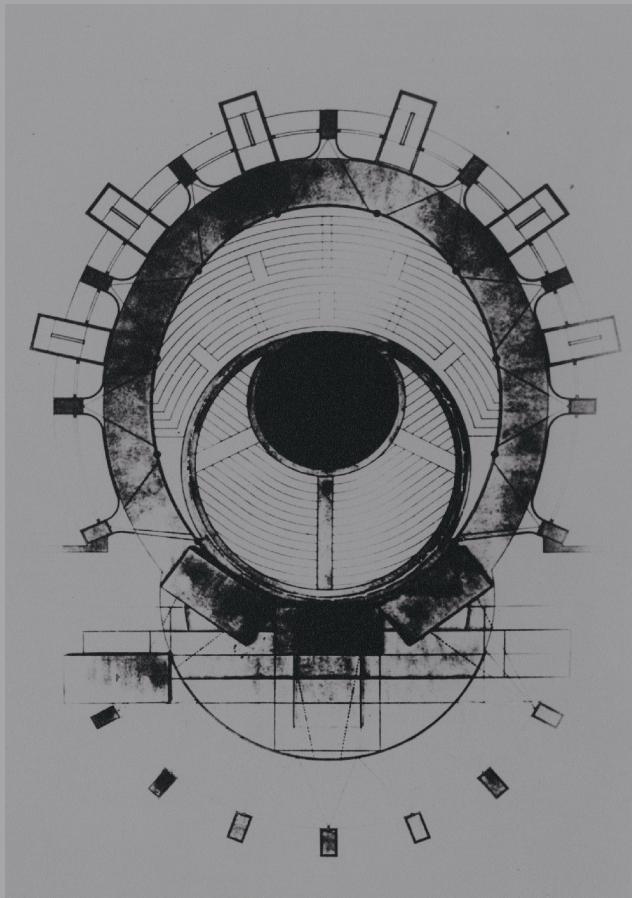


# REINVENTING *REGIETHEATER*



*The Actor-Director Relation  
in Rehearsals*

*Johannes Maria Schmit*

# Reinventing *Regietheater*

## The Actor-Director Relation in Rehearsals

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*Projekt Totaltheater für Erwin Piscator, Berlin,*

*Grundrisse der Bühnenvarianten [floorplan of the stage variations]* (1926)

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the crisis of *Regie* (i.e. of the agency of directing) in a post-#MeToo landscape. It argues that the outset of this crisis lies in an expansionist gesture – rooted in the avant-gardist ambition to merge art and life – by which directors have conflated artistic mandate with managerial control; a gesture culminating in the toxic institutional cultures painfully exposed during the last decade. Starting from this point of no return, the thesis examines the question of how to acknowledge the fact of directorial power abuse *without* cutting our practices off from the potential – or even the necessity – of directorial agency as such. Its title “Reinventing *Regietheater*” thus carries the tension between a historical form of theater (generally known as “directors’ theater”) and a yet-to-be-found future expression.

Conceived as artistic research, the discrete focus of the thesis is the rehearsal space and its confines. Within the micro-scale of the latter, the crisis of *Regie* reverberates first and foremost in the non-foreseeable instances of the actor-director interaction; namely in the increasing scrutiny applied to the tool of *improvisation*. In contrast to the prevailing strategy of eroding the rehearsal space’s symbolic boundaries (in the interest of directorial accountability), the thesis conceptualizes – practically as well as theoretically – a “Space of Rehearsals” as a heteronomous zone of safe but ecstatic play. This “Space of Rehearsals” is constructed through a rehearsal method informed by the psychoanalytic concept of transference as well as the interaction framework “Wheel of Consent”.

To answer its main questions, the thesis presents a “written part” as well as a set of “online resources” containing the documentation and “re-stagings” of the practical experiments. Four “books of *Regie*” present methodological reflections, a critical genealogy of a *theater of directing* (based on the author’s symptomatic practice) as well as the central concepts. Three so-called “Pre-studies”, devised through practical work with professional actors/collaborators form the empirical basis of the thesis, sketching out different possibilities for the actor-director relation in a re-invented *Regietheater*.

In the proposition resulting from the above, directorial agency does not necessarily sit with the director. Nevertheless, the disciplinary divide between actor and director is upheld; as well as the radical asymmetry in the distribution of authorial power, albeit in temporally limited and co-curated iterations. The main argument of the thesis is thus that the artistic potential of the historical form of *Regietheater* can be salvaged without taking a revanchist or revisionist stance: the idiosyncratic directorial agency known as *Regie* has its place in consent-based rehearsal settings.

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Video Diary; <i>video, 6h13min</i> .....	VD
The prompted interview: Sarah’s, the actress’, edit; <i>video, 51 min</i>	
The prompted interview: Johannes’, the director’s, edit; <i>video, 1h</i>	
“A/synchronicities at Play”; <i>split screen video, 2 min</i>	
“The Sweat of Fiction - the actor-director relation in centimeters”; <i>split screen video, 11 min</i>	
Claire’s Director (Pre-study #2); <i>pdf, 15 pages</i> .....	PS#2
Director in the SERVE quadrant (excerpt of an improvisation); <i>video, 7 min</i>	
“A Study in Transference”; <i>split screen video essay, 32 min</i>	
Letter to Johannes; <i>pdf, 3 pages</i> .....	LTJ
Letter to Claire; <i>pdf, 12 pages</i>	
“The practical knowledge of the Wheel applied to rehearsals”; <i>pdf, 11 pages</i>	
Anders’ Director (Pre-study #3); <i>pdf, 32 pages</i> .....	PS#3
Work Demonstration: “Rehabilitating Asymmetry in the Actor-Director Relation”; <i>split screen video, 59 min</i> .....	WD

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## **REGIEBUCH 1 (Introductory Material)**

## A THE PLURAL OF CRISIS IS CRISES. Preface

“alles nur künftige ruinen / material für die nächste schicht”  
[“all but future ruins / material for the next layer”]

Einstürzende Neubauten

Sometime in June 2020 I felt compelled to look up the plural of the English word “crisis”. The pandemic was only a few months old by then, a vaccine far from probable and the wild type of the virus was rampaging over the globe. In the news we saw the images of American cities in flames, national guard, and activists in covid masks clashing after the police killed an innocent man named George Floyd. Meanwhile, in the city of my home university, Stockholm, 47 shootings were being reported in the first half of the year alone. In the gruesome abduction (and later murder) of 19-year-old rap star Nils “Einár” Grönberg local gang violence staged itself; sending the political alliances of my progressive Swedish friends into troubled waters. With both the sales of firearms as well as anti-racist self-education books culminating at an unprecedeted high in the U.S., not only Europe's former transatlantic bulwark appeared to be on the edge of a civil war. The situation in my home country was as explosive, with the controversial Covid measures enforced by the Federal Republic of Germany refurbishing the trenches between East and West.

I had begun my dissertation the year before in what retrospectively appeared like “orderly times”. After some more rounds of global despair in my immediate surroundings (the Beta, the Gamma, the Delta variant) I tried to convince myself that this state of exception was going to last for at least as long as I was to be a doctoral candidate. Unbothered by this helpless attempt of my psychic apparatus to shortcut to the so-called final stage of grief, i.e. “acceptance”, one crisis has nevertheless *kept on chasing* the other until today. In fact, by the time of completion of this preface in 2025, the sequential implication of the “chase” image

seems no longer apt for the situation; in the moment I am describing, one crisis is rather experienced as *piling onto another*, propelling humanity vertically up the ruins of its future.

Struggling to gain an overview from this bird's-eye view imposed in June 2020 – i.e. in the vertigo of a health crisis piling onto a social crisis piling onto a climate crisis piling onto a geopolitical crisis – I found out that the plural of “crisis” is “crises”. All the while, my project description on the homepage of *Stockholm University of the Arts* boldly stated that my research set out to address the various “crises” the director faces today. English being the second language to most of us, none of my colleagues – peers or faculty – took notice of the mistake; (we are content with understanding each other in pretty much the same way as I imagine medieval scholars were fine communicating in “good enough” Latin.) But for a linguistically hystericalized mind like my own at the time, and plagued, like every artist, by pre-modern notions of similitude, the discovery was anyway revolting. How can the plural of a word possibly contain the *exact same number of letters* as the singular form? Is the analogous suggestion here that many crises are as good as one crisis? Or that one crisis is encompassing all other crises?

### *A thesis written in the trenches of the culture wars*

Surely “the pandemic” can be traced in the DNA of this thesis dedicated to the discrete crisis of *Regie* or *directorial agency*; as well as the reverberations of a theater of war stretched out over Eastern-European territory. But already by the middle of the 2010s some other political momenta became manifest that had steadily eroded the systematic premises of an avant-gardist *directors' theater*.

With the presidential campaign of an American real estate investor in 2016 a cultural undercurrent suddenly surfaced in the mainstream of the Western public that came as a shock to my field. The so-called alt-right (short for: “Alternative Right”) had long cultivated its styles of transgressions in the “rehearsal space” that is the anonymized internet (cf. Nagle 2018); but only the first inauguration of Donald Trump as president further consolidated the rise of this

culture from the abyss. Slowly, it became clear that the traditional domain of leftist art after 1968 – transgression of conservative constraints, liberation from social inhibitions, in short: “desublimation” (cf. Bowring 2011) – had fallen in the hands of a re-invented right wing. Seemingly overnight, the “fun” of the avantgardes, i.e. their “core business” (or “side gig”) of *épater les bourgeois* [shock the middle classes] had suffered a hostile takeover. From 2017 on, the “bourgeois” was going to be shocked by the “conservatives”.

For directors socialized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century this reversal meant a massive disorientation. When the highest U.S.-authority can take the spot of the “enfant terrible” then dissident theater makers might have run out of the cultural fuel that incited them to venture for their profession in the first place. (As of today, many of them still find themselves stuck on “planet transgressive art”; abandoned with a bunch of dangerous incels [Involuntary Celebatories].) This unsettling process can also be represented by applying the Freudian cosmology of *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. If the post-war project of a critical left was to insist on the existence and agency of an unaccountable subconscious by the means of artistic expression – thereby constantly putting the restrictive measures of a conservative *superego* into question – the alt-right revolution turned this logic upside down. With neo-conservative politicians asserting their “backstage self” (Goffman 1959) in the public sphere the *Id* – the joy of irresponsible play, as it were – has moved up into the heart of the conscious institution (of which the White House may be the ultimate archetypical cypher.) The arts in turn, pushed out of their traditional domain, are settling with the place left vacant by the traditional right, i.e. the *superego*. And in their most progressive shape, they are now often providing the work of inhibition, of control of impulses and of policing morally inferior conduct (Fisher 2013; Liu 2021).

### *Resisting to “Fight the good Fight” (1 Timothy 6:12)*

The massive political agency the New Right acquired in the 21st century – on the political surface as well as in terms of underground, partly terrorist, organization – has thus

drastically limited the playing field of the left-leaning arts to which the directors' theater historically belongs. *Directly*, in terms of aggressive policies derived from the populist assumption of a “cultural-Marxist” bias in public service or funding; but, arguably, even more *indirectly*, in terms of an internal state of alarm manifesting as a self-instituted *cordon sanitaire* meticulously policed from its left side<sup>1</sup>.

Over are thus the times when progressive Marxists could actively venture into the intellectual territory of nationalist conservative or even fascist thought, as was the case with Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht studying Carl Schmitt in the 1920s (cf. Haacke 2012). It appears unthinkable to stage – as dissident German director Frank Castorf did in the 1990s – a cult novel of the Skinhead movement (*Clockwork Orange*; published 1962, staged 1993) or to engage ambivalently with Ernst Jünger’s *In a Storm of Steel* (published 1920, staged 1997). Given the extended reach of the New Right and, consequently, the increased risk of being mixed up with it, it is not only the classical artistic strategy of *subversive affirmation / strategic overidentification* that falls out of the repertoire; more importantly, it has – as such – become impossible for the left-leaning arts to ever take a conservative stance. Not even where it would be strategically productive, as for instance when opposing neoliberal acceleration.

For the longest time during my research – for fear of my argument in favor of directorial agency being called authoritarian or “structurally aligned” with right-wing populist thought – I found myself speeding in the hamster wheel of “progressivism” instead. Knowing that an ever-growing and powerful right is quick to appropriate any leftist self-criticism, I felt unable to critically scrutinize the recent interventions into what I will come to describe as the “Space

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of the left-leaning German “Studentenbühne” [students’ stage] which emerged in the run-up to 1968 and produced the proponents of the later *Regietheater* cf. Hänzi (2014, 95-99). As a symptomatic text spinning the idea of a “cultural Marxism” for the right-wing cf. Minnicino (1992).

of Rehearsals". Given the consequences of being misunderstood, my own writing was mostly driven by the unconscious ambition to be "fighting the good fight" and appear as "progressive".

For the sake of knowledge production, however, I eventually had to pretend to myself that the miserable deadlock just described held no power in academia. In what is to follow, I am therefore deliberately appropriating a *classical* conservative stance where I deem it necessary for progress (as for instance in case of the (anachronistic) disciplinary division between actor and director). To put it dialectically: given the power of the new right wing and the accelerated progressivism it constantly propels the left into, I have felt the unfamiliar urge to – occasionally – protect the arts against politics.

\*

Granted: a doctoral thesis is not supposed to attempt a petty intervention into a cultural-political dynamics that might change its mechanism again in some few years from now. The reason I am invoking what has been categorized as the "culture wars" – which, according to a growing number of voices, are already coming to an end at the time of writing this preface – is to shed some light on the force field in which my research about the discrete domain of actor-director relations has taken place; to point out the magnetism of the poles, as it were, necessarily pulling my findings in both directions. (At the peaks of this *polarization*, I oftentimes had to refrain from writing; or, if I had not resisted, simply scrap the "opinion piece" I had produced the day before.)

Against the backdrop of this cultural push and pull of the last years, it has been difficult to know when exactly to be assertive in my writing, when to mediate or when to be polemic. Given the time-capsuled authority of its own format, a dissertation that is a debate article in disguise will run out of steam quickly. Instead of getting to react to it with the immediacy a

proper debate requires, the receiver is confronted with the condensed thinking of several years that – at once – breaks loose from a seemingly muted echo chamber. If the following is therefore oftentimes marked by a deep ambivalence, it is, again, in an attempt to “hold the tension”; making the opposing voices speak to each other dialectically and thereby possibly even *bridge* conflicting approaches in theater today.

## B THE SPACE OF REHEARSALS. Constructing our problematic

### *Brief overview and purpose of the thesis*

In this thesis, I start out with diagnosing the crisis of *Regie* or *directorial agency* as a crisis of the actor-director relation. In my reading, this crisis is brought about by an *expansionist take* on the rehearsal space historically rooted in the avantgardes’ ambition to approximate life and art. In this expansionist motion of breaking down the rehearsal space’s “walls” (from inside), directorial agency ends up conflating artistic mandate with managerial power over actors; which has led to what we nowadays refer to as “toxic” institutional cultures. In the micro-scale of the rehearsal space this crisis reverberates foremost in the non-foreseeable moments of the actor-director interactions. Here, namely the *improvisation* or *live direction*, essential tools of rehearsing, have come under scrutiny for being the privileged site of unwanted transgressions.

In reaction to this crisis brought about by the *expansionist take*, the aim of this thesis is to analyze and reconfigure the actor-director relation in the post-#MeToo landscape. While concerned with finding more ethical alternatives to the unilateral power of a director constructed as a “genius”, my theoretical and practical proposals simultaneously challenge the

emancipatory claims of current forms of non-hierarchical, participatory rehearsal practice. It is thus concerned with identifying and re-imagining sustainable forms of directorial work without losing the polemic challenge associated with the presence and power of *Regie*.

My main argument is that the artistic potential of the historical form of a directors' theater can be salvaged without taking a revanchist or revisionist stance against the rightful critique of the *expansionist take*. As I hope to show, an idiosyncratic directorial voice *will* find its place within a specifically designed consent-based rehearsal method. But rather than using the process of consenting as a mere means to regulate the relational antagonism in the rehearsal space, the thesis advocates possibilities to apply it actively as a means of theatrical creation.

In the following analysis, I examine the tendency to no longer differentiate between the logics of the *inside* and *outside* of the rehearsal space; but rather to evaluate its interactions by applying the same moral standards to both spheres. In various ways I then elaborate on the phantasmatic vanishing point of this motion as a rehearsal space liberated of affect, psychodynamics and transferential energy. In response, I put the nuancing question that further frames my research interest: How do we avoid *mystification* of the actor-director relation while simultaneously acknowledging the fact of an unconscious at work in our collaborative processes?

In that regard I propose what I call the “Space of Rehearsals”. The Space of Rehearsals – as I conceptualize it by help of practical experimentation with the interaction framework “Wheel of Consent” – is the sphere of safe and ecstatic play, of desire and freedom that opens between actor and director. It is supposed to safeguard highly intuitive operations by which, amongst other things, the (self-)exposure to the *non-foreseeable*, the *im-provisus* is possible again.

Ultimately, the proposition for a “Reinvented *Regietheater*” that can be deducted from my findings hopes to address and remedy the shortcomings of both the *expansionist take* on

directing as of a *dismantled rehearsal space*; and restore a Space of Rehearsals within the proper dimensions of the actor-director relation.

### *The concept of “Regie” and the construction of the thesis*

You are currently reading the “written part of the thesis”. The other part of my “Documented Artistic Research Project” (DARP) is to be found in the “online resources”, accessible through the link or the QR-code below.

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2649533/2649531/1895>



On this “exposition” site, hosted by the “international database for artistic research”, you will find all the materials which – for media-related reasons – could not be included in this “written part”. These materials consist namely of the documentation or the “re-stagings” of the practical experiments which are described in detail in *Regiebuch 3*.

\*

The “written part” at hand is structured into four volumes. I have called these *Regiebuch* 1-4 to mark the fact that they are all written from the perspective of directing. In German-speaking theater, a “Regiebuch” is a notebook in which all tangible choices regarding the mise-en-scène are noted during rehearsals. Foremost a work tool administered by the assistants, the

“Regiebuch” crystallizes into its final form by the premiere date, allowing for the revival of the show at later points.<sup>2</sup>

In the bigger picture of this thesis, the literal translation of “Regiebuch” gives me the opportunity to emphasize the specifics of the German term “Regie” (and thereby of the foreign word “Regietheater” figuring prominently in its title). Because “Regiebuch” does in fact not translate into a “director’s book” – that would be “Regisseurbuch” – but into the “book of *Regie*”; a term I have so far rendered as “directorial agency”. Far from being a pedantic one, this distinction presents a central wager in my research endeavor: because even though I initially sat out to describe the crises of the director (as described in the Preface), I have during my research closed in on a perspective in which “directorial agency” oftentimes transcends its institutionally assigned “host”.

As German theater scholar Peter Boenisch poignantly differentiates in the introduction to his English publication with the telling subtitle *The thinking of Regie*,

[w]e should note here the more than trivial slippage between *Regietheater* (literally ‘directing theater’) and its English rendition as ‘directors’ theater’. The latter places the individual artist rather than a theatrical practice and process in the centre, thereby disclosing a rather different ideological mindset. Writing a history of *the* director as a celebration of original inventions of ‘great

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<sup>2</sup> The necessity for a *Regiebuch* illustrates the emergence of directing as an art form of its own. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* it was Austrian director Max Reinhardt who introduced it to the routines of rehearsals: “In order to control [their] complexity (...) Reinhardt’s productions required a *Regie-buch* [sic] that went much further than all previous promptbooks. The *Regie-buch* became a plan for the production, incorporating interpretive ideas as well as staging concepts. This concept was later utilized by Brecht and developed into the *Modellbuch* (“model book”), a full record of the production that could be used as a pattern for succeeding productions.” (Izenour et al. 2024) The practical, work-in-progress character of the *Regiebuch* is further accentuated by the type of re-usable springback binder it typically comes in. As the enthusiastic authors of the Wikipedia article about “Klemmbinder” [springback binder] put it: “Unlike other binding methods, the cover can be reused by removing the old book block and replacing it with a new one. *In this way, the springback binder can be used for new content indefinitely*. Furthermore, no machines are required for binding.” (Wikipedia Contributors 2025; my translation, my emphasis) If you are reading the copy of this thesis provided by the archive of *Stockholm University of the Arts* you are holding a *Klemmbinder* in your hands.

men' (...) immediately pushes issues of authorship and authority to the fore. (Boenisch 2017, 7)

In contrast to a “directors’ theater”, the German term “Regietheater” allows for an emancipation from the individualizing deadlock “*the director*” is likely to find herself/himself in. Instead, the term *Regie* suggests the “recognition (and indeed, celebration) of an essentially collective, social and political practice” (Boenisch, 7), shifting the focus “from an exploration of what it is ‘the director does’, or what they should do, to what *directing* does, (...) tapping into and realizing the potential of *what theatre does and may do.*” (Boenisch, 5)

To reiterate this distinction in the more mundane usage of the shared theater lingo in the German-speaking field: *Die Regie* (“directing” is gendered feminine in German) cannot be on the toilet during rehearsals – or at least it would sound overly solemn to formulate it like this. *Der Regisseur*, however, (“the director”, here in the male gendered form) can very well be absent from rehearsals for a moment. But *die Regie* can only be “absent” in the metaphorical sense of making lousy or no choices for the mise-en-scène; a fact for which “she”, in turn, will be held accountable as a concrete person or as a concrete artistic team by audiences and critics.

The term *Regie* thus bridges a supra-individual or impersonal element with a concrete director or artistic team. By translating *Regie* into “directorial agency” instead of “the agency of the director” I want to account for what follows from this: that directorial agency – both “out in the field” but also specifically in the experimental one-on-one set-ups of this thesis – might very well at times sit with the actor. It is also for this reason that the question of “authority and authorship” (Boenisch, 7) associated with the assertion of *Regie* as idiosyncratic agency should not be dismissed too easily; the question is rather how *Regie* can travel between actor and director without undermining what I will soon come to describe as the “disciplinary divide”.

\*

Before I return to the structure of the thesis after this important clarification, please note that – for reasons of readability and cultural mediation with the Anglo-Saxon context – I occasionally use the terms “directors’ theater” and *Regietheater* synonymously. Nevertheless, the English term is always charged with the subtext of the continental theater tradition I am grappling with in the following.

The “written part of the thesis” thus consists of four “books of directorial agency”. *Regiebuch* 1-4 relate to each other in multiple ways; building on one another in a linear fashion but also communicating over each other’s heads. The “Introductory Material” of this *Regiebuch* 1 stands in close dialogue with the “Concluding chapters” of *Regiebuch* 4; a fact I have tried to account for by naming the respective chapters “A, B, C” and “X, Y, Z”. The chapters of *Regiebuch* 2 and 3, on the other hand, are *numbered*, with a continuity that spans across both books (Chapters I., II., III., 4, 5, 6, 7, 8).

Roughly speaking, *Regiebuch* 2 attempts for an overarching critical genealogy of a *theater of directing* – organized by a subjectively installed periodization of my “lived experience” in the field. Written in the form of personal, non-fiction literary essays, it presents an “average vita”, snatched from the realm of “memoir” by means of theoretical cross-readings. My overall ambition here is to stimulate interest in salvaging an ethically reinvented *Regietheater* by demonstrating its conceptual possibilities.

*Regiebuch* 3 presents the practical experiments conducted as “Pre-studies”. All three of them are devised through practical work with professional actors/collaborators. Forming the empirical basis of the thesis, they sketch out different possibilities for the actor-director relation in a reinvented *Regietheater*. (In speaking of Pre-studies, I allude to the tradition in painting where the tricky details of the composition are studied in isolation.) Within the confines of *Regiebuch* 3, they are interlocked with a set of essays which were written in direct response to

the respective Pre-study that preceded them. In that regard, this *Regiebuch* also displays the “genetic evolution” of how the research unfolded over the last six years.

In *Regiebuch 4* I synthesize my findings by discussing “11 deductions” derived from them. These are then, in a final step, tested against a “case study” presented by Lars von Trier’s production diary documenting the making of his film *The Idiots* (1998).

### *Research focus: the site of the thesis*

Given the vertigo described in the preface (the plural of crises, that is) the act of scaling down the research focus to a discrete site bears some heavy political implications. How to legitimately focus on the probable extinction of a marginal figure like the *theater director as auteur* when there are crises, seemingly more urgent, pressing right outside – and into – our rehearsal spaces? Or posing the same question from within: if the thesis at hand postulates the configuration of actor and director to be the volatile site where the crisis of *Regie* actualizes, what then are the actual dimensions of the space those two agents are meeting in? *What is the scope*, as it were, of the rehearsal space in this thesis? What does it encompass, what does it exclude?

To address this question, it is necessary to temporarily scale down the timeline to a rather precise moment and let go of the mythical dimension of crisis evoked in the preface.<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly maybe, the more immediate trigger of this research project lies in the cultural sensibility that arose from the movements invested into fighting directorial power abuse. The year 2017, as the year in which the #MeToo movement gained global traction, figures as a

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<sup>3</sup> The image invoked by both the *Einstürzende Neubauten* song quoted as a motto as well as by the “piling crises” of my preface is the painting *Angelus Novus* (1920) in its catastrophalist reading by Walter Benjamin. According to Benjamin, the painter Paul Klee depicted “the angel of history [who] sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage on wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet (...) [w]here we perceive a chain of events.” (Benjamin [1955] 2012, 257–58)

watershed moment in that regard. In my observation, whenever directorial accountability has been at stake since, the urgent question regarding the rehearsal spaces' proper dimensions is implicitly asked: Where does the legitimate directorial intervention into the integrity of the actor's work begin, and where does it end? Which instruction is part of an "aesthetic transaction" embedded in the conventional, social situation of the rehearsal and which one is not? However helpful, the spatial unit delineated by the physical border of the rehearsal space – its walls – seems to be too unprecise an indicator to draw a clear line by now. Sometimes the "rehearsal space" – conceived in the following as: the space of play, desire and freedom that opens between actor and director – is much bigger; sometimes it is minuscule.

To account for this dimension-shifting quality of the arena of encounter opening between actor and director, I will in the following speak of the "Space of Rehearsals" whenever I am *not* referring to the spatial unit of the rehearsal space or studio. The definition and practical establishment of this Space of Rehearsals will be a pre-condition for the sought "Reinvented *Regietheater*", i.e. a form of the performing arts where directorial agency and the singular voice that comes with it have their *legitimated* place.

## **Directorial expansionism**

Many of the transgressions that have led to the crisis of trust between actors and directors this thesis aims to address have to do with an expansionist take on the rehearsal situation. Following the avant-gardist inclination to break down the barrier between art and life, directors of the *auteur* lineage have oftentimes attempted for a "total grip" on their ensembles. Despite the "incessant supervision" (Grotowski [1968] 2002, 44) they already

exercise during rehearsals<sup>4</sup>, once supplied with managerial power on top, they start to administer “extra-aesthetic” resources as well; as artistic runners for instance they also distribute material security or attention amongst the members of “their” company. In the expansionist vein in question this can be done according to taste-driven favoritism, or worse, by coercion into “transactions” *outside* of the rehearsal space.

As we had to painfully acknowledge since 2017 this literally *excentric* movement of directorial practice is intrinsic to the work of some of the aesthetically most ground-breaking artists, oftentimes rooted deeply in the emancipatory aesthetics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Emblematically, when the director of the Belgian company *Troubleyn*, Jan Fabre, talked publicly about the risks the discourses of #MeToo bear for the actor-director/choreographer-dancer relation – namely for what he called “the *secret* bond between dancer and choreographer” (VRT Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie 2018; 1:31; my emphasis) – he launched the writing of the collective letter that would ultimately lead to his conviction in court.<sup>5</sup> Along these lines, the heightened awareness of the past years regarding directorial power abuse marks a cultural-historical point of no return; where *mystification* (as a means of conceptualizing the actor-director relation) just “won’t do anymore”. And while this point of no return is also the starting point of the thesis at hand, it simultaneously sets out to

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<sup>4</sup> Polish Director Jerzy Grotowski, for instance, whom I am quoting here in a moment of self-critical reflection regarding his “directorial wing-spread” was famous for imposing “night rehearsals” on his ensemble. The full quote reads like this: “The actor’s work is also a thankless one because of the incessant supervision it is subject to. It is not like being creative in an office, seated at a table, but under the eye or the [director] who, even in a theatre based on the art of the actor, must make persistent demands on him to a much greater extent than in the normal theatre, urging him on to ever increasing efforts that are painful to him.” (Grotowski [1968] 2002, 44) As Polish critic Jan Kott put it: “I don’t know whether the members of the group made their triple vows as monks and nuns, but this theater was modeled along the strict lines of a cloister. Grotowski demanded from his followers seclusion, obedience, and physical training almost beyond the limits of human endurance.” (Kott 1984, 140)

<sup>5</sup> The letter in question also evokes one of the most brutal iterations of the abovementioned quid-pro-quo transactional logics; with a performer claiming that working with Fabre “came down to the proposition: No sex, no solo.” (Ómarsdóttir et al. 2018) For more details regarding the accusations cf. Bradshaw (2021). For the final verdict cf. Harris (2022)

formulate its conundrum: how do we acknowledge the fact of directorial power abuse *without* cutting ourselves off from the potential – or maybe even the necessity – of directorial agency as such? How do we avoid mystification while including the fact of an unconscious element at work in our collaborative processes?

### *The discrete scope of the research: bracketing the mise-en-scène*

Returning to the discrete dimensions of this research: While invested into proposing a Space of Rehearsals that – from its outset – subverts the unilateral agency of the director, I need to emphasize that toxic institutional cultures (as the ones just described in the case of *Troubleyn*) are entrenched into systems beyond this very space's immediate reach. And while those patterns and logics must be addressed and remedied, they are arguably beyond the scope of what is researchable with the specific methods of artistic research.<sup>6</sup> In this thesis, the influences of, on the smallest scale, concrete work environments and, on the biggest, “interlocking systems of domination” as captured in bell hooks' formulation of the “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (*Cultural Criticism & Transformation* [1997] 2005) will thus foremost be felt in their reverberations; on the inside of the walls of the rehearsal space's container, so to speak.

So, while my methodological response as artistic researcher cannot encompass the full institutional scope of the crisis brought about by what I have described above as “directorial expansionism”, I have hopes that the empirical basis of the thesis (as generated in the Pre-

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<sup>6</sup> For a more promising methodology in this regard, i.e. a sociological one, cf. for instance Denis Hänzi's *Die Ordnung des Theaters – Eine Soziologie der Regie* [The Order of the Theater – a Sociology of Directing] (2014). In Hänzi's application of Bourdieu's analysis of the field of art onto the specifics of German theater – in which there also are “positions” within the competition, available by certain “positionings” which, in turn, are based on the “dispositions” of the individual artist – the serious games of distinction and domination show most clearly (2014, 43).

studies) is accessible to critically invested interpretations from the fields of sociology and/or cultural studies. My own motivation as an artist, however, springs foremost from an interest in the effects of the backlash that came in response to the disclosures concerning the *expansionist take*. Because as a theater maker I could not help but notice the abrupt change within the Space of Rehearsals' dimension in the wake of the 2017 moment. A change manifesting foremost in the ambition to rigidly formalize the power differentials within rehearsals, namely by "contractualizing" possible director-actor interactions. But also, most noticeably, in the concrete scrutiny that was suddenly applied to what only yesterday seemed like an essential tool for creation in rehearsals, i.e. the *improvisation* amongst actor colleagues or the technique of *live directing* as a variation of it. Understandably, after the revelations of #MeToo, the *unforeseen* (which is the literal translation of the Latin word "*im-provisus*") came under suspicion for being one of the privileged sites – if not *the* site – where abuse of power would take place *within* the rehearsal space.

To account for this fact this thesis brackets the *mise-en-scène* (i.e. the composition of the final staging, conventionally regarded as the main site of directorial work) and focuses exclusively on the volatile moment of rehearsing; understood as the precarious interaction between director and actor closest to the realm of improvisation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The exclusive focus on the rehearsal process – respectively on the specifically directorial methods of organizing it – is mirrored by the relatively new approach of "genetic research" in theater studies. For an overview of this theoretical domain cf. the chapter added to the re-edition of Bradby and William's seminal *Directors' Theatre* from 1988: "Dis/playing Direction: 'Genetic Research' as New Approach in Directors' Studies" (Bradby and Williams 2020, 210–28). Meanwhile, the crisis around *im-provisus* as the unforeseen – or the unforeseeable – can of course also be traced in the realm of the *mise-en-scène*. On an aesthetic level, namely the deconstructivist ambition in postdramatic theater, i.e. the quest for the "irruption of the real" (Lehmann [1999] 2006, 99), suddenly found itself in a *cul-de-sac* where the fetishized "emergence" and the unwanted "emergency" converged. In that collision the relation of audience and actor naturally comes into focus. As well as the institution's attempts to administrate the performativity of their unforeseeable encounter by, for instance, the means of "trigger" or "content warnings".

## The dismantled rehearsal space

The rigorous attempts to remedy the volatility of this interaction in the post-#MeToo era must certainly be seen in the light of the “directorial expansionism” that preceded it. As directors unilaterally pushed the space of (their) play, desire, and freedom far beyond the rehearsal space’s physical limit, the current – and ongoing – counterreaction invests into removing its symbolic thresholds more or less completely. By inserting various systems of “checks and balances” into the actor-director relation, rehearsals have been seeing an increasing formalization in the interest of directorial accountability; with daily check-in rounds and regular meetings between the theater’s leadership and the ensemble – without the presence of the director – as only two examples. The most radical progressive stance is to no longer make a difference between the logics of the *inside* or *outside* of the rehearsal space when evaluating its interactions; but rather to apply the moral criteria applied to any given social situation “outside” onto its inside.

As a symptom of this conflation, in particular the markers of identity performing in both realms – inside and outside of the theater – have been of special interest in the last years. Drawing on the linguistically invested “politics of the performative” (Butler 1997) mapped out by American philosopher Judith Butler, the use of racial slurs on stage, for instance, has been problematized accordingly. Analogous to the logic at play in the court system, where the quotation of a slur is necessary to prove the fact of a hate crime, its (re-)iteration through a canonic dramatic text is conceived as a repeated incidence of “injurious speech” (Butler, 43-70). Grafted onto the performing arts, this is arguably a more radical application than in the original concept; while the British philosopher J.L. Austin, who set the stage for the “speech act theory” Butler builds on, contested the possibility of any “happy [i.e. successful]

performative” within the linguistically “parasitic” (Austin [1962] 2009, 22) space of theater<sup>8</sup>, we obviously are not so sure anymore today. The speech that performs outside of the court room/the theater, seems to do so inside, too; and is therefore potentially “re-traumatizing”.

The problem only gets more palpable, when applied to the actor-director relation in rehearsals. In the wake of the global Black Lives Matter protests, a white German director was called out for shouting a character name invented by himself (“slave”) at a black German actor during rehearsals (cf. Slevogt 2021). The regrettable specifics of this drastic case aside (proof of yet another toxic culture at work), the controversy that spun from it also highlighted the symptomatic of the progressive stance. In a public letter written from the perspective of actor colleagues standing in solidarity (the letter was signed by 1341 theater professionals within 24 hours (Slevogt 2021) the term “transgression” [Entgrenzung] – first attributed to the aesthetical realm of the avant-gardes – exemplarily makes a second entrance in the same paragraph as an ethical category [Grenzüberschreitung].

I can create any form of “transgression” [Entgrenzung] in the rehearsal process, but this “transgression” must not spill over into the framework conditions that protect and embed this core rehearsal process. One thing is the artistic process, the other the production process; there must be a boundary between the two so that artists can work in a protected environment and withdraw. However, a rehearsal has reached its boundary the moment a director calls a black man a slave, that is not appropriate in any context. It is a racist transgression [Grenzüberschreitung] that turns free spaces into spaces of verbal violence. (Schmidt et al. 2021, my translation)

“Transgression” in its first iteration [Entgrenzung] denounces the issue of directorial expansionism (of a director *transgressing* the rehearsal space’s limits in an excentric motion to

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<sup>8</sup> When discussing the failures (“infelicities”) of a performative speech act, Austin asserted that “a performative utterance will (...) be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage (...) Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in a way *parasitic* upon its normal use (...)” (Austin [1962] 2009, 22)

intrude into the integrity of the actor's identity). But in search of a non-toxic, "clean" actor-director relation<sup>9</sup> the second iteration [Grenzüberschreitung] paradoxically further corroborates the rehearsal space as a place onto which the moral standards of the "outside" apply in equal measure.

Adhering to a comparable logics, the "Value-based Code of Conduct of the *German Theatre and Orchestra Association* suggests to "conduct myself respectfully and appropriately towards others (*in accordance with the law*)" (Presidium, Board and members of Deutscher Bühnenverein 2021; my emphasis); both inside as well as outside the artistic work process. Addressing the possibility of subconscious "bruise" in human signals, it raises awareness to the fact "that my conduct towards other people may have a different effect than intended. Because of this, I will endeavour to communicate clearly and *unambiguously*." (Presidium; my emphasis)

As I will come to argue in more depth, the phantasmatic vanishing point of this tendency is a rehearsal space cleared of psychodynamics and transferential energy. A place where the director "has no subconscious" – or at least does not make use of it – and where "affect" is no longer the material pre-condition of acting. But on what level do performatives actually operate once the rehearsal space is defined as the space of play, desire and freedom that opens between actor and director? What level of our consciousness do they emerge from when part of a generative improvisation between actor and director? Is speech within this container injurious *per se* or potentially an actual repetition, a quote "*parasitic* upon its normal use" (Austin [1962]

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, this ideal relation is usually projected onto the independent scene: "Modern discourse teaches us to think critically and holistically. This also includes rejecting any form of totality. Independent artists and companies show us how to work without torment, without outrageous titles, and without a knife at our throats or at our fly." (Schmidt et al. 2021; my translation)

2009, 22)? And – in case it belongs to the realm of the *unforeseeable* – by what method can its agents (namely the structurally more powerful directors) be held accountable for them?

Suffice it to say for now that the counterreaction to directorial expansionism fails in defining or practically establishing a Space of Rehearsals in which directorial agency, i.e. *Regie*, has a legitimate place. Within the dismantled rehearsal space of the “politics of the performative” the converse to the stated goal (protecting the “core rehearsal process”) is bound to happen. Because with the assumption of “transgressions” as *equally* performative inside and outside the rehearsals space “production process” and “artistic process” will eventually collapse into one.

### *Juridification and heterotopia*

In the institutional theater, the dismantling of the walls in question – this time by an expansionist move in a concentric motion (i.e. from outside-in) – necessarily opens the rehearsal space to *institutional* modes of dealing with the antagonism intrinsic to the actor-director relation. The consequent insertion of protocols, reprimands, procedures and in the final consequence, the summoning of the law has been described as a “juridification of the artistic sphere” [Verrechtlichung des Kunstraums] (Engler and Raddatz 2016, 63; my translation). Together with the more recent ambition of the formerly “feudal organizations” (i.e. the German city theaters) to catch up with the strategies of New Public Management, this process of “accountabilization” moreover translates into control and mediation through organized feedback and various report systems.

After the revelations of 2017, the theaters opened to a legion of soft-power experts from the professional-managerial class, such as diversity agents, leadership coaches and intimacy coordinators. Moreover, taking inspiration from less formalized structures, such as independently produced, oftentimes activist art, other ways of pre-establishing social

consensus have been invited, too; the most common tool here being the Code of Conduct (CoC) as a document informing beforehand about gratified behavior in the rehearsal space.<sup>10</sup>

Despite their limited means of “enforcement”, these latter forms are nevertheless proto-juridical, in the sense that they run the risk of reproducing the symptoms of a “juridicist” culture. Unless handled with great care they reproduce “the problematic dominance of law within the ethical life of our society” (Loick 2020), resulting in triumphalism of the righteous as well as the impossibility to reconcile *by means of* the very trial.<sup>11</sup> The ambition to level out the difference between the logics of inside and outside by the means of *juridification* can furthermore be read as the desire to strip the rehearsal space of its “heterotopic” status. In the linguistically invested conception of French philosopher Michel Foucault the “heterotopia” is a place where “other” behaviors are sanctified, a world within a world that is upsetting the outside. On a discursive level “[h]eterotopias are disturbing (...) because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ (...)” (Foucault [1966] 1994, xviii) Delineating the concept from *utopias* that “run *with* the very grain of language” (Foucault, xviii; my emphasis) Foucault names prisons, hospitals, ships, Turkish baths as examples of physical spaces living up to these anti-syntactical, heterotopic logics.

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<sup>10</sup> In the wake of the #MeToo moment the Royal Swedish Theater (Dramaten) made it a routine to read out its own CoC at the first rehearsal. For an interesting case study of how the cultural watershed moment in question was instrumental to restructuring same organization according to its efficiency goals, cf. Fagerlund et al. (2023).

<sup>11</sup> The impossibility of reconciliation by the very means of a lawful trial – one of juridicism’s main contradictions – is the subject of a great satire in the TV-series *The Good Fight* (King et al. 2021). In a para-court installed by a self-appointed judge (“Judge Wackner”, in fact a copy shop clerk) every ruling is consumed by the two rivaling parties forced to shake hands and to utter: “I respect you and I love you.” For a historical critique of juridicism as well as for a critique of that critique cf. Loick (2017).

The rehearsal space could easily be added to this list.<sup>12</sup> Directly embedded into – and often architecturally encircled by – the administrative apparatus of the theater organization, it is supposed to safeguard a sphere of highly intuitive operations between actor and director.<sup>13</sup> Or in case this definition would be excluding of an analytic, let's say Brechtian take on rehearsing: it is supposed to safeguard a sphere of provisional tryouts, radically open to the materials it assembles next to each other. Put even more simply, it is supposed to guarantee the possibility of play between actor and director.

## **The Space of Rehearsals opening between actor and director (the disciplinary divide)**

I am aware of the fact that “play” is far from a simple notion. In the present work, it encompasses the wide spectrum between Friedrich Schiller’s “radical autonomy” in aesthetics<sup>14</sup> and Betty Martin’s more therapeutic take on a “fundamental human need” (Martin

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<sup>12</sup> The fact that the theater figures so little in Foucault’s reasoning may be surprising given his familiarity with its processes. During his time at the *Maison de France* in Uppsala, Sweden (1955-58) he ran a small theater group for which he provided “la mise-en-scène” (Eribon 2011, 138) and took care of the costumes when touring. However, the scale of this set-up was probably too small to fully encounter the dynamics between the heterotopic rehearsal space and its surrounding institution. For a further elaboration on the Foucauldian “philosophical theaters”, his “dramas of knowledge” and “critical dramaturgies”, I may refer to Fisher and Gotman (2019).

<sup>13</sup> To what extent the demands of the rehearsal space conceived as a Space of Rehearsals *upset* the needs of the institution surrounding it is the material to endless anecdotal showdowns in the history of the German *Stadttheater* [city theater]. The most emblematic one to my knowledge would be the tale of German director Einar Schleef forcing the *Intendant* [artistic director] of *Schauspiel Frankfurt* to broom the floors of the main stage after a needle had pierced the foot of an ensemble member. Sardonically, Schleef had the ensemble sit in the auditorium and watch patiently as the CEO was “doing his sweep”.

<sup>14</sup> According to Korte, “Schiller’s concept of “play” is a decision to suspend rationality in an exercise for, or rehearsal of, human freedom in the political realm.” (Korte 2019, 147) In his series of *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* “Schiller’s *Spieltrieb* (play impulse) transcends the dualism between *Formtrieb* and *Sinnestrieb* (moral and sensuous impulses). According to Schiller, the *Spieltrieb* is the earliest disinterested

and Dalzen 2021, 196). In any case, “play” will only happen in a Space of Rehearsals restored to its proper dimensions, i.e. in the tension of what I have called a *dismantling* and an *expansionist* take on its symbolic confines. Establishing this Space of Rehearsals aligns with the research’s ambition to “reinvent *Regietheater*”; as a yet to be found form of the performing arts where directorial agency and the singular voice it brings has its *legitimated* place in the face of the actor. I will therefore come to propose an actor-director relation rooted in a consent-practice of which the end goal is “play” (Chapter 7); rigorously avoiding the pitfalls of a juridicist epistemology to the advantage of a psychoanalytically informed concept of interrelation.

In the following, this Space of Rehearsals is constituted by an opening between actor and director as two distinct disciplinary agents. As I will spend some time historicizing and thinking through directorial practices in *Regiebuch 2*, I shall first specify my concept of the “the actor”. As I argued above, the actor-director relation in rehearsals is the volatile site against which a re-invented *theater of Regie* has to “test itself”; understanding what “actor” I refer to is therefore a necessary step when constructing our problematic.

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activity of humankind – free from necessity.” (Korte, 147) This notion is in turn deeply intertwined with Schiller’s and Goethe’s reasoning about the autonomy of the arts; a concept that according to Boenisch – while often “misunderstood as advocating a withdrawal from reality” (Boenisch 2017, 56) – engenders an “artistic ethos more effectively than much manifestly ‘political’ art” (Boenisch, 70) In Schiller’s own words: “Art, as ‘the pure product of separation,’ is freed from the restraints and expectations of bourgeois society, and only because it is autonomous can it use its critical potential to project the hope for a more humane society into the future” (Schiller [1795] 1967, 544)

### *The director in a theater based on the art of this actor<sup>15</sup>*

As a premise to this thesis, the disciplines of acting and directing are maintained as utterly distinct, i.e. *not* interchangeable. In an anachronistic gesture – given the post-disciplinarity of contemporary performing arts – the thesis thus postulates the actor and the director as two incommensurable, yet fully interdependent, “dispositions”; propelled into their respective professions by a fundamentally different talent as well as a different desire structure. Leaning on Belgian philosopher Luce Irigaray’s feminist conceptualizations of two sexes that find themselves asymmetrically positioned towards the symbolic order, it is possible to conceptualize actor and director as two genres in the sense of generic groups, with different genealogical tasks<sup>16</sup>. As I will come to argue, this incommensurability of the disciplines paradoxically bears the potential to actively work with asymmetry and reach an equilibrium of agency on another level. Briefly put, actor and director *collaborate* in an antagonistic set-up; they sit with the contradiction of their respective needs regarding the rehearsal situation – and put it into play.

Without advocating a false essentialism (obviously there are people who are both, actors *and* directors) this insistence on distinct disciplinary competences is necessary to keep the well-intended discourses of organizational management and/or other transdisciplinary applications at bay. By insinuating potential interchangeability, addressing actor and director

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<sup>15</sup> The collaborators of my “Pre-studies” have each – within our respective configuration – pitched in with their specific conceptions of what an actor “is”. The following section springs primarily from the ongoing dialogue with Anders Carlsson, who is currently finishing his artistic PhD at Gothenburg University; researching acting in relation to phronetic competences. Cf. Carlsson (2026; forthcoming) For a discussion of “a theater based on the art of the actor”, also cf. *The Theatre’s New Testament*; an interview conducted by Eugenio Barba in 1964 (Grotowski [1968] 2002, 27–53).

<sup>16</sup> Irigaray’s affirmative take on “sexual difference” appears as anachronism when held against the backdrop of hegemonic gender theory and its current expression in queer feminism. To unload the critical potential of Irigaray’s “third position” and clear out the assumption of essentialism I refer to Soiland (2010).

as performative iterations (“functions”), these rarely capture the specificity of the artistic work, let alone the craftsmanship of the two disciplines in question.

On the contrary, it may be important to point out that the actor’s disciplinary competence begins where the directorial skill ends; and vice versa.

### *Some normative thoughts on the “skill of the actor”*

In the following I do not set out for a grand theory of acting but rather approximate – by means of a sequence of definitions – what I understand by the “*actorial* skill”. (In lack of an English adjective complementing the noun “actor” and the verb “acting”, I will make use of an idiosyncratic creation – “actorial” – in the following. The word is meant as a counterpart to “directorial” and suggests a similar bridging of the supra-individual and the concrete agency of the actor as discussed in the context of *Regie* above.) A first useful definition to depart from would be the following:

*An actor is someone who can act truthfully under imagined circumstances.*

While obviously carrying the baggage of a tradition informed by Russian theater innovator Konstantin Stanislavski, this wording has the advantage of already slightly relaxing the link between actor and character; a link that is otherwise an essential one in this legacy. Insofar as “imagined circumstances” do not necessarily imply a dramatic template but can intervene already *before* text/literature come into play. Reversely, in a *postdramatic* sense (a theater after drama, that is), “imagined circumstances” could just as well be deducted from the very situation of the performance; which would then be “overwritten” by the imaginary scene the actor makes of the material circumstance. Imagined circumstances can therefore also be “given” not through the fiction, but through agreements between actors, or with the director.

At any rate, and independent of the stage genre: the ability to alter the reality of the “performative situation”, i.e. the public’s perception, by the means of one’s imaginary *and* to be able to act on it, approximates the specific actorial skill I have in mind.<sup>17</sup>

With these clarifications, we may arrive at yet another normative definition; this time striking already “closer to home” regarding the theater of *Regie*:

*An actor is someone whose intentional immersion into imagined circumstances has real effects within a staged situation.*

Note that in this case the Stanislavskian category of “truthfulness” has given way to “real effects”. With this small discursive shift, I intend to unchain the systematic actorial work from the genre of psychological realism and the notion of mimetic “believability” (for which it may have been originally designed.) “Real effects” is anything that happens *for real* to an audience in “a staged situation”, be it their change of perception regarding the space, to their own absence or presence, their identification with or alienation from the person on stage etc. The definition can thereby also accommodate acting styles aiming for the “total act” – in the sense of Grotowski’s actorial transubstantiation – as well as a Brechtian ambition towards an audiences’ critical engagement with the scene.

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<sup>17</sup> This more classical normative definition is currently being critically reviewed in regard to the inclusion of neurodiverse students into acting training (cf. Glen 2025). At the IPPT (International Platform for Performer Training) in 2024, theater maker, actor trainer and researcher Zoë Glen also advocated for those unable to imagine (a phenomenon of neurodiversity known as *aphantasia*) to have access to acting education. While I strongly believe that there is place for everyone in the theater, I do not think that everyone has to have access to every one of its many disciplines. My own relative proximity to *aphantasia* for example – and thereby my distance from its opposite pole called *hyperphantasia* – positioned me quite early in the field of directing. Because whenever I tried to be on stage with people that live up to my definition given above, I was regularly thrown by my own inability to immerse into an imagined circumstance and act on it; as opposed to my fellows to whom it seemed effortless.

The real effects in question are not positively measurable, but also far from esoterically diluted. Actors and directors cultivate vernacular languages for them which allow to reconstruct the specific “auto-poetic feedback loop” (Fischer-Lichte [2004] 2008) of a given performance. Oftentimes audiences trained in the “art of spectatorship”<sup>18</sup> also contribute to this shared effort of tracing the “real effects” of specific moments during the show.

### *Further delineation*

The emphasis of the definition above on “*intentional* immersion into imagined circumstances” allows us to furthermore bracket two figures, or rather: artistic strategies. Both of them are of great significance for the canon of postdramatic theater forms and nevertheless quite uninstructive when re-framing the actor director-relation in a reinvented theater of *Regie*.

The first one is the performance artist who – informed by the production modes in fine arts – imports the strategies of the white cube to the black box or showcase. Operating independently of a directorial gaze, this figure (as well as the actor who mimics its strategies) rarely requires a work with imagined circumstances. Real effects in the context of his or her artistic strategies are much more likely to be based on “real actions”, i.e. interventions that change the situation of the audience on a close to quantifiable plane. Given this level of intensity, traditional performances are usually designed as one-time-events. Which is also why the classical performance artist rarely deals with the paradox of acting, i.e. the necessity to *repeat* the action of immersion into imaginary circumstances at certain, prescribed hours.

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<sup>18</sup> For Brecht’s concept of an “art of spectatorship” [Zuschaukunst] cf. Brecht (2015, 174). Unfortunately, the agents “lagging” in this constellation of audience and makers are often the theater critics, who – for fear of revealing their own phenomenological embeddedness – will insist on primarily semiotic descriptions of the *mise-en-scène*.

The other figure to bracket is the *amateur* or so-called “expert of everyday life”.<sup>19</sup> This theatrical “readymade” has played an important part in the process of assimilating the fine arts strategy of the same name for the stage; thereby opening a rich field of expression. Because of their *passive* installation in the framework of the *mise-en-scène*, the amateur/“expert of everyday life” is however far from intentionally altering a public situation by the means of immersion into imagined circumstances.<sup>20</sup> In reference to Michael Kirby’s “Not-Acting/Acting continuum” I therefore maintain acting, for the purpose of this thesis, as “as something *done by*, rather than something that is *done for or to*, a performer” (Kirby 1987, 6; my emphasis). This postulate then returns us to a paraphrase of the definition above:

*As soon as an agent within a staged situation succeeds in affecting the audience by projecting an imagined circumstance, we can speak of an actor.*

This “action” of acting can very well succeed in “amateur theater” as well, which saves us from a gate-keeping (read: professionalist) stance when defining the competence in question. Nevertheless, the systematic training acting students get today (to which the Stanislavski System still provides the blueprint) is a way to cultivate this competence. Hereby, the *stunt in the imaginary* at a prescribed hour – even though it may occasionally fail – is at least not left to chance.

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<sup>19</sup> To my knowledge, it was primarily the German theater collective *Rimini Protokoll* that promoted the usage of this term – “Experten des Alltags” – during the 2000s.

<sup>20</sup> Paraphrasing Boris Groys’ reflections in *On the New* (1992) one could describe this delineation in yet another way: the re-negotiation of the border between the “profane space” (of the streets) and the “cultural archive” (of the theater institution) which the insertion of *amateurs* into the *mise-en-scène* allows for, is foremost a matter of directorial, aesthetical composition; and cannot be accounted for in a thesis focusing on the very process of rehearsals.

Because of this specific competence the actor also steps on stage *opposite* of (I'm tempted to say: in opposition to) the director. Even in a classical *Regietheater* set-up, where authorial power is asymmetrically assigned to the advantage of the director, the competence of the trained actor may thus constitute an equality, an eye-to-eye-level on another, less quantifiable plane. The skill to produce real effects (to act, in the literal sense) by immersion into imagined circumstances has its own rigor, exceeding the director's full control and authorial reach. It requires a "technical apparatus" that both, actor and director, have to "put up with".<sup>21</sup>

### *"The Performer" as a technical innovation (the postdramatic promise)*

With the advent of postdramatic aesthetics in the second half of the last century "the performer" was introduced as the figure that would eventually relieve us from the "bulky luggage" of the actor. Or more specifically speaking: the performer was dealt to my generation of directors as someone who had shaken off the "bulky luggage" which the actor still carried around in the form of "imagined circumstances" linked to an invisible psychological backdrop. And while in the conservative theater institutions motivations deducted from dramatic literature in fact were the only legitimate way for a director to "move" an actor's body, the performer (of the independent scene) held the promise of being able to simply exist on stage for no specific reason other than the show; all the while – and here lies the emphasis for my definition – *not* projecting an imaginary whatsoever.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. the interview with French director Laurent Chétouane with the telling title "An actor is always awkward – that is why s/he has to stay" [Ein Schauspieler ist immer peinlich – deshalb muss er bleiben] in Primavesi et al. (2004, 284–91)

Against this backdrop the actor started to appear increasingly unflexible. For the protagonists of the *Bildertheater* [theater of images] of the kind that dominated in the 1980s (cf. Marranca 1996) it was impossible *to compose* with this heavy machinery; which is why actors would be replaced with dancers, mime-artists or dedicated amateurs unless their work with imaginary circumstance could be prevented from the outset.<sup>22</sup> From these various disciplines and the form-follows-function take on theatrical composition *the performer* was finally synthesized as a slim vehicle, adjusted to the aerodynamics of a stage liberated from literary imaginaries.

*Proposition: An actor is someone who effectively curates the interplay of projections in a staged situation.*

Thanks to this – from today’s perspective – transitory period of the performer’s hegemony, the linkage between a person on stage and an assigned character loosened up even more. And with the linkage between dramatic text and actor finally up for sale the more interesting questions can be asked: what is an *actor* on stage who does not take the literary template as a starting point? What does s/he *do* up there? And more specifically: what does an actor without a literary template do on stage that differs from the work of the performer? What can be conceived as the actor’s work today that does not retrogressively point to a state *before* the performer but *beyond* instead? With the baggage of psychological realism dropped for good on the one hand, and the enthusiasm for the performer’s “lightness” coming to exhaustion on

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<sup>22</sup> Asked about what he would like his actors to think about while they are on stage, American director Robert Wilson (1941-2025) answered: “Their dishes.” (In a conversation with the author in October 2001 at the occasion of rehearsals to *Leonce and Lena*, Berliner Ensemble)

the other, an *actor* post-drama, possibly also post-character has become conceivable. But most importantly, an *actor post-performer* seems in reach.

In this regard, it is the capacity of actively *projecting* an imagined circumstance to the ends of *creating real effects in an audience* that is essential in what I conceive as the specific skill of the actor in this thesis. In vernacular use, however, the term “projection” has a primarily negative connotation. As a concept appropriated from psychoanalytic theory, we have weaponized it (like many other of the Freudian “inventions”) to deflect the possibility of being “overwritten” by the unconscious of another subject. If somebody is “projecting” they are, still in vernacular use, not seeing the “real situation”; and the act of “projecting” is always something that happens *to them*. The actor however has trained and acquired the competence of projection, of consciously “overwriting” a “real situation” within the performance. In a “theater based on the art of the actor”, as Polish Director Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) has proposed it, the act of projecting even defines the actor-audience relation insofar as it engages a “psychic conflict” between the two agents. In Grotowski’s scenario, the array of projections at play between actor and director during rehearsals are sublimated into the encounter with the audience during the show. And as the following quote implies, the projected “feelings” are technically productive on both levels.

The performance engages a sort of psychic conflict with the spectator. It is a challenge and an excess, but can only have an effect if based on human interest and, more than that, on a feeling of sympathy, a feeling of acceptation. In the same way, the [director]<sup>23</sup> can help the actor in this complex and agonizing process only if he is just as emotionally and warmly open to the actor

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<sup>23</sup> Eugenio Barba, the editor and interview partner of Grotowski’s *Towards a Poor Theater* accepts the translation of “producer” instead of “director” throughout the book. A confusing fact that I have “corrected” in the quotes I use for the sake of readability; and to which Boenisch provides an explanation: “Where notions of *Regie* and *mise en scène* emerged in German and French theatre as early as the 1770s, the term ‘director’ entered English theatre language comparatively late (...) Before [the 1950’s], the theatre director was referred to as ‘producer’, placing the industrial organization of theatrical entertainment and the pragmatics of cultural production and circulation over and above any sense of ‘art’.” (Boenisch 2017, 2)

as the actor is in regard to him. (...) This element of warm openness is technically tangible. It alone, if reciprocal, can enable the actor to undertake the most extreme efforts without any fear of being laughed at or humiliated (Grotowski [1968] 2002, 47)

If the psyche is an energetic economy – as Freud suggests with his *constancy principle* ([1895] 1966, 297) on which the Grotowski of *The Constant Prince* (1965) and generations of psychoanalytically informed directors are building – then the “psychic conflict” and “excess” in question have to be fueled from somewhere. I argue that the *specific actorial skill* feeds off the ability to access the array of affects present in the space (of both the performance as well as of the Space of Rehearsals) and return them in the form of concisely *projected* feelings or emotions.<sup>24</sup> In that sense, affective dynamics are the raw material of acting and their accessibility a pre-condition for the work of the actor.

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To re-embed the term “projection” in the psychoanalytic cosmology – in other words: to keep the armory of its daily-life use sealed for the “time” of this thesis – I prioritize the closely related, but broader concept of “transference” from here on. Within the transference, the structural interdependence of reciprocal “projections” is already accounted for, which makes it harder to play a “blame game” of “who started?” Moreover, the technical productivity of the workings of a transference – often emphasized by psychoanalytic practice – allows to

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<sup>24</sup> For now, I am stressing the sublimation of affects into *emotions*, but it can just as well be *thoughts* or *ideas* the actor projects. Cf. also Michael Kirby’s elaborations on what he terms “simple acting” on the continuum of acting and not-acting: “At times in real life we meet people who we feel are acting. This does not mean that they are lying, dishonest, living in an unreal world, or necessarily giving a false impression of their character and personality. It means that they seem to be aware of an audience – to be “on stage” – and that they react to this situation by energetically projecting ideas, emotions, and elements of their personality, underlining and theatricalizing it for the sake of the audience.” (Kirby 1987, 7)

portray the projections within the actor-director relation in a *constructive* vein, similar to Grotowski's analogy quoted above. I will unpack the concept of transference in more detail in chapter 5. For now, I introduce it briefly to conclude my sequence of definitions with a last proposition:

*An actor is someone who effectively curates the transference (i.e. the interplay of projections) in a staged situation.*

## C ARTISTIC RESEARCH NOW AND *AVANT LA LETTRE*.

### A methodological statement

In the following chapter I attempt to contextualize the relatively new field of (publicly funded) artistic research in the longer tradition of modernist self-reflection within the performing arts. The formats developed by Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) and Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) shall serve as emblems of the reflexive traditions we can draw from when asking questions to “the theater” and its technical standards today. By anachronistically discussing the “artistic research methodology” of those two innovators of directorial practice, I hope to further situate my own attempts of conceptualizing the actor-director relation in our present moment.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> In introductory terms neither Brecht nor Stanislavski tend to be associated with their ground-breaking re-conceptualizations of the director's work, i.e. their shaping of the Space of Rehearsals. If the scholarly focus is not merely on the playwright (Brecht) or the acting pedagogue (Stanislavski) it will often be placed on their *mises-en-scènes* (as semiotic products). For some intriguing descriptions of Brecht in rehearsals cf. representatively Weber (1967) and for Stanislavski Toporkov ([1950] 1998).

Along the road of this inquiry, I move in and out of a broader discussion of the institutional framework this thesis emerges from; of how artistic research might dialectically relate to the art field it attempts to speak to. In doing so, I also present the “pedagogical undercurrent” implicit in my project by considering the different traditions at stake in today’s performing arts education, its various ways of transmitting knowledge. (Here in particular the institutional transition from art *academy* to art *university* (cf. Swedish Research Council 2015) and the resulting discontinuance of the master-apprentice-model will be of interest.)

Searching for the containers of knowledge in our art form, i.e. the formats appropriate for documenting and analyzing relational settings intrinsic of theater making, I will eventually elaborate on literature scholar Jane Gallop’s “Anecdotal Theory” as a practice of theorizing.

## Forms of knowing

To start with, I propose a brief discussion of the Aristotelean knowledge forms in which artistic research is able to operate in. In doing so, I draw heavily on a philosophical reading of Aristotle that, for good reasons, has developed specifically within the Swedish national context. With the country having undergone one of Western Europe’s most radical transitions – from a welfare state rich in tradition to a deregulated neoliberal economy – and with this system change spanning over a single generation only<sup>26</sup>, the Swedish intellectual response to technocratic governance is, in turn, one of the most productive and robust ones. Consequently, when read against this present-day political backdrop (where the rule of *techne* misunderstood

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<sup>26</sup> The so-called “system change” in Sweden has been saluted by the newspaper *Economist* as “the next supermodel”. “Government’s share of GDP in Sweden, which has dropped by around 18 percentage points, [since the early Nineties] is lower than France’s and could soon be lower than Britain’s. Taxes have been cut: the corporate rate is 22%, far lower than America’s. (...) When it comes to choice, Milton Friedman would be more at home in Stockholm than in Washington, DC.” (*The Economist* 2013) Also cf. Bornemark (2018, 243-47).

as *episteme* comes at the expense of *phronesis*) the three Aristotelean knowledge forms triangulating in artistic research blossom in their topicality.

In terms of the specifically Swedish critical response in question, it is necessary to mention here the unique institutional setting of an academic research center dedicated to studying practical knowledge. Its discursive intervention into the presupposed hierarchy between generalizable and situated knowledges may be flatteringly described as a “Söderturn”; referring to an intellectual microclimate fostered under the (vice-)rectorat of literature scholar Ingela Josefsson at Södertörn University in Stockholm (2000-2010).<sup>27</sup> As early as 1977, a reform of the Swedish higher education system stipulated that the training of intersubjective professions such as nurses, teachers, police etc. must be based on scientific grounds and is therefore to be integrated into an academic curriculum (cf. Josefsson 2006, 186). The absorption of these formerly practice-based educations into the epistemological premises of the university brought about clashes of knowledge forms that critically inform today’s national debate. Most prominently in the form of Swedish philosopher Jonna Bornemark’s analysis of the disempowering effects of ratio-based management in intersubjective professions. As experience has shown<sup>28</sup> and as I hope to demonstrate below, there is a lot to glean/harvest for the thinking and practice of artistic research in this regard.

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<sup>27</sup> The “Center for Studies in Practical Knowledge” (Centrum för praktisk kunskap) at Södertörn University was established in 2001. Josefsson was vice-rector from 2000-03 and rector until 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. for example an early research collaboration between the Swedish National Academy of Mime and Acting (Teaterhögskolan i Stockholm), the Swedish Institute of Dramatic Art (Dramatiska Institutet) and Söderturn University. In the publication resulting from it – *Berättelse och kunskap* [Story and knowledge] (Dahlstedt et al. 2006) – the practical knowledge as well as the work language of the performing artist are the objects of study.

## *The knowledge forms triangulating in artistic research*

For this knowledge project, I would like to suggest artistic research as the place where a specific artistic discipline gets to reflect the standards and conditions of its craft (*techne*). These conditions will differ through time and are site-specific. But the general assumption that there could be a potential science (*episteme*) to the technical aspects of theater making – in my case: the *crafting* of the actor-director relation – shall be my starting point. However, to productively discuss the relation between the two knowledge forms just mentioned – *techne/craft* and *episteme/science* – it is necessary to (re-)introduce a third one they triangulate with: *phronesis* – often translated as *prudence* or *practical wisdom* – being the other form of *practical knowledge* that Aristotle suggests alongside with *techne*.<sup>29</sup>

In a simplifying attempt for a definition, and alongside with Josefson's proposition, we could delineate the three forms as follows:

*Episteme* is concerned with knowing *that*.

*Techne* with knowing *how*.

*Phronesis* with knowing *when*. (cf. Josefson 2015, 53)

With this small formula, it already becomes clear that *phronetic* knowledge relates most intimately to the uniqueness of a given situation. *When* is it practically *prudent* to act – here and now – and when is it practically *prudent* to refrain from acting? A question that can neither be answered by *knowing that* (X always leads to Y); which would be the realm of generalizable knowledge, of things that are “always true everywhere”, i.e. the realm of *episteme*. Nor can the issue be reduced to the question of a mere *knowing how*: I might well have the technical, even

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<sup>29</sup> In Book VI of his Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle identifies a total of five forms of knowledge. *Techne* and *phronesis* (the two practical knowledges) as well as *episteme*, *nous* (intuitive reason) and *sophia* (philosophic wisdom). Cf. Aristotle ([350 BC] 1925)

embodied skills to provoke a certain reaction (as a director, for instance), but I cannot apply them in a pre-scripted order given the specificity of the situation. *Phronesis*, although like *techne* a knowledge related to taking action, can thus not be written down as a manual and passed on to someone else without mediation. As Bornemark suggests, it is “a *composed skill* that we cannot get rid of” (Bornemark 2020, 64; my emphasis, my translation<sup>30</sup>); it is based on the perception of our senses and feelings – as informants of the unique situation – as well as our experience actualized.

### *An example from the performing arts (Meyerhold's biomechanics)*

In the history of acting, the development of the so-called “biomechanics” can exemplarily further illustrate the interplay of the three knowledge forms at stake. Originating from Russian actor and director Vsevolod Meyerhold's deeply modernist investment into engineering the “new human”, biomechanics were the attempt to systemize physical actorial expressivity. Using the “objectivity” of the fairly new photographic media as a reference point, Meyerhold believed to have discovered three steps into which *any movement* could be divided: отказ (*Otkaz*, anticipating countermovement) / посыл (*Posyl*, execution) / стойка (*Stoika*, stop, fixation) was thus the pattern that was pronounced “always true everywhere”. This “scientific” discovery was then formalized into exercises for actors training – the so-called “études” – that were to form the basis of a craft; to be applied in the stagings of the time as well as of future generations (cf. Hoffmeier and Völker 1995).

With the installation of Socialist Realism as state doctrine for the arts and the political murder of Meyerhold in the wake of it (the director was killed on the 2nd of February 1940) the

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<sup>30</sup> Please note that all translations of Bornemark (2020) are my own. For reading in English cf. Bornemark (2018).

further dissemination of biomechanics, however, came to a sudden end in Soviet Russia. The lineage of actors familiar with it eventually shrunk to a handful, with the embodied knowledge being passed on clandestinely during Stalinism. In terms of technical descriptions, a few materials (manuals, as it were) had also spread to the West and were picked up by theater makers and ensembles such as, amongst others, Peter Brook in England or the Swedish experimental group Teater Scharazad (1976-1986). Especially the scarce photographs and film copies of the études recorded in the 1930s served as models for theater practitioners when trying to reconstruct the plasticity of the form in question during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, there was often no conception of *when* to apply biomechanics in a staging which could render the possible *know how* of it close to useless. (To my knowledge, the only recording of biomechanics applied in an actual staging lasts for about one and a half minutes (cf. Deliberate Movement Theatre 2015); an excerpt of Gogol's "Ревизор" [Revisor / "The Government Inspector"] from 1926, in the direction of Meyerhold himself.) It was thus only after the end of the Cold War, when the grand disciples of the apocryphal lineage got to attend rehearsals in the West, that the form could be salvaged in its playfulness and general applicability.<sup>31</sup>

To rephrase by returning to the triangulation of the three Aristotelean knowledge forms discussed above: the assumption of an *episteme* structuring human movement and thereby actorial expressivity inspires a new *techne* (biomechanics). The *techne* however needs to be

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<sup>31</sup> In the context of the kinship terminology in use here, Russian director and pedagogue Gennadij Nikolajewitsch Bogdanow deserves particular mention and praise. Surrounded by the aura of being "Meyerhold's Enkelschüler" [Meyerhold's grand-disciple] he taught regular courses at the Ernst Busch theater academy in Berlin since 1991. It is in this context he also collaborated on several stagings with Thomas Ostermeier (the artistic director of today's *Schaubühne Berlin*). Throughout the 1990s, Bogdanow also entered a close exchange with German theater scholar Jörg Bochow, whose thorough and systematic documentation of biomechanics is of inestimable value. Cf. Bochow (1997) and Mime Centrum (2018).

balanced out by *phronetic* knowledge based on site-specific perception, attuned emotions, and accumulated experience (provided by Meyerhold's grand-disciples) in order to blossom.

### *Phronesis in the administered university: the “manualizing class”*

For theater practitioners the existence and value of a knowledge form specific to the situation may be self-evident: the fact of the play text being a mere “manual” that needs to be salvaged for the here-and-now during rehearsals is commonly accepted. And the performance of even the strictest *mise-en-scène* is always an exposure to the uniqueness of the situation for the actor.<sup>32</sup> In an academic field such as artistic research, however – historically emerging from a university already structured on the premise of maximum plannability, i.e. the premise of New Public Management<sup>33</sup> – the place of *phronesis* must be re-asserted.

In attempting to do so we can luckily draw on already existing critical observations of other fields of practice; fields that are equally affected by the “transplantation” of their knowledges from the site-specific realms of apprenticeship onto the campus of the university. Nurses, teachers, midwives, and priests<sup>34</sup> are among the many examples Bornemark uses to demonstrate how the process of managerial streamlining – both in education as well as “on the job” – devalues phronetic competence, i.e. the *professional judgement* composed of sensual perceptions, situated feelings, and acquired experience. The philosopher therefore diagnoses our time with a “superstitious belief in manuals” (Bornemark 2020, 51), such as steering

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Tove Dahlberg's doctoral thesis *Slapp sängerna loss!* discussing the knowing-when from the perspective of an opera singer dealing with the libretto and its conventions (Dahlberg 2023, Chapter 6).

