family

name. Taking his call for vocation, I, too, would like to ask you, my dear reader – may I call 'you' by your first name, 'tu', may I call you, 'mon cher lecteur'? – to pronounce *cliché*. Repeat it. Again! Especially when vocalized multiple times, the final syllable of *cliché* almost sounds like the French 'I', one of the most general stereotypes in language which 'transforms the singular "I" into a general subject' (Ron 2017, 104). Merging typography and onomatopoesis literally enacts another self-portrait: Cli-*je*.

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FeedBack! Performance in the Evaluation Society

By Sabeth Buchmann

Abstract

Artistic performances in the museum have been increasingly evaluated by their viewers through modes of the quantitative evaluation of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). These public platforms, operating in the social domain, ascribe monetary value to popularity and 'equip us', as the German sociologist Steffen Mau suggests, 'with a certain kind of capital in certain markets.' As this phenomenon has been present in art world for a while, a fundamental tension has emerged between contemporary methods of ascribing value to performances by means of measuring digitally generated numbers and traditional critical analysis to critique performance. Traditional criticism addresses a contextual analysis rooted in aesthetic judgment. Against this background, my essay tackles the discrepancy between quantitative evaluation and qualitative criticism in the context of, what Mau calls the 'evaluation society'. It describes a shift from analysis and judgment to modes of publically digitalised evaluation. This essay takes as its case studies Anne Imhof's contribution *Faust* to the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017 and its social media representation and Anna and Lawrence Halprin's *RSVP Cycles*, also exhibited at the same Venice Biennial and at the documenta 13 in Athens/Kassel and argues that the works embody a type of performance that represent the described shift from categories of critique to those of evaluation. These case studies constitute a challenge to the redefinition of art criticism. My analysis of these works leads me to suggest that the logic of numerical values is already embedded in their artistic concepts as well as in established modes of critique. Considering the role of performance a ruling 'mode of power', as McKenzie describes it, I am suggesting to treat performance as both, a tool and subject of critique.

This essay examines how the medium of performance is critiqued inside museums, at biennials and documentas in the age of social media and argues that there has been a shift from traditional art criticism in sense of contextual analysis and aesthetic judgment to categories of quantitative evaluation. I am addressing the shift towards criteria that have less to do with critical categories of analysis, but with assessments that are based on value production by, what the German sociologist Uwe Vormbusch

calls, 'relationship markets' and 'reputation markets': In a conversation with Steffen Mau in *Texte zur Kunst,* June 2018, he pointed out that 'it's a question of how people are able to mutually evaluate each other in a fragmented modernity'. Of course, this question is also relevant for feedback-based forms of art criticism.

The influence of networking, likes, and links on social media platforms feed an attention economy of (art) criticism. Although the affixation of comparative value to human beings isn't new, the expansion and increased importance of numerical value is something that we participate in day per day via social media. While the participation of (media) consumers was (and occasionally still is) a classical demand of left-wing criticism, it has long since also dealt with the negotiation and relativization of quality criteria. In his highly instructive book *The Metric We. About the Quantification of the Social* (2017), Mau argues that evaluation operates according to the logic of quantification. Since statistics are normally a matter of assessment for institutions, the assumption that art is being measured and compared numerically, needs to be explained in more detail. Taking seriously the argument that numbers not only predict but are of importance, I am suggesting that visitor quotas and the number of Facebook likes and Instagram posts indicate which art exhibitions or events are relevant and which are not.

According to Mau, 'our consumer choices' correlate with our 'aesthetic, cultural, social and political preferences' (Mau 2018). Constantly communicated via Google searches, mouse clicks, and social networks, statistics and numbers help classify and evaluate our social lives and make them commodifiable to an advertising market. Mau is convinced that the number of online followers serves as an 'indicator' through 'which institutions can demonstrate that they are performing well' (Mau 2018). These mechanisms of quantification therefore have now an impact on editorial choices and critical judgment. Or, put differently, the quantity of interest in and the attesting of quality of an art work is dependent on numerical values. This, of course has, as

Mau admits, 'very little to do with a narrower evaluation of the artistic performance on the stage' (Mau 2018). Images of performance events thus also provide images of visitor gatherings that document public interest and evoke social relevance. Generally-speaking, to work effectively with the medium of performance, artists and institutions must position themselves as actors, resulting in that in order to make successful exhibitions and stage works more effectively than the traditional media coverage.

Performance, a subjective practice as well and as a source of social quality, might be a privileged site of evaluation because of its ephemeral nature and its reputation as a participatory and/or democratic practice. Considering the performance practice in the tradition of Yvonne Rainer and other choreographers of postmodern dance, in which professionals and amateurs participate(d), performance should not only be perceived as yet another elitist genre, but also as being socially and politically engaged beyond the artistic institution. It, therefore, makes sense to consider a possible connection between socially expanded artistic practice and an expanding evaluation logic.

There is no question that artistic performance practices depend on 'experts, in which networks of art critics, galleries, public institutions, and art periodicals are active agents of valorization' (Mau 2018). In this sense, 'the intrusion of new forms of evaluation – evaluation by the public, public interest, acclamation in the media, sale prices, followers and likes on social media (...)' (Mau 2018) has changed our common, perhaps naïve, understanding of art criticism as a more or less independent discipline following only its own conditions and rules. In this current climate, art critics recognize themselves as embedded actors within the expanded art institution. This is not new, of course, but the conditions of the market in relation to art criticism have intensified, insofar as criticism of and as art is increasingly dependent on 'relational' and 'reputation markets', now also including the approval of 'likes'. Drawing on Jon McKenzie's *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (2001), I am linking this phenomenon to the conjunction of,

what he calls, 'cultural', 'organizational', and 'technical' performances. As he highlights the role and function of performance in the 'design, testing, and evaluation of virtually all types of consumer products and technological systems', the emergence of data as art's lingua franca seems to exacerbate the horizon of problems of art criticism (24).

This is all the more remarkable when thinking about the reputation of performance as an antidote to the art market. As art criticism is often considered an elitist genre due to its hierarchical and selective practices, which represent internal institutional norms, performance and art criticism cannot be reconciled so easily. This is all the more reason to examine such values as 'social importance' or 'public relevance' within the framework of a society of evaluation, in order to understand the blind spots of today's art criticism. Insofar as they are often based on the traditionally democratic principle of feedback, artistic performances present themselves as a component that links the procedures of aesthetic qualification with those of social quantification. Since feedback structures configure, as Diedrich Diederichsen points out, 'new forms of public management, (...) new models of governance, which are accompanied by accountabilities to donors, to politics, and to the public sphere' (2008, 256ff.), it is obvious that especially participatory performances must be considered in terms of its role in the transformation of art and event markets.

In line with Mau's thesis that in 'new forms of mass evaluation […] laypeople have the last word', the logic of evaluation has already changed more 'established reputation systems' like the weighting of the 'expert' (Mau 2018). This has been provoked by a fan culture, affective customer loyalty, non-institutional interest groups and target groups. Of course, this polarisation of lay and expert judgment might sound obsolete, or at the least like a neo-conservative backlash against democratic and/or emancipatory concepts of performance practice. I am thinking here of the Judson Church Theater as well as the US-American choreographer and dancer Anna Halprin—who together with her husband, landscape architect and environmental designer

Lawrence Halprin—developed the so-called *RSVP Cycles*, on which Halprin's workshops and score practices, such as *Score for a Twenty-Day Workshop* (1968) are based. They were last shown at documenta13 in Athens and Kassel (2017) as well as at the Venice Biennial in 2017. Attributing new meaning to the widely conventional abbreviation for 'répondez s'il vous plait' ('please respond'), 'RSVP' designates a four-component feedback system: 'an assessment of resources (R); scoring (S); evaluaction, an evaluation of the work based on values (V); and performance (P)'.

I mention Anna and Lawrence Halprin's 'RSVP Cycles' because they represent the historical relevance of a participatory performance practice on the one hand and, on the other, because it is a significant historical example of the internal connection between performance and feedback-based evaluation procedures. Comparable to cybernetic models, the 'RSVP Cycles' implement the principle of a 'circular causal relationship,' in which actions resulted in alterations within a cyclical system that are then subject to evaluation. The reciprocity of action and (self-)evaluation, as the art historian Liz Kotz writes, is extended to all domains of human action: 'Even a grocery list or a calendar […] is a score'. Working with materials as diverse as architectural blueprints, diagrams, stage directions, and tabulations, Kotz quotes Halprin as she argues that 'planning for future events is the essential purpose of a scoring mechanism. […] Scores' therefore have to be understood as "devices used for controlling events, of influencing what is to occur"' (Kotz 49).

In addition to the undisputed participatory character of the *RSVP Cycles* we need to consider the role they attribute to the dialectics of scoring and evaluation, which is key to today's quantitative procedures: Regarding Halprin's model as an early example for the growing trend towards a 'total record of life'—in which 'everything that can be measured is measured and stored' (Mau 2017, 126)—does not negate its anti-totalitarian character. On the contrary, Halprin's practice is closely bound up with the 'prognostic capacity' that is a crucial feature

of the same quantitative procedures. 'Prognostic capacity', too, is hinted at in the *RSVP Cycles* and structurally contradicts Halprin's aspiration to artistic openness. Since the cycles functioned as a collective (self-) exploration of the body in its interaction with its environment, they are the basis of the 'Movement Rituals', which Halprin developed in collaboration with her multiethnic dance ensemble in response to the Los Angeles Watts Riots of 1965. Anna Halprin subsequently worked with other underprivileged groups, such as she did for the works created in the context of the women's movement. Her scores for *Female & Male Dance Rituals* were thought to help the participants to recognize and break down gender-specific blockages both physically and emotionally. Apart from the social implications, the 'RSVP Cycles' remind us of 'processes of control and regulation in dynamic systems' that has its roots in the military research since the late 1940s. Looking back to the performative revision of conventional body concepts in the context of postmodern dance, such as the Judson Church Theater, it is interesting to note that Norbert Wiener, the founding father of the discipline cybernetics, questioned the existence of the nervous system as a 'self-contained organ', and preferred to speak of 'circular processes emerging from the nervous system into the muscles, and re-entering the nervous system through the sense organs' (34). This scientific perspective converges with the approach of postmodern dance and conceives the body as an interdependent organism. Against this backdrop, the *form* of collective feedback, in which the Halprins discerned the possibility of 'evaluaction'—a neologism combining 'evaluation' and 'action'—is all decisive. It remains unclear whether it positions itself within the framework of emancipatory body practice, or if it aims at representational and political participation?

What are the similarities and differences to today's feedback systems? Following Tiqqun, a French collective of authors in the tradition of situationism, whose poetic-theoretical-political interventions aim above all at socio-technological sign circulation, it becomes clear that cybernetics was and still is a major factor behind the transformation of the

social subject into a 'self-disciplined personality', which has internalized the structural logic of constant (self-)observation and (self-) evaluation (Tiqqun 32). I, therefore, agree with Tom Holert's consideration that those types of art, including performative mediations of knowledge, tend to transfer author-centered categories like 'invention, expression, emotion, creativity, and subjectivity' onto the audience' (2018). The subject then appears as a relevant object of evaluation: Who is invited to participate, what are the target groups, where and under which conditions does art overlap with social fields and/or with pop, fashion or celebrity culture? Such more or less voluntary acts of assessment can occur either in form of twitter followers, Instagram stats, academia.edu analytics, or artnet rankings and increase the success of blogs, social media, and 'algorithmic governmentality' (Rouvroy and Berns 2010).

Holert is concerned with an evaluation based event and infrastructure that has advanced to a highly relevant sector for the market of contemporary exhibitions. And in regards to this, McKenzie's focus on the conjunction of 'cultural', 'organizational', and 'technical' performances (24), the role and function of performance in the 'design, testing, and evaluation of virtually all types of consumer products and technological systems' comes into view again. To me, this is strongly linked to the emergence of data as art's lingua franca as a significant reason for the exacerbation of the current crises of art criticism. The same is suggested by the performance scholar Marvin Carlson (1996). He argues that any practice—human and non-human, autonomous and functional—can now be performance. We are required to distinguish between (non-artistic) 'doing' linked to 'organizational', and 'technical' performances as well as everyday gestures and (artistic) 'performance'? As Carlson writes, 'The task of judging the success of the performance (or even judging whether it is a performance) is […] not the responsibility of the performer but of the observer' (5).

What Carlson notes is that the audience's position of power in performance implies a diminished significance of art criticism as a purveyor of both aesthetic judgments and expertise. The act of evaluation instead depends on the question of functional success.

Assuming that the audience is prepared to pass instantaneous judgment, Carlson's study also reads as an anticipation of the growing importance of feedback-based evaluation, since 'performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self' (Carlson 6). That is to say, performance is essentially addressing an audience. The audience represents the self that finds validation in it. This nexus of self-recognition and (self-)validation is one reason for the current expansion of the performative zone into the social realm as well as into the virtual world. As the boundaries between private, public, and commercial spheres have been blurred, performance could emerge as a key concept and artistic practice because it promises an appreciation and self-assurance within unstable and fluid spheres, where the production of events superimposes object production.

This includes the widespread conflation of art institutions, theatrical, educational, and scientific environments that we have seen in relation to the *RSVP Cycles,* as well as the interdisciplinary practices between visual and performative arts since the 1960s. Today, allegorical fusions of the exhibition space and the theater stage, the work place and the class room show the overlapping of different topologies. Holert points to Bruno Latour's science studies, which are based on the assumption that everything taking place in the academic realm—from the laboratory, to the studio and the seminar room, and not least on the various digital platforms of academic life—is intrinsically performative. What we are faced with today is a network-based transformation of institutions into infrastructural environments that foster performative ways of production.

This transformation is exemplified by *Faust*, Anne Imhof's contribution to the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2017, which referred to Johann Wolfgang Goethe's tragedy of the same name, written at the end of the eighteenth-century. Imhof's historical reference was meant to be read in the light of the neoliberal creative culture, in the sense of an archetypal parable of the tension between ambitious self-realization and the modern desire for self-improvement

and self-optimization. German philosopher Juliane Rebentisch has identified this tension as an experience accompanied by feelings of fear and exhaustion (2017). In Imhof's performance piece the spatial design consisted mainly of a double glass ceiling mounted at hip-height and that divided the exhibition hall vertically. The architectonic intervention evoked a spatial co-presence of performers and visitors, turning the latter into performers of a second order, not only during the performance times, but also when the room was supposedly 'empty'. Glass pedestals that were mounted at head height and 'laboratory' props and ready-mades placed below the elevated glass floor choreographed not only the movements of the performers, but also those of the visitors. The participating performers embodied a series of *tableaux vivants* which transformed archetypical emotions into expressions of the digital condition over the course of four to five hours of performance. The evaluation society—the anxiety probed by *Faust*, rightly identified by curator Susanne Pfeffer as the dark underbelly of biopolitical subjectification (9) —is also fueled by a growing dependency on visible and audible resonance signals, signified, for example, by an overreliance on one's smartphone. In their roles as (in-)voluntary (co-)performers, the spectators were prompted to act in a procreative, more or less participatory way.

Whereas, on the one hand, the trope of transparency exposes the architecture of the German pavilion as a representative example for the National Socialists' preference for fascistic aesthetics, it evokes, on the other, an absorptive image that mixes—as Benjamin Buchloh points out (2017)—obvious references to the cool and stylish appeal of high-tech flagship stores, like the Apple Store, which stand-in for and obscured the opaque infrastructures of global cooperations. As intended by the artist (cf. Pfeffer 2017), the spatial and choreographic design bolstered the perception of *Faust* as a technologically reproducible image rather than an ephemeral performance. Remarkably, digital agents played a crucial part in *Faus*t because their real-time Instagram feedback manifestly boosted, instead of deconstructed, the aura of the architectonic environment. A twofold code dictated the aesthetic of

Imhof's work: the photographic documentation shows the performers (including the fashion model Eliza Douglas) dressed in a mixture of casual sportswear and party clothing. Thus, the event explicitly addressed the overlapping of art, fashion, and club culture, creating an insta-famous, influencer aesthetic. Imhof's scenographic glass design also represented a perfect 'formula of the society of evaluation', where everything is exhibited, even if the performers act like self-referential, opaque monads in the middle of the audience. As Mau states, 'the more transparency, the better, because due to its image of objectivity transparency can hardly be criticised' (2018).

My criticism then becomes obvious: The photos of the four to five hour-long performance show the performers surrounded by masses of mobile phone users, who act like living sculptures perfectly suited for optical reproduction. In contrast to Anna Halprin, the choreography does not aim at the combination of physical and social movement, but rather at the participatory (re-)production of images and their distribution via and within (social) media. I have compared Halprin's and Imhof's work to distinguish between feedback-based concepts seeking to either connect us to emancipatory concepts, as in Halprin's case, or fit a bit too smoothly into the logic of economic-driven quantification, as is the case in Imhof's work. My article emphasises the argument that performance is an exemplary and vivid terrain of our participation in remote-controlled 'evaluation management' (van Eikels 286). Therefore, art criticism should analyse the instrumental values expanding within the infrastructure of networks of cultural, organisational, and technological performances in order to reflect on the society of evaluation, which it already inhabits. Considering performance a ruling 'mode of power' (McKenzie, 2001), it is necessary to treat it as both a tool and subject of critique. Assuming that performance claims to be a form of social criticism, its (art) criticism should develop a stronger awareness of the social expectations awakened when analysing performances, which further blur the genres of participation and evaluation. To this end, critics might need to better understand the media that level or at least obscure those distinctions.

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Criticism Within the Circus Sector: Redressing a Power Imbalance

By Katharine Kavanagh

Abstract

The field of circus performance does not have a critical culture built within its practice the way that other performance and visual art forms do. Performance analysis, beyond attainment of optimum physical technique, is neither embedded in the general training and professional routines of performers, nor in any established form of public review discourse. This essay provides evidence of some underlying issues that currently inhibit a culture of critical practice developing, drawing on Foucault's conception of power-knowledge. This paper presents the model of an 'Analysis Cube' as an adaptable tool that can be used to cultivate critical engagement within the circus sector, and to deepen the engagement and understanding of commentators from other realms of experience outside of circus. The creation of the tool has been grounded in an ongoing praxis, reflecting the principles of action research (McNiff). The evidence of this study draws on four editions of the Circus Voices critical development scheme that I led between 2016 and 2018 at performing arts festivals in the UK. Data obtained during the course of these residencies show how criticism has been perceived by circus practitioner participants, both conceptually and through direct response to reviews of circus productions. An analysis of this raw material reveals that a high proportion of participant responses position criticism as primarily an economic tool for creators; and participants recognise a distinct lack of circus specific knowledge displayed in mainstream criticism. A small selection of creative critical approaches responsive to the needs of circus practitioners are discussed in the end to outline potential ways forward in an emerging and distinct critical field.

Background

Among the many fields of artistic endeavour, circus performance has been subject to a notable lack of critical discourse throughout its history (Arrighi 65). Over the last three decades, an expansion of the circus form into more theatrical territory has led to increased recognition from theatre critics and arts writers from other backgrounds[1]. What is yet

1 Whilst the birth of New Circus is generally given as the late 1960s and 1970s, and

to emerge, however, is a strong field of critique that engages with the aesthetic and ideological perspectives of circus practitioners. As artist researcher Dana Dugan notes, 'much of the circus discourse resides in a context *about* circus, as an object of investigation (most of which is conducted by researchers outside of the circus community)' (18). In her monograph on audience research, Kirsty Sedgman calls for the cultural sector to pay 'critical attention to *whose values we are effectively prioritising*' (2018, 149, emphasis in original). She especially highlights a broad systemic issue of white western culture underpinning current models of cultural value, but the concern can also be applied in miniature when we find one artform—in this case, circus—being judged according to the value criteria of another. Within the UK performing arts industry, that dominant ideology is one that prioritises semiosis—the creation of meaning via an interpretable system of signs. Theatre is regularly evaluated based on its ability to communicate meaning and, while theatre's ability to draw emotion can also be prized, this is traditionally emotion that stems from cognition; from the artwork's ability to communicate meaning through interpretation. When emotion is drawn via other means than semiosis—such as kinaesthetic or social response for example—it becomes inarticulable within the hegemonic vocabulary in an example of Bernstein's restricted code, whereby the richness and complexity of an out-group's communicative modes are not articulable within a framework devised solely by in-group communicators (Ivinson). A new wave in audience research is developing methods by which the inarticulable of the audience experience can be accessed (for example, Reason; Sedgman 2017), however, work that reaches audiences on a level outside of thought is rarely offered a place at the arts industry table[2].