<sup>33</sup> Much has been written in that concern. Representatively cf. Connell (2013).

<sup>34</sup>All these professions have in one way or another served as metaphors for performing artists, be they actors or directors. Cf. the much-quoted aphorism of French *auteur* Jean Renoir: “The film-director is not a creator, but a midwife. His business is to deliver the actor of a child that he did not know he had inside him.” (Renoir 1974, 128)

documents and report forms, eventually leading to an overall *manual-ization* of intersubjective work situations.

In our time, we become blind to phronesis precisely because it cannot be turned into a measurable goal outside the situation. (...) The inside view that sees the value in the diversity of situations is rendered invisible because (...) it cannot be documented in a quality assurance system. We do not understand phronesis and turn it into *techne*, while we also misunderstand *techne* as something that should provide a manual where X always leads to Y according to the logic of episteme. (Bornemark, 64, my translation)

Bornemark goes as far as to diagnose the emergence of a “manualizing class” [manualiserande klass] (Bornemark, 89), i.e. an expanding stratum of employees foremost producing “manuals” in the shape of steering documents, guidelines and report forms. This “class” consists of professionals that are often not concerned or even familiar with an institution’s core activity, but only with its proceduralization.<sup>35</sup> In the high status these experts of a narrowed down *techne*-conception have assumed in recent years, our contemporary hierarchization of the Aristotelian knowledge forms is properly reflected. Exemplarily describing the managerial power yielded over one of Sweden’s most credentialled hospitals, Bornemark reconstructs the implied pyramid of knowledge: the more general the issues you deal with, the higher the status you assume in your field; while the work requiring situation-specific professional judgement – in that case, the work of the doctors and, even more, of nurses

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<sup>35</sup> The class-term Bornemark uses is not explicitly embedded into a sociological, let alone Marxist, perspective. The “manualizing class” however can be complemented with the broader concept of the so-called “professional-managerial class” (PMC) introduced by Barbara and John Ehrenreich in their two seminal essays (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1977a, 1977b). Following their definition the PMC consists of “salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function (...) [is] the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations.” (Ehrenreich 1977a, 13) Without delving too deeply into it, the contradiction of this class can be described as follows: given their lack of ownership in the means of production, the highly educated members of the PMC believe themselves to be empowering the oppressed classes, while their actual work consists of *steering them* in the interest of the capitalist 1%. With Bornemark’s “manualizing class” and the Ehrenreich’s revision of their own concept in mind (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 2013a, 2013b), it would be worth dedicating a separate study to investigating whether institutionalized artistic research establishes a PMC within the arts.

– is reductively seen as a mere execution of the “manuals” given out from above (Bornemark, 107-11).

Arguably, there is as yet no abundance of “controllers”, “HR-specialists” or “office managers” (the neologism replacing the previously unambiguously gendered “low-status job” of a “secretary”) impacting the core activity of institutionalized artistic research. However, this ongoing tendency – the *manualization* of practical knowledges – is to be kept in mind when we propose methods *as* artistic researchers. In our attempt for generality and universality – the academic epistemology as it were – we ourselves run the risk of narrowing down *techne* to mimic an “exact science” in the field of practical applicability; thereby sacrificing the dimension of *poiesis* (understood as the artificial creation of something unforeseen) linked to it. In our anticipatory compliance towards *documentable* artistic processes (which as such rather belong to the realm of *im-provisus*), *phronesis* oftentimes falls off the table. As artistic researchers within the institutions, we must therefore be critically aware of the strong interpellation – articulated foremost by requirements regarding the “impact” of the research – to provide the generalized “manual”, the extrapolatable “model”.

## **Aesthetic points of no return: Brecht as artistic researcher *avant la lettre***

Before further discussing how *phronesis* articulates itself in written form (by analyzing Stanislavski’s “documentation format”) I shall now return to the proposition that was my starting point: artistic research as the place where a specific artistic discipline reflects the standards and conditions of its craft by stretching towards its potential “science”. Here, Bertolt Brecht’s fantasy for an “international societ[y] of correspondence” (Gorelik and Brecht [1938] 1961, 114) consisting of “qualified experimental workers” (Gorelik and Brecht, 115) – the so-called *Diderot Society* – shall serve as our point of reference.

The notion of an exact science, an *episteme* organizing the intersubjective field of the arts, is of course practically inapplicable. Nevertheless, with the example of Meyerhold's biomechanics we have tangentially touched upon the productive effects of the very assumption that there *could* be a science to the craft (of actorial expressivity, in that case). When the arts (based in *techne* and *phronesis*) "stretch themselves" in the direction of "pure" *impractical* knowledge something interesting happens. Because obviously – in our field, too – there is "an intrinsic value in pure knowledge itself that is not governed by what is possible or prudent to do in a given situation." (Bornemark 2020, 71)

### *The Diderot Society & the modelbooks*

Brecht's attempts for a "theater of the scientific age"<sup>36</sup> are clearly informed by this promise of *episteme* in the sense of pure knowledge. In his "project description" for an association of artists modeled after classical scientific societies, the longing to escape the "thoroughly individualistic structure of the arts" (Brecht [1938] 1997, 257)<sup>37</sup> resonates strongly: "In contrast [to the arts], the sciences always had supra-individual [überindividuelle] tasks and objective criteria. They could be judged at any time on the basis of the subject matter

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<sup>36</sup> Brecht gave different names at different times to his overall aesthetic in theater. After his return to post-war Germany the term "epic theater" – developed in the 1920s – appeared too formal and the term "dialectical theater" was considered instead. "The theater of the scientific age" is yet another terminological attempt, maybe most resonant with the artistic research-paradigm. In her dissertation published ten years after Brecht's death, his collaborator Käthe Rülicke-Weiler discusses the different options, finally settling for the pragmatic "Brecht-Theater" in the vein of, for instance, "Shakespeare-Theater". Cf. Rülicke-Weiler ([1966] 1976, 225, endnote 2).

<sup>37</sup> The descriptions of the "Prospectus of the Diderot Society", that I will mostly quote from in the following section, differ slightly in English and German. Mordecai Gorelik, an American set designer, director and producer (1899-1990), whom Brecht met in 1935, took on the responsibility to coordinate the project overseas. When quoting his English translation, I am putting his name together with Brecht's as a reference (Gorelik and Brecht [1938] 1961). Where I deemed it more accurate to render the German words in a literal way, I use my own translation, and put only the German Brecht edition (Brecht [1938] 1997) I am using as a reference.

they set out to master.” (Brecht [1938] 1997) In the account of German theater historian Klaus Völker, Brecht’s projected *Diderot Society* thus

intended the systematic recording and collection of technical work problems of artists who were interested in the correct representation of the world and the conditions of human coexistence. Brecht was interested in the exchange between experimentally working artists, who were to provide descriptions of their methods and findings in the form of reports to the society. In this way, the members were to harmonize their technical vocabulary and help create a common terminology. (Völker [1976] 1999, 259; my translation)

In this perspective – of there being a potential science to the technical problems of theater making – a “modernist” notion of *progress* is certainly implied, historically manifested in the overall attempts of the classical avantgardes to self-institutionalize.<sup>38</sup> With the notion of *episteme*, a certain generational contract within the arts becomes tangible: because what is “always true everywhere” can be passed on, in Brecht’s own concern and words, *To Those Born After Us* [An die Nachgeborenen].<sup>39</sup>

Artistic research, in its outset, holds this same promise of continuity, of being able to build on each other’s results as artists, relying on the conceptual achievements of the past. Ideally speaking, artistic research thus represents the way out of a theater market’s historical amnesia, known to individualize “progress” in the shape of a “career”, i.e. the singular advancement of an artist with a (supposedly) idiosyncratic “signature”. In an ironic postulate against such notions of the theater director as “the visionary or the seer” (Gorelik and Brecht

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. for example the *Bauhaus*-School in Weimar and Dessau or the many “studios” researching acting techniques fit to the “new human” in early Soviet Russia. The film director Sergei Eisenstein, whom Brecht had also invited to contribute to the *Diderot Society*, is another good example of this spirit of *episteme* in the arts. In his terms, film montage is an almost objective language by which the audience’s reaction can be anticipated in the approximation to an exact science. Cf. Eisenstein ([1935] 2014)

<sup>39</sup> Brecht’s idiosyncratic German formulation that makes for the title to one of his “Svendborg Poems” is rendered differently in English depending on the translator’s choice: To Future Generations, To The Ones That Come After Us, To Those Who Follow In Our Wake. Even the most literal equation - To Those Born After Us – does not fully capture the echo of “Nachgeburt” in the title, i.e. the afterbirth/placenta.

[1938] 1961, 114) Brecht thus asserts the positive value taking over each other's means of expression: "The visionary ignores discoveries made by others; experiment is not among the mental habits of the seer." (Gorelik and Brecht, 114)

Further challenging this very notion of a (still effective) 19<sup>th</sup> century genius cult in theater, Brecht is also the first director to provide extensive and structured documentations of his own mise-en-scènes. His so-called *modelbooks* photographically depict the directorial *Arrangements*, i.e. the constellations of the actors on stage as well as their gestural material. Thereby documenting Brecht's stagings from one and the same visual angle – with a line of the dialogue underneath each photograph orientating us as to *where* in the piece we find ourselves – they strive to inform future attempts of setting up the same piece.<sup>40</sup>

What could easily be misread as an act of preposterous self-monumentalizing actually speaks to the core of applying "academic" values (read: the values of *episteme*) within the artistic field. By suggesting the repeatability of an experimental set-up, the gesture of the *modelbooks* thus borderlines positivist notions that artistic research, for better or worse, finds itself entangled in. In a "theater of the scientific age", they seem to suggest, there *are* aesthetic points of no return: a formal step that has been taken once does not have to be taken again. An *Arrangement* or an actorial gesture that was found in the process of one rehearsal period – as, for example, by Helene Weigel in "Mother Courage" at the *Berliner Ensemble* about 80 years ago – can be the starting point for a future one. It can be quoted and repeated.

All the while, the 106 *modelbooks* live a rather lonely life today: for the most part only accessible on site in Berlin (in the archives of the *Akademie der Künste*) and hardly ever

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<sup>40</sup> It is in fact the relative "dryness" of their format what sets the *modelbooks* apart from the portfolio or individual "artist statement" of a contemporary director. To further understand how far from self-promotion, dogmatism and pretense Brecht's invitation to work with the model is, also cf. his short text from 1951 "How Erich Engel uses the model" (Brecht 2019, 257–59)

published, they are far from being the living tools in the hands of contemporary theater directors that Brecht had envisioned them to be.<sup>41</sup> Obviously, in our zeitgeist there is some unease with the idea of “linear aesthetic progress” implied in their very format; and it probably took a society with a stronger teleological perspective, stretched into the phantasy of a dialectical, but ultimately advancing development to believe that there could be such a thing as *aesthetic points of no return*.<sup>42</sup>

## Considering the present moment: artistic research as institutional practice

Nevertheless, something of this teleological promise reverberates in the outset of institutionalized artistic research. Despite its pragmatic origins in the neoliberal reforms of higher education touched upon above, it seems to offer a framework – for directors at least – to meet on another platform. While “the field” is according to Swiss sociologist Denis Hänzi (2014) a “comparably unsafe” (Hänzi, 41; my translation) social sphere, where directors “fight to maintain or change the balance of power, struggle to assert their artistic claims or simply their bare existence *as artists*” (Hänzi, 29) artistic research contexts provide another *contract*

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<sup>41</sup> In that concern, they ironically share, despite better accessibility, the destiny of most artistic research publications. Cf. also the notable exception, i.e. the *modelbook* tool in a digital format, proposed by British theater scholar David Barnett on the homepage “Brecht in Practice” (Barnett 2025). For an English publication reproducing parts of the *Galileo*, the *Antigone*, and the *Mother Courage* model cf. Brecht (2019). Also cf. René Pollesch’s refreshing work with the *Antigone* model at *Zürich Schauspielhaus* (Fellmann 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Of which the sum, as Brecht put it in his *Short Organum*, would result in an “art fit for the times (...) at disposal of those who live hard and produce much, so that they can be fruitfully entertained there with their great problems.” (Brecht [1949] 1964, 186) My generation tends to think the GDR from its economically exhausted ending, but during the seven years after 1949 that Helene Weigel and Brecht were working together at the Berliner Ensemble the economical race between East and West was far from decided. Cf. also Heiner Müller’s so-called “Produktionsstücke” [production plays] discussing the dilemma of installing competitiveness amongst the workers within the socialist factory environments of the 1950s. As I will come to argue in *Regiebuch 2*, the *theater* productions of the GDR outran the West until their end, in terms of aesthetic standard and social relevance.

*of encounter*. Instead of meeting as singled-out competitors, who necessarily shield their knowledge from each other (mostly of working opportunities, but also of artistic methods, professional vulnerabilities, etc.), the academic values of “public access” and “shared knowledge” can in fact introduce a new gravitation into their conversation. In that sense, artistic research is echoing Brecht's hope to ultimately liberate “theater work” from the indecency of an individualized, and therefore somewhat intimate affair (cf. Weber 1967, 102).

I have myself experienced this discursive shift on several occasions during my PhD studies.<sup>43</sup> In the best of all scenarios the quality of encounters between theater makers under the umbrella of artistic research thus compensates for the obstacles an exiled communist writer faced in the 1930s when trying to launch a “Diderot-Gesellschaft” from his temporary home in the Danish countryside.<sup>44</sup>

### *Research of the arts or research of the world (by the means of art)?*

Using Brecht's (historically aborted) project of a “scientific society of artists” as a conceptual template for artistic research has many implications. In the following section I will unpack these more thoroughly by means of an anachronistic cross-reading with some programmatic stances of our present day. In the hope of homing in on the methods specific to artistic research, I start out with a schism that appeared already at the beginning of its institutional consolidations.

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<sup>43</sup> Most intensely probably at the meetings of the Alexandria Nova Network, a platform dedicated to the exchange of directors involved in performing arts educations across Northern Europe (cf. “Alexandria Nova” 2019). Encountering about two dozen colleagues assembled to discuss their dilemmas openly and contribute to possible solutions was unprecedented in my professional life. Cf. also the publication *Looking for Direction* that can be seen as a manifestation of the network's activities (Balevičiūtė et al. 2022)

<sup>44</sup> For a broader picture of the complicated circumstances under which Brecht tried to breathe life into the project cf. Völker's chapter “Unterm dänischen Strohdach” [Beneath this Danish thatched roof] (Völker [1976] 1999, 213–20)

In the words of Finnish philosopher and artistic researcher Esa Kirkkopelto, it can be put as the following question: is artistic research “research of art” or “research of reality by means of art”? (Kirkkopelto 2008, 27) Within the vocabulary of this chapter we could also ask: is artistic research really, as initially stated, the place where a specific discipline gets to reflect the standards and conditions of its own craft (*techne*)? Or is artistic research rather a way to research “the world” *by the means of art*, independent of the discipline’s technical aspects?

In his inaugural speech as the head of the newly-created research center (TUTKE) at the University of the Arts Helsinki, Kirkkopelto raised these questions by unpacking his hypothesis that “[a]rtistic research looks from art to theory and not the other way round.” (Kirkkopelto, 18); hereby delineating artistic research from what he calls “art research”. While the latter would be the formation of theory *about* art – such as for instance aesthetics or theater studies – artistic research takes its starting point, according to Kirkkopelto, in the “knowledge of the body or hand” (Kirkkopelto, 18) of the artist.<sup>45</sup>

This programmatic differentiation can be further explicated by critically looking at the example of the *International Brecht Society* in terms of an institute of research. By its own account, the IBS lays claim to “modeling itself on Brecht’s own plans for a Diderot-Gesellschaft” (cf. “IBS History”) Paradoxically, already its stated main objective though – “to encourage the international study of all aspects of Bertolt Brecht’s life and work” stands in stark contrast to this claim. Not only does it digress into focusing on an individual’s genius – “Brecht’s genius”, for what it’s worth – but more importantly it implicitly prioritizes scholarly work over contributions of experimentally working artists. Judging further by the activities

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<sup>45</sup> This decisive discursive distinction was also part of consolidating artistic research’s financial infrastructure in the art education of the Nordics. Finland, where Kirkkopelto stems from, is in many ways a forerunner of institutionalized artistic research, having offered doctoral programs in dance and theater from as early on as 1988. (For an overview of the Finnish development cf. Arlander (2009).)

since its establishment in the late 1960s<sup>46</sup>, the IBS can rightfully be attributed to the realm of what Kirkkopelto calls “art research”, i.e. a domain where research looks from *theory at art*.

In contrast, the *Diderot Society* extended its invitation “only to producing people” (Brecht in a letter to Jean Renoir; quoted after Völker ([1976] 1999, 259); my translation). And while the narrow notion of “producing people” as “artists only” can be questioned – scholarly writing is, of course, also production – this somewhat “protectionist” move makes all the difference. This is because the discussion of the discipline’s technical standards is *not* handed over to theater or film scholars (for whom aesthetics are of theoretical interest) but remains within the realm of the artists themselves. Consequently, the productive “stretch” for *episteme* (from within the arts) described above still originates from the “knowledge of the body and the hand” of the artist (read: the technician of theater making/the phronetic craftsman).

In the distinction between “art research” and “artistic research” Brecht’s and Kirkkopelto’s conception therefore align gracefully. The focus of the reflection however, i.e. the question regarding artistic research’s legitimate ‘object of study’, is accentuated differently on both ends. While Kirkkopelto advocates a move beyond disciplinary self-reflection – “[a]rtistic research is (...) ultimately more interested in reality than in art” (Kirkkopelto 2008, 18) –, for Brecht there seems to be no contradiction between researching the discipline’s own technical standards and the reality beyond. On the contrary, within the projected *Diderot Society*, one cannot even be done without the other. Insofar as Brecht’s imagined artistic research community sets out to “scientifically review the *theatrical* concepts of human coexistence” (Brecht [1938] 1997, 258; my emphasis), the theater’s technical standards will

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<sup>46</sup> An overview of the activities retrieved from the history section on the homepage (“IBS Congress and Symposia”) shows some artistic programming at the start in 1970, such as a “staging by Conrad Bishop and Elizabeth Fuller of Eric Bentley’s translation of *Die Maßnahme* (The Measures Taken) by the Milwaukee Theater X, including the original music by Hanns Eisler”; but no more of it in the coming years.

have to be scrutinized *in order to* research reality by means of art. By applying ‘scientific accuracy’ within a community of practice, the medium itself will eventually be pushed beyond the “self-expression of the artistic personality” (Gorelik and Brecht [1938] 1961, 114). Consequently, “the world (...) unknown and in constant process of change” (Gorelik and Brecht, 114) can emerge behind it. In this logics, artistic research – understood as a place where a specific discipline gets to reflect the standards and conditions of its own craft (*techne*) – *is* in fact researching the world while looking at art.

### *The postdisciplinary field*

In Brecht’s specific case this meant to get the form of “drama” to a technical level where it could actually represent the circumstances of human coexistence under capitalism. In that regard and “in spite of the great differences between them, the stage and the cinema can work together, insofar as both dramatic mediums explain nature and human relationships.” (Gorelik and Brecht [1938] 1961, 115) As he subsumes the cinema to what he calls the “theatrical arts” – a gesture that I adopt when researching the Space of Rehearsals by means of film making (cf. chapter 6 and *Regiebuch* 4) – Brecht embraces its exchange with progressive stagecraft. This is however as far as the stretch for interdisciplinarity goes within the *Diderot Society*; as any further crossing would make the discussion of technical standards impracticable.

Meanwhile the American performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson highlights how the socially engaged arts of our present day are seeing a lot of these interdisciplinary crossings. Her book *Social Works* (2011) starts out from

the recognition that socially engaged art seems to require artists to develop skills in more than one medium. The sculpture becomes a public sculpture when knowledges of audience perception and motion are tracked and re-imagined – i.e., when sculpture becomes self-consciously choreographic. The theatrical production becomes site-specific theatre when the extension of civic space unhinges the proscenium’s boundaries – i.e., when theatre becomes self-consciously architectural. (...) One can cite example after example where the

“social” turn in art seems to depend upon a cross-medium turn as well. (Jackson 2011, 27–28)

As socially engaged art prioritizes its own efficiency (in terms of impact) over the choice of medium, it is no longer committing to a specific discipline with necessity. In this context, so-called “de-skilling” – understood as the reduction of disciplinary prerequisites – holds the democratic promise of open access, low threshold participation and non-antagonistic togetherness. Against the backdrop of the post-disciplinary field that results from this, the discussion of the specific craft-based competence of the actor or director can easily be perceived as a reactionary, gate-keeping stance. In the most radical rehearsal set-ups of post-disciplinarity, actor will therefore also be interpellated as “active *participants*” (Thorpe and Gore 2019, 236; my emphasis) rather than as artistic agents with a distinct practice and skill set.

In contrast to the Brechtian conception in which the socially engaged arts *and* their aesthetic advancement are aligned in the same political motion, the artistic research environment of the present-day also champions the democratic promises of interdisciplinary aesthetics. This is partly due to academic funding structures, in which a chance of success is only given to research projects if they are broadly based; but naturally also a reflection of the ideological premises of the post-disciplinary field just mentioned. For the “time” of this artistic PhD, I however take the freedom to anachronistically “narrow down the craft” to the point where even the inner-disciplinary divides (*within* the performing arts) appear; researching “the world” while looking exclusively at the specific phronetic skills of actor and director in their interdependence.

### *The phantasmas of Artistic Research*

The sciences alluded to in Brecht’s “theater of the scientific age” are obviously not the humanities. The ideal audiences to be “fruitfully entertained with their great problems” are

“river-dwellers, fruit farmers, builders of vehicles and upturners of society” (Brecht [1949] 1964, 185) I.e. engineering professions strongly grounded in the workings of *episteme* (with the social sciences, according to their disciplinary self-understanding, included in the positivist paradigm.)

At the present day, there are still many tropes from the “hard sciences” traversing the scene of artistic research. The longer the field will come to exist – the less it might have to justify its validity – the more aware of its own genuine methods it shall become. In my case, however, this phantasmatic lineage to a *scientific* heritage (“scientific” in Brecht’s understanding) was clearly a factor: the number of practical experiments already conceived at the time of my application for example – three – obviously follows a script prompted by dissertations in biology or physics; seemingly convincing to both me and my assessors at the time.

The three-step is thus one of the dances I unconsciously adopted from the natural sciences, just like the idea of a *sterile* laboratory to make experiments in; yet another trope of the “hard sciences” I adhered to by producing the three practical explorations in question exclusively from the budget the university grants to its PhD candidates. In an attempt to not have “the market” interfere, I hoped to keep a “sterile” environment in which the actor-director relation could be studied without outer production circumstances dictating the course of action.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. the attempts for “sterility” (read: financial autonomy) in the “Theater Laboratories” of Jerzy Grotowski (in Wrocław, Poland) and Eugenio Barba (in Holstebro, Denmark) – yet two other artistic researchers *avant la lettre*.

## *Anticipations: the field of art and artistic research*

Of course, this presumed vacuum in which “pure” dynamics would be studied will always be absorbed by the actual context, which in the case of this thesis is the field of artistic research itself and more specifically the research environment at my home university. Despite this fact dawning on me soon after I started the program, my ambition has never become to unveil the “naked medium” on which my research presents itself.<sup>48</sup> I like to believe that by deliberately keeping a certain lenience towards the ideological undercurrents affecting it – by lightly repressing/playfully ignoring the paradigm surrounding me – I gave it the unconscious agency that can be re-visited in some years hence. This possibly paradoxical “conscious naïveté” also springs from my intuitive hypothesis that the field of artistic research is in fact currently punching out the matrix for the conditions of future artmaking. Thereby providing in fact a paradigm to be experienced (“researched” *en passant*, as it were), that we will experience in its full force soon.

As an artistic researcher this prospect of increasing relevance can make you optimistic; as a theater maker naturalized into the 20<sup>th</sup> century ideal of subversion not so much. In the institutional contexts of artistic research, the split subject (myself, in that case) will thus often experience itself as “ahead of time / in a bad way”. Luckily the frictions within the field – between for instance academic standards of research ethics and the necessity of taking risks in aesthetic experimentation – are still unresolved (cf. Ravini 2017). Given the discursive climate

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<sup>48</sup> Boris Groys describes the historical avant-gardes’ project as a penetration of the “submedial space”; in hopes of assuming an exceptional “meta position” from where the “truth of the medial” can be spoken and witnessed. (Cf. Groys 2012) My relative un-ambitiousness in assuming this avant-gardist meta position was also possible thanks to my peer Bogdan Szyber who meanwhile “did the work”: dedicating all the energy available for his dissertation to relentlessly displaying artistic research’s socio-economic frameworks. (Cf. Szyber 2019) For a presentation of “Bogdan’s case” – or as the double meaning of the Swedish title *Fallet Bogdan* suggests – his “fall” cf. the documentary of the same name by D’Arcy et al. (2024).

adapted from progressive academia, however, the genuinely artistic strategies of ambivalence, irony or “subversive affirmation” are dropping “off the menu” when it comes to artistic research methodology; just like they do, albeit slower, “out in the field”, too.

While in my perception the first generations of artistic PhD candidates, in Sweden at least, seemed to operate on a pragmatic plane mostly – welcoming the third cycle program as yet another long-term grant for their artmaking – I believe to witness a “turn to the constructive” in the cohorts surrounding and including my own. The rational sensibilities genuine to any state-of-the-arts university are slowly getting a hold of the subjectivity of the artistic researcher as s/he transitions out of the identity of the freelancing artist (and into the one of an employee of a public institution): with knowledge production, model formation, general applicability as well as social amelioration being the touchstones of this subjectification.<sup>49</sup>

This process is undoubtedly also a mirror of a general tendency in the overall art field after the social turn; and in many respects artistic research is a love child of “relational aesthetics” with its powerful, latent ethical propositions (cf. Chapter *Terracing the Territory III*). However, if my initial intuition/hypothesis is to hold true – the future art field approximates itself to artistic research standards (instead of the other way round) – then the “ahead of time” aspect might be *merely institutional* for now. As we are literally state

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<sup>49</sup> With Finland being the pioneering country for artistic research in the Nordics, Esa Kirkkopelto, again, was able to describe this shift as early as in 2008: “Artistic research is not only a freely chosen way of carrying out one’s own artistic projects, but must accept a certain requirement of truth and knowledge. (...) A fundamental ethical criterion is at work here defining what it means to be an artistic researcher as compared with other artists.” (Kirkkopelto 2008, 23–24) In turn, artistic research itself is not to blame for the hypothetical future approximation of the arts to its logics, but rather the “plural of crises” mentioned in the preface. In return for “knowledge production”, institutionalized artistic research offers a relatively secure financial structure. In the realm of research, art-making can thus be relieved of its precarious (production) conditions, while practitioners are also given the subjective sense of ‘contributing constructively’ to the common good.

employees in our function as PhD candidates/artistic researchers, the “future artists of the present day” are nevertheless already executing their tasks with the same mindset; employees of a “good” – participatory and sustainable – “state” that grants no guarantees.

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As this scenario might plunge the legacy of the above-mentioned subversive 20<sup>th</sup> century artist into too dark a place, the *potential* of inhabiting the field of contemporary, institutionalized artistic research shall also be highlighted in the same breath. (Before we return to its *avant-la-lettre* era and the formats of *phronesis*.) Because most certainly the anticipation of a situation where the “carnival of thinking” (Schramm 1996) genuine to the theatrical arts would be fully subsumed into the rationality of the social will foster critical counter-discourses. And, in that sense, artistic research might just be exactly the right place to develop strategies of resistance to a fully functionalized “state art”, i.e. *overt* strategies that transcend the prevalent melancholia or even resentment of the 20<sup>th</sup> century legacy in question. In *Regiebuch 2* I am myself testing some of these in an essayistic manner; being “ahead of time but in a good way” as my own phantasma of being an artistic researcher wants me to be.

## The formats of *phronesis*: Stanislavski as artistic researcher *avant la lettre*

Despite the position of the director itself being a relatively new invention<sup>50</sup>, an excessive pluralism of directorial practices prevails today; practices of which the majority, in turn, is likely to be idiosyncratic and therefore lost to attempts for a harmonized technical vocabulary or a common terminology. Along the lines of Brecht, the ambition of my research is clearly not to add yet another of these practices to the catalogue (by abstracting my own pre-existent artistic method) but rather to offer a way to *structurally read and affect* the actor-director relation as it figures in the rehearsal situation. The methodic question that comes along with this ambition – of how to represent and systemize the knowledge at play in a relational setting / of how to document theater processes for didactic purposes – brings us (back) to Russian theater pedagogue and director Konstantin Stanislavski.<sup>51</sup>

While as a director I can have reservations against the ideological premises of Stanislavski’s “system”, as an artistic researcher, I have always felt a strong sympathy for his desperate attempts to systemize practical knowledge. In a letter he writes at age 77, he vents his feelings of helplessness, most likely resulting from the push and pull between his overwhelming phronetic competence and his attempts to generalize it: “I am not capable of

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<sup>50</sup> Canonically, Ludwig Chronegk (1837-1891), member of the theater company of Duke George II of Saxe-Meiningen (the so-called “Meininger”) is often referred to as the first modern-type director. For a more differentiated picture problematizing the “assumption of a ‘watershed’ moment in the birth of *Regie* around 1880” (Boenisch 2017, 9). As a curiosity, Boenisch also tracks the first documented “*Regisseur*” in the German-speaking sphere: a certain “Herr Stephanie der Ältere” [Mr. Stephanie Senior], hired at the Vienna *Burgtheater* in 1774 (Boenisch, 18).

<sup>51</sup>As Katherine Angel asserts in her critical reading of “sexological research” by the means of positivist methods, i.e. by exposing people to “arousing material” in the laboratory setting: “Sex is one of the hardest of all human phenomena to study, because sex is something that happens between people, in context, and in conditions that are not replicable.” (Angel 2021, 82) What can be said about sex can – in this case – also be said about the rehearsal situation.

putting order to my immense material, I am drowning in it.” (quoted after Stegemann 2007, 9; my translation) Nevertheless, this shipwrecked artistic researcher *avant la lettre* carved out the systematics that are still laying out the blueprint for acting educations a century later. In the following, it is in particular the *format* he found to transmit and store this practical knowledge over time that shall be of interest.

First-time readers of the ‘great formalizer of acting technique’<sup>52</sup> usually find themselves disappointed. The promise made when carrying the first volume of the two major works home from the library is to get introduced to what has come to be known as the “Stanislavski system”. But when starting to read it – instead of a didactic manual – the book turns out to be a diary (!). A fictitious diary, to be exact, of an acting apprentice attending the master class of somebody called Arkadi Nikolaevich Tortsov.<sup>53</sup> In line with Stanislavski’s aesthetic values – as a theater innovator strongly influenced by naturalism – the text puts a lot of effort into making its own imagined circumstances plausible. (A note in the start even deems it necessary to explain why the narrator is capable of rendering the master’s teachings word by word: before he became an acting apprentice, it turns out, he worked as a stenographer (Stanislavski [1954] 2002, 14).)

This kind of realist excess (the sweat of fiction, as it were), together with the narcissistic construction, that both the student as well as the master are obviously Stanislavski’s alter egos (with no shadow aspects whatsoever!), makes in fact for a predictable, ultimately exhausting

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<sup>52</sup> “Quoted after” an imaginary blurb on a random Stanislavski edition. For the classical texts in English cf. Stanislavski ([1937] 2013; [1950] 2021; [1981] 2014)

<sup>53</sup> The possible *double entendre* of Arkadi Nikolajewitsch’s last name as “Torture” is quite suggestive to the Western ear. In fact, “the Russian master” tradition presented in Stanislavski’s writing – and still in effect today – requires a level of discipline hardly affordable (or desirable?) in any of our educational set-ups. In the author’s own words: “The actor, no less than the soldier, must be subject to iron discipline.” (Stanislavski [1937] 2013, 2)

read.<sup>54</sup> But nevertheless: the “system” – the “theory” and its “manual” – is *in there*, packaged in non-entertaining storytelling.

Especially from today’s perspective, where classical naturalism has long exhausted itself in theater (cf. Szondi [1956] 2013), it feels easy to dismiss Stanislavski’s choice of format. But the question of how to document relational settings for didactic purposes remains a critical one and naturally resurfaces with an artistic research project (like mine) that puts its focus not on the *mise-en-scène*, but on the rehearsal process. The overall question being, in more abstract terms, how the practical knowledge form of *phronesis* articulates itself when “stretching itself” towards *episteme*?

Let’s return to Bornemark’s mediation of Aristotle to find a starting point for this discussion:

Although [phronesis] can be described, theorized and verbalized, its own content cannot be summarized in text, which has meant that it has often been perceived as tacit. But perhaps it has a different language to the general and abstract language of *episteme* or the manualized knowledge of *techne*. (Bornemark 2020, 50).

And:

[It] does not belong in general texts, because it belongs to the situationally unique. It cannot be captured in rules or formulas. But that does not mean that it has no relation to language. It can be verbalized in *concrete stories* and we can reflect on it in a variety of ways (...) (Bornemark, 86; my emphasis)

Along these lines, the artificially crafted “concrete stories” Stanislavski uses to write the fictional diary might just be perfectly fit for his cause; inviting phronetic competence while

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<sup>54</sup> In an attempt to carve out the essential teaching from the lengthy descriptions, while simultaneously resisting the temptation of an “abstract resumé” (Stegemann 2007, 18), the German dramaturg Bernd Stegemann has edited a so-called “Stanislavski Reader”; reducing the volume of the original texts by about half.

simultaneously conveying the generalizable aspects of his “system”. While the much-dreaded theater anecdote<sup>55</sup> may thus be the phronetic format of the performing arts *par excellence*, once it is used as a conscious medium, it oscillates between both the knowledge forms of *episteme* as well as *techne*. Thus, in what I will come to call the *para-anecdote* an overlap between lived experience and didactic purpose is produced. This time not by a collective molding of a narrativized incident, but by the soft touch of authorial intention.

### *Pedagogical undercurrent within the three knowledge forms (parenthesis)*

Arguably, before the establishment of the performing art educations that resulted from Stanislavski’s historical systematization effort, practical knowledge used to transmit through the non-formalized pathways of “learning by doing” on the one hand and the transmission of Bornemark’s “concrete stories” on the other. For the greater half of the short period of time in which the director has been a distinct agent, for example, becoming one yourself was also based on the principle of apprenticeship. Being an assistant to one “master” – or even more likely: to many masters (i.e. different guest directors coming to the theatre where the assistant is permanently employed) – was the most common access road to the profession.<sup>56</sup> With the establishment of directing programs in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their proliferation by the end of it, however, the principle of apprenticeship slowly lost its hegemony. Today the situation is almost inverted: having been educated in one of the formal programs is the bottleneck to getting to work professionally as a director, while being an assistant is merely a

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<sup>55</sup> In German theater parlance there is the trope of the “Anekdoten-Onkel” [uncle of anecdotes], which represents the (often annoying) “old male actor” sharing his knowledge exclusively by means of “concrete stories” from a glorious past.

<sup>56</sup> I am aware that I am evoking a primarily German (city theater) scenario here (cf. Hänzi 2014, 160). Many theater cultures still see their directors emerge predominantly from the ensemble of actors.

steppingstone on the way to entering the formal programs in question (cf. Hänzi 2014, 191–209).

This shift naturally also affects how we view the transmission of knowledges in theater as such; on what plane we access the triangulation of *techne*, *phronesis* and *episteme* in our educations. Artistic research, as a third-cycle program only recently installed in the art academies, certainly accelerates the trend to “scientification” (the *episteme*-ization, as it were) of even the basic performing arts education. Foremost, of course, in the Master’s programs – that are nowadays often framed as “PhD preparatory” –, but also already in the B.A.s, the “draft” of this newly installed teleology can be felt. In approximation of the values applied for artistic research supervision – which could be, reductively, described as a primarily hermeneutic “mirroring” with the intention of letting the supervisee make informed choices (cf. Frisk et al. 2015) – the learning in the first and second cycle is no longer necessarily something the students receive in a vertical axis (as within the apprentice model of the practical knowledge tradition); but something they “research” or “workshop” their own way to. In concern for the student’s “motivation”, the pedagogical ambition is thus rather to “stimulate” than to “impose” learning. In the most radical forms of this pedagogical approach, there is close to no top-down transmission of pre-existent knowledge through the teachers, but only facilitation and eye-to-eye-companionship. What sounds like a more democratic or liberatory pedagogy, when practiced without the rigor demanded by its forerunners<sup>57</sup>, is necessarily at

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<sup>57</sup> bell hooks for instance, by the time of writing her seminal *Teaching to Transgress* (hooks 1994) still stands in the (bodily) tension between authoritative forms of pedagogy and the round circle set-ups of our days. She therefore seems to be fully aware of the stakes her approach proposes: of the high-wire act of *skillfully* facilitating a classroom where the students’ lived experience and theory connect: “Once the space for dialogue is open in the classroom, that moment must be orchestrated so that you don’t get bogged down with people who just

risk of presenting a “lazy way out” for the pedagogue. From my own teaching experience, I know that it oftentimes is *less* work to “devise” a course as “process-based”, as “mixing theory and practice” etc. rather than to prepare practical knowledge to the point where it can be demonstrated and “passed on” in a condensed manner.

To close this parenthesis and moreover illustrate my point, I would therefore like to render the “dramatic” collision of the two pedagogical paradigms in question (master-student transmission vs. eye-to-eye facilitation) by the means of an anecdote / concrete story.

In 2019 I was teaching a course in “postdramatic theater” at the B.A. program of the theater education in Zurich.<sup>58</sup> On the last day of our three weeks process – during which we had explored, amongst other things, “the emergence of the Lacanian Real” on stage – the head of the acting program announced the (seemingly spontaneous) visit of “a Russian delegation”. Wanting to help out my then employer – who sounded more than nervous on the phone – I agreed to his guests auscultating one of my courses; preferably, I said, they should come to “Rehearsing Stanislavski”, which I was teaching in the evenings but if not possible otherwise, “Postdramatics” in the morning would also do.

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like to hear themselves talk, or with people who are unable to relate experience to the academic subject matter.” (hooks, 151) For a symptomatic account promoting what has been called a “student-focused approach to teaching”, cf. Elmgreen and Henriksson (2018, 133–37). But also Paolo Freire’s dictum that “to teach is to not to transfer knowledge, but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge.” (Freire 1998, 30)

<sup>58</sup> The *Zurich University of the Arts* (ZHdK) is a front runner in the (self-)transformation of an art academy into an art university; and thereby presents an exemplary case crystallizing some of the more overall tensions between classical conservatory art education and “progressive”, academic pedagogical stances. In that vein, the ZHdK has been re-structuring its acting education radically since the turn of the millennium, moving from a more pre-conceived curriculum based on Michael Chekhov’s acting training to a flexible structure of so-called “modules”, which the students choose individually at the beginning of the semester (thereby somewhat “live-composing” their education). In practice that means that – apart from the compulsory teachings such as physical and voice training – there are always various courses on offer, each of them presenting a “situationist” intervention into the individual syllabus of the respective student.

Not knowing when exactly the “Russian delegation” was going to arrive, I went to work the next day, sticking to the program I had prepared for the last session. My intention was to extend an invitation to the students where they could reflect about our “postdramatic theater” course as a *work in progress* of its own right; which meant to retrospectively identify their co-authorship in the turns it took and to make sense of it in reverse. In an attempt to stress the celebration of the *actor-as-host* implicit to postdramatic aesthetics while simultaneously satirizing my own role as facilitator-director, I set up a table in our studio that catered to each student’s individual needs (in regard to nourishment, that is). There was coffee for the ones I knew enjoyed caffeine and there were certain teas for the ones who did not. There was lactose-free milk and – for the ones who did not like lactose-free milk – there was milk based on oat. There was also cow milk, various juices and biscuits, both for the gluten-tolerant and for the *intolerant*. All these individual ingredients amounted to a somewhat abundant feast setting (contrasting the habitually tiny number of students distributed among the world’s third most expensive city’s acting education.)

Immersed into the scenery of this “rich”, postdramatic gathering as well as into our conversation about the needs of the process (regarding the product) we suddenly heard a knock on the door. Slightly startled, I called for the strangers to present themselves and in poured a group of five professors from the legendary GITIS drama school in Moscow, respectfully aligning in front of the auditorium of our studio.

The “Russian delegation” looked well-meaning but not particularly happy, which had me jump from my seat in an instant motion towards them. Decoding the face of the head of the acting program who entered last – humbly following the Russian interpreter – I understood that the visit had not been going well so far. The tour across the student-focused learning environments of the West had progressively alienated the guests he was hosting; culminating in a frustration that was now – given the final sight of our set-up – going to be given vent.

Without much ado, I was asked to give an account of what we were “doing” at the moment. As I explained the notion of a meta-reflection of the course onto its proper content, a professor – whose frumpy outfits, by Western preconceived notions, could easily have been teleported from a German 1950s *Hausfrau* household – interrupted me. Understanding close to no Russian – but repeatedly identifying the word for “work” in her following interrogation (“работа?”) – I did not really have to wait for translation: “What is the *work*?” they wanted to know. “*Where* is it?”

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Some weeks later, one of the students told me how much the group had enjoyed the spectacle of their teacher encountering the “Russian delegation”; as an unexpected, but refreshing and definite (!) closure of a course worshipping experimental indeterminacy. How they had watched me from afar – themselves leaning firmly on the theoretical frameworks introduced in the weeks before – while their teacher was currently jumping from one leg to the other, dealing with the “emergence of the Lacanian Real” in the shape of an unexpected “Ревизор” [Revisor] or “Government Inspector” from the Russian capital.

## **From story to theory: the place of the anecdotal in artistic research**

Despite the formalization of directing and acting trainings, knowledge of theater processes is still packaged and transmitted in the form of “concrete stories” today, reminiscent of Stanislavski’s “sublimated”, para-anecdotal use of them. For artistic research conducted in the performing arts, I therefore believe “the anecdotal” to play a central role when it comes to the documentation of its findings; also in its rawer forms. With the help of feminist literature

scholar Jane Gallop's "Anecdotal Theory" I will elaborate this point in this last section of the my "methodological statement".

To say that "the anecdotal" plays "a *central* role" in the project of theory formation is a paradox at first sight; already the etymological root – with the Greek word (ἀνέκδοτον, *anekdoton*) meaning "unpublished" – advocates for the "merely anecdotal" to be carefully removed from anything going into print. (Anything invested into method, knowledge, and truth, at least.) As Jane Gallop points out in her introduction, "'Anecdote' and 'theory' have diametrically opposed connotations: humorous vs. serious, short vs. grand, trivial vs. overarching, specific vs. general." (Gallop 2002, 2). Her proposed synthetization in the concept of "anecdotal theory" however, "would cut through these oppositions in order to produce theory with a better sense of humor, theorizing which honors the *uncanny detail of lived experience.*" (Gallop, 2; my emphasis)

Obviously, there is a limit to what level you can abstract an anecdote, i.e. to what level you can rid it of the "uncanny detail of lived experience". Despite its basis in an incident blown out of proportions and/or context the anecdote always retains a material, site-specific layer that ultimately makes for its didactic momentum: it is *this* specific theater, in *this* era, where *this* specific director did something that *this* actor responded to. To give an example: it is not crazily funny (read: it is of limited didactic impact) to hear of a director who had gotten distracted by the reflection of stage light hitting the bald person's head in the row in front of him/her and, in consequence, made an unusual choice to amend the problem. By specifying it being Ingmar Bergman coming to see a rehearsal of his son's first attempt to stage something at The Royal Theater in Stockholm (*Dramaten*), we get the full juice of the circumstance. When we then hear that Bergman Senior demanded a pillow to be taped to his son's – the director's – head so he, the father, could focus on the run-through without being blinded, we are fully initiated to

the trope of sadist pleasure corporate to the tradition of *Regietheater*. (We have learned our lesson.<sup>59</sup>)

In my perception of this anecdote, the “uncanny detail” is the tape making sure the pillow stays on Bergman Junior’s head. What kind is it, I wonder? Are we supposed to imagine transparent scotch or the gaffer tape that is the theater technicians’ most beloved tool? Was the bald son bearded? If yes, it would make the removal of the pillow (after the end of the run-through) extremely painful... Whether true or not, history or story, the anecdote always proffers an indexical detail, that might be the exact locus of situated knowledge.

Anecdotal theory drags theory into a scene where it must struggle for mastery. Theorizing in explicit relation to the here and now (...), theory must contend with what threatens its mastery. *Subjecting theory to incident* teaches us to think in precisely those situations which tend to disable thought, forces us to keep thinking even when the dominance of our thought is far from assured. (Gallop, 15; my emphasis)

Arguably, artistic research, with its emphasis on practical exploration, is by default and methodically “subjecting theory to incident”. As a director initiating a rehearsal, not for the sake of aesthetics (“beauty” in the colloquial sense), but for the sake of knowledge production (let’s say, regarding consent and asymmetry in the actor-director relation), I therefore empathize with Bergman’s son. Despite the pillow on my head (i.e. the symbolic father’s “second order observation”, as in Niklas Luhmann’s observation of the observer (1996)), I force myself to keep on theorizing the situation even though the dominance of my thought is far from assured. In that way “anecdotal theory” is in fact a *practice*, in resonance with and informed by the composed competence of *phronesis* (situated perception, feelings, experience).

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<sup>59</sup> I owe this anecdote to Swedish actor and theater maker Iggy Malmborg. For further discussion of today’s “reproductive insecurity” within the theater field’s “intergenerational transmission” cf. Hänzi (2004, 260-68).

Gallop's approximation of this "method for theorizing" (Gallop, 161) in the "flesh of practice" is of course embedded into the bigger project of a feminist epistemology.<sup>60</sup> Invested into "revealing the concrete conditions that produce knowledge" (Gallop, 52) namely the anecdotal allows to walk the line between the professional and the personal for the sake of theory formation.

Breaking down the barrier between the professional and the personal has been central in the feminist effort to expand the institution of knowledge to include what and how women know. (...) Feminist teachers saw the inclusion of the personal within the academic as a way to consider thoughts, responses, and insights which would not traditionally be recognized as knowledge. (Gallop, 55)

Artistic research's epistemology is indebted to this tradition and the passage it has carved into "the institutions of knowledge". In a paraphrase, its quest might ultimately be described as making intelligible "what and how artists know".

With this, I shall leave the more general considerations around the methodology of artistic research. At the outset of *Regiebuch 3* I return to a discussion of the "concrete conditions" that produced the knowledge of this thesis. And in the conclusion of *Regiebuch 4* I make an attempt to sustain the anecdotal theory of this thesis by using a director's diary that could easily have stayed ἀνέκδοτον/*anekdoton*, i.e. "unpublished".

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<sup>60</sup> In her postscripts to *Anecdotal Theory*, Gallop picks up this term – "theory in the flesh of practice" – which she finds in conversation with Nancy K. Miller's *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*; a pledge for "the gossipy grain of situated writing [instead of] the academic sublime." (Miller 1991, xi)

## **REGIEBUCH 2 (Situating the Director)**



Figure 1: Terracing of the territory: *Stufenbühne* [step-stage] by set-designer Emil Pirchan for *Richard III*, Berliner Staatstheater, 1920. (Courtesy of Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung der Universität Köln, Schloss Wahn)

### *Short intro to Regiebuch 2 and chapter outline*

The following chapters (Terracing the territory I., II., III.) attempt for a periodization of directorial practices based on my own “professional biography”.<sup>61</sup> For the most part they are written as personal, non-fiction literary essays, snatched from the realm of “memoir” by means

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<sup>61</sup> Far from alluding to any sort of CV crowned with laurel – when speaking of “professional biography” – I refer to my “lived experience” in the field of theater making; an “average vita”, stretched out on what I will come to describe as the transferential matrix of “East and West” as well as of “Scandinavia and Germania”.

of theoretical cross-readings. My overall ambition here is to offer a non-moralizing analysis of the politics that put the director (as *auteur*) into *crisis*; as well as to stimulate the interest – by showing the theoretical possibilities – for salvaging an ethically reinvented *Regietheater*.

In indulging in a chronological mode of storytelling my hope is to eventually render my own directorial practice intelligible as a *symptom* of the present moment. If I were to assign a literary energy to this specific mode of writing, it would be the ever so subtle science-fiction French writer Michel Houellebecq has developed into a masterful technique. Initially, the chapters in question were therefore also alluding to this exact literary template by their title: “*Mapping the territory I.-III.*”<sup>62</sup> It is only when I discovered Emil Pirchan’s (1884-1957) methodical description of his work as set designer as a “*terracing* of the territory” [*Terrassierung des Terrains*] (quoted after Boenisch 2017, 82; my emphasis) that I found the more exact metaphor. In fact, my periodization is not an actual mapping (of a pre-existing landscape), but rather I am structuring the historical territory along the logics of a “*Stufenbühne*” [step-stage]<sup>63</sup>, actively molding and terracing a “Mountain Range”, “Foothills” and “Great Plains”.

By stressing this methodical fact, I hope to emphasize the possible “artifice” of my narrative. In that regard, the writing also lays no claim to the more comprehensive reconstruction a (theater) scholar could make of a by-gone era. What I propose instead is a qualitative reflection about – and informed by – my field of praxis. As a dogma/obstruction, I

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<sup>62</sup> The final part of Michel Houellebecq’s *The Map and the Territory* (2010) for example is set in a future projected only 25 years ahead. By staying true to the big paradigm shifts that can occur in this short a time span the writing paradoxically lives up to the Brechtian notion of “historicization”; albeit of the immediate future.

<sup>63</sup> Austrian stage designer Emil Pirchan developed this stage form together with German director Leopold Jessner. While it is not a “stage of stairs” (cf. Boenisch 2017, 92, n.2) the accurate translation of *Stufenbühne* is rather “step-stage” or – in a more poetic rendering – even “stage of stages”.

am therefore only theorizing the grounds I have an embodied, visceral sense of. (Given the long shadow of 1968 and its effects on the tradition of *Regietheater*, however, it was necessary to start the timeline two decades before my birth.) Consequently, my “terracing of the territory” results in the following three “eras”/chapters:

TERRACING THE TERRITORY I.: The Mountain Range of *Regietheater*

*Roughly covering the era from the 1960s to the 1990s*

TERRACING THE TERRITORY II.: The Foothills of *Regietheater*

*Roughly covering the era from 1992–2017*

TERRACING THE TERRITORY III.: The Great Plains

*Roughly covering the era of the social turn (starting in the 2000s) until today*

In the following section, I give an overview of the three chapters ahead. (*Please note that all the references to the literature I work with are to be found in the respective chapters. For the sake of a smoother readability of the following outline I am omitting them here.*)

*Terracing the Territory I.* (re)constructs the era most classically associated with the so-called “directors’ theater”. Differentiating it from other *auteur*-driven practices in other artistic fields (as well as from other cultural contexts in the West), I arrive at its specific iteration in the German-speaking context. While emphasizing *Regietheater*’s outdatedness in today’s perspective – characterized by “feudal” institutions “larded over” by charismatic male geniuses – the chapter stays open to the structural potential of the historical form. Specifically what I call the “ethical project of *Regietheater*” – salvaged with the help of George Bataille’s “general

economy” – helps me problematize the steady integration of contemporary arts into the paradigm of sustainability. Strategically repurposing *Regietheater*’s “model of planetary care”, I conclude by discussing the *assumption of scarcity* that puts directorial agency under the suspicion of cynical squander.

*Terracing the Territory II.* starts out by a brief “cultural psychoanalysis”, situating my writing more precisely on the axis between North and South, i.e. Scandinavia and Germany. After the short digression the chapter picks up its topographical timeline in the Foothills (1992–2017), now on the axis between East and West, culminating in post-unification Berlin. The years of the tenure of Frank Castorf at *Volksbühne* serve as the site to elaborate on what I call the “cognitive dissonance” within the directorial practices of the time. While postdramatic aesthetics are encroaching from the West, promising a liberation from alienated modes of theater production, an *exceptional* institution – much deeper rooted in struggles of emancipation given its origins in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century workers movement – keeps the key coordinates of *Regietheater* intact; the authoring director, the trained actor as well as a Bataillean economy legitimizing sacrificial and glorious excess.

Using Christoph Maria Schlingensief as the emblematic directorial figure at the *Volksbühne*, the chapter returns us to the moment when postdramatic theater and *Regietheater* are standing in a dialectical tension, epitomizing the push and pull between the concepts of “actor” and “performer”. In this context, I revisit my own directorial agency at the time as a symptom of a double-edged flexibilization; productively challenging the complacency of theater institutions and their permanently employed actors on the one hand and turning a highly skilled workforce superfluous on the other; ultimately, unknowingly, preparing the stage and backstage for the interdisciplinary “allrounder”. As I come to argue, the years of Castorf’s tenure, 1992-2017, coincide “exactly” with the process of installing and consolidating neoliberal governance in post-socialist Eastern Europe; a completion of a process marking the

moment where a critique of theatrical aesthetics based on the work of an ensemble (as a community of practice refining the “actorial skill”) loses its material basis.

Taking a new breath, the chapter rises above the immediacy of these (geo)politico-aesthetic tensions that re-actualized explosively during my research period and strives for a more structural iteration. In the guise of two canonic writers re-embedded in their literary universe – D.A.F. de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch – I extrapolate two types of directorial dispositions. Graciously helped by Gilles Deleuze’s essay “Coldness and Cruelty” we get to explore the De Sadian and the Masochian “genius” of *Regie*. While the latter is inclined to collaborative modes of production, contract-building amongst equals, workshopping of actors etc., the director of the De Sadian genius is bound to institutional power and the transformative channeling of its oppressive logics. Leaning on Deleuze’s reading of Bataille’s reading of De Sade, I propose a re-evaluation of the *libertine* as a discredited “monologic speaker”; opening to a qualitative perspective on *Regie*’s way to “take space”.

*Terracing the Territory III.* explores the place we find ourselves in at the present moment by setting out to critically historicize the state-of-the-arts conception of the director. As the acquisition of Eastern Europe as a market and the dismantling of the Western welfare state draws to a close, a new logic of both art criticism *and* funding has installed itself, replacing aesthetical categories with ethical ones. Cross-reading Nicolas Bourriaud’s “Relational Aesthetics” and Claire Bishop’s “Artificial Hells” the chapter stages the effects of this so called “social turn” on the very situation of rehearsals. In its ethically charged climate, the emancipatory claims of progressive directors and actors are foremost projected onto their praxis rather than on (macro-)politics. A symptom of what I will come to discuss as the “neoliberal immanence” of the rehearsals space. Following Bishop’s argument which reads the economic deregulation after 1989 as functionally connected to the ongoing instrumentalization of the arts for “the social good”, the chapter further edges out the dominant value system

structuring the actor-director relation. While emphasizing my own complicity with the imperative of “practice what you preach” (of aligning artistic practice and progressive political theory), I try to draw on the skepticism cultivated by dissident theater makers in the former East regarding governments commissioning affirmative social models in the arts. In that vein, the chapter critically interrogates whether our horizontal, participatory forms of rehearsal praxis live up to their rhetorical claims, or, in fact affirm ubiquitous “cybernetic” mechanisms of contemporary governance.

To flesh out this interrogation, the chapter retraces the journey of the central metaphor in cybernetic science – “feedback” – from its first interdisciplinary application (outside of electronic circuit theory) to the jargonistic use in the field of directing. Painting the portrait of a “cybernetic director” who has fully integrated the modes of governance implied in it, I sketch out how the values of Western Liberalism (after a supposed “end of history”) manifest in our concepts of *Regie*. The critical analysis of cybernetic epistemology makes it possible to question the subsumption of the actor-director relation into the logics of “communication”; a strategy often proposed in the interest of directorial accountability. I argue that organizational-managerial metaphors of circularity (and the promise of symmetric distribution of power implied in them) require care when grafted upon a dynamic that involves the agency of the subconscious. In order to further avoid the *mystification* that could be the consequence of such critique, the chapter concludes with an outlook on the “feedback metaphor of psychoanalysis” – the transference – that will be explored in *Regiebuch 3*.

# TERRACING THE TERRITORY I. – The Mountain Range of *Regietheater*.

## What is *Regietheater*?

### *Terminological clarification (What is gained in translation?)*

What is *Regietheater*? Throughout my PhD I have had many opportunities to test the German term’s intelligibility according to context. Whether it rang a bell with my listeners depended largely on the cultural backdrop on the one hand, and their field of practice on the other. Usually, analogies must be established to create a better understanding; names of directors known outside of Germany will be dropped, artists from fields other than theater. The simple translation (literally: directing theater) is usually not enough; as briefly discussed in Chapter B, there are reasons to doubt whether the English term “directors’ theater” renders the right field of resonance – particularly for the lack of an equivalent tradition in the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>64</sup> In the Swedish context, the term “regiteater” in fact exists within the jargon of the performing arts, so it can occasionally be referred to, almost as a technical term. I usually have to add the keyword “Bergman” to breathe life to it, unfolding the full scale of directorial idiosyncrasy that is implied.

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<sup>64</sup> The UK tradition for instance centers around the author, is rather an “authors’ theater”. To what extent these authors might then operate as “directors” can be experienced for instance through Sarah Kane’s “impossible” stage directions. Also see Boenisch’s introduction to the second edition of the seminal *Directors’ Theatre* (Bradby and Williams 2020).

Along these lines – when looking for a shared definition of *Regietheater* – the analogy to directors that are primarily film makers is tempting. For a while I have thus experimented with using the term of the “auteur” (as it came up during the French *nouvelle vague*) synonymous to the “director” of *Regietheater*; suggesting a “theater of the auteur” as equivalent. But what is appropriate when indicating the scale of artistic liberty taken – think of Jean-Luc Godard, Agnès Varda – is still misleading when it comes to the strategy of acquiring it. The “auteurs” in film were mostly writers from the start – film critics to be exact – who destabilized the division of labor imposed by the film industry by undoing the divide between director and scriptwriter (cf. Astruc 1948; Sarris 1962). Their artistic liberty thus gains ground by making conceptions – on the level of pre-production – that cannot be followed up by the routines of an apparatus designed for entertainment. (An idiosyncratic script, the argument goes, can only be directed by its own author.) The director of *Regietheater* however is rarely a writer in the sense of the “auteur”. S/he is commissioned for the staging of a certain text exterior to her directorial work, that – depending on status – s/he has either had the chance to pick or has been assigned to. The “writing” thus happens during rehearsals and as a theatrical *over-writing* of a given literary text.

Another analogy often suggested is the artistically ambitious dance theater (“Tanz-Theater”), usually represented by a highly staffed company associated with one choreographer. In that sense Pina Bausch, William Forsythe or Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker certainly allude to the *Regietheater* paradigm and can be helpful names when establishing a common understanding with practitioners from the field of dance. The major difference I usually stress in this context concerns the professional backgrounds of choreographers and directors, i.e. the fact that the *auteurs* of dance theater have usually been trained as dancers before starting to work as choreographers. This makes for another kind of alliance with their ensemble in the process of creating, which – when subsumed fully in the analogy – trivializes the difference in

technique between director and actor.<sup>65</sup> Because unlike the director in many other performing arts traditions, the “*Regisseur*” [director] of German *Regietheater* does not have a “former life” as an actor. S/he can come from Fine Arts or from the humanities (on the “apprenticeship” of directors in the respective context, see Chapter C above); s/he can even be very “actor-oriented” in terms of method; but usually his/her aesthetics spring from an ideological opposition to (or a sanctioned ignorance of) actorial processes.

I will go deeper into the “symptomatic” methods of the director of *Regietheater* in the following section; for now, let's conclude this small introduction (to what is lost or gained in translation when operating with the term) with a short definition, complemented by a list of historical representatives I have in mind when speaking of the phenomenon.

*Regietheater* is a sub-genre of the performing arts where authorship is monopolized in the position of the director.

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Jürgen Gosch, Frank Castorf, Einar Schleef, Jürgen Kruse, Claus Peymann, Peter Zadek, Achim Freyer, Robert Wilson, Johann Kresnik, Dimiter Gottscheff.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Especially in today's discourse of “expanded choreography” the position of dancer and choreographer is often presented as interchangeable. All the while, as actors and directors, we *cannot* simply swap places. In that concern, I have found the emancipatory discourses of the contemporary dance field most tempting to mirror my research in, but ultimately of limited use when addressing the actual technical differential structuring the actor-director relation. Cf. the refreshing insistence on the role of dancers and their experience of authorship (as distinguished from the choreographers') in the artistic research projects of Chrysa Parkinson. Particularly Parkinson (2018), but also the forthcoming *Authorship Ownership and Control: dancers' roles and materials* (2024-2027)

<sup>66</sup> This list is highly selective and purposefully left in alphabetical disorder. It is based on my own encounter/experience of a specific *generation* of directors (or their anecdotal legacy), on which I will elaborate in more detail below. Not all of them are German, but all have spent the larger part of their career in the German-speaking theater world. Other German theater directors in that vein, of which I have not experienced the works, would be Andrea Breth, Hans Neuenfels, Werner Schroeter and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. International representatives of a director-oriented theater that come to mind immediately are: Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Johan Simons and Ariane Mnouchkine.

### *Excavating a form for future use: structural and anecdotal definitions*

This combination of a structural definition on the one hand and a list of actual directors on the other (over half of them deceased by the time of writing), highlights one of the tensions of this chapter, putting the question to its more profound ambition. Is it to describe a specific era in theater history or to *excavate a form* (of theater making) for a possible use in the future?

For the former ambition, theater studies are surely better equipped. Many of its accounts, even contemporary to the phenomenon of *Regietheater*, offer an almost comprehensive overview<sup>67</sup>; which in turn leaves me the freedom to only contribute where my embodied sense of it has something concrete to add. My ambition for this chapter is thus rather to *re-visit* an antiquated aesthetics (that has been crucially important to me) without *revisionism*, i.e. without a desire to turn back the wheels of time.<sup>68</sup> In that sense I am proposing a re-construction that is at the same time a construction; noting down an overcome aesthetic agenda in the hope of displaying a future possibility for theater making. (The effects of this approach will become especially clear when I try – with the help of Bataille’s “general economy” – to name the “ethical project” of *Regietheater*; also, insofar as there has never been an explicit *ethical* agenda to it.) I will walk this line of construction and reconstruction by

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<sup>67</sup> Although far from explicitly focusing on *Regietheater*, Hans-Thies Lehmann’s seminal *Postdramatic Theater* covers a lot of its ground – of the above list half of the names are discussed there. Exemplary accounts are to be found in Brauneck 1988; Roselt 2009; Bradby and Williams 2020, Fliotsos and Vierow 2013. But also in Fischer-Lichte [2004] 2008.

<sup>68</sup> When describing the directors’ current positionality in the face of a seemingly lost mandate, *revanchism* (from French: revanche; revenge) could be yet another helpful concept. Emerging around the same time as Nietzsche’s *ressentiment* – the characteristic of those who “deprived as they are of the proper outlet of action, are forced to find their compensation in an imaginary revenge.” (Nietzsche 1913, 34) – the term was first used to describe French nationalist agitation after the territorial loss suffered in 1871. Ever since, its meaning has expanded to all kinds of aggressive retributive politics that – close enough to the concept of *irredentism* – are often motivated by hopes to re-gain economical influence.

breaking through to structural levels (as in the definition above) wherever possible. Always keeping in mind that the phenomenon cannot be described in merely abstract terms.

As one “linguistic” strategy – given the massively male dominated historical form in question – I shall from here on, when talking about the director of the Mountain Range of *Regietheater*, use the female pronoun only. This is not to obfuscate the patriarchal logics intrinsic to the historical form and era, but an attempt to get the writing into a semiotic balance: it shall help us to abstract from the mere historical context (if at all, pointing to it *ex negativo*), while re-rendering the form of *Regietheater* in its structural potential.

### *Symptoms (phenomena of a phenomenon)*

As touched upon above, unlike the *auteur*, the director of *Regietheater* works with a textual template, a literary material exterior to herself, that serves as the necessary site for her demonstration of power, i.e. as the place where her authorial agency reigns in full force. Polish critic Jan Kott points to the rehearsal setting the scene for the directors’ staging of herself as authorial genius: “The impossible theater begins when the aesthetics of a rehearsal become the principle and essence of the theater. During rehearsals, the director is second after God. And if God does not exist, he is God himself. (...) The director’s domination of the author and his text originates in the very aesthetics of a rehearsal.” (Kott 1984, 154)

The fact of having an author’s text as a point of reference is however what distinguishes her directorial process from forms of devising – and other postdramatic strategies –, where the goal is to establish an eye-to-eye-level between ensemble and director; by *starting from scratch* or by giving equal opportunities to contribute with materials before or during rehearsals (Thorpe and Gore 2019; Pálsson 2022). That is never the objective in *Regietheater*. What matters here, on the contrary, is the “reading” the director will give to the textual template, i.e. her *singular* interpretation. The staging is thus always a manifestation of this “ideologically superior reading”: pragmatically achieved by longer periods of preparation and – ingeniously

– by “higher” abilities of intellectual discernment. The rehearsals in *Regietheater* can therefore be described as the attempt of the ensemble “to get on her level”.

The textual templates in question are usually taken from the canon of classic dramatic literature, mostly German, but also from Shakespeare’s oeuvre, which by the effect of old-sounding translations has been somewhat subsumed into the national heritage. (This is of course true for every national tradition celebrating “their” Shakespeare. For the German context, both as analysis *and* symptom, cf. Gundolf (1914).)

In this literary territory of past centuries, no legal author’s rights can be violated<sup>69</sup>, but what could therefore sound like an “easy target”, in fact actualizes a deeper cultural battle: between a conservative, “bourgeois” agenda that commissions the director with the preservation of the canon on the one hand and her claim to artistic freedom outside of servitude on the other. Part of the latter is the liberty taken during rehearsals to “throw in” other texts, alien and – at first sight – incompatible to the classic announced in the program. In this collaging technique of chopping and screwing yet another power of the sovereign is displayed, i.e. *bastardization*.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, the cultural battles of the director of *Regietheater*, actualized in the performances of her stagings, are always *heroic*. They are decided – in absolute terms of glory or catastrophe – between the common-sense rationale of the majority and the idiosyncratic

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<sup>69</sup> If one wanted to describe this directorial gesture of appropriation in terms of colonial subjugation: at least when it comes to text and author, it usually operates in a place where no one lives anyway. The historical analogy would then be the “invasion” of Iceland by the Vikings.

<sup>70</sup> Here is an example of how these new directorial bloodlines belittle the author’s lineage: in the Berliner *Volksbühne* years between 1992 and 2017, whether the literary template was *Demons*, *The Idiot* or *The Brothers Karamazov* - we always went to see “the new Castorf”, never a Dostoevsky. For a more thorough analysis of the German director Frank Castorf’s *bastardisation* strategy cf. Korte’s Chapter “Reconstruction and Deconstruction” where the “method behind his deconstructive madness” becomes visible; with the collage technique in fact expressing a deep appreciation of literature transcending its bourgeois “auratization” (Korte 2019, 138-41).

expression of the artist. In this battle (that is also always “play” to her), the director figures as what American writer and performer Stefan Brecht has conceptualized as a “*free person*”: “erotic, socially self-assertive, playful and imaginative” (as opposed to the “*authoritarian phony*, the civilized adult” (Brecht [1978] 1986, 30)<sup>71</sup>). Aligned with Nietzsche’s aphorism proclaiming that the ones among us who do not have two thirds of their day available to themselves are “slaves”<sup>72</sup>, her six-hour theater shows are somewhat still compromises in terms of duration.

### *Fossil-fueled festivals (with the past catastrophe as the focal point)*

With its ancestry in the mythic age of Wagner’s late 19<sup>th</sup> century *festival*, the aesthetic form of *Regietheater* is obviously run on fossil fuels. The symbolic blueprints to the huge production houses known as German *Staatstheater* [state theaters] are the impossible “ocean tanker submarine” or the “flying factory”. This becomes most obvious in a massive concrete block such as the *Volksbühne* in Berlin-Mitte, built from the worker’s commons. Long into the transformation from an industrial into a service-based society, the actors in this place were still performing as *heaters*, desperately warming up the space by the means of running, screaming, and spitting; pure physical intensity. The director, in support of that exhaustion, lets the stage

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<sup>71</sup> In his fascinating book *Queer Theatre* Bertolt Brecht’s son portrays the (self-)conceptualization of the directors of the New York Underground theater of the 70s as “*f.p.*” (*free persons*): “Personal identity comes into being by imposing it on others; it does not preexist privately. The *f.p.*’s erotic inclination fuses with his inclination on another’s, hence his ends are not simply to fuck and/or kill but to establish *families*, somewhat enduring groups structured by erotic relations and relations of self-imposition (domination/subjugation).” (Brecht [1978] 1986, 30)

<sup>72</sup> “All mankind is divided, as it was at all times and is still, into slaves and freemen; for whoever has not two-thirds of his day for himself is a slave, be he otherwise whatever he likes, statesman, merchant, official, or scholar.” (Nietzsche [1878] 1924, aphorism 283) In a video podcast, shot against the backdrop of a premiere party in Bayreuth, the head of the Berlin *Volksbühne* Frank Castorf thus asserts the greatest talent of the *Regietheater* director: called out by the journalist on the ambition to “burn down the house [Richard Wagner’s *Festspielhaus*]” on the one hand while getting paid a lavish salary on the other, Castorf refuses to see the contradiction: getting paid excessively is good, as long as the director manages to stay “ungrateful”. [“Und dann muss man richtig undankbar sein.”] (Bayreuther Festspiele 2014; 2:09)

turn endlessly, aiming at a centrifugal force that ultimately exceeds the amounts of energy that can efficiently be re-integrated into the performance.

In the basement of the *Berliner Ensemble*, another “underwater tanker” of the German capital, this centrifugal excess (of the turning stage) was not only run on fossil-fueled electricity, but literally on the mechanics of warfare: in Helene Weigel’s theater 32 iron wheels of Soviet tanks – donated to the theater by the occupant – grinded in the circular rails underneath; doing their work up until 1999 (cf. “Das Theater Am Schiffbauerdamm | Berliner-Ensemble”).

The focal point of *Regietheater*, its point of departure is thus always the 20<sup>th</sup> century catastrophe. The directors named in the list above – proponents of the historical era – are all born in the 40s or 50s; they form a sort of “second generation” with their experience of WW2 and the *Shoa* being mediated, first and foremost through the silence of their parents. It is the same generation that produced the German terrorist movement (*Rote Armee Fraktion / Red Army Faction*/ R.A.F.) and the rationale in the arts is comparable: the deeper a society finds itself in denial, the more excessive the terror against it may be. In Freudian terms, the mandate of the director of *Regietheater* is thus to lead the audiences back to the original incursion from where their surplus anxiety springs (cf. Nelson 2012, 11). In a more contemporary language one could also say: the director of *Regietheater* is entitled to a re-traumatization of the collective and chooses her aesthetic methods accordingly. In that regard, *triggering* is part of her artistry.

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A review of this symptomatic account of *Regietheater*’s strategies will easily move on to a first multimorbid diagnosis: transgressive condescension, masculinist heroism, cryptic

militarism, romantic notions of the artist, elitist genius cult, etc. Intending a punchline, one could say: if *Regietheater* was run on fossil fuels and generational trauma, no wonder it has *run out of steam*. In the face of a climate disaster and the necessary “green transition” that lies ahead; in the face of the last generation of Holocaust survivors, as well as the perpetrators, disappearing; in the face of the fading memory of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century experience as such.<sup>73</sup>

But what if we are to grant *Regietheater* the presumption of innocence for a moment, arguing that every generation and culture operates within its own rationale when trying to remedy the existential void on this planet, its inescapable entropy. If we temporarily agree to take that as the quasi-theological starting point for the analysis of a certain aesthetical form, we are able to put the more interesting question: what are the values underlying *Regietheater*? What is its “ethical project”? What is “the good fight” the directors of *Regietheater* were fighting? (Or believed to be fighting?<sup>74</sup>) And not only the directors’ – also the audiences’, possibly society as a whole. What is the function assigned to art if this very form shall be its fixed point?

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<sup>73</sup> For this specific moment in time, one could also add: in the face of a global pandemic that left everyone exhausted and correspondingly precious about their “*personal* energy”. In that regard, a theater review of a *Volksbühne* production called *Drama* (directed by Constanze Macras in 2023) symptomizes an overall sensation of depletion: “Although it’s blessedly shorter [than a production from the season before] *Drama* is similarly meandering, and feels endless. After two and a half hours,” the critic claims, “*Drama* leaves one exhausted, not exhilarated.” (Goldmann 2023) – What happened *outside* this very place – *Volksbühne* – I wonder, where shows double the length were the standard, pouring me back into the city after hours and hours, steamy and stimulated?

<sup>74</sup> These are obviously anachronistic categories that are applied here; in contemporary activism, the phrase “Fight the good fight!” (cf. 1 Timothy 6:12) I used as a subheader in the preface is not seen as a tautology. As I hope to show, the transformatory “fight” of *Regietheater* however is more inclined to a dialectical outset: you contribute to a more just world by doing “negative stuff” in the arts.

## Caring for “The Accursed Share” – the ethical project of *Regietheater*

In the following section I will attempt to reconstruct the “ethical project of *Regietheater*” with the help of what French philosopher Georges Bataille has conceptualized as a “general economy”. Bataille’s work certainly has been a source of inspiration for the very generation of artists in question and therefore a cross reading should naturally bring forth parts of its aesthetic/societal program. But more importantly: when applying the Bataillean findings from today’s perspective – bringing it into a dialogue with the contemporary discourse of sustainability and circular economy – an excess of meaning is produced which shall help us to understand *Regietheater*’s topicality. The next section is thus dedicated to a brief re-iteration of Bataille’s concept formulated in the book *The Accursed Share* (Bataille [1949] 2007)<sup>75</sup>.

What Bataille calls the “general economy” works in contrast to the “particular point of view” of a “restrictive economy” (Bataille, 25), which is equivalent to what we understand by “economics science” today. The same limits its field of observation to global financial operations and is, in that concern, unable to account for the “circuit of cosmic energy upon which it depends” (25); or as Bataille puts it elsewhere: unable to account for the “play of energy on the surface of the globe” (21). What sounds like an esoteric concept at first is grounded in a deeply material dimension: the radiation of the sun is what – in the logics of a

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<sup>75</sup> The original title *La Part Maudite* [The Accursed Share] rings the bell of the idiomatic French term “le poète maudit” [the accursed poet]; a subtle hint to Bataille’s work being as much an inspiration to an aesthetical theory (concerning art and its societal functions) as one of global ecology. Please note that for the following section I exclusively quote from *The Accursed Share* ([1949] 2007) and – for reasons of readability – only reference page numbers.

“general economy” – “dispenses energy - wealth - without any return” (28) and thereby puts things around us in motion.

Notably, the “Bataillean sun” is providing *more* energy than can possibly be used by living matter on earth, which forces humanity to deal with what Bataille calls “the accursed share”, i.e. surplus energy. A “general economy” is thus never concerned with a “deficiency of resources” (39), but – quite the contrary – tries to find solutions for “problems following from the existence of *surpluses*” (39; my emphasis). In a capitalist order – the order the “particular point of view” of a “restrictive economy” applies itself onto - surpluses are of course reinvested into more growth. But in the Bataillean logics the exuberance of life on earth is exercising a level of *pressure* that can never be fully consumed, accumulated or efficiently re-integrated. Every system – industrial or ecological – will hit its limit of growth, so that the problem persists: how does humanity deal with effervescence, ebullition, exudation, extravagance, plethora, prodigality, superabundance and incandescence? (Bataille himself is quite excessive with vocabulary for the fact of a *too-much* or a *more-than-enough*; all circumscriptions of the cause for the accursed share.) “Supposing there is no longer any growth possible” he writes “what is to be done with the seething energy that remains?” (31)

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A lot of these “problems” of the “general economy” reverberate in contemporary discourses on the “green transition” and its attempts for a “circular economy”. While on the one hand the Bataillean stance could not possibly take issue with transitioning to an all-green

energy production<sup>76</sup>, the promise of a fully circular economy, on the other, suppresses the fact of the accursed share that is humanity's destiny. (In more charged terminology: most concepts of sustainability simply do not account for our "wild exuberance" (33) as living matter.) Aiming for a total re-integration of energy, in Bataillean terms, means thus to "proceed from a *particular* point of view" (the deficiency of resources i.e. scarcity) and applying that onto the "general situation" (39) of abundance.<sup>77</sup>

In Bataille's general economy the surplus solar energy making for our excessive wealth therefore "must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically" (21). And humanity as a species is most fit for finding possibilities of consuming "intensely, sumptuously" (37) as well as "*profitlessly* whatever might remain in the progression of useful works" (58). Because as humans, we have the capacity to not only spend wealth by *usage*, but also by means of *sacrifice*.

In the course of his writing Bataille tries to prove this point by looking into "the historical data" (43), namely of cultures ritualizing human sacrifice (mostly Aztec) or a warfare based on gift-giving (potlatch).<sup>78</sup> By illustrating his distinction between "glorious" and

<sup>76</sup> The involuntary destruction of the planet is exactly *not* an intentional squander, but an "acknowledgment of impotence" (Bataille, 22).

<sup>77</sup> In the recent account of an authenticated tech-optimist, the frustration over the Bataillean type of solar energy – and the accursed share intrinsic to it – can still be felt. As Bill Gates writes in *How to avoid a climate disaster*, solar panels can currently only extract 33% of the energy hitting them – with no technological breakthrough in that matter in sight (Gates 2022, 80). Engaging Bill Gates and Georges Bataille in a dialogue, we can quote the latter: "[T]o affirm that it is necessary to dissipate a substantial portion of energy produced, sending it up in smoke, is to go against judgments that form the basis of a rational economy." (Bataille, 22) Further engaging in the number game, we can speak of an "Accursed Share Rate" of 67% in the case of state-of-the-art solar panels.

<sup>78</sup> It would lead too far to go into the full analogy of these alternative economies and *Regietheater's* practices, but mirroring its actor-director relation in the one of sacrificer and victim *is* tempting. Here is a quote setting the scene for a future elaboration: "The individual who brought back a captive had just as much of a share

“catastrophic expenditure” (23) he subtly introduces an ethics into the play of cosmic energy on the planet. Humanity, according to Bataille, has agency in this play to the extent that it can either “*undergo*” or “*bring about* in [its] own way” (23) the complicated operations that the accursed share demands. If we are conscious of the “movement that exceeds [us]” (26) we can therefore choose “an exudation that might suit us” (24). In a society disembedded from the general economy though (i.e. a society like the Western, that has lost touch with the sacrificial offering of parts of its wealth) the excess energy will necessarily find its own “unconscious” outlets.

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To elaborate this point – and re-connect to the “ethical project of *Regietheater*” – it can be helpful to situate Bataille’s writing historically. Conceived during and in the immediate aftermath of two world wars – *The Accursed Share* was published in 1949, but the work on it had started 18 years earlier already – the most recent “catastrophic expenditure” of excessive solar energy stands as a clear image in the mind of the author. It was the plethora of industrial extension that exuded here in a massive *Materialschlacht* [battle of materiel]. From the perspective of someone about to transition into the cold-war scenario from which the directors of *Regietheater* will emerge, he adds: “We can express the hope of avoiding a war that already threatens. But in order to do so we must divert the surplus production, either into the rational

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in the sacred office as the priest. A first bowl of the victim’s blood, drained from the wound, was offered to the sun by the priests. A second bowl was collected by the sacrificer. The latter would go before the images of the gods and wet their lips with the warm blood. The body of the sacrificed was his by right; he would carry it home, setting aside the head, and the rest would be eaten at a banquet, cooked without salt or spices – but eaten by the invited guests, not by the sacrificer, who regarded his victim as a son, as *a second self*.” (Bataille, 53–54; my emphasis) For the seminal study of potlatch, see Marcel Mauss’ *Essai sur le don* [*The Gift*] ([1950] 2021)

extension of a difficult industrial growth, or into unproductive works that will dissipate an energy that cannot be accumulated in any case" (25).

With this line of thought – all of a sudden – a politically ambitious theory of the arts becomes tangible. To make my point even clearer, I repeat the quote above in a radically reduced version: "Avoiding a war that (...) threatens [by diverting] the surplus production (...) into unproductive works." Here, in a nutshell, we find the "ethical project of *Regietheater*" with its excessive forms and industry-like apparatus, revolving stages, immense ensembles, and actors at their boiling point<sup>79</sup>. Here lies the promise of an art form's contribution to a "glorious" (not "catastrophic") expenditure. Dialectically speaking, we can draw a preliminary conclusion: the symbolic warfare of *Regietheater* (as described above) is a contribution to world peace. Its excesses are all ethically motivated in the "rationale" of the general economy and its imperative to squander the accursed share.

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I acknowledge it is quite a stretch in scale – from a "theory of the sun" to a sub-genre in the performing arts called *Regietheater*, a phenomenon as historically and regionally discrete as can be. But despite the Bataillean economy motivating many more forms of 20<sup>th</sup> century art, it simply *is* the intellectual framework that captures my own experience of *Regietheater* in its

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<sup>79</sup> The "subject at its boiling point" is a phrasing Bataille uses in his preface. ("Thus, the object of my research cannot be distinguished *from the subject at its boiling point*." (Bataille [1949] 2007, 10) In an interview with Bernhard Schütz, one of the protagonists at *Volksbühne*, his interlocutor introduces him as follows: "You're something like an amphibious vehicle. You can function as an actor in the air, on water, and on land. You're something like a classic decathlete. (...) You always generated tremendous energy during your acting. One could say you were like a Hephaistos [god of volcanoes and metallurgy] or a type of machinist." (Kurzenberger et al. 2011, 53; my translation) I have a clear image of Schütz shipping tons of coal against a wall during Jonathan Meese's *Volksbühne* production DE FRAU in order to produce actorial heat – proving Bataille's point.

visceral essence. (Never did I experience the excesses of a six-hour Castorf show as pure hedonism or cynical squander, but always as a collective, willful destruction of the surplus energy playing over the surface of the globe.) In the topology of ebullition and incandescence the Bataillean scenario presents us with, the giant in the Mountain Range of *Regietheater* thus reminds us more of *The Little Prince* from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's universe: inhabiting a very small planet, he makes sure to broom his three volcanos (active and inactive) on a daily basis; an efficient action of squandered energy, of useless productivity for the greater good.

## **The Bataillean sun and the Club of Rome: leap into the present tense**

For a further analysis (a revisiting of the *Regietheater* form, as announced above, from a discourse more contemporary) it is necessary to situate *The Accursed Share* historically a second time; this time from its own future perspective. The *Limits to Growth*, published in 1972 (i.e. 23 years after Bataille's book) as the report to the so-called Club of Rome (Meadows et al. 1972), is usually referred to as the wakeup call for Western industrial societies in terms of a presumed innocence. By the means of computer simulations, the study demonstrates the depletion of non-renewable natural resources within the next 100 years. Combined with the exponential growth of the world population and three other factors (food per capita, industrial output per capita and pollution) all its simulations end in collapse. The world will simply "run out" of resources if business continues as usual.

While the validity of the approach and method of the authors was put into question in the immediate aftermath of the publication, today there is a general agreement in the scientific community as well as the general public that the prognosis was right: with half a century

“incubation time”, humanity *knows* by now that it is currently inhabiting a point of no return in regard to its own survival. As mentioned already there is no way to take issue with a necessary “green transition” from the perspective of Bataille’s general economy. However, the powerful discourses derived from *The Limits to Growth* reformat our conceptions of energetic abundance and squander drastically, which in turn affects the social function of the arts (as well as our conceptions of the Space of Rehearsals). Therefore the freshly unearthed “ethical project of *Regietheater*” appears in an anachronistic light: against the backdrop of an impending planetary collapse, were excessive art forms (like the directors’ theater in its German post-war iteration) not merely a symptom of Western predatory societies, of their industrial squander and ruthless destruction of living matter?

It is true that it is harder than ever to distinguish between an intentional, sacrificial “misuse” of resources and a mere waste in the interest of profit.<sup>80</sup> This insecurity, however, paired with the sensibility that emerged in the wake of *The Limits to Growth* has made the arts adopt the *premise of scarcity*. Gradually abandoning the archaic, general economy that is the starting point of forms such as the historic *Regietheater* the arts have, in Bataillean terms, fully adopted the particular standpoint of a restrictive economy. (In Bataille’s own words: “Precedence is given to *energy acquisition* over energy expenditure. Glory itself is justified by the consequences of a glorious deed in the sphere of utility” (Bataille, 29; my emphasis).) Consequently, discourses of sustainability are omnipresent in art and art education, informing

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<sup>80</sup> Swedish writer and activist Andreas Malm (2016) suggests the concept “fossil capital” for forms of capital that generate profit *through* emissions. “[F]ossil capital is (...) self-expanding value passing through the metamorphosis of fossil fuels into CO<sub>2</sub>.” (Malm 2016, 290)

policies as well as epistemologies.<sup>81</sup> By now the concept has long transgressed from an ecological ideal to a model of social regulation. The theory of privilege for example (elaborated on most explicitly in Critical Whiteness Studies) is clearly built on the premise of scarcity: the space you take in a social sphere – due to your structural advantage – is *taken from* someone else. As access and agency are the *limited resources* in each social setting, your privilege must be the disadvantage of someone else in a more or less exact equation.<sup>82</sup>

The project of reinventing *Regietheater* (in this specific case: of constructing a contemporary ethics derived from its historical premises) is thus faced with an unpleasant, somewhat risky task. Without calling the end goals of the expanded sustainability project into question, i.e. ecological and social justice, it will have to stay critical to its underlying “cosmology”. And it does so first and foremost by insisting on the premise of abundance. Provocatively put: nothing has changed for the arts under the “Bataillean sun” since the announcement of *The Limits to Growth* in 1972. As artists (inhabitants of the planet), we are still dealing with the problems that derive from it offering us *too much*; its genuine *solar*, as it were, *potlatch warfare*.

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<sup>81</sup> By the time of this writing there are – at my university alone – two M.A. projects, independently of each other, investigating more climate-friendly ways to build and re-use set design. Consequently, the PhD call for 2021-22 for *Performative and Media-Based Practices* extended a specific invitation to “audiovisual design with a focus on sustainability”. (Stockholm University of the Arts 2021) The teaching staff of the Performing arts department, in turn, conducted their own research project (2022-24) starting with the question: “How can we continue to create relevant and innovative performing arts with a smaller climate impact?” (Garpe et al. 2024)

<sup>82</sup> From that perspective, it feels logical to scrutinize theories of abundance such as Bataille’s general economy for not “checking their privilege” in the first place. Cf. also Huber’s analysis of climate activism suffering from the “credentialed politics” of the professional-managerial class (2022, 109–43). For a brief definition of the PMC, cf. footnote 35 in *Regiebuch* 1, Chapter C.

## *Challenging the aesthetics of degrowth*

Given the urgent necessity to implement macroscopic measures to prevent the threatening climate disaster – and given the possibility (!) of achieving this<sup>83</sup> – a high cultural standard is conceivable where *every* realm of society will have turned relationally and energetically sustainable ... *except for* the arts. To achieve this, however, the artists of our time will have to critically scrutinize the uncanny connection between their current aesthetics of degrowth – supposedly modelling a climate-conscious *politics of less* – and the neoliberal austerity measures introduced in the 1980s. As American geographer Matthew T. Huber provocatively suggests in his *Climate Change as Class War*:

The critique of affluence and “overconsumption” overlapped perfectly with the rise of the environmental movement at the same moment. Much like Greenspan and Volcker [the chairmen of the US central bank 1979-2006], the Club of Rome’s 1972 *Limits to Growth* announced a new reality to which society had to adjust [.] (Huber 2022, 159)

“Environmental politics”, Huber goes on, “rose and expanded precisely during the period of neoliberal restraint. It subscribed to what Leigh Phillips terms ‘austerity ecology’, a politics of limits, reducing consumption, and lessening our impact, distilled in the slogan ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’.” (Huber, 159).

With their integration into the post-industrial society of service, the arts are subsumed into the same sensibility of scarcity and circular re-investment. Instead of dealing with the

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<sup>83</sup> Tech billionaires – such as the already mentioned Bill Gates – are currently funding the research on climate technologies that could *potentially* transform the production modes of the huge industrial sectors – concrete, steel, energy etc. – to a “net zero” carbon output by 2050. Looking at the list of the promising “Breakthrough Energy Ventures” (cf. “Breakthrough Energy” 2025) it becomes obvious that the cultural sector, even if it were to align its entire global carbon footprint, hardly has the potential to make a difference on the functional level. Initiatives within it, such as for instance *The Theatre Green Book*, have to therefore be understood as merely symbolic, micro-political attempts for social relevance within a restrictive economy (cf. *Theatre Green Book*).

“accursed share” their function is reformatted to providing the extrapolatable models for change. In strict Bataillean logics, this turn – away from the sacrificial festival to the useful facilitation – is dangerous though: the pressure exercised by the abundance of solar energy will simply move to other realms of squander and find its catastrophic expenditure there.

In consequence, a *reinvented Regietheater* does not provide a societal model of any kind. On the contrary, the upscaling of its politics would be devastating for humanity and the planet. Instead, art will provide the radical exception in an overall sustainable reality. Its contribution to social amelioration will thus never be direct, but only dialectical; consciously maintaining the place of irresponsible expenditure and attending to – by celebrating and wasting – the terrestrial energies that exceed us.

This call for a “new autonomy” of the arts of course rings the bell of German playwright Schiller’s concept of *play* again; elaborated on in yet another foundational text for the “ethical project of *Regietheater*” (cf. Schiller [1795] 1967: *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*) and touched upon briefly in Chapter B. *Play* however, accepting of the Bataillean premise, is “serious business” and affords no doubts around its own mandate for squander. And while the notion of an autonomy or exceptionalism of the arts has been scrutinized for its bourgeois roots, a contemporary “re-commitment to being un-committed” (Jackson 2022, 98) holds the promise of a true democratic emancipation from the imperative of micro-political self-improvement.<sup>84</sup>

In the Chapter *Terracing the territory III.* of this *Regiebuch*, dedicated to the Great Plains of our present moment, I will return to a more thorough discussion of the so-called “social turn” (i.e. the of arts’ integration into the project of social amelioration after the dismantling of the welfare state) and its specific impact on the director’s position. Here, I will

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<sup>84</sup> In her text “Relative Autonomy in the Age of Climate Politics”, Jackson engages Adorno’s elaborations on commitment [Engagement] in a dialogue with the “literalizing functionality of climate aesthetics” (2022, 97).

also attempt a more thorough analysis of a notion of circularity (“feedback-loops”) that organizes our understanding of our eco-*system*, but also of the audience-actor encounter and the actor-director relation in rehearsals. For now, I hope to have shown that “the ethical project of *Regietheater*” simultaneously informs and transcends the question of a specific theatrical form (a sub-genre of the performing arts where authorship is monopolized in the position of the director) – and how its reconsideration is not a revisionist backward gaze, but might in fact help to address the specific function of the arts in the face of impending catastrophe.

But let’s move on “topographically” for now. Out of the Mountain Range of *Regietheater* and into its Foothills.

## TERRACING THE TERRITORY II. – The Foothills of *Regietheater*.

### **Productive (un-)specifications: two necessary particularizations**

My *re*-construction of *Regietheater* in the previous chapter benefits from a certain historical distance mixing with a specific mechanism of “cultural transference”. Before venturing into my next attempt for periodization – into an era I call the Foothills of *Regietheater* – I would like to lay out this mechanism briefly. In combination with yet another necessary particularization – regarding the transferential energy drawn from a *specific* theater institution – it shall help us to pinpoint the correlation at work in this ambition of *terracing the territory*: between the *reconstruction* of a historically passé form of theater and the *construction* of a future possibility

In the following I am applying the psychoanalytic notion of transference in its specific Lacanian iteration. I have touched upon the overall concept shortly already when describing the “actorial skill” in Chapter B but will unpack it in more detail in Chapter 5 (*Ambivalent Accountability*). Briefly put, transference is for Lacan the effect of a process of assigning knowledge to one agent within an asymmetric relation. This agent – for instance the analyst in the psychoanalytic relation – thereby turns into the so-called *subject supposed to know*, a subject inducing an urge to respond to because of the supposition of knowledge (cf. Lacan [1964] 1998). The transference as a dialectical structure of interrelation is always sparked by a so-called *agalma*, the Greek term for “ornament” or “statuette” that Lacan conceptualizes by help of Plato’s *symposium*; a shiny “substance” that is asymmetrically attributed and thereby sparks desire but also envy and indignation (Lacan [1960] 2001).<sup>85</sup> The end of psychoanalytic treatment is reached when the analyst – in the analysand’s eyes – falls from the assigned position of supposed knowledge and is revealed as a mere *objet petit a* (the cause of the analysand’s desire).

### *Transferential axis: Nord-Süd*

Already during my applications for doctoral educations in Scandinavia, I have been making use of a specific narrativization of the German theater context, edging on mythologization; “reciting” a certain “seductive tune” that I had learned to play during my visits in the North (arguably, like a flute). Far from being a merely manipulative strategy, the narrative in question springs from an identification with the way I was interpellated by my

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<sup>85</sup> In the case of the *symposium* that Lacan discusses, the supposed knowledge in Socrates – his *agalma*, as it were – sparks the desire of young Alcibiades to lie next to him. For a more thorough discussion of *agalma* and its figuration in the audience-actor/spectator-performer relation, cf. Holling’s *Übertragung im Theater* [Transference in the Theater] (2016, 76–82)

Swedish friends and colleagues throughout our first encounters: as a *subject supposed to know* in regard to historical dialectics and transgressive theater.<sup>86</sup>

There are various ways to explain this cultural transference of which many will lead to the very blunt 19<sup>th</sup> century assumption of Germans as a “people of poets and thinkers”. A cliché into which – paradoxically – namely the Frankfurt School has been breathing new life; gaining “German philosophy” international reputation by working through the impossibilities of reasoning and writing after the historical *Zivilisationsbruch* [break with civilization] of the Holocaust. Accordingly, my Swedish friends and colleagues always admired what they perceived as the “criticality” in the German theater scene; the eagerness of theater makers to strongly disagree in public discussions as well as rehearsals (a standard of discourse that can be linked to Habermasian conceptions of the public sphere) as opposed to the Scandinavian ambition to seek mutual understanding and compromise.<sup>87</sup>

However, even if we were to bracket an *actual* aesthetic/philosophical tradition or a veritably charged German history – laying the basis for the cliché in question – it is hard to neglect the strong reference point German culture has *in fact* been in the North up until the post-war era. In Sweden this fact is illustrated by the adapted “neutrality” during WW2, i.e. the country’s incapacity to break off the bonds with a republic turned fascist. In that regard, Scandinavia’s forceful and ongoing re-orientation towards the Anglo-Saxon context during the

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<sup>86</sup> My personal entrance to Sweden has been through the performing arts scene in Malmö in the second half of the zero years. Here, I’ve mostly been in the contexts of the independent group *Institutet*, whose aesthetics I perceived as a radicalization of theater forms I was familiar with from Berlin (cf. Schmit 2026, forthcoming).

<sup>87</sup> In a pun the Austrian author Karl Kraus reversed the „Volk der Dichter und Denker“ [people of poets and thinkers] in „Volk der Richter und Henker“ [people of judges and hangmen] The sentence gained traction and resonated long after WW2, but was originally coined to refer already to the Germans of World War I. (cf. Kraus 1922). The Scandinavian ideal in question can be found for instance in the writing of Danish-Norwegian novelist Aksel Sandemose. In *En flykning krysser sit spor* ([1933] 1962) he pinpoints the productive as well as destructive effects of self-suppression in the interest of consensus by formulating the ten “commandments” of an imaginary Danish village (cf. “The law of Jante” on the very first page).

second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century carries traces of a repression; and as a German theater maker it has therefore been surprisingly “easy” to tap into the vein of this cultural “unconscious”.



*Figure 2:* In the Pied Piper of Hamelin, a famous German legend, a rat-catcher takes revenge on a town that failed to financially reward him for his services. Playing the same flute that lured the rats into the local river he seduces the children of the town to follow him into a cave from where they never return. (Illustration by Kate Greenaway to the Robert Browning version of the tale; 1888. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

A reverberation of my frequent interpellation as *subject supposed to know* of the performing arts and historical dialectics can still be heard in a formula Swedish intellectual Horace Engdahl gave out in 2011: “Germany is a Sweden for grown-ups.” (cf. Leonardz 2011) Staying within the image, the German PhD candidate *in* Sweden, playing his *Pied Piper* flute,

would be luring the “infants of historical consciousness” into the cave of their positive transference onto him; dreadful of the day, his writing will be translated into the “grown-up” context of his intellectual ancestors, revealing an illegitimate amount of generalizations.<sup>88</sup> (To stress the irony of the thought experiment at hand: imagine the loss of fetishistic pleasure that would come with *Nico*, the *The Velvet Underground* member from Cologne, singing “All tomorrow’s parties” with a perfect American accent.)

I am laying this mechanism of cultural transference out *not* in order to re-affirm (or indulge in) a presumed asymmetry, but because it undeniably has had some “productive” effects on my research: Scandinavia has generously allowed me to drop quite some “national ballast” when re-telling the tale of *Regietheater*, to look at it from an “unfamiliar” distance – as in *verfremdet* – and become “unspecific” in a generative way. In other words (and given the institutional situatedness of this writing in Stockholm): when re-constructing “German *Regietheater*”, I am by now in fact *also* constructing it along the line of a Scandinavian projection. Consequently, the “Germany” I am talking about would oftentimes be more precisely rendered with the Scandinavian word for the country – “Tyskland” – in the sense of a non-translatable technical term.

### *Tyskland*

This is a strategy my artistic partner, Swedish actor and director Iggy Malmborg, and I explored in a work in 2018, bringing the cultural transference between the theater scenes of Sweden and Germany to its full circle. Commissioned by Berlin’s *Gorki Theater* to contribute

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<sup>88</sup> In an urge to safeguard myself from an alignment with Engdahl’s conservative polarization, I have often worked with hyperbolic allegorizations of *Germania* and *Scandinavia*; offering transparent mythologizations of my own (self-)experience in the North, by which the implicit “German superiority complex” could be described as a symptom. Cf. also my collaboration with Brussels-based group “German Staatstheater” (Schmit et al. 2023)

to a series entitled “Mythen der Wirklichkeit” [Myths of Reality]<sup>89</sup>, we operated with the word *Tyskland* as an empty signifier that could be alternatively charged with the meaning of either “Germany” or “Berlin-Kreuzberg in 2006” or “Castorf’s Volksbühne”. Taking inspiration in a facebook-group from the early zero years called *Grabbar som åker til Berlin och kollar på teater ibland* [Dudes that go to Berlin and watch theater sometimes], the piece was built around a score in which two presumed “Scandinavians” meet in a destroyed set design in Berlin-Mitte; which is the focal point of their phantasmatic cultural projection. Asking each other enthusiastic questions based on the formula “Did you know that in Tyskland...?” they explore each other’s ignorance in front of an audience that knows better.<sup>90</sup>

At the start of the show a dark-pitched voice of authority – rhetorically leaning on the “The 10 Commandments for Gilbert & George” (Gilbert & George 2007) – names the performative imperatives of “tysk teater”. These shall serve us as a transition to the next necessary particularization.

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<sup>89</sup> The series set out to give the instrumentalization of national myths and legends in the hands of populist governments a “critical cultural reading” (“Tyskland | Gorki” 2018).

<sup>90</sup> “Did you know that in Tyskland the independent scene steals aesthetics from the institutions because that’s where the cutting-edge stuff happens? Did you know that all the actors in Tyskland are dramaturges from the outset? Did you know that in Tyskland you can wake up, bring your child to daycare and then go party in the best club in the world? Did you know that the communist terrorists in Tyskland are the trendsetters for hairstyles? Did you know that in Tyskland, it is illegal to make a show that is less than five hours?”

## 20 COMMANDMENTS FOR TYSKLAND

THOU SHALT PRODUCE FRICTION.

THOU SHALT MAKE USE OF REFERENCES.

THOU SHALT NEVER BE AFRAID.

THOU SHALT USE EXHAUSTION AS A PORTAL TO TRUTH.

THOU SHALT STRETCH TIME.

THOU SHALT MAKE PEOPLE WAIT.

THOU SHALT BE NEGATIVE.

THOU SHALT RIDICULE THYSELF.

THOU SHALT BE COVERED IN DUST AND SPERM. THOU SHALT BE DRUNK AND SMART. THOU SHALT BE DRUNK AND DIALECTICAL.

THOU SHALT PRODUCE ALIENATION.

THOU SHALT BE HATED BY THE BOURGEOISIE.

THOU SHALT FIGHT PHYSICAL AND TECHNICAL LIMITATIONS.

THOU SHALT CREATE SITUATIONS IN WHICH THOU LOSETH CONTROL.

THOU SHALT CONTRIBUTE THROUGH DESTRUCTION.

THOU SHALT SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH WASTE.

THOU SHALT BE SOLIDARIC, WITHOUT MAKING THYSELF LIKED.

THOU SHALT VALUE DIFFERENCES, WITHOUT DEFENDING INEQUALITIES.

THOU SHALT USE THYSELF AS A READYMADE.

THOU SHALT MAKE USE OF SEX.

THOU SHALT NOT KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THY DOST, BUT THOU SHALT DO IT.

The “aesthetical values” presented in the list above allow for another particularization of my claim to authorial overview. Because when I speak of Tyskland’s *Regietheater* the term is obviously *haunted* by a *certain* theater (an experience of a *certain* institution). Only occasionally providing its name (in the style of a random reference) paradoxically enhances the power of its specter – casting an auratic shimmer over my “re-construction”, that might not always be serving the project at hand. So, to speak it out without further ado: when speaking of Germany, I might just mean Tyskland, i.e. the Swedish projection; but when speaking of Tyskland’s theater I might just mean “Castorf’s *Volksbühne*”.

The following sections will therefore expand along this other construction line that necessarily informs my *re*-construction of *Regietheater*; gently leading us into the Foothills of *Regietheater*, a period more or less synchronous to the duration of Frank Castorf’s tenure (1992-2017). By entering the specifics of an idiosyncratic theater institution in Berlin, I hope to simultaneously work through the methodological question of how an *exception* can metonymically indicate the whole. In a later step, the excavation of the specific directorial tradition Castorf’s *Volksbühne* stands for shall help to position my research interest in relation to the postdramatic theater forms that turn hegemonic in the same period.<sup>91</sup>

### *Busting the ghost: Rosa Luxemburg’s Volksbühne*

In the case of “Castorf’s *Volksbühne*” the material basis of its “exceptionalism” has traditionally been obfuscated for the sake of a more generative hauntology.<sup>92</sup> The specter of *Volksbühne* is, in that sense, of a special, most productive kind: it did not start haunting only

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<sup>91</sup> Please note that in the following, I, again, do not aim at a scholarly overview over Castorf’s tenure. In that concern I reference to – and heavily draw on – Christine Korte’s dissertation *Refusing the End of History. The Politics and Aesthetics of Castorf’s Volksbühne* (2019)

<sup>92</sup> *Hauntology*, homophonous to the French *ontology*, is Jaques Derrida’s proposal to think of present time as constantly resisting closure from the past. (cf. Derrida 2012)

“from beyond the grave”, but already *during* Castorf’s 25-year tenure it would regularly appear all over the German-speaking theater world; as the phantasmatic blueprint for an “ideal theater”.

In turn, the compulsion of every artistically ambitious leadership to look at their own city theater through the prism of Castorf’s institution has led to a fair amount of frustrated feelings since 1992. Unfortunately, the analysis of failure (“Why can’t we do the same?!”) often contented itself with an acknowledgement of the theater’s exceptional status based on its position in the capital.<sup>93</sup> But the reasons for the aesthetic specificity of the *Volksbühne* are more profound, i.e. historically grown. They have their basis in a unique institutional set-up, set in motion by an emancipatory ambition. While German city theaters are traditionally based on bourgeois initiatives of the 19th century (if they didn’t simply originate in feudal times), the *Volksbühne* was from the start an association of and for left-oriented workers. In the first period of its existence (up until WW1) the shows were thus only accessible to the members of the “Verein Freie Volksbühne” [association of the free Volksbühne]; which was a way to bypass political censorship on the one hand as well as to provide tickets affordable to workers on the other.<sup>94</sup>

The *Volksbühne* productions by the outspokenly Communist director Erwin Piscator in the 1920s further set the tone of an aesthetically ambitious, nevertheless mass-oriented theater.

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<sup>93</sup> Truth be told, since the reunification of Berlin five major city theaters (*Schaubühne*, *Gorki*, *Berliner Ensemble*, *Volksbühne*, *Deutsches Theater*) are to be found in a radius of some 8 km; an exceptional density making for unprecedented possibilities of specialization in the respective programs. The *Volksbühne* – in this “geographical” constellation – was able to serve an aesthetical niche unaffordable to any singular city theater in a smaller city.

<sup>94</sup> Only with the building, inaugurated in 1914 and financed by the same means of the association’s members’ *Arbeitergroschen* [workers’ pennies], did the until then nomadic institution solidify. As Korte puts it: “Now the organization would have its own permanent home and performing ensemble. For the first time in German history an audience had created its own theatre institution, rather than a theatre having to create its audience.” (Korte 2019, 11) For an overview of the *Volksbühne* history (up until the 1970’s) in English, cf. Davies (2013)

(So hard to imagine from today's perspective, where mass entertainment and formal conservatism have become almost inextricably connected!) It is Piscator's theater, avant-gardist in form and committed to *proletarian culture* [Пролеткульт], that lays the basis for the aesthetics that will be picked up after 1945 and again after 1989.

Despite the *Volksbühne*'s later integration into the state subsidized apparatuses – first socialist, then liberal – it seems to have “no contract” with its alleged sponsors, i.e. the taxpayers. Until today the house is one of the few city theaters in Germany that does not offer subscriptions, i.e. the regular contractual mode by which bourgeois audiences engage with “their” city theater. (The formula being: “In May next year we will get to see HAMLET” in exchange for “HAMLET in May next year will be sold out.”) This historically acquired independence makes for great freedom and reactivity in programming, not to mention the fact that such a set-up holds no obligation towards a canon of the so-called classics. (If Castorf as a director picked up Schiller for example, it is because he had a specific artistic ambition with it, aiming at a concrete, contextual intervention; not because he had to.<sup>95</sup>)

Structurally, these production circumstances recall the freedoms that make theater practitioners choose the “independent scene” nowadays – for the price of incomparably smaller resources, a taboo placed on classical dramatic literature as a starting point and the lack of a steady ensemble. A paradox of scale that is part of the enigmatic radiance of the *Volksbühne* specter; especially when held against the backdrop of Scandinavia (as well as many other places in the West), where aesthetic innovation has always been the core contribution of “free

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Korte's three case studies as examples of how Castorf attempts “to revitalize the dramatic text with a view to exploding its hidden power in the present.” (2019, 40)

groups". How can an organization of this size, we wonder, operate with this level of independence?<sup>96</sup>

By analyzing the historical legacy of the *Volksbühne* the undisputed exceptionality of Castorf's tenure loses at least some of its more mystifying aspects. Because given the pre-existent lineage of resilience and emancipation, the organization and its stage has been a special place all along; and – in this narrow sense – the “revolutionary” Castorf was actually more of a site-specific traditionalist, tuned in to the place's history and locality.<sup>97</sup> In other words, he himself was *haunted* by the *Volksbühne*'s specter.

## A semblance of continuity

All this being said, I have barely touched upon the obvious reason for resilience, i.e. the new energy the *Volksbühne* drew (as an institution) by preventing a Western take-over after the German reunification. In a historical situation where close to every head of any public institution in the former East is replaced by a West-German counterpart – a measure to “safeguard” liberal democratic values – the importance of having an East-German artistic

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<sup>96</sup> Speaking of scale: the question of how a state-funded institution was able to lay claim to an authentically subcultural “vibe” is in fact hard to explain. Trying to indicate the specific atmosphere of a “night out” at Castorf's *Volksbühne* I am tempted to refer back to Stefan Brecht's “sympathetic observer's record” of 1970s New York independent theater ([1978] 1986). What happens during the living room shows the author describes in it renders best the experience audiences came to share in the 800-seat auditorium at *Rosa Luxemburg-Platz*. Brecht's book in fact even accounts for “the infamous ‘party atmosphere for underdogs’ (...) the informality and raucousness of the *Volksbühne* foyer”. (Korte 2019, 130)

<sup>97</sup> For Castorf's many concrete cultural-political interventions in the guise of a “hysteric local historian” [hysterischer Heimatkundler] (Seidler 2010) cf. Korte (2019, 126–31). The architecture of the building itself surely helped his cause when excavating the very site's *spiritus loci*: the theater on *Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz* is festive but sober; as opposed to the neo-classicist interior of the Berliner Ensemble for example, where Bertolt Brecht's gesture of crossing out a painted eagle in the balconies (the Prussian coat of arms) would proof too tiny to prevent the re-appropriation of the space by bourgeois audiences over time.

director at the “people’s stage” cannot be overstated. I will expand on the implications of this political outset between West and East below paying particular attention to how it affects the actor-director relation of our present day. For now, let us note that the radiance and resilience of the *Volksbühne* “refusing the end of history” (such is the title of Canadian theater scholar Christine Korte’s passionate account of the phenomenon (2019)) has made for a factually *non-representative situation*; by upholding the *semblance* of a continuity within the *Regietheater* paradigm.

When I graduated in 2009, to me as well as to many of my (West German) peers, the aliveness of Castorf’s stagecraft and programming pointed to an actual heyday of what we had come to understand as *Regietheater*. Mistaking the *exception of the Volksbühne* to be an indicator of a rule made for what could be called the “cognitive dissonance” of the Foothills; a topographical confusion regarding the continuity of the Mountain Range of *Regietheater*, a “cognitive dissonance” as to what lies ahead and what lies behind.<sup>98</sup>

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The timespan I want to *re-construct* in the following sections roughly dates from the middle of the nineties – when I started seeing shows at the *Volksbühne* as a teenager – to the year 2017 (as the year where Castorf’s tenure ends). I realize, methodically, this chapter is harder to write than the preceding one. (Why? *Because “I” enter(s) the scene.*) More than

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<sup>98</sup> “Cognitive dissonance” is the term Diedrich Diedrichsen uses when discussing the cultural political crisis that emerged in the wake of Chris Dercon’s appointment as new artistic leader of *Volksbühne* in 2015. A dissonance that reverberates through all the troubling questions regarding *Regie* today: “Although I – and that has irritated me most in this cultural struggle – politically and theoretically would rather be on the side of Critical Whiteness and Queer Studies, I stand aesthetically and cultural policy-wise on the side of [Castorf’s] *Volksbühne*.” (Diederichsen 2017; translation by Korte)

before, I run the risk of giving a merely subjective account; a risk, intrinsic to artistic research, that will only increase the closer I get to the present day. Maybe more of an artist than a researcher, I can only *hope* for my “story” to structurally *resonate* with its “audience”; and thereby prove my points. However, I promise to attempt for a maximum of distancing in the following; if not by classically academic methods, then by what I can translate into writing from Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*; as a method of de-naturalizing the all too familiar social backdrop. Furthermore, Lacan’s optimism in regard to the possibility of “crossing the plane of identification” (Lacan [1964] 1998, 273) shall inspire my approach, i.e. the possibility of looking at my director-self as a “symptom” and at my artistic practice as “symptomatic”.

The following sections are therefore intended to trace the mutations of the director’s conception in the given period: from the vertically aligned “giant” of *Regietheater* to the present day “cybernetic director”, who mostly operates on the horizontal plane. Accordingly, the era in question is very much a time of transition between the two models, marked by their paradox: all the while the aura of the director as *auteur/genius* is still intact, the methods and circumstances of his/her work are starting to distort. I therefore call the period in question the Foothills of *Regietheater*, i.e. “a region of rolling, undulating or hilly terrain lying between an area of plains and a mountain range.”<sup>99</sup>

### *Simmering Synchronicities*

As laid out in the classic accounts of Erika Fischer-Lichte and Hans-Thies Lehmann, the so-called “performative turn” and the postdramatic aesthetics it entailed date back much

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<sup>99</sup> This poetic sounding definition retrieved from a quick google search evokes a movement that Heiner Müller mirrors in his play *The Mission* from 1979; where a MANN IM FAHRSTUHL [man in elevator] finds himself seamlessly released from the verticality that had trapped him. All of a sudden standing on a plane (a plain) he starts walking: “I continue walking into the landscape that has no other calling than to wait for the disappearance of mankind.” (Müller, 1979; my translation)

further than my periodization of the Foothills suggests.<sup>100</sup> While Lehmann dates the full emancipation from dramatic text to the beginning of the 1980s (Lehmann 1991, 291), Fischer-Lichte localizes the “performative turn” as contemporaneous to J.L. Austin’s introduction of the category “performative” into the philosophy of language in 1955 (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 31). Its effects have thus been running parallel to the actual heyday of *Regietheater* described in *Terracing the Territory I.*; partly feeding into it, partly undermining its premises. By the end of the 1990s however, the directorial methods described are all up for discussion and actively challenged: the director at the Foothills of *Regietheater* does no longer necessarily need a literary template to motivate his/her antagonistic engagement with audiences. Consequently s/he no longer relies on professional actors to challenge his/her “ideologically superior” reading. And last but not least, the proscenium stage of the “flying underwater tankers” (as which I have characterized German city theaters in the previous chapter) are no longer the privileged site for “breaking the 4th wall”; the aesthetic strategy most classically associated with *Regietheater*.

But at the same time as this distortion of method is taking place – one could also call it a *transdisciplinary expansion* into the *postdisciplinary field* – the cultural premises once enabling *Regietheater* are still intact: the fossil-fueled institutions are still turning at the full speed of their resources, the generational trauma still legitimizes the “homeopathic terror” of the arts and the Bataillean general economy described above still seems to be the ideological blueprint for the theater, when “assuming its social responsibility”.

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. Lehmann ([1999] 2006) and Fischer-Lichte ([2004] 2008). For a less enthusiastic, nevertheless precise account of the same phenomenon, cf. Stegemann (2014).

Most importantly though, the transgressive theater of the 90s is still the love child of a generation of 68ers that refuses to retire. While making it hard for those born after to find their genuine take on political art, they convincingly induce the desire in them to re-enact the push-and-pull of the neo-avantgardes: heroic artistic intervention against canonic preservation. Unfortunate as this heavy ballast of 68 may have been for my own as well as the previous generation, it did occasionally work to our advantage; because in the interpellation of the era in question conservatives are still conservatives of a “classical consistency”; confused maybe by recent neoliberal destabilizations, but ultimately sticking to their core business, i.e. repression and sublimation.<sup>101</sup>

In that sense, by the turn of the century and especially within the conservative landscape of German city theaters the avant-gardist mechanism is still in function: in the Foothills of *Regietheater* the director can still occasionally “épater les bourgeois [shock the middle classes]”, as did Alfred Jarry or the Futurists at their respective *fin de siècle*. (cf. Nelson 2012; Bishop 2012)

### *The emblematic figure*

The most emblematic figure for the transitional period in question is certainly the German multidisciplinary artist Christoph Maria Schlingensief (1960-2010). Born a generation too late to credibly embody the *auteur* figure of New German Cinema that he is ambushed by as an aspiring artist, he still starts off as a filmmaker aiming at a maximum of idiosyncratic expression. (Schlingensief starts young as a director. His self-authored filmography includes

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<sup>101</sup> In the Preface I have touched upon what happens when conservatives discover the pleasure principle. In that regard, “the authoritarian phon[ies]” (Brecht [1978] 1986, 30) of the Foothills are still far from the de-sublimated right-wing subjectivity that shows its grimacing face in the second half of the 2010s.

even the films he did in 1968, i.e. as an 8-year old.<sup>102</sup>) However, gradually his movies begin to explode the aesthetic framework of fiction film by insisting on the circumstances of their production in a way that can hardly be conveyed by the medium itself. The shooting periods start to resemble durational performances in themselves<sup>103</sup>; while their plots react to contemporary politics at a speed much more suited to the contextual agility and the tempo of theater production. (*Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker* [The German chainsaw massacre] for instance is a clairvoyant anticipation of the predatory move the West is about to make into the East – released in the very year of the German Reunification.) Consequently, in 1993 Schlingensief, the West German, is invited to make his debut as a theater director in the former capital of the GDR, East Berlin.

The first of his works at the *Volksbühne* turns out to be a failure on all levels though; as a theater director he seems unable to capitalize on the live moment and in the audience's as well as in the critics' general perception the evening is nothing more than a series of ridiculous provocations. Only with the director's frustrated, spontaneous intervention – interrupting the sixth performance by putting himself on stage, retelling the death of his great-grandmother and stripping naked afterwards – does it start to carry traces of authorial specificity.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> For Schlingensief the same is true as for Bernhard Schütz, the *Volksbühne* actor (born 1959) that will become his sparring partner in the 1990s: "Too young to be a 68er and not brainwashed enough to become a terrorist." A description the German writer Rainald Goetz has given of his own as well as Schlingensief's generation (quoted after *Berliner Zeitung* 2000).

<sup>103</sup> The film *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* [100 years of Adolf Hitler] (the year of production, 1989, marked the hundredth birthday of A.H.) is shot in 16 hours. The result – "showing" the last hour in the *Führerbunker* – closes in on an edited *documentation* of a performance.

<sup>104</sup> In Schlingensief's own account: "I had a record put on, a blood pad under my arm, and a blood capsule in my mouth. Then I took out a syringe and injected myself. Lights out, and the blood flowed. Lights on, and I bit into the beer glass, a manipulated one from the props department. Suddenly, it was completely silent in the theater. I began to tell the story of how my mother sat at her mother's deathbed, turned on the radio, and it was playing

Despite the initial failure and ongoing internal conflicts (cf. Hegemann 2005, 124–28; Korte 2019, 223) Schlingensief gets hired again and again, and his potential as a director of live situations slowly but steadily unfolds; he will keep on producing performances at the *Volksbühne* for another decade, with his last work there being the masterful “Kunst & Gemüse, A. Hippler” (2004).

### *Graduation: my own naturalization into the Foothills*

It is under the radiance of this emblematic figure and in these general circumstances that I study to become a director. At my graduation in 2009, I have no idea that I am entering the era of *Regietheater* in its Foothills. The directors of the time – be it Christoph Marthaler, René Pollesch, or, as just described, Schlingensief – are too confusingly similar to the “giants” from before. Despite their “expanded methods” they thrive on a comparable entrepreneurial aura, simulating the semblance of continuity. In my mind, climbing up the steep slopes of their lineage, I will thus arrive at their Mount Olympus any day; crossing through the clouds, I will ultimately come to sit in the heavens of *Regietheater*.

Things seem to be going well when I get my first employment as in-house director of an East-German city theater that clearly positions itself in the tradition of the *Volksbühne*. During my job interview the artistic director anticipates, tears of enthusiasm in his eyes, that I will most likely come to “masturbate with a chainsaw” in the shade of the *Monument to the Battle of the Nations*. (Europe’s highest monument, the so-called *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* (91

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“Holy, Holy, Holy” from Schubert’s Mass. And in the silence, I announced the motorcycle act. Suddenly, I had the performance in my hands. I asked everyone to take off their clothes, to show themselves naked, as God created us. Throw away your earrings, be naked, naked, naked! Then the audience shouted: Take your own clothes off, and I did (...). From that evening on, it was clear that I would also go on stage, that this would give the whole thing a sense of seriousness and authenticity. Finally, the stupid giggling had stopped. The addiction to disrupting the other actors in their agreed-upon performance began. It had become clear to me that the unpredictable, the gap in the sequence, was what interested me in theater.” (Lochte and Schulz 1998, 26-27; my translation)

meters high) was erected by the German Reich in the wake of WW1: despite the anachronism it represents, it seems too tall to remove.) For context: two years prior, Christoph Schlingensief has been diagnosed with a cancer that will lead to his untimely death in 2010. “The chainsaw” reference indicates that the artistic directors of the country are already searching for someone to take his place.

But to return to the potential of the topographic image: the definition of foothills necessarily makes an arbitrary choice when it comes to perspective. Standing in the “rolling, undulating or hilly terrain”, either the “mountain range” or the “area of plains” lies ahead; depending on our own alignment. Meanwhile, the German word for foothills I have in mind, *Ausläufer*, already implies a directionality of descent. Literally translated, the mountains are “running out”; in other words, their “time is up”.

My hybris/blindness towards the actual landscape I graduated into can thus be explained from the vantage point of retrospection. With the help of the *Volksbühne* as metonymy and Schlingensief as an emblematic figure I have described some of the semblances that pointed to an unbroken lineage of the *Regietheater* tradition, suggesting it to still be a veritable mainstream by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From today’s perspective, however, it becomes apparent that the Foothills landscape in question was continuously shaped by two tectonic plates grinding against each other, asynchronously. In the following section the conflicting theater traditions of East and West Germany (but also of the two Europes aligned on this axis) shall therefore be extrapolated.

### *The sun rises in the East (Transferential Axis: Ost-West)*

Until 2017, when my Swedish colleagues and friends would descend along the North-South axis of cultural transference described in the beginning of this chapter – hoping to hit the vanishing point of their projection of “tysk teater” – they would find themselves, with

inevitable regularity, *face à face* of a massive building crowned by the Scandinavian word for “cheese”.

The three capital letters O S T, shining in purple neon and composing the German word for “East”, were installed on the roof of the *Volksbühne* soon after Castorf’s takeover in 1992, indicating the orientation of future political resilience. As Korte puts it: “Building on discarded socialist and local histories, Castorf’s aesthetic compass pointed defiantly to the East, establishing the overarching orientations and strategies that carried him through his tenure.” (Korte 2019, 42) In their radiance the letters thus point to the alignment of yet another axis of cultural transference waiting to be unpacked. An axis stretched out between West and East – this time featuring myself as the powerless pinball of “over-identification”.

For me, an (back then: young) aspiring directing student born in the West, the *subject supposed to know* of theater was clearly located in the East. The theater makers of the former GDR carried a level of “street-credibility” unaffordable to their Western colleagues of the same generation. They seemed to all have worked in other (read: real life) professions in their former lives, they had been bricklayers, stage technicians or check-out girls (Behrendt 2002) before becoming dramaturges, actors or directors. They had been forbidden to study because of conscientious objection of military service or they had been trained in close combat. It seemed that if they didn’t end up as political prisoners all along they would gather in the theaters which were *residues of dissidence* and – in that – places of *actual societal relevance*. Given the tight corset of official cultural-political censorship, very subtle allusions in codes – be it of acting, costume or directorial reading – could be handed over to an audience that was maximally attuned to nuances, willing to carefully receive everything said between the lines.

In this briefly sketched portrait I am following the lore of my educational institution, *Hochschule für Schauspielkunst “Ernst Busch”*, in which the values of GDR theater seemed

intact even when I started studying, i.e. 15 years after the fall of the wall.<sup>105</sup> In light of the most recent geo-political developments as well as Castorf's premonitory statements, the OST sign, however, did not only mark the insistence on the East-German East, but alluded to a broader orientation towards the entire Eastern-European, and particularly the Russian historical perspective and its theater tradition (cf. Raddatz 2016a). In that regard, the political project of the *Volksbühne* was perfectly placed in West-Germany's *Regietheater* tradition, highlighting the fact of a collective repression; in this case the *arbitrariness of a reunited Germany's affiliation with the powers of the West*.

In the present post-89 narrative, the division into two German states – one Soviet-oriented, the other one Western – is usually re-told as a sovereign decision of the allied forces in the wake of the Cold War. The fact of a strong pre-existent linkage orienting Germany towards Russia is thereby omitted; when in reality the division in 1949 is a rather precise rendering of opposing tendencies *within* Germany, latent since the 19th century. Because already before WW2 German conservative as well as revolutionary forces, if at different times, prioritized an alliance – also culturally – with the state neighboring their Eastern border.<sup>106</sup>

Instead of further expanding on the geo-political implications of this ongoing repression in the Western narrative – surfacing in the crisis around Ukraine's alliance(s) by the time of writing this chapter – the following section shall stress the consequences of an OST

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<sup>105</sup> As a written record I could refer to the *Jahrbücher* or yearbooks of the *Ernst Busch* theater academy during my education (2004 -2009); in which the teacher's bios would usually be stressing the above-mentioned former lives as “workers” in socialism (exemplarily cf. Völker 2005). As students we were of course well aware that the theater academy was often “selling” us a 1950s GDR theater as state of the art (after all you can't “hide the world” from your disciples if your institution is located in the heart of Berlin.) However, if Ernst Busch was the dusty tradition, Castorf's *Volksbühne* was the proof that – in and against this lineage – there was a possibility of contemporaneity that was vibrant and alive.

<sup>106</sup> For an extensive historical analysis, cf. Creuzberger (2022). Also Korte (2019, 224): “In 2000, Castorf turned *Dämonen* into a three-hour long, Dogme 95-inspired film. The film was shot in the former East German province of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which Castorf claimed was located on the border to Russia.”

orientation for a theater aesthetics. As we will come to see, Germany's contested political status as part of the West is nevertheless an important backdrop when discussing the split that divides conceptions of actor-based theater from conceptions of postdramatic theater.

## **The “facile and ritualistic subversion” (postdramatic flexibilization)**

When I started working as a director in German city theaters the models of collaboration within *Regietheater* felt antiquated to me. The whole institutional set-up was so out of step with the times, that it was easy to oppose it with a minimum of critical reflection. The young director could thus enter a city theater and – by proposing a working method that differed ever so slightly from the default hierarchical set-up – be celebrated as a “liberator”.<sup>107</sup> The routines of an institution that is until today often *factually* a part of the city's administrative organs are so hostile to creative processes that a freelancing director will easily channel the ensemble's discontent into what could be termed a “resentful productivity”.

To give this mechanism another name, we shall speak of the “*Dead Poets Society* syndrome”. In many ways during the zero years, the young director entered the city theater as John Keating, i.e. Robin Williams' teacher character from the movie of the same name (cf. Weir 1989). Independent of the place's institutional logics, s/he evokes the longing for

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<sup>107</sup> Bowring elaborates on Herbert Marcuse's critique of the “facile and ritualistic subversion in ‘left-radical speech’ of petty bourgeois taboos by the casual use of obscenities (...) This ‘systematic desublimation of culture’ (...) was something Marcuse detected in activist poetry, the guerrilla performances of the ‘Living Theater’ group, the semi-spontaneous literature of Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti, the political indiscipline of the Hippies, and the anti-intellectual championing of ‘emotional’ working class literature.” (Bowring 2012, 17)

authenticity in an ensemble worn out by traditions that can hardly be traced to their (meaningful) origins. (“O Captain, my Captain!” is thus the battle cry of the city theater actor that has gotten a taste of a devising process, where s/he was for once interpellated as a co-author.)

What I didn't realize, when I entered the institutions as a “liberator”, was that I was coming not only as an agent of aesthetic change, but also of *flexibilization*. The image of the actor sitting by a table in the theater's cantina, enjoying a beer between his two appearances (he is playing Romeo's father, so there is not so much work on his “shift” today) was a provocation, a nightmare to me. New methods were necessary to get the actors more, if not *totally* involved. By the means of *devising*, the division of labor could at least be challenged during rehearsals. Keeping the whole ensemble on stage for the full duration of the piece – even when they are not “in the scene” – was another way to extend this ambition into the performances themselves.<sup>108</sup> While this seemed like a radical intervention into the “industrial” mode of production the city theaters were still adhering to by the turn of the millenium, today it appears more as a symptomatic expression of emotional capitalism's script<sup>109</sup> in a service society; when you are “burning for your job” (be it acting, be it “selling frozen yogurts”) you are never off-stage.

As I hope to demonstrate in the following, the postdramatic wave of aesthetic *innovation* I have been part of as a director surely has had its impact on the flexibilization of

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<sup>108</sup> Lehmann gives the example of Belgian director Jan Lauwers' works, where the ensemble seems to be “‘inhabiting’ the stage” (Lehmann [1999] 2006, 110) In my own experience, Jürgen Gosch's stagings of Roland Schimmelpfennig's texts introduced this nowadays so common strategy of permanent presence by the turn of the millennium; thereby championing the effects of authenticity within the occasionally absent-minded actor.

<sup>109</sup> Emotional capitalism is a term to explain the mechanisms by which our economic practices capitalize on our emotions and ideas of self-actualization (cf. Boltanski and Chiapello [1999] 2017).

formerly “in-authentic”, i.e. alienated (but nevertheless stable) work conditions. In that regard the anti-theatricality and postdramatic disenchantment adapted in the course of the performative turn transformed much more than mere aesthetics. Certainly, these could be read as a mirror if not an *effect* of the more general process of neoliberal de-securitization<sup>110</sup>; benefitting the “mobile” classes to the dis-advantage of the ones depending on the “site” of their work.

By way of example, I could mention the painful process I entered with a light technician in the years between 2008 and 2010, when I was working as an in-house director. Obsessed with the “plain”, authentic quality the working lights were giving to the scene, I reduced his contribution to “running the show” by turning on the electricity in the building and making sure the emergency-exit-signs were lit. (The stage manager, who would usually give him cues, had already been disposed of; in tune with a notion of postdramatic radicality, the lights in the show would simply be on or off and the actor was taking care of that himself.) During the two and a half-hour show – of which the exact duration was flexible (!) – the light technician in question would sit in his light booth, waiting to turn the electricity off again after everybody had left.

His wordless discontent did not leave me unaffected back then (in fact I started having a strong transference onto him, which left me sleepless in return), so when it was time to set-up a new piece, we finally had a “confidential talk”. In a gesture of seeking compromise, he offered to create a light situation – with *his* lamps – that would have the same effect as the working lights. A simulation of my idea of authenticity, as it were.

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<sup>110</sup> In a similar vein as Stegemann’s critique of the purely self-referential “re-import of the performative” (2014, 32; my translation) into theater, Chukhrov (2021) criticizes the conflation of fundamental differences in the material production of performance art and the performing arts. For a further discussion of theater and performance art making in relation to neoliberal work conditions cf. also Kunst (2015) For a take on the “mobile classes” beyond aesthetics cf. Wagenknecht (2021).

From today's perspective, I see him differently; as well as at Romeo's father (the actor with the beer in the break). In the *total involvement* emotional capitalism demands of its subjects a certain level of alienation seems to have become an indicator of mental health. The idea of acting as "sometimes just work" – as opposed to self-actualization – thereby channels the knowledge of an industrial proletariat, unavailable to the post-disciplinary (read: non-alienated) performer of service society.<sup>111</sup>

However, in the strife for maximum efficiency in contemporary theater management, every resource that is not used for a certain duration will ultimately be disposed of. At the risk of generalizing, one could therefore attempt to make the following claim: as the directors of postdramatic or anti-theatrical aesthetics had no use for the craftsmanship of the many departments in a city theater they were entering, they indulged in the risk of "job cuts and liquidation".<sup>112</sup> In the concrete case of the theater I was hired at, this meant the advent of so-called "event technicians", all-rounders that were doing sound, light and stage technique all at once. Young, motivated men usually, much nicer to talk to, less embittered people for sure, and also much less competent than the light technician I clashed with before.

### *The actors: "De Waber"*

Something of this sensibility – regarding the generative aspects of alienation in theater making, and for acting in particular – was present in the workings of Castorf's *Volksbühne* all

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<sup>111</sup> For a further discussion of the effects of a *forbidden alienation* on theater processes, with special focus on the work and education of actors, cf. also the conversation entitled accordingly between German sociologist Wolfgang Engler and critic Frank Raddatz (Engler and Raddatz 2016)

<sup>112</sup> A direct quote from the letter the staff of *Volksbühne* addressed to the Berlin House of Representatives after the announcement of the plans Chris Dercon, the former runner of Tate Modern, proposed for their house (cf. Oltermann 2016). For an overview of the competing forces in the *Berliner Theaterstreit* [Berlin Theater Controversy] cf. Korte's *Conclusion: The Last Partisan* (2019, 353-368).

along. The conflict lines this produces within the postdramatic mode of production culminated, of course, in the controversy around Castorf's succession; but while that was foremost a cultural-political showdown, the early years of the *Volksbühne* saw the dilemma also dealt with on stage. The 1997 staging of *De Waber [The Weavers]* for instance – a naturalist drama organized around a historical uprising of crafts people threatened by automatization – gave a lot of opportunities to riff on the transition from actor to performer. In that sense, the asynchronicities of a forceful transformation from industrial to service society – brought upon the East in the speed of a decade – could productively be mirrored; not only on the level of semiotics, but just as much from within the parameters of the work of the actor.

Along these lines Castorf's adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* entitled *Endstation Amerika* [Terminus America] (2000) worked gracefully with the fantasy of the U.S. as the land of the politically free; in the specific compensatory way it blossomed from social discontent in the last years of the GDR. In parallel, the mise-en-scène stressed the Eastern-European origins of the Stanley *Kovalski* character as a subjectivity (read: acting style) that cannot be fully integrated into the smoothness of American communication, i.e. psychological realism.

Highlighting the false promise of non-alienated work made by a society of service, or, as it were, the price of “liberation” within emotional capitalism, the *Volksbühne*'s historical insistence on the actor and the ensemble as well as its (alienated) relation to the director bears some potential of resilience even for today. While its specific production circumstances cannot be reproduced, let alone the historical situation they blossomed in, its premise can still be used within the framework of an artistic research project. Outside of the field's immediate trends, a theoretical lock might thus be placed in time; by backtracking to the moment when *Regietheater* and postdramatic theater were still in a dialectical tension, we can ask: what would a *theater of the future* be that – fully accepting of the “post” of drama – holds on to the actor instead of championing the non-alienated performer?

To explore this question, I shall first extrapolate the actor and his/her technique as the very site of aesthetic innovation within the progressive Eastern European theater traditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ultimately this will lead to a discussion of Brecht's legacy to which both, West and East, lay claim.

### *OST, again*

The very abbreviated story of an OST-oriented theater in the 20<sup>th</sup> century begins of course with Stanislavski's "system" instituting the, back then, controversial inauguration of the actor as a creative artist. It leads on to the Soviet avant-garde traditions best exemplified by the figure of director, actor, and pedagogue Vsevolod Meyerhold, known as the developer of a non-psychological actor's training called "biomechanics". From here, it proceeds over Brecht's institutional consolidation of an "epic acting style" in East Berlin to Polish director Grotowski, who ultimately defines his excessive "poor theater" as one in which "the actors and the audience are all that is left" (Grotowski [1968] 2002, 33). "Moscow Art Theater", "Berliner Ensemble", "Teatrlaboratorium" are the names of some of the containers figuring in this Eastern-European lineage; of which Castorf's "Volksbühnenensemble" could be seen as the latest (or last) iteration.

As incommensurable as these examples may be, the point to be made can already be alluded to: however progressive the theater rooted in Eastern European traditions might become during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it will regularly insist on the actor as the medium of its own transformation. In other words, the actor is the needle's eye through which the kingdom of

heaven (read: the new theater) can be reached.<sup>113</sup> This transformation of aesthetics through the transformation of actorial techniques, however, can only be achieved through the continuity of collaboration, as well as an insertion of actor's training into the creation of *mise-en-scènes*. In other words, the ensemble is the community of practice that sustains the change.

Actors and continuity are an expensive combination, though. The actor of a steady ensemble – continuously and communally reformulating his/her technique – is a “species” that the present-day theater avant-gardes, in their most explicit formulations, are no longer putting up with. In search for aesthetics suited to the present moment, makers of the postdramatic tradition understandably broke with the conservative institutions of city theaters, which are the only providers of stability when it comes to ensembles. As the Swedish director Karl Sjölund rightfully points out in his production *Stumt tvång [Mute Compulsion]* (Sjölund 2022), Grotowski's “*poor theater*” is financially unaffordable for a present-day project-based funding system. The question whether to work with actors or not is thus not only an aesthetic (read: ideological) choice, but one of material resources.

In the educational contexts that have brought the most innovation to the German-speaking theater field in recent decades – I am referring to the Applied Theater Studies programs in both Hildesheim and Giessen – actors (or acting students) are simply out of reach; be it for financial or geographical reasons. As both universities are located in quite isolated small towns in Germany the impulse necessarily goes to working with one's peers, usually in collective setups.<sup>114</sup> The relative isolation of these university programs that combine theory

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<sup>113</sup> The biblical metaphors stand in the context of Barba's seminal interview with Grotowski *The Theater's New Testament* ([1968] 2002, 27–54). It would be worth conducting a study that connects the present claim of actorial transformation as the privileged site of aesthetic innovation in Eastern European theater traditions with the theological conceptions of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the case of Grotowski, the images informed by Roman Catholicism – “transfiguration” or “transillumination” – are obvious.

<sup>114</sup> The education in Hildesheim had made this impasse a virtue; at the time I spent a semester on site (in 2003) the education was specifically oriented on exploring the workings of the chorus in theater.

and practice obviously makes for a great focus, conducive to idiosyncratic artistic approaches. However, namely the polemics against a “theater based on the art of the actor” often articulated by these contexts usually stem from an idealist position; capitalizing ideologically on the regrettable fact that the continuous and formally ambitious actor-director relation – be it in education or in the field – has become materially unavailable under the conditions of flexibilized capitalism.

All the while, the tradition of theater studies that evolved around Hans-Thies Lehmann’s institute in Frankfurt – the geographical and theoretical fix point for the program in Giessen – obviously lays claim to an OST orientation when referring to the “Postdramatic Theater” as “a post-Brechtian theatre”; a theater “which knows that it is affected by the demands and questions (...) that are sedimented in Brecht’s work but can no longer accept Brecht’s answers.” (Lehmann [1999] 2006, 27) From a perspective of OST, however, it is hard to see how to attend to the *sediments* of Brecht’s work when not only abandoning the “drama” – what the epic theater calls *Fabel* (the story or reading of a play) – but also the actor. Because while the first step of emancipation from dramatic theater (the “story-telling aspect”, as it were) was already sketched out by the directorial interventions of Sergei Eisenstein and Meyerhold in the 1920s, the second step – abandoning the work with, through and against the actor – was never consumed by the innovative traditions of the East. In other words, while Brecht may attack the *formatting* of the bourgeois actor, s/he is as such still the undisputed medium of his theater.

As I have shown, the Foothills challenge this premise in the sense that the innovative aesthetics and the aesthetic investment into the art of the actor take two different routes. In the geopolitical outset that frames my reading here – where history is written by the winners and the East is allegedly “catching up” with the West – the reliance on the skill of the actor appears as a retrogressive move. In terms of theater aesthetics, that would mean that ultimately the

avant-gardes of OST will “come to reason” and embrace the historical superiority of the postdramatic paradigm. In this very light it is of course hard to see how putting up the three neon letters on top of a theater in Berlin would be an assertion of a rich, and somewhat intact, tradition.



Figure 3: 24.7.2017: end of the Foothills era / removal of the CHEESE sign. (Photo: Jörg Carstensen/dpa)

## “Le Froid et le Cruel”: the two lonelinesses of the director

I have called myself a midwife. The fact is that I am an abominable tyrant. In reality I am ten or twenty midwives, as many midwives as there are aspects of the film. I wanted the actor, while thinking himself his own master, to be my unwitting slave.

Jean Renoir (1974)

I began by exploring the various transitions within the period I designate – based on my professional biography – as the Foothills of *Regietheater*. I described the push and pull between concepts of actor and performer, between *Regietheater* and postdramatic theater at work in this period. In parallel, I have tried to portray myself/the director as an agent/object of a bigger transition from industrial to service society that re-actualized in a “belated” showdown in the East; deeply impacting the conceptualizations of what a post-Brechtian theater might be.

The Foothills served me as an image to see how I, as a director, was positioned; in the sense of *being positioned* between two temporalities. (The “sense” of the two tectonic plates described, grinding almost unnoticeably between my feet). All the while the image of the Foothills is open, undetermined. In hindsight reconstructing my position within, I get to see the options it provides; with one of them being to simply turn around and re-enter the Mountain Range from another valley. In contrast, my directorial practice has clearly tended towards the flexibilization of disciplines (welcoming the advent of the performer in the actor) and the overall invitation extended by the postdramatic paradigm. Before we enter the Great Plains of our present day in the third chapter of this *Regiebuch*, I propose a final conceptualization of the transitional movement in question: the move (my move) from the director of the “De Sadian” to the “Masochian genius”.

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It is very tempting to liken the institutions of the German city theater – exemplified in the *Volksbühne* – to the remote *château* of the De Sadian universe (e.g. the fortress described in *The 120 Days of Sodom*). Structurally there is a similar set-up: the hierarchic division into different departments (of pleasure), the daily schedules and different chambers, not to mention the casting process when creating a new ensemble (of victims) from scratch. In fact, the scandals of power abuse in recent years have once again highlighted the feudal, pre-republican organizational structure that makes for the etiology of these “houses”.

However, the forceful attempts to install a transparent and "healthy work environment" in the aftermath – usually by means of New Public Management mechanisms of control – also render the specifically “*artistic perversions*” that sprung from them, obsolete.<sup>115</sup> In the following I will therefore extrapolate a set of concepts introduced by Gilles Deleuze in his seminal essay on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch<sup>116</sup> *Le Froid et le Cruel* (Deleuze [1967] 2006); these will allow for a more structural overview of the dynamics within the Foothills of *Regietheater* and highlight the specific dilemma of the directors naturalized into the era that persists until today.

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In his essay, Deleuze starts out by questioning the notion of Sadism and Masochism presenting an intertwined functional unit as conceptualized by Austrian neurologist Richard von Krafft-Ebbing and expanded upon by Freud. In Deleuze’s words, “sadomasochism” is a

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<sup>115</sup> A whole study could be devoted to arguing why among the three diagnostic categories Lacan proposes – the neurotic, the psychotic, and the pervert – the latter has most potential for conceptualizing the director.