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the movement known often as Contemporary Circus has been attributed to a 1995 beginning (Trapp and Kluth, n.pag.), a seachange in recognition from the established arts industry can be seen as starting in the mid-1980s with the growing international prominence of Cirque Du Soleil from Canada, Circus Oz from Australia, and Archaos from France.

2 This is often realised in distinctions such as 'high' versus 'popular' art, or 'art' versus 'entertainment' (See Shrum; Savran e.g.).

Foucault's concept of 'power-knowledge' (1995, 27) refines the old maxim that knowledge equals power to present a mutually reinforcing process wherein the two elements are inextricably tied. Those who define the parameters of known categories have power over those who are constrained within them. The perceived lack of value that criticism currently seems to have within the circus industry (beyond pragmatic recognition of the economic function that reviews play in marketing and self-promotion), can be explained by a corresponding lack of pertinent critique expressing circus knowledge. My work seeks to address this power-knowledge imbalance by opening a space for insider circus perspectives to be voiced within the wider sphere of performing arts criticism.

A barely-existent history of critical discourse around the art of circus productions (as compared to theatre, music, and visual arts for example), has resulted in shallow and pervasive general perceptions of critical practice that reflect popular representation[3]. Just as the term 'circus' conjures to many a restricted code of red noses and big tops, the idea of 'criticism' calls up notions of 'fault-finding' (Williams 85), and is associated with negativity, arrogance and high-handed self-importance (Fisher). This is in stark contrast to the theoretical positioning of critique as a virtue (Foucault 2007, 43), or as constructive practice (Latour 246). To engage people with circus knowledge in the critical project, the notion of criticism has to be made accessible, and the confidence to contribute and redress the power imbalance must be nurtured.

Two particular features can be observed impeding the development of nuanced critical articulacy in circus. One, often seen in those nominal critiques produced by outsider commentators, is a permeating romanticised vision of a historical circus, which clouds current realities (Trapp and Kluth; Lievens 2016). The other is a tendency to polarize, setting types of circus choice in binary opposition that, by default, create walls of 'good' versus 'bad' in what is, ultimately,

3 The critical perspective that exists amongst practising circus artists has overwhelmingly been towards achieving specific, personal training goals, rather than observing the artistic work of others.

an ambiguous matter of subjective appreciation (Frieze 2). 'What is circus?' has already become a tired question within circus studies discourse. Or, rather, the attempt to answer it with an all-encompassing definition has become tired, with growing recognition that the answer can only come in fragments: this is circus; and this; and this (Kann). Variety and diversity are cornerstones of circus, which is rhizomatic in nature. No single element can be considered in isolation, as there *is* no single element; yet, almost paradoxically, specificity is required to develop depth of knowledge in any element area. A critical mechanism is required that recognises the contemporaneous choices available in circus creation[4], yet sets them into a multi-dimensional context that allows users to acknowledge the specific parameters of their discussion; to say, 'This is a *part* of circus that I'm examining right now. It joins with other *parts*, in always different constellations'.

In this light, I propose a tentative step forward in the search for 'complex and diverse tools' that practitioner-scholar Bauke Lievens calls for (2015 n.p.), to enable critical and knowledgeable discussion of twenty-first century circus: a conceptual model that can be used to define temporary boundaries for a region of inspection without implying any fixed essentialist core. Jon Burtt and Katie Lavers recommend that circus education should complement its 'linear training sequences' and 'rigid progressions' of physical Behaviourist Training (149) with reflectively engaged modes. My suggestion is a model that can be used as a tool to invite discussion and stimulate thinking, as well as to clarify the parameters of immediate concern within an otherwise intangibly broad subject. It is my hope that application of the Analysis Cube model discussed below—combined with efforts by circus schools to educate in ways that overcome the perceptual barriers to critical engagement highlighted above—will build in the circus sector a culture of critique as practice. Practice that does not leap straight to judgement,

4 The term 'contemporary' has been deliberately avoided in this discussion, relating as it does to one pole of a particularly pervasive and troubling circus discourse binary, in relation to 'traditional' (Ursić 49). Moreover, Fabián Barba discusses the problematic use of 'contemporary' as a stylistic categorising label in dance, and suggests that the concept is a 'distinctively Western' one (n.p.).

bypassing other forms of engagement (Butler n.p.) but that, following Mendelsohn (n.p.), engages knowledge and subjective position as 'the crucial foundation of the judgement to come.'

#CircusVoices

The tool I propose has been cultivated as part of my ongoing action research in the field of circus criticism, and has been largely influenced by my experiences running the Circus Voices critical development programme. The Circus Voices programme was initiated in 2016 in response to the difficulties I encountered trying to search for production critique imbued with in-depth circus knowledge. The scheme arose from my experience publishing an online platform dedicated to circus reviews—The Circus Diaries[5]—which itself sprang from a personal frustration with how rarely circus productions are discussed in performing arts publications, in print or online. Moreover, when they are given space, the coverage is not often meaningful to those invested in the art-form as practitioners or experienced viewers.

Knowledge, and the knowing thereof, have been acknowledged as the 'primordial responsibility' of critique (Foucault 2007, 50); yet, the critical responses I was able to find usually failed to meet this responsibility[6]. Meanwhile, the printed reviews in King Pole—the magazine of the Circus Friends Association of Great Britain and, as such, a site of circus knowledge—failed to provide critique; their focus on factually listing show contents and offering only praise categorises these fan reports as 'interested' rather than 'disinterested' reviews within the genre studies field of linguistics. That is, they are members of a

5 http://thecircusdiaries.com

6 A notable exception in the English language is John Ellingsworth's online Sideshow Magazine, which was active between May 2009 and February 2015, and now exists as an archive at http://sideshow-circusmagazine.com. The situation is healthier for Francophones, whilst other European nations also give critical attention and dedicated resources to the circus arts that the UK and USA have hitherto been short of. In South America, the notion of circus is formulated differently, without the segregation of practice and production observed in the Global North (Sorzano). Therefore, circus critique emerging in this region is unlikely to fall into the traditions of product-focused arts criticism as have been established in Europe, but investigations of this area are beyond the capacity of my current research.

promotional genre rather than a critical one (Shaw). The Circus Diaries began as a personal attempt to draw elements of circus knowledge and critique together, providing publicly available information that would contribute a sense of relativity and context to the hyperbole laden and detail light alternatives (in themselves, few and far between).

A single viewpoint such as my own, however, can only ever give a fragmentary, partially accurate representation of an event. There is no space for dissent, agreement, extension, or dialogue. I have been living and working around the fringes of circus society for the last ten years[7] but I am aware that my own prior education in theatre means my approach towards circus critique unavoidably carries traces of the hegemonic external perspective that needs unsettling. An important element of the Circus Voices programme, alongside encouraging circus practitioners to recognise and articulate their critical outlook, is my own unravelling of the values and viewpoints that characterise a distinctly circus approach to criticism. However, bodies of criticism from multiple (knowledgeable and critical) perspectives are required to give a broader sense of any production, and to fulfil my wider aims of contextualising and demythologising circus work. Enlisting other contributors to the project, though, is not as simple as putting out an invitation due to structurally inherited distance from the practice of critique within circus culture. On enquiry and observation, it transpires that restricted notions of what criticism means are not the only factor causing reticence towards critical engagement either. Fear plays a part. Beyond mere fear of the unknown, lurks fear of inadequacy—many circus practitioners have been led to believe that they are academically under par in relation to the conventional educational model, and criticism is seen as a product of

7 In 2008 and 2009, I toured as a volunteer with NoFit State Circus' tenting show Tabú. I lived on site, training in the various disciplines with the show performers, assisting with site maintenance and catering chores, performing front of house and merchandising duties, and joining in the mass effort of building up and pulling down the tent. Whilst I quickly realised that I don't have the obsessive qualities required to perform professionally as a circus artist, I do have those required to become a circus academic and advocate. I have continued to practice circus recreationally, where my drug of choice is tightwire.

particular academic requirements. Fear of personal repercussions is also expressed in what is a very small and inter-mobile industry.

An inspirational programme that made some successful steps towards combining circus knowledge with criticality in a different way was 'Unpack The Arts'. This EU-funded scheme introduced arts writers to circus discourse over twelve festival residencies in eight different European countries between 2012 and 2014, producing 120 articles on circus from as many participants[8]. Circus Voices, on a much more modest scale, inverts this process to engage circus professionals—and their existing knowledge—with approaches to critical practice. It aims, on the micro level, to develop individual participants' confidence in circus analysis and articulation and, on the macro level, to help build a broader culture of critical discourse in and around the circus arts. It amplifies an echo of the 'get-your-hands-dirty' model of Italian criticism, characterised by 'positioning the critic inside its field of enquiry' (Laera 100). To date, there have been twenty-two participants, plus myself, across four iterations of the project—three during Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and one during Circus City festival in Bristol[9]. Participants have been embedded within a festival context where a high volume of circus-based work was programmed, and activity has included group visits to shows, critical discussion, workshop activity, and the creation of critical responses for publication on The Circus Diaries platform. Although there has been reflexive priority shifting within the different editions, and variation in the shows seen, certain exercises have been repeated with each cohort. Examining the outcomes of two of these exercises using Corpus Linguistics methods sheds a more empirical light on current conceptions of criticism within the circus industry, revealing gaps in understanding and opportunities for development, while also

8 https://www.circuscentrum.be/en/2015/03/22/unpack-the-arts/

9 Although the Circus Voices project has been largely self-funded, I gratefully acknowledge the various support received from the Network of Independent Critics, Roundhouse London, Crying Out Loud, Circus City, Circus Futures and NoFit State Circus, as well as all the circus companies who have kindly provided tickets.

giving birth to new trajectories for a circus-centred critique to explore[10].

One of these exercises was designed to address the problem of limited preconceptions, opening space for discussion and thought to expand on the notion of what criticism means, is, and can be (see Figure 1). Large sheets of paper were annotated by participants of each residency, based around the triangulating questions of *what* forms criticism can take, *who* it can be useful for, and *why* it can exist (the purposes it can serve). Analysis of these annotations[11] reveals that the perceived value of criticism is heavily skewed towards the critiqued artists as beneficiaries in economic terms, rather than to the strengthening of the sector more broadly. Over half the items addressing who can benefit refer to the arts industry. Audiences are next but at less than half the frequency, followed by researchers. Within the comments acknowledging benefit to the arts, however, around 60% address only the particular needs of the critiqued artist, either directly, or via reference to marketers, PR, bookers or funders. This indicates a lack of acknowledgment around how a critical culture can benefit the development of the circus sector more widely. The limited perspective this suggests is further reflected in the tiny proportion of codes explicitly articulating purposes of criticism—only 4% of the total codes generated, comparable to 50% articulating potential readerships, 24% expressing potential forms, and 18% suggesting useful types of content. One more takeaway from this data is the insular perspective that emerges, with just over half the responses that verbalise benefits of criticism referring to benefits directly within the confines of the narrow circus sector.

10 Paul Baker et al. discuss how Corpus Linguistic methods reveal statistical patterns in texts that, when combined with a Critical Discourse Analysis approach (Fairclough), can be analysed along dimensions of structural power dynamics and textually encoded knowledge.

11 Dataset of 434 items, drawn from coding 238 separate comments.

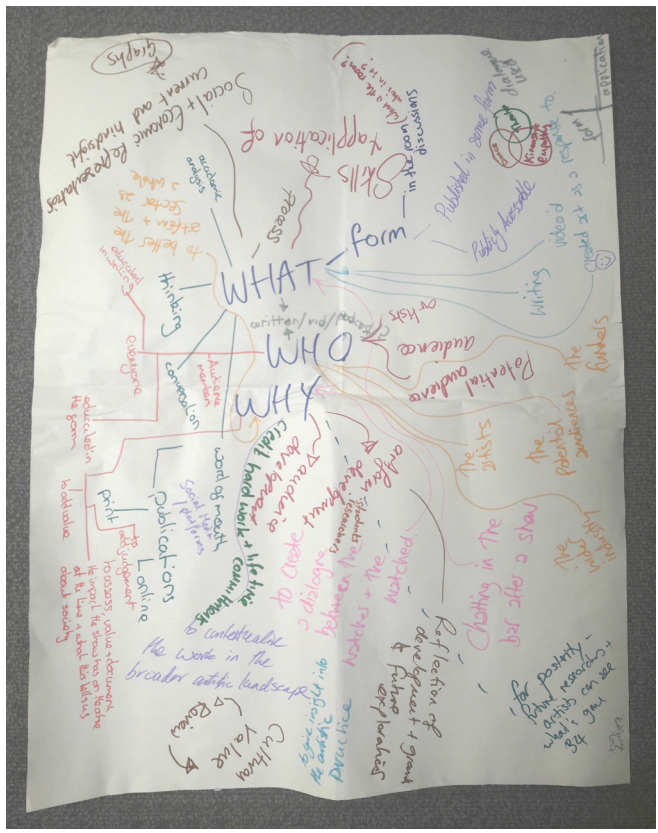

Figure 1: Example of raw Who What Why (WWW) data.

Another exercise was designed to engage participants with problems and successes of mainstream critical coverage of circus, from newspapers and online sources, through informal discourse analysis. This exercise ('Review The Reviews', RTR[12]), asked participants to read several reviews of one or two circus-based shows, keeping in mind the various purposes and readerships we had previously discussed. Annotations were made to mark elements of the reviews deemed useful or unhelpful, and anything else that struck the participants as noteworthy. Across the four editions of Circus Voices, comments were made on twenty-nine reviews taken from six different shows, both from print and online publications (some

12 Dataset of 575 items, drawn from coding 448 separate comments.

commercial, some independent blogs).

Finding enough reviews to make a comparative exercise was not an easy task for any of the Circus Voices editions and, despite my original intention to carry out the exercise based on shows all participants had seen as a group during each residency, this was not always possible—even in the hotbed of review culture that is Edinburgh Festival Fringe—so some comments came from a perspective of having seen the work in question, some from without. When even globally touring, commercially successful circus companies struggle to receive substantial critical coverage when they play in the UK, it would certainly seem that a change in the power-knowledge dynamic is required.

Comments in the RTR exercise were coded using a frame loosely derived from the *metafunctions* of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday)[13]. Within the context of this research, *experiential* comments refer to the denotational information content of the reviews, *textual* comments refer to the writerly qualities of the work—grammar, phrasing, coherence—and *interpersonal* comments refer to the personality, or 'voice' of the reviewer, including their stance of subjectivity or supposed objectivity. The results show especially high reference to the *experiential* content of the reviews, where further codes are based on the critical functions of *description, interpretation* and *judgement*[14], with the addition of *phenomenological* reporting of affect (see Figure 2). Over twice as many negative points were made about the reviews as positive. When participants mentioned *interpretation*, over a third of the comments directly disagreed with the reviewer's analysis, whilst another quarter described missing interpretations. Similarly, in mentions of reviewer *judgements*, less than 10% of comments were in agreement. These two facts pre-empt the tone of discussion around *description*. For nine positive comments about accuracy, there were 128 correspondingly

13 Within systemic functional linguistics (SFL) it is conventional to write network labels in small capitals and feature labels in italics. As my system is a bastardised version of SFL categorisation, I refrain from capitalising to avoid causing accidental confusion. Instead, I use italics to denote all categorical network labels, to distinguish them from normative use of the same words.
14 Following Edmund Feldman.

negative comments. These inaccuracies were ascribed to four major categories: *lack of attention* (factual errors in the recounting); *lack of respect* (including a notable number of complaints around uncredited or inconsistently credited performers); *inappropriate articulation* (empty terms and misleading representations); and, the most substantial complaint, *lack of knowledge*[15].

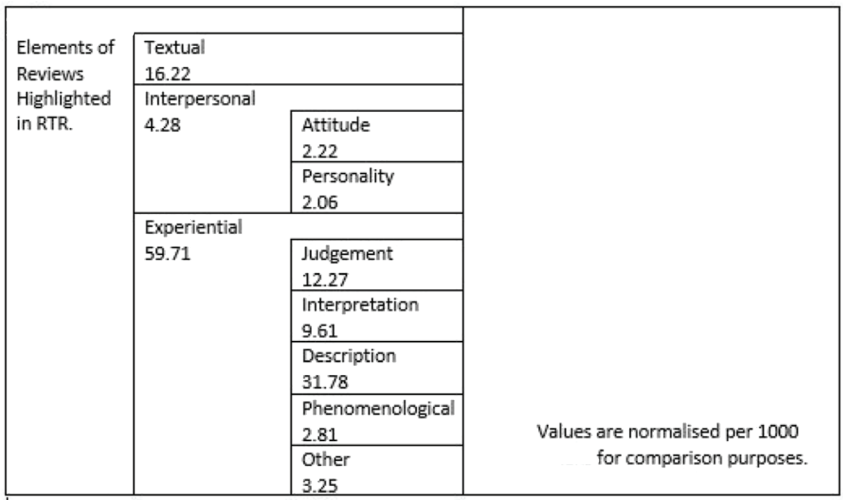

Figure 2: Comments in the 'Review The Reviews' exercise; shown here coded using a frame loosely derived from the metafunctions of systemic functional linguistics.

When *phenomenological* elements of the reviews are mentioned, nearly three quarters of the comments were explicitly in favour. This reflects a desire expressed through the *content suggestions* in WWW data for the reporting of *affect* (see Figure 3). Moreover, the main areas of importance under *content suggestions* are *evaluations* and *context*, mirroring inadequacies highlighted in the RTR exercise.

15 When analysed further, three particular problem area where knowledge was lacking were highlighted: industry knowledge, referring to people, companies, venues et cetera; genre context, referring to an understanding of the bigger picture of circus arts; and technical knowledge, referring to vocabularies of technique and equipment.

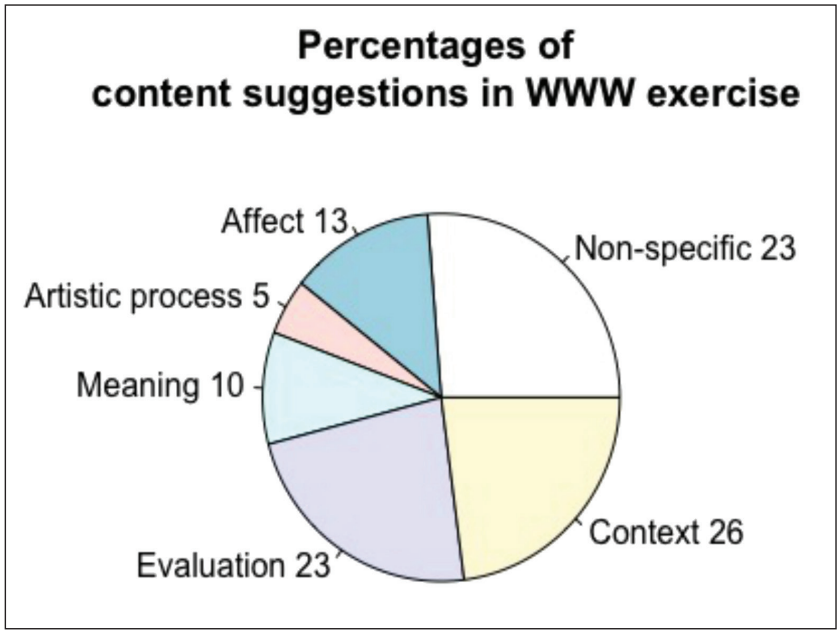

Figure 3: Pie chart of content suggestions in WWW exercise.

Finally, whilst *interpersonal* comments make up a very small number of items out of the whole RTR set (less than 5% of all considerations), the complete agreement across all instances is marked, praising a writer who acknowledges their subjective position, and showing a complete consensus against faux-objective writerly approaches. The important issues these analyses raise in relation to how criticism is perceived among circus practitioners can be simplified as a) a dominant sense that criticism's main function is as a marketing tool for artists, and b) a lack of circus knowledge among critics and irrelevance of content in public reviews (from which I surmise a disregard for criticism may well be based). Whilst this has been a small study, the quantitative findings empirically reinforce hitherto tacit suppositions of the problems that underlie attempts to develop a culture of critical discourse within the circus arts. These problems, though, are not the full story of the analysis. More encouraging are the creative solutions that have been proposed and developed by the 'Circus Voices' participants.