<sup>116</sup> The Austrian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch is most famous for his novel *Venus in Furs* (1870)

“monstre sémiologique”, a “semiological howler” (Deleuze, 134). Drawing on the vernacular use of the terms combined here, he therefore wonders: can the sadist really wish for a masochist to be his victim, when his pleasure derives from the absolute absence of enjoyment in the mistreated? And vice versa, is it productive for the masochist to have a sadist in charge, when actually every detail of the humiliating scene shall play out according to his fetishist script – that he created and of which he paradoxically needs to stay in control of? Deleuze’s answer is negative; in fact, “the genius of Sade and that of Masoch are poles apart; their worlds do not communicate, and as novelists their techniques are totally different.” (Deleuze, 133)<sup>117</sup>

From the outset rejecting to think of the two “geniuses” or artistic *modi operandi* in terms of a *unity of opposites*, Deleuze is subsequently able to construct both in their respective logics. (And as the title of his essay indicates by invoking the cold Carpathian Mountains of *Venus in Furs*, his project is foremost to do right by Sacher-Masoch whose work – *because* of an assumed complementarity with De Sade – has suffered an “unjust neglect” (Deleuze, 13).) Very schematically speaking, the “genius of Sade” is primarily connected to the institution (and its supremacy over the law), as well as to the authoritative command of the master. Its language is the scream or the calm reasoning, both of which do not attempt “to prove anything to anyone”. (Deleuze, 19) All the while the Masochian genius, despite the outer appearance of

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<sup>117</sup> Note already the unfamiliar adjectives I will come to use based on this premise: “Masochian” instead of “masochist” and “De Sadian” instead of “sadist”. This is in line with Deleuze’s overall attempt to re-embed the two perversions in their original literary universes; a place from which they have been isolated – “cut off from their *Umwelt* and stripped of their flesh and blood” (Deleuze, 42) – by insertion into Krafft-Ebbing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*. I will support Deleuze in this ambition by addressing the specific *artistic* perversions as “Masochian” or “De Sadian” and the *sexual* ones as “masochist” or “sadist”. Furthermore – for reasons of readability but also because perversions are *in fact* results of gender norms – I will stick with the binary proposition Deleuze makes: the hero in Sacher-Masoch is always male, while the mistress is always female. Also, the *libertine* in De Sade is almost always male, another fact that will be reflected in the pronouns. However, when speaking of the “*director* of the Masochian/ De Sadian genius” I shall, as usual, use the gender-neutral formula of “s/he”. For a queer revision of Deleuze’s reading, cf. Thanem and Wallenberg (2010).

total submission, is based on a necessary cooperation and a contracted alliance (with the mistress). Its language is thus the one of *Soufflage*.<sup>118</sup> In Masoch's world,

[w]e are no longer in the presence of a [de Sadian] torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is unconsenting and unpersuaded. We are dealing instead with a victim [ i.e. the Masochian hero] (...) who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes.

This is why *advertisements* are part of the language of masochism while they have no place in true sadism, and why the masochist draws up contracts while the sadist abominates and destroys them. The sadist is in need of institutions, the masochist of contractual relations. (Deleuze 20; my emphasis)

Surprisingly, those two “geniuses” do start “talking to each other” again, albeit in a non-dialectical fashion, when applied to concrete relations. Held against the backdrop of theater, for instance, rehearsals can either be conceptualized as an authoritative demonstration of a directorial vision (De Sade), or an invitation to “workshop”, where actor and director (mistress and victim) can find “a common language”. As we will come to see, the Masochian genius thus naturally leans more to production circumstances of the independent scene, where “equals” come together under voluntary terms for a given time (the “contract”). In his/her “commerce with the devil” (as Deleuze puts it drawing on a medieval distinction) the De Sadian director is “possessed”, while the Masochian is “in a pact”. (Deleuze, 21)

### *The De Sadian Genius: the director as libertine*

Before moving on to unpacking my own symptomatic practice under the logics of the Masochian genius (*within* the German city theater institutions), I will dwell for a moment on

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<sup>118</sup> Literally the French word “souffler” means “whispering, blowing”. The German theater tradition has adapted the noun “Souffleur/Souffleuse” for the profession of the *prompter* and, consequently, invented the word “Soufflage” to describe the activity in itself. This etymology is indicative of the director of the Masochian genius who constructs rehearsals as live situations into which s/he will have to intervene occasionally without creating a total rupture in the presence of the actor.

the association of the De Sadian hero – the *libertine* – with the director of *Regietheater*. Distinguishing him from the hero of Masoch's novels – whose ambition is to make his collaborator (the torturing mistress) identify with her role by the means of pedagogical interventions – Deleuze suggests that

nothing is in fact more alien to the sadist than the wish to convince, to persuade, in short to educate. He is interested in something quite different, namely to demonstrate that reasoning itself is a form of violence, and that he is on the side of violence, however calm and logical he may be. (...) It follows that the reasoning does not have to be shared by the person to whom it is addressed any more than pleasure is meant to be shared by the object from which it is derived. (Deleuze, 18-19)

I recognize this mode of speaking from attending countless *table reads*<sup>119</sup> with directors I have been an assistant to. In fact, everybody who has worked in the Mountain Range (or the Foothills) of *Regietheater* will recognize this “*demonstration* related essentially to the solitude and the omnipotence of its author” (Deleuze 19; my emphasis). It is usually a radically non-pedagogical mode of speaking, a take-it-or-leave-it address, unconcerned with a resonance in terms of articulated speech.<sup>120</sup> In a paraphrase of Deleuze's words: the director of the De Sadian genius figures as a *libertine*, among his/her victims and accomplices, engaged in reasoning (Deleuze, 19).

One last time the former artistic leader of the *Volksbühne* shall stand in to exemplify this point with even more clarity. When Frank Castorf delivers his “intellectually superior

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<sup>119</sup> In both a postdramatic as well as a *Regietheater* context it may be inadequate to speak of a *table read*; implying that there would be a “piece” of dramatic literature around which the ensemble congregates when meeting for the first time. I am using the word here in lack of an English equation for the German *Konzeptionsprobe*, which could be rendered as *concept rehearsals*, i.e. a first rehearsal where the artistic team presents the basic idea for the staging.

<sup>120</sup> The extreme version of this “communication” is the pre-written letter containing the dream/vision for the staging, the unmediated directorial desire, read out loud at the occasion of the *concept rehearsal*. The German director Sebastian Hartmann has made this his signature method.

reading” (see previous chapter) of the play at hand – in a sequence of massively disturbing statements, just like the De Sadian hero – he barely makes eye contact with the ensemble. He just talks for about an hour or two straight, eyes resting on the table, ostentatiously “repudiating any relationship between audience and speaker” (Bataille [1957] 1986, 189). Simultaneously, Castorf is known to scream throughout entire rehearsals. Judging from my sources of information<sup>121</sup>, his screams are however rarely directed *at* the actors, but *to* them; he screams the text he wants to hear (usually a live overwriting of the literary template) and the actors repeat it with the same intensity, from within the spatial set-up they find themselves in. After the try-out, the ensemble and the – by now red-headed – director congregate again and he elaborates in a calm manner. What struck the outside eye as a scene of directorial terror might in fact have been the authoritative demonstration of a specific musicality in the logics of the De Sadian genius.<sup>122</sup>

We shall, for the sake of the specific genius showing itself, momentarily resist the temptation to psychologize these directorial gestures (making them a symptom of an individual lack, as for instance in the case of the avoided eye contact) and read them as a *demonstration* of power instead, in the sense of an *exposition*. Because in the Deleuzian line of argument the director of the De Sadian genius *gives* “his solitary voice to violence” (Bataille, 191), colloquially speaking, “keeping it in the mix”. Leaning on Bataille’s *Erotism*, Deleuze

<sup>121</sup> I have personally never attended Castorf’s rehearsals (which might explain the transference energy at hand, his constant re-emergence in my writing.). The “observations” here are thus based on watching rehearsal documentations, interviews with and about the “man himself” (Hegemann 2005; Krump 2015; Schütt 1996; Raddatz 2016b) as well as hearing the anecdotes and accounts of friends and colleagues. To get a sense of a *Konzeptionsprobe*, cf. Schauspielhaus Hamburg (2018)

<sup>122</sup> I owe this observation to Karl Sjölund, who pointed it out in a course on *Regietheater* I gave at Stockholm University of the Arts in 2020. Sjölund, who is currently the artistic leader of the Swedish theater group *Institutet*, operates himself with a similar approach to language on stage as a score. In the video interview with Bernhard Schütz (of which Kurzenberger et al. (2011) give a shortened transcription), the *Volksbühne* actor also describes Castorf’s stagecraft in terms of “aria” and “recitative”.

elaborates further on this point: as outrageous and atrocious the depictions of torture and assault in De Sade's writing may be, there is something "off" with their level of articulation. Given violence's original incursion from a sphere beyond the reach of language, it is "unlikely that a torturer would ever write [or speak] like that" (Bataille, 187). Quite the contrary insofar as the default articulations of actual abusive violence usually lack any demonstrative part; its rationalizations are marked by a level of banality and often put forth in the language of authority, as an excuse.<sup>123</sup> In a stunning move, Bataille and Deleuze thus identify the discourse of the De Sadian *libertine* with the one of a victim. Not of the victim(s) in the fiction though, but of their author, who, at the time of his first novel, is already a long-term prisoner. (*The 120 Days of Sodom* is written after eight years of imprisonment.) In Bataille's words, De Sade, "punished for a reason he believes unfair, cannot resign himself to silence" and speaks out "as violence never does" (Bataille, 190). The *libertines* are thus "mouthpiece[s] of a silent life" (Bataille, 188), bringing "violence into the field of conscious experience" (Bataille, 194) by "infus[ing] it with the orderly calm of awareness" (Bataille, 193). A strategy adapted by the director of the De Sadian genius.

To be clear: speaking of De Sade's "victim perspective" is not to give him (or the director in question) a morally justifiable position all of a sudden; much less to restore him by alluding to a contemporary hierarchy of victimhood.<sup>124</sup> Obviously, social relations in De Sade's materialism are relations of domination, asymmetric and entangled; so in contrast to the

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<sup>123</sup> A fact Hannah Arendt has thoroughly elaborated on in her case study of Adolf Eichmann, rendering the mass murderer as a quiet, "law-abiding citizen" (1963).

<sup>124</sup> Much of Castorf's authority in the early 90s, for example, sprung from the fact that he was censored in the former East; even though "he vehemently contested the label 'dissident' and argued that he profited greatly from the GDR." (Korte 2019, 127) For an elaboration on the contemporary hierarchy of victimhood cf. Campbell and Manning (2018).

project of retrospectively constructing an *ethics of Regietheater*, “all is lost” when it comes to the marquis. But this paradoxical idea of a figure of oppressive authority speaking violence/exercising power *with the articulation of a victim* leads us closer to the “genius” of the *Regie* associated with it. Namely to the upsetting question how and if “bringing all the voices into the space” can be achieved by the means of the authoritative monologue?

In a social economy of presumed scarcity (see previous chapter) we are quick to jump to *quantitative* modes of safeguarding participation, e.g. when organizing speaking time. However – in the interest of establishing the Space of Rehearsals – it can be worth observing the *quality* of the speech (the discourse) of the monologic speaker and if it provides equality/balance on another level. The director of the De Sadian genius carries quite some responsibility in regard to this, insofar as the mandate to speak is handed down to him/her by the hierarchy of the institution. However, this social responsibility s/he takes on is not consumed by doing the “socially responsible thing”, i.e. redistributing authority. By demonstrating a power indifferent to the ensemble and at times “repudiating any relationship between audience and speaker” (Bataille, 189), this mode of *Regie* does not inflict violence, but *objectifies* it. In the case of some directors, this is done with such a high level of purity (a lot of Id, very little Ego), that it might be more appropriate to speak of a *channeling* of power.<sup>125</sup> In other words, by *taking space*, the director of the De Sadian genius paradoxically *creates*

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<sup>125</sup> Compare this reflection of Jane Gallop quoting De Sade: “An awkward footnote appended to a later statement by Dolmancé [a *libertine*] tries to make clear a (...) distinction in the use of the word ‘despotism’: ‘The poverty of the French language restricts us to the use of words which, luckily, our government today rejects, with good reason. We hope that our enlightened readers will understand us and will not confuse absurd political despotism with the very prurient despotism of libertine passions’ ([Sade 1970, 283]) This extraordinarily subtle distinction tries to sort out the nearly inevitable confusion between a momentary, imaginary feeling of mastery and a formalization of that mastery into an enduring system.” (Gallop 1982, 90)

*space* – and in its purest form the De Sadian *Regie* is thus demonstratively violent without being sadistic.<sup>126</sup>

### *The Masochian genius: the workshopped mistress*

The workings of the Masochian genius are obviously very different. Because of the “love contract” between (masochist) victim and mistress the asymmetry of the relation seems suspended at first sight; it can therefore be much harder to detect the operations of power within. But even though the manipulations of Masoch’s hero do not appear as much *at the expense* of the manipulated (compared to De Sade), we still find ourselves in the realm of a “perverse” mode of theater production; where one agent *uses* another *as a means* to their own aesthetic pleasure.<sup>127</sup>

The difficulty for the director of the Masochian genius is that his/her counterpart – *in order* to be used – has to perform the part well and therefore, at least to a certain degree, identify with the role. Given the lack of complementarity between the two perversions in question, s/he therefore has to be trained or *cultivated* into the special kind of “sadism” the masochist desires.

The woman torturer of masochism cannot be sadistic precisely because she is *in* the masochistic situation, she is an integral part of it, a realization of the masochistic fantasy. She belongs in the masochistic world, not in the sense that she has the same tastes as her victim, but because her “sadism” is of a kind never found in the sadist. (Deleuze, 41)

Therefore, the subject interpellated by the masochist must both dress and torture in the exact way his fetishist script demands of her while simultaneously (!) giving the impression of

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<sup>126</sup> Maybe one of the meanings encapsulated in Antonin Artaud’s formula of “a pure cruelty”, a cruelty “without bodily laceration” ([1938] 1958, 101)

<sup>127</sup> In the Foothills of *Regietheater* we are still far away from the Categorical Imperative of relational aesthetics, where participants are interpellated as *ends in themselves*. Cf. Immanuel Kant’s second maxim (2020, 61) as well as *Terracing the Territory III*.

self-authored agency. In the figure of the “workshopped mistress” we thus find another configuration of the “forbidden” alienation described earlier. In her capacity to not only follow a score, but also engage “with inner conviction”, the Masochian mistress is thus anticipating the “performer” of emotional capitalism and – ultimately – of post-disciplinary postdramatic aesthetics.

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To concretely culminate the concept at hand I shall give a short account of my process of staging *In Furs*, an adaptation of Sacher-Masoch’s most famous novel, in 2009. The (post)dramatic text by German playwright Katharina Schmitt suggested a wide range of possible interpellations: what at first sight seemed like a dialogue between the characters could often be re-aligned as an ambivalent address to the audience; especially at the beginning of the piece where the mistress is not responding yet. In our mise-en-scène the Masochian hero, SEVERIN, thus starts out by walking through the audience, (who is seated on a huge fur), wooing his potential WANDA.



Figure 4: *In Furs* by Katharina Schmitt (2009, Centraltheater & Skala, Leipzig): Anna Blomeier (Severin) and Melanie Schmidli (Wanda). (Photo: Nils Bröer)

As a director I wanted the actress playing Severin to expose herself to the possibility of actual eye-contact with individual audience members, in other words, to be open for the emergence of an actual transferential event. Given the new constellation of audiences with every show, a fixed choreography (of gazes) was not an option for achieving this goal. Instead, a situationist attitude<sup>128</sup> had to be *cultivated*; or as we used to say in the postdramatic parlance of the Masochian Genius: the specific “presence” had to be found.

The training of this “presence” meant a radical and paradoxical re-programming of a fundamental skill acquired during the actors’ education, i.e. the ability to stay with the

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<sup>128</sup> Lacan talks stunningly about being caught off-guard as an analyst every time (!) the transference “kicks in” during the analytic process (Wolff 1982; 45:15). Here, I am also alluding to the situationist dream of a city in which the buildings would have moved positions over night while their inhabitants were asleep. (Unfortunately, I cannot find the reference to this dream anywhere, which means I must have read or heard of it sleepwalking.)

“imagined circumstances” by blocking out the reality of the performance situation. In the set-up suggested for *In Furs*, however, both the fiction *and* the real presence of the audience had to be attended to. To add to the difficulty, this was to be done with a rigor and a vulnerability, that would not allow for a categorization within the orthodoxy of “breaking the fourth wall”. The cruelty of the “naked gaze” should indeed hit as a performative shock.

For the ensemble, and the actress playing Severin in particular, this destabilization of acquired skills was experienced as a month-long deterritorialization during the “workshop/research phase”. And while de-skilling is often presented as an emancipatory, inclusive move, in this context it might be more appropriate to speak of a “forced unlearning”. With me and the artistic team being the only stand-ins of a future audience to be met by the actress’ gaze, the situation in the rehearsal space was oftentimes claustrophobic; and my assumption of the Masochian educator role would certainly have been called into question more radically if not for the “perverse” universe the play itself was providing us with. (If the mistress of the masochist will unlearn the heteronormative script of female passivity, the actress should ultimately be ready to reformat her professional routines.) However, the intervention of the Masochian educator, of the contract-bound *souffleur*, in short, of the *young director in the Foothills* bore its irreducible level of transgression into the realm of actorial integrity.

## Two geniuses mixing in the Foothills: leap into the present tense

Deleuze’s provisory attribution – the sadist needs institutions, the masochist contractual relations – has given us a first hint to the production circumstances in which the two “perverse” geniuses of theater thrive; and in which they still exist as residues. While De Sadian directorial practices obviously rest on an institution modelled after feudal (vertical) authority, the Masochian contract can be established in the horizontality of the “free market”. These contracts

between workshopped mistress and Masochian hero regulate mutual engagements on a temporal basis which approximates them to the logics of the project, typical of the independent scene.<sup>129</sup> While avoiding the “forced marriages” between members of a city theater ensemble on the one hand and the invited directors on the other, “equals” come together under voluntary terms for a given time.

Given the independent scene’s ambition to maximally rid its working constellations from perverse or “toxic” power dynamics associated with the institutions, it seems to provide the ideal production circumstances for the Masochian genius. In the Foothills of *Regietheater*, however, another dialectic emerges *within* the institutions: with the rising awareness around alternative modes of collaboration, the director of the De Sadian genius suffers a sudden loss of “moral authority”. Especially against the backdrop of a first generation of Giessen-educated theater makers s/he can hardly serve as a role model anymore; while the working methods of the Masochian genius, by contrast, hold the promise of a much greater permeability within the actor-director relation. Still equipped with the authority classically assigned to the director by the (De Sadian) institution, the “new generation” thus starts to redistribute agency and to organize authorship in a *more* horizontal way.<sup>130</sup> As a result, rehearsals start to split into two parts, of which the first one is more of a “workshop”, also called “research phase” in which the criteria of the work are found in a shared effort. (This first part corresponds to the *formatting/cultivation* of the Masochian mistress, the establishment of a “common language”

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. the six months project duration of Sacher-Masoch’s contract with Fanny Pistor Bagdanow (Sacher-Masoch 2013, 139) As quoted above, “advertisements are part of the language of masochism” (Deleuze, 20); Deleuze thereby stresses the fact that the masochist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century finds his mistress by putting out small newspaper adds. “Les petites annonces”, as it says in the original.

<sup>130</sup> The emphasis here is on “more” as in “relatively more horizontal”. The push and pull of the Foothills finds its mirror in the pedagogical discussions of the 1990s and specifically in bell hooks’ attempts to democratize the classroom (cf. hooks 1994; as well as footnote 57 in *Regiebuch* 1) Clearly a redistribution of power is intended, but on the terms of the teacher.

between her and the “victim”). The second part then constitutes the conventional work of the De Sadian mise-en-scène.

This split is partly experienced as a liberation on the part of the ensemble as well as the director. Oftentimes though the initially experienced freedom (see the “Dead poets society-syndrome” described above) is frustrated once the demands of the institution make themselves forcefully heard again. This usually happens in the final rehearsals, and it takes some phronetic skill as a director to navigate this transition out of the “research phase” without losing the support of the cast, and thereby the spirit of the piece. As will be revealed in this transitory phase: the De Sadian violence (of the institution) and the intrinsic alliance of the director with it was just suppressed, temporarily invisibilized (by means of the Masochian contract). However, as shown in the example above, the manipulative violence intrinsic to the Masochian artistic perversion ultimately prevails in the “workshop” part of rehearsals as well.

## TERRACING THE TERRITORY III. – The Great Plains

On the front cover of the first edition to Nicolas Bourriaud's *Esthétique relationnelle* (1998) – the book that rendered a whole practice of fine art-making intelligible – we see an installation by Rirkrit Tiravanija (1996). Despite the white walls and the headlights indicating a museum or gallery space, nothing on the photo strikes us as out of the ordinary. At most, the orange piece of cloth hanging as a squared backdrop alludes to traditions of abstract painting; but all other objects – the metal shelves, the beer benches, the TV with attached VHS recorder, the books – all seem to be put there for the sake of functional use. It is obviously a space to be entered, not to be looked at. A space awaiting the next encounter.

To the left hand we see a woman sitting by a small table, an empty beer glass in front of her. She is immersed in a book, possibly a catalogue. Is she the artist, available for a conversation? Or is she a participant, engaging with the piece? Stopping myself from doing more research about the work itself (and thereby finding out who she might be) I would like to imagine her – for the sake of the following argument – as the director in a rehearsal space awaiting her ensemble.



Figure 5: The director awaiting her ensemble on the cover of Bourriaud's *Esthétique relationnelle* (© Les presses du réel/Le Consortium, Dijon)

## Rehearsals as participatory art pieces

The proposition that I will examine in this final chapter of *Regiebuch 2* can be formulated bluntly and in advance:

After the so-called *social turn* the performing arts have assimilated the non-antagonistic sociability championed in Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*.

Theater rehearsals are thus modelled after the logics of participatory art pieces, where the director engages the ensemble in the way the relational artist engages his/her participants.

This is done according to an ethically charged protocol, where the actors shall not be used as means to an end, but as ends in themselves.

Based on this promise, a “cybernetic” director emerges who computes the input of the actor/participants into the output of the mise-en-scène.

### *Recap: the social turn in the arts / the artist as philanthropist*

In her book *Artificial Hells – Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, British critic Claire Bishop (2012) has given a by now broadly received analysis of what she identifies as a “social turn in the arts”. To further inform the reading of the imaginary theater director waiting on the front cover of Bourriaud's book, I shall briefly retrieve Bishop's main argument. From there on, I will return to the situation of the first rehearsal to discuss the points suggested in the proposition above.

In the wake of an “ethical turn” in the field of philosophy (cf. Dews 2002) that re-centered “[q]uestions of conscience and obligation, of recognition and respect, of justice and law, that not so long ago would have been dismissed as the residue of an outdated humanism” (Bishop, 25) art criticism, according to Bishop, started to apply foremost *ethical* categories to the works it discussed. *Aesthetic* categories in return – due to “academia’s embrace of social history and identity politics” – got under suspicion to “[mask] inequalities, oppressions and exclusions (of race, gender, class, and so on)” (Bishop, 17).<sup>131</sup>

This means that “pieces” after the social turn are no longer necessarily evaluated with criteria from within the field of aesthetics, but rather by *values* distilled from other, ethically charged discourses, such as socially committed activism for example. Despite this shift away from aesthetic categories, the notion of “good” and “bad” art however prevails, albeit in a moral iteration. As Bishop claims, “the tendency is always to compare artists’ projects with other artists on the basis of ethical one-upmanship – the degree to which artists supply a good or bad model of collaboration” (Bishop, 19). In a value system, where “activation of audience is positioned against its mythic counterpart, passive spectatorial consumption” (Bishop, 275), bad art pieces thus “fail” at providing the “right” level of participation. In these logics, “a work of art is *better* the more participants it brings into contact with the processes of production (Bishop, 23; my emphasis)”. Or, in Bishop’s ironic iteration of concrete examples: “the work of Oda Projesi is better than that of Thomas Hirschhorn because it exemplifies a *superior model of collaborative practice*, one in which individual authorship is suppressed in favor of facilitating the creativity of others” (Bishop, 22; my emphasis)

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<sup>131</sup> An early anticipation of this would be Susan Sontag’s reading of rules of taste as the enforcement of power structures. Cf. *Notes On “Camp”* (1964)

As Bishop observes, the ethics in questions are marked by a certain orthodoxy: as opposed to the “creation of singular acts” (Bishop, 23) or “the disruptive specificity of a given practice” (Bishop, 22) namely “conscious authorial renunciation” (Bishop, 23) on the artist’s end seems to be gratified. What could be summarized as an *ethics of self-suppressing facilitation*, however, has a clear rationale, given the overall ambition of *instrumentalized* participatory art.<sup>132</sup> Because only if the artist can eventually be taken out of the equation does the “piece” have a chance to acquire the status of a “model”, of an “ideal system” or a “tool” (Bishop, 23); only stripped of artistic idiosyncrasy will it be a blueprint for “the social” that could potentially be scaled up. It is in that sense that Bishop defines the ameliorative ambition of the art forms at hand as a “soft form of social engineering” (Bishop, 5), commissioned to create *models* of social change.

In her analysis, Bishop tracks this change in the function of art as the effect of the dismantling of the Western welfare states (Bishop, 14-15). In a kind of continuous currency exchange since the 1990s the “art money/public funding” is charged with values the neoliberal state stopped taking responsibility for, i.e. equal access and agency, care for the weakest, democratic participation etc.<sup>133</sup> In these logics, artists, equipped with public money are to adhere to the rationale of the philanthropic billionaire: avoiding structural reform, but intervening in autonomously chosen areas for the general good.

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<sup>132</sup> Note that it is against the backdrop of pre-existent interventionist forms of the historical avant-gardes and their disruptive potential that Bishop attests this recent “*instrumentalization* of participatory art” (5, my emphasis). An important point to delineate her argument from the ones that take issue with “participatory art” as such.

<sup>133</sup> A correlation that can hardly be emphasized too much, as it explains many of contemporary artists’ sense of exhaustion when shouldering an unreasonable weight in their collaborations: obviously the individual ambition to embody a state apparatus of care – a “One Woman Welfare State” – is to collapse under the precarious conditions of neoliberalist (cultural) politics (cf. Gerner Nielsen 2023).

### *The woman waiting on the front cover of Bourriaud's book*

The woman waiting on the front cover of Bourriaud's book – the director I identify with / I identify *with* myself – has internalized this call. (She knows the lines from inside the book she is waiting on.) She is aware of the currency that provides for this first encounter between her and the ensemble; she “knows” about the welfare state values the public art money has assumed in a seemingly unconscious transaction. She knows that – more than for the aesthetic proposal – she will be scrutinized for her proposed “model of collaboration”. How will she treat the structurally weaker members of the ensemble? How will she grant access on equal terms, give everybody opportunity to make themselves heard? How does she organize the process of decision-taking during rehearsals? What level of participation is she able to provide?

(In Bourriaud's language that I will from here on “sneak into” the description of the scene: How will she “‘give everyone their chance’ [?] [T]hrough forms which do not establish any precedence, *a priori* of the producer over the beholder (let us put it another way: no divine right authority), but rather negotiate open relationships with it, which are not resolved beforehand” (Bourriaud 1999, 58).)

Having emptied the beer, her mind anticipates the possible contradictions: what if the process spins out of hand but the product turns out to be brilliant? What if one of the structurally weaker members of the ensemble turns out to be a weak actor? Sooner or later the fact might transpire that she is not exclusively interested in what the others bring to the table, and then what...? Yes, what will she do, when the ensemble finds out that she actually *did* prepare for this first day?

Her immediate strategy is a restrictive management of her own directorial vision, i.e. “authorial renunciation”. The way she gets up – as the ensemble enters – marks her position as a host in a borrowed venue; she is extending a welcoming hand on behalf of a value system that exceeds her, a social blueprint that transcends the present space. Far from the arrogance of

the “factory owner” that the artistic director of a theater institution affords “on his own turf”, she demonstrates that she is “in service”. Welcome, she says, to the “arena of exchange” (Bourriaud, 18)!

Sitting down with the ensemble on the beer benches, she explains that rather than “an individual producer of discrete objects”, she will – for the coming weeks – be a “producer of *situations*” (Bishop, 2), proposing experiences to be worked through, responded to. Here is what she says in more detail: based on “the false polarity of ‘bad’ singular authorship and ‘good’ collective authorship” (Bishop, 8), I will exemplify “a superior model of collaborative practice; one in which [my] individual authorship is suppressed in favour of facilitating the creativity of others.” (Bishop, 22) “[I]diosyncratic or controversial ideas [of mine] will be subdued and normalized in favour of a consensual behaviour upon whose irreproachable sensitivity we can all rationally agree.” (Bishop, 26)

The above-mentioned *situations*, she explains further, shall be playgrounds for the ensemble, places where it can express and contribute freely. The goal is to represent each and every actor *fully*. The actors’ subjectivity shall not be subsumed under the dramaturgy of a piece that has “nothing to do with you” or else under her own, the director’s, alien agenda. In terms of ethics, that would be using people *as a means* (not as *an end in themselves*); in other words, I would exploit you. You as an ensemble, she says, shall ask yourself the following question when confronted with my suggested situation: “Does it give me a chance to exist in front of it, or, on the contrary, does it deny me as a subject, refusing to consider the Other in its structure?” (Bourriaud, 57)

For this aim to be achieved –installing the ensemble as an end in itself rather than a means – the correlation between process and product, between rehearsals and show, has to be reconfigured. The show is no longer the goal that has been mapped out beforehand, the “preordained idea” (Bourriaud, 40) of a conceptual artist, to which the process of rehearsals

will bend itself. The emphasis will instead lie on rehearsals themselves and the places they take us to. “[F]orm only assumes its texture (...) when it introduces human interactions” (Bourriaud, 22). And the premiere (the product) therefore “does not represent the logical end of the work, but an event” (Bourriaud, 54). It is, what could be called, a “happy ending” (Bourriaud, 54) to a rehearsal process. To put it more radically: our process is the product we offer. The “model of sociability” (Bourriaud, 17), the “methods of social exchanges” (Bourriaud, 43) we create in the coming weeks will be what our audiences will come to witness. Our dance, our piece is *how we relate*.

For this new correlation of process and product to have as few dialectical ripple effects as possible, I promise to stay in close touch with you throughout the coming weeks. We will keep rehearsals low-fi, let them be “scaled down models of communicational situations” (Bourriaud, 47); (big technical apparatuses only deepen the trench between actor and director by splitting our senses.) The showcase for instance, i.e. the stage form established in the theater of the Renaissance and still in use today, would be such a big technical apparatus, isolating the director in the realm of the visual. Ignoring it, I will stay close to your experience of being “up there” – and prevent myself from telling you what works (and what doesn’t) from “down here”. I will be your neighbor rather than the royalty to whom the performance used to cater in central perspective. In fact, I promise that, under any circumstances, I will prioritize “proximity” and “tactility” (Bourriaud, 43) over the visual. As a director of this relational art piece that are our rehearsals, I will thus be sensing, not seeing.

## Cybernetic promises – the director as *machine à gouverner*

As announced above, I have meanwhile *opened* Bourriaud's book, serving myself with quotes to feed the director's imaginary address to the ensemble at this first rehearsal. To do right by her character, it felt necessary to counterbalance Bishop's critical incisions with the enthusiasm of a theorist in the rush of pioneering.<sup>134</sup> Doing right by her is also doing right by my own directorial practice as well as my enthusiasm for the “aesthetics of the relational” as they developed throughout the social turn. Like many other theater directors of the Foothills, I have adapted the ethically charged premises of an art form that takes “as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context” (Bourriaud, 14) – despite the contradictions that appear to us as we walk the Great Plains of the present moment.

But what then, one could ask, was the pioneering enthusiasm about? What was the emancipatory and/or aesthetic promise of an “esthétique relationnelle” applied in the performing arts?<sup>135</sup> In the following, I will try to answer this question by producing a more comprehensive

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<sup>134</sup> Bourriaud is not only a critic and theorist (like Bishop), but also a curator whose writing – as one might say with a wicked tongue – is not only driven by the the rush of pioneering new intellectual territory but also by the anticipation of a “gold rush”. Because once the relational art-piece is established as an intelligible “object” it will be possible to sell it on the art market. In a similar sense, artistic researchers are also playing with a certain stake when theorizing about the field that feeds them. As for Bishop's perspective on Bourriaud, one could think that her critique is informed by the vantage point of over a decade's distance to the “rush”. But her counter-proposition advocating “relational antagonism” came in fact rather promptly (Bishop 2004).

<sup>135</sup> As usual, the correlations between fine arts and theater are full of asynchronicities, transdisciplinary syncopations, untimely imports, exports, and re-imports. While the story – from within the performing arts world at least – is usually spun in a way that the theater would be running after the aesthetic innovations of the fine arts, this very case could also be presented differently. Because when looking back to the 1990s, relational (fine) arts seems to “discover” what might as well be called the “workaday world of theater making”: art pieces where “the Other [is] presupposed” (Bourriaud, 26) i.e. works that reserve a place for the spectator's presence and agency in the moment of encounter or again, as Bourriaud puts it, presume “dialogue as the actual origin of an image-making process” (Bourriaud, 26). All these supposed novelties of relational works are so deeply engrained in the logics

genealogy of a “Regie” which has fully integrated the notions of dialogue and circularity evoked above; and consequently, attempts to function as a *real-time system with an appropriate feedback mechanism*. By tracking the metaphor of feedback to its first transdisciplinary application, I will propose a cross-reading of our field with so-called cybernetic epistemology; thereby highlighting a model of governance ambivalently informing our contemporary rehearsal practice today.<sup>136</sup>

### “Kritik”

From the perspective of my professional autobiography, I can still recall “the moment” when, in the German-speaking context, I started giving the actors “Feedback”, instead of “subjugating” them to “Kritik” (the convention I had formerly learned at the place of my education, Ernst Busch, Berlin). Without my awareness at the time, this shift of vocabulary repositioned myself as a director in relation to the ensemble in a radical way: I had become one step closer to being a *cybernetic director*, that is to say: consider myself part of a

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of theater making that, rather than an explicit aesthetic position, they constitute the basic *techne* of actors and directors. Even classical rehearsals are thus – just like relational art pieces – always anticipatory situations, *installations*, as it were, where the empty seats “scream” out the fact, that this is not *it* - not yet, at least, without the actualization in the arena of encounter / without the audience. Revisiting Bourriaud’s “ground-breaking” account I therefore cannot help the impression of being “introduced” to the theater practitioner’s commonplace knowledge that there exists an “auto-poetic feedback loop” (Fischer-Lichte [2004] 2008) in the time dimension of the exhibition; that art piece and spectator mutually affect each other in an open-ended process. Brutally put: Bourriaud’s *Esthétique relationnelle* applied to the audience-actor relation provides us with a poor version of Grotowski’s “poor theater”, formulated with 30 years delay. (To further extend this already ridiculously long footnote, I could refer to performance study scholar Shannon Jackson’s disenchantment in that regard: “It is quite unnerving for a theatre historian to learn that the traditional terms of their workaday world are the terms used to mark the disruption of visual art traditions, whether that disruption is celebrated as a liberation or castigated as the end of art as we know it.”(Jackson 2011, 19)) Nevertheless: when looking *not* at the audience-actor *but* at the director-ensemble relation in terms of relational art pieces, the picture appears upside down again, with the chronology suddenly inverted. Because when mirroring the very *processes* we are facing in the performing arts today, Bourriaud’s conceptualizations start carrying factual “news value”. As I have tried to show in the imaginary situation above, they might even provide the code by which *rehearsals after the social turn* become readable.

<sup>136</sup> The subsequent section of this chapter is a partial reworking of Schmit (2022).

communicative system, which I wasn't going to steer through authoritarian power (or intellectual superiority, or charismatic seduction), but through control.

“Kritik machen” is probably best translated into English by the term “giving notes”. But while you “give notes” *to* the actors, “Kritik” is something you “make with” the actors. (“Kritik machen *mit* den Schauspieler\_innen”/Giving notes to the actors.). The participatory ring of the preposition “with” in German is misleading, insofar as the case is instrumental: “Kritik” is by tradition given out frontally, i.e., the director walks through the notes and the only conventional way for the actors to respond is by asking questions of the pragmatic kind: in attempts to clarify the directions received.

Usually, the director will be seated at the head of the table, so as to be seen by everyone in a more or less central perspective – a spatial, but also psychological reversal of rehearsals *on the floor*, where the actors are exposed. (Note that this set-up is not really an option in Rirkrit Tiravanija’s installation, where the beer benches align actors and director equally on the same axis.)

### *Kritik as review or Kritik as ideology critique*

“Kritik machen”, the act of making “Kritik” thus implies a normative review of the actor’s operations on stage. (“Do this. Don’t do this.”) The aesthetical goal usually defines the criteria for such a review: in our practice, the intended *mise-en-scène* will thus inform the “rights and wrongs” addressed in the actor’s work.

Despite its pragmatic aspects, “Kritik” can also activate an undercurrent notion of “critical theory” as associated initially with the Frankfurt School. In this very space of resonance, the actor’s operations on stage can also be reviewed, “criticized” from an “ideology-critical” position, thereby creating criteria that are transcending the ones of the *mise-en-scène* at hand. This specific directorial access point of “Kritik” naturally doesn’t stop at the limits of what could be argued to be the actor’s most autonomous terrain: his or her acting techniques.

In the paradigm of “*Kritik* as ideology critique”, these are also under suspicion of being mere products/tools of a “cultural industry” and scrutinized as such. The actor’s default tools for representation will thus naturally be messed with – and his/her re-programmed *techne* can even turn into the site of the director’s genuine artistic expression, as was the case in Grotowski’s stagings for instance.<sup>137</sup> Within the metaphor of “*Kritik machen*” the actor’s work can therefore be looked at as “an embodiment of ideology” that needs to be scrutinized by an intellectually superior character (the director) who will split “false” from “right” consciousness throughout the process of rehearsals.

### *After Kritik: feedback and its implications*

So how did *feedback* – a concept originating from electronic circuit theory – find its way to the center of our directorial practice, challenging, if not replacing an “old school” paradigm of *Kritik*? When did it arrive, by what channel and, above all, what did its circular logics do to the scrutinizing frontal set-up described above?

The fact that the German language has preserved the term as an English neologism – and that despite the option of an existing word (“*Rückkopplung*”) – hints to the Anglo-Saxon axis by which the concept was introduced: *Feedback* as part of cybernetic theory is thus yet another of the many post-WW2 theory imports within what could be called a “North Atlantic

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<sup>137</sup> Some of the most productive performing arts works in the second half of the twentieth century spring from turning ideology-critical readings of acting techniques into aesthetics. A great example would be Peter Handke’s powerful *Offending the Audience* ([1966] 1971) in which the rhythms of psychological acting are highjacked by the performative effects of one long sequence of speech acts. Obviously, the “messing with the actor’s techniques” demonstrated in Claus Peymann’s original staging would never have succeeded without the agreement, contribution and investment of a generation of actors (in this specific case of Michael Gruner, Ulrich Hass, Claus-Dieter Reents and Rüdiger Vogler), who themselves wanted to emancipate themselves from acting styles associated with Nazi German melodrama.

Treaty for Theory” or “North Atlantic Theory Organization” (with the US as the strong arm, of course).

Putting it this way, I am most likely channeling the cold-war resentment this term must have produced among some of my older East German theatre teachers due to its arrival in the 90s.<sup>138</sup> Most of the time, however, it is worth retracing the stream of theory imports to its source. As concepts tend to be genuine while they are still breaking ground, we can expect some strong (political) promises when searching the broader field of knowledge in which the term *feedback* was first applied. The following sections will therefore offer a brief overview of the history as well as the epistemology of cybernetics. The scope is condensed to the anthropological implications that resonate within our field of work. These implications will allow for a discussion of the ideal of governance in cybernetics, which, as already mentioned, inform the interaction between actor-director/ director-ensemble in rehearsals today.

Feedback is one of the central metaphors within cybernetics, a term (re-)introduced by US-American mathematician Norbert Wiener in 1948 ([1948] 2013, 11). The word “cybernetics” itself is derived from Greek κυβερνητική (kybernetike), meaning “governance”, with κυβερνήτης (kybernetes) being the governor or “steersman” of a “ship”. In Wiener’s take, cybernetics is conceptualized as the science of steering systems. As he describes in his autobiography (Wiener 2018, 389), Wiener’s interest in circular causal and feedback mechanisms arose out of historical urgency. Throughout WW2 he invested his capacities as a researcher into devising an anti-aircraft gun that would anticipate the moves of fascist attackers over British territory. This became necessary, as the speeds of the new warfare had complicated the equation between target and shooter significantly: the airplanes of the “Luftwaffe” were no

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<sup>138</sup> In the perspective of pedagogical power as well, *feedback* and its circular logics certainly did what they set out for: complicating one-way master-student relations by setting up a communication model that *requires* the learner to “talk back”.

longer to be hit where the gunners saw them, but the shot was to hit precisely where they would appear in the future. (“The future” being: some split seconds later.) Wiener worked on creating a computing machine that would control the anti-aircraft gun based on the data it was fed back. The input being the flying pattern of the Nazi pilots and the output the position of the rifle in anticipation. Ultimately, the project failed to be completed before the war ended, but it can be asserted that the installation of the first digital “real time systems with appropriate feedback mechanism” (Pias 2016, 21) was intended between fascist aircraft and the machine guns of the Free World.

The “steering systems” analyzed in post-war cybernetics – presented and discussed in particular at the so-called *Macy Conferences* between 1946 and 1953 – cover an enormous range of seemingly disparate phenomena, aligning them in a somewhat horizontal manner.<sup>139</sup> As the subtitle of Wiener’s first publication on the topic suggests – “Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine” (Wiener [1948] 2013) – even the line formerly drawn between the organic and the inorganic is destabilized in this transdisciplinary endeavor. In her book *Zeros and Ones* Sadie Plant (1998) lists the elements connecting the steersman and the ship that make for the feedback loop underlying the metaphor in the etymology: “eyes, hands, skin, bones, decks, rails, wheels, rudders, maps, stars, currents, winds, and tides” (Plant, 164) – all form the cybernetic organism interconnecting “living” and “dead” material. In return, any machine equipped with a sensory apparatus (sensor) that – through a process of feedbacking – administers its activity can be analyzed as a self-regulating, cybernetic system, i.e., a system that, while running with a certain degree of autonomy, can prevent its destruction.

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<sup>139</sup> The *Macy Conferences* are documented in what the editor rightly calls a “somewhat unusual document” (Pias 2016, 533); given its volume as well as its transdisciplinary range.

An often-used historical example is James Watt's steam engine, a machine maintaining self-control with the help of an energetic feedback loop: "if it starts to run wild, the bars of the governor fly upward from centrifugal action, and in their upward flight they move a lever which partly cuts off the admission of steam. Thus, the tendency to speed up produces a partly compensatory tendency to slow down." (Otto Mayr quoted in Plant, 157) A more everyday-life example of a cybernetic system would be the one installing a feedback loop between heating and outer temperature, i.e., the *thermostat*, preventing a room from freezing or overheating.

The ultimate cybernetic machine is certainly W. R. Ashby's *homeostat*: an electrical apparatus that does not produce anything, except for adaptations to random disturbances introduced into its proper circular set up – thereby stabilizing itself in an eternal feedbacking activity.

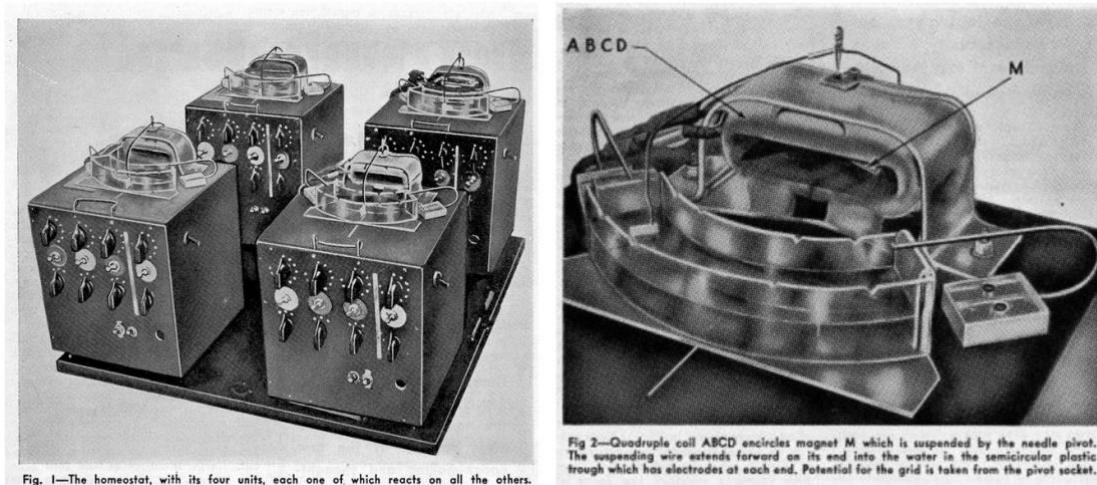


Figure 6: The first published account of the homeostat appeared under the title of "Design for a Brain" in the December 1948 issue of the journal *Electronic Engineering* (London).

*Homeostasis* itself is probably the most potent metaphor for both the present capitalist system as well as the endeavors of many of the performing arts within it. Arguably, the *adaptive, ultra-stable system* is an aesthetical ideal held by many choreographers who refrain

from micro-managing the movements of their dancers but suggest *scores* or *systems* instead. Here the shift from “giving notes” (*Kritik*) to “giving feedback” – or in a contemporary spin: to “giving *notions*”<sup>140</sup> – can be witnessed in its full emancipatory potential: by merely “mirroring” the operations on stage within a circular system that is transparent to everyone involved, the performer’s choices reach another level of informedness. Thereby providing for what is often experienced as the performer’s *stability* on stage.<sup>141</sup>

### *Neural computation and information theory*

From the selection of “sensitive machines” above, it becomes clear how the body, in turn, can be described as a cybernetic system in its own right. Consequently, one of the first theoretical “transplantations” of the term *feedback* is made – from its original application in electronic circuit research – to our nervous system. The nerve cells are a thankful recipient of the new theory as their activity can in fact be described in binary terms: either they transmit information, i.e., send signals or they don’t. In Wiener’s language they either “fire” or “repose” (Wiener, 120), which in turn can be translated into zeros and ones; thereby complying with the kind of algebra the newly emerging computing machines operate by.

The common precondition of the three foundational concepts of cybernetics – switching (Boolean) algebra, information theory, and feedback – is digitality. It is thus only when humans and machines operate on the same digital basis, [of zeros and ones] that the epistemology of cybernetics is itself able to be productive. (Pias, 16; my emphasis)

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<sup>140</sup> I owe the observation of this latest shift in parlance to choreographer and curator Erik Valentin Berg.

<sup>141</sup> As opposed to a certain fragility within the *mise-en-scènes* of *Kritik*, where everything collapses once random outer disturbances permeate into the theater space, “homeostatic” works can have an amazing precision, while at the same time “unthreatened” by mundane “noise”. Personally, I will never forget the fantastically focused staging of *Lenz* by Laurent Chétouane (former chemical engineer and nowadays theater director and choreographer) that played out on a summer evening 2006 in the middle of Berlin – with the windows open to the daylight and the sounds of the city weaving themselves effortlessly into the actor Fabian Hinrich’s synthesizing presence.

In the light of this, the human subject turns into “a special sort of information machine” (Pias, 16) both in terms of internal, physiological processes – we wouldn’t be able to keep our balance if not for an elaborate feedback loop between nerves, muscles and perception – but also in interaction with other systems. The precondition for exchange is that the so-called *bits* – the smallest units of communication within a given system – are narrowed down to such a degree that the coordinate axis of their measurement can be exactly defined. We can speak of “good communication” in the cybernetic value system when the bits are unambiguous.<sup>142</sup>

### *Universalization of cybernetic epistemology*

By installing a functional analogy that can be expanded into other fields, cybernetic logics have given new life to classical scholarly disciplines such as biology, sociology, ecology, economics, linguistics, and last but not least, theatre studies.<sup>143</sup> Interestingly though, the epistemology in question is rarely referred back to as a basis. It is as if the hype of recent years regarding systems theory and actor-network theory has erased the traces of the various waves of cybernetic renewal in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (In fact, many of my friends in academia or the performing arts did not really know what to make of the term, when I shared the excitement about my recent “discovery” – nor did my cousin, who is an engineer constructing state-of-the-art “sensitive machines” for Tesla.) Instead, the prefix “cyber” lives

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<sup>142</sup> In an exciting discussion after the presentation of a psychoanalyst at the *Macy Conference* of 1952 (*The Place of Emotions in the Feedback Concept*, Lawrence Kubie) computer engineer Julian Bigelow insists: “Measurements which are useful can only be taken when the thing is so narrowed down that it can be said precisely what the coordinate axis is: exactly where is the evidence of anger in this man or that man; exactly what is it that is to be measured? It must be done only in very simple systems. It is never done in anything as complicated as I understand psychotherapy to be.” (Pias, 588)

<sup>143</sup> The “global” success of Erika Fischer-Lichte’s conceptualization of the theatre performance as “a real-time system” in which audience and performers are self-organizing in an “auto-poetic *feedback loop* [auto-poetische *Feedback-Schleife*]” (Fischer-Lichte [2004] 2008, 59; my emphasis) was probably due to yet another transdisciplinary application of cybernetic’s central metaphor.

on as a more or less hollow, cut-off signifier (a discursive ghost ship in the realm of the internet) while the idea of the cybernetic organism (cyb-org) inspires both the mass cultural imaginary as well as a specific branch of post-Marxist feminism.

In fact, after some golden years of fantastically wild transdisciplinary exploration, cybernetic research had to eventually stick closely to its instrumental applicability in the fields of the military and the industry; and was never “set free” into the universities as a knowledge producer in its own right. At the same time, cybernetic logics rule close to everything around us, as a structure so integrated we hardly notice it (cf. Tiqqun 2011). It will therefore be easy for us to agree that the refiguration of our state apparatuses by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – what has become known as New Public Management – was based on cybernetic notions of “communication and control”; and that our subjectification as citizens/users of the state is nowadays achieved through a proliferation of feedback loops in all directions.

### *“Regierung” / director/governor*

If it is true that today’s overall models of governance are shaped by a theory of steering self-organizing systems laid out in the 1950s – what effects does that produce in our day-to-day practices as process leaders in theaters (as “processors” of texts, actors, space etc.)? In other words: what is a director modelled after the ideal of the governor in a cybernetic system? In order to approximate an answer, it is necessary to take a closer look at the ideal of governance implied in cybernetic theory. For this to be done more attentively, let’s pull away the (ugly) backdrop of neoliberalism just introduced, and return to the antifascist ambitions of its early protagonist. As Claus Pias writes in the foreword to his edition of the *Macy Conferences*:

In real time systems with appropriate feedback mechanisms, Norbert Wiener himself believed to have recognized what had been missing from typical critiques of society. A society without feedback is, simply enough, “an ideal held by many Fascists, Strong Men in Business, and Government.” The future task of cybernetics would thus be to install such *machines à gouverner* [governing

machines] in the realm of politics and to model them according to state-of-the-art technical systems. (Pias, 29)

Here the strong democratic promise inscribed into the political aspiration of designing a *governing machine* reverberates (with democracy understood as “redistributed authorship” in the making of a government). And maybe a distant ringing from the Mountain Range of *Regietheater* (from the *auteur* and his/her possible *terreur* during rehearsals) transitioning into models of directing attuned to the “relational aesthetics” of the Great Plains.

### *Cybernetics of the left*

For the political promise of cybernetics to gain even more shape, it might be helpful to flip sides (diagonally) within the Cold War set-up it emerges from; from capitalist Global North to socialist Global South, where – under the presidency of Salvador Allende – the first attempt was made to manage an entire national economy with the strategies formerly applied to companies on the free market only. In an unlikely collaboration between the socialist Chilean ministry of economy and the British business consultant Stafford Beer, project CyberSyn (Cybernetic Synergies) was developed (cf. Beer [1979] 1995). A prototype institution intended to become a *machine à gouverner* by which wealth, health services and goods were to be redistributed equally.



Figure 7: A depiction of the so-called operations room of project *CyberSyn*, where the Chilean officials were being fed economic data in real time. Note the circular arrangement of the feedback round – together with the ashtrays that Stafford Beer insisted on. A Gentlemen's club of digital planned economy. (Design and copyright: Gui Bonsiepe)

The Chilean (cybernetic) take on socialism did not have more than three years before the U.S. put a violent end to it in 1973. The termination of this attempt is painful insofar as we will never know how the socialist version would have differed from neoliberal forms of cybernetic government we are facing today. (What we know about the efficiency of the project is that a transportation strike induced to overthrow Allende and his political allies prior to the military coup, was successfully “managed” with the help of CyberSyn<sup>144</sup>.)

There would be a lot more to say about the astonishing fit of Chilean socialism and the cybernetic promise – for now, let us just use the *Verfremdungseffekt* of this exquisite montage (of cybernetic governance on the one hand and a democratically elected socialist government

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<sup>144</sup> I take most of my information from this insightful radio feature *Projekt Cybersyn – Chiles kybernetischer Traum von Gerechtigkeit. [Chile's cybernetic dream of justice]* Funk, Jannis, and Jakob Schmidt (2020). English language readers can refer to Morozov (2014).

on the other) to identify some basic traits of how power is modelled/dissolved in the leftist *machine à gouverner*:

*Equity*: the circular feedback systems identify lack and excess and redistribute on equal terms. The Marxian motto “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” can be programmed as a default setting.

*Access, Recognition, and Mediation*: everything that operates within the span of intelligible information will be heard by the *machine à gouverner*. It doesn’t discriminate senders of inputs, but simply computes everything into a singular output / course of action.

*Accountability, Transparency*: as soon as the *machine à gouverner* is equipped with memory, the processes leading up to a specific output can be traced back. Every decision has its binary branch that can be accounted for.

*Real Time*: brought up to a certain speed, the *machine à gouverner* can even account for its own decisions in what is perceived as real time by human beings.

### *Director as “machine à gouverner”*

So much for the political promise of cybernetics in its leftist formulation. But how can these historical attempts to create a type of governance that will *systematically* shake off the fascist shadow inform our quest for the cybernetic director? My underlying thesis is the following: after the fall/take-down of the director-as-auteur figure from the Mountain Range (the ideologically “superior” genius of the *Kritik* paradigm), there is an urgent call for another type of governance. With some due historical delay given the asynchronous terrain of the

Foothills – but with a clear analogy in the historical transition to post-fascist forms of government – the process of theatre making is finally being integrated as a *real time system with appropriate feedback mechanisms*. Halfway into the future's full realization of this project, the director is currently assigned the position of the *machine à gouverner*. Let's see how this claim holds up when we apply it to the set of cybernetic political promises deduced above:

*Equity:* The cybernetic director (from here on abbreviated as: c.d.) prevents rehearsals from turning into a competition “of the fittest”. Rejecting classical drama with its default hierarchization within the cast, the c.d. prevents inequalities (for instance found in the concept of the protagonist) from perpetuating into the ensemble. As an alternative, the c.d. devises theater pieces from scratch, where everybody can contribute according to their capacities, receiving more or less equal spaces of attention in the final output. (Roughly speaking, a piece with 6 actors/performers amounts to 6 solos.)

*Access, Recognition and Mediation:* The cybernetic director has worked on his/her preconceptions to the point where they are cleared from social preferences, libidinal obsessions or racist biases. By familiarizing him/herself with the norms underlying his/her own speaker's location, s/he can let a maximum of accounts from the ensemble shape and influence the final piece. Therefore, the c.d. listens, hears, and synthesizes. In the output generated, the voices and the accounts (the inputs) of the actors are not pitted against each other or dialectically juxtaposed – but aligned as events in a sequence in time.

*Accountability, Transparency:* The cybernetic director works in a space equipped with memory. Artistic decisions, also from older works, can be traced and explained. Spontaneous

intuitions (visions) have to be – and can be – argued for by the c.d. The overall concept is always laid out as a map beforehand as a way to guarantee participation and control on the ensemble's end. If turns are taken during the process, the binary option is being discussed openly. The c.d.'s speech strives to be unambiguous. For the sake of the intelligibility of its signal, it is cleared from subconscious *noise*. The c.d. avoids under all circumstances communicating *with the help* of subconscious noise.

*Real Time*: The cybernetic director can respond to questions concerning process-based choices at any time. There is no “lag” between unconscious intentions and formulable ambitions: his/her *want* and *need* are identical.<sup>145</sup>

## **State of the arts / Neoliberal immanence: leap into the present tense**

The above elaborations strike me as an adequate description of the status-quo “progressive” directorial practices; they have formed a “positive ideal” by which I have oriented myself throughout the last 10 to 15 years, reflecting my unconscious entanglement with the cybernetic hypothesis and its political promise. As with everything that is more or less

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<sup>145</sup> To explain the scriptwriting terminology: while the *want* would be the conscious aspects of a person's actions, the *need* would be what they are *actually* trying to make happen; respectively their subconscious agency. In the psychoanalytic matrix classical characterization operates by, *want* and *need* are often divided by a seemingly unbridgeable gap.

pure contemporaneity, it is hard to see the ideological inscriptions in the “values” at hand.<sup>146</sup> However, given the spectacular act of the neoliberal “value exchange” referred to by Bishop above (one could also speak of “money laundering”, whereby the cultural sector is nowadays commissioned with the tasks of the dismantled welfare state) the effects of what could be called “neoliberal immanence” are slowly becoming tangible.

The iteration of cybernetics in a post-socialist (i.e. a post-Allende) world highlights the situation in the West as one in which revolutionary ambition has no historical anchor/experience anymore; other than 1989; a revolution that precisely did *not* lead to the intended reform of socialism, but to more economical deregulation. This process has been optimistically described by American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama as “the end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” (Fukuyama 1989). History has come to an end by the early 1990s, not in the sense that there won’t be any more historical events. But in the sense that the only struggle left is *within* the liberal democratic system<sup>147</sup>: it is ultimately an *immanent*, a *legal* struggle for access, recognition of rights, transparency etc., i.e. the classical values of liberal democracy; now mediated by the “cybernetic director” in the rehearsal space.

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<sup>146</sup> Fully unpacking the delineations of the cybernetic “Regie” presented here would thus require an even more extensive critique of neoliberal governance as such. In this regard I refer exemplarily to Boltanski and Chiapello ([1999] 2017) on which Stegemann (2014) builds his arguments in regard to theater.

<sup>147</sup> In the language of the lineage from Brecht to postdramatic aesthetics discussed in *Terracing the Territory II*, the thesis of the “End of History” – or in its pessimistic iteration suggested here: of total *neoliberal immanence* – could be sustained as follows: “While Brecht at least had the memory of concrete revolutionary practice, Pollesch writes for those whose only experience of revolution was in 1989 when the fall of the Berlin Wall helped to open up even more areas of the globe to the deregulation of capital markets and other neo-liberal economic tenets.” (Barnett 2006, 40)

And while the thesis of the “End of History” has become the punching ball for the deconstructivist left<sup>148</sup> as well as for the geopolitically re-activated right, the directors of relational optimization, of soft power engineering described in this chapter are in fact reconciliated with Fukuyama’s starting point. By projecting their emancipatory claims foremost onto their praxis rather than onto (macro-)politics, they seem to say: Let’s fix the “inside” (as the power differentials “outside” appear as unchangeable). With this premise, liberal democratic values *are* actually the blueprint for any future model of sociability within the rehearsal space understood as a relational, *real-time system equipped with appropriate feedback mechanisms*.

### *Ways out / Alternative orthodoxies?*

Despite the lack of public or even scholarly debate concerning the explicitly *cybernetic* contribution to our present-day political order, various authors – taking up a genealogy similar to the one presented here – have made exciting suggestions for forms of resistance; be it through radicalized levels of withdrawal or the active disturbance of feedback-based communication: amplifying the “noise” present in every signal. (Cf. exemplarily Tiqqun (2011), Dany (2014), Diederichsen and Etxeberria (2021); but also the extensive critical research presented in the documentary series *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (Curtis 2011).) In a similar vein, a lot of artistic strategies – at least up until the turn in the performing arts described in this chapter – spring from a genuine resistance against the notion of cybernetic equalization (the *homeostasis* described above). In the Foothills of *Regietheater*, Christoph Schlingensief and

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<sup>148</sup> The publication year of Fukuyama’s seminal book *The End of History and the Last Man* ([1992] 2006) coincides with the beginning of Castorf’s tenure at *Volksbühne*. Throughout the 1990s “its unofficial in-house theorists, Marxist stalwarts Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou” (Korte 2019, 278) would be frequent guests. For an explicit reckoning with Fukuyama’s thesis cf. Žižek (2009)

Jonathan Meese therefore complicated signals by their sheer proliferation. Overstraining the governor in the steam-engine of theatre, their works are letting the centrifugal energy of the *autopoetic feedback loop* run out of control – thereby consciously steering the system of any given performance into turbulence.<sup>149</sup>

Unfortunately (at least for the arguments against the full integration of feedback logics that I am making here), recent calls for control of the director's agency have often been responded to with a wholesale rejection of cybernetic epistemology. The directorial defensiveness problematizing “communication” as defined by “information theory” thus usually regresses to a somewhat updated version of the *cult of the opaque genius*. But given the gravity of the abuses of directorial power, the question of resisting systems of control has to be nuanced; foremost by bearing in mind the difficulty of dismissing the cybernetic paradigm altogether.<sup>150</sup>

Once we fully accept the fact that the asymmetry between actor and director is *artistically productive* but has to be *checked and balanced in the social situation of rehearsals*, we can finally ask the more urgent questions:

Are there ways in which the director can be held accountable that are not based in cybernetic epistemology?

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<sup>149</sup> Cf. for instance Jonathan Meese's various performances of DE FRAU (*Volksbühne*, Berlin 2007) to the “pathology of feedback” diagnosed in Norbert Wiener's grandchild (Wiener 2018, 409).

<sup>150</sup> As if to complicate the issue even more, the Chilean example problematizes claims that *technocratic politics* are synonymous with neoliberalism only. Knowing that equal (re)distribution of wealth and access might ultimately be a matter of numbers, a materialist left will necessarily have to find its own take on the precondition of digitality in cybernetic logics.

How can the director be an agent of “relational antagonism” (Bishop 2004) in the rehearsal space?

What is consent without *homeostasis*?

And finally: what are concrete methods to curate asymmetry in the Space of Rehearsals?

These are the questions I work through in the following *Regiebuch* 3. By means of practical experimentation – within the three so-called Pre-studies – and a proposition for a consent-based rehearsal method; as well as by engaging with the non-digital “feedback metaphor of psychoanalysis”, i.e. the transference.

By terracing this last part of the territory in which I situate the director, I have pointed at the trajectory cybernetic epistemology has taken through our field so far; and how its premises gained traction during the social turn. In line with the logics of computational anticipation of the closest future (see Wiener’s anti-aircraft weapon) I hope to have provided enough “data” for a critical perspective on what is to come, when we attempt to look at the actor-director relation merely through the lens of bivalent logics. Arguably, a scenario in which feedback logics lose the dialectical tension of emancipation and become systemic on their own terms – cut lose from the regime of *Kritik* – is catastrophic for the Space of Rehearsals. In that sense, the circle is not the answer to all our problems.

**REGIEBUCH 3 (Three Pre-studies and two  
related essays)**

### *Short intro to Regiebuch 3*

It is very hard to write a book. Because each book is two-dimensional. I wanted this book to be characterised by a feature that does not fit under any circumstances into the two-dimensionality of a printing element. (...) But unfortunately, books are not written as spheres.

Sergei Eisenstein (1929)

*Regiebuch 3* presents the three practical experiments I conducted during my thesis, interwoven with two texts that emerged in between. While *Regiebuch 2* attempted for an overarching genealogy of *a theater of directing* – organized along a subjectively installed timeline/vertebra – the compositional principle in *Regiebuch 3* is that of the *montage*.

By this I mean that – wherever possible – I refrain from providing a moderating “voice-over” which would spare the reader/the audience the work of semantically connecting the elements assembled. As Russian director Sergej Eisenstein, one of the early conceptualizers of *montage* in film, contends: “[M]ontage is (...) an idea that DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another (the ‘dramatic’ principle).” (Eisenstein 2009 27; emphasis in original)

Each chapter in *Regiebuch 3* shall therefore stand as a shot/fragment in its own right, producing a “third meaning”, when cross-read with another. This dialectical “third” can also be an open question, as for instance the one possibly resulting from the *montage* of the “transference” chapter with the one on “consent-based rehearsal methods”. (As you will see, the problem of “How to conceive the Wheel of Consent® as a Ring of Fire?” is picked up within the practical experiment that ensues.)

Despite the autonomy of each of the chapters, their order is nevertheless not random. Instead, it reconstructs the “genetic evolution” of how the research unfolded over the last seven years (from beginning 2019 to end 2025). What came after what in my process. In re-staging

this “unfolding” for this final version of the thesis, my ambition has been to keep an indexical layer present throughout: second-guessing the impulse to update the vocabulary representative of a specific stage of the research – unless it proved to be a complete fallacy, of course.

This rather light touch in terms of my own editorial review within *Regiebuch 3* also results in minor repetitions or even contradictions regarding the other volumes. Namely the essay on transference (Chapter 5, written in 2022) has been left intact for the sake of the build-up of its argument (with only the cross-references to other chapters adjusted). “Unconsciously” it often speaks to *Regiebuch 1* and *4* which were written later.

The genealogical dramaturgy also means that certain concepts otherwise central to the thesis only come into play as *Regiebuch 3* progresses. The “Wheel of Consent as an intermediate layer in the actor-director relation”, for instance, is still absent in Pre-study #1 (Chapter 4 and PS#1, online resources). The *knowing-when* of *phronesis* is not put to use yet in regard to the transference (Chapter 5), let alone the “Space of Rehearsals”. Therefore only Chapter 7 – which was begun after Pre-study #2 (Chapter 6 and PS#2, online resources) but accomplished only after Pre-study #3 (Chapter 8 and PS#3, online resources) – operates with the full inventory of concepts.

As for the two reflective texts, I have avoided letting the discoveries occasioned from the three practical experiments to be bypassed by their theorization. Every collaboration within the so-called Pre-studies is a “concrete story” (Bornemark 2020, 86) in the sense of the format of *phronesis*, grounding the theory in the anecdotal, “subjecting theory to incident” (Gallop 2002, 15). The knowledge produced in them is not hidden but situated in between me and the three professionals I worked with: *this* is the director I can be in *this* theater based on the art of *this* actor. A fact I am emphasizing by naming the Pre-studies after the collaborators in question: *Sarah’s Director*, *Claire’s Director*, *Anders’ Director* / Pre-study #1, #2, and #3.

In speaking of Pre-studies, I allude to the tradition in painting where the tricky details of the composition are studied in isolation. Each Pre-study of the thesis at hand anticipates another one and so does even the final one. Together they sketch out different possibilities for the actor-director relation in a *reinvented Regietheater*. My hope is that in combination with the critical genealogy presented in *Regiebuch 2* they result in a contradictory, nevertheless dialectical picture; a *spherical book*, as in Eisenstein's dream of a new medium.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the Pre-studies in themselves do not lay claim to actualize the full alternative of a *reinvented Regietheater*. But hopefully the montage of *Regiebuch 2* and 3 offers an idea of it; “un soupçon de mer”, as it were.<sup>152</sup>

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Before venturing into the five chapters assembled in this *Regiebuch*, however, I give an introductory overview to the material conditions that produced the Pre-studies and the conceptual choices that resulted from it.

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<sup>151</sup> In his diary entry from the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1929, Eisenstein further expands on his discontent regarding the *two-dimensionality of a printing element* – as well as the possible form appropriate to write about his artistic method: “This demand has two aspects. First, it supposes that the bundle of these essays is not to be regarded successively. In any case, I wish that one could perceive them all at the same time, simultaneously, because they finally represent a set of sectors, which are arranged around a general, determining viewpoint, aligned to different areas. On the other hand, I want to create a spatial form that would make it possible to step from each contribution directly into another and to make apparent their interconnection. (...) Such a synchronic manner of circulation and mutual penetration of the essays can be carried out only in the form (...) of a sphere. But unfortunately, books are not written as spheres. (...) I can only hope that they will be read according to the method of mutual reversibility, a spherical method – in expectation that we will learn to write books like rotating balls.” (Eisenstein 2016, 91)

<sup>152</sup> “Un soupçon de mer” is what the real estate adds in the cities along the *Côte d'Azur* promise: “A glimpse of the ocean” shall be visible from the tiny balcony of this thesis.

## Set-up of the Pre-studies (context/concept)

The material basis for making my practical experiments “outside of the field” (i.e. outside of the market for theater professionals) is the research budget SKH grants to its doctoral candidates (400.000 SEK by the time of writing). In order to live up to the premise of “research through artistic practice”, candidates of other universities with significantly less financial resources will necessarily incorporate works in their PhD that are “co-produced” with the external funds of theater institutions or companies; which, in turn, “produces” different methodologies. Whether the budget in Stockholm will be considered big or small very much depends on the type of artistic practice to be researched: while it will be enough to finance three autonomous studies in the performing arts – as I am presenting here – my film-making peers have no choice other than to mix with the needs of their industry in order to produce their practical cases.

As it would anyways have been hard to finance three autonomous *ensemble works*, I designed my studies as one-on-one encounters from the outset. This is both a concession to the financial framework (the collaborators could be paid appropriately) *and* a conceptual choice: the one-on-one dynamics of the actor-director dyad seemed like the smallest unit to a field of observation (theater rehearsals) that exponentially complicates the more people enter it.<sup>153</sup>

This maximum reduction of factors – for the sake of focus – necessarily comes at the price of a certain reductionism: neither the dynamics between acting colleagues can really be considered in the set-ups suggested here nor the ones between the director and the artistic team (costume and set designers, dramaturges, etc.). Group dynamics, that are to some extent the

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<sup>153</sup> Beyond financial and conceptual considerations, it is also the set-up I feel most “at home” in as a professional director. I have always liked “making solos”, giving maximum attention to one artist’s journey through rehearsals.

essence of rehearsals, can thus only be explored by the means of the *para-anecdote*, i.e. in the overlap of authorial intention and anecdotal knowledge. In the fictional video diary created in *Sarah's Director* (cf. VD, online resources), for instance, the alliances between actress and director are strongly affected by the imaginary ensemble that surrounds them; a trace of the “uncanny detail” of our individual lived experience.

Another reduction certainly concerns the instances when the actor-director dyad started to triangulate with the work of the camera. The most obvious case of this being the Pre-study #2, *Claire's Director*, where the set-up makes explicit reference to a situation I had experienced on a film set (cf. chapter 6 and PS#2, online resources). By inviting artist Mary Szydłowska into the constellation with my collaborator, a strong third agency entered the conceptual framework. Mary took on the roles of cinematographer and editor, and as the “local wizard” of our workplace Brussels, also partly of a producer. It would have been absurd to *not* get involved on the levels of contents or to ignore the work of transference in the constellation of three. And indeed, we did produce and share a lot of knowledge in our symbiotic triangle. However, when communicating the study, I have often – stubbornly – represented it by focusing on the conceptual outset of the actor-director dyad. In terms of methodology, I have so far found no satisfying take on this irregularity and need to appeal to the ethos of the *Diderot Society*, where “problems may also be presented as unresolved.” (Brecht [1938] 1997, 259; my translation)

### *Second-order observation (the phronesis of psychoanalysis)*

Given the conceptual framework of the one-on-one structure (heeded with rigor in the first and third Pre-study) the default set-up of psychoanalytic practice soon offered itself, effortlessly, as a lens. With the analogy of analysand and analyst it provided both “scientific” concepts of the dynamics at work in the actor-director relation as well as a “technical” take on

the concrete interaction; on the *rappo*rt between actor and director, as it were.<sup>154</sup> (*Rappo*rt (French for “relation”) is the technical term psychoanalysis uses to describe the “bond” between analyst and analysand.) Bearing this structural analogy in mind, one of the central methodological questions regarding the Pre-studies can be addressed: what is the validity of the account of the artistic researcher who figures in the role of “the director” in his own studies? What to make of this “accumulation of offices” and seemingly unilateral power over the narrative?

In the one-on-one set-up of psychoanalysis, too, the analyst – even though implicated in the treatment and its various transferences – simultaneously documents the process; when finally communicating it to the outside s/he represents it in the default format of the “case history”, by the means of the report, the dissection, the interpretation. Criticism of the scientific validity of the psychoanalytic methodology has thus persisted since its beginnings and, in that regard, artistic research might have a historical lesson to learn when defending a situated knowledge that is “neither a fully scientifically formalizable nor an esoterically diluted rapport between two subjects” (Tholen et al. 2001, 9; my translation)

All the while, constructive propositions from *within* the psychoanalytic school have also contested the mastery of the analyst’s account (his/her one-sided narrativization), calling for a new technique of “case history” writing. Namely Luce Irigaray’s enigmatic allusion to a case history that succeeds in a “re-staging of *both* transferences” (Irigaray 1977, 144) (the analysand’s *and* the analyst’s) has been inspiring my own ambitions, setting a standard that could eventually be met. First of all, because of welcoming genuinely theatrical means – the

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<sup>154</sup> Even though Freud collects his practical reflections on the analyst-analysand relation under the title “*Technique of Psycho-Analysis*” (Freud 1915; my emphasis) I would argue that a lot of his observations touch upon phronetic knowledge. Namely regarding the emergence and management of the transference during an analysis, everything seems to be a question of “knowing *when*”, given the unique situation. More about the *phronesis of psychoanalysis* in Chapters 5 and Y.

“case history” as a “re-staging” [re-mettre en scène] – while, secondly, acknowledging the director’s entanglement in the situation.

Technically, I have tried to meet this standard of re-staging *both* transferences foremost by safeguarding the integrity of the actor’s perspective; more specifically by devising formats of documentation from the outset that limit my possibilities of intervention. *Simultaneity* and *parallelity* in particular have been helpful methods here (Claire and me sending letters to each other at the same time or Sarah and me picture-locking the individual edits of the same interview-material without mutual feedback), resulting in a kind of “two channel aesthetics” that overarches the whole research project.

### *The third thing*

Within this structure of one-on-one encounters and two-channel documentation, the question of *how* we agreed on the “third thing” – the material we would work with – is also worth a short elaboration. When there are no outer forces imposing a certain material – the opposite of what is the rule for a director “in the field” (who is usually commissioned to stage a template of some kind) – the choice of material turns seemingly arbitrary. Moreover, in an artistic research project like mine, concerned with the *process* of rehearsals and its collaborative dynamics rather than with a certain *mise-en-scène* or a specific aesthetic shape, finding the material can almost feel like “an excuse”, an excuse to meet and rehearse.

Given this outset, rather than imposing a “random third thing”, I have sought to carefully let the material emerge from the context of our constellations: the professional context of my collaborators, the artefacts of our relation, the location of our study, the moment in time.

Going by that “organic” approach, a “magical network of relations” usually unfolded wherein my collaborators had agency, if they desired it.<sup>155</sup>

The initial fear on my end – the reason to keep the status of the material “weak” – was to be absorbed by the aesthetic or content-based challenges a specific material poses; and to fall into professional patterns of directing (“problem-solving”) which would ultimately distract me from the focus I had as an artistic researcher, i.e. the actor-director relation. It was only during the second Pre-study that I was made fully aware (by my collaborator Claire) of the dialectical tension between the quality of a material and the quality of the collaborative dynamics. In that sense, contrary to what I thought earlier, the choice of material is not random at all, but an actual factor impacting the “object of study” in artistic research.

In the case of the work with Anders, however, a given method started to suffice as a reason to meet and rehearse. Running into the “Wheel of Consent” midways into this PhD project, I was happy to find a “material” that could in itself attend to the purely relational aspects of the rehearsal situation. From here on, the challenge was rather to turn this given method into a theater practice that could then, in turn, process another “third thing”.

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Along those lines – while I avoided imposing personal “home territory” in the choice of the concrete template we were working on – I still deliberately made space for the studies to be “haunted” by the ghosts of strong *auteur*-directors.

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<sup>155</sup> The “magical network of relations” is Mary Szydlowska’s and my common formulation. In retrospect, it is always fascinating to see how the choice of material is intuitively already aligned with the research questions / the logics of the research. How, for instance, the psychological realism we confronted in the work with *A Streetcar Named Desire* allowed for a discussion of psychodynamics and conflictual tensions in rehearsal processes.

In the case of *Sarah's Director* that would be Lars von Trier, who figures in the dispositive of the confession booth as well as in the fiction maintaining our imaginary. In the case of *Claire's Director* the young Chantal Akerman was waylaying us in the streets of her place of birth, Brussels. And with *Anders' Director* we directly confront our own “old selves” in the *gestalt* of theater makers resentfully worshipping a bygone cult of “male” transgression embodied by Christoph Schlingensief and other figureheads of the Foothills of *Regietheater*.

These “specters” of a past era (that was, in fact, only yesterday) serve as theatricalizations of a freshly repressed layer of directorial self-understanding; occasionally evading the formulations in my own writing.

### *Simulations (composition as analysis)*

Within the three Pre-studies presented, I am exploring different possibilities for process documentation: the simultaneous letter, the prompted interview, the video essay, the work demonstration etc. With the formats being manifold, the choice that binds the three practical attempts together is that they do not happen “out in the field”. They are not documentations of “real processes”, as it were; they are definitely not field studies, but rather *simulations* of possible rehearsal processes.

I have thus avoided to use my own professional practice “out in the field” as the site of research. Rather than venturing into the disciplines of (auto-)ethnography/anthropology (where I have no formal training) this has allowed me to devise documentation formats with an artistic agency in their own right – an agency affecting the set-up, process and analysis differently from case to case.

As the discussion of the specific studies will show, the work with video as a means of documentation, for instance, has always impacted the way the actor-director relation (the object of research, so to speak) presented itself. Exploring the dynamics of consent-making in a

simulation of a film set for example (cf. Chapter 5 and PS#2, online resources), has brought about results that can hardly be abstracted from the circumstances of their documentation method.<sup>156</sup>

I will concede that the pragmatic choice for video as a means of documentation has sometimes led to a double bind that seemingly explores the logics of film making as much as the ones of theater directing. This is partly due to my own artistic in-between status parallel to this PhD as a theater practitioner who only recently started operating in both mediums. Nevertheless, my longer background and biographical embeddedness in theater should justify this being research into the logics of *theater-making mostly*.

More generally speaking: by allowing the medium of documentation to affect the aesthetic set-ups I have tried to confront what could be called the *Heisenberg uncertainty principle* in artistic research. The fact that a theater process is documented under the premise of “knowledge production” naturally affects our behavior as professional collaborators. In that way, the medial apparatus to document it has to stay affect-able, too, given that, as researchers and artists, we will always be in two places at the same time.<sup>157</sup>

In that sense there is no raw material, no “source data” to be found in my studies – at least none that is not already processed through a performative awareness genuine to both my

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<sup>156</sup> Specific questions in that regard would be: When is consent between actor and director really established once we work with recorded images? On set or rather in the editing room? I venture deeper into the question of what kind of film-making *can* in fact be read through the lens of theater rehearsals when discussing my findings in relation to Lars von Trier’s production of *The Idiots* (1998) in Chapter Y.

<sup>157</sup> The *uncertainty principle* is a fundamental concept in quantum mechanics first introduced by German physicist Werner Heisenberg in 1927. Simply put, it formalizes the limits of accuracy when calculating the position and momentum of *quanta* outside of the macroscopic scales that humans can experience. What stuck with me from high school is that the attempt to exactly define a seemingly objective position of, let’s say, neutrons in an atom is close to impossible; because as the mere medium of observation induces light – which is both a wave and a stream of *quanta* – the very scene of observation is put in motion and energetically distorted. Cf. also Heisenberg (2015)

collaborators – trained actors, dancers, directors and artistic researchers – and myself. This condition, although alien to the classical scientific axiom of an object of study *outside* of the researcher’s realm, is long integrated in the humanities as well as the social sciences; where the performative turn has shed light on the levels of “artifice” generated by the latter’s classical tools of data collection, such as for instance the interview.<sup>158</sup> The interesting question is therefore rather how to “distill knowledge” from the precarious data offered by a simulation.

### *Reality within the illusion*

First of all, it was slightly careless to claim earlier that the studies were not “real processes”. Because within the realm of the simulation – given its durations – my collaborators and I experienced very real dynamics that mirror our lived experience and, in fact, inform the research questions *as* lived experience. In reference to Žižek’s call for a “Third Pill” – rejecting the alternative of either living in the illusion *or* in the reality behind the illusion – I would argue that the simulation method bears the chance of uncovering the “reality *within* the illusion”; simply by operationalizing “fictions which already structure our realities” (Žižek in Fiennes (2006)).<sup>159</sup>

To give an example: the discourse I use in the para-anecdotal video diary of *Sarah’s Director* (VD, online resources) is consciously improvised along directorial tropes I have experienced/made use of in my professional past. When it comes to the question of “knowledge

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<sup>158</sup> For a reflection of the qualitative interview as a genuinely artistic method of staging cf. Gerner Nielsen (2021)

<sup>159</sup> The “third pill” Žižek insists on in *The Perverts Guide to Cinema* (Fiennes 2006) comes from the alternatives the movie *Matrix* (1999) presents its characters with. Taking the blue pill makes them stay in the illusion of the constructed world around them while the red pill makes them see the reality behind. Žižek insists: “I want a third pill. So what is the third pill? Definitely not some kind of transcendental pill which enables a fake, fast-food religious experience, but a pill that would enable me to perceive not the reality behind the illusion but the reality in illusion itself.”

distillation”, it would thus be meaningless to apply a classical discourse analysis to my speech: the analysis is already in the performance. The knowledge product, so to speak, is *in* the composition of the improvisation.

This is not to say that everything in the study is executed with full control, sealed against the possibility of an emergence or, even, an emergency. The fact that we move from day to day without a narrative plotted beforehand makes for unexpected turns; thereby introducing the slip in language as well as the clumsy gesture; in other words: the manifestations of the transference. In that sense the assumed division of experiment and follow up-analysis (as the dramaturgy of nature science suggests) might simply not apply in artistic research methodology. In fact, if we adapt the mindset Brecht suggests for the actor of his “theater of the scientific age” (being *in* the embodiment of the character *and* demonstrative of its construction, i.e. its “dramatic arch”), experiment and analysis are collapsed into each other: the choices of composition made in the moment will encapsulate their own analysis. Composition or even play *is*, in these cases, a form of analysis.

### *Structure of the Pre-studies’ presentation*

Despite the abovementioned ambition to safeguard the indexical (read: anecdotal) quality of the three Pre-studies, I have nevertheless made use of a certain streamlining when organizing their material. Something I deemed necessary to simplify access to what can feel like an overwhelming amount of “data” otherwise.

Each Pre-study is therefore divided into the following sections:

#### CIRCUMSTANCE / FACT SHEET

This section provides the basic practical parameters. Where, when, with whom, with which material. In the interest of highlighting the “genetic evolution” of the research project,

also the respective Pre-study's first presentation date is indicated; these are the occasions of my 30%, my 50% and my 80% seminar at SKH.

## SCORE

This section describes the research set-up and artistic endeavor.

## INDEXICAL TRACES / RELATIONAL ARTEFACTS

This section offers some insight to the relational aspects of the collaboration itself. It also assembles various materials that emerged during the work, i.e. images, montages, texts written for or in its context. *Please note that in the interest of their “indexicality”, the scanned or screenshot documents in this section are not corrected when it comes to orthography.*

## REFLECTIONS / SENSE-ABLE TRANSLATIONS / PLAY

This last section presents the artistic translation of the sedimented research findings. It provides a reflection by means of composition, be it of edited film, of text and image or of a knowledge-sharing format. Here, I invest into the idea that composition is a form of analysis genuine to artistic research; a thought I elaborate in the following section where I discuss the “concrete conditions” that produced the knowledge of this thesis.

*Please also note that all audio-visual material of the Pre-studies is to be found in the online resources. A QR-code as well as a link on the first page of each of them re-direct there.*

#### 4 PRE-STUDY #1: Sarah's Director

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<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2649533/2649531/1895>

# Pre-study #1 SARAH'S Director



First presented: 11.9.2020

## CIRCUMSTANCE / FACT SHEET / #1

Place: Online (Karlsruhe, Germany & Tversted, Denmark)  
Time: 4 weeks in June & July 2020  
Collaborator: Sarah Sandeh (actress)  
Materials: "A Streetcar Named Desire" by Tennessee Williams (1947)  
"Dogville Confessions" by Sami Saif (2003)  
DCTP Alexander Kluge's work for television (since 1987)

# SCORE

Given and imagined circumstances.  
(The set-up)

Today, on the 2nd of June 2020, my collaborator Sarah Sandeh and I start the first practical study of my research project.

It's a fictional rehearsal of which only the documentation will be available.

The documentation consists of daily video diary entries by my collaborator and me, assuming the roles of "actress" and "director" in alignment with our actual professions.

The format of the diary entries is loosely connected to the format of a Roman Catholic confession booth and the way it has been appropriated for the "making of" Lars von Trier's "Dogville".

In the fiction, Sarah and I enter the booth one after the other at the end of each rehearsal day.

In the fiction, our video entries are thus private to ourselves, while in reality we have an online workflow allowing us to see each other's daily "confessions".

While our backgrounds are made to look like the same booth, in reality, we are recording in two different locations (north of Denmark, south of Germany). The program we are using to record is the photo-booth app on our computers.

The fictional world outside of the booth is a hybrid of theatre and film production circumstances. We imagine the text we are working on to be produced in a setting similar to the one of Lars von Trier's "Dogville" and "Manderlay"; that is to say: a Brechtian, anti-illusionist approach to set-design in combination with acting techniques from the tradition of realism.

The text we are working on is Tennessee William's "A Streetcar Named Desire" from 1947.

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iii



While the imagined circumstance is a filmization of the play, the process being documented is the one of a four-week rehearsal. Here, we are borrowing from a luxurious convention of old day's Hollywood movie making, where the script was rehearsed extensively before the film was shot.

My collaborator Sarah is casted for the part of the protagonist Blanche (which, in the world of "Dogville" and "Manderlay" would be: Grace.)

If the diary entries make it necessary to mention fictional colleagues, we use the first names of the cast of Elia Kazan's film adaptation of the play from 1951.

Stella - Kim	Pablo - Nick
Mitch - Karl	Eunice - Peg
Steve - Rudy	Stanley - Marlon

The actor of the Young Collector is called Martin.

Caption: Screenshot of the inside and outside of the booth in the work of Danish documentary film maker Sami Saif: "Dogville Confessions", 2003

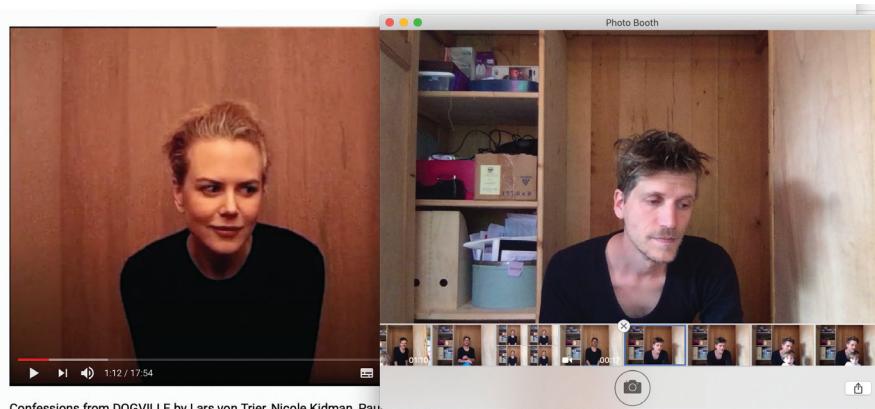
# INDEXICAL TRACES/ RELATIONAL ARTEFACTS

## Protocol 13.5.20 - Zoom Conversation Johannes/Sarah

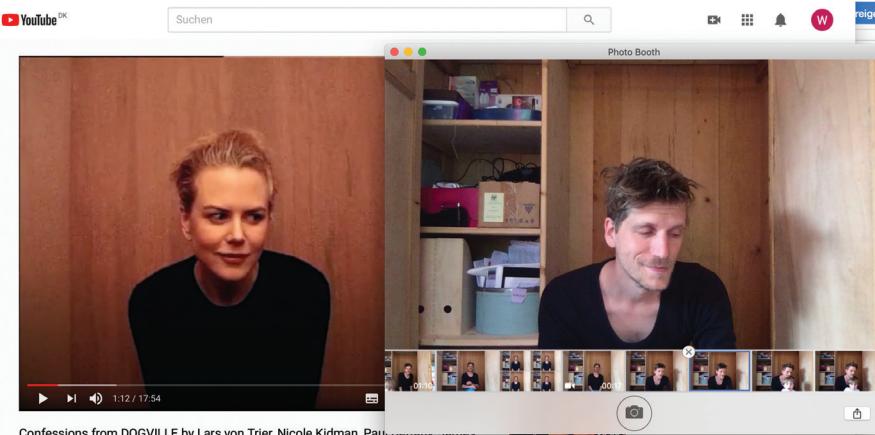
- \* We've agreed on a timeframe: 1.6.-1.7.
- \* We allocate around 3 hours a day for making a video diary entry.
- \* Sarah agreed to an hourly wage according to Level 3, following the prefect's recommendation.
- \* We'll be making entries daily, except the weekends.
- \* The working language will be English.
- \* Johannes gives Sarah access to the Research Catalogue page, where the videos will be uploaded.
- \* Johannes sets the conceptual frame. He adjusts it as necessary.
- \* We're 'rehearsing' "A Streetcar Named Desire" by Tennessee Williams. Sarah has the role of Blanche DuBois.
- \* The first entry to the diary is already made by Johannes and available on the research catalogue. It will not be part of the final documentation, but only be used as a starting point for Sarah's "response".

## Conceptually:

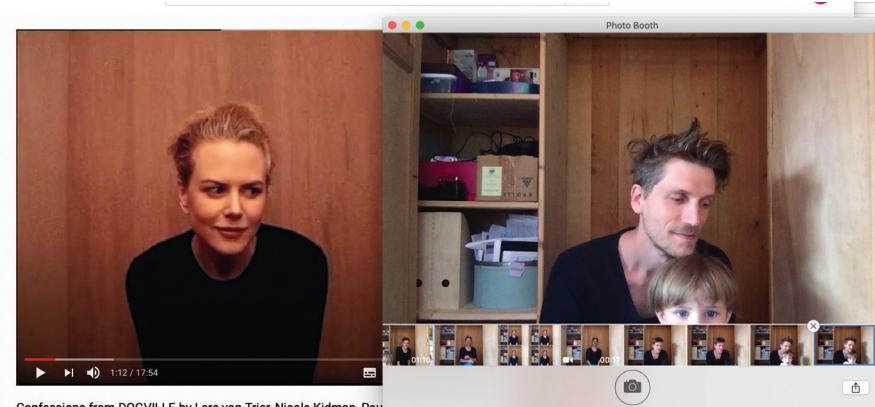
- \* Sarah will always identify / respond from the position of the "actress"; age and identity will vary.
- \* We're looking for dilemmas. That is to say, situations where both "the director" and "the actress" is right.
- \* We're both "combing" through past situations from our professional lives to find these dilemmas.
- \* As makers, we will watch each other's diary entries daily. But the "director" and the "actress" in the box will not "know" of the other's "confession", whereas the makers have the overview.



Confessions from DOGVILLE by Lars von Trier, Nicole Kidman, Paul Bettany, James



Confessions from DOGVILLE by Lars von Trier, Nicole Kidman, Paul Bettany, James



Confessions from DOGVILLE by Lars von Trier, Nicole Kidman, Paul Bettany, James

To be figured out:

- \* Daily workflow
- \* Should there be a “Rehearsal Plan”? What scene what day ?
- \* Fictional setting (Johannes defines the situation of rehearsals)
- \* Informed consent form (possibility to drop out?)
- \* Set design
- \* Acknowledgements; Sarah co-author or participant; to be figured with uniarts
- \* Feedback during the study? How is the professional contact between S. and J. formalized ?

Try-outs for the booth.  
(Pandemic times)

**Informed Consent**

For Sarah Sandeh,  
hereafter: Collaborator

The Informed Consent - an interesting document on the tipping point between formality and the very content of the research; halfway between the actual work contract and a possible symbolic one.

**Aim of PhD-project**

The overall aim of the research is to examine the professional relation between actor and director in the performing arts; the project looks into alternative models of consent between those two agents by focussing on the mutual transgressions that shape the process.

**Aim of practical study & Method**

The overall aim of the specific study is to generate material by which the professional relation between actor and director can be analyzed. The PhD-candidate (Johannes Maria Schmit) and the collaborator (Sarah Sandeh) therefore engage in a fictional rehearsal process, using a format of video documentation as to render this relation visible.

In this set-up the PhD-candidate takes the role of „the director“ and the collaborator the role of the „actor“.

**Responsible**

The PhD-candidate sets the conceptual frame and adjusts it during the process, if necessary. He is the overall responsible for the study.

The PhD-Candidate also decides how to further use the generated material in the research project. Whether in transcription, as an edited video or the likes.

**Risk information**

The PhD-candidate has given the collaborator a clear picture of the framework and offered her the chance to ask critical questions about it; as well as to make adjustments before the start of the study.

Possible risks and benefits have been discussed and awareness has been raised on the side of the collaborator around the levels of access and availability to the documentation, that differ from regular artistic productions; the material generated will stay publically available for a very long time and cannot be altered after the publication of the PhD.

It will also not be anonymized.

**Voluntariness**

The Collaborator has the right to withdraw her consent at any time and with immediate effect. No reason needs to be provided when leaving the study. Any material produced already may, however, still be used in the research.

**Publication**

The project does not deliberately ask for sensitive personal information (such as for example political or religious convictions, health issues, ethnicity etc.), but if such comes up in the artistic process it will be part of the documentation.

The documentation will be stored according to the procedures by which SKH (Stockholm University of the Arts) follow the GDPR rules (EU General Data Protection Regulation). That is during the whole process of the PhD project.

The study will be presented in relation to the PhD-project in academic and research contexts.

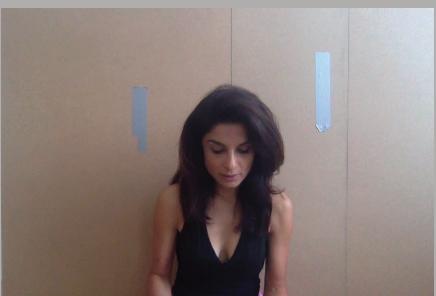
In case it should be presented in other contexts – during or after the PhD-project is over – a new consent has to be obtained from the collaborator.

Those parts of the documentation that are included in the presentation/exposition of the project will appear among other things on the Research Catalogue, and DiVA (swedish research database).

The parts of the research that the PhD-candidate chooses to present will be publically accessible and stored for long time.

**Acknowledgment**

In all publications the Collaborator will be acknowledged by her name and her function.



Sarah and Johannes in the fictional booth; with the video diary entry to the right presenting an indirect response to the proposition on the left. In the course and in the interest of the study, we reduce our private communication to one weekly phone date on Sundays. Interpersonal irritations are, if possible, not discussed, but processed in and through the work.

I've tried something today. Something that I don't do, usually. And that is that I tried to work with my mood. That is the mood I was in, when coming to the rehearsals. And that mood was very much based on my state of health. I've been feverish yesterday, so we couldn't rehearse. For the longest time of the day I was lying in bed, in some kind of delirium, dreaming of rehearsals of course, mostly. And what I did today was to start the rehearsals by telling a long dream I had had. There was no obvious connection between the dream and the play and I could see the ensemble getting frustrated, because I took a lot of space ... I took a lot of time ... with that dream that went ... that meandered somehow ... and it was not what it was about, it was about telling a dream and getting us on that level of communication. Then we started rehearsing and there had been these cakes delivered for the birthday scene again ... and today for the first time we got to have these cakes that will be there eventually when we come out ... and they are very beautifully done... you can see the effort that the props people have put into it ... my guess is it takes an hour to make the decoration ... and when we were rehearsing, Sarah was being ... her suggestion today for that scene was acting ... acting like a small child on her birthday party ... one can say that even a 4 year old has more patience and decency at a birthday dinner, at her birthday dinner, than Sarah was showing as Blanche today ... So she kept on eating these cakes, cutting them up so we had to use new ones every time, and she was sort of throwing her lines and throwing her pieces of cake at Marlon... and he didn't like that ... and Kim didn't like that either... I think they both felt some kind of responsibility towards the people who had made those cakes ... maybe also, in more general terms, some sustainability sensibility of a millennial that feels awkward wasting things ... maybe of an East German that feels "here goes the West German again" - Sarah in that case - just not having any idea of what resources are, and that they are limited... so that produced some strange irritation that fed into the conflict between Stanley and Blanche. I myself was of course ... There is that position that comes with the director's position that is being a judge; a judge that is supposed to judge on an aesthetic level... give sort of my judgement of what's within the law of that production or outside of it... But here it turned very much into ... I was sort of asked to judge from a moral perspective, because Kim and Marlon, they kept on looking out - while they were playing, seeing Sarah - they kept on looking at me, signaling: Is this what we're doing here ? Is this how it's supposed to be? ... And I tried very hard to not assume that place. I ignored them or I tried to not pick up on their "cries for help" ... and I just let myself be dragged by that kind of only-child energy; which is a fate both Sarah and I share ... we're the single children of our parents. And I just went ... tried to just go and have her take the lead on that and let that be the root of the setting. And yes, that made for a bit of a strange entrance into the weekend. My hope was of course that we would go into the weekend with a good feeling, for the whole production... but it didn't happen now. We're going into the weekend with a shitty feeling, I guess... Let's see where we'll meet on Monday.



transcript stu... headlines stu... protocol\_ss\_j... Premises Study Midpoint 22n... excerpts\_quot... +

Q and the director - he was a little sick needed that to play the scene, but she also needed that to feel a level of respect - she needed to feel the more experienced colleague embracing her. And that's what happened. We let it run. It was a very long SESSION of looking at each other for a while. And when we were done, Sarah took back on her glasses. I ended the rehearsal, also given that we had reached to some point, I think we had only rehearsed 2 hours today. and we went home. that was the day.

DAY 5 / SSF

There are 4 words in this play and they are really important to me. THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS. If you don't believe in god it's quite smart to believe in the kindness of strangers. This is not a religious play, none of them seems to be religious. so for Blanche to believe in the kindness of strangeness is beautfiul. It's a substitute for god. I really think that blanche believes that. And I don't think that the other character's do. Today when I entered the room, I noticed that MY director, he is a little fragile and this made me KIND. And we repeated the scene, that we did on our first day; and I was sitting with my back to my audience - the audience that wasnt there. and Kim was sitting with her face to the audience. And I was just playing with my back, with my neck. It was only the view of the director that moved me. He was the only one that was there. So I could just do, what I couldn't do the day before. And I really enjoyed looking at Kim. There was a similarity between this rehearsal and

9736 words

### Constellation and Purpose (University = Universalization?)

The overall purpose of the study is to create material by which the professional relation between actor and director can be analyzed.

Clearly, there is no way to universalize from the very specific constellation presented here: Sarah and I are close friends; we got to know each other in 2008, when we were hired as director and actress in the same theatre. Back then we worked together once, making a piece that we are both still fond of.

Despite the specificity of our constellation - especially when it comes to the level of pre-existent trust - there are factors that might nevertheless be extractable for the sake of their "structural truth". Namely our generational position, somewhere halfway between the aesthetic paradigm of "Regie-Theater" and an emerging cohort of theatre-makers articulating legitimate doubts around monopolized authorship / the mandate of the director.

This in-between status of ours might mirror itself in our phantasmatic rehearsals as well as in the modes of real interaction when making the „documentation“ of it. (In our present artistic dialogue, as it were.)

While there is an emerging sensitivity that aims at establishing the rehearsal situation as a safe space - where director and actor actively maintain each other's comfort zones - we are as much part of an older concept; where consent is reached by means of mutual challenges and transgressions.

Within this generational-political situatedness of our own practice, the study tries to cast light on the bigger research questions of my project: what are models of consent genuine to the actor-director relation? How do they work? Which of them are ethically sustainable? Which of them aesthetically?

### The reality within the fiction. Reflection at the midpoint. 22nd of June 2020. Fragment.

Sarah and I are now half-way into our fictitious rehearsal process. Yesterday we met for a professional conversation, (instead of the usual friendship update, that we have set as a Sunday routine for the duration of the study); we talked about how things were going and what adjustments might still be made.

In our fiction, we have reached the point where Sarah, the actress assigned with the role of Blanche DuBois, grows more and more unsatisfied with the director's egalitarian ambitions during rehearsals („People get happy and gay, but the theatre collapses.“). Within the reality of the project, that moment coincides with me suggesting to Sarah, my collaborator, that she shall take the lead on creating the daily fictional settings from here on; so I would - as well - be able to react to an imaginary circumstance that wasn't fully in my control. Interestingly enough, this proposal for a more shared agency was met with a certain level of resistance from my colleague, who was arguing her case very well: why such level of devising was not serving the purpose of the "piece".

After the initial refusal, it took us some arguing and shared thinking to pick apart the roles and constellations at play here (actor/director vs. artistic researcher/collaborator) and get to see how authorship and agency apply in those different realms. And - paradoxically? - it was by me assuming the imperative authority of - was it me as artistic researcher/ the one responsible for the project or me as director? - that I was finally able to "convince" my collaborator to take creative control for the duration of the coming week. - (Note the compromise in terms of duration!)

I'm very happy that this moment of negotiation occurred within our fiction, as well as in the reality of our collaboration. As it is quite an accurate mirror of a certain point in time that I have often experienced during actual rehearsal processes - and rarely resolved.

Put as a question, I would describe it like this: what is it, that - at a given point - has me as a director wish for a higher level of authorship in actors than they might actually be able to or even want to provide?

Is it a sense of boredom, the experience of a bubble, where I'm only being fed my own input? A loop of missed-out transformations, with the actor's work merely being a resumé of my own ideological presumptions?

Is it a political unease ? The discomfort within an economy of participation, where top-to-bottom management appears outdated.

A pacifist stance, in opposition to organizational models derived from the military?

An ethical dilemma? Steering people through a process they don't have the full picture of.

Is it laziness? The fatigue that comes with having the conditions for creativity rest on my own shoulders time and time again? - (A thought locating the strategies of (neoliberal) outsourcing and (postdramatic) devising in dangerous proximity.)

Or is it an unbearable sense of loneliness? The isolation of the director/protagonist in relation to the ensemble's/chorus' jouissance...

\*

My dilemma, I guess, occurs mostly within directing practices that are "neither-nor" (My own practice, but most likely one of most directors of my own and the coming generation.) That is to say, neither truly devised works, where the result is to the highest possible degree based on how the process shaped it; nor fully masterminded (conceptual) works, where the execution attempts to avoid all possible friction with the material's genuine contribution.

...

# REFLECTIONS/ SENSE-ABLE TRANSLATIONS/ PLAY

2 months after accomplishing their fictitious rehearsal process around "A Streetcar Named Desire", Sarah and Johannes made an interview to analyze the work.

They met in Stockholm, in an actual studio, where they would have been conducting the study if not for an all-encompassing pandemic that hit in March 2020.

\*

In a first attempt to compress the vast amount of digital documentation from the study, Johannes had formulated a number of made up TABLOID FRONT PAGES, "covering" single events in the rehearsal process.

These “headlines” were then used to prompt our conversation.

During it, Sarah is aware of the overall format, but doesn't know the content of the individual prompts.

\*

The original interview was 2h18 long.

It has been cut by over half its length now, with one edited version made by Sarah, and another one made by Johannes.

The editing work was done parallel and accomplished on the same day, so that Sarah and Johannes would not be aware of the choices the other makes.

There is an overlap in the selection of material, but this method ensures the integrity of the actor's and the director's different perspectives.

\*

On a content level, the guiding star during the interview was the research question of Johannes' project: How does consent work in an actor-director relation ?

Showing singular perspectives in regard to that has also been the criteria for editing.

\*

The visual set-up and editing style is our individual interpretation of the performative TV-interviews German filmmaker Alexander Kluge proposes in a Brechtian tradition.



Christoph Schlingensief

**Actress Deadnames Director**

**Actress Produces Alienation Within The Ensemble To Help Director**

**Bystander Director Exploits Interpersonal Conflict To Produce Better Acting**

**Actress Threatens To Calm Down A Little And Be Polite On Stage**

**Director Wastes Ensemble's Time By Telling A Dream With No Connection To The Play**

**Director Insists On A Certain Intonation**

**Director Brings In An Actor He Knows The Actress To Be Sexually Attracted To**

**Director Forces Iranian Actress To Sing Iranian Song During Table-Read**

In a general climate of retribution and deplatforming – “the time of the great purge” as playwright Carmen Aguirre called it in early 2021 – I had allowed my own ethical anxiety to compose imaginary tabloid headlines. Sarah and I use them in a constructive take on sensationalism (transmitting knowledge through sensations), as Jane Gallop suggests for her book “Feminist Accused Of Sexual Harrassment”. (1997)

In the context presented here, this set-up also reproduces the dispositif of classical theater processes: the director in the dark, the actor in exposure.

\*

During the interview,  
Sarah had the freedom to apply the language  
of her choice.  
Subtitles in English are provided.

\*

The study itself as well as this analysis  
are haunted by Danish director Lars von Trier.  
His ghostly presence accompanies both versions  
in the form of classical music:  
4 pieces by Vivaldi and Pergolesi  
Trier uses in "Dogville".



And I trust this life off-stage  
when being with other people.

The prompted interview.  
Sarah's, the actress', edit.

**"I trust this life off-stage"**

The prompted interview.  
Johannes', the director's, edit.

5 AMBIVALENT ACCOUNTABILITY – the Actor-Director  
Relation as *Rapport*

*An A4 page of helpful definitions (out of context) – to be browsed as a warm-up*

“In psychoanalytic theory, transference is the human tendency to put people in the position our parents have held for us. It is a nearly universal response to people whose opinions of us have great authority (...).”<sup>i</sup>

“Transference is the repetition of infantile prototype relations, of unconscious desires in the analytic relation. Without transference, psychoanalysis is simply literary criticism, by an unimplicated, discriminating reader, lacking either affect or effect.”<sup>ii</sup>

“(...) the analytic work is done through verbal interpretations of the patient’s emerging unconscious transferences. The analyst takes over the role of one or other of the helpful figures of the patient’s childhood. He cashes in on the success of those who did the dirty work when the patient was an infant.”<sup>iii</sup>

“Psychoanalysis (...) works because of the transference, because the patient transfers previous relations with others onto the psychoanalyst, reactivates the emotions, and can work them out in analysis.”<sup>iv</sup>

“But the transference is not only the projection or a reparation of history; it is also an appropriation of the other – here, now, the food the analysand partakes of to bring his/her analytic process to a successful conclusion (...).”<sup>v</sup>

“Transference is not peculiar to psychoanalysis, but is actually the structure of all love. What distinguishes psychoanalysis from other relations is the possibility of analyzing the transference, of being aware of the emotions as a repetition, as inappropriate to context.”<sup>vi</sup>

“What facilitates the recognition of the feeling as transference, as an inappropriate repetition, is the fact that the analyst is getting paid. The money proves that the analyst is only a stand-in.”<sup>vii</sup>

1

What is transference? There are many definitions of the term that work almost synonymously, each of them enriching the concept from different angles. In the following I will unpack some of the ones quoted above, but mapping the field of this essay I'd like to start with a most reductive, a provocative one:

*Transference is a concept feminist post-structuralist scholars use to their defense when accused of sexual harassment.*

What sounds like a punchline in a highly sophisticated stand-up comedy is true for at least two outstanding cases – one more recent, the other one dating from the '90s. One of them more spectacular, the other one more interesting in its articulation.

As an article in *The New Yorker* from 2018 claims, the star scholar Avital Ronell, accused by her former graduate student in the year before, “employs the psychoanalytic term ‘transference’ to describe intense relationships with her students. She is not the first feminist post-structuralist scholar to have done so,” the article proceeds, “nor is she the first to get in trouble for it (...) [In 1993] two graduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee filed sexual-harassment complaints against the scholar Jane Gallop, who was eventually found to have violated a rule against consensual amorous relationships, though the university found no evidence to support other claims.” (Gessen 2018)

By highlighting two cases in which women figure as the accused, my intention is not to shift the focus from the majority of #MeToo cases being about abusive men in power. (The emphasis is thus on *feminist post-structuralist scholar* – a label I wouldn’t mind having glued onto myself.) What I believe to be of interest here, is the reaction of two academics deeply embedded in the epistemology of 20<sup>th</sup> century humanities (both are literature scholars) when

confronted with juridical logics. By introducing a concept from psychoanalysis in their defense both suggest the criteria by which to hold them accountable as stemming from a place other than the law with its bivalent/two-valued logics.

And while in Avital Ronell's case a reference to the concept of transference really appears to be the insertion of a smoke curtain – set up to cover the factual (and spectacular) transgressions into her doctoral student's private sphere – Jane Gallop provides us with a more elaborate take on the term, a veritable methodology of transference in pedagogy.<sup>160</sup> From the perspective of a comparative literature scholar with special expertise in French psychoanalysis, Gallop had been conceptualizing transference long before the complaint against her (for example in her 1982 publication *The Daughter's Seduction*) and also kept on exploring its potential afterwards (cf. Gallop and Blau 2003). In the book that is an explicit reaction to the case (*Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*), she re-articulates as follows:

In my formal response to the student's complaint, I used the psychoanalytic notion of "transference" to explain her relation to me. In psychoanalytic theory, transference is the human tendency to put people in the position our parents have held for us. It is a nearly universal response to people whose opinions of us have great authority, in particular doctors and teachers. Since our feelings about our parents include an especially powerful form of love, transference is undoubtedly an "amorous relation". But transference is also an inevitable part of any relationship we have to a teacher who really makes a difference. (Gallop 1998, 56)

So far for an enthusiastic take on transference (or rather: transference love) highlighting its energizing effects on knowledge production and – the transposition seems effortless – artistic collaboration.

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<sup>160</sup> For a contemporary account of Gallop's teaching style cf. the article *A most dangerous method* (Talbot 1994) The context I myself heard of Jane Gallop first was in fact not through the harassment case, but through bell hooks' references in the already quoted essay collection *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994).

No wonder, one could argue in an instant reaction, psychoanalysis is sometimes being popularized as “the dangerous method”.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, this exact ambition – to think the clinic as a space of ambivalence, resistant to the bivalent logics as applied in the field of law (through yes/no interrogation) or in cybernetic computing (through zeros and ones) – is what enables the analogy to the processes of art-making, that I set out to explore in this text; it allows us, despite all incommensurability, to mirror the interaction between actor and director in the *rappor* of analyst and analysand.<sup>162</sup>

In doing so, we enter controversial territory. All the way, as my thoughts around actor-director dynamics gain specificity (in the slow pace of a PhD project) the case of Belgian choreographer Jan Fabre keeps lurking as a constant uncanny backdrop. In 2018 twenty former employees of his company Troubleyn, mostly dancers, had addressed the public with an open letter (Ómarsdóttir et al. 2018) in which they articulated accusations, that eventually led to Fabre’s 18-months suspended prison term in 2022. In the interview that incited the open letter, Fabre not only claims that sexual harassment has never been an issue in his company, but also – and this may have been the final trigger for many – that discourses such as the ones the #MeToo movement brought about (i.e. discourses that challenge the rehearsal space as a sphere

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<sup>161</sup> In his paper *Observations on Transference Love* (1915), Freud himself compares his work to the work of a chemist: “The lay public (...) will doubtless seize upon this discussion of transference love as another opportunity for directing the attention of the world to the serious danger of this therapeutic method. The psychoanalyst knows that he is working with highly explosive forces and that he needs to proceed with as much caution and conscientiousness as a chemist. But when have chemists ever been forbidden, because of the danger, from handling explosive substances, which are indispensable, on account of their effects?” (Freud 1915, 170–71)

<sup>162</sup> In the context of this text *rappor* (French for: *relation*) is used as the technical term identifying the specific intersubjective exchange between analyst and analysand; the analytic relation, as it were. The fact that, within the proposed analogy, I will come to equate the actor with the analysand and the director with the analyst is in no way a statement of possible hierarchies of health. To help this important point, I have avoided, along with Lacan’s proposition (cf. Evans 2006, 10), the word “patient” wherever it didn’t figure in the original literature; to the advantage of the tongue twister “analysand”. The attribution of these roles I depart from will also get more and more flexible the further this text proceeds.

of ambivalence) are “also dangerous (...) Because you are effectively destroying and hurting the relationship – which was such a secret bond between director, choreographer, actors, dancers” (VRT Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie 2018; 1:31). As the non-academic, transgressive artist he has been celebrated as for the most of his career, Fabre does not seem to have the psychoanalytic vocabulary at hand for his pre-emptive defense – but could he have meant an active, generative transference when he talked of the “secret bond”?

Unfortunately, the “murky mysticism” that Polish cultural critic Jan Kott attributed to his compatriot Jerzy Grotowski some decades earlier<sup>163</sup> seems to prevail when it comes to artistic directors safeguarding the power they hold over an ensemble. And “transference”, being necessarily an unconscious process, can easily be co-opted for this line of argumentation. But even though not scientifically formalizable, its workings are not esoterically diluted either. They can be rendered conscious (with some delay) and taken active responsibility for. With some training and technique, I would argue, the workings of the transference can even be registered in the moment.

What would happen, I wonder in this text, if Gallop’s claim was put to a test, the intuition concretized: if the transference is “inevitable” in any *rapport* that “really makes a difference”, could its documentation / reconstruction serve as a way to account for the dynamics between actor and director when involved in the vulnerable process of rehearsals? Could the active engagement with the transference inspire a situated ethical stand that is in return *not* modeled after bivalent logics? And what if re-staging the transference was the outset for this *ambivalent* accountability?

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<sup>163</sup> “What is the final meaning of Grotowski’s metaphysics, and is it possible to separate his method from his murky mysticism and apply it in a theater with other goals and a profane vision?” (Kott 1984, 143)

## 3

When I ventured into the first practical study for my PhD project, the question of how to document a rehearsal process for later analysis was primarily methodological, unconcerned with the ethics of giving an account of oneself or others. I primarily needed a framework that would reduce logistical complexity, focus in on the actor-director relation, and make space for my own as well as my collaborator's lived experience. All this seemed to be most efficiently achieved through a rehearsal *simulation*, to which the format of the 'confession booth / video diary' lent itself swiftly. (For a more detailed description of the Pre-study, cf. Chapter 4 and PS#1 in the online resources)

With the pandemic suddenly requiring an even more mediatized exchange between Sarah and me – adding a level of daily data transfers (videos) between our two workplaces – aspects of imagination and projection started to push to the forefront of the work. Imagination and projection are, of course, in and of itself an important part of the – therefore – "messy" relation between actor and director, but they became an ever more crystallized element in the absence of a material setting, a concrete cast of colleagues, an actual shared working environment.<sup>164</sup> As one of my professors pointed out on the day of the 30% seminar, where I first presented the "diary" material: the central concept in the discussion is probably the transference and how one works with it.<sup>165</sup>

At the point of that reflection, I had only just accomplished the 3-weeks rehearsal simulation, and after the seminar I was still left with 6 hours of documentation of an imaginary

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<sup>164</sup> As Sarah described it in the interview reflecting on the study: "I always sat down in front of that camera... I dreamt of our rehearsals... and that was us in another world, that was the real world." (*The prompted interview*, Sarah's Edit; 44:02; cf. online resources to Pre-study #1)

<sup>165</sup> The professor in question is John-Paul Zaccarini, who, in the framework of his thesis entitled *Circoanalysis* (2013), makes productive use of the transference concept as a means to clarify the position of the performer towards the audience.

rehearsal process for – as I had promised – “later analysis”. But what kind of analysis was it going to be? And to what exact end? The transference comment stuck with me, but little did I know about a default format for documenting/re-constructing transferences at that time. (Little did I know about the classical psychoanalytic case history, as established by Freud). What was going to be the point of access through which to approach this amount of “data”? Was I going to transcribe the video diary entries and treat them as qualitative interview material, possibly coding them into a fancy software used in the social sciences, in the hope of the algorithm creating connections I could not make? Was I then going to *analyze the discourse* that Sarah and I had used – for the most parts consciously – during the simulation? None of these methods seemed to lead to surprising explorations or genuinely fit well with an *artistic* research process. Unsatisfied with my attempts, I intuited that before I could move on, the broader, underlying question had to be answered: What is the epistemological force field in which the dynamics in rehearsals become obvious? What is the best conceptual lens through which to analyze them? Or, more specifically relating to my research question at the time (“What are models of consent in the actor-director relation?”): Which setting provides possible metaphors fit to describe the specifics of consent-making in *artistic* processes?

## 4

Before I venture further into the *rappo*rt between analyst and analysand as a possible mirror to reflect the actor-director relation, it is necessary to briefly give an overall context for this ambition of mine: to “document rehearsal processes for later analysis”.

As I have elaborated in *Terracing the Territory III.*, the position of *Regie*, once calibrated against the backdrop of the ethics of participatory art, easily appears as an illegitimate power at play. Accordingly, progressive theater practices are suggesting that any position producing power differentials on a large scale – the director’s being a classical one –

will have to be kept in check. I found a helpful image to render this ambition of “*keeping in check*” tangible when tracing the etymology of the word *control* to its first appearance in Renaissance French. Deriving from Middle French “*contreroule*” (Oxford University Press 2025) it describes a simple and concrete tool for doublechecking accounts: a second roll of paper (a “counter-roll”) that can be unfolded next to the notations of the treasurer, making sure no numbers were deleted or corrected secretly. Given this contextual outset, the ambition to document rehearsal processes holds the promise of being able to trace back the instances of consent-making between actor and director and the power dynamics coded into it.

Within the regime of *contreroule* it goes without saying that the person taking on the director’s position, will have to provide *account-ability*.<sup>166</sup> In *Terracing the Territory III.*, I have given a vision of how a “fully accountable director” can be imagined through the metaphor of a *machine à gouverner*: as yet another of the “real time systems with appropriate feedback mechanisms” (Pias 2016, 29), fully equipped to render the decisions taken in the course of rehearsals transparent to everyone. I have tried to paint this figure not only as an ideal agent of neoliberal New Public Management, but as one simultaneously shedding light on what could be called a “cybernetics of the left”; where notions of equity and redistribution are also processed through a fierce application of Boolean algebra and its bivalent logic (zero/one, yes/no). From here, taking the accountability metaphor to the extreme of its digital root (*account-ability*), the question arises: what model of intersubjective exchange (or *rappoport*) does this metaphor actually imply, and how compatible is it with the logics of artistic processes involving directors? More specifically: is there a way to think accountability (the application

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<sup>166</sup> This term has enjoyed a certain buzz within the realm of a popularized abolitionism, holding the promise of an alternative to the shortcomings of a biased jurisdiction. For a more in-depth discussion of concepts transcending juridical modes of subjectivation see Loick (2017; 2020).

of the *contreroule*) outside of a bivalent logic? And, again, could the tracking of the transference possibly provide us with this *ambivalent* accountability?

## 5

A privilege of directorial processes, or in fact any artistic process, is to work with *intuitions* – things we sense but cannot account for (yet); most likely as the effect of an unconscious reaction to given circumstances or of an “intelligence speeding”.<sup>167</sup> In the paradigm of *Regietheater* and the genius-cult it feeds off, intuitions are the unquestioned prerogative of the director. (To give an easy example: no film of Tarkovsky would have been made without the valorization of the director’s intuitions.) The team, the ensemble thus takes a collective leap of faith in their execution.<sup>168</sup> With this in mind, the question of the model of intersubjective exchange underlying the bivalent accountability paradigm can be specified: can directors interacting under its premise afford an unconscious agency or not?

As has become clearer than ever by now, this exact realm of artistic domination – intuition and the leap of faith that comes with it – is also where directorial abuse of power can occur. The Fabre case painfully exemplifies how the line between artistic and intimate exploitation can be blurred under the cover of a genius assumption. One effective way to confront this dilemma is to exclude the unconscious agency of the director from the creative process, or at least to limit its reach. By implementing appropriate feedback mechanisms in rehearsals, the director thus turns into a part of the ensemble as a communicative system of its

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<sup>167</sup> This is how American choreographer Ralph Lemon paraphrased *intuitions* at a PhD course of SKH in Stockholm, in fall 2019.

<sup>168</sup> A great example of this mechanism can be found in the documentary about Tarkovsky’s last film production (cf. *Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky* (Leszczyłowski 1988)). The collective leap of faith the team takes in the making of *Offret [The Sacrifice]* (1986) becomes ever more visible given the cultural strangeness of a Russian director “dropped” in a Swedish context.

own right, rather adapting than imposing, liking him or herself to Deleuze's *surfer*.<sup>169</sup> In this set-up, mimicking the real time response-ability of an artificial intelligence, he or she will only make suggestions/directorial choices that can be transparently argued for in the moment. The ensemble – to which the director no longer stands in dialectical opposition – figures as a circular, self-organizing system, moving from one moment of presence to the next. In an inversion of an aphorism of one of the *auteurs* of the past its *modus operandi* could be described as: "The step drives the experience, not the leap."<sup>170</sup>

In turning towards this bivalent logic of creation ("Are you ok walking down that conceptual path? Yes/No"), the "dangerous method" of activating and managing a transference – and its asynchronicities – is replaced by a model of directing that is probably more easily mirrored in cognitive-behavioral approaches than in psychoanalysis. Of course, directorial practice as mere facilitation of collective work is not a problem in and of itself; but as the artistic *results* nowadays mostly align themselves to that very mode of production – instead of juxtaposing for example an excessive performance to a sustainable process – they tend to lead to what Claire Bishop, in her analysis of instrumentalized participatory art, has called "useful, ameliorative and ultimately modest gestures" (Bishop 2012, 23) .

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<sup>169</sup> "All new sports – surfing, windsurfing, hang-gliding – take the form of entering an existing wave. There is no longer an origin as starting point, but a sort of putting-into-orbit. The key thing is how to get taken up in the motion of a big wave, a column of rising air, to 'get into something' instead of being the origin of an effort." (Deleuze 1995, 121) If nothing else, the image provides a refreshing de-militarization of directing's root metaphor: moving from identifying as a *field commander* embarking on D-Day to surfing the waves of Omaha Beach.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Heiner Müller in his speech *Shakespeare eine Differenz* [Shakespeare: a Difference]: "The leap drives experience, not the step." (Müller, 1988)

## 6

I hope the sections above plausibly demonstrate that the specific optics we choose for analyzing rehearsals feed back into our modes of production, i.e. that our methodic options for “later analysis” inform what we believe is possible in the moment of making. To re-phrase: as we, as theater practitioners, do not have a way to hold the unconscious agency of the director to account, we choose a work method more fit for analysis with notions derived from organizational management, information theory and jurisdiction. We choose the bivalent model of accountability. But what if there was a method to account for the unconscious – as well as the conscious – *rappo*rt between actor and director? A method for documenting and analyzing rehearsal processes, neither “fully formalizable nor esoterically diluted” (Tholen et al. 2001, 9; my translation); neither operating on the surface of speech acts as in digital data analysis nor drowning the responsibility of the director in the spirals of an unintelligible desire. And what if that method could – with generosity – hold both agents of the *rappo*rt, actors and directors, to account?

## 7

Over the following pages I will elaborate on how the transference could possibly provide a conceptual force field from wherein to analyze rehearsals. I will do so by mirroring my own experience as a theater maker in the psychoanalytic situation as it has been described by practitioners theorizing the workings of transference within it. More concretely speaking, I’m looking into specific reflections of Sigmund Freud, Paula Heimann, D.W. Winnicott, and Jacques Lacan.

The chronological order of the three upcoming subsections (I.-III.) is determined by the fact that the discourses at hand react to each other, but this should in no way suggest a comprehensive rendering of the concept of transference in 20<sup>th</sup> century psychoanalysis. Quite

the opposite, as I have been selecting texts only by the principle of *resonance* with directorial practice. After accomplishing this cross-reading of the transference in the *rappo*t of analysand and analyst with that of actor and director, I will conclude with a discussion concerning the limits of the same analogy; as well as offer a theoretical perspective opening for further practical exploration.

## I. Transference love: staying with the mess

Let's start at the top, with Freud, respectively Jane Gallop. The professor's self-justification wasn't all done where we left off earlier. After rejecting the recommendation by her university to henceforth "stop working with any student who has a transference onto me" (Gallop 1998, 56), she concludes:

At its most intense - and, I would argue, its most productive - the pedagogical relation between teacher and student is, in fact, a "consensual amorous relation." And if schools decide to prohibit not only sex but "amorous relations" between teacher and student, the "consensual amorous relation" that will be banned from our campuses might just be teaching itself. (Gallop, 57)

In this last paragraph, Gallop echoes Freud's *Observations on Transference-Love*, a paper that argues for the professional legitimacy of amorous feelings within analysis. Addressing "beginner[s] in psycho-analysis" (Freud 1915, 159), Freud uses his clinical experience to reconstruct the situations where the analysand "falls in love" with the analyst.

Freud elaborates that in case of an amorous transference, a course of action is to be taken "for which there is no model in real life" (Freud, 166). In this, one could say, *poetic* model the "patient's craving for love" shall neither be "gratified" nor "suppressed" (Freud, 166); the latter because it goes against the basic ambition of analysis (to bring to the surface), the former because it goes against the principle of reticence; but mostly because both courses

of action would deprive the analysand from the singular chance of experiencing an actual transference play out *without* real life consequences.

So instead of *ending* the treatment in the moment a transference is subjectively experienced as love, Freud's suggestion is to "stay with the mess" while letting the analyst carefully "curate" it.<sup>171</sup> In Freud's conception this is achieved by bearing in mind – and constantly reiterating it – that the feelings on the analysand's end are primarily an effect of the intimate setting of analysis itself. (Freud, 168) They are not original (far from having anything to do with the analyst's qualities), but a repetition of former relations; "a repetition inappropriate to context" (Gallop 1982, 143) invited to play out in the ambivalent setting facilitated by the analyst.

In French, rehearsals are called *répétition* – and as a director I recognize the emotions occurring in the immediacy of the analyst-analysand encounter from my workplace; as well how they are channeled into the practice. Especially when operating in the genre of psychological realism (as we did in Pre-study #1) there seems to be a necessity of activating a transference within the present constellation of colleagues to feed into the actor's work.

What I take from Freud's (and Gallop's) takes on transference, is the way it brings a situation into presence and *actualizes* it into the immediacy of the present *rappoport* between actor and director. Transference *love* is certainly an extreme case, but the *intensity* that a regular transference alone brings to the table of a rehearsal space can be very productive and gratifying. As Gallop writes in *The Daughter's Seduction*: "Without transference, psychoanalysis is simply

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<sup>171</sup> The English translation of Freud's text proposes „managing the transference” to describe the analyst's work with it. The German original verb "handhaben" could also be rendered as "handling the transference". Both words reflect the notion of mastery, that implies the sovereignty of the analyst in regard to the unpredictable unconscious of the analysand. In this context, I'm trying out the word "curate" with its root in *curare* (healing) and will observe what it does.

literary criticism, by an unimplicated, discriminating reader, lacking either affect or effect.” (Gallop, 73), Simply put: “Psychoanalysis (...) works *because* of the transference” (Gallop, 142; my emphasis). In that way, despite all its “highly explosive forces” (Freud 1915, 170), the transference is desirable and sought after for the sake of moving forward. And on the contrary: not getting a hold of it in time is what leads the analytic process, in our case the rehearsal process, to failure.<sup>172</sup>

In theater terms, one could add: to simultaneously look at the emotions as repetition (all the while they are being experienced) introduces a Brechtian notion of distance-evoking aesthetic strategies of the epic theatre. By reiterating the analytic setting itself as the producer of the emotions at hand, the analyst invites the analysand to “adopt the analytic attitude” (Freud, 167) – which in turn recalls the ideal Brecht holds of the actor as well as of the spectator. In that respect Freud himself has an interesting reflection regarding how much “element of spontaneity” (Freud, 162) or level of surprise the analytic, (epic) “dramaturgy” should contain. To the question *at what point* the patient should be made aware of the transference active in the space, he chips in with the following:

It has come to my knowledge that some doctors who practise analysis frequently prepare their patients for the emergence of the erotic transference or even urge them to ‘go ahead and fall in love with the doctor so that treatment may make progress’. (Freud, 161)

A proposition that Freud responds to with the words “I can hardly imagine a more senseless proceeding.”

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<sup>172</sup> In his account of the famous Dora case ([1905] 1956) Freud has to admit to failing in “getting a grip” of the transference, which – in his interpretation – leads the analysand to ending her treatment prematurely after three months.

## II. Countertransference: introducing the director's body

In Freud's paper, transference love appears to be a one-way-road where only the analysand is prone to produce amorous feelings towards the analyst, while the latter maintains the technique of mastery through "neutral" interpretations. It is therefore the achievement of the following generation of psychoanalysts to fully unpack Freud's sparse conceptualization of the so-called counter-transference – highlighting the importance of the analyst's emotional response in the treatment.

Freud's intellectual shortcomings on that matter can be explained with some epistemological assumptions underlying his theory – patriarchal and heteronormative in nature – that have been duly deconstructed in the meantime. (*Pars pro toto*, cf. Donna Haraway calling out the "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (1988, 581).) The idea of neutrality in analysis also contains a "scientific" notion of directing as it is classically conceived and partly still taught today: the director as the uninvolved outer eye, positioned on the vantage point of the auditorium, organizing the (emotional) chaos into central perspective vision. An oculocentrist, *scopic* set-up that finds its most radical metaphor in Descartes' bull's eye experiment (cf. Descartes [1637] 2001, 91–97 and SCORE-section in Chapter 6/PS#2, online resources)<sup>173</sup>.

Luckily, in 1950, Paula Heimann's pioneering essay "On Counter-transference" comes along to lock the analyst/director out of the dark box of their disembodied observation:

When I tried to trace the origin of this ideal of the "detached" analyst, I found that our literature does indeed contain descriptions of the analytic work which can give rise to the notion that a good analyst does not feel anything

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<sup>173</sup> As Descartes writes after the accomplished dissection: "[H]aving thus seen this picture in the eye of a dead animal, and having considered its causes, *you cannot doubt* that an entirely similar one is formed in the eye of a live man, on the interior membrane" (Descartes, 97; my emphasis).

beyond a uniform and mild benevolence towards his patients, and that any ripple of emotional waves on this smooth surface represents a disturbance to be overcome. (Heimann 1950, 81)

But, she continues:

In my view Freud's demand that the analyst must "recognize and master" his counter-transference does not lead to the conclusion that the counter-transference is a disturbing factor and that the analyst should become unfeeling and detached, but that he must use his emotional response as a key to the patient's unconscious. (Heimann, 81)

In an exciting move, Heimann thus restitutes what we nowadays would call a *body* to the director/analyst<sup>174</sup>; and in doing so, she interweaves the two unconscious agencies of analyst/analysand (actor/director) in a mutual inter-dependency: "Our basic assumption is that the analyst's unconscious understands that of his patient. This rapport on the deep level comes to the surface in the form of feelings which the analyst notices in response to his patient, in his 'counter-transference'". (Heimann, 82)

Along that line of thought, Heimann even goes as far as crediting the unconscious agency of the analysand with authorship: "[T]he analyst's counter-transference is not only part and parcel of the analytic relationship, but it is the *patient's creation*, it is a part of the patient's personality" (Heimann, 83; my emphasis). As directors, in artistic collaboration, we experience

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. also the more recent attempts to articulate a phenomenological/embedded perspective on directing by Saatsi ("Notes on the Director's Body", 2022) and Hjort ("The Director's Body", 2025). While Descartes implicitly stresses the methodical importance of positioning oneself on the vantage point of the auditorium – i.e. on the "interior membrane" (Descartes, 97) of the black box where the "objective image" of the stage will appear – the feminist science project "insist[s] on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim[s] the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere" (Haraway, 581) Ultimately, this is an ongoing showdown between different epistemologies (should I say: denominations?) and their prioritized senses – the sense of seeing in a battle with the ones of hearing and touching – that culminates both in the breach between Lacan and his "rebel student" Irigaray (described further below) as well as in the conceptions of the contemporary director. (Cf. *Terracing the territory III*. in *Regiebuch 2*)

this moment a lot when becoming aware of the ambivalent origin of our instructions: this suggestion I'm making might as well be authored by the actor's unconscious agency.

D.W. Winnicott spins this thought even further when he speaks of situations in which the analyst not only "owes" his or her emotions to the analysand (in the sense of a countertransference s/he registers), but where they must also be made available in return. From his own clinical experience Winnicott recognizes fear, love and hate towards his analysands; three distinct emotions of which the latter is the focus in his paper "Hate in the Counter-Transference" from 1949. While "in the ordinary analysis the analyst has no difficulty with the management of his hate" (Winnicott [1949] 1994, 351), this is more difficult when dealing with psychotics. Here, "the analyst is under greater strain to keep his hate latent, and he can only do this by being thoroughly aware of it" (Winnicott, 353).

However, Winnicott's proposition not only discusses the mere registration of the countertransference as a tool for *informing* interpretation, but also the special case of its *actualization* in the analytic situation.

(...) in certain stages of certain analyses the analyst's hate is actually sought by the patient, and what is then needed is *hate that is objective*. If the patient seeks objective or justified hate he must be able to reach it, else he cannot feel he can reach objective love". (Winnicott, 353; my emphasis)

Regarding my own feelings towards actors, I certainly recognize fear, love and hate as emotions during rehearsals. And also the very specific, exceptional situation where the display of my hate has proven productive for the further collaboration is familiar to me: if, for example, an attempt to "sabotage" the work went unanswered, the relationship between the ensemble

and me (as well as the piece) often imploded. In Winnicott's words, the actor seeking my hate and not reaching it doesn't feel like s/he can reach "objective love" within the work.<sup>175</sup>

The notion of an "objective counter-transference" is interesting though. Had we not just left this epistemological fallacy of Freud behind us? To understand what Winnicott means by "objective" it is helpful to understand what it is, in his view, *not*: emotions in the analyst springing from identifications that are under repression (more analysis for the analyst is needed!) as well as identifications belonging to the analyst's personal experiences and development. Instead, the "truly objective counter-transference" consists of "the analyst's love and hate in relation to the actual behaviour of the patient, based on objective observation". (Winnicott, 350)

This last line may strike us as somewhat "pre-postmodern" in the sense that – despite its acknowledgment of the interwoven, non-formalizable setting of transference and countertransference – it still makes a claim to objective, super-personal truth. And it is easy to see the potential abuse of power if a hypothetical director were to fully appropriate this position: "Cleansed of repressed identifications and personal experience, my countertransferences are pure and I therefore actualize them relentlessly during rehearsals". Yet, and as problematic as it is, without a minimum of this assumption (of an objective countertransference), there could be no directorial agency at all.

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<sup>175</sup> In artistic terms "objective hate" could maybe be translated as the rigor – Artaud's synonym for "cruelty" in *The Theater and its Double* – a work carries from within. ("One can very well imagine a pure cruelty, without bodily laceration. (...) From the point of view of the mind, cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination." (Artaud [1938] 1958, 101)) Winnicott's "objective love" would then – in artistic terms – be experienced as an intrinsic logic the piece has to follow in order to do what it intends; despite personal experience and repressed identifications of its director.

### III. Lacan: the director as subject supposed to desire

There are various modulations of the concept of transference in Lacan's thinking over time, all accompanied by its continuous re-positioning in regard to other central concepts, such as the *subject supposed to know* (Lacan [1964] 1998). The most interesting modulation of this concept when it comes to analyzing rehearsals may lie in Lacan's re-positioning of the transference as a *dialectical structure*. In doing so the emotions that were until then thought to *be* the transference (in themselves) start to carry less information in regard to their content value (e.g. love, fear, and hate); but are becoming indispensable indicators of an actual *rappor*, revealing the very fact of transference.

With this shift of focus the idea of transference-as-repetition. i.e. as a re-enactment of *former* relations, also loses some importance, and the attention can be turned to its specific structure in the present moment of the analytic situation. Thereby, the detailed work of psychoanalytic interpretation, which seems hard to take on in the rehearsal space anyway ("Who from your past am I representing in this situation?"), is replaced by an analysis of the identifications obvious to everyone "present".<sup>176</sup>

With this structural, *here and now*-oriented approach, the division between transference and countertransference ultimately becomes obsolete. As Lacanian psychoanalyst Dylan Evans lays out for us:

In the 1960s Lacan becomes very critical of the term countertransference. He argues that it connotes a symmetrical relationship between the analyst and the analysand, whereas the transference is anything but a symmetrical relationship. When speaking of the analyst's position it is both

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<sup>176</sup> The quotation marks intend to stress the specific logics of transferences within artistic constellations where fiction plays a part. In the Pre-studies with Sarah and Claire, for example, we were surrounded by an imaginary cast that was purely the result of our mutual transferences: Stanley, Mitch and Blanche (from *A Streetcar Named Desire*) as well as the Chantal Akerman/Julie of *Je, tu, il, elle* were all representing various configurations of our actor-director *rappor*. I elaborate on this point in *Regiebuch 4*.

misleading and unnecessary to use the term countertransference; it is sufficient to speak of the different ways in which the analyst and analysand are implicated in the transference. (Evans 2006, 31)

Asymmetry as a structural condition for a working transference is another interesting element of the Lacanian clinic. It stands in a somewhat direct opposition to the notion of a fully articulated director, as I have pictured it above in regard to the cybernetic promise of a real-time accountability. On the contrary,

[the] task of the analyst throughout the treatment is to make it impossible for the analysand to be sure that he knows what the analyst wants from him; (...) In this way the analyst's supposed desire becomes the driving force of the analytic process, since it keeps the analysand working, trying to discover what the analyst wants from him; (...) By presenting the analysand with an enigmatic desire, the analyst occupies the position of the Other, of whom the subject asks *Che vuoi?* ('What do you want from me?'), with the result that the subject's fundamental fantasy emerges in the transference. (Evans, 40)

It is of course hard to imagine a director maintaining the same level of enigmatic silence as an analyst can afford by convention. But the supposition of knowledge and desire<sup>177</sup> on the director's end is nevertheless a driving force for the actor's creative activity.

What is important here is how this supposition is not necessarily met by *actual* knowledge or desire but is a posture the analyst embodies for the sake of activating the transference (that then, in return, will offer material to work with.) Even in the case of initial mistrust, "sooner or later some *chance gesture of the analyst* is taken by the analysand as a sign of some secret intention, some hidden knowledge. At this point the analyst has come to embody the subject supposed to know; the transference is established." (Evans, 199; my emphasis)

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<sup>177</sup> Lacan speaks of the *desire of the analyst* (a desire *supposed* within the analyst as well as an actual desire proper to the analyst) as yet another engine of the analysand's speech (cf. Lacan [1966] 2006, 724). Theater practitioners will recognize the effort being put into figuring out sexual orientations of people "whose opinion of us have great authority", as Gallop paraphrases the director or curator in the performing arts, when speaking of "doctors and teachers". (Gallop 1998, 56). And the drop of tension it can produce once 'the truth is out' (cf. Gallop, 86).

Lacanians sometimes ironically admit to only having two tools in their therapeutic tool kit, i.e. *puns* and *cuts*. Both are part of what Lacan conceptualizes as *punctuation*<sup>178</sup>, referring to the possibility of rendering the speech of the analysand back in a way that produces an alternate meaning or by simply cutting it off in an unexpected place. A practice finding its full expression in the unpredictable length of a classical Lacanian session.

This mastery over time is a power the director traditionally holds in rehearsals, be it by initiating it, ending before the “official” ending time or be it in the cut of an ongoing improvisation. Especially the latter of the two operations is prone to have the actor wonder: “Why did s/he cut us off here?”, “Did my actions not satisfy?”, “Why did s/he become aware of time all of a sudden?” A set of questions ultimately leading up to the all-comprising “What do you want from me?” – *Che vuoi?*

Thus – however skillfully his/her desire is concealed from the actor – by convention the director still has to provide the punctuation of the “cut” (literally by uttering the very word on the film set) and thereby assume the position of the *subject supposed to know / to desire* – ultimately establishing the possibility of a transference. In that sense, even the director who attempts to reduce his or her agency to the maximum (which would be only saying “start” and “stop”) will still set the *dialectical structure* of the *rappoport* in motion.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> A classical Lacanian *pun* (based on a *double entendre*) would be this one: *Analysand*: “Tu es ma mère. (You are my mother.)” *Analyst*: “Tuer ma mère. (Killing my mother.)” (cf. Evans, 159–60)

<sup>179</sup> This very mechanism might offer an explanation to a phenomenon that came to my knowledge during an exchange amongst directing professors in 2021 (Alexandria Nova Network meeting, Stockholm, October 2021). Across the broad variety of programs, it seems that directing students currently have a very hard time *ending* improvisations that they initiate with their actor-student colleagues. Thereby dragging them out into seemingly endless sessions... Besides it possibly being a beginner’s mistake, this could have to do with the effects of the punctuation we have just established: held against the backdrop of values such as co-creation, collective authorship etc. (that the directing students usually embrace), this most minimal gesture of directorial agency – the cut – always re-establishes the asymmetry of the relation. In other words, by interrupting an improvisation the students are ‘running the risk’ of ‘accidentally’ being turned into a *subject supposed to know/to desire* and in return having to curate a transference, i.e. to deal with the 20<sup>th</sup> century baggage of the ‘dangerous method’.

Concluding this chronological, yet sporadic account of the transference concept and its Lacanian rendition will allow us to briefly discuss the effectiveness of the suggested analogy. To what extent can we speak of the actor-director relation as *rapport*? How meaningful is it to compare the transference in the psychoanalytic setting with the transference taking place during rehearsals? Which specific takes on it are productive in this regard? – Briefly put: what are the limits of this analogy?

To clarify, I would first of all like to stress that it is not the full-scale psychoanalytic project that I wish to align to the realm of theater making. Attempts in that direction have been made already, mostly in the avant-gardes of the past century, many of whom accepted the premises of psychoanalysis without reservation.<sup>180</sup> As I do acknowledge an irrevocable drift away from the baggage of that tradition, my focus is *specifically* on the transference and its potential to analyze our processes.

Of course, there are a whole lot of psychoanalytic notions attached that cannot simply be left at the door, when working with this concept. (The most prominent one maybe the *unconscious* itself; a notion that – if the trend for self-management and cybernetic optimization progresses at the current speed – might strike us as totally ridiculous in 30 years from here.) However, when looking for an alternative, i.e. an ambivalent accountability, the *transference-as-a-dialectical-structure* seems best suited to competing with the bivalent logics of juridical and cybernetic discourses; that is most likely because in Lacanian terms, unconscious agency is also a coding activity, with the difference that it cannot be represented in Boolean algebra.

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<sup>180</sup> I have already talked about the Grotowski of *The Constant Prince* (1965) and Freud's *constancy principle* ([1895] 1966, 297); on which generations of psychoanalytically informed directors are building in the neo-avantgardes of the 60s and 70s. In *Regiebuch 4* I take a closer look at Lars von Trier assuming the “chair of the analyst” in his work with the cast of *The Idiots* (1998). For an early 20<sup>th</sup> century embrace of the psychoanalytic paradigm I might refer to the surrealist movement (exemplarily cf. Pierre 1990).

Another instance where the specific Lacanian take on psychoanalysis proves most compatible with the logics of art-making is when contrasting the purposes of rehearsals and treatment. To state the obvious: one is therapeutic and finds its goal in the relief of the patient, while the other is bound to a future artistic presentation, that is, at best, believed to have a cathartic effect. Or, put even more simply: rehearsals find their goal in theater, analysis finds its goal in healing.