Moving Forwards

Without an entrenched relationship to particular critical norms—such as the 250-word newspaper column, or star ratings—the circus practitioners involved in this research were able to articulate an eclectic range of ways for critical discourse to emerge once they began to consider its potential role (see Figure 4). Of the few *purposes* that were explicitly mentioned, just under a fifth referred to *creating dialogue*, while just over a fifth acknowledged *artistic response* as a driver.

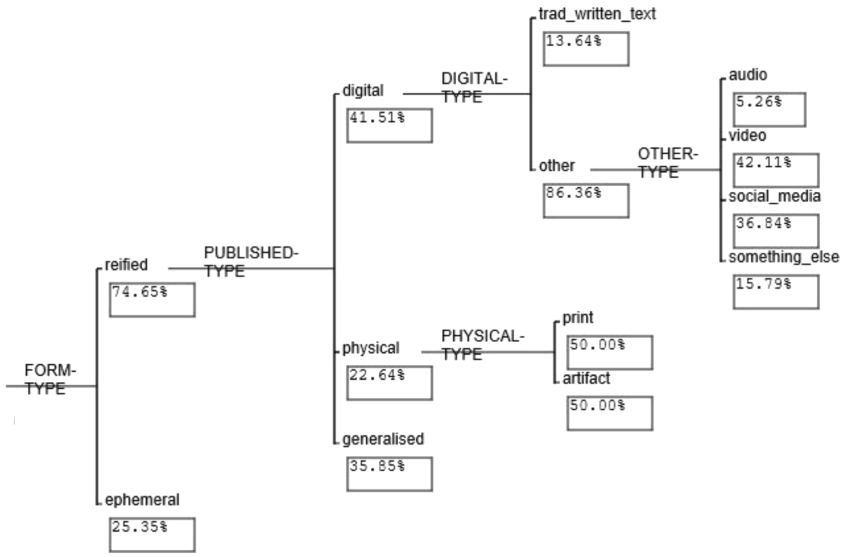

Figure 4: UAM CorpusTool visualization of WWW data expressing forms through which critique can be realised.

A reflection, perhaps, of the way digitally driven communication culture is diminishing the dominance of the written word as a transmitter of information, some of the forms of critical response that have come out of the 'Circus Voices' project have taken on a particularly visual identity. Rosie Kelly charts her response to work as it progresses, highlighting key moments, and theming her labels to generate a sense of the event's atmosphere (see Figure 5). Francesca Hyde has produced

concrete poetry that reflects the form of the work in question. *Wire-Do* (see Figure 6), is a solo tightwire and shibari performance with a very minimalist, zen-like aesthetic and *Gibbon* (see Figure 7), is a juggling show that's densely packed with formal, self-reflexive and lightly humourous patterning of bodies and objects, which these forms of artistic response capture and communicate. With each 'Circus Voices' group, we have also experimented with different forms of video response (Kavanagh n.d.). Many commentators have acknowledged the way mainstream performing arts criticism has been changing since the advent of the internet. Circus criticism should not try to fit itself into the box that theatre criticism is pushing out of. Introducing critical discourse into the circus sector, it is vital to remember this, and make the most of our unique opportunity to forge forward rather than trying to conform to a dominant mode that is arguably on its way out.

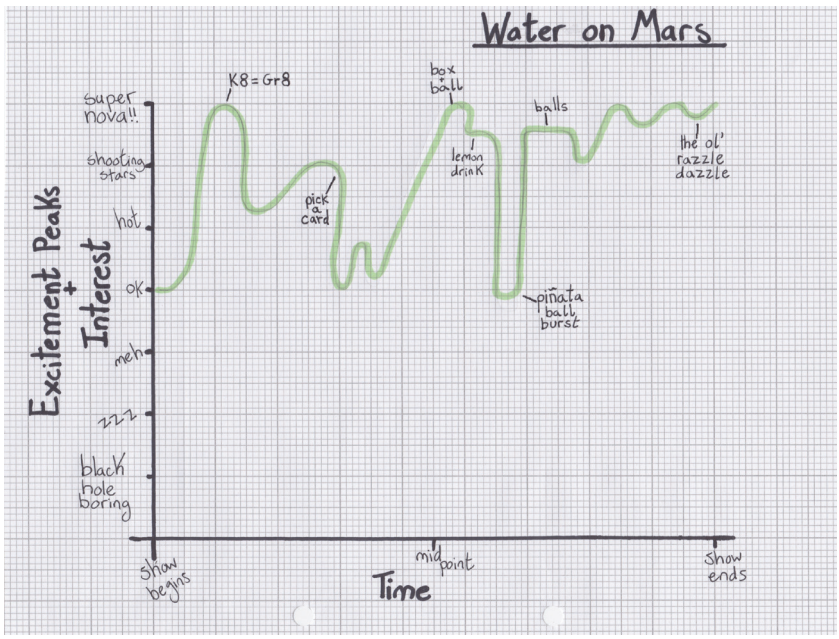

Figure 5: Rosie Kelly's response to 'Water on Mars', by Plastic Boom, August 2016.

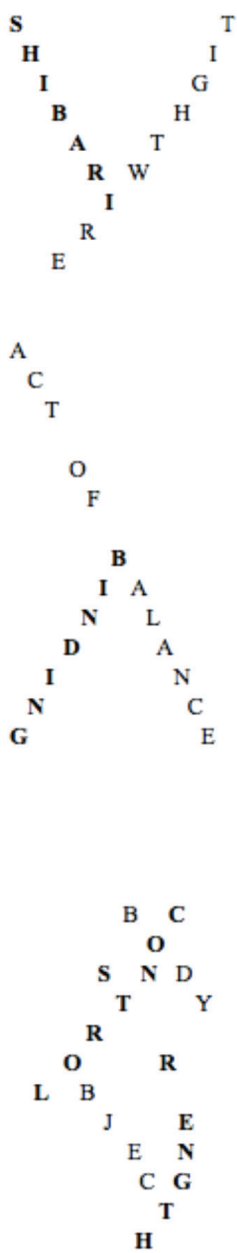

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Figure 6 (left): Francesca Hyde's response to 'WireDo', by Lumo Company, August 2018.

Figure 7 (right): Francesca Hyde's response to 'Gibbon', by Gandini Juggling, August 2018.

The Analysis Cube Model

The model I propose now as a tool for approaching critical discussion of circus comes in the visualisation of a cube. The circus analysis cube facilitates a process of critical engagement that can prompt discussion and stimulate thinking, opening space for previously unarticulated forms of knowledge to establish themselves in discourse. It has been used with circus students to develop awareness of their own tastes and drivers to inform their future creation work, and it can also be used to frame particular research questions for more academic study, allowing depth of insight to develop in specific areas. The cube visualisation is intersected on each of its three physical dimensions by axes representing dimensions of critical interest. These axes determine the parameters for discussion, and are selected according to the interests, tastes or other purpose of the critical analyst. Within a circus analysis cube, individual points can be plotted relating to particular objects of study, be they artists, institutions, or productions. This can be used as a starting point from which to further interrogate the relationship of the object to its three-dimensional position, or multiple objects can be plotted within the same axes to provide a basis for comparison. Importantly, the axes—or dimensions of interest—should be chosen in direct relevance to the individual critical task. Some examples are provided here, but these are by no means exhaustive or unalterable, and have come from the particular interests of circus practitioners who have participated in the development of this tool[16].

In one of the few of academic discussions of categories in twenty-first century circus practice, Bim Mason (204), identifies 'centres' and 'edges' of categorisation that can overlap and interchange, with qualities of fluidity increasing towards edge positions and with more

16 My thanks to all those who have contributed to the development so far: students of NCCA BA (Circus Arts), Circomedia MA (Directing Circus), and DOCH BA (Circus) and MA (Contemporary Circus Practices); attendees of the NoFit State Circus 2018 convention and 2019 Transitions Young Circus project; participants of the Roundhouse, Upswing and New Vic Theatre 50:50 directors programme; and Sebastian Kann for talking through early stage ideas with me. Thanks also, of course, go to all Circus Voices participants, past and future. Likewise to all Patreon supporters—you have helped make this research possible.

fixed qualities, temporarily solidified, in centres. The circus analysis cube is an extension of this notion. It encourage a move away from existing labels—inherited from circus-external powers reifying their own knowledge and thus reinforcing their power—towards finding new centres for examination and articulation that emerge from the lived practices of circus professionals and amateurs.

As an example, I shall briefly discuss one configuration of the model that I've found pertinent to the traditional reviewer role. Using the Cirkus Xanti/Ali Williams Productions show '*As A Tiger In The Jungle*' as a case study, I identify how the production sits in relation to my personal tastes (see Figure 8).[17] It should be emphasised that no area within the cube is inherently 'better' or 'worse' than any other and, in light of the discoveries discussed above, an acknowledgment of my subjective position in any critique should strengthen my argument to present the show in a fair manner. Neither are the dimensions quantifiable; they exist to give an idea of relational connections. The centre point is where all elements are balanced evenly.

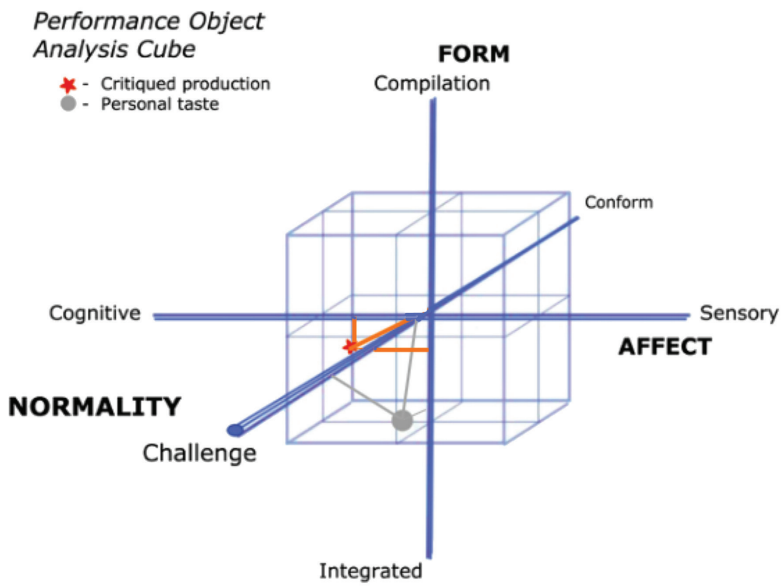

Figure 8: Example of Analysis Cube in use.

17 I worked on this show in Spring 2019 to provide audio description services, so am somewhat familiar with its internal mechanics.

The process of this positioning reveals that the production naturally falls into the region of work that most appeals to my own tastes (bottom-left-front). '*As A Tiger In The Jungle*' uses more narrative story-telling than I typically prefer, as the visualisation illustrates in its position tending more towards semiosis-led cognitive affect; the choreography of the routines is more separate from the overall meaning of the show than I would choose, tending more towards a compilation of separate elements than my personal preference for holistic integration (though still more integrated than compiled overall). This analysis allows me to check any snap judgements I might make about content being 'too spoonfed' or 'too disjointed', and to refer to these conditions in a more considered way. Furthermore, an interesting discussion around the dimension of 'Normality' is revealed through the difficulty I had trying to decide where to place my point along this axis. The production has been created in collaboration with Nepalese performers who were trafficked into Indian circuses as children, but who decided to continue making circus work on their own terms after being freed. While there is little about the semi-autobiographical show which challenges British ideas of what circus-theatre can be (besides, perhaps, its high-level execution and unusually deep and thought-provoking socio-political subject matter), in the context of Nepalese circus—and the experience of these particular performers—the entire approach is startlingly original and breaks from established patterns of conformity.

Examples of other potential dimensions for consideration in circus performance analysis are given in Figure 9. New lines can be created, even by 'folding' these suggested dimensions so that two ends of one axis combine to form one end of another. However, the cube can also be used to analyse the drivers that fuel creation or, in circus studies more broadly, the drivers that fuel circus engagement which may go beyond performance making and relate to personal health, social, or recreational pursuits. Whilst live performance is the public face of circus, it is itself only one fraction of the total field (see Figure 10).

Narrative	COMMUNICATION	Abstract
Scrappy	AESTHETIC	Slick
Choreography-based	EXPRESSION	Text-based
Resolved	ENDING	Suspended
Resonance	RESULT	Escapism
4th Wall	CONNECTION	Immersive participation
Evident	CONSTRUCTION	Hidden
Didactic	DELIVERY	Seductive
Provoke	ENGAGEMENT	Satisfy
Skills demonstration	INTENT	Concept communication
Innovation	APPROACH	Established
Habitual	CHOICES	Considered
Comfortable (for audiences/for artists)	SENSATION	Uncomfortable (for audiences/for artists)

Figure 9: Alternative suggestions for Analysis Cube axes.

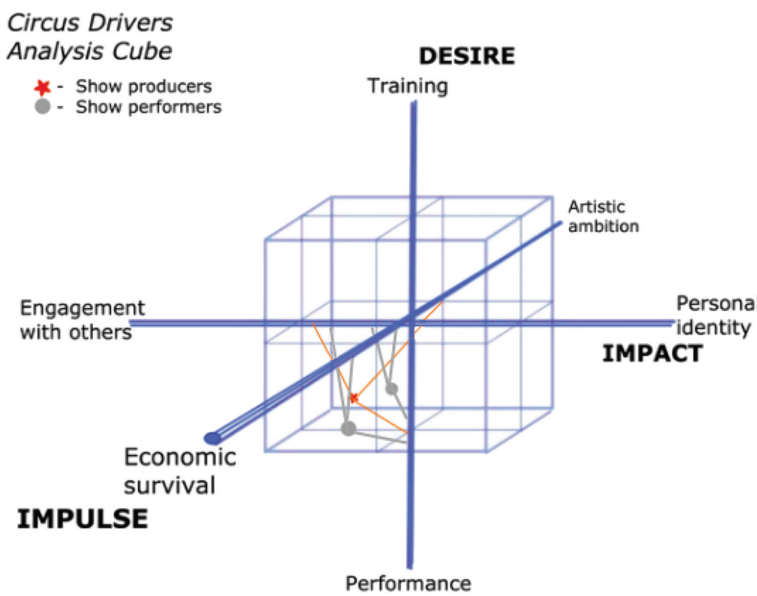

Figure 10: Example of Analysis Cube in use, *'As A Tiger In The Jungle'*.[18]

18 Although a full descriptive analysis here is beyond the scope of this paper, it is interesting to note the difference in financial motivations amongst the team—and the different strength of urge to engage with others—seemingly at play in this particular project.

In conclusion, I acknowledge that my suggestions will not be ultimate solutions, but are starting points to build from. This model is designed for use in educational environments—either formal or ad hoc—to bridge the cultural distance between circus and critical practices, to facilitate the development of a strong field of circus critique that articulates and engages with the perspectives of circus practitioners. When conversations generated by these cubes multiply and intersect, circus knowledge shifts through the process of its articulation. Or, put more accurately, the power-knowledge begins to shift. The ultimate goal is for the communicative codes available to circus artists to move away from restriction and into elaboration to redress the power imbalance in the current circus discourse.

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Platform, Vol. 13, No. 1, On Criticism, Autumn 2019

In Appreciation of 'Mis-' and 'Quasi-': Quasi-Experts in the Context of Live Theatre Broadcasting

By Heidi Liedke

Abstract
This article shifts the hegemonic hierarchy that prioritises experts over non-experts in the context of cultural criticism and explores the potential of the 'quasi-expert,' understood as a positive figure that contributes to the theatrical discourse. The prefix 'quasi-' puts the focus on the temporariness and playfulness of the endeavour; it aligns the form of criticism with the heightened liveness of performance when it is broadcast. The article suggests the necessity for a further dissection of the power structures within the discourse of 'critique' itself. Taking up Nicholas Ridout's concept of the mis-spectator (2012), it considers the notion of quasi-expert appraisal taken from Walter Benjamin (1935) and transfers and applies this to the context of twenty-first century criticism and livecasting. The livecast experience forcibly diminishes the distance between the spectator and the spectacle. What this is supposed to create is higher levels of intimacy, control and engagement, to speak to spectators who are enthusiastic and valuable in uttering their opinion of their theatre experience. The article, thus, assesses this turn to the experiential in light of recent considerations of spectator-centrism in theatre and sheds light on the interplay between communality and the individual in the emergence of a 'feeling I' as a form of criticism. Put differently, the quasi-experts' main impetus is their feeling I rather than (merely) their (acquired) knowledge.

Contrasting the 'extremely backward' attitude of the masses toward Picasso with the 'highly progressive' one toward Chaplin, Walter Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility' (1935) characterizes the latter as 'an *immediate, intimate fusion of pleasure in seeing and experiencing* with an attitude of *expert appraisal*' (29, emphasis added). What he describes here is linked to the effect the reproduced work of art (the copy) can have on the viewer, namely produce an increased closeness. Thinking about film and cinemas where the masses seek and find entertainment, he characterizes the viewing situation as one of '[r]eception in distraction

[…] which is increasingly noticeable in all areas of art and is a symptom of profound changes in perception' (34). That is, the copy of the work of art and film change the ways in which perception is performed and make its parameters shift. Benjamin holds that while concentrating before a work of art means being absorbed by it, being distracted by a work of art (which is something he links to the masses' relation with the cinema especially) means absorbing it into oneself.

In the twenty-first-century, however, I would argue that to concentrate on and be distracted by a work of art are not mutually exclusive anymore. Hybrids between performance and film such as live theatre broadcasting provide a realm in which phases of distraction (in the form of responding to it, for instance) and concentration (silent watching) alternate in waves. Thus, while the historical context is a very different one, questions raised by Benjamin are relevant again in the context of this phenomenon that has been popular since 2009 with the National Theatre making a start (with NT Live). Certainly, theatrical performances have been telecast to private homes before and British and American television were built upon foundations of live telecast theatrical drama. Those latest livecasts (a neologism introduced by Martin Barker [2013]) are both a reproduction (a two-dimensional copy of the three-dimensional production) *and* film; they are also firmly enmeshed in social media as the space in which they are advertised and then commented on, thus presenting a fruitful ground to think about how experiencing, perceiving and critically assessing a work of art changes in the context of these new developments. As Michel Foucault has put forward, critique can be 'the art of not being governed quite so much' (2007, 45). In my argumentation, this resistance to 'government' is understood as conventions and automated patterns of evaluation and appreciation, a 'consensus around value' (Ridout 2012, 173). A form of expertise on social media uttered in response to livecasts that takes on the form of a disruption of this consensus shall be investigated in the following.

When Benjamin, as quoted in the passage above, describes the relationship between consumers and art, he prioritises the visual

quality of this encounter. It is an encounter based on a one-sided act of looking for which no further expertise is needed – this suggests, as Dominic Johnson has compellingly put forward in the context of theatrical performance, an insistence on the cultural experience as depending on complex relationships between vision and other forms of sensory perception (see Johnson 2012). This insistence combined with an attitude (personal positioning) of expert appraisal creates an immediate and intimate fusion of pleasure. What is an *attitude* of expert appraisal? If you are not an expert, are you a quasi-expert? This article wants to shift the (hegemonic) hierarchy that prioritises experts over non-experts in the context of cultural criticism and explore the positive ramifications of this latter concept/persona. Foucault defines critique as a mechanism that lays bare power structures and that is – problematically – a 'natural law', an 'indefeasible right' (46). What I'm suggesting is the necessity for a further dissection of the power structures within the discourse of 'critique' itself. Taking up Nicholas Ridout's concept of the mis-spectator (2012), I will think about quasi-expert appraisal and transfer and apply the thrust of Benjamin's argument to the context of twenty-first century criticism and livecasting. The prefix 'quasi-' puts the focus on the temporariness and playfulness of the endeavour of being an expert; it aligns the form of criticism with the heightened liveness of performance via the broadcast.

This performative playfulness also contributes to an elimination of distance between artwork, that is, broadcast performance, and spectator. Digital Theatre, a platform that works with several major British theatres and makes their livecasts available for download, describes its aim as bringing 'the live theatre experience to your screen by instantly streaming the best theatre productions from around the world anytime, anywhere' (cf. DT homepage). It, thus, forcibly diminishes the distance between the spectator and the spectacle. What this is supposed to create is higher levels of intimacy, control and engagement, to turn spectators into willing, enthusiastic and valuable quasi-experts and mis-critics – their opinion matters, at least potentially. What form of criticism do they produce? The key questions this essay puts in

parallel are, thus, what kind of spectator/critic emerges through social media and how this figure and process is shaped by live broadcasting as a new form of mediation and mediation of liveness especially.

Spectators and Quasi-Experts: Immediacy vs. Afterlife

Apart from their expertise as experiencers (a term suggested by Nelson 2010) when taking part in pre- or post-livecast assessments online, quasi-experts also bring another dimension to the table: their own liveness. This is because livecasts are primarily marketed as immediate experiences. Thus, they need to be actualized by those watching them, even more than traditional theatrical performances *in situ*. Yet each live transmission *is* being recorded and thus turned into a document, which is constantly re-shaped by those watching it, for instance, when they review it. In line with Toni Sant's specification of documentation as a (powerful, creative) process rather than 'mere' fossilization (2017), even those livecasts that are archived can never be static or finished. Livecasts are inherently dynamic: they are not only made up of the filmed content of the theatre performance but also the (informal) texts surrounding them and the feedback loop they create in the virtual space in which audiences can talk about them and especially their experiences of them. In this sense, it is through the participation of quasi-experts that the liveness of the performance can be prolonged and shaped even after its 'now' has passed. It is for this reason that a close examination of this peculiar figure of the quasi-expert is called for.

In 'mis-spectatorship, or, "redistributing the sensible"', Ridout argues for a re-distribution of the (non-)sensible by the mis-spectator which I'm reading partly as a revaluation of the seemingly banal/private experience. He uses the compound figure of Marcel (from Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, YEAR) to develop the figure of a spectator who – self-reflectively, laboriously – shifts those (evaluative) terms dominating especially the critical consensus, a kind of consensus that bears worrying similarities to habit/habituation, conforming and 'imaginary yardsticks' (2012, 181). The mis-spectator ignores those yardsticks and therefore makes 'mis-takes' which enable

them to disrupt 'the consensus which masquerades as collectivity in the folklore of the institution of the theatre' (2012, 182). According to Ridout, '[t]his inexpert figure closely resembles Rancière's 'emancipated spectator,' who … emerges as the producer of meaning upon whom the theatre does not exercise its powers of educational reform' (2012, 174). What Ridout and Rancière (2009) put to the fore – and which crucially contrasts with Bertolt Brecht's 'expert spectator' (1964, 44) – is the appreciation of a kind of spectator who does not *need* or does not *want* (educational) support. As Kirsty Sedgman has pointed out, the use of the word 'expert' is not unproblematic within an arts context as it seems to suggest that those writing about theatre from 'highly invested positions' are something other (better) than 'mere' audiences (2018, 309). Referring to Paul J. Sylvia, Sedgman draws attention to the fact that recently in arts research the distinction between the 'emotional physical and cognitive responses of 'experts' – those whose knowledge has been gained variously 'through training, formal study, and experience' – and those of 'novices', who, 'in contrast, generally lack such knowledge and hence apply … personal experiences when judging art' (309) has opened up.

To speak of 'novices' is to add another term to the list of describing a non-conforming way of assessing art; in order to provide some continuity, I find it more fruitful – and more embedded in the nomenclature – to talk about mis-critics and quasi-experts in this context. Recent work acknowledging the development(s) toward spectator-centrism in contemporary British drama provides a context here. Andy Lavender detects a shift from *mise-en-scène* to *mise-en-sensibilité* in twenty-first century performance in general, and especially, but not only, immersive performance. This is also relevant when thinking about mis-critics. According to Lavender, in new theatre the play no longer takes place 'over there' (on the stage) but 'with us inside it'. This (re)arrangement of affect:

> implicates the *matter* of theatre – what it is about, deals with, dramatizes – with its *mediation*. When we are within mediation, as participants or immersants, we are

> differently response-able. […] The power at stake here is a mixture of agency, authentic feeling, witness from within and – not least – the power to withdraw, not to participate. (Lavender 2016, 100, emphases in original)

Mise-en-sensibilité describes how the spotlight is more and more on spectators – at least potentially – but the term 'response-ability' is even more interesting: for to be response-able means to matter and be an important and central element of a performance. One has the ability to participate by responding. In order to do so, the spectator, as Spence and Benford emphasize, needs others and their (bodily) presence and his/her participation in that group combined with his/her internal experience and autobiography. Yet the *implied* presence of other spectators can have a similar effect on the individual spectator-as-centre: it can fuel the wish to articulate one's part of the event, even if only in one's own eyes. Thus, the above considerations can be applied as well when examining the reactions to livecasts that are explicitly advertised as inviting a direct response from audiences via social media and enabling them to participate in this event from their 'local venue'.

Coinciding with this spectator-centrist awareness, there is an acknowledgement of what Oona Hatton sums up fittingly with the term 'crowdsourced theatre criticism' (2014) and that Duška Radosavljević thinks about as the potential of 'the democratizing and creatively empowering technological developments of the twenty-first century' to free the idea of criticism from 'the constraints of pre-Enlightenment structures of authority and power hierarchies'. The possibility this opens up is that 'the idea of criticism [can] redeem itself of its association with power and authority' (2016, 29).

In an age of user-submitted web content livecasts allow their audiences (the feeling of) a key role in determining its shape, and theatres reach out to audiences to engage with their shows on social media. This new paradigm of spectatorship with its emphasis on what Eglinton calls 'first-person experiences' (2010) in the context of immersive theatre, is, I want to argue, crucially linked to a new paradigm of criticism. With regard to livecasts, it seems to particularly foster and enhance

the manifestation of the 'feeling I', one's own and personal position with regard to the cultural product witnessed and particularly one's emotional rather than balanced/rational response. Despite reminders by, for instance, Erin Hurley, who in *Theatre & Feeling* emphasizes that 'feeling is what is most consequential about theatre' (Hurley 2010, 9), the feeling spectator who shares his/her (perhaps banal) emotional response has not yet been given enough attention in a scholarly context. More specifically, a placing on the map of the value of such leisurely critics is not explicit enough and attempts in this direction do not sufficiently link these roles with criticism. Exceptions in this regard are Michelle MacArthur's article in Radosavljević's *Theatre Criticism. Changing Landscapes* and brief essays by Linda Hutcheon[1]. Hutcheon's claim that 'in the digital age experience has replaced expertise as the prime criterion for critical authority' (MacArthur 258) is very much to the point but she talks about this in a very short essay in the context of consumer culture.

Liveness and After-Liveness Enabled by Social Media

In an audience survey conducted in 2018 by the RSC after the live screening of *Romeo and Juliet* 69% of respondents found the livecast 'totally absorbing' and 71% felt an emotional response to it. Some of the reactions on Twitter regarding *Macbeth* (collected on the @NTLive page as 'Moments') indeed attest to that: the livecast is described as 'Blimey @NTLive my heart is hammering out of my chest #Macbeth #NTLive' by @scrufflove and all @Jenstra1 can write is 'OMFG Goosebumps #macbeth @NTLive'. After the livecast of *Antony and Cleopatra* on 6 December 2018, @VibhutiJPatel tweeted 'This was just all sorts of brilliant. Ralph Fiennes and Sophie Okonedo are dazzling. And the fact I was able to watch it from my local cinema @CamPicturehouse because of @NTLive still amazes me. #AntonyandCleopatra #Shakespeare'. @PhilofBeeston thought that '#AntonyandCleopatra from @NTLive was superb. Fast moving production inhabited Hildegard Bechtler's

1 Hutcheon, Linda. 'Reviewing Reviewing Today'. *Literary Review of Canada* (2009): 6-8.

amazingly versatile set. Verse speaking was perfectly articulated by whole cast. Sophie Okonedo gave an outstanding Cleopatra – no wonder Ralph Fiennes' Antony was so love-struck'. And @BethanMedi summed it up as: 'I am absolutely blown away by the @NationalTheatre broadcast of #AntonyandCleopatra. It was exciting and full of passion from start to finish. There is nothing quite like theatre!!'

First of all, one notices different degrees of seriousness – some users go into more detail than others. Secondly, the format of the tweet posted casually from one's smart phone brings about a – certainly also performative – colloquialisation of responses, something that Ong, with regard to the digital age more generally, has fittingly described as 'secondary orality' (Ong 1982/2002) and which we now, given how drastically the implications of 'the digital' have changed since the early 1980s, might refer to as tertiary orality. This casualness increases the immediacy of the experience because the responses reflect spontaneous responses to the performance right after leaving the cinema (they were all posted on the night of the show). It is crucial to note that the social dimension of theatre-going extends to/differs from the social dimension of the online space: both have their own (behavioural, linguistic) etiquettes. The online space allows for a more fragmented, catchy way of reacting to something which both increases the ambivalence (and thus can relativise any 'absolute' statements) and the playfulness of the engagements, when, for instance, emojis or gifs are used.

Thinking about whether the spectator's agency is limited or expanded in the livecasting context, Bernadette Cochrane and Frances Bonner argue that live broadcasts deprive audience members of 'the ability, indeed the right, […] to select and compile his or her own edit of the proceedings' (2014, 127). Being forced to look at particular spots on the stage can completely change the impression of a performance. An extreme example for this is the NT's livecast of *Macbeth* on 10 May 2018, where the focus was mostly on the protagonists' faces (played by Ann-Marie Duff and Rory Kinnear) instead of giving a permanent sense of the stage design. Yet it seems that if a spectator accepts and perhaps even wished for a mildly 'guided' show in the first place, they

can thoroughly plunge into it and they do not mind the 'tunnel vision' of the livecast.

What else is entailed in this purported closeness of the performance to the recipient? In order to approach this question, it is necessary to think about the connection between response-ability, liveness and Twitter as a form of personalized live-feed that all are part of the closeness or plunge experienced. The parameters according to which liveness is assessed shift. While there is not enough space here to dwell on this issue in detail, a brief reminder of Peggy Phelan's definition is due: she focused on the temporal dimension of liveness, saying that '[p]erformance's only life is in the present' (1993, 146), meaning that 'performance is so radically 'in time' (with time considered linear) that it cannot reside in its material traces and therefore 'disappears'' (Schneider 2012, 66). Rick Altman usefully argues, however, that for an event to be perceived as live it does not necessarily have to happen at the same time as it is viewed. What matters is whether 'the television experience itself is […] *sensed* as live by the home viewing audience' (45, emphasis added). As Hitchman paraphrases, in the livecasting context liveness is not seen in the nature of the original but 'as a condition of *viewing*' (2018, 176, emphasis original) This means that being part of an audience and being an audience member at the same time with others attending a film, a performance, or a film of a performance, defines liveness and not the relation between oneself and the work of art. Social media such as Twitter contribute to this loosening up of parameters since they create an after-liveness that enables the user to operate much more independently. Twitter also emphasizes the individual viewing experiences in constituting, in many instances, the only documented form of one's memory of a performance. I would, thus, agree with the statement that 'social media enables the experience of liveness to travel outside the confines of physical co-presence' (Bucknall/Sedgman 2017, 124) but the *sense* of a co-presence of audience members is still crucial.

We Are In It Together: Critiquing the Experience Online

'In the case of crowdsourced theatre criticism,' MacArthur points out,

'there is no need to hide one's inexperience' (MacArthur 261). The same holds true for livecasts. While MacArthur describes instances where social media users would assess a review somebody else had written while admitting they had not seen the show, this unabashedly personal, experiential dimension of the 'feeling I' dominates responses on social media to livecasts. When on 25 December 2017 followers of the NT Live Facebook page were asked to share their favourite livecast of 2017, the call was answered with over 400 mostly elaborate responses. After naming the title of the play and commenting on the actors' performance most users added descriptions of their personal circumstances when watching it: from where they had watched the livecast, with whom and, especially, what it felt like for them (for instance, to have the 'intimacy of the theatre' transported onto the 'big screen'). While there were several comments on the atmosphere in the cinema, there was no interaction between the respective users, apart from occasional likes of what others had posted.

With regard to *Yerma*, for instance, phrases come up such as 'I felt like I was living a life and not just watching a show. […] I couldn't believe someone's acting could actually make me feel such a spectrum of emotions. (…)' (Alexandra Bonita) and 'Thoroughly engrossing, provocative and affecting production with an extraordinary central performance from Billie Piper … Absolutely loved the modern, innovative stage design … Won't forget' (Matthew Floyd). With regard to *Angels in America*, one user (Amber Bytheway) reports being left 'aghast with amazement and vulnerability and hope' and after watching *Millenium Approaches* (the first part of *Angels in America*), Kit Rafe Heyam wondered how she 'was going to emotionally get through the next week'. Several commentators would also insert biographical information and context for how they came to watch their favourite livecast and, in the case of *Angels in America*, members of the LGBTQ community reported being especially grateful to have seen the play. After the livecast on 20 July 2017 @NicLeeBee wrote on Twitter that 'Andrew Garfield has broken my heart tonight. Amazing stuff. Incredible performances all round but Andrew kills me. #NTlive

#angelsinamerica' and @floridiangoblin felt that 'Andrew Garfield's portrayal of Prior Walter is honestly outstanding. I was deeply moved by his very raw performance #NTlive #AngelsinAmerica'. The comments are mini-reviews, yet not only with a focus on the plays themselves, or the quality of the livecast (occasional complaints about glitches in the transmission), but on the experience of attending them.

A survey of these responses presents one with a huge collection of private glimpses and emotional perspectives on a given livecast. On their Facebook page, the NT Live's prompt was to name the favourite production and say why, and *not* how it had made them feel but this for the majority seemed to be synonymous. These comments do not so much present attempts to engage in an act of sharing and of experiencing a 'we' but rather to be an 'I'. And this is a danger inherent in the specific (technological) format the responses are solicited in and the fact they can only be given from one's computer or smartphone. As Jen Harvie puts it, it can 'isolat[e] individuals in silos of blinkered attention to personal mobile communication devices. The kind of self-interest evident in that scenario is actively cultivated by dominant neoliberal capitalist ideologies which aggressively promote individualism and entrepreneurialism (…)' (Harvie 2013, 2). We can connect this with the above mentioned remarks about what Benjamin referred to as 'reception in distraction' for his time and how these are no longer mutually exclusive in our context. Indeed, being attentive to one's smartphone distracts the user; it isolates them from the artwork/theatrical performance they are experiencing and creates a distance. At the same time, it can focus one's attention when one goes online to check what others are saying about a play, for instance, or to tweet about it. Then reception can happen *via* distraction and so can (a new form of) attention.

Thinking back to the effect of the implied presence of other spectators, one must note that there is a friction between the 'we', or the communal viewing situation, and the 'I' that *is* created. Looking at cinema audiences, Hanich argues that, first of all, being a spectator is being active and sharing an activity with others, which is based on a

we-intention even if it is not spelled out (2014, 339). Thus, in addition to acting in the form of perceiving – Hanich aligns his argumentation with the enactivist approach of, for instance, Alva Noë (2004) – the spectators are also acting – and this is my take on Hanich's elaborations – in the form of forgetting the physical co-presence of other spectators but at the same time retaining a sense of their co-presence. Quite rightly, 'they have simply receded to the fringe of the field of consciousness. What is more, throughout the film this […] prereflective *acting* jointly may be supplemented by *feeling* jointly' (Hanich 339-340, emphasis original). And thus, despite the mutual forgetting in exchange for a focus on the film/broadcast watched, and despite the fact that levels of attention vary, in its communality all these perceptions 'contribute their individual share to the joint action of the attentive audience' (Kennedy 2009, 14). This is why social media when used as channels for post-show reflections actually do not increase levels of individuality – even if the tweeting act as such is a solitary one – but prolong the being part of an audience out of which a given individual experience has materialized.

Just Feeling It

To reiterate what was stated above, I argue that it is necessary to strip considerations of spectator-centrism and quasi-expertise of any negative shade and speak of the manifestation (and rightful place) of the 'feeling I:' the experienced but inexpert happy commenter, whose response has its own validity. The responses on Facebook and Twitter are united in their cheerfulness, it brings the commenters pleasure to see, which makes us rethink what it means to speak of the social dimension of theatre. For instance, Anne Ubersfeld (see also McAuley 1999) holds that

> [t]heatrical pleasure is not a solitary pleasure […] The spectator emits barely perceptible signs of pleasure as well as loud laughter and secret tears–their contagiousness is necessary for everyone's *pleasure*. One does not go alone to the theatre–one is less happy when alone. (1982, 128, emphasis added)

Here we are back at Benjamin's description of the masses' reaction to Chaplin as 'an immediate, intimate fusion of *pleasure* in seeing and experiencing with an attitude of expert appraisal'. The responses reflect the joys of a first-person encounter with theatre and a solitary reflection, no matter how casual and perhaps banal it may be. While the experience of a 'we' manifests itself implicitly and it is this framework of joint attention that enables the individual response, it is not more valuable than the experience of an 'I' and certainly not a greater source of pleasure: on the contrary, one gets the impression that for viewers it is quite pleasant to have experiences of their 'feeling I' and to verbalize them because they know there is a forum for it. One can link this to a freeing from rules and hierarchies that Radosavljević observes when thinking about the secondary orality of the digital age:

> When it comes to writing, the hierarchies of the publishing world have demanded that we abide by certain orthographic standards. Even the pedagogies of literacy have been governed by the same rules. However, with the removal of those editorial hierarchies in the digital world we have been freed to revert to more personal, more creative and more conversational means of expression. (2016, 18)

The centrism on one's personal experience and feelings in livecasts is also reflected in the phrasing of the questions in online questionnaires following some of the RSC's livecasts that are veered toward eliciting assessment of the experiential component of being an audience member – something everybody can relate to and something that one does not, for instance, need to have a particular educational background for in order to understand.

Thus, livecasting, with its inherent – and, as I argue, *constitutive* – invitation to audiences to be a part of it and to *feel* it, can remind us that texts are not dead things, and can elicit responses from viewers that may not be according to the standards of the ATCA but are still an equally valid part of the discussion. With their appeals to follow and comment on their livecasts and contribute to their paratexts, the

involved theatres do encourage something like a slight shift with regard to 'who has the say': of course, the audiences do not (yet) have a say in choosing which show staged in either the NT, the RSC or other theatres will be livecast.

Yet, in entering and participating in this space on social media created for them, the spectators in a way have the final word. This is a kind of emancipation that demands activity on the part of the spectator and provides visibility. Quite importantly, this activity is purely self-regulated. During the livecast of *Romeo and Juliet* the presenter Suzy Klein repeatedly reminded the audience to fill in the above online questionnaire after the show but this was voluntary. And this is precisely where the potential lies: the spectator has the option to engage in and share both one's opinion of the play and simply the experience of being there. When theatre is made available to growing numbers of audiences, for instance through livecasts, they are not anonymous masses. While their faces and names may not be visible, their individual voices are audible. They want and can be heard. This way, a new understanding of the purpose of criticism as a (re)living of the excitement of theatre can continue to emerge.

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Reports from the Field

Critical Endeavours: Experimental Searches in Contemporary Performance Criticism in Turkey

By Eylem Ejder

This essay traces my search for new critical models in the face of the current politically polarized atmosphere in Turkey.[1] I look for possible ways to experience criticism as a collective activity and find ways of resisting and changing the polarized social-political landscape in my country. Together with my colleagues, I developed various critical models to foster collaboration during the critical process. In doing so, my intention is to understand the crucial role criticism can play in fighting societal polarization and resisting the isolated single voice of 'critique'.

As a theatre critic, I believe in navigating the movements between theatre, politics, and criticism and try to go beyond the practice of a limited mode of the solitary performance review. Collaboration is the only way to build a renewed and resistant life practice in the face of the oppressive politics of a country like Turkey. My critical endeavours, therefore, are an attempt to organize more inclusive and collective forms and languages that will soften the polarization which has become a feature of every-day life in Turkey. The motivation behind this is to respond critically to what I see as a lack of dialogue in the cultural life of my country.