This last assumption can be challenged though. As Evans condenses for us: “[What Lacan calls the *end of analysis*] is not the disappearance of the symptom, nor the cure of an underlying disease (e.g. neurosis), since analysis is *not essentially a therapeutic process* but a search for truth, and the truth is not always beneficial (...)" (Evans, 55; my emphasis). This redefinition sheds a new light on our analogy, insofar as the “search for [psychoanalytic] truth” aligns more easily (or elegantly?) with the purpose of art-making. If both analysis and rehearsals are engaged in this quest – at the risk of the findings being “not always beneficial” – the work within the actor-director relation may in fact be commensurate to the *rapport* of analyst and analysand again.

## 9

All the while, I am well aware that the contemporary mental health paradigm has long left the technique of classical psychoanalysis behind. Lacan nowadays seems merely of interest in the cultural field, respectively the field of cultural studies, while cognitive-behavioral approaches are the hard currency in clinical management, returning mental health drop-outs to the job market at speeds unheard of. In that framework, the concepts of transference as well as

of the *subject supposed to know* appear as extra bulky luggage, let alone a possible ‘search for truth’.<sup>181</sup>

Regardless of this, I understand the possible dissatisfaction of concluding an account of the notion of transference with the Lacanian take. Viable critiques of Lacan’s abstractions have been put forth, with the most interesting ones applying his own terminology. Still the question remains: how to go beyond Lacanian discourse without bypassing it on the fast track of cognitive behavioral measures returning us to cybernetic premises and bivalent logics? Is there a formulation springing *from* the Lacanian take on transference that can inform the project of accounting for the actor-director *rappoport* in an ambivalent accountability?

10

The most interesting revision – again from the point of resonance with directorial practices – is certainly offered by Lacan’s famous rebel student Luce Irigaray, who was expelled from his school – after the publication of her “heretic” *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) – but kept on contributing to feminist theory *from within* psychoanalysis. Specifically her proposition to highlight perception modes alternative to the piercing gaze of what she calls the “économie *scopique* dominante” [dominant *scopic* economy] (Irigaray 1977, 144) – in order to insert the body of the analyst into the transference differently – calls for a more thorough practical exploration.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Employment periods are an explicit criterion in the evaluation of the efficacy of, for instance, MBT/*Mentalization-Based Treatment* (cf. Bateman and Fonagy 2008). This shift in priorities is of course also a mirror of the power differential between the research infrastructures of the Anglo-American world and continental Europe. Cf. also Gallop (1982, 139): “According to certain French psychoanalysts, particularly Lacan, English and American psychoanalysis has repressed the unconscious out of psychoanalysis.”

<sup>182</sup> In terms of challenging the specific mediality of the “économie *scopique*” of cinema, cf. also Mia Engberg’s doctoral thesis *Darkness as Material* (Engberg 2023).

In terms of an ambivalent way of accounting for our artistic processes, Irigaray's critique of the classical case history with its object-subject divide into patient and analyst, phenomenon and interpretation inspires the try-outs with my current collaborators; mostly by stirring the ambition to safeguard the integrity of both the actor's and the director's account, limiting an all too quick mediation between them. It is also in this context of her critique of analytic mastery that her word of the “re-staging [of] *both* transferences” appears – a formula almost, not elaborated further in the passage, but maintained as intuition<sup>183</sup> – that seems so genuinely suited to an *artistic* research process. As an invitation to account for the transference by theatrical means, i.e. by means of composition.

Taking this metaphor of the mise-en-scène literally [“remettant en scène les *deux* transferts”] (Irigaray, 144) –in fact, taking it completely out of the context of psychoanalysis and back into the field it was borrowed from – we can see the abundance of tools we have at hand, both as actors and directors, to *stage/re-stage* our transference.

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<sup>183</sup> The full quote in the English translation reads like this: “If I wrote up a case history ... I would not do it as it has always been done: by the “report”, the dissection, the interpretation of only the analysand’s transference, but by restaging *both* transferences [remettant en scène les *deux* transferts].” (Irigaray quoted in Gallop 1982, 102)

## 6 PRE-STUDY #2: Claire's Director

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<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2649533/2649531/1895>

# Pre-study #2 CLAIRE'S Director



First presented: 7.10.2022

## CIRCUMSTANCE / FACT SHEET / #2

Place: Brussels, Belgium  
Time: 2 weeks in November 2021  
Collaborators: Claire Vivianne Sobottke (Performauthor)  
Mary Szydlowska (Camera and Montage)  
Materials: *The Wheel of Consent* by Betty Martin,  
"Je, tu, il, elle" by Chantal Akerman (1974)

# SCORE

In an attempt to radicalize the sensorial division between actor and director – the split between touch and seeing that structures their relation – the set-up of “Pre-study #2” referred to a situation I had first experienced during a film shoot in 2019.

Because of time pressure on set and in order to “get the things we needed”, I would frequently be encouraged by the producer to “live direct” the final take. This meant telling the director of photography and the actors *what to do when*, based on what I saw on my monitor.

T A B L E.	
<i>Discours Cinqiesme</i>	
DES IMAGES QUI SE FORMENT	
SUR LE FONDS DE L'OEIL.	
C Omparaison de ces images avec celles qu'on voit en vne chambre obscure. 35	
Explication de ces images en l'œil d'un animal mort. 36	
Qu'on doit rendre la figure de cet œil un peu plus longue lorsque les objets sont fort proches, que lorsqu'ils sont plus éloignez. 37	
Qu'il entre en cet œil plusieurs rayons de chaque point de l'objet. 38	
Que tous ceux qui viennent d'un mesme point se doivent assembler au fonds de cet œil environ le mesme point; Et qu'il faut disposer sa figure a cet effet. 38	
Que ceux de divers points s'y doivent assembler en divers points. 38	

In these situations, I had to be maximally efficient with my instructions, insofar as my voice could be heard on the recording; and the risk of cutting into the original sound, especially into dialogue, would create problems during the editing process.

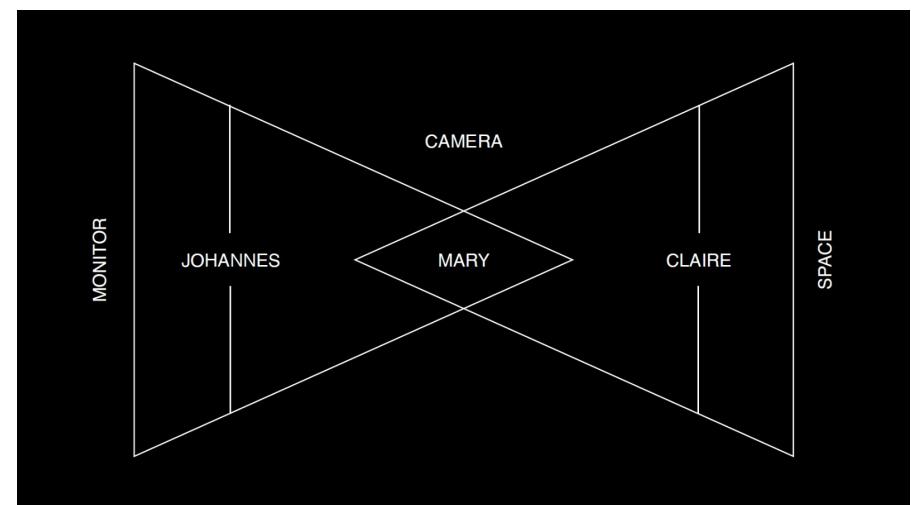
However stressful, I enjoyed these moments of live-directing a lot, as they were inserting me into the dance of actor and camera in a concrete way. Working with film for the first time, I experienced them as a theatrical rehearsal situation with heightened stakes; defamiliarized – *verfremdet*, as it were – by the presence of the camera.

When I finally saw the raw material in the editing room – with my voice not yet edited out – it felt very much like the *documentation of a relation in rehearsals* that could be used for the purpose of the artistic research at hand.

\*

Wanting to re-visit this specific “économie scopique” (Irigaray 1977, 144)) of a film shoot, I thus re-created the described set-up for the Pre-study in its most condensed form. Actor, director of photography, director; or, in terms of the technical *dispositives* at work: space, camera, monitor.

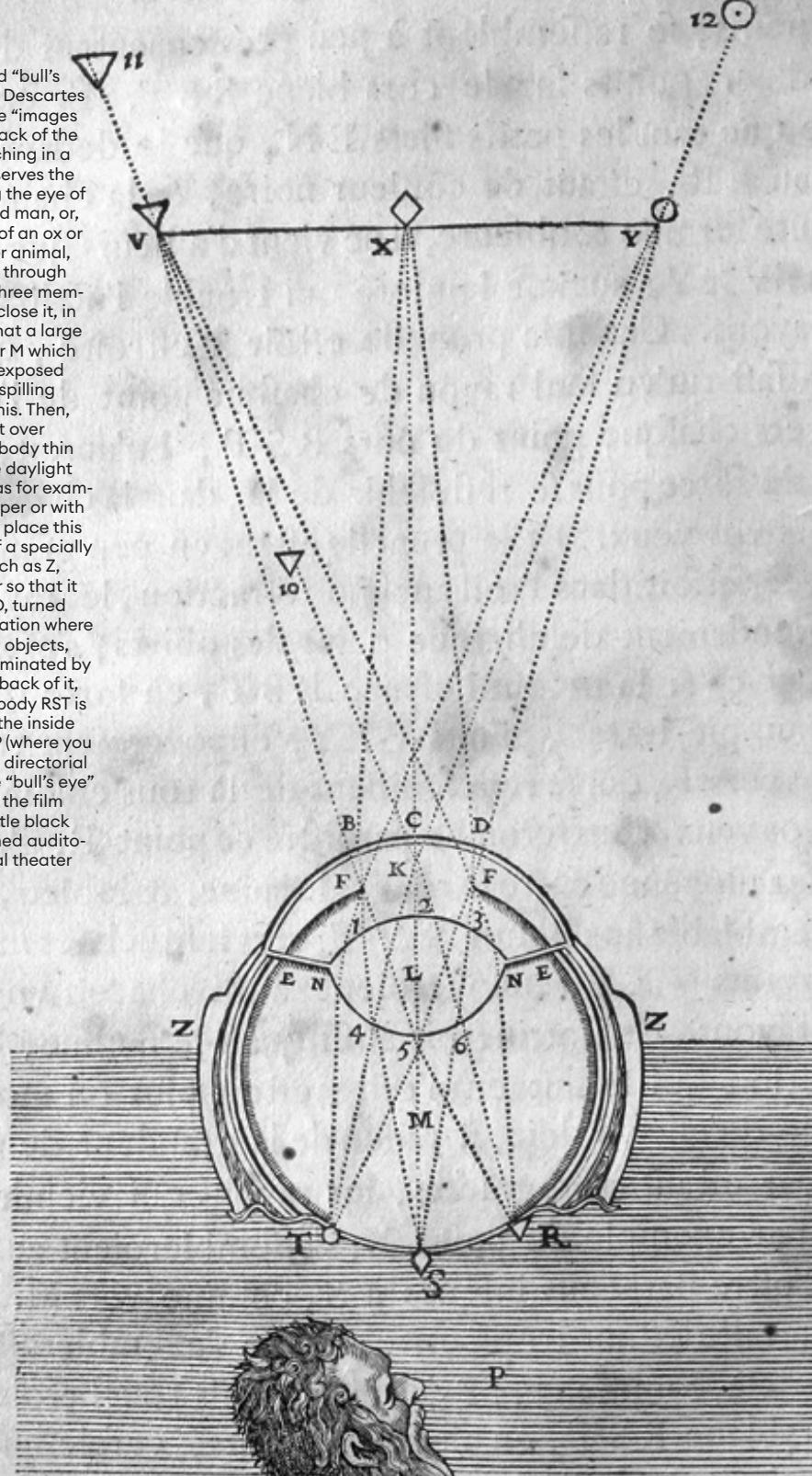
An equation represented in this sketch, light-heartedly alluding to Lacan’s optical schemas:



My ambition here was to put the Wheel of Consent’s “économie des flux” [economy of flows] (Irigaray 1977, 144, again) – as based on contact, proximity and tactility – in the most extreme continuum with a dis-embodied ocular practice. To tickle the director in Descartes’s black box, as it were – and to make him express his supposed desire.

Riffing on Lacan’s schemas of the *Eye and the Gaze* presented in Seminar XI (1964)  
Design: Mary Szydłowska  
after a sketch by Johannes M. Schmit

With his so-called “bull’s eye experiment”, Descartes demonstrates the “images forming on the back of the eye”. While crouching in a black box he observes the world: “(...) taking the eye of a newly deceased man, or, for want of that, of an ox or some other larger animal, you carefully cut through to the back the three membranes which enclose it, in such a manner that a large part of the humor M which is there remains exposed without any of it spilling out because of this. Then, having covered it over with some white body thin enough to let the daylight pass through it, as for example a piece of paper or with an eggshell, RST, place this eye in the hole of a specially made window such as Z, in such a manner so that it has its front, BCD, turned toward some location where there are various objects, such as V,X,Y, illuminated by the sun; and the back of it, where the white body RST is located, toward the inside of the chamber P (where you will be)” – From a directorial point of view, the “bull’s eye” is the monitor on the film shoot, and the little black box is the darkened auditorium in a classical theater rehearsal set-up.



The film set where I first experienced the radicalized partition of the senses within the actor-director relation. In the photo, the director of photography, the production designer and me, are discussing whether the cup in her hands should be in the upcoming shot or not. The grave expression on our exhausted faces reminded me of a photo of 25-year-old Rainer Maria Rilke in Russia; the famous poet who formulated an ontology of artistic creation rooted in the idiosyncrasy of *Einsamkeit* [solitude]. The little montage proposes the director as an “impossible poet”: a *solitary figure*, operating in the most collaborative setting imaginable, i.e. a film shoot. (From left to right: Minh Duc Pham, Smina Bluth, Maja Avnat, Svea Immel)

# INDEXICAL TRACES/ RELATIONAL ARTEFACTS

For this second Pre-study, I invited dancer, choreographer and actress Claire Vivianne Sobottke as my collaborator.

When we started speaking, I was eager to pick up the “transference” track I discovered after the work with Sarah.

However, my first idea to initiate Claire’s and my collaboration – by spending a week together reading psychoanalytic theory on transference – never happened. (With life circumstances being only one of the reasons.)

Meeting a little later in Berlin – the reading week was meant to take place online – Claire and I reconstructed, in a shared effort, the resistance she had felt towards entering into the collaboration through theory.

(In this regard it is important to mention that Claire is not opposed to theory *per se*; but the specific *psychoanalytic* theory, with its patriarchal lineage/baggage, did not extend a good enough invitation.)



Montage of "A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière" (1887) by André Brouillet. The "patriarchal lineage of psychoanalysis" looking at itself; with the "hysteric woman" slipping away in the fold.

In our conversation, my collaborator-to-be also stressed that for her the question of how director and actor reach consent cannot be abstracted to the discrete limit of a moment in rehearsals. As a *performauthor* (see her letter and text below for an explanation of the concept), the process of consenting already starts with *jointly setting the frame* of the future undertaking.

\*

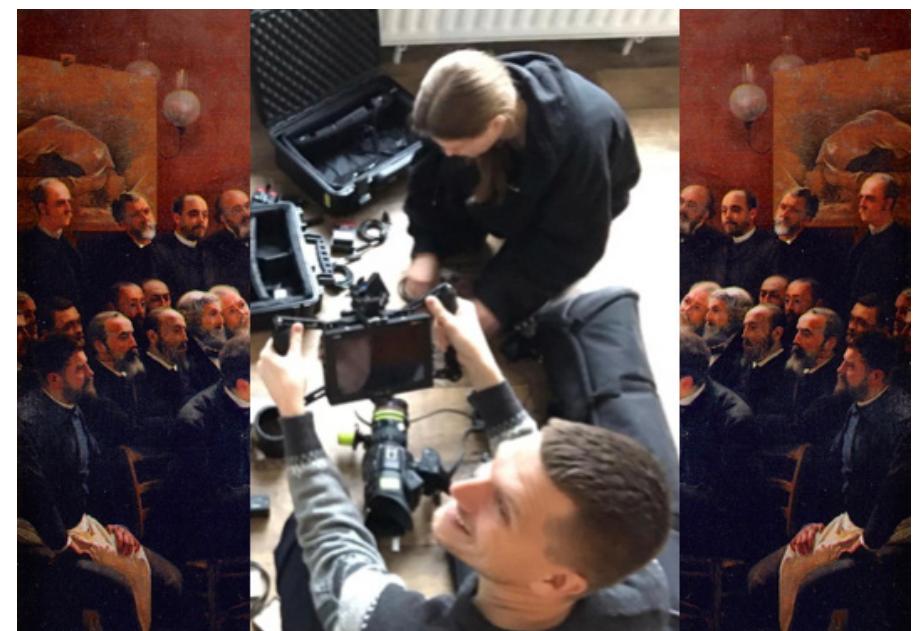
In response to my interest in the transference and its actualization in the actor-director relation, Claire suggested two methods for us to explore: one was the “Wheel of Consent” as developed by American intimacy trainer Betty Martin, and the other, “Emotional CPR (eCPR)”, which can be traced back to an initiative by community psychiatrist Daniel Fisher.

Both methods/practices come from a therapeutic realm, that is to say: a context of which the goals do not necessarily align with artistic ambitions (aiming for example for “*imbalance*”, “*fetishization*” or “*becoming the symptom*”). And while the try-outs with “eCPR” in fact did not lead beyond the scope of the therapeutic – i.e. attending exclusively to the *relational situation* within rehearsals – the “Wheel of Consent” proved to have potential for being – simultaneously! – a means of artistic creation through play.

\*

The other factor Claire made me aware of – in terms of artistic research methodology – was the extent to which the choice of material *will* affect our relation as collaborators; in the sense that the relation between actor and director that unfolds during our rehearsal simulation cannot be abstracted from the aesthetic resonance the specific material we work with will produce.

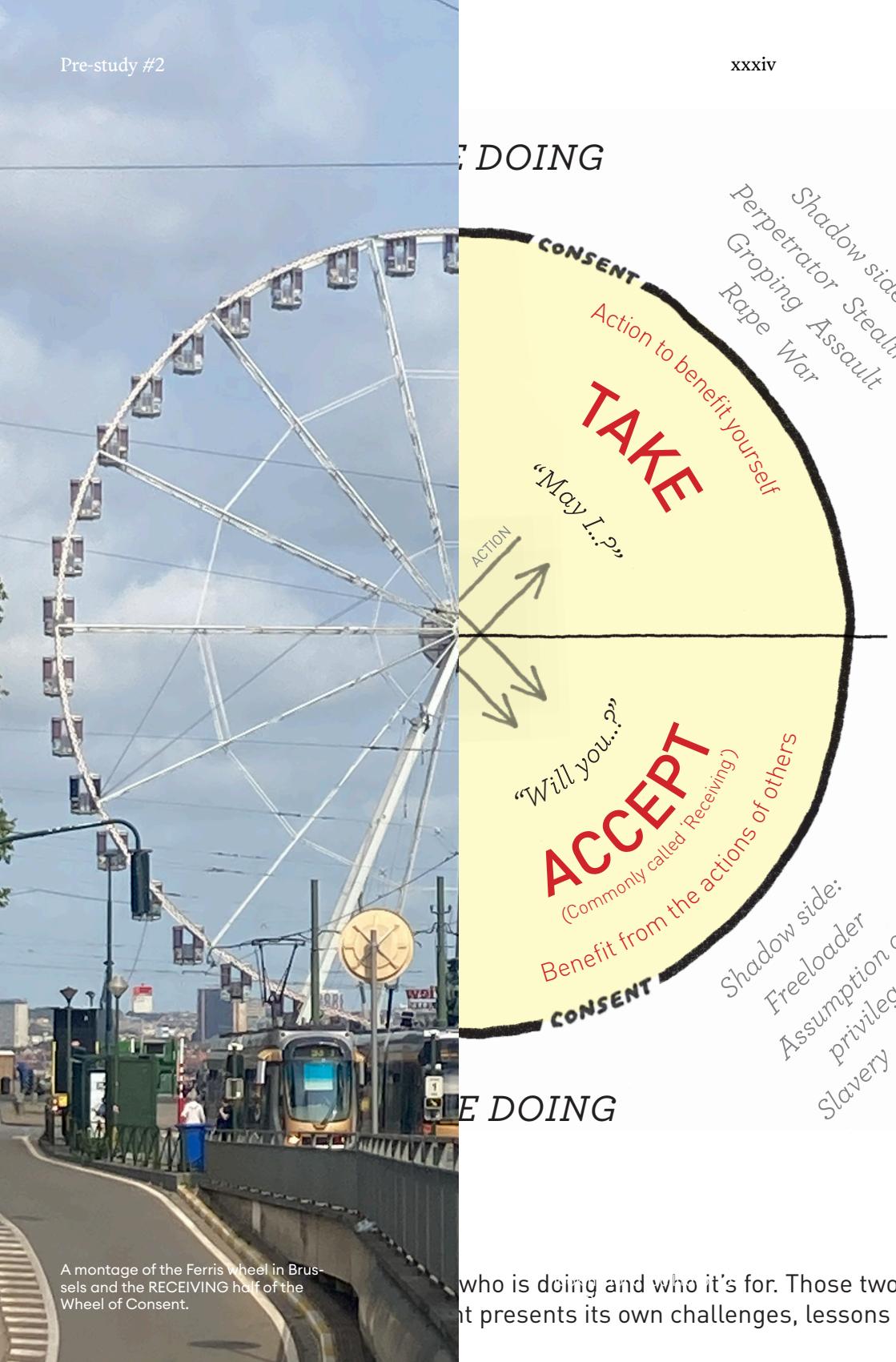
In Claire's spoken words: “Don't underestimate the importance of an exciting material for the quality of the relation.” (Rehearsal on the 26.11.2021)



In our case, this “third thing” that was going to mediate our encounter was Chantal Akerman’s debut film, “*Je, tu, il, elle*” from 1974. Claire had suggested I watch it after our meeting in Berlin; and with Brussels slowly crystallizing as the pragmatic location of our work, it became obvious that Akerman’s “turf” was going to align generously with our ambition.

On a cold November day in 2021, Claire and I thus started out with a tour on the local Ferris wheel; overlooking the city while gliding gently through the quadrants of SERVE, ACCEPT, TAKE and ALLOW, that we had yet to understand in their inter-relatedness.

Montage: Claire taking a photo of Mary Szydłowska preparing the camera while the artistic researcher familiarizes himself with the director’s monitor.



A montage of the Ferris wheel in Brussels and the RECEIVING half of the Wheel of Consent.

who is doing and who it's for. Those two  
it presents its own challenges, lessons

After a first try out of Betty Martin's practice of "Waking Up the Hands" (touching a chosen object for your own pleasure), we read out two letters that we had written to each other independently; formulations of our expectations and projections regarding our collaboration.

We read *prima vista*, that is to say, I read Claire's letter out to her, and she read mine out to me.

The letters are artefacts of our relation as well as of our relations to others. Anders, for example, who is mentioned in the beginning of Claire's letter, is a common friend and colleague. (As a result, the fact that Anders and I became collaborators in my Pre-study #3 is based on Claire's curatorial intuition.)

The two letters work very much like a two-channel video; even though they cannot be played back simultaneously, their ignorance of each other's content produces the desired montage effect. Similar to Sarah's and my independent interview-edits, they theatricalize the limits of my authorial reach as an artistic researcher; thereby aligning with the overall methodological ambition of "re-staging both transferences".

You have invited me to deconstruct the role of the director with you.

**speculative suspicions** (full of fear and trauma)

I want to tell you about our common friend Anders, the beachbum. Anders has, just like you, started a PHD recently in a wealthy Scandinavian country. His questionary circles around the idea of parasites. Recently he wrote me, asking if I could imagine to collaborate with him in the context of this research. One of his main desires in this endeavour was to 'give up control', he wrote. He has been professor, thus in leading positions in the academic context for some years now.

I responded to him by saying quite some things and then also mentioned that I think a good way of giving up control in a collaborative context with me, would be that I direct him. After working with him many years ago in a project investigating the mechanisms of Hysteria, I found it healthy to imagine a shift of roles. No answer to that proposition from Anders.

Anders has worked as performer before. He has been directed by Markus Öhrn as part of an exclusively male team. Maybe it is necessary to say that I appreciated the work. In this process I remember a lot of questions came up about authorship, for Anders. To whom does a work belong? Who will be recognized for making it? And who will profit from the support that an artist can receive after producing a so called successful work.

Anders was never directed by a woman. He has never been part of a project or context initiated by a woman or female defining x-multiplicity.

You told me recently that you enjoy it to work reflected by, put in motion through - the feminine gaze. Has it ever happened? If not: How come? Why have you never played & performed & worked in service of a woman?

How do you relate to inviting women to take the role of performers in a research, in which you're busy undoing the classical roles: director - interpreter / genius - muse / rational - emotional / controlled - chaotic etc.

To -Give up control- what does it mean in the context surrounding Anders? What would that mean to you? What could it mean in the relationship between men and women? What could it mean in the context of our work relationship, of our friendship? Mine and Anders? Yours and mine? How does patriarchy fuck around with our curiosity for each other in our creative work?

How are men trying to give up their positions of being in control? Is a new awareness reflected in men critically investigating century - old - systems in universities all over the world, while being paid more or less well?

Now that you are trying to deconstruct the role of the director in your PHD in Stockholm are you not making it about that same old director once again? - Meaning, are you not dedicating time and space once again, giving importance once more, to a very specific dusty old apparatus, which we could as well leave aside? And is an academic attempt to deconstruct something ever threatening to anything?

And then also: Why not make it about the work itself?

Why not stop retelling each other who we are, reaffirming our history?

Why not make a great movie instead?

Why not try sth new?

(I guess academia doesn't accept researchers who wanna make great movies)

(Though recently Antonia Baer told me that she received funding to make a work simply by describing a dream that she had dreamt)

(Do i despise academia?)

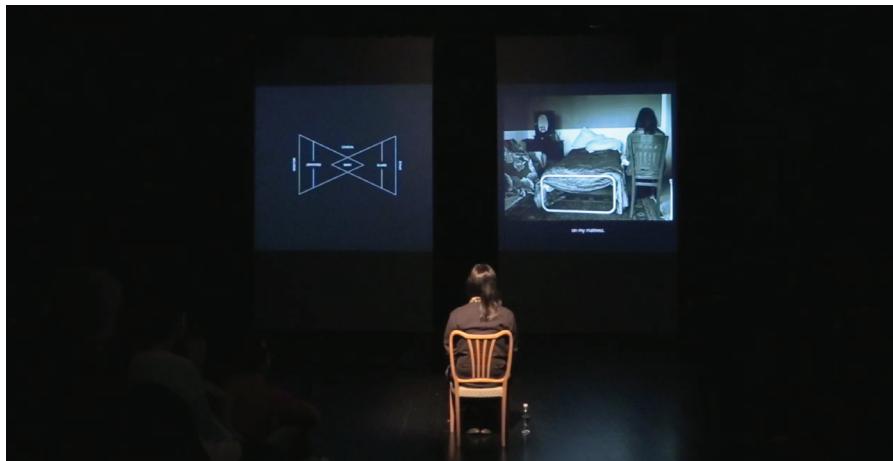
(Do i think they are all cowards)

Liesel Claes, Liesel Claes, Liesel Claes  
 here comes my letter to you about  
 our upcoming workshop/ collaboration.  
 I will start by saying that it's a big PLEASURE  
 to prepare this with you. The voice mails  
 we send back and forth, the places  
 you chose to record them from, the  
 depth of reflection - it all tastes like  
 really good bread, with both our bacteria  
 in the dough. It's such a pleasure in  
 the sense, that it already gives a  
 sense of what I'm after / what I actually  
 mean / what I might mean with TRANS-  
 FERENCE: this notion of energetic  
 connectedness of two agents; in the  
 case of rehearsals director/actor, in . . .

First page of Claire's letter.  
 For the full length version,  
 see the online resources.

First page of Johannes' letter.  
 For the full length version,  
 see the online resources.

# REFLECTIONS/ SENSE-ABLE TRANSLATIONS/ PLAY



Score for the Voice Over during the projection  
of the two-channel film "A Study in Transference"

Live performance of the score  
on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2022 at  
SKH, Stockholm

Stills from Chantal Akerman's  
movie "Je, tu, il, elle" (1974) by  
courtesy of "Collections CINE-  
MATEK - © Fondation Chantal  
Akerman"

To see the entire two-channel  
film, please send  
a brief statement of your re-  
search interest  
to [registrator@uniarts.se](mailto:registrator@uniarts.se).

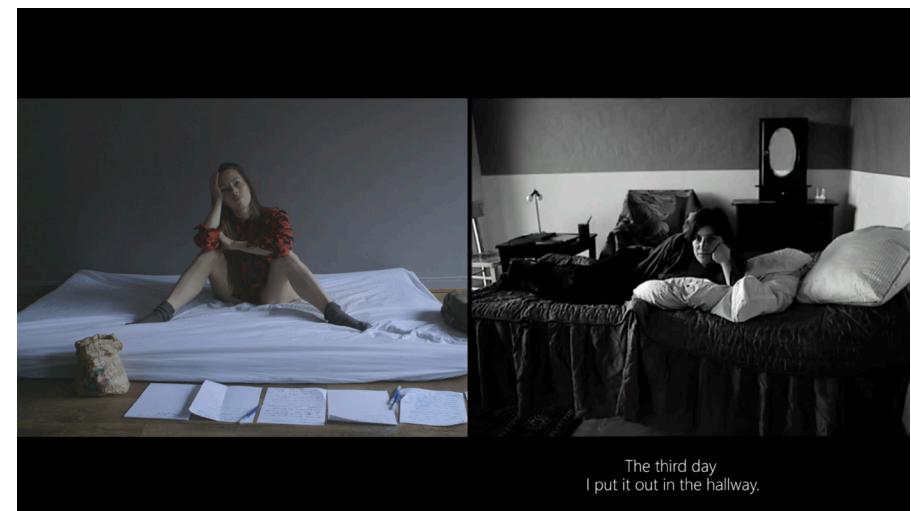
je

tu

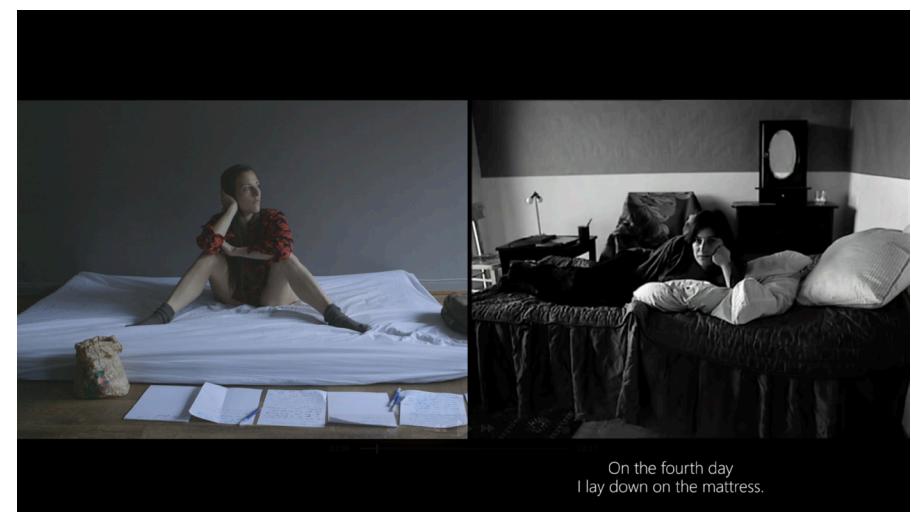
il      elle

a study in transference

SET UP: BRUSSELS, NOVEMBER 2021



1st spoken Text/  
start when Claire turns  
her head, looks to Chantal



In November 2021 Claire, Mary and I spend two weeks working in an apartment in Brussels.

*Chantal/JULIE: Vide la pièce est grande je trouve.*

The project is to explore the present possibilities of the actor-director relation while responding artistically to Chantal Akerman's first feature-length film.

Specifically, to its first 32 minutes, where the main character is trapped in the same location.

We start our work by a visit to the Cinémathèque in Brussels, where we browse through the original script.

With this shared basis, we split up into our different areas of expertise, as we begin shooting. For Mary, that is the camera lens, for Claire, her practice as a dancer and actress.

*Le matelat, je l'ai changé de place le cinquième jour.*

For me, retreating behind the wireless monitor of the director, the study will turn out to be a quest on how to situate myself in a seemingly self-sufficient universe.

The universe I mean is the universe of what Claire calls the "performaauthor".

## THE PERFORMAAUTHOR

A performer who performs in and simultaneously directs their work.

Someone who makes things by being in them.

As she writes to me in a letter before we begin: "[A performaauthor is] someone who is inside and outside, knowing and not knowing, being seen and seeing. Someone sexual and vulnerable, sensual and thinking, listening and singing, touching while being touched, moving while creating an image."

2nd spoken Text  
during Chantal's  
rearranging of mattress

*Je l'ai soulevé en suite  
j'ai placé le bout contre la fenêtre  
contre le mur ensuite*



and then against the wall.

The original material offers an exploration of loneliness and intimacy with oneself. It seems like Chantal Akerman is explicitly performing for the camera, trusting the cinematic frame to produce the fictional layer by itself.

At our visit at the Cinémathèque we find out that an actress had actually been cast for the main part. But Akerman decided to replace her (with herself), appalled by the perfection of her acting.

In our study, we undo this fusion of director and actor again, of performer and author; and we ask ourselves: What does the exploration of loneliness and intimacy with oneself become under the gaze of someone else?

Furthermore: What if that other is a man?

We consciously work with this most volatile, emblematic moment.

A male director instructing a female performer in her loneliness and intimacy.



Claire: *How are you feeling over there? In the other room?*

Johannes: *Ehm... I am doing good. I found a water pipe... a warm water pipe that is heating my ... ass. It's good... How are you feeling?*

Claire: *I feel a bit strange, I think... Because I actually don't see you and... I also don't know what to talk about.*

In the letter I write to Claire (before we begin), I explain that I'm interested in exploring the psychoanalytic notion of transference.

To stay in touch during rehearsals by the means of a sort of psychodynamic hotline.

Claire: *Do you think you can really imagine... like ... how do you imagine it to sit here?*

Johannes: *I imagine it strange because ... clearly Mary is the stronger presence in the space right now.*

3rd spoken Text  
during writing



*Je me suis couchée et je lui ai écrit couchée le sixième jour.*

Transferences may occur between all agents within an artistic process, including the fictional, absent agents, such as Chantal Akerman in our case.

For transferences to really kick in and create an intense bond between an actor and a director for example, the relation has to be asymmetric. Therefore, the Lacanian analyst keeps his or her desire in the dark; provoking the analysand to speak out their fundamental fantasy.

As an answer to the question: What do you want from me?

IN OUR STUDY WE WORK  
WITH SPEECH  
IN AN ATTEMPT TO STAGE  
OUR TRANSFERENCES  
IN REAL TIME  
  
WRITING A LOVE LETTER  
WHILST EATING SUGAR NAKED

## 4th spoken text



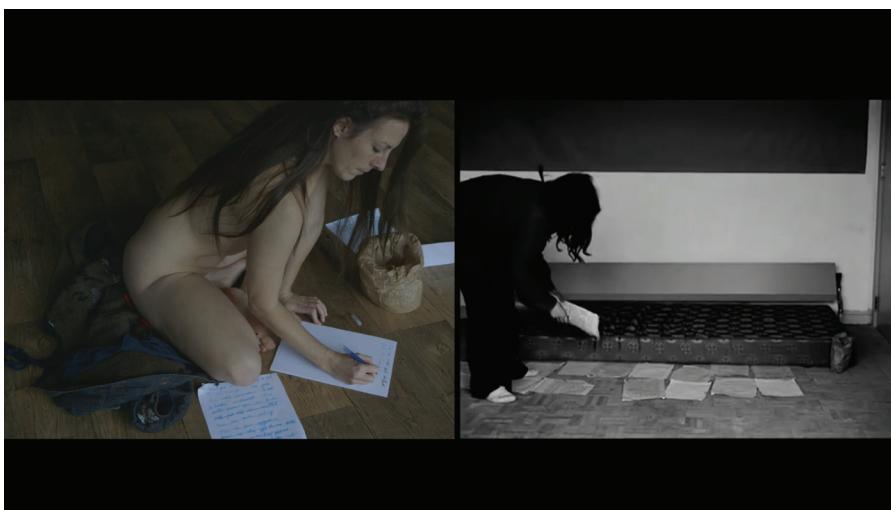
J'ai recommencé à écrire des jours après.

Start to speak right after:

In the psychoanalytic setting (that we're comparing rehearsals to), transference is actively sought. It's of great value.

Because if the analyst fails to adjust to its workings on time, the analysand might end the treatment prematurely.

For lack of effect or affect.



Claire starts writing.  
*Continue when she pushes  
her hair back:*

In practice, there is also the special case of a transference that is subjectively experienced as love or falling-in-love – by either the analysand or the analyst. Freudian orthodoxy reminds us that this so-called “transference love” is not original – but an effect of the intimacy of the analytic setting itself.

*Des jours après, j'ai lu tout ce que je lui avais écrit.*

Claire's image disappears

In case “transference love” occurs, there is thus no reason to stop the analysis.

With the full realization of the effect of intimacy in mind, analyst and analysand (actor and director) will continue their work.

5th spoken text  
during exercise  
“Je me suis écouté respirer”

Mary: Ok.

Johannes: Ok.



Transferences are unconscious. So the ambition to voice them in real time is doomed for failure...

... but one can always try, of course.

*Et puis j'ai oublié de jouer ce jeu et j'ai attendu.  
J'ai su que j'étais là pendant 28 jours.*

Johannes: *J'ai joué avec ma respiration.*



In an attempt to activate our own transference - besides relating to Akerman's movie - we worked with the so-called Wheel of Consent. A model that explores the various dynamics of SERVING and ACCEPTING, TAKING and ALLOWING in relational settings.

Chantal gets up.

Johannes: *I did the same thing, but lying on my belly.*

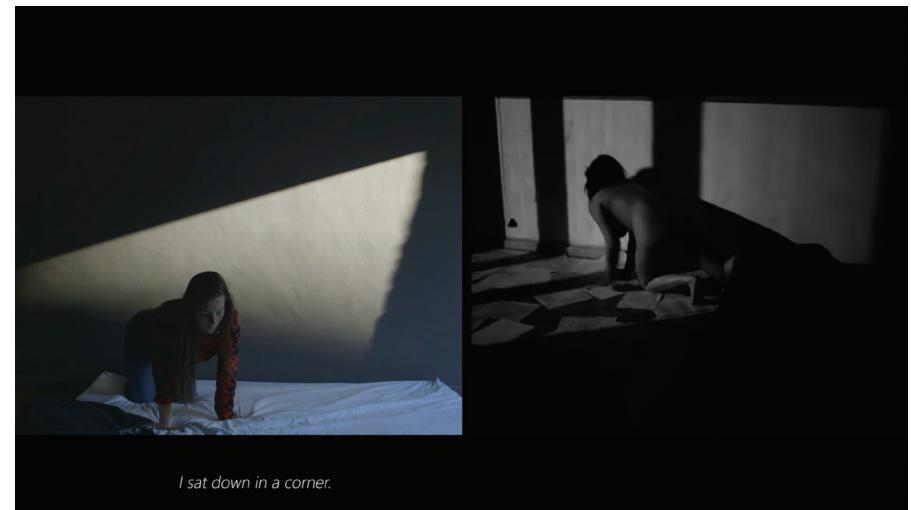
The idea in the Wheel is that in any given intimate interaction you come to an agreement beforehand regarding two questions:

Who is doing ? And: Who is it for?

Sound of washbasin

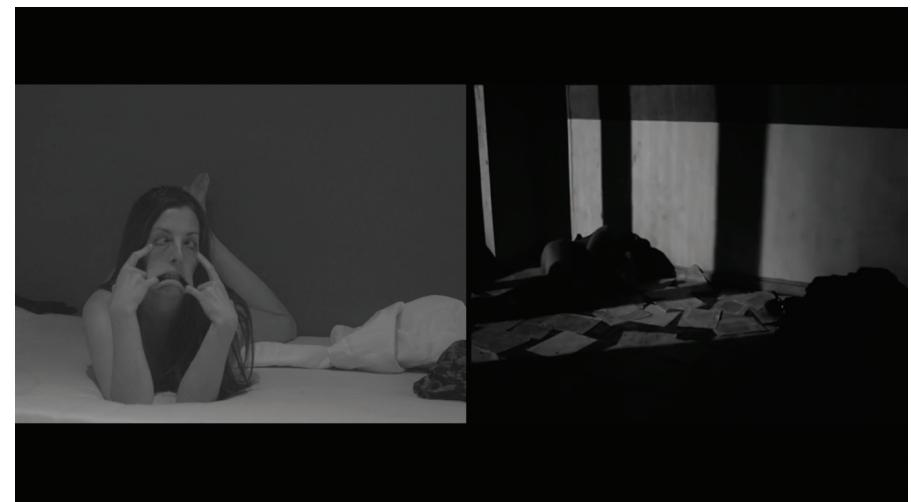
In this particular exercise, Claire is doing actions "for me". The default setting of the actor-director relation, as is often assumed...

Johannes: *Je me suis assis dans un coin.*

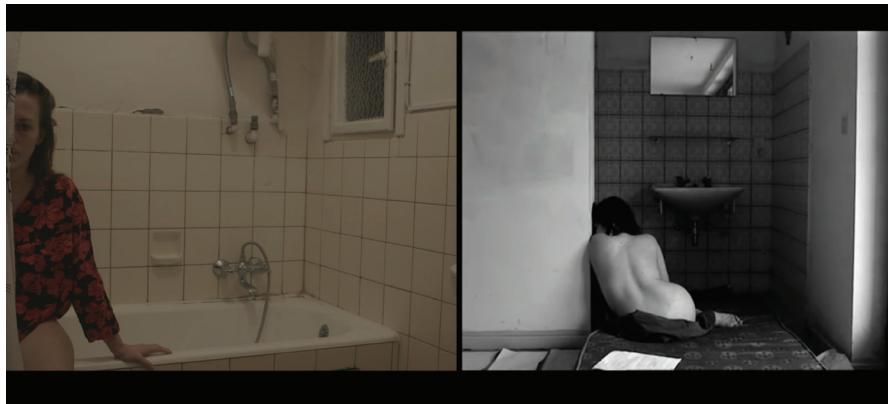


... but only one possibility within the range of the Wheel.

6th spoken Text  
during grimassing Count-  
down 21,23 after cut



In retrospect, I am not sure if the frameworks combined in our study fed into each other.



Mostly because of their opposite temporal logics.



The Wheel of Consent asks for a desire to be voiced *before* the action.



While the desire active in a transference is only documented *afterwards*.

Usually in the re-staging, that is the classical psychoanalytic case history.

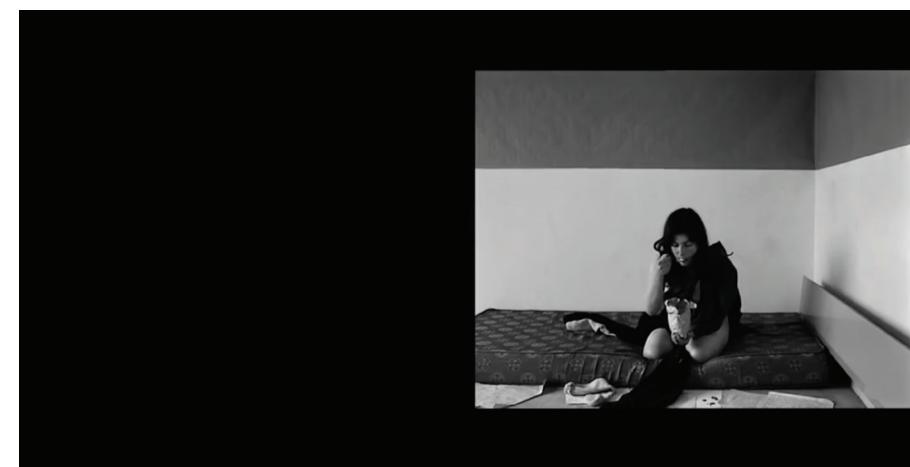
Johannes: *"This is fantastic!  
Your head is completely out of the picture."*

For me, as a director, it gets boring rather fast: to get exactly what I ask for.

In fact, we could all feel the difficulty of being truthful to our desire – before the transference was activated..

In the course of our work, we therefore digressed from the Wheel. Formulating exercises where Giving and Receiving are in a more complicated relation.

7th spoken text (last one)



Claire's image disappears at the same time:

IN THIS EXERCISE

THE PERFORMAUTHOR  
ANALYSES THE DESIRE

THE DIRECTOR TRIES TO EXPRESS;

AS A RE-STAGING FROM INSIDE  
AND OUTSIDE.



*Camera & montage: Mary Szydłowska  
Performauthor: Claire Vivianne Sobottke  
Artistic Researcher: Johannes Maria Schmit*

7 PROPOSITION FOR A CONSENT-BASED  
REHEARSAL METHOD

For the following chapter, I take inspiration in the twofold structure Swedish writer and performer Tova Gerge suggests when discussing consent in her artistic field. For her critical contribution with the Swedish title ‘En praktisk och en opraktisk text om samtycke’ [A practical and an unpractical text on consent] (Gerge 2024) she proposes two graphically distinct columns: the one to the left presenting “a useful text on consent in contemporary dance” and the one to the right discussing “why consent and usefulness are not enough” (Gerge 2025). Even though I will be writing this chapter in one column, the tension of a “two-channeled” thought process persists here, too. On the one hand I am conveying an applicable proposition to integrate the actor-director relation into a consent-based method for rehearsals; and on the other I am encouraging a critical reflection of the premises of “consent culture” and its ideological shortcomings in the arts. Unlike Gerge’s two-columned essay, I will try to present my argument in a sequence: starting out with the unpractical critique, before moving on to the practical proposal.

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In the field of the performing arts, the category of “consent” has been dealt to us as crucial ever since the pushback against the “expansionist” conception of directing described in chapter B (i.e. a *Regie* operating outside of the limits of the rehearsal space by conflating artistic and administrative power). Its consistent application holds the promise of leveling out real life power differentials that leak into the deregulated *hetero-topia* of the rehearsal space; replacing it with a *u-topia* of the Foucauldian iteration: as “a fantastic, untroubled region (...) based on fables and discourse” (Foucault [1966] 1994, xviii). After the popularization of the #MeToo movement in 2017, the lack of formalized methods of “consenting” from within the actor-director relation opened the field to the interventions of the *manualizing class* (cf. chapter C,

“*Phronesis* in the administered university”). In the theater institutions, experts oftentimes unfamiliar with the logics of artistic creation (i.e. the needs of the Space of Rehearsals) have thus been invited to insert their “tools” and “techniques”; institutionalizing systems of checks and balances for the redistribution of agency between actor and director<sup>184</sup>.

But what is supposed to strengthen the ensemble in its asymmetrical positioning in relation to the theater director is in reality oftentimes a devaluation of the phronetic competence and disciplinary knowledge of both. The rehearsal practices of postdramatic theater forms, for instance – especially in their feminist iteration – have long since experimented with adjusting their processes to the speed of the authoring collective; finding more theater-specific formats of consenting in which responsibility for moving forward is shared and no one likely to be overruled by the director or a majority within the group.<sup>185</sup> But even earlier adaptations of rehearsal practices to progressive aesthetics – such as the so-called “inductive method of rehearsal” perfected by Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble in the 1940s<sup>186</sup> – are designed to prevent the actors from being overrun by hidden directorial agendas. As I will argue the ahistorical insertion of protocols, “tools and techniques” into the actor-director relation –

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<sup>184</sup> As already touched upon in Chapters B and 5, the *contreroules* meant to contain unbound directorial agency these days are instituted in theaters as formalized complaint procedures, codes of conduct, regular check-ins of the ensemble with each other and the theater’s leadership, intimacy coordination, sensitivity trainings etc. All these functions usually require experts from the professional-managerial class.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. exemplarily Matzke (2014). Even though not explicitly focused on the work of the performance collective *She She Pop* (that Matzke is a part of), her scholarly interest in the variety of rehearsal set-ups takes its starting point in the work of the group. (cf. Matzke, 310)

<sup>186</sup> The method in question suggests that the director refrains from laying out a pre-conceived directorial vision (which would be the equivalent to a theory in a deductive approach). Instead of a table read where motivations and backgrounds of the characters are discussed and anticipated, the actors are placed on stage in a preliminary *Grundarrangement*; a “blocking” that gives a first hypothesis about the social relations at stake. From there, the situation is collectively analyzed “in the moment”; with the director functioning as a “Spielleiter” [game leader] (cf. Barnett 2025; “inductive rehearsal”). Even though the term “inductive rehearsal” cannot be found in Brecht’s writing, it is an appropriate description given the author’s use of the respective method in other contexts. Cf. also Brecht’s poem *Über induktive Liebe* [On inductive Love] (1938) and how it relates to the propositions of a consent-based approach in the realm of touch.

ignorant of those already existent emancipatory practices – therefore runs the risk of having reductive and paralyzing effects, instead of dynamic or galvanizing ones.

## IC as an exemplary case and what is required instead

At the time of writing, demands to regulate aspects of the actor-director relation by means of intimacy coordination (IC) have been proliferating rapidly. From April 1, 2025, Sweden's two main collective bargaining agreements for theatre – *The Institutional Theatre Agreement* and *The Private Stage Agreement* – officially list “intimacy coordinator” as “artistic staff” (Svensk Scenkonst et al. 2025). The agreements require employers to consult with directors, choreographers, and performers about appointing one whenever productions include intimate scenes or “if it is reasonable *for other reasons*” (Svensk Scenkonst et al. 2025, 5; my emphasis and translation). Meanwhile, theater directors in European countries where such formal requirements are not yet installed have internalized the call in an anticipatory fashion and started demanding intimacy coordinators to be hired into their team (cf. Wøldiche 2024). Given this strong overall ambition to standardize their presence in the rehearsal space, the very proposition of *intimacy coordination* deserves a short discussion as an exemplary case.

As a method historically emerged in a similar vein as stunt coordination/fight choreography in the movie industry (cf. Fairfield 2019), IC naturally has a strong interest and, presumably, a lot of competence in dealing with the unforeseeable, the *im-provisus*. A stunt on a film set is a potential life-and-death situation and it is therefore essential to put everything that can be controlled under control. The analogy from which IC legitimizes itself is that a scene featuring bodily intimacy holds the potential of sexual transgression and consequently of a traumatization of the actors involved; therefore, the detail of the intimate action needs to be

anticipated, thoroughly choreographed and executed in the exact agreed manner. In the words of American theater scholar and intimacy choreographer<sup>187</sup> Amanda Rose Villareal:

The work of an intimacy choreographer is to uphold ethical interactions by using consent-based practices, to empower performers with the agency to assert their personal boundaries, to level power imbalances in rehearsal and performance spaces, and to craft choreography for performed intimacy – all with an informed and culturally competent approach that supports both performers and the production. (Villarreal 2022, 7)

There are surely no grounds for taking issue with this concept, and given the pressure of highly industrialized modes of production (in film, but also in some theater contexts) the default presence of an intimacy coordinator is undoubtedly useful. Also from an aesthetic point of view IC can work well, especially when it comes to film: everybody who has been working with the medium knows its mechanistic aspects; a scene can feel “stiff” on set and suddenly come to life in the editing room.

However, the mechanistic epistemology<sup>188</sup> underlying both stunt and intimacy coordination has wider consequences, when applied to contemporary theater. Paradoxically, it does not seem to limit itself to the instances where skin, bone and other physical materials collide or touch, but implies an overall politics almost exclusively derived from the ideals implicit to the social turn. (“Ethical interaction”, “empowerment”, “agency” and the “level[ing]

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<sup>187</sup> As the field is only at the beginning of its own “fieldification” (Fairfield 2019, 67) the titles differ. As for now, there are “intimacy coordinators”, “intimacy choreographers” and “intimacy directors”.

<sup>188</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the “mechanistic” conception of the human in the lineage of Hobbes and Descartes and its de-humanizing effects cf. Federici (2004,133–61). “In Descartes, body and nature are identified, for both are made of the same particles and act in obedience with the physical laws set in motion by God’s will. Thus, not only is the Cartesian body pauperized and expropriated from magical virtue; in the great ontological divide which Descartes institutes between the essence of humanity and its accidental conditions, the body is divorced from the person, it is literally dehumanized. (...) In Descartes, the reduction of the body to mechanical matter allows for the development of mechanisms of self-management that make the body the subject of the will.” (Federici, 140) It is in this sense that one can speak of “dehumanizing” protocols in intimacy coordination’s partition of the body into static zones that can be and others that cannot be interacted with.

out of power imbalances”, as suggested by Villarreal (2002, 7) above.) These political premises are rarely discussed explicitly (let alone, critically) but are taken for granted as unspoken assumptions when resurfacing as the ethically charged vocabulary of relational aesthetics.<sup>189</sup> Once introduced into the rehearsal space, the “culturally competent approach” (Villareal, 7) of IC therefore implies a *meta*-physics of anticipation and homeostasis that hopes to establish social justice by the means of “real time systems with appropriate feedback mechanism” (Pias 2016, 21). A cybernetic epistemology that, as I have discussed in *Terracing the Territory III*, has difficulties accounting for and responding to the longing for a safe, but ecstatic “leap” within the realm of *im-provisus*.

In the context of mere aesthetics, an interdisciplinary application of IC – unattuned to the diversity of rehearsal methods – furthermore requires forms of theater, such as psychological realism, which were long left behind by the emancipatory postdramatic traditions (cf. Barnett 2006; Pollesch 2012). Seen in the light of this double retrograde grafting – from the U.S. onto Europe, and from film onto theater – IC might have as little to do with today’s continental performing arts aesthetics as have the fencing scenes in “Romeo and Juliet”. Read against the backdrop of the ambition of this thesis, this new line of business – other than responding to a very legitimate need – has therefore only short-termed chances to remedy the crisis of trust between actor and director; let alone to curate the asymmetry needed between them for a reinvented theater of *Regie*.

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<sup>189</sup> In conversation with an intimacy coordinator from the field of film who is lobbying for IC as a standard method in the institutions of the German performing arts, I eventually had to explain the meaning of the word “postdramatic”, which – for some reason – he kept on understanding as “posttraumatic theater”. Also cf. “Culture Change Hub” – the telling title of the institution currently providing the more extensive out of two educations for intimacy coordinators in Germany (three workshops over three days and 17 online sessions)

### *What is required instead...*

In the following I elaborate on what I believe to be “required instead”. I would like to stress that for me the dialogue with enthusiasts of *intimacy coordination* does not end here but is being further enriched the more the field differentiates. Still operating in the “unpractical part” of this text, I take the liberty to critically reflect on the epistemological premises of consent-based interaction frameworks, without necessarily having the “best” or “better practice” up my sleeve.

*But what is required instead* is an expansive and adaptive method attuned to open processes; inviting our phronetic competence as makers when consciously jumping, *falling* – and landing together. As a first step, my contribution therefore aims at building the expertise of consenting amongst ourselves, as theater makers, (instead of outsourcing the responsibility to the manualizing class); as well as to adapt it to the specific needs of our working methods. Much more than a “tool kit” to merely regulate the relational aspects of a rehearsal – let alone pure physical intimacy – I am looking at “consenting” as a method of artistic creation *in itself*. As a way to embrace the emergent *im-provisus* of the rehearsal within the dynamics of actor and director. And as a way to mutually install and curate the asymmetry of the actor-director relation within a theater of *Regie*.

In the following I will unpack what needs to be considered when formulating this alternative. The main shift away from IC’s epistemological premises is an invitation of desire’s *instability* into the Space of Rehearsals. Accordingly, “desire” is, in my proposition, conceived as “social, emergent and responsive” (Angel 2021, 38); and in that sense not merely “intimate”. Just as any “libidinal” expression, it is conceived as instable and difficult to anticipate; but once subl(im)ated into the heterotopic “public sphere” of the Space of Rehearsals, it paradoxically allows us to take responsibility for it.

## *Consent and transference*

Consenting is complicated. Even when bracketing the coercive effects of real-life power differentials corrupting our negotiations (as I do here<sup>190</sup>) the mere fact of transference in the actor-director relation is “safeguarding” the complexity of the operation (cf. Chapter 5). The documentarist and Lacanian scholar Agnieszka Piotrowska takes things to the extreme when arguing that no consent given by someone involved in an active transference is worth anything (cf. Piotrowska 2018). The postulate here is that the agency of our unconscious sabotages our self-expression, thereby making our “Yes” untrustworthy (Piotrowska 2014).

Here we find a critique of consenting understood as a merely cognitive, fully conscious procedure that has been spun further by British writer Katherine Angel, when pointing to the shortcomings of so-called “confidence culture”<sup>191</sup>:

When did we buy the idea that we know what we want, whether in sex or elsewhere? The rhetoric of consent too often implies that desire is something that lies in wait, fully formed within us, ready for us to extract. (...) We don't always know what we want and we are not always able to express our desires clearly. This is in part due to violence, misogyny and shame that make desire's discovery difficult, and its expression fraught. But it is also in the nature of desire to be social, emergent and responsive – to context, to our histories and to the desires and behaviours of others. (Angel 2021, 38-39)

Transference is the technical concept borrowed from psychoanalysis that I have suggested for describing this *emergent and responsive* desire in rehearsals. A desire emerging from the interdependent, inherently social constellation of director and actor, respectively the

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<sup>190</sup> For a broader discussion of explicitly feminist critiques of the category of consent in regard to material inequality cf. Halley (2016) and Loick (2020).

<sup>191</sup> A term describing a pseudo-empowering attitude “which holds that it is not primarily patriarchy, capitalism or entrenched institutional sexism that holds women back, but rather their own, individual lack of confidence – a lack framed as an entirely personal matter.” (Angel 2021, 16)

ensemble. Transferences are – in this regard – necessary artistic energies fueling the process of creation. Despite their explosive nature, it is difficult to imagine a rehearsal space that can do without them entirely. On the contrary: as a sphere of play, the Space of Rehearsals can be conceptualized – alongside the psychoanalytic cabinet – as one of the only spaces in which transferences can be *experienced* without real life consequences. A proposition for a consent-based rehearsal method therefore must account for the agency of the transference in the actor-director relation. Paradoxically, for a successful consenting process, it must invite desire into the space, rather than keeping it at bay. Furthermore, instead of *coordinating* it – as if it was pre-existent – it has to stay reactive to its mercurial, emergent nature.

Out of the various methods of consenting I have familiarized myself with there is really only one that lives up to this task. A *practice and a model* that synthesizes various embodied knowledges as well as interaction frameworks surfacing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and thereby stands a chance to respond to rehearsal methods informed by the emancipatory theater traditions described above. In the following section, I will therefore explain why I found the so-called “Wheel of Consent” superior to other methods of consenting in regard to the Space of Rehearsals sought after in this thesis.

Before moving on, I should however stress that while I am influenced and inspired by the “Wheel”, I have not studied directly with its developer, Betty Martin, or the “School of Consent”, co-founded by her in 2018. The most profound and encompassing teaching of the embodied practice – as well as the concepts that derive from it – is therefore to be found in the courses offered by the school (cf. The School of Consent) as well as in Martin’s writing (Martin and Dalzen 2021). What I propose here, is primarily the Wheel’s “transposition” into the actor-director relation in rehearsals.

## *Genealogy of the Wheel of Consent*

“I’m one of those lucky people who grew up in the touch-y feel-y hippie years.”  
Betty Martin (2023)

The genealogy of the “Wheel” is not easily retraceable from the available sources. Many of the accounts are “hagiographic” in that they were written as reports by colleagues who had little historical distance. Or they are self-reported information.

On her homepage, the person commonly referred to as its “developer” – American chiropractor and “self-propelled erotic adventurer” Betty Martin – gives an idea of the many influences she synthesizes in the “Wheel”. Besides a broad variety of experiences in bodywork, “first in therapeutics – Chiropractic, Educational Kinesiology, Reiki, Neuro-Emotional Integration – and later in body-based erotic education” (cf. “About Me”), she also references her exploration of postmodern dance practices, such as Authentic Movement or *contact improvisation* (Martin and Dalzen 2021, 198). With the latter being especially informative with regard to her notion of “play”.

As one of her decisive influences Martin names the Body Electric School (cf. Cullinane and Love 2022), an institution established in the San Francisco Bay Area in the Mid 1980s health crisis. According to its self-description, founder Joseph Kramer “developed the erotic massage practices that are central to the School’s work in response to the ravages of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the wave of fear that was sweeping the gay community.” (Body Electric School) Kramer – as a drop-out of the Jesuits still abiding to the order’s motto: “To Be a Person for Others” – used the Body Electric School to provide an environment for “gay men to connect sexually in a *safe and ecstatic* manner in the era of AIDS” (Kramer 2002; my emphasis). In 1992, Kramer was joined by sex-positive porn activist and later performance-art legend Annie Sprinkle, who expanded the curriculum to Taoist Erotic massage classes for

women, too<sup>192</sup>. In Kramer's and Sprinkle's teaching the separation between "giving" and "receiving" – so central to the practice of the Wheel – is already inherent (even though not yet explicitly formulated in its counter-intuitive iteration, where active touch can also be "receiving".) It was also in the early 90s that educator and activist Harry Faddis joined the Body Electric School as an instructor and invented the "3-minute game" (cf. Faddis and Body Electric School (Oakland 2000); a set of two performative questions that form the foundation to the dynamics modelled in the Wheel today. As Martin recalls in an interview:

Well, I was on a personal journey in my own erotic awakening in my mid-40s, and I went to a bunch of workshops, mostly with the Body Electric School, and at one of them we played a game called the Three Minute Game. (...) [T]he Three Minute Game is a game for two people, and you take turns asking each other these two questions. One question is, what do you want me to do to you for three minutes? I can think of some fun things I might like you [the interviewer] to do to me for three minutes, thank you. And the other question is, what do you want to do to me for three minutes? It's a very different question, creates kind of the opposite dynamic, but likewise I can think of some fun things I might want to do to you for three minutes. (Kuhn 2024)

My own first indirect encounter with the propositions of the "Wheel" must have been about 20 years ago as a participant to a so-called "Cuddle Party" in Berlin. As the non-profit charitable organization of the same name describes the format, a "Cuddle Party is a playful social event designed for adults to explore communication, boundaries and affection" (*What Is a Cuddle Party?*)<sup>193</sup> Back then I was attending it with the hidden agenda to cast one of its

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<sup>192</sup> Both Kramer (2002) and Sprinkle (in 2005) obtained their PhDs from the "Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality" in San Francisco; a private unaccredited for-profit graduate school that was founded in 1976 and had to close in 2018. While the homepage of the Institute is no longer online, the internet archive offers an exhilarating throwback into this "Californian episode" within research (cf. "The Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality" 2011). Far from academic schadenfreude – given two "Doctors of Human Sexuality" whose "alma mater" is no more – we must well consider the possibility that the field of institutionalized artistic research, which makes this very doctorate possible, may one day be shut down and archived just as well.

<sup>193</sup> Betty Martin was one of the Board Members of the organization and trains and certifies new facilitators. (cf. *Board of Directors | Cuddle Party INC.*)

facilitators for a theater evening designed along the lines of Christoph Schlingensief's "Talk 2000" (cf. Schlingensief 1997). "Talk 2000" was a TV format regularly recorded in the cantina of the *Volksbühne* with the aim of bringing together the most diverse group of people and propelling their constellation into irrevocable turbulence. In contrast to the regular talk shows of the 1990s, Schlingensief's moderation (if you can call it that at all given the literal meaning of *moderatio* being "temperance") was in no way psychologizing but – in the Brechtian tradition – always demonstrated the socio-political contradictions the guests and the host found themselves entangled in. All the while, "Talk 2000" was always more than playful, thereby "treat[ing] of the theater as a place of entertainment (...) try[ing] to discover which form of entertainment suits us best." (Brecht [1949] 1964, 180)

For our epigonal attempt in 2005 my colleagues and I had already assembled the party leaders of the so-called APPD (Anarchistische Pogo Partei Deutschland), a rainbow-colored clown from Latin America, the *Reichskanzler* of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Reich (Wolfgang Ebel) and another conspiracy theorist from Europe's largest association of hackers (Chaos Computer Club e.V.). There was also a chicken running around in the role of yet another "invited speaker" addressed by the name of "H5N1" – the virus subtype of the bird flu that was a major scare in the media of the time. The idea was that after the escalation (that this explosive mix of people cramped into a small room would necessarily lead to) the facilitators of "Kuschelparty Berlin" [cuddle party Berlin] would enter the room, calm it down and ultimately get the guests to cuddle with each other. This plan never amounted to more than a concept; of course, because the facilitators would very likely have refused the proposition, but primarily because of our overwhelmingly beautiful experience at the cuddle party itself. (We ended up not even asking.)

### *"Safe and ecstatic"*

Thinking back 20 years, I still recall the awkwardness of the introduction round, the performative training we got in saying "no", the various protocols of an exactly timed physical

encounter, but also – very clearly – the *bliss of touch* I received, knowing that it was “for me”. (I might, in fact, never forget the collective “bask in the afterglow”<sup>194</sup> we shared as an ensemble of cuddlers after the blindfolded cuddling circle at the end.) While the Cuddle Parties have never transgressed from the therapeutic realm into the arts, the Wheel of Consent has made a veritable breakthrough in the dance scenes of various European capitals within the last decade (cf. Gerge 2025, 52). It is also there – in Berlin’s dance environment – that my collaborator Claire picked it up and introduced it into the research. When it became clear that the working place for our Pre-study was going to be Brussels, we had little trouble finding someone who could introduce the “Wheel” to us in the Belgian capital, as there, too, there are many dancers and performers who familiarized themselves with its basic workings.<sup>195</sup>

Rather than seeking the reason for the current momentum in a sophisticated marketing strategy, I would argue that the nerve it strikes can be traced back to the circumstances from which the “Body Electric School” emerged in the San Francisco Bay Area. In the face of an epidemic that required an extreme level of alertness and communication between people engaging in intimate exchanges, the work of Joseph Kramer and his colleagues nevertheless drew on a conception of the erotic as expansive and ultimately liberating. The “touch-y feel-y hippie years” of the 1960s and 70s that Martin refers to are still part of the DNA of the “Wheel” today; just as much as the mindful integration of the anxious protocols of the health crisis caused by HIV in the 1980s and into the 1990s. In their combination they help us to navigate

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<sup>194</sup> A wording we find in Annie Sprinkle’s workshops from the 1990s (cf. Sprinkle 1992)

<sup>195</sup> While the “School of Consent” currently works to solidify the professional training of facilitators by means of educational formats of various lengths attuned to different levels of expertise, the “Wheel” is out there rolling already; accessible for everyone through Martin’s generous online resources, it is doing its work as a model and a practice, ahead of its possible institutional consolidation.

the present moment “where we, for good reasons, have become attentive to each other’s physical integrity, fragility, and boundaries” (Gerge 2025, 48).

The “Wheel” has the great advantage of having developed its strategies for creating consent against the backdrop of this genealogy, rather than as an acute and reactive remediation of a series of spectacular power abuses. Thanks to the lifespan of its developer, the Wheel’s epistemological premises are neither informed by well-meaning but oftentimes retributive strategies to contain unchecked power nor by the consent rhetorics of confidence culture. Instead, they align with a much older, expansive understanding of desire, aiming for a “safe and ecstatic” (Kramer 2002) encounter between two creative partners.

## **The Wheel of Consent’s container as a Space of Rehearsals**

In the following final section of the unpractical part of this text, I will take a closer look at the conceptual premises of the “Wheel” and how they relate to the concept of the Space of Rehearsals promoted in this thesis. Here, a special focus is given to the “Wheel” as a protocol conducive of what I will come to describe as the *maieutics* of desire; as well as of the practical knowledge form of *phronesis* introduced in the introductory material (Chapter C). I.e. Aristotle’s “practical wisdom” salvaged by Swedish philosopher Jonna Bornemark to problematize professional-managerial or cybernetic interventions into the professional judgement of the people working “on the ground”. By transposing the embodied practice of the Wheel into the *improvisational* interaction between actor and director this situation-specific knowledge form is regained in the rehearsal space.

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As described above the dynamics within the Wheel are deduced from the two questions of the 3-minute game: What would you want me to do to you for three minutes? And: What would you want to do to me for three minutes? In a conversation with Betty Martin, Harry Faddis mentions the poem that inspired the game during his work with the groups (of mostly gay men) enrolled at the Body Electric School. (*Harry Faddis Conversation* 2015; 1:48) It is called “The Breeze at Dawn” and is attributed to the Persian poet Rumi.

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don’t go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don’t go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth across the doorsill

where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open.

Don’t go back to sleep.

(translated by Barks 2004, 36)

According to Faddis, specifically the line “You must ask for what you really want” proved useful as the guiding principle when answering the two prompting questions of the game. Taken out of context, this imperative could easily be read as a predecessor of the above-mentioned “confidence culture”, where “knowing what you want” is taken for granted and equated with safety. The “breeze at dawn”, however, clearly invites a subconscious agency and

makes room for the articulation of a desire unintelligible to ourselves. This is important insofar as it distinguishes the communication organized by the “Wheel” from, yes – *communication* as defined by cybernetics (cf. *Terracing the Territory III*.). Even though we are encouraged to speak our desire as clearly as possible and without hinting (no “mind-reading” is required on the receiver’s end), the ultimate goal of its articulation is not a “cleansed signal”. The Wheel is therefore not proposing a relentless optimization of human relations where bivalent signals (Yes/No, Zero/One) – cleared from subconscious bruise – are unambiguously communicated. Instead, the door we step through by entering its Space of Rehearsals is “round and open”<sup>196</sup>, reactive to the instable and emergent desire within an active transference.

The possibility of such fragile articulation is safeguarded by various installments that highlight the “heterotopic”, out-of-the-usual quality of the exchanges within the “Wheel”. These installments are in their totality referred to by Martin as the “container” of the practice (Martin and Dalzen, 60). Besides the most obvious component of this container, i.e. an agreed-upon time frame, one of its key elements is the embodied fact of the person “asking for what they really want” *leaning* (against a wall or the back of a chair). This provides a very basic indication to the surroundings – but mostly to oneself – that the prompting questions are meant to be responded to from the positions of one’s own point of gravity. (And it is probably the deeper function of the nowadays clichéd “director’s chair”, providing the person supposed to “ask for what they really want” with a transportable place to sit and lean during the shoot.)

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<sup>196</sup> In this reading, the “Wheel of Consent” can be conceived as a “Ring of Fire”, which has been the ambition of Pre-study #3 (cf. Chapter 8).



Figure 8: The nouvelle vague (in the body of French director Francois Truffaut) running around on set instead of leaning into the Hollywood studio chair. (Screenshots of *La Nuit américaine*, 1973; © Warner Bros.)

### *Clarifications: indulgere genio*

Another installment is the division between “clarifications” and “negotiations” formalized within this container. As the two functions of dialogue are separate in time and follow each other in a non-interchangeable sequence, the first part can be fully dedicated to a *maieutics* of the most direct and truthful articulation of the desire in question. The partner asking “clarifying questions” thus turns into a Socratic counterpart, using a form of dialogue that the philosopher (according to Plato) transposed by using the practical knowledge his mother held; as the “solid and very famous midwife” (Plato 1881, 111) she was. Accordingly, *maieutike* from which the word *maieutics* – the so-called socratic method – derives, literally means “the art of midwifery” (In turn, *Hebammenkunst* is the translation of *maieutics* to German). Because of the mode of asking within the format of *maieutics* the desire of the *leaning person* becomes fully unfolded (“birthed”) before it enters into negotiation with the partner’s needs and limits. Given the consent-based setting it thus allows for highly *intuitive* propositions – in the sense of “the first thing I see” – that are nevertheless not pursued one-directionally.