In the following, I will introduce two examples of these critical endeavours.[2] The first one is a collective conversation fostered by the

1 I would like to thank Turkish Scientific Research Council (TÜBİTAK) for supporting my PhD studies, within the 2211-A National Fellowship Programme.
2 Other examples of critical endeavours include: 'Theatre Correspondence', which discusses a current performance via letters exchanged between two critics (for the examples, see 'Tiyatro Üzerine Mektuplaşmalar' (Ejder and İpşiroğlu); 'One Performance Three Views', which brings together the director, a critic, and an audience member to jointly write about the same performance; 'Inquiry', which collects at least three critical essays on a single performance and asks the director to respond to them all.

writing group 'Feminist Endeavour,' a group of four women theatre critics, of which I am one of the co-founders. The second example is a mode of criticism in the form of an interview, which I called 'Inter(Re) view'. It traces a conversation between a critic and an imagined audience member. In order to contextualise these practices, I will first give an overview of the contemporary political situation in Turkey today, outline the contrasting landscape between politics and theatre, and introduce modes with which resisting (with) theatre becomes possible.

Contrasting Landscapes: Politics, Theatre and Criticism in Turkey

Over the last decade, Turkey has been through a substantial change in its theatrical and political life. Despite the socio-political crisis—authoritarianism and censorship in art—current theatre and performance practices in the country present a dynamic and hopeful landscape, which questions and wrestles with ideological and socio-political problems. A contrasting landscape has emerged between the official politics and the contemporary art scene. Turkish society has (been) polarized into two sharp poles of conservatives versus secular elites; or religiously influenced nationalists versus liberal republicans; or more generally and recently, people who support the president (and his ruling party) versus those who do not (cf. Cagaptay).

The list of events that bore witness to this polarization is long: In 2013, Occupy Gezi gathered together people from various backgrounds that were previously though unlikely to mix: such as Kemalists, Islamists and radical leftists (cf. 'Turkish Spring'). There have been many bombings and other terrorist attacks on people at peace rallies, such as the ISIS attack in Ankara in October 2015 which killed 103 people (cf. 'Deadly Bombing Attacks'). In 2016, a failed coup attempt lead to many people being persecuted by the regime and a state of emergency being called, which lasted over two years (cf. Abdul-Ahad and Kingsley). In 2017, the new presidential system was introduced (further expanding President Erdogan's authority), prompting many speculations about shifts from a republican regime toward an authoritarian, one-man regime (Çalışkan 5-13). Critical

journalists have been and are being arrested. Academics who signed the declaration called 'Academics for Peace' were dismissed from their institutions and some have even been arrested (cf. Weaver). Recently, the Supreme Election Council cancelled the Istanbul local election (on 31 March 2019), following an appeal of the AKP (cf. 'Everything Will Be Fine'). All these events speak of the social and political unrest in the country.

Although most commentators draw attention to the problems and describe this situation as a crisis in political, social and economic life, the government not only rejects these claims but brands any detractors as traitors (cf. 'Erdoğan: Kriz Yok'; 'Bahçeli: Ortada Bir Kriz Yok'). In such a situation, everyone, not only artists, academics, and journalists, are exposed to increased scrutiny. A number of official directors of the state-sponsored theatres have already been dismissed or forced to resign from their positions (cf. Akyol). In the last theatre season, Barış Atay's long running solo show *Only A Dictator* has been banned in almost every city in the country for allegedly criticising the president (cf. Acer). All this leads to a paradoxical and even paranoid position, where the similarly rooted 'crisis' and 'criticism' is simultaneously highlighted and denied. In such a divided, conflicted, and frightening environment, the possibility of real dialogue, mutual tolerance, respect for diversity and, not least, the possibility for engaged criticism is fundamentally lost.

In spite of this somewhat hopeless outlook, current theatre and performance practices present a dynamic and hopeful landscape, which productively negotiates these ideological and socio-political problems. In Istanbul alone, more than one hundred and fifty productions perform every single evening is.[3] Not only has there been an increase in the number of new groups, playwrights, new venues, and independent theatres producing work, but these new outlets address current political issues and tell the difficult stories in new and experimental ways.[4] As

3 My colleague, Tijen Savaşkan, a member of theatre prize jury, told me that jury members attended 173 different productions that premiered in 2018 in Istanbul, and there were other productions which she couldn't see.

4 During the last theatre season, subjects include women's and transgender issues, problems with language and identity, migration stories, as well as narratives of war

a consequence of this increased theatrical activity, there has been a gradual expansion in the number of theatre critics, new online-theatre magazines, websites and blogs focusing on current performances alongside more traditional print journalism.

This diversity and expansion—especially on digital media platforms—however, leads to a disorganization (or discontent) among the critics. Thus, as a member of International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC), I have tried to play an active role in reflecting the current critical landscape by co-editing the theatre magazine *Oyun* (Play), the quarterly printed magazine of IATC-Turkey since 2008. I have endeavoured to gather theatre critics from different age groups, disciplines, and institutions (universities, journals, publishing, or festivals) in order to meet, share, and think together within space of *Oyun*. This attempt was a reaction to what I saw as disorganization among critics, a lack of detail and critical approach to theatre practices parts of the cultural landscape, and to give voice to women by women critics, who have remained silenced for so long. The same concern can be seen among theatre practitioners. Therefore, with my colleagues, I aim to make *Oyun* not only the voice of new theatre collectives and a record keeper of contemporary practices from a critical perspective, but also a bridge between scholarly approach and new kinds of experimental writing.

Invigorating Criticism

This hope-inspiring theatrical diversity in the face of the political turmoil, thus seems to me, to demand a new approach to performance criticism that will bring out new critical forms which have the potentials to create a larger and more inclusive conversation about theatre. Turkish literary critic Orhan Koçak argues 'criticism is one of the tools of being a different kind of speech, writing and being like others, and its aim is

and political brutality. Theatrical forms involved musicals, 'in-yer-face' drama, feminist theatre, queer theatre, performance art, storytelling, monodrama, monologues, solo performance, and new adaptations of classical texts. (For the examples see: Eider, 'Contrasting Landscape of Theatre in Turkey').

to make visible as many aspects of the work as possible to incorporate it into the world of meaning that is consisted of ongoing questions and ongoing answers' (Koçak).[5] Similarly, the prominent Turkish literary critic Nurdan Gürbilek thinks 'criticism is an endeavour to make the work speak about its response to the world' (Gürbilek), and argues it is 'a conversation with the work, which makes unheard voices heard' . Inspired by Koçak and Gürbilek, I have begun to think about theatre criticism as a plural conversation, that talks to, through, and via the work. This approach sees theatre criticism as series of possibilities that offer us an experience of creative transformation, brings with it a sense of being togetherness, and provides a chance to think about how the world might be instead of as is;[6] this, therefore, is an endeavor to think and imagine criticism as 'something other'. Criticism as 'something other' is inspired by two concepts: The first is Peggy Phelan's contemplation that '[p]erformance's only life is in the present'; that it 'cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so it becomes *something other* than performance' (Phelan 146, emphasis by the author). Inspired by Phelan's definition and the blog 'Something Other', which aims to have interdisciplinary conversations about art, I understand criticism as the creation and reflection of this 'something other'. Secondly, I refer the well-known poem *Değişik* (*Different*) by Turkish poet Can Yücel, that begins as 'Başka türlü bir şey benim istediğim (*Some other* thing I want…)' (Yücel 5). Here, by approaching criticism as 'something other', one accepts it both as being already *something other* and transforming into *some other thing we want*. It is a utopian vision instead of a given, established way of seeing. In this light, criticism oscillates between the 'as is' and 'what if' of a critical endeavour.

5 'Yapıtın mümkün olduğu kadar çok yönünü görünür hale getirmek, anlam dünyasına dahil etmek, sorular-cevaplardan oluşan, süregiden sorulardan ve süregiden cevaplardan cevaplardan oluşan bir anlam dünyasına davet etmek yapıtı, mümkün olduğu kadar çok yönünü, ayrıntısını [görünür kılmak]'.

6 Here I am inspired by Jill Dolan who searches for the utopian potentials of the theatre and asserts that utopian performatives imagine and embody the world as 'what if' rather than 'as is' (Dolan, 128).

'Feminist Endeavour': Critics in Conversation

'Feminist Endeavour', which takes its name from the idea of feminist perspective on theatre and life, is a writing and research group, which I have co-founded with three experienced women theatre critics who are also editorial members of *Oyun* (Play): Zehra İpşiroğlu (emeritus theatre professor, the founder of the department of Theatre Criticism and Dramaturgy at Istanbul University), Tijen Savaşkan (editor of magazine *Oyun*), and Handan Salta (former vice president of IATC-Turkey section). We organize dossiers for the journal *Oyun* (*Play*) that focus on topics like gender, feminist theatre, migration, adaptation, storytelling and solo-shows. We also put on post show discussions which gather together audience members, casts, and critics. We particularly focus on performances dealing with women's issues which highlight being a woman in a conflicted, male dominated society.

Alongside organizing post show discussions and making oral criticism, we also engage in a particular model of print criticism published periodically in the *Oyun*. The process is multifaceted and involves voices of critics and practitioners. In a first stage, we record our own email conversation about a particular production, which we then edit and publish in the journal *Oyun*. One of us, as a moderator prepares critical questions for the production and others reply and comment. Since it is a collaborative work, each of us can be the moderator and take responsibility. To discuss a production via e-mail allows the participants to have more time to think and formulate a reply than during a face-to-face conversation. In addition, the dialogical form enables the participants to get in touch with each other and revisit earlier points. In a second stage, we ask the theatre group or director of the performance to write an essay about his/her work. Ultimately, we combine the Feminist Endeavour email conversation and director's piece into the same volume of the journal. This allows the reader to see the performance in conversation from different perspectives on the page.

As a collaboration between women theatre critics, Feminist

Endeavour gives weight to power of solidarity between women in a society and in performance. Since we believe in the power and critical role of criticism, it is important which performance we select to discuss and how to discuss it. Our last work, a conversation about *The Song of Resentful Hearts* (*Küskün Yüreklerin Türküsü*), is a good illustration of this practice because it shows the reality of the activist movement lead by women. The performance features the activists Saturday Mothers, a group of women who gather at Galatasaray Square (a central square in the city of Istanbul) at 12pm every Saturday and sit-in protest for half an hour. The group has been meeting since 27 May 1995. They hold photographs of lost loved ones, who fell victim to political murder during military coup in 1980 and the late 1990s. In the last 24 years, they have repeatedly been exposed to violence, been detained and even banned from the square many times. On 25 August 2018, after police shot tears gas, water cannons, and plastic bullets at these old women, national and international public outrage was directed at the government (cf. 'Tear Gazes at Mother's Protest').

In reaction to these events, the documentary play, *The Song of Resentful Hearts* (*Küskün Yüreklerin Türküsü*), written and directed by Metin Balay at Tatavla Sahne, with reference to Berat Günçıkan's biographic book based on interviews with the Saturday Mothers, premiered in Istanbul on 3 October 2018. The performance uses lyric and ballad forms to presents the stories of some of well-known members of the group. Four actresses sitting on chairs, each tells her own story about how her son or husband had been tortured, detained and died in detention (see Image 1).

At Feminist Endeavour, we approached this production by questioning what the play's structure reveals about gender, patriarchy, and politics of violence. For *The Song of Resentful Hearts*, our main focus was to understand how the ballad form of storytelling can enable the unfolding of political movements and expose the power relations lying behind the collective trauma and loss at the heart of the performance and activist groups. Although we found 'it was bravery [sic] and exciting

to carry this silent and long-running protest to the stage' (Feminist Çaba 26) in a time when the group's demands were being ignored by the government and members of the group were exposed to police violence, we thought it failed to reveal the real perpetrators inflicting loss, trauma, and death, i.e. the ideological systems of nationalism, misogyny, xenophobia, and militarism behind this political murders. Each mother's monologue ended with the same expression: 'it is the devil who does this (torture)'. However, as İpşiroğlu says in the discussion, 'to make a critique of the political system in a society through such performance, where democracy cannot be settled, means to swim in dangerous waters. This is unfortunately a reality. In this respect, we can understand the director's choice' (34). Feminist Endeavour placed the political tensions at the centre of the discussion while the performance itself largely neglected to do so. And by doing this, we, too, take the risk of swimming in the dangerous waters of politics in our country.

Imagined conversation: Inter(Re)view

Image 1: A scene showing the solidarity of Saturday Mothers in *The Song of Resentful Hearts*, Istanbul, 2018. Photo: Volkan Erkan.

The second critical practice I will illustrate here is a combination of 'interview' and 'review' by my colleague Handan Salta. Salta sometimes uses the question-answer technique to review performances or festivals as if she is interviewing someone. In her search for new critical models, she arrived at an imagined interview which we call 'Inter(Re)view'. It is a critical practice where she interviews an imaginary audience member, 'an imaginary well-read woman friend of her who is fond of going to theatres with no interest in theatre criticism'. Salta calls her Sakine which means 'calm woman' or 'silent'. This projected foil allows Salta to engage with in a performance 'as if' she was more than one spectator, 'as if' there was more of a collective theatre going and 'as if' there were more feminist critics; thus she wills her criticism into being, or more precisely, into being *something other*.

Inter(Re)view is an imagined encounter between a critic and an audience member. This example Inter(re)view concerns the current monodrama *Kader Can* (2018) staged in Istanbul by Theatre BAM. It is about the army memoir of the title character Kader Can (meaning 'fate' and 'spirit of life'), a young rapper living in a poor outskirts of Istanbul. Through rap, he exposes his inner conflict with nationalism, the patriarchy and increased political polarization (see Image 2). The two women's Inter(Re)view discussion centres around the systems of oppression Kader faces.

Handan: We can grasp the traces of social structure built upon oppositions and polarizations through Kader Can's personality and reactions; also his immediate use of oppositions like urban – rural, well educated – low educated, rich – poor, men – women, patriot – traitor is highly related to the position he is in in the army now.

Sakine: He is immediately preoccupied with traitors, flag, homeland when his sole concern was singing rap songs and his girlfriend Ayla before joining the army. (…) The last few theatre seasons have hosted several plays about women who are pressured, exposed to violence and helpless in front of the whole set of values designed against her. However, this play sheds light

> on the situation of men in the same surroundings, where they are not happy or free either. It hints that nobody is able to make a free choice. (…)-We do not know what's going to happen to Kader Can either. However, he keeps on singing and this means hope–for all of us! (Salta)

This critical model deliberately plays with polarization. Salta

Image 2: Deniz Karaoğlu in *Kader Can*, written and directed by Murat Mahmutyazıcıoğlu. Istanbul, 2018. Photo: Murat Dürüm.

chooses a woman different from herself, who is not from her social background or class. She attempts to show the transformative power of criticism through a form which toys with opposites. Sakine is the representative of a new audience profile who is fond of going to independent theatres. Since the audience numbers in Istanbul are steadily increasing, we might not yet hear much from these new groups, but Salta attempts to lay the groundwork for including them in critical conversations. Here, the Inter(Re)view embraces the potential of the binary opposition between audience member and critic and abolishes it. In other words, this is an imagined conversation in which no one tries to instruct or dictate to the other; it is an exchange where both critically question the work and also each other. It is an endeavour that

not only searches for answers, but that will also lead to new questions. The reciprocal mode of the Inter(Re)view can be read as a rehearsed emancipation, displaying consensus rather than conflict, and portraying a hopeful outlook for the women and youth of Turkey.

In lieu of a Conclusion

In this essay, I highlighted the prosperous landscape of theatre and theatre criticism in Turkey that thrives in spite of and even as a response to the ongoing political oppression of artists and critics. Feminist Endeavour and Inter(Re)view are critical practices that resist the polarizing mode of everyday politics. Through their form, they reflect the present situation and reveal their feminist potential by focusing on issues women face under the patriarchy. They imagine collectives and multiple voices, where we see a lack of dialogue and too many solitary voices. These new models of critical endeavour are stubbornly hopeful and speak to the prospect that critical practice can be a mode of addressing political crisis. It might be too early to discuss the consequences of these practices or theorize them more analytically, but my aim is that introducing them here has opened the possibility of more creative forms of criticism to develop in Turkey and elsewhere. In her study on contemporary criticism, Duška Radosavljevic remarked that a 'single act of criticism [might not] move mountains or part seas, but a cumulative effect of criticism as a collective endeavour' can have this effect (Radosavljevic 29). I hope that together with other critics, we can unfold the repressed potentials of theatre criticism as well as open new possibilities through which we imagine theatre and life as the *something other* we hope, dream, and fight for.

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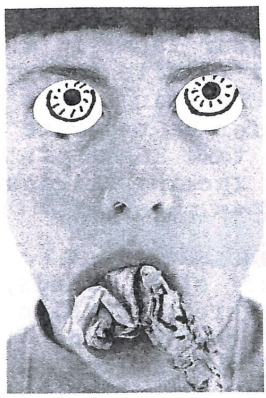
Excerpt from "All of the Art I Experienced 1.11.18 to 8.11.18 (and How it Made Me Feel)"

A Zine by Megan Vaughn

CHEKHOV'S
FIRST PLAY
Dead Centre

This was my second time at Cheknov's First Play but tne first time was 3 years ago so it was a weird neadspace to be in: remembering so many key images but only naving a very tenuous grasp of now tney all fitted togetner. I tnink if I could advocate for anything in this world, it would be for some kind of device which could ensure you always remained as surprised and delignted as you were the very first time you encountered something. Cheknov's First Play is one of the greatest shows of all time, but now I have a bette sense of what tney were trying to say, I8m not nearly as impressed.

Pernaps the nicest tning about the snow getting tnis new London run is the warm fuzzy glow tnat comes from being able to recommend it to friends who are into DEad Centre'S kind of textual fuckery. It feels like giving someone a gift.



I'd wanted to see Libby Norman's work for ages, mainly because I find the phenomenon of fandom to be the most fascinating and joyful thing of all time, and this piece, Breaking Up With JK Rowling, captures all the heartache and disappointment that is felt when one of your faves becomes problematic.

There's a v funny and honest text - about the magic of escapism slash escapism of magic for a queer teenager - but it was the 2nd half of this show that really made it. Libby opens up a conversation about Harry Potter, love, identity, and liberal politics but does so in such a lowkey way that the show could really be over, with this an optional extra for the most dedicated. It makes me think of how documentary filmmakers keep the camera running after the end of an interview: Libby was getting to the real meat of her ideas by inviting us to relax together and help her tear apart her old Harry Potter books, the memory of which had become tainted by Rowling's centrist politics and her revisionist takes on her characters' histories and identities. As we tore pages and crossed out words, we could talk without the pressure of being In A Discussion.

LIBBY NORMAN

Breaking up with JK Rowling

I do also wonder if my own personal sense of comfort in that space also partly comes from no longer having a professional connection to the live art community and so feeling somehow freer and less socially-awkward about work friendships.

You wear a foam hat with gauze over your face; it's designed to look like a musnroom. It's quite hard to get it on over the headphones. The whole thing feels totally stupid. A snow which is less for us and more for the rest of Ipswich, who get to take loads of videos for their insta stories of the fucking weirdos dancing round the town centre dressed as mushrooms.

Something cool happens though. I mean, all that silly/irritating/crowd-pleasing stuff still stands, but the impact of having your face covered in public is that you develop this wonderful bravery. I don't think I can remember a time when I've been less self-conscious. I could've run through the streets naked. Well, maybe not quite naked, but I was certainly much happier to be performing so ostentatiously in a group of strangers. We had become a gang of mischief-makers, so not only were we protected by our relative invisibility, but by our gang mentality. By the time we got to the library, I would have happily started pulling books off shelves and being a total arsehole while people tried to work/read. It didn't matter that I had no idea who anyone else in the mushroom heads were (other than my friend Rhiannon), there was strength (and safety) in numbers.

BY MUSHROOMS

Yao Liao

There's still afairly big part of me wondering wnat The Point was, but as an experiment in disassociation and collectivism, it was v good fun. Plus I got some great photos for my instagram.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that (apart from Quizoola) it is preferrable to have the works of Forced Entertainment described to you by a knowledgeable friend than it is to actually sit through them. This makes their table-top retellings of Shakespeare's stories somewhat self-referential. He, too, is improved greatly by simply reading or listening to a synopsis.

The story I saw was The Tempest, and I knew already that there would be a storm and a shipwreck and a monster, but I have to admit I was surprised by how much flirting was going on when presumably everyone wants to, y'know, get home and Not Die and things like that. Most of the characters were played by alcohol too, so I guess it was a bit of a party island, like Ibiza or somewhere.