In the Space of Rehearsals formatted by the Wheel, the *leaning person* – be it the actor or the director – is therefore prompted like someone whose *genius* is about to receive a gift. Following Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2007), the Roman demonology presents the *genius* as a divine entity that is assigned to us at the moment of our birth (*everybody* has a *genius*!) and that we are bound to for the rest of our lives. The original ancient concept thus implies that one *has* rather than *is* a *genius*; and in this vein, birthday gifts, for instance, are always offerings to the divine demon of its recipients. If they are good, they “hit their nerve” or – in the words of my collaborator Claire – their “existential kink”.

A Latin phrase perfectly expresses the secret relationship each person must maintain with his own Genius: *indulgere genio*. One must consent to Genius and abandon oneself to him; one must grant him everything he asks for,

for his exigencies are our exigencies, his happiness our happiness. Even if his – our! – requirements seem unreasonable and capricious, it is best to accept them without argument. (Agamben 2007, 10)

Agamben's further explanation also gives a sense of the “fetishistic”, meanwhile not necessarily “sexual” nature of the desires that the prompted *genius* dictates:

If in order to write you need – he needs! – a certain light-yellow paper, a certain special pen, a certain dim light shining from the left, it is useless to tell yourself that just any pen will do, that any paper, that any light will suffice. (Agamben, 10)

Intuition (understood as *experience actualizing* in the split of a second or *intelligence speeding*) may be a synonymous, contemporary concept. But it is important to stress, that – unlike the shift of meaning suggested by the bourgeois adaptation from *having a* to *being a* genius – it is exactly *not* the artist's unreduceable individuality that has agency here. As Agamben points out instead, *genius* accompanies us as an “impersonal, preindividual element”. (Agamben, 11)

Given the proposition to *indulgere genio* the desires articulated within the container of the Wheel can, however, hardly be communitized; they do not have to be made common-sense, and they do not have to survive a vote. In other words, they may remain idiosyncratic. At the same time they do not have to be heeded unconditionally by the partner either. Because in the “negotiations” of the container they are brought into play with his/her “limits” and “boundaries”.

### *Negotiations: situational limits as the flapsides of desire*

Unlike regular consent rhetorics who tend to conflate the two, the orthodoxy of the Wheel suggests a productive distinction here. While “boundaries” are unchangeable (defining the edges of our “domain” (Martin and Dalzen, 356), the “limits” are reactive to the situation within the container. That means, they depend on contextual factors like “with you”, “here” and “now”; and thereby ultimately attune the actor-director relation to the practical knowledge

form of *phronesis*. As elaborated in Chapter C, *phronesis* is the Aristotelian knowledge form concerned with the uniqueness of a given situation. Rather than adhering to the “know(ing) how” of *techne*, *phronesis* invites the “knowing when” as a necessary element for the professional judgement within a specific situation. Because of this capacity, *phronesis* can attend to the mercurial, instable nature of desire invited by the Wheel.

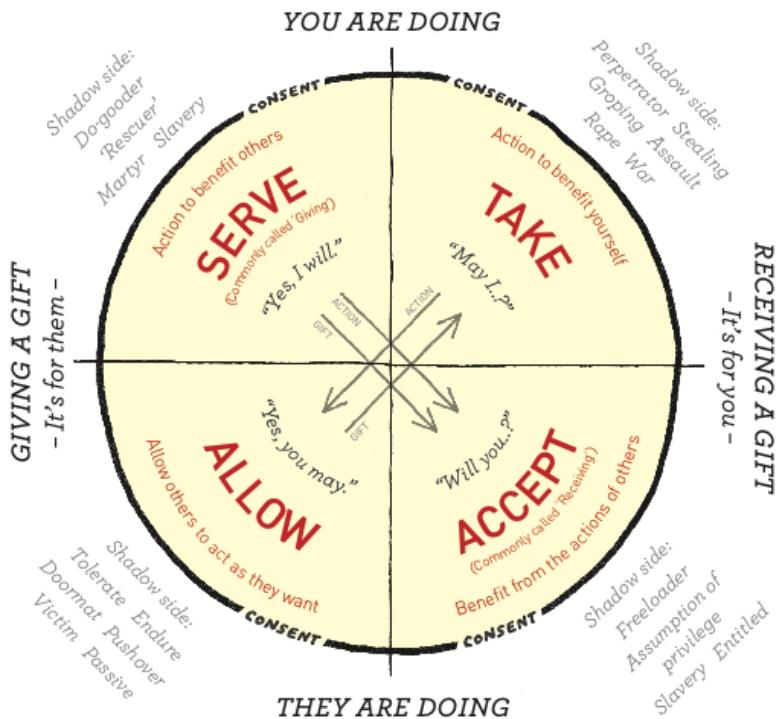
Rather than “safe words”, the Wheel uses situational “limits” to harvest the potential of a given situation. Their articulation is therefore not a means of (self-)defense based on a presumption of scarcity given one’s own resources. Limits are not “limitations” – as in “something you are unable to do, a condition of limited ability” (Martin and Dalzen, 310) – but provide a situational knowledge that plays on a similar plane as the articulated desire of Agamben’s *genius*. One must accept the limits – of oneself and others – without argument. Or as one of the phrases widely quoted in the Wheel of Consent context puts it: “‘No.’ is a full sentence.”

To sum up: desire and limits open the Space of Rehearsals to the situation-specific knowledge of *phronesis*. By mediating this insertion, the Wheel’s container helps to re-establish the shared responsibility actor and director hold for it. Instead of outsourcing the rehearsal space’s safety to the management of a manualizing class (cf. Bornemark 2020, 89), the dynamic possibilities of the Wheel are used for more than a mere regulation of the social relations within rehearsals. With its ultimate goal being “play” it can be applied *simultaneously* as a means of artistic creation.

## Reflections on the Wheel of Consent as a practical method of rehearsing

From here, I move on to a reflection of the more meticulous application – the “transposition”, as it were – of the Wheel of Consent onto the actor-director relation in our practical experiments. In doing so, I use the quite advanced “technical terminology” from Martin’s universe, applying the Wheel *as a model* or interaction framework (rather than a practice). For the reader unfamiliar with the Wheel on the one hand, but familiar with the processes of theater-making on the other this “leap” will – in the best case – spark the interest in the embodied practice. As a possible bridge or intermediate read, the online resources offer an insight to how we concretely worked with the *Wheel as a practice* in rehearsals. A pdf entitled “The practical knowledge of the Wheel applied to rehearsals” demonstrates the transposition we made in Pre-study #2; while the “work demo” of Pre-study #3 gives an even more structured outline of how we moved from a practice based on *touch* to one of *seeing* and *speaking* (cf. WD, online resources and chapter 8). Also, the two-channel video work in Pre-study #2 – “A study in transference” – is informative with regard to the method insofar as the raw material for it consists exclusively of “3-minute games” transposed into film takes. It is, as it were, “shot on the Wheel of Consent”.

# THE WHEEL OF CONSENT



In any instance of touch, there are two factors: who is doing and who it's for. Those two factors combine in four ways (quadrants). Each quadrant presents its own challenges, lessons and joys.

The circle represents consent (your agreement). Inside the circle there is a gift given and a gift received. Outside the circle (without consent) the same action becomes stealing, abusing, etc.

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You are welcome to share, including this diagram, with attribution (leave this paragraph in).

Figure 9: The graph of the Wheel of Consent in its entirety. (Copyright and usage on the bottom)

## The Wheel of Consent and the default set-up of the actor-director relation

The historically grown “default set-up” of *Regietheater* seems to position the director in the RECEIVING half of the Wheel, i.e. as someone doing an *action to benefit him/herself* (TAKE) or as someone *benefiting from the action of others* (ACCEPT). On a macroscale this is rather obvious given the attention the director will get by the time of the premiere, or during

the exploitation phase of the film/product. In her letter, Claire for example points out the way her contribution – the contribution of the ensemble, so to speak – risks being subsumed under the director's name due to the conventions of crediting works; a misalignment oftentimes starting with the terminology used to describe her function in the work contract (cf. LTJ, online resources).

But also on the microscale, when looking at the situation within the discrete limit of a moment in rehearsals (as my Pre-studies suggest to do) this seems to be the case. The “Thank you” by which the director will cut off an improvisation for example installs him/her as the recipient of a gift, *performatively* (re-)positioning him/her in the RECEIVING half throughout the process. On the German-speaking film set, the director conventionally ends a take by saying “Danke, aus” [thank you, off] – thereby symbolically “cashing in” the actorial work accomplished in the take; again, most likely from the position of the TAKE quadrant, *doing an action to benefit him/herself*.

With our practical explorations, however, I hope to have shown that the Wheel does not suggest a pre-set for the disciplines of actor and director when it comes to their positions within its two halves of RECEIVING and GIVING. They can both start out and operate from any quadrant. Despite the history of one-sided attention and directorial entitlement, we can therefore resist the temptation to place the halves or the quadrants of the Wheel in a moral hierarchy, once the director gets involved. In other words, there is no notion of compensation or retributive justice coded into the concrete interactions of the Wheel (cf. also Martin's analogous reflection on *Gender and the Quadrants/Taking and Gender* (Martin and Dalzen 2021, 66, 300)). As actors and directors, we will have preferences in regard to our position within the two dynamics, most likely bound to our desire structures that had us interested in the respective disciplines in the first place; but we start from the concreteness of the encounter every time we play a 3 minute-game. *Ad hoc*.

In a similar vein, the Wheel as a rehearsal method is not meant to establish a place of equilibrium within the asymmetric relation between actor and director (consent is not “consensus” as for instance the German translation as “Konsens-Rad” erroneously suggests). Clarifications and negotiations are not supposed to lead to the normalization of a formulated desire, or to a moderation in terms of symmetrically shared pleasure. The ethics of the Wheel are located on another plane: namely in the fact, that everybody involved knows *who is doing* & *who it is for* – and that these positions are interchangeable. As Martin puts it regarding the ACCEPT quadrant: when formulating your request to the person SERVING, “go for wonderful. (...) Stop trying to ‘give’ your giver a good experience.” (cf. Martin 2025) Or in a broader sense: “When it’s for you, be selfish. When it’s for them, be generous.”

But even in the case of the actor starting out in the SERVE quadrant – again, what I call the default set-up of *Regietheater* as a historical form – we can witness a de-naturalization of the conventional rehearsal situation. A shift in power dynamics, as it were, due to the insertion of the Wheel. Insofar as the responsibility of initiating always lies with the ones in the GIVING half, a rehearsal is conceivable that would not begin *until* the actor asks the decisive question: “How would you like to direct me?” Thereby undercutting the mastery over time and timing the director usually assumes when entering a rehearsal space (cf. the last section of WD in the online resources: *Transposition #3: Disciplines*).

### *The Wheel as a de-naturalizing, intermediate layer*

When working with the Wheel as a model it is essential to repeatedly point at the most obvious (but somehow easily overlooked) line in the graph by which it is represented: the circumference of the circle, that gives the quadrants their final dimension, as a result of the concrete *maieutics of desire* between actor and director.

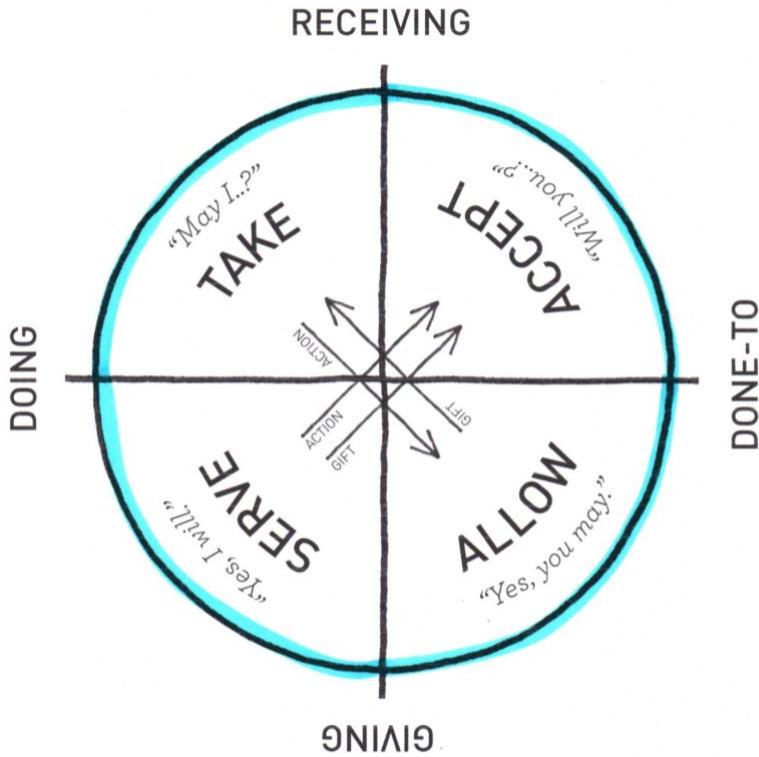


Figure 10: The Wheel of Consent with the highlighted consent circle. (Courtesy of Betty Martin)

While the depiction as a model “on paper” suggests the circle as a static entity (stable in size), its final diameter is in fact the result of the slow and careful work of consenting. Its size varies based on the agreement found and it might therefore be useful to sometimes picture the Wheel in an organic metaphor, for instance as a muscle. As Martin puts it in her annotation (below the original graph): “The circle represents consent (your agreement). Inside the circle there is a gift given and a gift received. Outside the circle (without consent) the same action becomes stealing, abusing etc.”

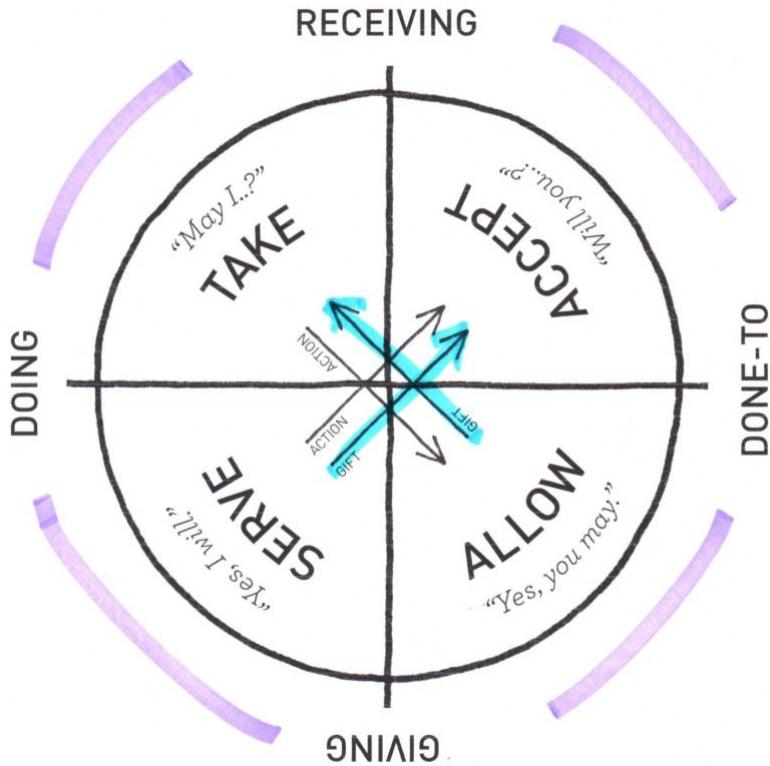


Figure 11: The Wheel of Consent with the gift given and received (inside the circle) as well as the shadow sides of the quadrants (marked in purple). (Courtesy of Betty Martin)

With highlighting the consent-circle an outside appears, that is in turn highly informative regarding the quadrants' inside. The Wheel of Consent orthodoxy calls this outside the “shadow sides”. Each quadrant has their own shadow side attributed to it. (The shadow of TAKE is “stealing, groping” etc.; the shadow of ALLOW: “endure, push over” etc.; the shadow of SERVE: “martyr, slavery” etc.; the shadow of ACCEPT: “entitlement, assumption of privilege” etc.) The act of consenting by the means of the Wheel thus holds a promise for a *reinvented Regietheater*’s rehearsal method that can hardly be overestimated; a promise that is particularly radical to a current generation of directors. There is a way to TAKE without *stealing*, a way to ACCEPT without *assuming privilege* or *entitlement*. Consequently, there

may be a way to ALLOW without *enduring* or being *pushed over*, to SERVE without reducing oneself/or being reduced to a *martyr* or *slave*.

The Wheel's shadow sides turn even more operational when contrasted with the positive "values" that are attributed to each quadrant. Generosity for SERVE, Integrity for TAKE, Surrender for ALLOW, Gratitude for ACCEPT. These values can be of help when assuming the position within the dynamic one agrees to work in. As a director, I can for instance use the value attributed to the TAKE quadrant as "integrity towards my desire". My desire might be what I want to see or sense when directing the actor in the space. Knowing that we have agreed upon the dynamic in which I am *doing an action for my benefit*, I act with integrity by trying to live up to it. As Martin writes about the TAKE quadrant, whom she considers the "keystone of the Wheel" (Martin and Dalzen, 290): "this is hard for almost everyone, and often feels odd, elusive or scary" (Martin 2025). Cf. also WD in the online resources: *Transposition #1: BEYOND TOUCH*.

### *Methods of devising read through the Wheel*

As many of the directors socialized in the Foothills and navigating the post-#MeToo landscape today I have my "natural issues" with the RECEIVING half, i.e. the quadrants of TAKE and ACCEPT. The risks of slipping into their shadow sides – both *groping* and *entitlement* are associated with the *directorial expansionism* described in Chapter B – seem too high. The *Wheel as a (bodily) practice* offers possibilities to reconfigure this neurotic avoidance; or, if nothing else, to at least find a deeper understanding of the pleasure the GIVING half provides. Personally, I found out for instance – on the level of touch – how much of my pleasure (transposed into: joy of directing) derives from being "good" at SERVING. Setting aside what I would prefer and make space for the choice of my counterpart, the actor. Contribute to his/her creative process, as best as I can. In other words, indulge in being the *facilitating director* that I critically scrutinized in *Terracing the Territory III*.

All the while, with the help of the *Wheel as an (analytic) model*, we can formulate an audacious speculation – hopefully historicizing the present moment: in an attempt to stay at a safe distance from the RECEIVING half within their artistic practice (or more precisely: from the shadow sides related to TAKE and ACCEPT), particularly male directors nowadays mostly operate from the ALLOW quadrant. They do so in applying the methods of devised theater, symbolically initiating the interaction with the actor by asking: “How would you like to touch me?”; or in transposition: “What do you want the audience to feel or experience with this work?”

From the touch-based exercises I know the extravagant situation that can occur in the dynamics of TAKE and ALLOW (and that I believe to be the secret hope driving this directorial positioning): Because very often the action that the partner in the TAKE quadrant proposes – in response to the question “How would you like to touch me?” – is in fact pleasurable to the person in the ALLOW quadrant as well. It can for instance feed into the desire to be objectified or “treated as a thing” for a discrete moment in time; with the positive value of *surrender* coming to its full effect.

Suddenly, a paradoxical win-win-situation occurs: the person in the TAKE quadrant *doing an action to benefit themselves* is benefitting the person in the ALLOW quadrant *at the same time*. Transposed into the logics of rehearsals this means: the authorial lead the actor may assume aligns with the unspoken directorial desire. Within the classical hierarchies of the theater institution the director nevertheless appears to be giving a gift, *allowing others to act as they want* (cf. also *Terracing the Territory II., The facile and ritualistic subversion*). Of course, this situation of a win-win – of a successful devising process, as it were – does not always occur. Moreover, what may appear as a generous “giving of space” sometimes points to directorial lenience or a fear of conflict rather than directorial desire. In that regard it is well

worthwhile also for directors to become aware of the shadow sides of ALLOW (*tolerate, endure, pushover*).

### *Live directing within the Wheel conceived as Space of Rehearsals*

There is another interesting special case within the touch-based practice that has an even clearer equivalent when “transposed” to the rehearsal situation. Primarily because, for once, it involves *speech during touch*. The so-called “Bossy Massage” exercise sets out to train a mode of playing with directness. While still embedded in the SERVE/ACCEPT dynamic the requests normally formulated as questions (“May I...?”) are now rendered as imperatives instead. The Bossy Massage is therefore a rare occasion where speech is actively invited *during* a three-minute game, as opposed to the clarifications and negotiations normally carried out beforehand. Furthermore, the speech functions one-directionally, with only the receiving person speaking.

The “ethical basis” of these one-directional imperatives lies in the agreement that the actions carried out by the person SERVING are to benefit the person in the ACCEPT quadrant; and that if their execution does not meet the initial desire, the request has to be rendered more precisely. With the Bossy Massage, also the mercurial quality of desire can be accounted for by asking for new things whenever they cross your mind. Within this set-up, the speech of the person receiving the touch will necessarily turn two-fold. Specifically, the value of the ACCEPT quadrant appears to split simultaneously into its opposite. So while keeping *gratitude* in mind – towards someone else doing the best they can (in SERVE/*generosity*) – the impulses for new imperatives have to spring from a situational *ingratititude*. (“This is not how I imagined it.”)

In many ways, the speech within the Bossy Massage can therefore be likened to the director’s improvising speech in rehearsals; emerging in the flickering movement between getting what you ask for and *not* getting what you ask for. Embedded in the Wheel of Consent’s logics, however, this exchange between actor and director no longer appears as a “naturalized”

situation; it contains a mutual awareness of a gift being given and received, an active work with the positive values of *generosity* and *(in-)gratitude* as well as with the shadow sides. In other words, it contains *distance*.

Needless to say, also in the Bossy Massage positions/quadrants can be exchanged, with everyone maintaining their original discipline. (It's quite an experience actually to see an actor on stage in the Bossy Massage mode relentlessly telling the director where the instructions are not doing what s/he wants them to do.) To complete the picture, I should add that speech is not a hundred percent one-directional in the described set-up. The Wheel of Consent puts emphasis on the fact that you should be able to "trust the No" of your partner, especially when playing with directness/imperatives. (This trust of the "No" is in fact the pre-condition for formulating your desire unconditionally, also in the regular protocol of asking.)

In practice, especially in acting contexts where the emphasis always goes to saying "Yes" (in order to avoid a so-called "blockage" of the situation), this is hard to maintain. In general, the pressure of production will often imply an affirmative stance, which ultimately makes it hard to trust both "Yes" and "No". In the de-naturalized set-up of rehearsing with the Wheel however, the "No" can also be "forced". Actor and director can agree that – if it doesn't come "naturally" – it will have to come randomly; at least once within the duration of a 3-minute game.

With this backdrop in mind, the film-set-situation described as the inspiration for the work with Claire (cf. SCORE in chapter 6 and PS#2, online resources) can be re-visited applying the Wheel of Consent's terminology. Me live-directing during the final take would then have to be read as embedded in the agreement of the Bossy Massage derived from the SERVE-ACCEPT dynamic. When the actors deemed my imperatives nonsensical or useless for what they were pursuing at that moment, they took action in a different way, thereby non-verbally articulating a "No".

Far from sabotaging directorial authority though, the actor thereby simply places us in the other of the two dynamics, possibly with me in the ALLOW and them in the TAKE quadrant. From here on we re-configure, understanding jointly when we swap dynamics again, this time maybe with me, the director, in SERVE. For the time being, this masterful movement within the Wheel constitutes for me the ideal dance of a *Regie* oscillating between actor and director. A dance opening the Space of Rehearsals to its main goal: safe and ecstatic, fierce play.

## 8 PRE-STUDY #3: Anders' Director

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# Pre-study #3 ANDERS' Director

## CIRCUMSTANCE / FACT SHEET / #3

Place: Norsesund, Sweden & Tversted, Denmark  
Time: 1 week in February 2023, 3 weeks in September & October 2023  
Collaborator: Anders Carlsson (actor and director)  
Materials: *The Wheel of Consent* by Betty Martin  
"Alcohol and drug policy for staff and students at the  
Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH)"  
Various Codes of Conduct

# SCORE

At the start of our collaboration, Anders and I were still looking for an external “material” as the focal point of encounter; similar to what had been “A Streetcar Named Desire” and Chantal Akerman’s “Je, tu, il, elle” in the Pre-studies before. This time though, nothing seemed to “impose itself” and our interest kept on gravitating to our very relation as “actor” and “director”.

After the first workshop (in February 2022) I therefore understood that, this time, “The Wheel of Consent” could in fact be our sole “material” point of focus. As a sort of “text” highlighting our disciplinary constellation.

Critical of the tendency to “manualize” consenting in a cognitive-behavioral matrix, I invited Anders to look for ways of welcoming the agency of the unconscious within the dynamics of the Wheel. For possibilities to “soak it”, so to speak, in the juice of transference. We provisionally entitled a direction of inquiry: “The Wheel of Consent as a Ring of Fire”.

Anders’ familiarity with “Gestalt therapy” in his stage work (based on the teaching of Finnish actor Marcus Groth) seemed to offer technical possibilities in that regard. The hope was to detect the affective expression of the transference in the encounter of actor and director; and possibly even “manage it” by means of an embodiment in the real-time situation that is the rehearsal.

I had already seen Anders apply this skill – of tracking the *gestalt* and using it as a springboard for embodiment – in his encounter with audiences. It provided him with the freedom to masterfully play with timing and syntax of his performance while actively curating the transference at work in the live-set-up of a theater show.

In that regard, the performative position of “the host” seemed to offer him a specific agency. During our first workshop we were therefore still looking for an opportunity in which Anders could “host” a real social situation; and we agreed this should be the seminar I was going to present our research in.

\*

Ultimately the Pre-study resulted in a “Work Demonstration” during which Anders and I walk our audiences through the steps we deemed necessary to systematically transpose a therapeutic practice (The Wheel of Consent) into a method for theater rehearsals. We do so by facilitating the audiences’ own embodied experience as well as demonstrating critical set-ups in which Anders and I assert the disciplinary roles of “actor” and “director”.

We have presented this work demo (which carries the title: “Rehabilitating Asymmetry in the Actor-Director Relation”) as a small “knowledge product” in different live contexts so far. In the online resources, you will also find a version

specifically adapted to the medium of video in which it is presented. The demo is meant to be a starting point for further elaborations by its recipients, a documentation that can serve as a model of practice.

\*

In the PLAY section below, I am proffering – together with a shortened transcript of the “work demo” in question – its anecdotal backside as well; it is based on the material we explored when imagining a real-life hosting situation for Anders, i.e. before we made the “constructive turn” to a mere knowledge-sharing format.

The texts that were supposed to drive this “hosting” situation were:

Firstly, the “Alcohol and Drug Policy for staff and students at Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH)”, as one of the first communications I received from my department after having been hired as a doctoral candidate in 2019.

Secondly, the “Code of Conduct” of a theater festival where Anders and his group *Institutet* used to be regular guests, celebrated for their transgressive interventions.

The montage of these texts sparked the anecdotal memory of a German director who had his assistant serve him aquavit in a coffee cup during morning rehearsals. A strategy to hide his alcohol consumption from the ensemble and especially from his wife, who was cast in the main role. A “psycho-physical action” – drinking aquavit from a coffee cup – we used as a gestural starting point.

\*

As we were rehearsing, my intention was to film Anders' and my interaction, but something went wrong technically, which had the camera take a series of photos instead of recording a video.

The photos taken in fixed intervals of some seconds, in turn, reminded me of the Brechtian "modelbooks" that I had first encountered during my director's training. A somewhat forgotten form of theater documentation, mostly insofar as they are intended as models of practice rather than as an archive.

As British theater scholar David Barnett explains on his homepage [www.brechtinpractice.net](http://brechtinpractice.net), Brecht's modelbooks "used photographs that mostly framed the whole stage in order to show both the actors' positions and their gestural relationships to one another." Their function was "not merely to record that [Brecht's productions] had taken place, but to help theatre makers understand how they were made and what they were trying to achieve."

Barnett also presents an argument for the modelbooks' medial superiority over video documentation – even for today's theater:

1. A photograph can pick out key moments in a scene.
2. When taken together, the photographs can represent the way that a scene changes over time, from point to point.
3. Photographs don't attempt to give a sense of what it was 'really' like to have been in the theatre, something that video often attempts, but often fails to achieve."

\*

Looking at the randomly taken photos from our rehearsal as part of a Brechtian modelbook, I suddenly found a staging at work; a staging of the *gestural relationship* Anders and I have to each other in the very moment of improvisation.

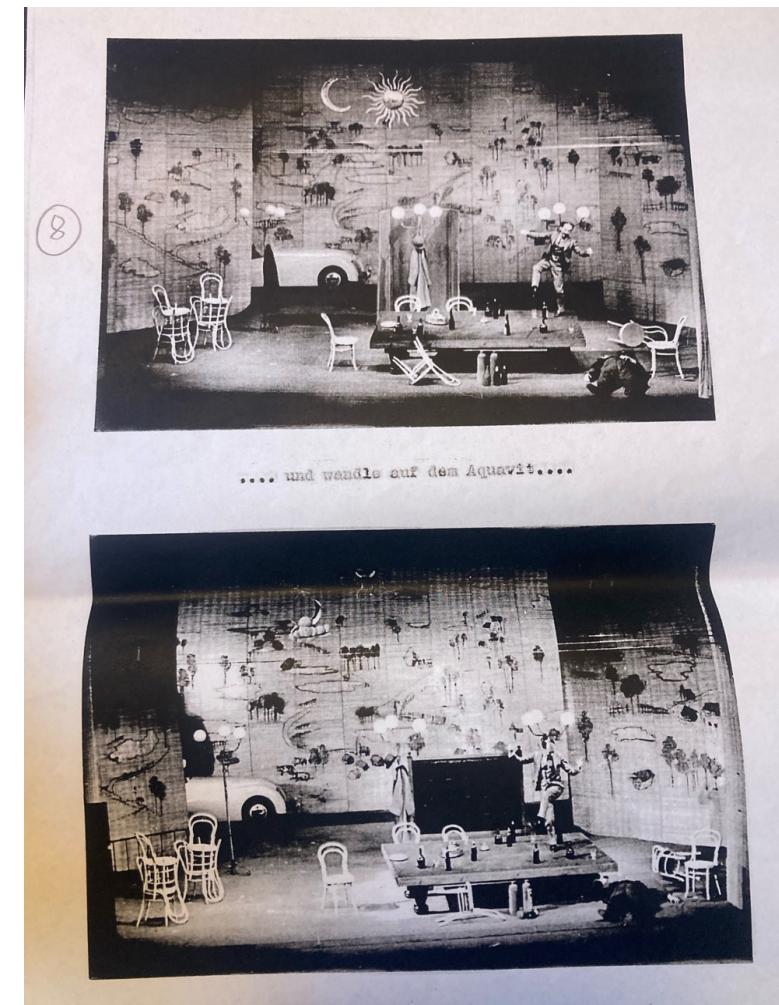
Maybe even a "re-staging of both transferences" at work in the *gestalt* of this specific actor-director dyad. Definitely of its quite long history, now confronted with an invisible third, i.e. the anticipated audience of a research community.

\*

In that context, namely the gesture of dropping pants in performative situations, adapted from the emblematic figures of the foothills – Christoph Schlingensief in my case – imposes itself as an uncanny detail.

As we later found out through discussions, both Anders and I had at first missed out on the cultural turning point, where this gesture turned from transgressive-but-welcomed to inappropriate; from subverting our gendered authority to allegedly asserting it.

In various ways we have since been made aware of the gesture's problematics, given our positionality; and in our shared rehearsal we obviously try to attune to the new sensibility, working with this only recently installed super-ego position. Both in terms of its internalization (through our own shame) as well as through childish defiance to the outside.



Page from Brecht's modelbook "Mr. Puntilla and his Servant Matti".  
East-Berlin, 1952.

# INDEXICAL TRACES/RELATIONAL ARTEFACTS

father is the phallus—in the form of a penis (her penis, his penis) or a baby—but the gift is phallic, making up for her 'lack' which is a phallic lack. The 'phallic' gift becomes a 'fallacious' gift. There is some insistent link between phallic reasoning, theories of the phallus, and fallacious reasoning. Somehow to try to think the phallus is to wind up with fallacy.

Irigaray asks in her accusation: 'your often contradictory and embroiled statements on the status of the phallus in relation to the real organ or the real sex, do they not have also as their cause ... to maintain veiled from your gaze and that of others how it stands with the sex organ of your Father in psychoanalysis' (*Misère*, p. 886). The analysts do not want to clear up, to reveal the status of the phallus. According to Lacan, the phallus 'can play its role only when veiled'. To clear all this up is to reveal/unveil the Father's 'Phallus' as a mere 'penis', as one signifier among others, prey to the contingencies of the letter, of the materiality of signification, alienated from the referent. Lacanian analysts protect Lacanian discourse from being just another 'contingent translation'. The stake is the Father's Phallus. To confuse and thus veil the status of the father's 'phallus' is to endow him with a 'Phallus' which he then might give to any daughter, to any analyst.

The daughter, in this case Lemoine-Luccioni, awaits the phallic gift, the fallacious gift. In the sentence quoted earlier she

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homogeneous group. And so on.

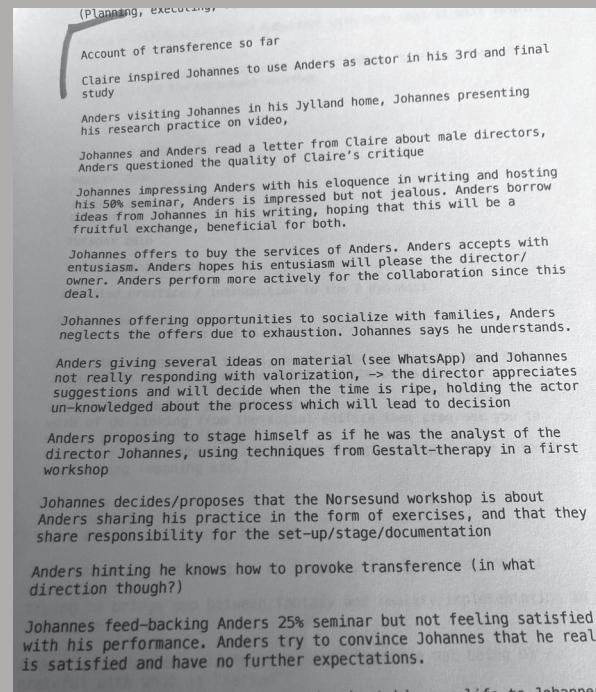
As I anxiously seek my own claim to 'dissidence', to being 'a new kind of intellectual', to 'exile', am I not in some sort of transference onto Kristeva, some archaic transference onto the phallic mother, 'more dangerous than the Primitive Father', seeking some reason for my own existence beyond the woman who is everything?... And I find plenty of reasons, lots of space. She is Bulgarian; I am American. I do not have Asiatic cheekbones. It is much easier to distinguish myself from Kristeva than from Irigaray who speaks as 'woman' without any specifications.

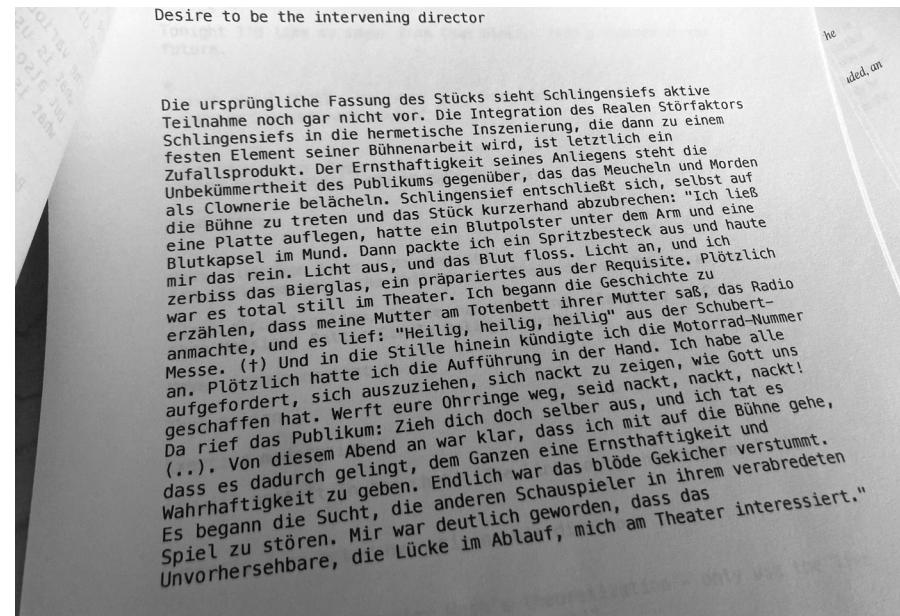
Just as Lacan's sadistic capriciousness reveals the prick behind the Phallus, the male sexuality behind the supposedly neutral position of authority; so Kristeva's narcissistic self-reference reveals the specific woman (the vulgar Bulgar), the female self-pleasuring body, behind the Mother. The phallic position, according to Kristeva, cannot be avoided. The most subtle, diffuse play will always erect itself. But if 'the phallus can play its role only when veiled', then to refuse and deny the phallic position may mean to veil it and be all the more phallic, whereas blatantly, audaciously, vulgarly to assume it may mean to dephallicize.

At the end of *Des Chinoises*, Kristeva speaks of such a knowingly fraudulent assumption of the position of power: 'a power

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and now, the unrepresented, the passive, neuter, the representative, is always demanded between body and body and between body and Body representation. Kristeva une bouge pas drunk la gl fluid from ice, that w represents strained in Other's, t the name in the o without





The "Ur-Szene" in which Schlingensief ruins his own mise-en-scène by stripping during the sixth performance; described by himself in "Schlingensief! Notruf für Deutschland" (Lochte und Schulz 1998, 26-27). For translation cf. the footnote in *Regiebuch 2, Terracing the Territory II*: "the emblematic figure".

## RE\_DICK\_ULIZATION: THE STATUS OF THE PHALLUS IN THE ETHICAL TURN

Apocrypha / Fragment.

A shortcut to tracing the transition from the foothills of *Regie-Theater* to the present day can be found when observing the change in the value placed on exposed male genitalia on stage. Taking the last step in the critical genealogy of directorial agency at hand, I shall briefly attend to this emblematic detail - the actor's flaccid penis - while doing my structural best to not exploit "it" as a mere provocation/obscene intervention, served on the plate of scholarly research. --- (Let's try):

As we've seen earlier, one of the "20 commandments of Tyskland" asserts:

THOU SHALT RIDICULE THYSELVES.

This rule applies especially to the cis-male actors/performers/directors of the foothills era. The "Ur-Szene" described above (Schlingensief's spontaneous intervention in the sixth show of his theater debut) has as many predecessors as successors. Entire shows have been based on the sight of naked male genitalia dangling across German stages (think of Jürgen Gosch's masterful *Macbeth*), and in particular the hyper-masculinist Volksbühne actors have pulled down their pants whenever they reached the boiling point of their subjectivity. "Again and again", writes the contemporaneous critic Robin Detje, "we catch them literally with their pants down" (Detje 2005: 16) in "a Chaplin or Keaton-inspired brand of slapstick based on emasculation and self-humiliation." (Korte 2023: 328)

Paradoxically, this gesture was usually understood as a self-diminishing exposure, even as a twisted form of castration; with the gap between the symbolically charged phallus and the loose organic penis inviting collective laughter. Ridiculization (in the theatrical sub-genre of *Regie-Theater*) could thus effortlessly be transposed into *re\_dick\_ulization*.

In the context of the present day's heightened sensibility towards the performative iteration of power and its potentially re-traumatizing effects, the gesture of dropping one's pants has become difficult to consider in the light of an emancipatory potential. The gap between phallus and penis no longer evokes comic relief, but alarm: the loosely hanging penis is potentially erect and the actor propelling it over the stages of German state theaters parades the physical power of a perpetrator. Ever since, the "re" in "re\_dick\_ulization" rather associates with "re-ification" (of patriarchal dominance).

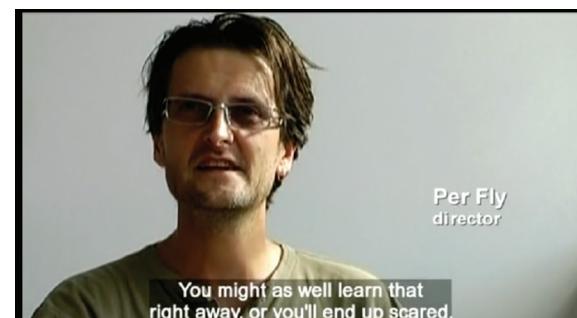
The actor's or the male director's – implied biologism only adds to our discomfort, ultimately provoking our *ressentiment*: not all human beings have a penis to swing around. Doing so, in consequence, alludes to a triumphant gesture championing sexual asymmetry and cis-essentialism. Not to talk about the implicit hetero-norm repressing the homosexual or female desire that traverses the scene. From a queer vantage point, the only reason why a straight man would enjoy being naked in public is because he asserts males as being "ugly by nature".

In a progressive reading, the actor's exposed penis is thus no longer an object of obscene amusement but rather a site of shame regarding a chauvinist legacy.

After our first workshop in February, I picked up the work on the *Terracing the Territory* chapters. This is a small fragment of text that was supposed to provide a transition between the *Foothills* and the *Great Plains*, but which I ultimately could not fit into the proposed topography. It is first and foremost a reflection on Christoph M. Schlingensief, who died in 2010 as one of the last male directors seemingly in control of his own public "castration".



Still from doctoral project of Trygve Allister Diesen: "Being the director – maintaining your vision while swimming with sharks". A six-part video essay completed in 2011.



\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

*Perhaps you already know the work of PhD candidate Outi Condit in Helsinki, it has some common aspects with your project, especially ideas of instant real-time steering of the actor.*

<http://www.outicondit.com/?portfolio=remote-control-human>

actor in SERVE quadrant:

*to let yourself be talked through, to submit yourself to a medium of sorts, is to excavate the vessel from its content*

*remotely controlled like a drone?*

*steered by a crazy bus driver high on cybernetic phantasmas?*

*how is the bus driver steering?*

*is he using the voodoo powers of TRE-trembling to maneuver his actor with his jumping wobbling penis as his remote-control device?*

*is he using headphones on the actor, giving him live instructions of what to say and what to do? (we have seen this has been an interesting apparatus on stage, but why not stay more traditional?)*

*let's stick to the basics of actor-director relationship: one (director) pre-scripts the other one's (actor) performance (a performance that as rehearsal happens now, but as a public event only at a later point in time)*

*pre-scripting, or to play with the etymology of the most generic of theatre notions: "improvisation". The prefix "im" indicates a subversion, an act of negation, and "provideo" is the ability to foreclose the future, to control what is going to happen, or at least steering the performative actualization through directives along the way as it unfolds*

*a script or a score or any other kind of pre-scripting of the living presence of performance is always text, but perhaps different kinds of texts*

Anders' study notes ahead of our second workshop in September 23. Over the summer, I had gotten further with the articulation of the "Wheel of Consent as a method of rehearsals", based on reflecting the work of PRE-STUDY #2. Below, Anders responds to the first draft of my try-outs, sometimes quoting the text directly.

*the temporality of directors' input -> actors' output is a linear dramaturgy, but there is no immediacy here since a medium is involved*

*the actor is not only a channel, but a channel with a parasite, a disturbing noise on the telephone-line between director and audience*

*according to Michel Serres, communication happens at the expense of a third excluded, an un-invited guest: the parasite*

*but I would say that art happens when the excluded third is included and invited*

*apart from being a medium, the actor is also a material thing, a body*

*the material aspect is already a parasite, a disturbance to immediacy of communication*

*the actor is situated in-between text and reception (or director and audience) and this in-betweenness is not a completely smooth passing of a message, the particularities of the medium itself adds flavors to the message, suggesting that the actor inhabits a position to infect intentionality in new directions - an "im" to "provideo"*

*the "im" is not only an embodied/situated/performative HOW, in the logic of: "I will do/say what you ask for, but in ways you didn't expect"*

*it's rather "I will do what you ask for, but you will not know if I did it because you asked me or because I enjoy it"*

*director in SERVE quadrant*

*Johannes: "I found out for instance – on the level of touch – how much of my pleasure (read: joy of directing) derives from being good at SERVING. Setting aside what I prefer and making space for the choice of my counterpart. Contributing to his/her creative process, as best I can. In other words, indulge in being a facilitating director."*

*the pleasure of SERVING tends to be sensitive to how the serving is received and if it's enjoyed by the other part, and it can be hard to know for sure*

*is it acting, of both actor and director, which disguises the true nature of the transference love?*

*the object of desire is not known in the present, only possibly and in retrospect can we gain insights about transference*

*is it possible to register, track, disclose, unveil processes of transference in a live performance?*

*Johannes: "The LIVE-DIRECTING method is a way / a promise for me to come out of the dark, to try to be obvious in my desire. I'm not saying that my instructions will be clear, intelligible signals/messages; they will sure be full of subconscious bruise, but I have hopes that my transference will also be documented."*

*compare to what sometimes is called counter-transference in psychoanalysis: it happens in situations where the analyst cannot help but play out immediate desires, the problem is that these disrupt and threaten to destroy the healing process if not handled with precision and care in the analyst's own analysis with a more experienced therapist. If handled well, counter-transference can be a great asset for the process. But the thing is that things can only be sorted in retrospect, and transparency cannot really be attained in a now, as long as the relation is based on asymmetry. The asymmetry allows one to be spontaneous and the other to keep impulses inside.*



FROM KATHERINE ANGEL  
- PLAY AROUND DOC  
(by Johannes)

*When did we buy the idea that we know what we want, whether in sex or elsewhere? The rhetoric of consent too often implies that an artistic vision desire is something that lies in wait, fully formed within us, ready for us to extract. Yet our visions desires emerge in interaction; we don't always know what we want; sometimes we discover things we didn't know we wanted; sometimes we discover what we want only in the doing. This – that we don't always know and can't always say what we want – must be folded into the ethics of rehearsals sex rather than swept aside as an inconvenience. p.38f*

*We don't always know what we want and we are not always able to express our desires clearly. This is in part due to violence, misogyny and shame that make desire's discovery difficult, and its expression fraught. But it is also in the nature of desire to be social, emergent and responsive – to context, to our histories and to the desires and behaviours of others.*

As a way to stay critical towards the ideological premises and shortcomings of "consent culture" I have continuously engaged with the writings of Katherine Angel, namely with her 2021 publication "Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again". In the document Anders is quoting from below, I played a language game of *Verfremdung*, reframing her findings within the actor-director constellation.

*We are social creatures; and our desires have always emerged, from day one, in relation to those who care, or do not care, for us. Desire never exists in isolation. This is also what makes rehearsals sex potentially exciting, rich and meaningful. How do we make this fact galvanizing rather than paralysing? p.39*

*above speaks for the necessity for actors-directors to learn how to steer transference as a resource for mutual creativity and joy in their relation*

*an established macro or micro consent may possibly establish the necessary trust to begin working, but can a consent harbor/contain/hold the complexity of transference processes, which to an important extent are unconscious to both parties and only retroactively possible to detect, map, sort-out or attribute?*

*with Emma Bigé, the dance-philosopher and choreographer, Im-provideo contains the negation of the ability to foresee what will happen, an antidote against what she calls "canned thought" but what could also be called "canned performativity"*

*the point is that Im-provideo is the gesture/action/cut which creates an exposure of a situation to process, open-endedness, différence, alterity, futurity, otherness, transformation, growing, decay, etc. I guess it's a kind of "bouillon" of segmented experience from my years with "Institutet", with being a professor and now with being a researcher: A basic and distinguishing movement of performing arts (and particularly acting) is to insist and push the acknowledgement of embodied materiality. We are eating, shitting, fucking and dying animals*

*(...)*

*Johannes warning about "sheer combinatorics":*

*"In the orthodoxy of the Wheel, there can be no dynamic between the TAKE and the ACCEPT quadrant for instance, as both parties involved would be inhabiting the RECEIVING half of the Wheel simultaneously.*

*In a similar logic, SERVE and TAKE do not combine, as both parties would find themselves in the DOING half simultaneously, with no one there to be done to."*

*- Hey hunny, let's take a walk on the wild side, let's go into SERVE and TAKE mode... or would you prefer to play TAKE and ACCEPT with me? Let's get toxic, let's be wild!*

*A SORT OF INTERIM GUT FEELING SUMMED UP*

*- it would be interesting for me to investigate both the unhol-  
ly connections between quadrants which cannot live up to  
standards of consent*

*- the shadow territories of consent, can they be accessed with  
deliberation or only without transparency?*

*- not knowing what kind of director-actor-audience appara-  
tus we will construct, and taking for granted that it should  
have a kind of material as a focal point or objective... my  
imagination tends to return to written text, that there is a  
kind of "given" for both director and audience, but that the  
opening is about the HOW of the moment, a moment which  
is open for the agency of director, actor, audience and other  
kinds of factors*

*tbc in conversation <3*

# REFLECTIONS/ SENSE-ABLE TRANSLATIONS/ PLAY



Work Demonstration: excerpt of the transcript of the video version



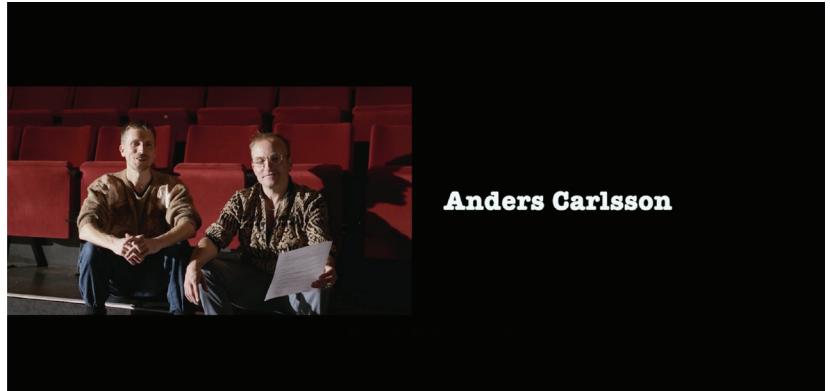
**AQUAVIT IN THE CUP:**  
Rehearsing the COC (Code of Conduct) with Anders Carlsson.

A Brechtian modelbook on the staging of the transference between actor and director.

My name is Johannes Maria Schmit and we're doing this in the context of my research project that is an overall project investigating actor-director configurations.

This is the result of the third PRE-STUDY I've made. The idea of a PRE-STUDY is that it can be applied in a theater of the future. We share our knowledge by demonstrating a practice.

And let me just introduce my collaborator:



, who is a PhD candidate in Gothenburg at the Academy of Music and Drama.

We have been working for four weeks in a laboratory setting with a specific model called the Wheel of Consent. The Wheel of Consent is a therapeutic practice that draws on the practical knowledge of various disciplines of body workers. It has been synthesized by a chiropractor called Betty Martin. In her own words, she is also a "self-propelled erotic adventurer". The objective of our four weeks Pre-study was to experiment with how this therapeutic model could be made – or with Johannes' choice of terms – "transposed" into a rehearsal method.

And we will go step by step, from this therapeutic focus on touch – touching the hand as a beginning –



Actor: Dear Fellow Researchers,



My name is Anders Carlsson, and I am a PhD candidate.  
My area of research is acting and I am your host here tonight.

to an expanded realm  
of artistic doings of other kinds.  
And the purpose is  
and has been to refigure and rehabilitate  
this asymmetric and presumably problematic  
relationship between director and actor.  
The therapeutic model  
has helped us to de-naturalize or make unfamiliar  
this relationship,  
as it has been sedimented  
through our professional experiences.  
We had to unlearn and learn this relation anew in a way.

In my overall project,  
I insist on this disciplinary division  
between actor and director.  
And that is a little bit of a negative response  
to what I call “transdisciplinary quick fixes”.  
Where there is an assumed exchangeability  
of those two positions –  
that is always put forth as a way to rid  
our professions of asymmetries and also antagonisms.

So for this Pre-study I assume the role of the director  
and Anders the role of the actor.  
And we postulated this relation  
between those two roles  
as asymmetric.

What we will demonstrate  
is how the Wheel can be transposed  
to inform a way of working in the theater;  
moving from a practice that is based on touch  
to a practice that includes also seeing and speaking –  
with an increasing degree of complexity.



Initially I would like to discuss some general structures of this event.



Some of you are here as supervisors, some of you are here as staff.  
Some of you are here as other researchers.

### Demonstration #1



What we want to show you now  
is the embodied practice of the Wheel,  
the way it has been originally designed.

We will explore the two dynamics that the Wheel offers.

They are always based on two questions.  
They answer two questions.  
And the first of them being ...  
And the second being ...

**Who is doing ?**

**Who is it for ?**



The relaxed leaning back  
is to tell my body that “it’s for me”  
and, that it’s pleasure and not work.  
As Betty Martin says: I am following the pleasure.  
The first dynamic of the two is initiated by the question:  
how would you like me to touch your hand  
for the next three minutes?

I heard this question, and I check in with myself.

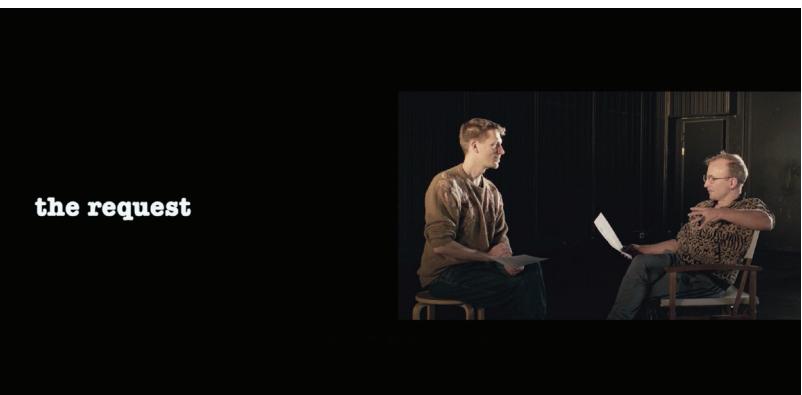


However, the policies I will speak about now, apply to all of you.



Employees and students ... employees and students at Stockholm University of the Arts, SKH, are expected...

I know that this is for me.  
I set aside what I'm only okay with,  
and I go for the most wonderful thing  
that comes to mind.  
Once I can feel a wish emerging,  
I try to be as direct and specific as I can.  
So I try to avoid hinting or using "maybes"  
or "whatever you want to give".  
And I formulate it as a question. "Will you...?"



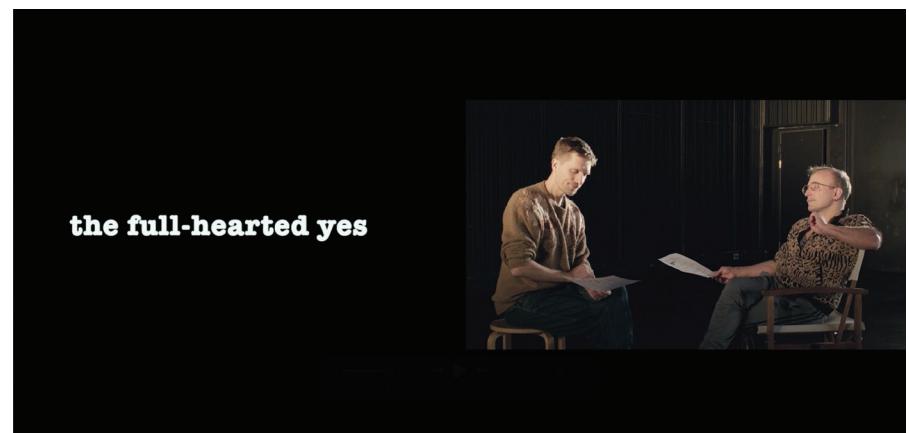
And I take in this request or wish,  
and I check in on my end.  
I honor my limits.  
They could be situational,  
for instance, "here", "now/today" "while being filmed".

All these situational limits  
play a part in whether I am able to give this.  
Because I ask myself the question,  
what am I able to give with a full heart?  
And it might be that when I ask myself that question,  
I need certain clarifications.  
Like I need to find out:  
Okay, what is it exactly that you want?  
Or I need to negotiate the specifics.  
For instance, I could say  
"I can do this part, but I can't do that part."  
And then we do this, we clarify and we negotiate.

Let's say that we have found an agreement.  
This consent is then sealed  
by the receiving person, me,  
rephrasing the request  
according to the negotiations or new agreement  
and then the giving person  
articulating a full-hearted Yes



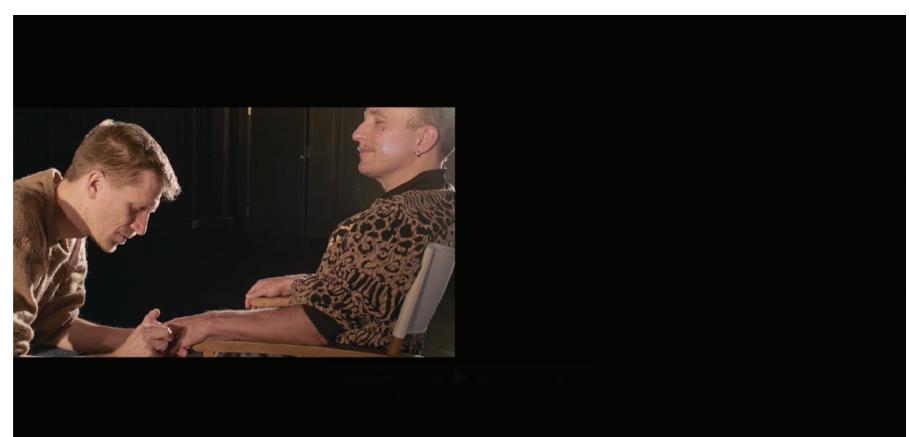
... to take an active part in supporting a good work environment.



the full-hearted yes

And then the three-minute game can start

(...)



(...)



Demonstration #2



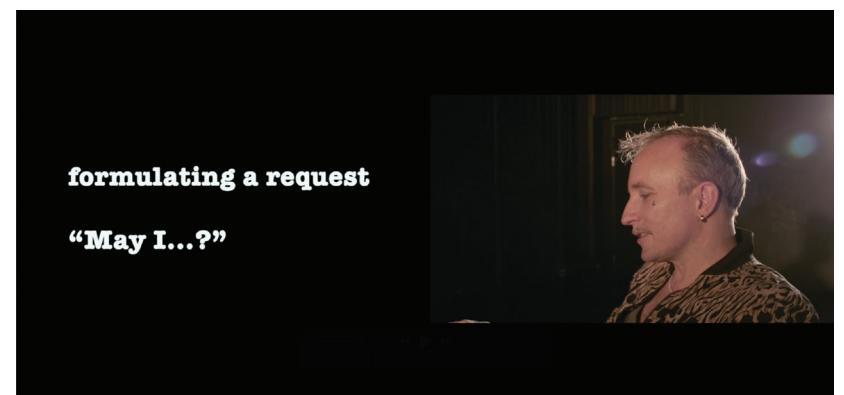
This means a restrictive attitude...



... towards alcohol and drug use.

Now we will show you the other dynamic that the Wheel contains. And it is a bit more counter-intuitive in the sense that the action that will be performed by Anders is still for his own pleasure.

So while we usually associate somebody doing an action with giving, like "giving something to someone else", in this case, it will be for his own sake. And I offer my hand to this. This game is initiated by me asking a slightly different question, and we will jump right into it. I'm going to ask you, Anders: How would you like to touch my hand for the next three minutes?



... kind of paint or draw with my fingertips on your veins and try to follow them and explore their patterns? Very lightly.

I take this in, I consider: is there a situational limit to this? "Today maybe not..." but I actually... No, I don't have a limit towards it. And I can feel that I'm already able to give you a full-hearted Yes. So I will set the timer. For the three minutes to start... and off we go.

[timer rings]



The employer, SKH, students and all employees, have a joint...



... a joint responsibility ...

And I bring my action to completion.  
And it's me saying "thank you".

And I will say "you're welcome".

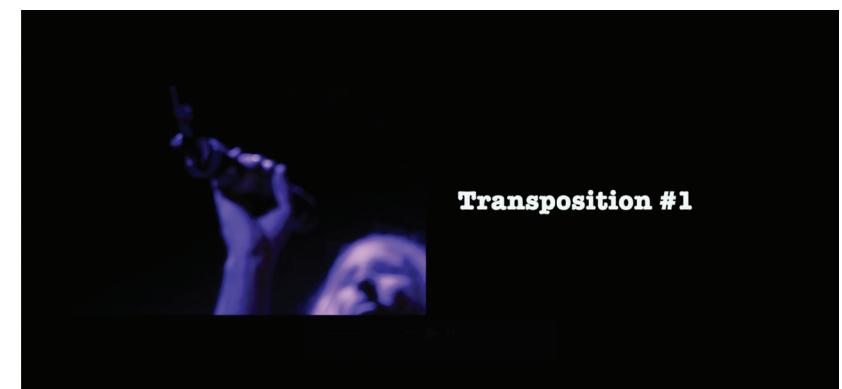
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And this is quite interesting  
in terms of the situation  
with being able to lean  
there is a risk  
that the person in this presence  
or in this dynamic, the person that is doing  
actually starts to give.  
And I, myself, notice, of course,  
that it's pleasurable for me.  
And so there is another type of risk  
that is: I assume that "it's for me".  
So it's a sort of interesting dynamic  
to stay in...  
Betty Martin says:  
whenever you start giving,  
remind yourself  
that it is actually for you  
in that case.

And we call that position  
that I was in here, leaning, TAKING.  
That I'm taking this.  
It's for me.

(...)

**Transposition #1**



As mentioned earlier, we are here today  
to rehabilitate the relationship  
between actor and director



... to promote a positive and creative environment.



And this means a dissociation...

in its asymmetry.  
And for this purpose, the TAKE and ALLOW dynamic,  
where we are sitting now,  
seems to be the proper starting point.



Yes. The TAKE quadrant  
especially seems to be extra charged  
when it comes  
to the position of the director.  
Because the TAKE quadrant  
accumulates a lot of asymmetry.  
The things that are happening in  
the TAKE quadrant are “for me”.  
So they are feeding into my, let’s say, directorial vision.  
And at the same time  
it is also me that is “doing”.  
I am in control, let’s say, of timing,  
of suggestions, of... I have the agency.

So it’s a quadrant that really ...  
where two things intersect that have been  
problematised mostly in their “shadow side”.  
So it’s very hard to tell the difference  
between a TAKING  
that is within the borders of consent  
and the shadow side  
that would be “stealing”.

If we now want to rehabilitate  
this asymmetry between us,  
then it’s interesting to understand that  
there is a sensitivity that invests  
a lot of attention into the two quadrants  
that are on the giving end, where you’re doing things  
for the partner.



... from drugs, doping agents and other habit-forming substances.



By entering this event we all agree to respect each other's physical, mental and emotional boundaries within the space.

Now Anders is sitting in ALLOW but there's also SERVE.

In a rehearsal process there can be a group dynamics that identifies with Anders' position very much as somebody that is maybe "pushed over" maybe "enduring".

While this TAKE position is often seen as some kind of, in a colloquial sense, pervert, somebody that has an illegitimate desire. And what we try now with this exercise, playing the Wheel without touch, but still staying in these dynamics, is to train our consent skills, so we can actually manifest this line between TAKING and "stealing" and emphasize it.

(...)

So now we're going to play a three-minute game. And I'm sitting here in ALLOW. And I'm initiating this game by asking: "Johannes... here and now, how would you like... or what would you like to do to me the next three minutes?" Now Johannes is a little bit checking in. Perhaps he has an emergence of... a kind of emerging desire or a request.

Yeah, I have something.

Okay.

And in this dynamic, I will always formulate with "May I...?"

May I, Anders, spin you around like, in a way that you are on the floor and I will, mostly hold you ... we will mostly be in touch by the hands. And I would spin you within this circle that we have now.



We don't tolerate racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, misogyny ...



... or any other oppressive behaviour or language.

Not as a consent circle,  
but just as a space.  
But sometimes I would also like  
to spin you on your feet.

Spin me on my feet?

Like like like by holding your feet.  
So, like, you would always be more  
or less on your spine.

Oh, yeah.  
With my spine.

Yeah, exactly.  
And I would use your feet to spin you.

A clarifying question would be:  
do you want me to be like a beetle  
on my back...  
offering both my arms and legs perhaps?  
And you are going to spin me, right?

Yeah.

And is it important for your enjoyment  
that it works?  
That we get a spin on it?

Yeah.

It matters in the sense  
that I should feel like  
it's very easy for me to do this.  
I think I should feel ...  
I want to feel competent in terms  
of being able to produce  
a lot of movement  
by seemingly little action.

Yeah, I see, I see.  
That can depend on the friction  
you know, from what I'm wearing right now  
and it will not help if I undress,  
I think it will be even worse.  
Just with those clarifying questions,  
I can give you a full-hearted Yes.  
I want to try this.

Okay.



Never... assume consent!



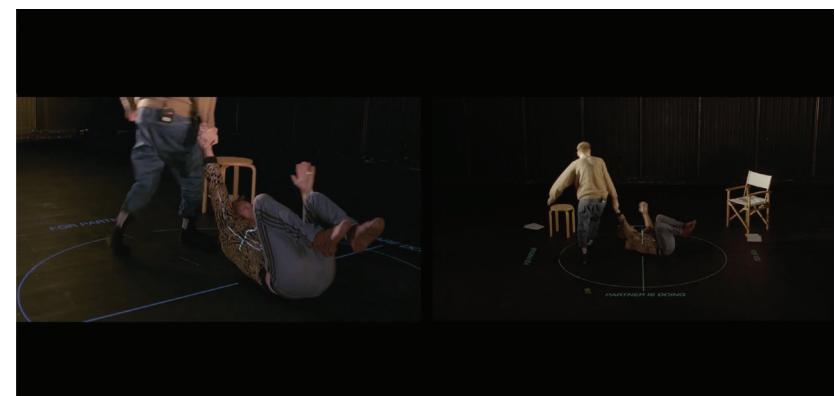
Be aware of your prejudices, privileges, behaviours and the space you occupy.

Fantastic.  
Then I will re-ask my question:  
“Will you, for the next  
three minutes, allow me to spin you  
by touching both your hands and your feet?”

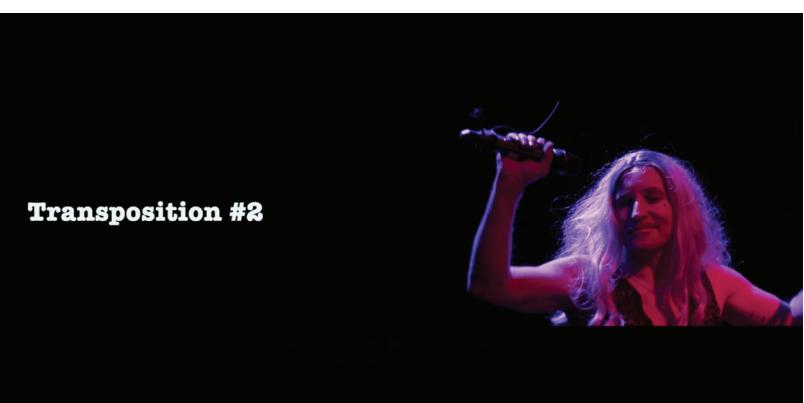
Yes.

So then we get rid of our chairs, right?

(...)



(...)



### Transposition #2

In our next section,  
we will show you some of the adjustments  
that we deemed necessary  
to turn this therapeutic practice  
into a method of artistic creation.



Avoid using perfume !



Never ! ...

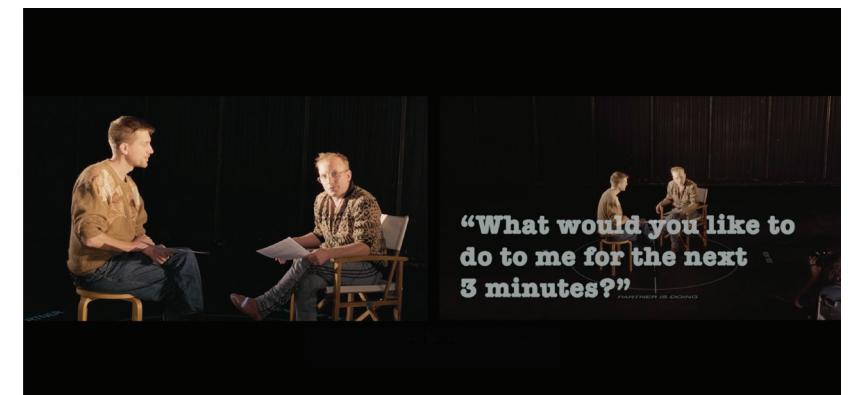
And we do that  
by doing a first move outside  
of the therapeutic practice,  
by playing a three-minute game  
that doesn't involve touch.

Not necessarily.

Not necessarily. Yeah, exactly.

And we're going to stay,  
with this dynamic in TAKE and ALLOW,  
we only swapped seats.

And as you know by now it starts  
with the person in ALLOW,  
Johannes in this case,  
asking this question to the person in TAKE  
and now in the variation  
of this question,  
it could be like this:



Instead of asking,  
“How would you like to touch me?”  
we will just go with “What would you like  
to do to me for the next three minutes?”

And what I'm about to do now  
is to formulate  
something that we have called  
a “request” so far.  
But let's problematize  
that term a little bit  
because we found that necessary.  
“Request” belongs to a rather cognitive approach



... assume the identity, sexuality, gender, pronoun, health or sickness, ability or background of others.



Director: I think this works really nice. The montage of those two texts and gestures: lenience and retribution.

to human interaction;  
IT language or economical language.  
And what I mean by that is  
that there is a risk of aligning the Wheel  
with what I would call a logic of  
confidence culture.  
Where a lot of emphasis is given to our ability  
to articulate,  
to know our desire.  
“Request” carries this undertone of a  
desire completely intelligible to ourselves,  
accessible to the subject at any moment,  
as if consent was the result of  
a symmetric equation of input and output.  
And while such an assumption of control  
might be productive for therapeutic purposes,  
artistic work will not benefit from it, I would claim.  
Because we deal with emergence  
and loss of control, unforeseeable events,  
and so on.  
We invite those qualities.  
In short, the unconscious.

So how to crank the Wheel  
out of this  
cognitive-behavioral matrix that we feel  
it risks falling into?  
In other words, how to soak it  
in the juice of an active transference?  
One point  
of entry for letting an unconscious agency  
into the dynamics of the Wheel  
is to exchange the term “request”  
with an alternative term.

And what this term should do or perform  
is the acknowledgment that desire or the unconscious  
is not an individual digging  
in the depths, in the vertical depth.  
It's rather a horizontal...  
horizontally in a Lacanian sense  
so that the unconscious is a channeling  
of something out there.  
Something that is in the air  
or because of someone  
looking on or a camera being present.  
In other words, it is phantasmatic.  
And looking for an alternative term, we, of course,



First with the coffee cup with aquavit: "That alcohol policy is just a dull paper, right? ...



... but not the CODE OF CONDUCT!"