Interestingly, Caliban was an aubergine. Aubergines are now officially the sexiest fruit/vegetables, superseding early successes the cucumber and the cherry, so I am left wondering if Caliban was always a mega-horny monster, or if that is just one of those beautiful contemporary interpretations that only internet culture can deliver.

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Vulnerable Selection: Reshaping Selection Practices In the Performing Arts

By Michael Norton

For the last ten years, I have been working internationally across theatre, dance and contemporary performance and in that time, I have sought to make the process of how work gets programmed, curated, commissioned, or booked a more transparent and rigorous practice. As an audience member, I have often found myself wondering at a choice of programming and the perceived lack of transparency in the communication of programming choices from artistic institutions. When speaking to other artists or critics about this frustration, I observed flippant dismissals of programming choices and lamented the limited awareness and representations of the intersections of class, race, gender, and ability. Many concluded that these 'lazy' or 'safe' choices were made on grounds outside of the organisation's announced values or mission. This might just be insider gossip, but it points to a bigger issue: If there's such a fundamental lack of understanding of how programmes are made within the industry, how are audiences meant to comprehend the largely opaque selection processes of cultural programming?

In recent years, this miscommunication has repeatedly put arts leaders across disciplines on the back foot. Chris Dercon and Marietta Piekenbrock's failure to communicate with their audience, for example, showcases this issue. While they publicly declared a desire to return to the fundamentals of 'theatre' for their first season at the Volksbühne Berlin in 2016, they were unable to adequately justify this choice to their audience and failed to engage with their theatre's local importance as a cornerstone of socialist Berlin. Audience numbers dropped rapidly, and one might say that their inability to mitigate notions of neoliberal programming was among the factors that lead to their early dismissal after a mere 255 days as directors (Syme 2016). In the same year, Christopher Y. Lew and Mia Locks, the head curators of the Whitney Biennial in New York City, were blindsided by accusations of racist profiteering

for their selection of Dana Schultz's *Open Casket* (Greenberger 2017). The painting exhibited the body of Emmett Till, a black child who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955, which drew criticism that Dana Schultz, a white American, was gaining cultural and economic capital at the expense of his death. Again, Locks and Lew were not able to effectively connect with their audience over their curatorial decision. In 2014 the Barbican's lack of ability to defend its programming of *Exhibit B* after protesters and petitioners decried it as a racist 'black and white minstrel show', meant that they saw no other option but to cancel the show (Andrews and Odunlami 2014). These are just a few examples of the increasingly visible challenges to the seemingly under-interrogated decisions in programme selection. Moments like these often result in public outcry because art institutions are perceived to lack empathy, interest, or effort to understand the context in which their work is seen. My question, thus, became: How could a selector work to avoid such blind spots in selection? How can a selector avoid the missteps of Dercon and Co?

This question led me to have conversations with 30 arts leaders in the UK, where I asked them how they select works for the cultural venues they were responsible for. What I found was that the collaborative methods and feedback structures utilised in selection practices often reflected the implicit values or biases of an individual or organisation much more than any mission statement ever could. But unlike activities like strategic marketing or artist development, the way individuals or teams selected work usually went unevaluated. My practice as a selection consultant seeks to challenge this status quo.

Cultural gatekeeping in the UK is going through a transformation, so now is an exciting moment to have this conversation. The appointment of leaders like Kwame Kwei-Armah at The Young Vic, Lynette Linton at The Bush, Madani Younis at the Southbank Centre, Suba Das at HighTide, and Tarek Iskander at Battersea Arts Center stand in contrast to what Lynn Gardner called the 'dinosaurs' of performing arts institutions who need to be 'dragged into the 21st century over diversity' (2018). At this moment of transition, I want to encourage those in the

cultural sector to not only rethink *who* is doing the selection, but *how* it is being done. While a wider breadth of non-white representation and gender diversity is no doubt a much-overdue shift in the cultural landscape, how work is selected will continue to be a barrier to risky and innovative works if there is no rigorous development of value-informed methods of selection.

The Practice of Vulnerable Selection

Simply put, selection is a process of observation, reflection, and reaction. My method, Vulnerable Selection, proposes tools to evaluate how we observe, and what structures might support a reflective evaluation before making a decision. I've developed this method over the course of three years while working with artists and organisations in the UK and USA, including Cambridge Junction, Circumference, Diverse City, the Total Theatre Awards, and Parallel 45 Theatre. While I will outline this method as a tool to interrogate working practices and generate a season of programming for a venue or festival, it has also been useful in providing feedback for artists, building a plan for project development, or even as a solo practice of reflection after seeing a performance.

How we observe something is informed by our subjective impressions and biases, but these biases don't need to be a selector's enemy. Rather, an awareness of how one's experience factors into one's taste makes a selector unique and informs their aesthetical preferences. What follows is a description of the six stages of evaluation I propose, which encourage selectors to vulnerably explore their values and tastes. The aim is to support the growth of both the selector and the programme for which they are selecting. Drawing on sociological and artistic research and contemporary leadership techniques, Vulnerable Selection considers the practice of leadership and aims to shape these practices with realistic and efficient expectations.

Ground Rules

Before beginning a reflection process, it is important to put together a selection committee and be clear on who is responsible for the selecting

at the end of the process. Constructing a team with diverse knowledges, backgrounds, and experience will serve to enhance the work and give new perspectives to the selector/s. Some of the more successful selection practices I have observed incorporate not only staff and board members from their organisation, but also some of the audiences and artists which the organisation serves.

For a selection practice to succeed, it is essential to foster a culture which feels psychologically safe. Talking about taste, values, and opinions can often become very personal and emotional, and it's important that the framing of care is set up before the discussion can begin. Psychological safety can be defined as 'being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career' (Kahn 708) and invites vulnerability into a selection practice. Psychological safety is not about censoring, rather, it encourages a space for people to take risks in front of each other. *Vulnerable Selection* asks the selection committee to articulate personal values and dig deeper into questions of positionality without fear of unspoken judgement. Before beginning any selection it is important to have the conversation about creating psychologically safe spaces by asking the participants to imagine a space where they feel safe taking risks. We then talk in a group about what those spaces look and feel like, and how we might create them together. Common barriers to psychological safety include arguing as a decision-making strategy (i.e. bullying), interrupting, unacknowledged hierarchies, and a culture of gossip. Tools that support psychological safety include access to agendas before a meeting and structured break time. Once these barriers are discussed and agreed upon, I put them into a contract to establish an official agreement. The group is then aware that these are the parameters we need in order to have conversations that lead to us presenting dynamic, courageous, and risky work on stage.

Once these ground rules have been set up, we embark on a set of questions, which become a method of reflection. Without an intentional process, reflecting on work comes down to questions like 'what did you think?' which not only provides very little data, but can

also be difficult to answer. Taking time to understand the function of each stage of evaluation allows for an efficient but thorough review of potential work. Each method of evaluation should be designed to the needs of an organisation, curator or community, but what I suggest here is an example I've utilised with Parallel 45 Theatre in the USA. However, the individual stages might differ from organization to organization. Introduced by Michael Quinn Patton, the line of questioning I use supports evaluative anthropological inquiries to collect qualitative data (7). I have used these questions to interview a scout, discuss a show, design a season, or even build a mission statement. As the stages progress, we as a selection committee deepen our awareness of ourselves as selectors and other voices in the room. We gain more clarity in why we select the work we do. And hopefully, we develop a clear and comprehensive season of work that informs the values of the organisation we're supporting.

I run these sessions as it best fits each organization but often I function as a facilitator who is outside of the evaluation and is committed to maintaining the integrity of the process by following the agreed-upon steps. Previous to the meeting, the person or people who are tasked with making the final selection assign various performances or scripts to different members of the committee. It is not necessary for every person to have seen or read each work discussed: illuminating why one found that aspects of a performance did or didn't work to someone unfamiliar with it requires an even clearer and more precise description and evaluation. Each work goes through the stages of evaluation before the selector will decide if the work needs further review. As facilitator, I ask questions, encourage the selection committee to make sure they have all the information they need, and enforce the agreement of psychological safety if it is at risk of being compromised.

The Six Stages of Vulnerable Selection

Stage One: 'What are We Looking at?'

These prompts address concrete human action, conduct or our ways of doing.

The aim of this stage is to get everyone focused on what they are evaluating. Is it dance? How many people are on stage? What language do they speak? What does the stage look like? These details are important ground work for the questions that will follow, so it is important to make sure everyone on the committee can imagine the work before moving forward. Production images can be helpful at this stage.

As much as possible, taste is left out of this first stage of evaluation, so that even if not everyone in the selection process has seen the work they get a sense of its the form and content. This stage sets the framework for what will be evaluated through more positional discourse later on. As a facilitator, I push people to avoid the instinct to give a moment by moment account, but rather focus on the big picture of the work. I finish each stage by checking in with everyone on the committee to make sure they all feel they have a clear image of what the work being discussed is, and encourage questions if there are gaps in understanding.

Stage Two: 'Letting it All Out'

These prompts address a conviction, judgment or belief.

This stage allows for the clearing of taste and most directly mirrors the selection practices I observed in my interviews. I call it a 'clearing' because this stage often feels like a blurting-out of value proclamations, such as 'I loved it!' or 'I want my two hours back'. It's important to remember that this is only one of many factors when considering a work, and this is all data for the selector/s to consider when making their decision in the final stage and is not a definitive judgement. This stage consists of a committee member letting us know what their opinion of the work is. As these conversations happen in a committee setting, it is here that someone can feel fragile, because unlike in a conventional selection practice, it is important to understand why someone loved, loathed, or dismissed a performance. Here is where we start to reveal the value

systems of a committee, and those values are important to be noted as the selection continues. If for example, the performance 'just didn't work,' it's good to know *why it didn't work for you*. Sweeping statements like this can not only dismiss valuable work but also have the potential to diminish courage in other assessors.

When evaluators are struggling with this transition, where taste is no longer expressed as an objective truth but rather as a subjective value, I draw from the feedback process developed by DAS Theatre – Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam. They focus on each feedbacker's perspectives so that the feedbacker must declare positionality before providing feedback. It fits into the format of 'as a _____, I needed _____.' For example, one might say 'as a queer person, I needed a more non-binary discourse on stage.' I use this assertion of perspective as it allows selectors to see their own subjective position in their criticism. This encourages a separation of feeling (this is true!) and perspective (my lived experience tells me this is true!). A selector can then ask: Do I want more non-binary discourse? Yes! Is that what our programme needs? Not necessarily.

Stage Three: 'Heart Check'

These prompts address emotions, sentiments and passions.

This is a moment to transfer the selector back into the show. Though at first this might appear similar to the second stage, the aim is to reflect on your emotional and sentimental experience *during the performance,* not your critical reflection after the work. A prompt suggesting that the committee should begin not with 'the show was' but rather 'I felt' creates space for a personal reflection, not an assessment of the success or failure of the work. There is a big difference between 'I was bored' and 'the show was boring.' There is a gentleness in this stage as people acknowledge experiencing sadness, fear, exhilaration, joy, longing, or frustration. By separating this out, the selector/s can consider the emotional experience of an audience and thus begin to consider what the *emotional dramaturgy* of a venue might be.

Stage Four: 'Bringing Out the Expert'

These prompts address the range of information that you hold about the production and its context.

This is the moment to evaluate the materials, aesthetic forms, themes, language and dramaturgy of the production. This stage draws on what the work explicitly addresses literally and conceptually. The aim of this round is to understand the maker's intention behind the work: what creative tools were used to produce that intention on stage? Following this, we evaluate those principles in relation to the selection committee's explicit values. For example, if we were evaluating the film *Billy Elliot*, it would be important for us to discuss the contexts of class and art which the film touches on, the choreographic score as it informs the dramaturgy of the film, or what the creative team say about the work. The discussion then focuses on how these assumptions and contexts do or do not line up with the values of the organisation.

Stage Five: 'Looking Outwards'

These prompts address concrete and practical information concerning distribution, location and population.

Whereas stage four is evaluating what the intention of the work is, this final stage places it against the backdrop of a wider cultural context. The conversation at this stage addresses the question of 'why now?' Is there an urgency to the work? As a selection committee looks at their position in a wider field of cultural production, we consider how a specific performance is informed by or engaged with broader cultural, scientific, or political conversations. What is the experience the organisation wants to create? Does this work support that?

Also beyond the urgency of the work, practical concerns can be addressed at this stage that look at the wider scope of the artist's work. Is the venue interested in supporting this artist beyond this project? What do audiences for this kind of work traditionally look like? What barriers might the venue or organisation present to that artist or production?

We also reflect on the representation of age, gender, ethnicity, background, ability and experience of the artists. It is important to note if a production being considered speaks primarily to a middle class experience, and reflect on how that might speak to the values of an organisation. Does who is on the selection panel speak to the identities represented in the work? What audiences and artists are and are not being represented by the organisation? Does that fit in line with the values of the organisation? As the exclusive practices of the arts come under more scrutiny, these uneasy, revealing conversations are reinforced by the psychologically safe structures of this practice.

Stage Six: 'Reaction'

Choosing the next steps of action and decisions

This mutli-facetted feedback results in diverse data, rich with potential. At this point the evaluation process is complete, and the selector/s choose work outside of the committee structure. It is up to the selector/s how this process takes place: some prefer to propose seasons to the committee and carry out another round of evaluation, some prefer to move forward with a decision without further discussion. With this data a selector can feel confident that whatever they select, their decision rests upon a rigorous and comprehensive process of evaluation. What they chose is up to each selector's positional knowledge and experience, but now these have explicitly been acknowledged in the process rather than remaining in the unengaged unconscious which many selection processes usually build on.

Conclusion

Vulnerable Selection is the result of my values of empathy and courage shaping a process that asks leaders to practice vulnerability in a committee of peers. But as Brené Brown points out, courage is embracing the inevitability of failure (2016, 19), and sometimes this process has failed. But embracing that failure has led to important considerations for future evaluations. Often after using *Vulnerable Selection*, we find a conflict between an organisation's announced values and those enacted by the

selection, because the enacted values unveil biases towards a particular artistic form, aesthetic genre, or background, age, race, ethnicity, ability or gender of the artists involved. This can be a productive moment in confronting organisational decision-making processes. If we want greater risk taking in selection processes, we need to acknowledge when an organisation fails to produce the culture it claims to support and allow them to try again after a deeper interrogation of how they act upon their values. The way forward for arts leadership in the 21st century is to embrace the vulnerability of selecting, acknowledge that awareness of positionality is an asset, and build an intentional, transparent process to evaluate the work artists create.

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Art Criticism and Its Lingua Franca

By Zofia Cielatkowska

> Language is and has always been a tool of Empire. For a native speaker, English is a resource, a guarantee of universal access to employment in countless places around the globe. Art institutions, universities, colleges, festivals, biennales, publications, and galleries will usually have American and British native speakers on their staff. Clearly, as with any other resource, access needs to be restricted in order to protect and perpetuate privilege. Interns and assistants the world over must be told that their domestic—and most likely public—education simply won't do. (Hito Steyerl)

Paraphrasing Mladen Stilinovic words, one could observe that an art critic who cannot write in English is not an art critic (Stilinovic). However, for the writers and editors the situation is much more challenging and they are expected to write and speak not just any English, it has to be a native-level English. As art criticism operates internationally, the working language is English. The dominance of the English language in the art world is so obvious, that it is like oxygen; no one notices it apart from the non-native speakers who first have to learn the language. To them, it is an additional effort and both a temporal and economic burden. While the Scandinavian countries, for example, are exemplary in that a very good English education is provided via the public education system, globally good English skills still need to be considered a luxury. English, understood as a skill and a social tool, required from anyone from the medical professional to the lawyer to the art critic, often means attending privately paid lessons or language courses. In that sense, language is a matter of social class and money. Very often 'native speaker is a key phrase in job postings for writing and editing positions in the arts. From the legal point of view, article 21 of the 'EU Charter of Fundamental Rights' stipulates language—like sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin —as among the attributes against which it is illegal to discriminate. The

article further states that any discrimination on grounds of nationality is clearly prohibited. Answering question 2002 on the legality of the phrase 'native speaker' in job advertisements, Anna Diamantopoulou, wrote on behalf of the European Commission:

> The Commission is of the opinion that the phrase 'native speaker' is not acceptable, under any circumstances, under Community law. […] However, the Commission recommends using a phrase such as 'perfect or very good knowledge of a particular language' as a condition of access to posts for which a very high level of knowledge of that language is necessary. The Commission will continue to use its powers to fight against any discrimination caused by a requirement for 'native speaker' knowledge in job advertisements. This also applies to its relations with its contractors.

On legal grounds, the use of the term 'native speaker' in a job advert is discriminatory. Most of the jobs in the globalised world require 'perfect or very good knowledge of a particular language', especially English, which is a justifiable requirement. But it is difficult to expect from anyone, that they will change their birth certificate. Art criticism—writing and editing—requires sure a great knowledge of the language, and in this context, particularly, the idea of a *native speaker* seems to be unjust for one more reason: writing and editing is work that requires experience. So-called native speakers (not necessarily of English, but of any language) do not write or edit well just because of the fact that the language they write or edit in is their first language. However, if one thinks about job adverts—especially for editors in art magazines—the word 'native' functions as something in between a skill and ability. Quite recently, in a semi-professional context, I heard an editor admit frankly that at their organisation '[they] prefer native speakers'. Are these subtle practices and suggestions excluding non-native English speakers from writing and editing positions discriminatory? Linguistic capital is clearly a way to impose and maintain a power that is not only symbolic but also economic and political. In this case, a *habitus* of writing English in a certain way is adapted as English is the lingua franca of the global

art market. As Pierre Bourdieu points out:

> Language is a particularly effective mechanism for maintaining distinctions among social classes because it functions both to communicate and signal identity, with one function frequently disguised as the other. (28)

When talking about the language of the art world, 'social class' has a double meaning. The fact that people from Spain, France, the Ukraine, or Brazil have to know a certain native-like level of English in order to get access to the job market seems unfair especially when one compares different levels of social mobility. Upper middle-class individuals from non-English-speaking countries have more access to language education than their colleagues from different social and economical backgrounds. While Bourdieu refers mostly native languages and the distinctions it produces between social classes (via use of vocabulary, grammar structure, use of colloquialism and cultural references, etc.) in the context of art criticism, this issue returns in a different manifestation: non-English art writers, regardless of their class background, need to know the English spoken in the art world, which as a matter of class privilege is highly specialised, complex, and exclusionary. Ironically enough, being a 'native' functions as skill and ability, which is to the detriment of non-native English speaker as well as English speakers from lower class backgrounds. When English native speakers go to Spain, France, the Ukraine, or Brazil, they will have more job opportunities in art writing than their local counterparts. The dominance of the English language is therefore both arbitrary and unjustified.

I have personally experienced the way in which the privilege of the native speaker manifests. In order to fund my living costs during my PhD studies, I not only worked on research and teaching at my university, I also held a full-time position in an outsourced call-centre of a French cooperation in Poland. My job was to pick up phone-calls with a 'smile in my voice' and say, 'Bonjour, C'est Sophie du SVP. Comment

est-ce que je peux vous aider?'[1] and aid customers in solving their IT issues. All of the people working there—except one—were graduates of French philology but not native French speakers. French clients who were calling knew very well that the help desk was not situated in France, and had precast assumptions of our ability to speak French. I remember my French colleague, who was usually very patient, putting a caller on loudspeaker, and we heard outraged screaming from the other side of the line. The callers yelled, 'You don't understand what I'm saying, I want somebody who can speak French!'. My colleague calmly replied in impeccable French: 'Dear Sir, you are speaking to the French person'. This situation was funny but it also shows that only the native French colleague could have dealt with the customer in this way. Others would have had to endure the shouting much more subserviently. The privilege of 'native-language' shone through clearly that day. It didn't matter how well I or any of my colleagues knew the language. The incident had not been about language skill, but about discrimination based on an assumption of non-nativeness.

Understanding this condition of language privilege might threaten some as it may easily be seen as a devaluation of one's success. Especially to those who have worked hard to achieve the status of quasi-native speaker, highlighting this imbalance might seem a challenge to their personal achievements. At this point, some might suddenly feel the urge to defend their privilege (of either being a native speaker or having the resources to invest in one's language development to achieve quasi-native levels) thereby further strengthening the very hegemony, which is at stake here (Blanchet 71). However, acknowledging the privilege of being a native speaker does not mean denying one's individual achievements. It is merely an act of understanding that financial, social and cultural capital has the structural and logical effect of rendering certain relations and positions 'natural'. To recognize the privilege of language is to become aware of the structures and systems that lead to linguistic homogenization in the art world and continue to exclude

1 'Hello, this is Sophie from SVP. How can I help you?'

social actors based on their individual class positions and backgrounds.

There are also those that profit from this linguistic homogenisation and the hegemony of a single language, English, in the art world and beyond. English as a commodifiable skill is part of the neoliberal and capitalist world: language certificates are entry tickets into the universities around the world, but completing a university degree in the English language still does not make one a 'native'. There are ways for a non-native English speaker to attain a native-like status. But as Steyerl notes, that that, too, is a question of financial ability.

> The only way to shake off the shackles of your insufferable foreign origins is to attend Columbia or Cornell, where you might learn to speak impeccable English—untainted by any foreign accent or non-native syntax. And after a couple of graduate programs where you pay $34,740 annually for tuition, you just might be able to find yet another internship.

Good luck to those who want to try! Steyerl's ironic suggestion comes from her essay 'International Disco Latin', which is a satirical response to Alix Rule and David Levine's essay 'International Art English'. In this essay the authors analysed the press releases sent by museums and galleries from all over the world and mercilessly criticized and mocked the language employed there. Commenting on the haphazard semantics, the often obscure vocabulary, or the incorrect grammar, they coin the term 'International Art English', which describes a decidedly amateurish English in stark contrast to the 'correct' British national corpus. Steyerl's 'International Disco Latin' reveals the privilege connected to such semiotic pedantry and highlights the precarious working conditions in the art world. She draws attention to the fact that press releases are usually written by overworked and under-paid (if paid at all) employees or interns. 'International Art English' was meant as an ironic comment, but it disregards these global power dynamics. As Steyerl points out in 'International Disco Latin':

> The art world (if such a thing even exists) harbors a long tradition of terrific self-serving sarcasm. But satire as one of the traditional tools of enlightenment is not only defined by making fun. It gains its punch from *who* is being made fun of. But Voltairean satire is mostly too risky. We are indeed lacking authors attacking or even describing, in any language, the art world's jargon-veiled money laundering and post-democratic Ponzi schemes.

Steyerl's essay, exposes the mockery of those with lesser means as a mechanism of class warfare: 'International Art English' is designed to separate those who are 'in' on the joke form those who are not. It seeds out those who are perceived to be rightly belonging to 'the establishment'. Laughing *at* instead of *with* becomes a symptom of discrimination.

Didier Eribon's *Returning to Reims* echoes this sentiment. Eribon is a French sociologist and philosopher, raised as a working-class boy in a family that lived in provincial public-housing estates, where everyone left school as soon as possible and worked in manufacturing jobs. He was able to pursue his education due to his mother's willingness to take on an additional job and his night job as a porter. Written after Eribon's return to his hometown following his father's death, *Returning to Reims* evokes the working-class world of Eribon's childhood. It mixes intimate and touching personal stories with a sociological reflection on class identity and the social reproduction of privilege. He notes that often people living in the social and geographical periphery feel neither excluded from nor deprived of various social goods because, they have no means of gaging what constitutes the norm for those in the centre of society. This, he argues, makes it even more difficult for them to understand the extent to which they are being discriminated against (cf. 52). 'International Art English', one might argue, follows a similar pattern in that it preys on the ignorance of those whose first language is not English, and who, being at the periphery cannot possible gauge the level of their ignorance, which becomes the basis of Rule's and Levine's joke.

Eribon's decision to include his personal stories and reflections is rare in the academic and artistic outputs. Perhaps this is because those with such experiences succeed less often or because they fear of discrimination when telling their stories publicly. The fear of ridicule and contempt is very present. In her portrait for *The Guardian* journalist, Kim Willsher, perfectly captures Eribon's experience:

> [The contempt] is everywhere, almost conditioned, always a bit pejorative, demeaning, contemptuous or mocking. Even if it's not violent, there's a superiority. I feel attacked by this. When people speak this way about the concierge, that's my grandmother; or the factory worker, that's my grandfather; and the cleaner, my mother. […] People who say they are proud to be working-class are really saying they are proud to no longer be working-class. I escaped my background but I was still ashamed to admit it or make reference to it. I was ashamed of my family, of their habits, even of the way my mother pronounced words.

Maybe such personal stories are rare in the art or academic world because the only justification for these stories is when they can be told from the position of success? Then, they become acceptable. But how many of those stories are not told? How many are not listened to? How many will never have a chance to be told from the perspective of success?

Art and the Linguistic Periphery

> The social world, is of the order of belief, perception and appreciation, knowledge and recognition-name, renown, prestige, honor, glory, authority everything which constitutes symbolic power as a recognized power-always concern the 'distinguished' possessors and the 'pretentious' challengers. (Bourdieu 251)

What is important to emphasize in regards to the art world and art criticism is that 'success' is predicated on cultural and social capital, meaning the ability to effectively network with those already on the inside of the system (Prieur and Savage 566-80). People usually meet

and socialize with people of a similar social standing, which can become an obstacle to those perceived to be from the 'wrong background' in the art world especially, as the blurring of private and professional is particularly common here. Events such as openings, meetings, talks, previews of biennales, art picnics, or gatherings are where these connections occur giving an advantage to those, who are already used to such events from their personal lives or upbringings. The importance and power of these events rests on the simple fact that, they are not a formal, and thus reproduce existing (private) networks under the guise of professional contacts. The art world functions in between the fluid borders of what might be called a network and a community.

The reality of networking makes the notion of the periphery and the centre even more precarious as is not only true geographically, where there are 'centres' around which the art world –and by extensions its critic –gather, it is also true in terms of the periphery of the English language, which makes it harder for those at the outside to make their voices heard and welcomed on the inside. English as the *lingua franca* of the art world adds to existing forms of discrimination and acts as an international gatekeeper for those from lower social backgrounds globally. The question 'who can afford to be an art critic?' then becomes not only one of specialised knowledge, higher education, and an interesting perspective, but crucially it is also dependent on the financial means to speak as 'native' as possible.

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Performance Responses

Ralegh: The Treason Trial

Directed by Oliver Chris. The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, Shakespeare's Globe. London. 29 November 2018.

By Alessandro Simari

My verdict was guilty. The truth is that the fix was in.

There was the considerable influence of the Clerk (Amanda Wright), who in the relative privacy of the deliberation room indicated to us—the twelve who comprised the audience-jury in Oliver Chris's immersive, verbatim piece—that the role that we were to perform was, above all, to protect the person of King James I. In contradistinction with modern legal procedures, the burden of proof was instead on Sir Walter Ralegh (Simon Paisley Day) to demonstrate his innocence of 'treason in the main'. Were we truly convinced that Ralegh might not have posed a threat to the sovereign? The Clerk subtly made it clear how the 'Crown' would expect the jury to vote.

Quick photo of the "Jury Member" lanyard worn by the author. Photo: by the author.

I came in with the knowledge of the historical fact that Ralegh *was* found guilty in his 1603 treason trial. The jury instructions, spoken on stage minutes into the performance, to 'follow the same course as you did the other day' had brought this historical detail to the forefront of my mind. At the interval, the jurors were escorted by a robe-wearing usher out of the auditorium and into a basement room of Shakespeare's Globe where we were to hold our deliberations. I recalled at this point that, although execution was the maximum sentence for treason until the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998, Ralegh had *not* been executed as an immediate consequence of this trial. Perhaps knowledge of this fact served to assuage any simulacrum of anxiety I may have been experiencing as I re-entered the deliberation room, prepared (as I was) to re-perform Ralegh's condemnation in the distinctly low-stakes context of a theatrical performance.

On this particular evening, there was a barrister who had unwittingly purchased a ticket for the performance that, to their dismay, placed them inside this mimesis of a deliberation room. As our deliberations began to conclude, and it became apparent that Ralegh was likely to be found guilty, the barrister intimated to their apparently bloodthirsty fellow jurors that—given the paucity of unimpeachable evidence presented against him—Ralegh could never be convicted in a contemporary court with its presumptions of innocence and high evidentiary standards. There was on my part, too, the feeling that it was necessary to use my guilty verdict to obstruct the use of theatre to reproduce the mythologies of legal and moral progress that were bound up in the barrister's remarks. The jurors were told by the Clerk that a majority decision was all that was necessary for a verdict, but, for whatever unknown reason, that barrister too concluded that Ralegh was guilty. A unanimous verdict against Ralegh was returned.

I did not, in other words, treat the role of audience-juror as that of the embedded, legally-prescribed arbiter (or critic) of the innocence or guilt of a person in a theatricalised legal proceeding. Rather, I interpreted my role in a fashion much more akin to that of the more typical labours that I usually perform in a theatre: that of the critic who

works in the field of theatre and performance studies, who is attending a performance event, and who is interested in interrogating the ideological work of theatre. In that very personal and specific sense, the opportunity to return a 'guilty verdict' on theatre seemed too good to pass up.

In an interview conducted by Will Tosh for the production's programme, Chris described the play's contemporary resonances as residing in 'a human story about a morally questionable individual up against a biased political and legal elite'. The artistic decision to costume performers in modern business attire is part of that semiotic framework. It continues to strike me as a dubious proposition to interpret Ralegh as *against* rather than *embedded within* seventeenth-century England's political and legal elite, though he had run afoul of it. From my position as audience/juror/critic, Ralegh's costuming—a three-piece suit with a burgundy tie and pocket square—seemed more immediately to serve the purpose of transforming Ralegh from a historically-situated legal subject into a trans-historical legal subject. That is, in what Rebecca Schneider calls the 'syncopated time of re-enactment', the character of Ralegh was being performed at once as a historical figure situated within the specific historical context of a seventeenth-century show-trial, and also as a quasi-historical figure who is appealing to an audience who are themselves entrenched, as modern legal subjects, in contemporary ideals about the fairness and impartiality of the law and its incumbent legal procedures. Notably, the Clerk's explanations about the differences between seventeenth-century legal proceedings and these modern ideals were only given to the jury. There was, in this way, two juries who were asked to pass verdict on Ralegh, and each with a differing set of (spoken and unspoken) performative instructions. We, the audience-jury, were asked to cast aside our status as modern legal subjects and strictly embody a historical-legal subjectivity; the rest of the audience was not.

This dialectic played out when the guilty verdict was announced, and the audience registered their dissatisfaction with the decision by booing and shouting at the stage and also, in part, at the jurors. Spontaneously, cries of 'betrayal', 'traitors', and 'rigged' overwhelmed the

Clerk's pronouncements.

For a moment, the performance ground to a halt.

It is said in Volume 2 of Cobbett's *Complete Collection of State Trials* (1809) that, when the jury returned from deliberations in 'not a quarter of an hour', that Ralegh responded to the verdict by remarking: 'My lords, the Jury have found me Guilty: *they must do as they are directed*' (29, emphasis added). Paisley Day, whose speech throughout the performance had been quick and impassioned, spoke these words with a deliberate almost staccato delivery. In an instant, the matter of Ralegh's innocence or guilt seemingly became of secondary concern. Ralegh's lines set off a wave of knowing nods that circumnavigated the auditorium.

The audience, who had just vocalised their outrage at the verdict, were now contented that their interpretation of the performance/trial as being 'fixed' was acknowledged and endorsed by the play's principal figure. They correctly recognised that the jurors never had the power to overturn the predetermined outcome of proceedings; I had entered deliberation room clinging to the fallacy that, as critics, we might.

On my way home, walking across the Strand and past the Royal Courts of Justice, it occurred to me that—not for the first time and nor do I suspect for the last time—I had misjudged the efficacy of making a critical intervention into the ideological work of a production through the mechanisms of participatory theatre. This was a particularly damning realisation given that I have elsewhere written about how the formal structures of participatory theatre can delimit the emergence of a radical or 'emancipatory' politics. The verdict was indeed fixed, but not necessarily in the way that should have been most obvious to me when I entered the theatre. I had chosen to take up the role of critic in the perhaps deluded hope of seeing a different set of politics represented on the stage, and instead I inadvertently participated in endorsing the very politics I sought to undermine.

I cannot say that I regret my verdict; I only wonder what the alternative ending would have looked like.

The Twilight Zone

An Almeida Theatre production adapted by Anne Washburn.
Directed by Richard Jones. The Ambassadors Theatre, London.
Attended on Saturday 16 March 2019.

By Anne-Louise Fortune

Cast of *The Twilight Zone*, the Ambassadors Theatre, 2019.
Photo: © Johan Persson.

I have settled into my seat in the snug surroundings of the Ambassadors Theatre in London's West End as I wait for the evening's performance to begin. I am here to review *The Twilight Zone* for an online and print magazine. The original 1959 television version of *The Twilight Zone* has become a by-word for stories of psychological horror and unexpected twists, and so in this theatrical version I am expecting to be taken on a journey into strange, alien worlds, that ask us to interrogate our prejudices and norms. The intimacy of the auditorium creates a sense of suspense. The scene is set by the theatre's safety curtain which has been remodelled to resemble a retro monochrome analogue receiver, complete with tuning dials and a now obsolete CBS logo in the shape of a human eye. I am struck by the sense of familiarity this creates: it feels as if we are gathering around the TV set as one great extended

family, waiting for broadcasting to begin. In an era of smartphones, streaming and multiple screens, this sense of community and focus is a welcome respite from the 'always on' pressures of the digital age.

I will not be paid for writing the review, although my ticket and souvenir programme are both complimentary because as a member of the 'press' my opinion is valued and respected. As a theatre-maker, I have a comprehensive knowledge of the processes and creative decisions involved in theatre production. My brief for the evening is to watch the show, review it overnight for the magazine, and assign it a star value out of ten. As reductive as the star system may be, it is still the basis of most entertainment marketing campaigns, and the implication from PR agencies is that a star rating and a 'pull quote' are the expected outcome of allowing critics complimentary access to their commodities. It is this system to which the public, we are told, gives credence. Whilst we as critics may consider the system to be problematic, if we attempt to dismiss it what will it be replaced by? In an era which seeks to encompass the totality of cultural experience in a five second GIF or a 280 character tweet, what value is there in more a considered, academic response?

Evocative of the fast-paced, fleeting nature of online culture, the structure of the show consists of eight storylines. Rarely told in a linear format, fragmented strands overlap and interweave, flowing mercurially through the productions structure, as trending tweets and news alerts monopolise our screens. Opening with the full ensemble cast, the first narrative offers a slice of classic American retro-cultural nostalgia. A group of strangers find themselves forced into a remote roadside diner when a police officer appears. It is made known that a member of the party is an 'alien', and those assembled must deduce who is the interloper of the group. Quickly the conversation descends into accusations and hyperbole, and we are introduced to several of the stereotypes who we will encounter throughout the show: the vamp; the young girl; the cynical wise-cracker. Moments of silence punctuate the dispute, but rather than fuelling tension, this moment seemed to disengage the audience.

As the diverse cast move into a scene change, I am struck once again by the aesthetic of the production. It has been beautifully crafted by set designer Paul Steinberg and costume designer Nicky Gillibrand, invoking the disorienting atmosphere of the TV show to perfection. Paying homage to the original broadcasts, Steinberg and Gillibrand created a retro-monochrome world, complete with costumes in shades of black, white and grey. The set is akin to what we might imagine the inside of a TV set to look like – a black box with white stars of myriad sizes, which cleverly manipulates our understanding of the size of the playing space. The stars remind me of my remit – that I must place a numerical value on the worth of the production. Iconography from the show move across the stage on rotating discs in choreographed movement sequences, whilst larger items of set are moved on and off stage behind them as tracks from a score by Sarah Angliss play during moments of transition. Each of these elements: innovative set changes, nostalgic TV show references, and evocative soundtracks, elevate the production and create the sense that you are on the edge of experiencing something quite incredible. Although, this 'something' is never quite realised. Despite the undeniable artistry and conceptualisation of the design, the show consistently feels more like an transitory aesthetic experience than a cohesive piece of theatre.

The magazine I am writing for doesn't delineate to its reviewers how the rating system operates, other than to state that anything to be awarded ten out of ten must be 'perfect', although I have concerns regarding this frame of reference. Surely the highest marks should be awarded for a performance which offers its audience something greater on an experiential level, rather than necessarily being free of any flaws? Indeed, if a production was free of flaws, would it be a rewarding experience? If all the possible moments of failure and difference in a performance have been erased, would it be as entertaining and fulfilling to an audience? Having already transferred from an Off-West End venue to the Ambassadors Theatre, there's a clear possibility that the show may progress onto Broadway, or perhaps a national tour. At such a crucial moment in the show's development, it is understood that the

voice of a critic can and will be used to promote (or demote) the shows future incarnations. Yet, with a star rating that doesn't align with the system used by other outlets, and with the delay between press night and my viewing of the show, I am uncertain of the reach and impact of my review. All the ingredients are in place for this show to deliver an amazing evening at the theatre, but it is in the stories themselves that the production doesn't quite come to life. Although well scripted, flawlessly directed, and technically delivered with aplomb, there is nothing that *affects* me. It seems somewhat ironic that whilst I am considering the desensitising nature of technology and instant culture from the position of a critic, these aesthetic elements turn out to be the moments in which this live performance excels. As a collection of nostalgic tropes and an exercise in recreating the world of a TV show, this production is a success, but as a piece of narrative theatre the show fell short. Lacking relevancy, intensity and intrigue, it was as if it had been frozen in the late 1960's, only to be defrosted over half a century later, and served lukewarm to its audience.

I complete my review overnight and award the show seven out of the ten possible stars, yet I am left feeling unfulfilled. In a digital world saturated with illimitable content and opinions, what is the value of a critical review? Is it to be used by our publishers as a demonstration of their legitimacy and relevance? Is it to gain exposure for ourselves and our opinions, as we try to become noticed in an ever-crowded marketplace of 'experts'? In a system which we as critics may consider to be problematic, do we have to conform, at least partially, in order to be regarded as relevant? Should we adhere to the star system whilst providing criticism for those readers who do wish for a more considered response? In this era of instant response, perhaps there is still a place for the more considered response. Perhaps when GIFs have evolved and tweets have become too fleeting and too numerous to attract any attention, and the reductive nature of the star-rating system has been exposed as flawed, perhaps then the more considered response may be the one which endures.

Book Reviews

Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now: Criticism and Theory in the 21st Century **edited by Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady**

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 212 pp. (paperback)

By Amy Borsuk

In this collection, editors Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady have compiled thorough, multi-lensed essays which aim to conduct 'Presentist' readings of Shakespeare's work that argue for 'Presentism' as a key critical mode of scholarly engagement with Shakespeare. This mode of engagement acknowledges our position in 'the now' while always reinterpreting our past. DiPietro and Grady have curated this collection with two related goals: first, to demonstrate Presentism as an essential methodology, distinct from New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, for engaging in historical analysis of Shakespearean text and performance; and secondly, to demonstrate how Shakespeare's plays engage with a notion of 'now' or the 'present' and how this resonates with our present. The contributors aim to answer DiPietro and Grady's question, 'Where, then, does Shakespeare figure in the much more urgently felt immediacies of our changing world?' (2) Altogether, the anthology conducts rich, dense work interrogating relationships between the early modern past, the present, and Shakespeare through epistemological modes such as eco-criticism, phenomenology, aestheticism, affect, labour, and Marxist theory.

Throughout the book, the 'present' serves as 'a methodological starting point, the inevitable horizon of interpretation, or its enabling condition' (4), which as both an object of study and a state of existence always inescapably structures our ways of thinking and writing. DiPietro and Grady position these Presentist essays as a demonstrable return to the favourable dialogic practice of reading history in the context of the present, which they argue that New Historicism and Cultural

Materialism no longer achieve. Their methodology is fundamentally dynamic and self-reflexive, conscientious that:

> the significance of [Shakespeare] texts is never static or 'timeless', but rather involves a negotiation and constant renegotiation between horizons of interpretation and an ever-shifting present, from which we view the past with new understandings, with different interpretive lenses, with different senses of what is important and relevant, and what is not. (2)

However, the fluid, time-focused, and at times ahistorical analyses of Shakespeare's historical context and texts in these articles undermine the overall assertion that Presentism is a return to the original methodological intentions of Cultural Materialism. While the contributors focus on specific histories through sociopolitical and economic lenses, the differences in these contexts are often collapsed or left un-analysed in order to make the past feel more immediate with the present; this is particularly evident in Whitney and Reinhard Lupton's chapters.

The book is structured into nine chapters, with each contributing author demonstrating how Shakespeare can be positioned and made visible within the 'immediacies of our changing world' (2). Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady's opening essay, 'Presentism, Anachronism and *Titus Andronicus*' gives attention to the dialectical tension between historicist work focused on understanding text in context and the inescapable reality of merely accessing the 'present'. They draw parallels between the early modern audience for *Titus Andronicus* and contemporary, post-9/11 audiences, arguing that the play's portrait of Aaron the Moor and his effective terrorism resonates today because of the 'turbulence of global politics post–9/11' (14). In chapter two, 'The Presentist Threat to Editions of Shakespeare', Gabriel Egan explores competing New Textualist and New Bibliographical contemporary practices for editing Shakespeare's quartos and folios to demonstrate the paradoxically conservative results that arise from radical practices, and vice versa, in folio editing. 'Shakespeare Dwelling: *Pericles* and the

Affordances of Action' by Julia Reinhard Lupton reads *Pericles* through the 'urgency of the now' manifest in 'the present time of performance' (60), drawing from craftivism, theories of affect, labour and affective labour to analyse 'the capacities of artisanal efforts to general political speech' within the play (61). In Chapter 4, Cary DiPietro writes about virtual place as a form of theatre and conducts a fascinating eco-critical analysis of the early modern ecology, pastoral imagery, and aesthetics of Prospero's island in *The Tempest*. Although he does not evoke Presentism directly, he argues that the pastoralism within the play evokes an audience's nostalgic connection to the past. Charles Whitney uses a New Economics lens on the presence of common enclosures and fields in *As You Like It* to argue that 'some of what was becoming culturally residual then in relation to the capitalist dominant needs to become culturally emergent now, in some new form, in relation to that same dominant' (105); that is, the protection of common land in *As You Like It* needs to be revived for the planet today. Similarly, Lynne Bruckner eco-critically explores the parallels in the relationship between land and political power in 21st century America and 16th century England in her chapter, ''Consuming means, soon preys upon itself': Political Expedience and Environmental Degradation'. W.B. Worthen, in the seventh chapter, explores contemporary performance as re-performing memories of Shakespeare, rather than being any original or true Shakespearean text. Hugh Grady's chapter 'Reification, Mourning, and the Aesthetic in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Winter's Tale*' focuses on aestheticism as a mode of theoretical political engagement in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the final chapter, Mark Robson closes the collection with an appropriately playful, yet rigorous, engagement with anachronisms and evocations of 'the present' in *Julius Caesar*.

Altogether, *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now* is ambitious in its scope, at times overly so, but does open a new mode of dialogical historical work that offers a fundamental shift of perspective. It is not a declaration or justification of Shakespeare's relevancy, nor an exploration of how Shakespeare has been remoulded to speak to contemporary concerns, but rather an argument for the importance of recognizing

how we invest in and reinterpret the past always in relation to our 'now'. It is an engaging book for researchers both new and familiar with Presentism as well as for those who seek to focus on the subjectivity and relational foundation of historicism, particularly as conducted through Shakespeare studies. The concept of Presentism is repeated clearly throughout the chapters, which helpfully reinforces learning, even when the distinction between Presentism and its supposed predecessors struggles to feel distinct. Simultaneously, the complexity and depth of each critical analysis yields diverse original research that will readily engage scholars focused on contemporary conceptions of 'Shakespeare'. *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now* demonstrates that Shakespeare is a cultural topic, a body of texts and plays, and a historical subject which is constantly being expanded by scholars who continue to engage diachronically with Shakespeare-of-the-past and Shakespeare-of-the-present.

Critique and Postcritique edited by Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017. 336 pp. (hardback)

By Jaelyn Endris

There is perhaps little surprise that in our contemporary moment of political fragmentation predicated on an anti-intellectual resistance to criticism, the function and politics of critique should be the subject of much debate and energy. As such, the role of critique is one primary concern of Anker and Felski's *Critique and Postcritique*, an edited collection of essays from scholars working in and around literary studies. *Critique and Postcritique* aptly situates itself within the 'energy, excitement, and revitalization' (Anker and Felski 20) of contemporary literary studies enlivened and re-envisioned through feminism, queer theory, and postcolonial studies, among others and reflects ways in which scholars in the humanities might destabilize often entrenched paradigms of criticism. For Anker and Felski, this manifests at the

level of the institution as well, locating how 'the ethos of critique is losing its allure...unfolding hand in hand with a larger sense of crisis in the humanities and of institutional retrenchment' (20). The energetic pull between genres of critique as diagnosis, or critique's role in 'the scrutiny of an object in order to decode certain defects or flaws' (Anker and Felski 4), and genres of postcritique that resist diagnosis through situated and reparative models of critique, formulate, for Anker and Felski, a productive tension that renders postcritical approaches as both antidote and alternative through 'countertraditions of critique' (21). For Anker and Felski, postcritique is thereby a means of resisting against 'an extended assault on the autonomy of universities' (18) through the reimagining of critique as political investments interrogated within and through 'the forms of value, play and pleasure cultivated by an aesthetic education' (20), wherein postcritique might thereby 'forge stronger links between intellectual life and the nonacademic world' (19). *Critique and Postcritique* therefore embarks on an exploration of postcritical modes to determine 'fresh ways of interpreting literary and cultural texts that acknowledge, nonetheless, its inevitable dependency on the very practices it is questioning' (Anker and Felski 1).

Moving between diagnostic, paranoid, or symptomatic approaches and affective, reparative, and perspectival approaches to reading, *Critique and Postcritique* draws most heavily from intersections in literary criticism and feminism, queer theory, and postcolonial studies. Through the political and cultural situatedness of these fields, reading as method becomes an object of investigation in an attempt to render reading not as dogmatic or apolitical but as situated and lived. For example, Toril Moi's chapter ''Nothing is Hidden': From Confusion to Clarity; or, Witgenstein on Critique' and Ellen Rooney's chapter 'Symptomatic Reading is a Problem of Form' both take up an interrogation of reading as method to understand how critique might function both as a means of productively undoing entrenched structures and as a means of understanding one's personal and political investments in a particular text. Moi notes that critique is not synonymous with theory and that 'a theory is not a method' (35); she articulates how

reading is less about the application of a theory to a text to determine its deep, hidden meanings and more about 'different thematic or political interests' (Moi 35) that inform how meanings are produced through the ways in which one looks at text. For Rooney, these investments in situated readings also formulate a practice of critique through iterative breakages and reformations of reading, highlighting how 'symptomatic reading...anticipates its undoing, undoing itself, again and again' (Rooney 147). One of the hallmarks of *Critique and Postcritique* is how reading therefore might be taken up as a practice in which critiques might iterate upon and reformulate critical positions through an understanding of reading as an active, agential process.

As a result of this investment in a practice of reading, *Critique and Postcritique* also puts important emphasis on the position of the reader and the disposition of critique, or 'the attitude with which critique is approached' (Castiglia 212). Heather Love's chapter 'The Temptations: Donna Haraway, Feminist Objectivity, and the Problem of Critique' re-imagines Donna Haraway as a literary critic which resists the idea that critique is destructive and examines critique as an 'attention to care-in-the-making' (Love 68). Christopher Castiglia's chapter 'Hope for Critique?' begs a similar question through a shift in critical disposition from paranoid to hopeful readings, whereby critique is not 'the assumption that texts conceal beneath their surface an abstract agency' (Castiglia 211) but rather 'an imaginative space coexisting with and perpetually troubling the imperative here and now within which new ideals...can be envisioned' (218). Through Love's attention to care in critique and Castiglia's attention to a critical hopefulness, reading as method is further re-envisioned as a form of dynamic fieldwork, as 'experiments in ways of looking' (Love 66) that take up new or different dispositions that 'actively contribute to the ethics of the possible' (Castiglia 226). Through this imagining of critique, the critic herself is not only implicated but also made responsible for her investment in a practice of reading; this resists the complacency of singular, apolitical critique in favour of a situated, reflexive, and iterative process of looking for multiple perspectives and meanings.

While *Critique and Postcritique* is a book primarily interested in the traditions of literary criticism, the suggested postcritical approaches to reading practice offer innovative and productive ways through which practitioners and scholars in performance studies might extend these literary traditions into practice-based research. This resonates as critical reading takes shape through postcritique as a form of practice-based knowledge production determined through an engagement with self-reflexive, situated models of knowing (Barrett 2). Of particular interest to performance scholars and practitioners might be the way in which Heather Love extends Nathan Hensley's concept of a curatorial reading, in which readers cultivate a 'persistent critique' (Love, 68) that is 'established in the making' (Love 68). This approach might collide with Barbara Bolt's concept of materialising practices, or reflexive, embodied practices that 'constitute relationships between process and text' (Barrett 5), and offer those working in performance studies an interesting opportunity to examine how notions of practice-based research might extend or sit alongside more conventional forms of critique. As a result, *Critique and Postcritique* reflects a timely and imaginative look at practices of critique that extend beyond received conventions to find new alliances with other ways of knowing and signals a productive future for critique that performance studies scholars and practitioners will want to read.

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Thinking Through Theatre and Performance edited by Maaike Bleeker, Adrian Kear, Joe Kelleher, Heike Roms

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2019, 321 pp. (paperback)

By Bojana Janković

'This is a book for students,' announce the editors of *Thinking Through Theatre and Performance*, a book 'for use in classrooms' (1). Structured in four sections, devoted to watching, performing, traces left and interventions undertaken by theatre and performance, the volume edited by Maaike Bleeker, Adrian Kear, Joe Kelleher and Heike Roms consists of 21 essays, each starting from a question. These questions vary greatly: some appear ontological, for example, Kelleher opens the book by asking 'Why Study Drama?'; while others unravel from a deceptive simplicity as when Thomas F. DeFrantz begins by asking 'What is Black Dance? What Can It Do? and concludes that Black dance is 'dancing beyond disavowal towards Black joy' (97). Others still jump straight into questions of political responsibility, by asking if staging historical trauma re-enacts it (Nyong'o 200-10). Each of the essays follows a similar structure: the titular question establishes the problem, which is investigated through a case study and dissected through a specific methodology.

The stated intention of *Thinking Through Theatre and Performance* –to be used by students and in classrooms—is therefore present from the very outset of each chapter. On a formal level, the book answers the question 'what does an essay about theatre and performance look like' by presenting an array of possible answers. Miguel Escobar Varela's chapter on intercultural exchange (173-85) folds personal experience into academic research, starting from the former and introducing scholars like Rustom Bharucha and Dwight Conquergood in slow, deliberate steps, to arrive at concrete advice for intercultural makers and researchers. When Mike Pearson titles the sections of his essay 'Let's presume', 'Let's venture' or 'Let's allow' (115-29), he not only

investigates 'how theatre thinks through things' but also breaks the mould of essay-writing by illustrating how lateral thinking is also lateral writing.

I re-lived the excitement of my (early) student discoveries several times while reading *Thinking Through Theatre and Performance*. This is the discovery of a cherished subject being contorted, collapsed and expanded. Broderick D. V. Chow's disassembling of the idea of a trained body as an unthinking body (145-57) pushes against the doctrines of acting still held in most UK drama schools. Jazmin Badong Llana (211-24) asks how theatre thinks through politics by discussing the annual re-enactment of a 1985 massacre committed during a protest in the Philippines, which opens complex questions of party politics, institutional appropriation, and historical re-contextualisation. To those familiar with the contributors' work, the essays in this collection may occasionally appear familiar; but to those beginning their explorations, or even redirecting towards a new topic, these essays illuminate possible avenues to follow, often loudly bypassing the harmful norms of theatre and performance practice. Colette Conroy does not ask how theatre can be accessible but what a *fully* accessible theatre is (47-57), moving beyond ideas of inclusion within existing theatre structures to a place where theatre is re-imagined because audiences are understood anew.

In the above mentioned introduction, Bleeker, Kear, Kelleher, and Roms stipulate the contributors were not asked to survey 'the current state of knowledge in one or other area of the discipline' but rather to 'construct essays [...] that work through particular provocations, ideas or methods of approach' (4). This open-ended invitation makes the individual article's attempts to simplify or complicate the question at hand all the more visible. Louise Owen (70-84) uses *Beyond Caring*, a performance about zero-hour workers in a meat factory, to introduce foundational Marxist thinking; the focus on representation of economic systems, embedded into the essay title, limits this exploration to the performance itself, without allowing it to expand to the working conditions of theatre-makers. Theron Schmidt's article (158-70) appears almost as a companion piece to Owen's essay;

by invoking task-based dances of Yvonne Rainer and one-to-one encounters of Adrian Howells, Schmidt articulates theatre as a space where conditions of contemporary work are questioned and 'worked through' (167). Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink (100-14) establishes the discipline of scenography (silently different to the Anglo-American stage-design), disassembles the practice-theory binary in favour of an intertwined relationship between the two, and expands the notion of scenography to a symbolic link between the spaces outside and inside the theatre. While Groot Nibbelink's article can function as a crash-course for those new to the discipline, contributions such as the one by Bojana Cvejić, on social choreography, (270-83) may require a more experienced or theoretically-confident reader; this illustrates the collection's wide understanding of both students and classrooms.

The range of topics considered in the volume invites another question, of whether case studies match the topical array in their diversity. The volume predominately discusses European and North American work, but it is not entirely limited to one region or tradition and is invested in showcasing different ways to make, think and reconsider theatre and performance in the context of different political, social, and economic circumstances. Latin American company Colectiva Siluetas, and their performance *Afuera: lesbianas en escena* (*Outside: Lesbians on Stage*) become Sruti Bala's case study for how theatre impacts audiences in tangible, rather than funder-friendly terms (186-99). Carl Lavery evokes Mike Brookes and Rosa Casado's project *Some Things Happen All At Once* to suggest an 'ethics that emerge from audiences' confrontation with the materiality of stage pictures' (266) in contrast to the less subtle (and perhaps more frequent) spelling-out of eco-ethical ideas. The last section includes articles on disrupting institutions which appropriate radical performance (Johnson, 243-56) and recognising theatricality as an enabler of law (Nield, 284-95). Johnson explores Christopher D'Arcangelo's 'unauthorised works', which in the 1970s disrupted major museums, and makes them a mediator for a re-examination of institutional frameworks performance adapts to today. Locating instruments of theatricality in the racist performance of violence against

Bobby Seale, co-founder of the Black Panthers, gagged and chained in a courtroom, Nield reminds that performance is always used politically – just not always by those who make it. A volume which begins by asking why 'drama' should be studied, therefore finishes by suggesting that studying, making, and teaching drama, theatre, and performance comes with a set of specific societal responsibilities as well.

Renouncing the idea of collating a comprehensive survey of current scholarship, the editors of this volume send a different kind of invitation to their contributors and readers: to begin from the idea that thinking (through) theatre means thinking outside the black box, whether understood literally or as a symbol of the normative. This makes *Thinking Through Theatre and Performance* a good classroom companion for students in higher education and their pedagogues, but also a considerate guide for those making, writing, or otherwise engaging with performance.

Critical Encounters with Immersive Storytelling by Alke Gröppel-Wegener and Jenny Kidd

London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 136 (hardcopy)

By Meg Cunningham

In an entertainment culture that is saturated with the buzzword 'immersive', Alke Gröppel-Wegener and Jenny Kidd's short book *Critical Encounters with Immersive Storytelling* stands as a contemporaneous critical engagement with an ever-widening field. The book is distinctively oriented 'against a backdrop of increased (uncritical) use of the term 'immersion' within a range of contexts, and a broader narrative turn within culture and across society' (106). Set in an intersection of many genres, this book lays out a critical framework that both academic and industry critics can use to systematically investigate immersive storytelling experiences, not just by engaging the audience experience but by examining the production itself as well as intention within the

creation process. Therefore, Gröppel-Wegener and Kidd expand their critical analysis beyond the well trod paths of audience reception studies and neoliberal critique.

Gröppel-Wegener and Kidd draw examples from international productions and 'reference scholarship from disciplines as diverse as media, games, theatre, theme park design, human computer interaction, and museum studies to make sense of the quality of immersion' (18). They engage with the term 'immersion' and it's various uses in these different industry and scholarly fields including transmedia studies, adaption studies, the experience economy, Virtual Reality (VR), and experiential marketing. They determine that there is not yet a single critical framework useful for critics to address the complexity of immersive storytelling experiences that can be applied to all of the mentioned genres of study. Ultimately, they propose a multi-layered, flexible, critical framework that addresses the creation, implementation and experience of story within an immersive event.

Gröppel-Wegener and Kidd's critical investigation with immersive storytelling 'explores how story emerges at the interstices of the creative process, the creation itself, and the experience of the participants' (17). In order to critically examine the emergence of story in these theatrical experiences, the multi-layered critical framework they propose can expand or contract based upon the format of the experience; this critical framework is able to embrace the many genres within this field. Their framework sits upon several interwoven 'orientations' that critically interrogate immersion: (1) the role of the participant; (2) the development process of story-telling and -making; (3) the creation of story within space and through sensation; and (4) the properties of story that are revealed from the previous three categories. As one of the greatest strengths of the book, Gröppel-Wegener and Kidd illustrate the relationship between these four orientations in a clear and concise Venn Diagram (found on page 28); it includes a fuzzy edged circle of 'immersion' that encompasses the story orientation and overlaps the outer circles of participant, process, and creation orientations; this diagram further reveals the complex relationships

between story, creation, experiencer and genre. Throughout the book, they 'introduce a mechanism for *critically* engaging with how stories are not just told, but *made* through experience' (104, emphasis in original); in this emphasis, Gröppel-Wegener and Kidd contribute a new form of critical engagement into the field, no longer only focusing on the audience experience but the creation and creation process.

After utilising their framework to analyse the vast *Harry Potter* universe and a smaller case study, an immersive heritage experience at St Fagans National Museum of History in Wales, Gröppel-Wegener and Kidd direct the chapter just before the conclusion, 'Against Immersion?', outward toward the current climate surrounding scholarship of immersion to address some of the reoccurring criticism against the term 'immersive' and the privileging of 'immersive experience' as cultural capital. They highlight a variety of critical threads (societal and scholarly) against consumerist, manipulative and escapist uses of 'immersion.' Within this chapter, they remind the reader 'that it is criticality itself that we wish to promote as a practice of reflexivity in and around immersive encounters' (85), so each researcher should draw up their own distinctions around the complexity of immersive storytelling experience and not solely focus on any one (negative) aspect of it. Although they don't specifically refute the 'charges' against immersion—for example, 'immersion has been co-opted by the mainstream' (90) or 'immersion is addictive' (94)—they do echo Lukas' question (2016): 'Why assume immersion is inherently negative?' (100) for critics to consider. For the critic, they embrace Lonsway's notion of 'complicated agency' (2016) that allows for both 'empowering and disempowering, supportive and challenging of free will, educational and consumerist' (100) critical engagement with an immersive encounter. Throughout the book, by engaging with the multi-faceted nature of immersive storytelling experiences, Gröppel-Wegener and Kidd provide tools within which critics can examine and engage with the complex field.

This is not a book for the making or practicing of immersive storytelling experiences; rather, it specifically aims to inform those who engage critically and analytically with this type of work. The final chapter

emphasises the book's short and quick capture of the current status of the field. It is one of the first books that attempts to encompass the diversity of genres that fall under the description of 'immersive storytelling'; and although this is a vast territory to cover, by primarily applying their critical framework to the wide world of *Harry Potter* (from novels and films to theme parks and exhibitions), Gröppel-Wegener and Kidd are able to touch upon the smorgasbord of genres.

Critical Encounters with Immersive Storytelling is a wonderfully straight-forward, streamlined read. For those familiar with the scholarly work around immersion and participatory theatre, this book will read as a contemporaneous survey; for those engaging with this field for the first time, this book will serve as a comprehensive introduction to the complexity necessary for critical engagement. With more theatre and performance work falling under their category of 'immersive storytelling', whether as self-defined or not, Gröppel-Wegener and Kidd's timely framework provides a foundation for those who critically engage with it.