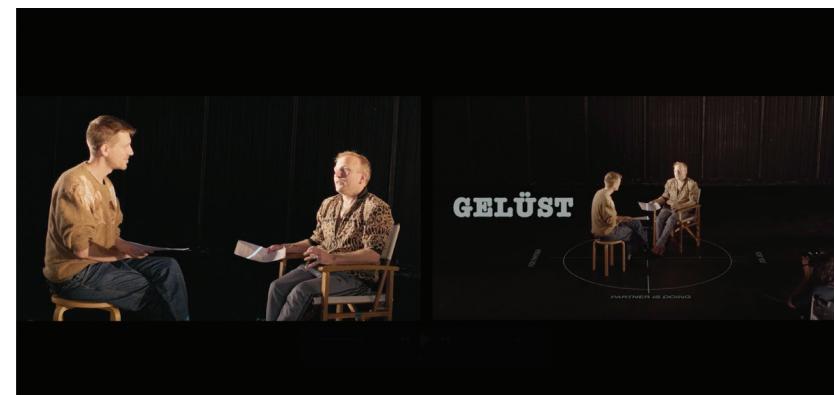
need an alternative word.  
And the one that we suggest here  
comes from the experience  
of teaching German-speaking directing and acting students.  
And one student,  
when we were trying to fit  
all these Wheel of Consent words...  
when we were trying to translate them,  
one student  
came up with a German equation of "request"  
that she called "Gelüst".  
"Gelüst" might not speak to you immediately.  
And for now,  
it can also stand as an empty signifier.  
We will just use it  
as a technical term in German.  
However, it is interesting to somehow  
compare it  
to the mother tongues we have.

In Swedish it would be "böjelse"  
and in English "inclination" maybe.

And "Gelüst" of course has yet another ring,  
but in German definitely,  
It has a kind of baroque undertone,  
something of a De Sadian empire or universe.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The libertine.  
It could also have something to do  
with perversion or "the pervert".

(...)



After this parenthesis now,

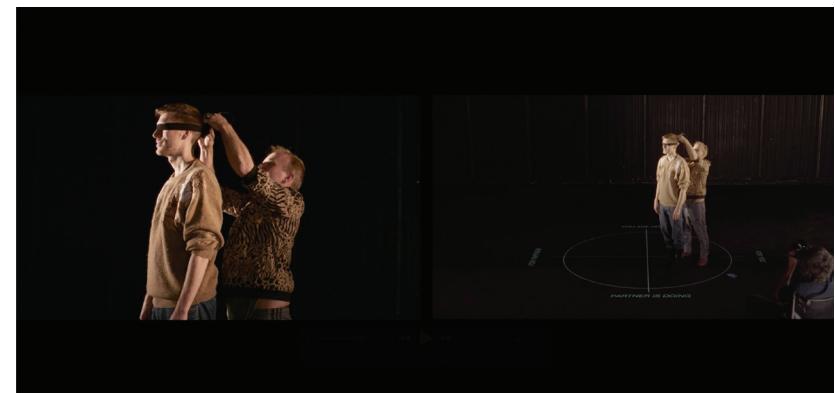


You get this extreme host/hostage-taker energy. This “Dog Day’s Afternoon”-vibe. “Remember: I, Sonny Wortzik, am the victim here!”



I don't think we are playing a trans-woman...

problematizing the idea of a “request” and exchanging it with the notion of “Gelüst”, we will play our game, and see what that change of term... how it affects our three-minute game.  
(...)



[timer rings]

Thank you.

You're welcome.

(...)

### Transposition #3



In our third demonstration, we will mark the disciplinary divide between actor and director with a cut like this.



We can just play a white guy in a wig.



Because if everything has to be respected...



And, in this specific setting – of an imaginary audience presence – this situation of rehearsals can remind us of a Brechtian conception of rehearsals as potentially public. And that, of course, has a lot to do with the notion that we've discussed about the phantasmatic of a rehearsal situation or the shared horizontal space. (...) We will now play two last three-minute games in our disciplines. We have arrived at the point where Anders is – as an actor – and me – as a director – in the dynamics. And we start with SERVE and ACCEPT. Anders in SERVE, me in ACCEPT. And this is what I call the default setup of theater, if you want, but also specifically of the director's theater.

And now in this specific spatial setup with an auditorium and a stage, the initiating question will be,



Actor: ... then no assumptions about my identity can be made anyways!



Just because I have a penis... Don't assume anything...



Although Johannes described that as the “default setup of theater”, note that this way of putting the question actually, gives me, the actor, the decision of when the rehearsal begins.

So now Johannes is checking in or has already.

I have something coming.  
And in the SERVE and ACCEPT dynamics  
I start my question by “Will you...?”

Will you, Anders,  
hide the fact that you're working  
for George?  
Like every action  
that I will tell you to do  
will be informed by the desire  
to look good on the camera  
now, of this video,  
but will you hide that from me?  
So will you make me feel  
that I am the point of focus  
and everything that I say?  
That would be  
how I would like to direct you.

And maybe if I spin  
on and fantasize a bit more,  
it could be a  
fictional situation  
that I direct you into.



... just because you see this !



Yeah, it could be  
a situation that I decide upon in the moment  
what it should be.  
That's my GELÜST.  
That's the first thing that I see.

Now some clarifying questions.  
You will give me some kind of situation  
and I will act for you  
but secretly actually  
acting for the camera  
to look good on the camera,  
but I don't necessarily  
look straight into the camera?

That would be not hiding it from me.  
It's important that you hide it from me.

Yeah. Okay.  
Is there more  
that I would need to ask on that?

Now Anders is also checking in,  
and we're playing on all planes  
of an aesthetic limit of an ethical limit.

Nothing more comes to mind,  
so I think I'm ready to jump into this.  
So you have a full hearted Yes.

Fantastic.

(...)

Your knee has this shot.  
And now you look up to the sky  
and there's snow coming on you.  
It's snowing on you.



Director: That's a twist that makes it really harder to read.



I really like this dramaturgy of inviting the audience by mocking guidelines...



(...)

Thank you.

You're welcome.

---

What we will do now is play a last game.  
 And as you can see, we haven't changed  
 anything in terms of our disciplines.  
 It's still me down here,  
 as a director, Anders as an actor.  
 But we swapped the positions within the Wheel.

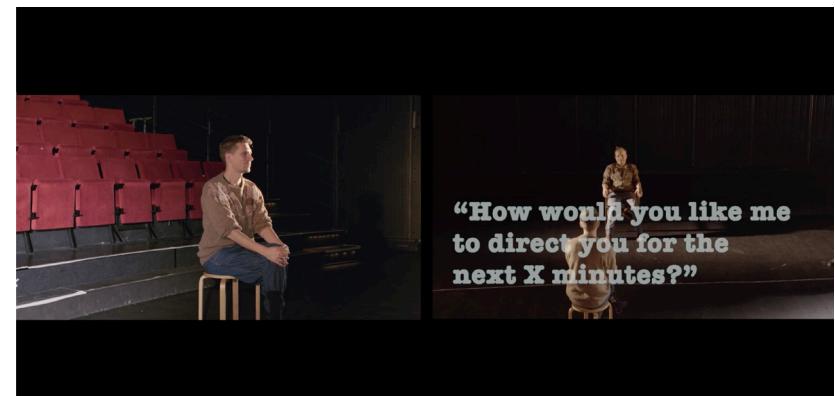
So within the SERVE and ACCEPT dynamic,  
 I am in SERVE now, which is indicated  
 by me not having anything to lean on.  
 So I am in the giving half.  
 While Anders, as an actor, is in the receiving half  
 And the way it works as a game now  
 - I have the control over initiating -  
 and I do that by asking Anders:



... but your oppressive behaviour ??! That's not re[dick]ulous.



It's so nice...



There is obviously a GELÜST coming up.

It's always the most stupid idea that comes first.  
But that might be something in it.  
So I try to expand on it and see if it...  
I would like us...  
no, I should formulate it like this.

It's for you.

So will you, Johannes, direct me  
for the next three minutes ...

(...)



What we aspired to demonstrate here



“Don’t assume anything ! ... Just because you see this !”



“That’s just your projections! That’s your prejudice!”

was that the Wheel of Consent allows us to destabilize power positions without suspending our respective disciplines.

And in spite of asymmetry in roles, function, and influence, the Wheel of Consent can help us to trouble the default conceptions of, for example, authorship, initiative, mastery over time, etc.

So this is suggesting that – possibly – trans- or post disciplinary approaches are not the only way to trouble or destabilize power in rehearsal situations.

There is even a utopian scenario of a split rehearsal day where the initiative is redistributed ...  
 Let’s say, in the morning, the ensemble would be in the giving half of the Wheel – that means in SERVE and ALLOW – while the director is in the receiving half.  
 The director would be in TAKE or ACCEPT.  
 And then in the evening it would be the other way around.  
 Let’s say the director would then be in SERVE – just like I have been in the most recent game – or the director would be in ALLOW and the actor in TAKE.

So the initiative, as you’ve seen, of starting a game is always in the giving half. So SERVE and ALLOW assume mastery over time. And in that sense, the morning rehearsal I’ve just described would only start when the ensemble, the actor, is asking the question, “how would you like to direct me or us?” And in that sense an essential power of the director, which is related to starting a rehearsal, but also cutting off improvisations, is suspended by the help of the Wheel.



Hihih!

And that is sort of  
one of the promises it makes.  
We're not all the way through with  
exploring all its possibilities for  
an actor director-relation  
or for rehearsals as such.  
But this is what we got.

\*

So thank you.

Thank you.

## **REGIEBUCH 4 (Concluding chapters)**

## X PRELUDE – “What the hell were you doing in this house?”

In 1998 Lars von Trier publishes a “diary”, that he recorded during the production of his film *The Idiots*; the second movie made in compliance with the obstructions agreed upon by the “Dogma 95” signatories.<sup>197</sup> The book – also containing the original screenplay – presents a transcript of “daily diary entries”, originally recorded by the director with a dictaphone. Von Trier’s oral journaling spanned over a period of roughly 5 months (21.5.-15.10.1997) covering the rehearsals, the actual shoot and the beginning of the editing process. “In keeping with the spirit of Dogma”, von Trier states in a short prefatory note to the print edition, “I have neither read nor corrected the text.” (von Trier 1998, 159, my translation<sup>198</sup>)

\*

When I started my artistic research in 2019, I was intrigued by this relentless method of documenting a directorial process. Back then, I had just heard some audio excerpts of the actual dictaphone recordings, as they figure in the *making of* devoted to *The Idiots* – a

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<sup>197</sup> The signatories of the so-called “chastity vow” were Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg (the director of Dogma #1, *The Celebration*). They signed on behalf of the “Dogma collective” which further consisted of the directors of Dogma #3 (*Mifune’s last song* by Søren Kragh-Jacobsen) and Dogma #4 (*The King is Alive* by Kristian Levring) For the actual text of the “chastity vow” and the “manifest” as well as a contemporary perspective (all in English) cf. the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of the Danish film magazine p.o.v. dedicated to *Aspects of Dogma* (Raskin 2000).

<sup>198</sup> For lack of English versions, all translations of publications in Danish in *Regiebuch 4* are my own. The longer passages of von Trier’s diary (that I mostly work with below) can also be found in their original form in the endnotes.

documentary by Jesper Jargil with another Dostoevskian sounding title: *De ydmygede* [The Humiliated] (1998).

Taking inspiration in Lars von Trier's "sound" of oral journaling, the "diary format" was little later going to structure the fictitious rehearsal process within my first Pre-study (*Sarah's Director*). In my later narrativization of it, however, the reference to the "confession booth" in Sami Saif's *Dogville* documentary has always prevailed (cf. Chapter 4 and PS#1, online resources). And in fact – after years of futile attempts to dig up *The Humiliated* in the folds of the Internet again – I had almost forgotten about the dictaphone diary. In other words, by the end of it, I had forgotten the beginning of my PhD project. And only through a recently published essay collection (Albinus 2024) – authored by the most prominent actor of the ensemble of *The Idiots* – was I reminded of this exquisite documentation's existence. Remembering a forgetting that somewhat informed my first artistic research "invention" (cf. Kirkkopolto 2015, 51) – and that shall now serve as an entrance into these concluding chapters.

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In his "Essays on Theater, Delusions and Failures" from 2024 the Danish actor Albinus recounts the inner trajectory the international breakthrough of *The Idiots* has sent him on. During his reflections, Albinus keeps on circling back to the field of German theater in particular that – given the agalmic radiation of what he critically terms "fænomenet Lars von Trier" (129) [the phenomenon Lars von Trier] – kept on hiring him as an actor throughout the three decades to come. In the essay where he specifically reflects the haunting success of the movie ('Du store idiot' ['You great idiot']), he ventilates his discontent of continuously being reduced to his performance as STOFFER dating back to the summer of 1997. ("Stoffer" is the

character name of the group leader of the pretense “idiots”; a nick name derived from “Kristoffer”, but also the Danish slang expression for “drugs”.<sup>199</sup>)

It is also in this context that he recalls “the most honest conversation I have ever had with anyone about the movie” (Albinus 2024, 126). The scene in which this conversation is set, plays out right after the world premiere of *The Idiots* in Cannes, where von Trier’s film is *ex ante* attributed the cult–status it will, in fact, come to have. Due to a concussion Albinus suffered some weeks earlier, he had to cancel his following film and theater jobs, leaving him disoriented under the flashlights on the Côte d’Azur. According to his own account, he lands in Copenhagen both “*broke* and mentally *broken*” (Albinus, 127). Meanwhile, the book version of Lars von Trier’s dictaphone diary has appeared in Denmark’s most renowned publishing house; with the tabloid press immediately extracting the “juiciest” passages from it. In particular the director’s ambivalent infatuation with one of the actresses proves to make good material for scandalizing headlines. On the way back from France, von Trier is himself stuck in traffic jams on the German highways and therefor asks Albinus to urgently pass by his wife, who is currently trying to make sense of the “revelations” in the press and the “reality” of the process. Commissioned by “his” director to provide the missing link (and possibly take the biggest blow), “Stoffer” arrives in a home filled with empty bottles and overflowing ashtrays.

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<sup>199</sup> I will admit that I myself have been high on STOFFER, too, reducing the actor to this *one role*. The words and way by which Albinus initiates the “orgy scene” – a scene that lifts *The Idiots* uncannily far above the comedy genre – have stuck with me and many of my *Regietheater*-socialized colleagues as a kind of cult phrase. Not knowing what he was exactly saying in Danish – “gruppeknald!” [group fuck!] - we *did* get the defiant intonation right: excessively repeating his words on all occasions we were ourselves – up until the early 2010s, at least – deluded by “fænomenet Jens Albinus”. As a close witness of the “social turn” in theater, Albinus proposes his own poignant analysis of its origins and effects. To compare his experiential account of the 1999 production of Strindberg’s “Father” at the *Volksbühne* – his first commission at a German theater – with the one of the 2023 staging at “Nibelungenfestspiele Worms” is highly informative of the transition I have myself attempted to describe in *Terracing the territory III*.

Bente Trier's distress is not alleviated by the fact that the warm memory of her pregnancy runs as a side story through her husband's diary; with the birth of the couple's twins making for an aside amid the "love story" between actress and director. ("Oh yes, by the way, we had two children the day before yesterday." (von Trier, 281)) Taking further into account that – as a professional pedagogue – she is an outsider to the film industry and possibly estranged by its sketchy work environments from the outset, Albinus has quite a task in mediation before him. He manages well, however, allowing for von Trier's wife to "flip the lid" (Albinus, 128): "What the hell...?", she bursts out while hitting the table, "what the hell were you doing in this house?"

\*

Arguably, this justified indignation of Bente Trier in 1998 has turned into a general sensibility in the course of the last 30 years. After the social turn – of which I have discussed the specific effects regarding the rehearsal space in *Terracing the Territory III*. – we all find ourselves sitting in the sofa spot of Jens Albinus back then; awkwardly sinking into the gap between a "questionable process" and a "great artwork". Here, however, when taking the emotional charge out of Bente's question (the melodrama of empty bottles dancing on a sofa table hit by a fist) we might find the exact inquiry I have pursued in this PhD project: What is the heterotopic logic of a work environment of which the aim is play? What are the specifics of the professional relation between actor and director within? Which ethical lens is attuned to that relation/space, which one is not? And, finally, on the methodological plane, but still concerned with the questions above: what are the appropriate formats for documenting and analyzing the relational settings of theater making as such?

Living up to the emphatic interrogation – “*what the hell* were you doing in your research?” – I will try to sum-up the findings of this thesis in what is to follow. First, I do so with reference to my own practical explorations, i.e. within the simulations of the Pre-studies (Conclusion 1); and in a second step I sustain my argument with the “anecdotal theory” that can be inductively harvested from Lars von Trier’s dictaphone diary (Conclusion 2).

## Y TWO WAYS TO CONCLUDE

### Conclusion 1: Eleven deductions

I started out with diagnosing the crisis of *Regie* first and foremost as a crisis of the professional relation between actor and director. In my reading, this crisis is brought about by an *expansionist take* on the rehearsal space historically rooted in the avant-gardes, i.e. in an eccentric motion breaking down its walls from inside to approximate art and life. In this expansionist move directorial competences end up conflating artistic mandate with managerial power over actors, which has led to what we in recent years have called “toxic” institutional cultures. In the micro-scale of the rehearsal space this crisis reverberates in particular in the non-foreseeable moments of the actor-director interactions; in that regard, the *improvisation*, an essential tool of rehearsing, has come under scrutiny for being the privileged site of unwanted transgressions.

As a reaction to this crisis, I have described the tendency to no longer make a difference between the logics of the *inside* and *outside* of the rehearsal space; but to evaluate its interactions by applying the same moral standards to both spheres. I have elaborated on the phantasmatic vanishing point of this motion as a rehearsal space liberated of affect, psychodynamics and transferential energy; and put the nuancing question in response: how do we avoid *mystification* of the actor-director relation while simultaneously acknowledging the

fact of an unconscious at work in our collaborative processes? By what means – other than bivalent logics – can we *account* for the agency of the unconscious?

In response to what I describe as the *dismantling* of the walls of the rehearsal space – this time in a concentric motion, outside-in – I have thus worked on proposing something that I call the “Space of Rehearsals”. The Space of Rehearsals is the sphere of safe and ecstatic play, of desire and freedom that opens consensually between actor and director. The Space of Rehearsals as I conceptualize it – by help of practical experimentation as well as theoretical reflection – is supposed to safeguard highly intuitive operations by which, amongst other things, the exposure to the *non-foreseeable*, the *im-provisus* is possible again.

In the following I recount how I arrived at the Space of Rehearsals proposed in this thesis, with a special focus on the findings of the three Pre-studies. Below you will find 11 deductions that result from my research endeavor and that I will sustain in the course of this conclusion.

1. Affect is the material pre-condition for the work of acting. It is also a necessary “instrument” in the actor–director relation.
2. Affect in the rehearsal space is the effect of the transference between actor and director.
3. The transference between actor and director is an effect of intimacy and asymmetry in the setting of the rehearsal space.
4. The transference is unconscious but can be re-staged.
5. The actualization of the *rapport* between actor and director during rehearsals provokes the re-staging of the transference.
6. This re-staging cannot be managed unilaterally by the director but must be curated in a joint effort with the actor.
7. The intermediate layer to help the curation of the transference is provided by the container of the Wheel of Consent.

8. The Wheel of Consent's container safeguards the agency of the situation-specific knowledge form of *phronesis* in the Space of Rehearsals.
9. With the help of the Wheel of Consent's container the affect (that is the effect of the transference) is "objectified".
10. In the Space of Rehearsal these "objectified affects" can play out without real life consequences and be used for the work of acting.
11. The Space of Rehearsals is thereby established as "salle de répétitions" [hall of repetitions] in both a Brechtian and psychoanalytic sense

### *The necessity of affective dynamics in the actor-director relation*

From Pre-study #1 I am able to conclude that the affective dynamics intrinsic to the actor–director relation are a necessary pre–condition for the work of acting. In Sarah's conception it is primarily the director's task to provide her with what she productively understands as "irritation". In the following quote she goes as far as to evoke the metaphor of "care work" when it comes to providing an atmosphere in the rehearsal space where affect is welcomed.

Somebody has to produce irritation, I believe, in a rehearsal space. It can be the intern, if you like, or whoever – but there wasn't anyone *who took care of that*. Generally speaking, I'm happy if the director does that. But my [director] ... you didn't do it. It was simply a very beautiful atmosphere in which everyone was really comfortable and in which, from my perspective, nothing happened to rehearse *A Streetcar Named Desire* or to find anything out about it.

*(The prompted interview, Johannes' Edit; 13:50; my emphasis)*

The material point of this argument is striking: the emotions the actor works with have to come from somewhere. The character's fictional circumstance can be an inspiration, a channel or – to paraphrase Sarah – define the stakes of the overall artistic ambition (Sarah's Edit: 18:36). But without a "hook in reality", an atmospheric counterpart in the rehearsal space,

they are too abstract to enable an authentic performance. Walking the fine line between a technique promoting the complete surrender to the present affect on the one hand (cf. exemplarily Strasberg 1987) and its postdramatic circumvention on the other (cf. “the performer” of chapter B), Sarah differentiates further:

If I'm angry for real my acting is bad. When I'm acting that I'm angry my acting is good. The anger is. But I have to get into a situation in which I could really be angry. And then I find myself another exit, shortly before. And that is the acting. I don't go to the anger. I stand right in front of the anger and then I take the other exit. But it still is good if I am in a situation in which I am right in front of it. Or right in front of sadness, right in front of joy.

(*The prompted interview, Sarah's Edit; 9:55*)

As our rehearsal-simulation demonstrated, these affects productive in acting are foremost derived from the concrete transference between the actress and the director; as well as between the actress and her colleagues. The fictional characters are thus not the starting points, but function as intermediate layers or catalysts that anticipate and shape the possibilities of these concrete relations. To some extent they provide the scenery for the re-staging of both transferences. In the case of Pre-study #1 that scenery would for instance be the relation of the characters Stanley Kowalski and Blanche Du Bois. The active avoidance of *Sarah's Director* to mirror the dynamics of male perpetrator and female victim in the fiction play out in the “reality” of the rehearsal.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Cf. Chapter C for the discussion of the enhancing effects of the “rehearsal simulation” when it comes to the intelligibility of the transference. A “synopsis” of the transferential dynamics in regard to the fiction of Pre-study #1 could read like this: Sarah, Johannes and the ensemble are rehearsing *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the American classic by Tennessee Williams, charged with volatile content such as domestic and sexual violence. Sarah is assigned the part of Blanche DuBois, the “glamorous outsider”, dependent on the “kindness of strangers”. In the course of rehearsals, the conflict between the main cast and the director becomes more and more acute due to opposed concepts of good collaboration: while Sarah upholds that rehearsals have to harbor temporal asymmetry for the sake of an idiosyncratic result, Johannes – given the content of the piece – attempts for an ethically sustainable, transparent collaboration with the whole ensemble. The drama culminates when the director is presented with the option of firing the actor playing Stanley Kowalski who is obviously not living up to the standard of excellency set by Blanche, the character, as well as Sarah, the actress.

Similar to the fictional characters, also the authors themselves have the potential to punch out the structure of the transference between actor and director. That is especially if they have been canonized as *auteurs* over time and radiate the socratic agalma of “supposed knowledge”; as can for instance be seen quite clearly in our various transferences onto Chantal Akerman in Pre-study #2.

### *The transference and the productivity of asymmetry*

Meanwhile, the psychoanalytic notion of transference (unpacked in Chapter 5) provides us with a language for the productivity of these affective dynamics anchored in the reality of the Space of Rehearsals. By reading the actor-director relation as a *rappoport*, I therefore installed a resonance between the various psychoanalytic traditions and the logics of the rehearsal space. In that regard, it is in particular the *technical* aspects of analytic praxis that were important; as well as the discussion of the analyst’s phronetic competence in “knowing when”. (For instance, *when* to offer the interpretation of the transference to the analysand.) Implicitly, psychoanalysis also provides us with different suggestions of *curating* the transference in a shared effort, so we do not have to be afraid of creating the conditions for it.

In an admittedly quite eclectic manner, I nowadays apply pre-Lacanian, more pragmatic notions such as “positive” and “negative transference” (cf. Winnicott) as well as the “counter-transference” (cf. Heimann) alongside core concepts of Lacan’s structural take (where the affect is a mere indicator of the fact of transference, but not the transference itself).

In the interest of a Space of Rehearsals welcoming the agency of the unconscious, I relied strongly on the way Lacan conceptualizes the “mechanism” of transference; and thereby also hints to the *techne* of establishing it. His emphasis on the productivity of asymmetry within the *rappoport* (in relation to knowledge, that is) allows me to highlight different actor-director

configurations; of which three concrete ones have emerged and are represented in the respective Pre-Studies.

#1: On the continuum of symmetric or asymmetric configurations in relation to “supposed knowledge”, *Sarah’s Director* is asked to lay full claim to the *subject supposed to know*. Whether his/her authoritative position is assigned by the institution or by the ensemble, whether it is based on actual competence or the “chance gesture of the analyst” described in Chapter 5,III; the importance lies in *embodying it*. All this, in the interest of establishing the transference and thereby generating the artistically productive asymmetry of which the friction (“irritation”) is the result.

#2: This Pre-study suggests a very different position for the *subject supposed to know*. It can in fact no longer be found unilaterally in the director anymore, insofar as the *performauthor* is operating from both the actor’s and the director’s seat, “knowing and not knowing, being seen and seeing, (...) moving while creating an image” (cf. LTJ, online resources). Rather than as an instructor installed on the vantage point of “supposed knowledge”, *Claire’s Director* is invited into the rehearsal space as a *subject supposed to desire*. The desire of the director, in turn, is welcomed as idiosyncratic and radical as in the classical *Regietheater*, but it does not organize the entire scenery of rehearsals anymore, let alone the mise-en-scène. The directorial desire can therefore also be subject to the interpretation of the *performauthor*; and as we have demonstrated (cf. the last exercise in “A study in transference”, online resources), s/he can even generate performative material from explicitly unpacking it.

Nevertheless, also in this actor-director configuration the transference is sought after as an artistic driving force. With inspiration in the fields of dance and performance art, a score was established to organize the asymmetry it involves. This is the Wheel of Consent’s container, which I have conceptualized as a rehearsal method in chapter 7.

#3: With the Wheel of Consent as an intermediate score to establish and curate asymmetry, it was possible to reintroduce the disciplinary divide between actor and director (demanded in Pre-study #1 and questioned by the *performauthor* of #2), albeit in a defamiliarized manner. One of the most important findings of Pre-study #3 is that – with the help of the Wheel's dynamics – the position of “supposed knowledge” can alternate between actor and director *without* them suspending their respective disciplines. This is due to the fact that within the Wheel the *subject supposed to know* always resides in the receiving half. Very concretely (and at the same time more structurally) speaking: the “supposed knowledge” – Agamben's Roman “genius”, as it were – always sits with the *person leaning*; a position that is available to both actors and directors during rehearsals and with which they can take turns.

With the help of the Wheel's container the directorial mandate is thus established *ad hoc* and specific to the site. *Anders' Director* thereby gets to work from the position of an authority transparently defined from within the rehearsal space. An authority independent of the (good or bad) culture of an institution but nevertheless absolute in its temporally and spatially limited iteration. As shown in the work demonstration “Rehabilitating Asymmetry in the Actor-Director Relation” (cf. WD, online resources), *Anders' Director* is invited to both desire enigmatically *and* temporarily monopolize the available agency (mostly from within the TAKE and ALLOW dynamic). However, there is no secret intention or hidden agenda at play; no master plan or longer-term transactional scheme between actor and director outside the confines of the rehearsal space.

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To sum up: within the restored confines of the rehearsal space, the *subject supposed to know* of the classical directors' theater re-appears in a *defamiliarized* shape; proposing radically

and enigmatically, but entangled in the two questions (“May I?” and “Will you?”) that invite for the maieutics of desire on the ensemble’s end. Actor and director thus jointly create the performative conditions for the Space of Rehearsals as a safe environment; “safe” in the radical sense that a subconscious agency can play out in it without real life consequences.

### *Curating the transference in the Space of Rehearsals*

As pointed out in Chapter 5, I the English translation of Freud’s wording proposes “*managing* the transference” to describe the analyst’s work with it. Etymologically the translation strikes close to the original German “*handhaben*”; a verb that could also be rendered as “*handling* the transference”, which implies the same root metaphor as “*manipulating*” with its original neutral meaning of “*handling* something skillfully by *hand*”. (Both “*management*” and “*manipulation*” are derived from the Latin noun for hand: “*manus*”.) “*Management*” and “*Handhabung*” thus appropriately reflect the notion of mastery, that implies the sovereignty of the analyst in regard to the unpredictable unconscious of the analysand.

Contrary to what the Freudian *techne* of psychoanalytic mastery suggests, a “Re-invented *Regietheater*” proposes the *curation* of the transference to be a joint endeavor of both actor and director. Perhaps surprisingly at first glance – and unlike the unilateral “care work” suggested to *Sarah’s Director* – the maintenance of the asymmetry in their *rappor*t contains a symmetrically distributed responsibility.

By using the term “curation” I propose an *artistic* responsibility that both actor and director can take towards the transference happening between them. This proposition necessitated from the “problem” posed by the *performauthor* in relation to the director as *subject supposed to know* and was theoretically sustained by Luce Irigaray’s suggestions for undercutting the passive/active divide in the analytic relation.

In Pre-study #2 and #3 I have thus worked with ways of capturing the transference as a theatrical object, a “scene” so to speak, in the Space of Rehearsals. Given its unconscious nature, the possibilities of tracking it in real time proved to be limited though. The attempts to capture its *Gestalt* while entangled in directing and acting usually eclipsed the main focus that these activities require. The curatorial effort in question will therefore mostly consist of “*re-stagings*” of the transference.

As proposed in the Pre-studies, this can be done by creating an artistic interpretation of the *rapport* exterior to the immediate material (cf. Chapter B, “the third thing”); with some of the tried-and-tested formats in this thesis being the “prompted interview”, the “simultaneous letter” or “the modelbook”.

These formats have of course emerged from a genuine artistic research context, where time and resources are allocated in accordance with the defined research endeavor and its methodological quest; i.e. to find appropriate formats of documenting and analyzing the actor-director relation. In the interest of practical theater work which does not have this affordance I also started to apply a more meticulous scale to the “*re-staging of the transference*”; as a way to describe its workings *within* the Space of Rehearsals. It is also in that perspective that I have suggested it to be a theatrical object that can be traced and curated with the help of the Wheel of Consent.

### *The actualization of the rapport: acting vs. acting out*

As I have argued in Chapter 7, the Wheel of Consent safeguards the agency of the situation-specific knowledge form of *phronesis* in the Space of Rehearsals. Not only does its container invite the “knowing when” (a competence inaccessible to the AI-mimicking “cybernetic director” portrayed in *Terracing the Territory III.*) but it also distributes the responsibility for the curation of the transference more symmetrically.

In the vein of the above-mentioned notion of unilateral mastery handed down by Freud, I have already discussed the various reflections on the technical aspects of psychoanalytic praxis in regard to *when* the analyst is supposed to “interpret the transference” for the analysand (cf. Chapter 5,I). The careful attention paid to this precarious, if not explosive moment is not surprising given that the unconscious of the analytic situation is supposed to suddenly *actualize* in it. In this moment of actualization, the analysts offer their verbal interpretation of the very transference happening within the present *rapport* by unpacking *it* as a *repetition* of a former relation in the analysand’s life.

The “knowing when” of the “master analyst” in regard to this moment (i.e. the precarious of its timing) has its equivalent in the hierarchical rehearsal set-up. As a slightly more mundane occurrence in rehearsals, the actualization of the *rapport* usually comes in a twofold form: 1. as the necessity of describing something to the actor that the director believes to be an unconscious expression (undercutting the intended *mise-en-scène*) 2. as the necessity to push through to something that is *meant to be* less controlled, “more unconscious” (for the benefit of the intended *mise-en-scène*). The explosiveness of these moments in rehearsals – where the director offers his/her “verbal interpretation” of the actor’s unconscious – can usually be channeled back into the very performance. The actor then re-stages the affect of the transference onto the director in the constellation with the colleagues. This affective actualization is then in turn fixated in the repeatable emotional score of a theater show or the indexical singularity of a film take.

As I have shown in the Pre-studies, the asymmetrically positioned actor and director of a *reinvented Regietheater* can share the responsibility towards those two forms in which the *rapport* actualizes. Given the immediacy of the affective reaction (to having been “read” by the director) this requires, however, some extra attention to the *quality* of the “re-staging”. Naturally the first response in acting will often come as an “acting out” (the Freudian

“ausagieren”); which is, in Lacanian terms, the analysand’s reaction to a failing or insufficient interpretation by the analyst, i.e. the unconscious response to a sense of not having been properly listened to (cf. Evans 2006, 3) Since by convention the actors answer to the actualization of the *rapport* by means of acting (instead of a verbal re-staging conventional to the psychoanalytic clinic), their response in the form of “acting out” is at risk of remaining a mere symptom of the director’s failing interpretation.

Countless are thus the examples of actors’ unconscious transferences onto the director extracted from them as “acting” (read: acting out) for the sake of the *result*. As I will demonstrate below (with *The Idiots* as a case), film is especially prone to capitalizing on this moment insofar as its indexicality can capture the affect of the transference *in actu*.<sup>201</sup> But also in the expansionist vein of theater directing, the *mise-en-scène* is frequently designed to re-actualize the directorial interpretations of the actor’s unconscious during rehearsals. Thereby provoking yet another “acting out”, albeit redirected onto the audience this time.

While the aesthetic efficiency of this strategy can hardly be doubted (when it comes to authenticity) the prioritization of “acting out” over “acting” is, on the long run, a dangerous directorial method. (As Sarah puts it in the continuation of the quote above: “I stand right in front of the anger and then I take the other exit. (...) And that is also the control I need. The control I want to have. This exit that I’m choosing. The acting.” (*The prompted interview*, Sarah’s Edit; 10:38) Continuously depriving the actors of the conscious re-staging of their

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<sup>201</sup> Given film’s specific mechanistic mediality producing a surface without texture, the distinctions between “acting” and “acting out” are easily conflated here; oftentimes also actively blurred by the means of the edit. As we will see in *Conclusion 2* the transference onto the (film) director plays out in its most radical form when he or she is also operating the camera (from what is actually the acting colleague’s point of view). But even in the regular setting (of the director seeing the image in the film monitor) the structural dynamic conducive of “acting out” is at work. (Cf. my experience/conception of the monitor as Descartes’ “bull’s eye/black box” and the sensory asymmetry that comes with it in Pre-study #2).

affect makes it impossible for them to take responsibility for the transferences at play; it leaves their *management* unilaterally to the director – an impossible task in itself – and is therefore bound to backfire sooner or later.

### *The Wheel as an intermediate layer to organize the affective dynamics*

In this regard I have proposed the “Wheel of Consent” as a necessary intermediate layer that both actor and director can organize around; as a practice that invites the transference and its “symptomization” in the affect while simultaneously systematizing the directionality of the exchange. As I have elaborated in Chapter 7, responding to the questions of “Who is it for?” and “Who is doing?” allows actors and directors to gain clarity over their “instance of touch” (as the embodied practice would call it). It decelerates the Space of Rehearsals to a level of attunement in which the “re-staging of the transference” can be experienced as the “gift given and received” that it in fact is. Even in the immediacy of the settings described above.

As we have shown – in Pre-study #2 and especially in the work demonstration of #3 – a Space of Rehearsals attuned by the Wheel can contain all sorts of affects. With the necessary level of care, also “perversions” – such as for instance “sadistic directorial *Gelüste*” – can be contained in the temporal agreement made; which means the directors do not have to end up *outside* of the Wheel’s container to get what they desire (which would be the shadow sides “stealing” or “entitlement”). In the best-case scenario, the affects mediated by the Wheel thus converge on the “objective counter-transferences” of which Winnicott advocated the temporal actualization in the special context of working with psychotics.

In this Space of Rehearsals rehabilitated as a sphere of play (the ultimate goal of the Wheel of Consent practice), these affects therefore meet the high stakes of a fiction such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* – or, for what it’s worth, of Lars von Trier’s *The Idiots*.

### *The Space of Rehearsals as a “salle de répétition”*

For “acting out” to be sublated into “acting”, both director and actor need to be aware of the workings of the transference and the factors that provoke it. According to the psychoanalytic premises, these are asymmetry (of the *rapport*) and intimacy (of the setting); a claim to truth that I found easy to sustain when practically experimenting with the analogy of a rehearsal space inviting the maieutics of desire into the actor-director relation.

In watching the affects manifest – and thereby observing the fact of transference unfold – the analysand, too, is invited to “adopt the *analytic attitude*”. (Freud 1915, 167; my emphasis). This is mostly done by cultivating an awareness around the transference *as enacting itself in form of a repetition*. The “exit” (not into “acting out”, but into “acting”) that Sarah describes in Pre-study #1 springs from exactly this premise: the actor instrumentalizes the affect provided by the transference onto the director while circumventing its actualization as a misunderstood original presence.

Admittedly, this is an ambitious demand made on people involved in the work of acting. But luckily – and maybe surprisingly – the (psycho-)“analytic attitude” Freud advocates here, aligns with the Brechtian critique of originality (or rather: his plea for repetition) that I have discussed in the context of the *Diderot Society* as well as the *modelbooks* (cf. Chapter C and 8 as well as PS#3, online resources). Therefore Freud’s *techne* also contains the premise of the Brechtian acting method that both director and actor can adopt as a basic *Haltung*

[attitude/posture<sup>202</sup>] during rehearsals: to critically observe the transference re-stage itself while involved in its affect.

Ultimately, with these premises brought into alignment, the Space of Rehearsals proposed in this thesis can also be conceived of as a “salle de répétitions”; which in the pragmatic sense of the French word simply means “rehearsal space” or “studio”; but in a very literal translation “hall of repetitions”.

## Conclusion 2: Anecdotal inductions

In this following concluding chapter, some of the “concrete stories” of Lars von Trier’s production diary are presented and commented upon as annotations to my findings. If you will, they are “meat on the bone” of the structural points just made. As an anecdotal theory that “subject[s] theory to incident” (Gallop 2002, 15), these concrete stories synthesize and sustain the 11 deductions presented at the outset without reducing themselves to mere “evidence”. With their anecdotal “juiciness” and the “uncanny detail of lived experience” (remember the etymological root of “*anekdoton*” being “unpublished”) the dictaphone diaries are supposed to open this thesis to future, inductive entrances. As a consequence, this coming part roughens up the material one last time: while the classical conclusion has a *gestus* of wrapping up, this one runs the risk of “making a mess in the beauty”.

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<sup>202</sup> In German the word *Haltung* – describing someone’s physical *posture* – metaphorically also indicates a person’s *attitude*. In Brecht’s terminology – adapted to both the stagecraft of the playwright as well as the actor – *Haltung* encompasses both meanings in one. (Cf. also Barnett 2025; “*Haltung*”.)

Before I get into the details, I would briefly like to argue for the specific choice of material in this endeavor. The Danish director Lars von Trier is a controversial figure. Bringing his situated knowledge into the mix of a research invested into “asymmetry and consent in the actor director–relation” can hardly be done without accounting for the popular associations that follow in the trail of his persona. In many regards, von Trier nowadays represents the “old white man”, i.e. the polemic caricature metonymically indexing racist patriarchy within the ongoing culture wars. As a “boomer” (von Trier was born 1956) he has moreover had “plenty of resources” at his disposal, that he – in that same vein – used “unwisely”, leaving “us” with the mess of it all. Obviously his (speaking) “time is up” today; it had in fact already exceeded the carrying capacity of the planet by the early 2010s. In that regard his ambivalent play with the “I am a Nazi” phrase at a press conference in Cannes was an untimely dad joke; but even more than his own repeated attempts to publicly self-sabotage, Björk’s accusations of sexual harassment in 2017 might have put the last nail in his coffin.<sup>203</sup>

In the public image of the last years, von Trier in fact appears as a *libertine* punished already in his lifetime; part-time burning in hell, part-time vegetating in the nursery home of his birth town. Struck by Parkinson or the symptoms of abstinence – popular opinions differ as to where his massive shaking comes from – he has to sit on his hands during interviews to keep reasonably still. A recent attempt to place an “old-fashioned personal ad” [en gammeldags kontaktannonce] on social media – in search of a “girlfriend/muse” – hardly lived up to the Kierkegaardian “elasticity of irony”<sup>204</sup> characteristic of his previous PR stunts. Instead, the

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<sup>203</sup> The Icelandic singer played the main part in von Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark* (2000).

image of a sick old man who is “rightly” denied intimacy is perceived with malicious glee. (In the brutal (patriarchal) order of a buffalo herd, “Lars” would thus be the last one to drink. When we see him drag himself to the well, long after the rest of the pack is out of sight, we can easily backtrack his status as the former lead buffalo.)

### *The LVTOTI (Lars von Trier of The Idiots)*

While it has become questionably fashionable to “culturally divorce” from Lars von Trier, I have no ambition to counter this trend in the following. I truly consider it a lost cause to nuance or differentiate any of his public utterances, to jump to the defense of either the person or his directorial methods.<sup>205</sup> The reason to use his diary as material is that the dilemmas of the actor-director relation presented here – at their *boiling point*, i.e. in the middle of production – persist in all severity today. So while from the vantage point of the Great Plains von Trier’s methods may appear as alternatively “psychopathic” or “pubescent”, the sleepless nights of the director are still topical. In other words: despite the well-intended attempts of recent years to rid the actor-director relation of its antagonism – what kept the director awake in the 1990s still does so today. Especially within the configuration advocated by this thesis, where the disciplinary divide between actor and director is maintained, the diary thus provides

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<sup>204</sup> The “elasticity of irony” is a formula Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard uses in his essay ‘Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology’ (Kierkegaard [1843] 2013). In the perspective of the argument at hand, it promotes the distance gained by treating the experiences made in the moment *as repetitions*. In the autobiographically charged fiction Kierkegaard tests this agency provided by the “elasticity of irony” against the affect of love.

<sup>205</sup> Especially when writing about the diary material presented below in a language other than von Trier’s mother tongue. Against the backdrop of his home country, the notorious “genius” (*Geniet* is the title of a commendable biography by Thorsen (2011)) often appears as a rather average Dane; with his sarcasm being a sophisticated form of a culturally ubiquitous irony. To re-contextualize such a statement as “Ok, I am a Nazi” for instance (cf. The Telegraph 2011), one would therefore have to start by writing in the mother tongue of the *Sjælland*-based families that go by the names of *Trier/Høst/Hartmann*.

a quite unique articulation from an inside/artistic – rather than an organizational-managerial/outside – point of view.

To properly link this articulation to my own findings, I will thus refrain (to my best capacity) from either morally defending or condemning von Trier. But rather present him as an emblematic figure operating somewhere between the Mountain Range and the Foothills of *Regietheater*, where he symptomizes dilemmas that the Great Plains have not resolved. In all discretion I will therefore focus on the “Lars von Trier of *The Idiots*” – from here on abbreviated as: LVTOTI – and bracket the public *persona* formed over the last four decades.

### *LVTOTI in the Regietheater tradition*

Given the massive inspiration a great deal of his German contemporaries took in the Danish director, LVTOTI can arguably be presented as a prominent figure emerging in the Foothills of the *Regietheater* tradition. This is mostly due to the international success of Dogma 95 – and especially of *The Idiots* in German theater circles – which obscured the fact that the 42-year-old director had been successfully making films for about two decades already. With Christoph Maria Schlingensief, whom I have portrayed as the “emblematic figure of the Foothills” (cf. *Terracing the Territory II.*), LVTOTI thus shares the strive for an emancipation from the deadlock of *auteur* cinema his generation finds itself in.<sup>206</sup> Like Schlingensief, he uses

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<sup>206</sup> One of the most telling documents regarding von Trier’s engagement with the *auteur*-lineage is probably the deeply respectful letter he writes to Ingmar Bergman in 1998 inviting the Swedish *grand seigneur* of cinema to make a Dogma film (cf. Schepelern 2017, 240). The generational baggage is also evident in his 1988 adaptation of the screenplay for “Medea” (1962) left behind by the Danish silent movie legend Theodor Dreyer (1889-1969). A rather monumental movie that would, in a spectacular turn, be picked up by Swiss theater group 400Asa and spun into a “Dogma film for stage” entitled “Medeä - 214 Bildbeschreibungen” [Medeä - 214 image descriptions] in the year 2000.

the quest for unfiltered authenticity emerging in the arts – and specifically in the media of the 1990s – as a lever in this regard.

For Frank Castorf *The Idiots* are certainly a decisive inspiration for the further development of the use of video so central to his stagecraft (cf. Korte 2019, 223–24). In fact, LVTOTI's ecstatic rave in the production diary about the rawness and velocity of Dogma, where “[t]he creation process and the filming happen simultaneously” (von Trier 1998, 237) reads like the very formula Castorf developed to mastery. Finally, the invitation LVTOTI received in 2001 to stage Richard Wagner's “Der Ring des Nibelungen” [The Ring of the Nibelung] on the “green hill” of Bayreuth can be counted as the most definitive consecration within the canon of German-speaking theater.<sup>207</sup> For the sake of the following argument, I thus hope to claim – in an admittedly appropriating and hyperbolic gesture – *The Idiots* as one of the most significant pieces of *Regietheater*.

### *The Regie of LVTOTI*

My hyperbolic statement here is of course aimed at the legitimacy, worthy of criticism, of applying the case of a movie production to the conceptual framework of *theater* rehearsals examined in this thesis. But given the massive restrictions of the Dogma rules regarding postproduction (2, 4 and 5 in particular<sup>208</sup>), I am prone to argue that *The Idiots* is in fact not a movie but rather a documentation of various instances of live stagings in the medium of film.

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<sup>207</sup> Cf. Hänzi's chapter “Bayreuth: Männermachende Mythenfabrik” [Bayreuth: men-making factory of myth] (Hänzi 2014, 301–7) After 2 years of preparation von Trier eventually steps down from the commission. (cf. Parly 2018; Schepelern 2017, 248–51)

<sup>208</sup> “2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot).(...) 4. The film must be in color. Special lighting is not acceptable (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera) 5. Optical work and filters are forbidden.” (Cf. Raskin 2000, 7)

If one brackets the final intervention of the edit (and I concede that this is hard to do<sup>209</sup>) the process of production reminds us primarily of theater. Because in essence, it is the work of an ensemble that, after some weeks of rehearsing the manuscript of a contemporary author, attempts to perform it in chronological order within the given settings. During these “shows” – the takes could last around 50 minutes (Raskin 2000, 16) – the sound operator is creating the sound design of the future scene live on location; occasionally extending his microphone – away from the actors – and into the tip of the trees. Consequently, the musician is on set, too, playing the soundtrack from behind the camera whenever needed. (“The Swan” by Saint-Saëns, playing from the wings, as it were.)

This shift of production mode has a significant impact on the actor-director relation. While the *auteur* film may have provided the controlled setting in which the *libertine* installs his/her authoritative vision, the Dogma rules actively incapacitate the director of the De Sadian genius. Neither are the technical possibilities available of adding an auratic shimmer to the actor by means of light settings or color grading, nor the retroactively added soundtrack, as one of the most powerful artifices to “*post-produce*” an “inner world” in a character. Last not least, as the “shooting must be done on location” (Dogma rule 1), the retreat into the film studio/fortress is never an option.

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<sup>209</sup> The fact of a *post*-production (mainly the edit) is of course affecting the actor-director relation during the production phase of a film already. As opposed to the theater rehearsals where the ensemble is involved with the directorial choices up until the premiere, film processes – by convention – install a moment of letting go on the actor’s end; thereby making way for the director to enter a new artistic collaboration with the editor. Given this industrially fragmented mode of producing film, it is rare that there is a collective dissatisfaction on set specifically aimed at the final artistic product. In contrast to a theater ensemble, the actors usually do not feel sufficiently informed about the outcome of the work and therefore limit their opinion and agency to their individual parts. The fact that during the making of *The Idiots* there are long discussions between the actors and the director – which sometimes reach a level of hostility closing in on “mutiny” – is yet another indicator of the theater logics at work here. The chronological shooting method in fact allows the ensemble to get a sense of the story they are telling; and critically scrutinize it. Furthermore, LVTOTI – for authenticity’s sake – seems interested in an acting style where editing is as unnecessary as possible.

With Dogma's dismantling of the De Sadian institution of film on the aesthetical plane, the actor and his/her work become ever more important. Arguably, by means of the movement's so-called "chastity vow" Grotowski's vision of a "poor", actor-based theater suddenly comes within arm's reach for the movie industry. But unlike the Polish director who strives for maximum expressionist plasticity of his ensemble on stage, LVTOTI sticks with the paradigm of psychological realism inscribed in the genetic code of his medium.<sup>210</sup> In the world of Dogma, however, there are almost no cinematic means left to strengthen the actor's believability once the shoot/show is over. As a result, the structural dilemma of the actor-director relation blossoms painfully during the production of *The Idiots*. More than ever, "authentic" emotions have to be performed under the pressure of the take; emotions depending, in turn, on psycho-physical procedures that can hardly be forced and therefore lie beyond the control of the director.

In alignment with the methodological problem of this thesis – the search for appropriate formats of documenting and analyzing relational settings intrinsic to theater making – the making of *The Idiots* therefore possibly presents the most appropriate way to document actorial improvisations. To *index the im-provisus*, as it were. But unlike with Castorf's or Schlingensief's stagings, the *Regie* of LVTOTI can easily be accessed today and is even revisitable without losing the "live aspect" of the performance. Cross read with the production diary that was published "in the spirit of Dogma" (von Trier, 159) – unread and unedited – his directorial agency at work during the shoot of *The Idiots* is discussable in a more international context (and specifically on the transferential axis between Scandinavia and *Tyskland* that I have described in *Terracing the Territory II*.) In complementarity with the making-of (*The*

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<sup>210</sup> In that regard, my reading of the acting in *The Idiots* through the lens of the non-psychological *Volksbühne* style in the late 1990s was a total misunderstanding. Only by seeing Jargil's making-of many years later did I comprehend that the heated discussions in the plenum of the ensemble always circle around "the characters"; fully invested into identification with them and their relation to the group. The surprising discovery might also be an explanation why Castorf's own attempt to shoot a movie in the style of *The Idiots – Dämonen* [Demons] in 2000 – can be considered an artistic failure.

*Humiliated*) as well as the actual final edit of *The Idiots*, LVTOTI's diary thus forms a package rich in different perspectives, paratext and context. Yet another artistic research *avant la lettre*.

### *Deductions 1,2,3: The fact of transference on the set of The Idiots*

Judging from the recordings, it is obvious that there are strong transference energies at play during the production of *The Idiots*; between the director and the ensemble (as an entity) as well as in particular between him and the actress casted for the part of SUSANNE (Anne Louise Hassing). These active transferences and their respective affects (as Winnicott has suggested: of fear, love and hate) make for both the director's sleepless nights – desperate moments during which he records his journal or attempts for bodily exhaustion by means of masturbation – as well as for the most intense happiness during the shoot (cf. for example the entry on 25.6.1998 starting out with the exclamation: "Ecstatic film joy!" [Ekstatisk filmlykke!] (von Trier 1998, 179)<sup>211</sup>).

The transferences at play are thus manifesting by their characteristic ambivalence and mercurial nature. Often, they align with a pre-Lacanian conception of "positive" and "negative transference": on some days LVTOTI feels fully embedded in the ensemble – describing it as "a bunch of buddies [that] compensate for childish or youthful failures in relation to one's surroundings" (236) – on others, his subjective experience of alienation from it is excruciating.

Initially he had wanted to live with the ensemble during the entire shoot in the villa that makes for the main location. When this preferred set-up is pragmatically reduced by the production company to a one time 24h session (including sleep-over) which ultimately does not lead to any artistically satisfying results, he is crushed. While the increasingly drunken ensemble continues to improvise during the night – together with the cameraman and, again, to no avail – the director disappears. Returning to the irritated group after two hours of sleep, he sees no other option than to lay bare his feelings: "I got a strange sensation of loneliness, which... well, you may laugh, but that was something deep from childhood, from parties that

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<sup>211</sup> For the rest of this *Conclusion 2* I am almost exclusively quoting from LVTOTI's diary. Unless otherwise indicated, the page numbers therefore refer to the bibliographical entry for *von Trier 1998*.

I attended but didn't participate in and where I had no contact with anyone and just sat sulking in a corner. *I experienced this again, (...) I felt increasingly marginalized, and my jealousy toward everything, the girls – and perhaps especially Anne Louise, (...) – but overall toward the group was immense.*" (206; my emphasis)<sup>viii</sup>

When it comes to the fiction as a blueprint for the actor-director relation at hand, it is thus the main character STOFFER's relation to the group of "idiots" (of which he is the initiator) that punches out the possibilities for LVTOTI's relation to the ensemble. A month into the shooting period the director notes that " [t]he comparison between me and Stoffer in the movie becomes more and more screamingly grotesque" (254). And in the group improvisation during the 24h shoot just mentioned, where LVTOTI experiences the ensemble as "hostile" and "almost sabotaging the whole project" (206), STOFFER is not granted "the authority he was supposed to have" (205) according to the script.

*Deduction 4: The dictaphone diary as a unilateral re-staging (with a double voice)*

LVTOTI's dictaphone diary in print is, of course, not a "re-staging of *both* transferences" as I have myself attempted for, but unilaterally one of the director's. The actors' simultaneous account is missing. Jens Albinus' only retrospectively – with almost 30 years distance – pinpoints the transferential energy invested into "fænomenet Lars von Trier" [the phenomenon Lars von Trier] at work during the production. "All of this Lars von Trier stuff" (Albinus, 128), as he puts it, which blinds both him and the ensemble, von Trier's wife at the

time as well as an entire industry. Regarding LVTOTI's most intense actor relation during the shoot, especially the re-staging of Anne Louise Hassing's transference is missing.<sup>212</sup>

Nevertheless, as someone who spent a lot of time in the position of the analysand, LVTOTI is aware of his own entanglement as the “analyst” of the actor-director relations at play. His diary therefore often reflects the possibility of a countertransference and its effects on both his account as well as his artistic judgement (read: phronetic competence) in the situation of directing. On one of the last days of the shoot where the whole ensemble is being filmed by him in a long sequence, everybody appears to be happy to contribute – “except for Anne Louise who sat and sulked (...) or was it me that sulked, sorry, that is impossible to say.” (265) Arguably, the “solitary voice” of the diary is therefore often double. Resonating with the speech of the director of the De Sadian genius described in *Terracing the Territory II*. (who displays institutional violence with the articulation of the victim) LVTOTI's sarcasm, his often degrading vocabulary (applied to things that obviously matter to him) as well as the abrupt transitions from sensitive topics to banalities could in fact be read as *demonstrative* of his own association with authority. In this perspective, the re-staging of his transference in his diary would then be, similar to De Sade's articulations, a “demonstration related essentially to the solitude and omnipotence of its author” (Deleuze 2006, 19).

#### *Deduction 5,6: The actualization of the rapport with SUSANNE/Anne Louise*

The dictaphone diary documents many of the two-folded instances where the *rapport* is being actualized and the transference re-staged in an immediate reaction; with the most intense of these instances showing up within the actor-director relation of LVTOTI and Anne Louise Hassing. I first use a situation from the third week of the shoot, to give an example of the director offering his “verbal interpretation” to push through to something “more unconscious” for the benefit of the *mise-en-scène*.

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<sup>212</sup> There is an interview with both Albinus and Hassing in the Danish Journal of Film Studies *p.o.v.* (Raskin 2000, 11–34), where they reflect on the process and the acting required. Even though it contains interesting information about the shoot and gives an idea about how Hassing positioned herself in the immediate aftermath of *The Idiots*' distribution phase, it cannot be considered a self-authored *re-mise-en-scène*.

In the interest of her performance living up to his “concept of authenticity” (203), LVTOTI has worked on establishing a transferential axis (a *rappo*rt) between Hassing and himself. To do so, he regularly cuts along “the edge of the therapeutic” (203), searching for different ways to align the SUSANNE character with the actress’ biography; often staging small psychodramas that build up to the take.

During the rehearsals for a remarkably short scene (that is shot and re-tried over several days to no avail) he finally fully assumes the “chair” of the analyst. A microphone is put up, so he can film alone with the two actresses figuring in the scene:

And then she [Anne Louise Hassing] had a long talk about her childhood and all sorts of things, and then the little therapist in me kicked in, because all the conversations we have are always on the edge of the therapeutic, and in my many years of experience with therapy (...) I have also picked up a few things. (203)<sup>ix</sup>

In the case of this example, he has “picked up” on the “chance gesture” observed by the *Gestalt* therapist, in other words, on psychoanalysis’ investment in the “punctum”:

And just as she had said this [an observation regarding her upbringing] she had a little tic, which was very small, but I attached myself to it. I thought it’s clear that this is what therapists do – before you become aware of what you’re doing, they observe, they hear and put things together, and then they see (...) what is being said without being said and is in fact unconscious. (204)<sup>x</sup>

His repeated insistence on the detail in Hassing’s account ultimately leads to an affect that she then re-directs into her performance, acting it out with her colleague during the scene. This happens to the full satisfaction of the director who concludes in his journal: “To skip the sentimental part, it certainly made the scene come alive (...) [It] came home, and afterwards I did a long relaxation exercise, which was almost like a tiny little Band-Aid on the wound.” (204-205)

Given the unilateral account of the director, we cannot know, but it is at least possible that the facilitated psychological breakdown led to an artistically satisfactory result for the actress, too. The further development of the actor-director relation, however, suggests the

opposite<sup>213</sup>. While the episode described above plays out at a moment where it is still possible to provide a kind of after-care in form of a “relaxation exercise” the final week of shooting is characterized by a “state of war between me and Anne Louise [that] broke out in broad daylight” (259). To make matters worse, the particular ambition to shoot *The Idiots* chronologically results in the most important scene of the film being produced in this very last week.

Unlike psychoanalysis, a film-shoot or a rehearsal period is not a limitlessly open-ended process. A fact which complicates the directorial “knowing when”, especially in regard to the other possibility of actualizing the *rapport*, i.e. the necessity of describing something to the actor that the director believes to be an unconscious expression (undercutting the intended mise-en-scène). Here is LVTOTI’s account of the final shooting day to start with:

[We shot] a couple more times with all the actors, we sent them home, and then I just wanted to pick up on Karen and Susanne’s meeting by the picture of the dead child. There wasn’t much energy left, so I didn’t have much faith that we could fish out some emotion and compassion from Anne Louise again. But she tried to go in on her own and fish it out herself, and suddenly she succeeded beyond all measure. I think she was bawling for half an hour, and it was amazing. (258)<sup>xi</sup>

The success in terms of acting that lives up to LVTOTI’s “concept of authenticity” is provoked by the precarious verbal interpretation of the actress’ unconscious expression.

Earlier I pointed out that I could very, very easily read when she was present and when she wasn’t by the fact that in her natural state – and in the scenes where she is functioning and present – she never has a closed mouth. She has a half-open mouth, listening and participating completely naturally, but in the scenes where she is blocked, she just has a closed mouth and some almost porcelain-like cheeks and eyelashes that are one hundred percent Bambi. It may

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<sup>213</sup> This impression is further corroborated by Hassing’s reflections in the interview two years after the shoot, where she is asked about the “type of acting” in the film: “Sometimes I had some discussions with Lars about what was character and what was *me* and it is quite clear that he wanted the two to mesh. (...) Bodil and I had some very long improvisations where he looked for something very specific. There’s that windowsill scene that is short, but it is very important for the relationship between Susanne and Karen. There I think he used some methods that almost resembled therapy. I had prepared something about Susanne – what could her background be? Then Lars said: “Oh, just try and forget that and tell me about yourself.” You can say that it works, I guess. I mean, the result is good, but I wouldn’t like to work like that forever.” (Raskin 2000, 17)

be imprudent of me to say it [Det er måske *uklogt* af mig at sige det] but it's a fact (258)<sup>xii</sup>

It may be “imprudent” or “practically unwise” of LVTOTI to articulate what has dawned to him in yesterday’s sleepless night (261), yet... Here, the director even invokes the very word used for *phronesis* – “*klokhet*” – in the the Swedish translations of Aristotle (cf. Bornemark 2020); thereby inviting for yet another reflection on the explosiveness of *the moment* where the transference is interpreted. (As well as of the directorial “knowing when” getting corrupted by the pressure of the final shooting day.)

As to be expected the verbal interpretation provokes the affect derived from the sense of being mis-read on the actress’ end – “[o]f course, she got angry when I told her that, pointing out that a closed mouth could be as natural a part of her as anything else” (262) – and the *acting out* in the confines of the fiction hereafter<sup>214</sup>:

But suddenly she could deliver and gave a magnificent performance at the end of the day. (...) It was touching to watch and of great value to the movie, so we ended in great satisfaction. Afterwards, we sat and had a small glass of wine and were very happy that it was all over and said goodbye in style. We almost became good friends again and agreed that this week’s enmity was unnecessary and had just been a torment for everyone in the group and completely foolish and to the great detriment of Susanne’s character at that time. (258-59)<sup>xiii</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Here, LVTOTI not only assumes the “analyst’s chair” like in the scene described above, but also operates the camera from the point of view of Anne Louise Hassing’s colleague. Thereby allowing for the transference onto him to play out in its most radical way. (A “technique” von Trier has further developed in the movies to follow *The Idiots* – namely in *Dancer in the Dark* and *Dogville*; with the handheld camera operated by himself bringing him, in his own words, “as close as possible to the actors” (von Trier quoted in Schepelern 2017, 247; my translation).) Insofar as a basic principle of psychoanalytic treatment is, according to Freud, to “force as much as possible into the channel of memory [by means of verbalization] and to allow as little as possible to emerge as repetition” (1920, 19) LVTOTI’s “failure” in verbal interpretation can even be a conscious directorial strategy; managing the ratio between the *channel of memory* and the “preferable” *acting out*.

## *Deductions 10 and 11: Transference Love in LVTOTI's "salle de répétition"*

As a psychoanalytically informed director (in the sense of someone having undergone extensive analysis himself), LVTOTI reflects on the fact that the transference is a "repetition of infantile prototype relations" (Gallop 1982, 73), "inappropriate to context" (Gallop, 143). The acknowledgements of his own immaturity in relation to the ensemble are therefore legion in the diary. Revisiting his sensation of jealousy experienced during the sleepover shoot for instance, he describes himself as "twelve years old again, sitting there sulking" (234); and even though he experiences the projection of STOFFER onto himself as grotesque, he anyways admits that his own level of childishness is more extreme than that of the character (254).

Naturally, the awareness of the transferences in the Space of Rehearsals being "repetitions" is put to maximum strain when it comes to the affect of love. In psychoanalytic orthodoxy the principle of reticence (discussed in chapter 5, I) makes it possible to conceive even of this affect – that is, on a subjective plane, usually experienced as most genuine/original – *as a repetition*; and to continue the intimate work within the *rappo*rt by neither gratifying nor suppressing the desires that emerge from it. While this third way (that I have called a *poetic* model insofar as it has no equivalent in real life) is totally viable in the Space of Rehearsals suggested here, its borders are often blurred at the boiling points of the conventional relation of actor and director. And it is exactly in these edgy zones where the sensibility of the social turn finds its point of attack, when scrutinizing "psychoanalytically informed" methods of directing. What to make of the principle of reticence for example in the case of the following statement from yet another of LVTOTI's sleepless nights?

[B]ut to claim that not almost all actresses have appeared in my sexual fantasies would be a lie. Perhaps Anne Louise in particular has appeared there on a regular basis. And it's probably been like that in... well, all the movies I've made, I guess, when I think back. And I've talked about that before, it's part of it all. (239)<sup>xiv</sup>

If my assertion in the prelude is correct – that the social turn extrapolated the justified indignation of von Trier’s then-wife to a general sensibility – then the plea for the productivity of establishing transferences in the actor-director relation will have to test itself against what appears to us as the most scandalous scenario. Fortunately, however, LVTOTI’s diary offers such a relentless account of “transference love on set” – providing a case so exemplary, albeit not of “best practice” – that it should be possible to make the necessary distinctions.

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Clearly, when recording himself in the middle of a sleepless night, the director of the *The Idiots* is attempting to think “in precisely those situations which tend to disable thought” (Gallop 2002, 15). He tries to maintain an “analytic attitude” towards the affect overwhelming him; in terms of the vocabulary proposed in this thesis, he is trying to critically observe the re-staging of his transference onto the actress manifesting as infatuation; all the while maintaining that affective dynamics are a necessary instrument, a “working tool” (262) in the actor-director relation.

Interestingly – and maybe unsurprisingly – the first mention of the growing infatuation occurs in the same diary entry as the one where he describes the “breakthrough” of him fully assuming the analyst’s chair (where “the little therapist in me kicked in” (203)); a potentially explosive situation where maximum intimacy and maximum asymmetry are eventually resolved by both actress and director through staging an aesthetically satisfying scene. The “discovery” of the affect – “I want to say a few words about my relationship with Anne Louise in this movie … it’s something … well, somewhere I think she’s … well, gorgeous, and it’s kind of grown along the way, because she is” (209) – is immediately followed by a longer

reflection attempting to prove it being a *repetition*. If not of “infantile prototype relations” then of other “automatisms” within the intimate and asymmetric set-up of a film shoot.

And as I was just talking to Bente about, at the beginning of my career I had a very difficult relationship with actresses. I was always almost at war with them (...) That relationship changed a bit already on *The Kingdom* and especially on *Breaking the Waves* and of course I fell into exactly the same ... trap I wouldn't call it, but in the same automatism as most other directors: that you enter some kind of “directorial infatuation” with some of the characters/actors [personerne]<sup>215</sup>. It's important for me to use the word infatuation, because that comes closest to it, and I have to say that I ... on *Breaking the Waves* it's been Katrin, who played Dodo, who I kind of have ... had ... I was insanely jealous of almost everything she did, other than being in the movie, and I guess that was also an infatuation. It has been, and now the same with Anne Louise. (209)<sup>xv</sup>

In the spirit of *episteme*, LVTOTI then makes a first attempt at universalization:

I can see that in reality it's exactly the same thing that goes on in any directorial situation, and what I've concluded – and this may be a post-rationalization to make things look nicer – it's that in reality it's a much, much healthier relationship than being at war – and maybe it's two sides of the same coin. (...) I'm just trying to defend the feelings I can have towards the cast. I don't know if it can be defended, probably not. Yes, any feeling one has is worth something, I keep telling myself. Anyways, maybe it's natural that it happens in the relation director/actress. (233)<sup>xvi</sup>

This generalized approval of the affect of love as informative instrument within the actor-director relation – its naturalization in the heteromatrix of director and actress in the specific case of LVTOTI – is however not upheld. Only four days later, the sleepless night sounds like this:

I don't know... the whole thing is going through my head, and after the weekend I had calmed down a lot about Anne Louise, but now... now it's going through my fucking head and I don't want to be... now it's uncomfortable. I don't want her to be nice to me or stupid to me or anything. I just want this movie to be over with, so I don't have to see her. And it's completely stupid,

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<sup>215</sup> The word in the Danish original is marked by an ambivalence; it can either mean the fictional “characters”, but it can also mean the “persons”, which in this context would be equivalent to “the actors”.

because she just walks around and is completely ... well, she's not doing anything. (240-41)<sup>xvii</sup>

The sense of repetition is still there and has even increased. But the “side of the coin” seems to have flipped. The affect may still be love, but the transference turned from positive to negative.

Some stupid movie infatuation, it's too childish. I'm not even in love! It's not even a reality, it's just a fucking fantasy in my head. (...) You could say that sensitivity is a working tool, but it's not a tool that's particularly pleasant or easy to deal with. (...) Now the newspaper comes, it's three o'clock, and I can't sleep, and I have to consider jerking off for the fifth time to fall asleep... My poor, poor, poor dick. Oh, for fuck's sake...! (241-42)<sup>xviii</sup>

As already described the following last period of the shoot is characterized by a “state of war” between actress and director. Obviously, the unilaterally managed transference has meanwhile exploded into LVTOTI's face. Ultimately, the final goal of the director (to make “a great movie”) does not align with the final goal of the analyst (which may differ depending on the various schools but always centers around the analysand as an end in him/herself.) As relentlessly honest as LVTOTI may be as an artist (or as the “character” figuring in his diary), his search for honesty/truth of expression in the cast of *The Idiots* – the authenticity of Hassing's performance, as it were – is always already in a pact with the extractivist logics of the film medium.

It is hard to speculate what happened on Hassing's end in this last week. The development however indicates that the actress was in fact not put in control of the affective dynamics at play throughout the shoot. That there was no intermediate layer that would allow her to take the “exit” into acting or to possibly work with the double “inside and outside” perspective of the *performauthor*. However, instead of offering more interpretations of this relational “U-turn” with the vocabulary of this thesis I shall let LVTOTI conclude for now:

I've been a better director when admiring instead of hating – significantly better. So apart from the emotions being a side effect of the job, you could say that the emotions – however unpleasant and unintended they may be – also become a working tool in the sense that things get better, much much better. (262)<sup>xix</sup>

This reflection is from two days after the last shooting session. One day later he notes:

Yesterday I met Anne-Grethe and today Anne Louise and I realized that estrangement sets in immediately after a job of this type. It was almost like meeting a couple of old aunts you hadn't seen for a long time and had no particular desire to meet. It emphasizes the insanely professional nature of this wildly hysterical industry. It's especially interesting when you consider how relatively close we have come in the crazy process described above. Thought-provoking and quite scary. (269)<sup>xx</sup>

## Z POSTLUDE – The “Final Pre-study”

Fierce play gets you everywhere.

Scout Niblett  
in the Foothills  
(2001)

While I was able to relate most of my deductions to the concrete stories in the production diary of *The Idiots*, there was no evident match for the ones concerning the Wheel of Consent (deductions 7, 8, 9). Naturally”, one could argue; because while the dynamics of giving and receiving were of course in play at the time the film was made, they were not yet systematized in the model I am working with in this thesis (cf. Chapter 7, *The genealogy of the Wheel*) Despite the slight anachronism, it could however be fun to retrospectively describe the “three-minute games” LVTOTI and the ensemble were engaging in. An attempt for this type of analysis – in the style of the transcribed dialogues you find in the online resources to Pre-study #2 – would certainly show which quadrants Anne Louise Hassing, the ensemble and LVTOTI

are inhabiting *when*; or yet, are assuming to inhabit. Shadow sides would become visible as well as agreements made that stay within the confines of the circle of consent.

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The fact that the deductions regarding the Wheel of Consent are not included in the analysis of LVTOTI's anecdotal material could, however, suggest a short-cut conclusion of the following kind: if only the method that this thesis promotes had been available to him and his ensemble, the actor-director relations at stake would have been “clean”, (and the sleepless nights superfluous). They would stand the test of the ethically charged perspective by which we evaluate rehearsal processes in the era that we call, for lack of a better word, post-#MeToo.

I do, however, not mean to suggest this.

A method is only as good as the dialectical stance it can accommodate. The Wheel is useful for our ambition of a *reinvented Regietheater* only if we engage it in a relation to the “ethical project” of its tradition (i.e. in relation to the “sacrificial squander” or the “care for the Accursed Share” that *The Idiots* can exemplarily stand for.) In the context of this thesis, the Wheel's application therefore implies a critique of the premise of scarcity and the politics of austerity applied to the rehearsal space. For the method to radiate into the realm of aesthetics – as a proposition that avoids its own subsumption into the expert business of relational optimization within the art institutions – it needs this broader analysis that situates the director in our day.

LVTOTI's “unclean” process is therefore an important dialectical pole in this discussion. First and foremost, because it does not shy away from the workings of the transference – by, for

instance, proposing yet another collective soup kitchen piece in the lineage of Tiranvanija – but tries to distill its affective dynamics into the realm of aesthetics. Having put this as drastically: would I have wished for the ensemble and the director to have an “intermediate layer” at hands, a “container” by which they could have shared the responsibility of “objectifying” the workings of the transferences at play? Certainly yes.

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For me, the elaborations on the “Wheel of Consent as a rehearsal method” have only begun. I consider the experiments of this thesis a first proposition that I sincerely hope will be picked up where I left off, challenged and transformed. There are a lot of open questions to be researched, transcending the discrete focus of the present inquiry. For instance: how does the *maieutics of desire* – and the situation-specific *genio* – relate to the actor’s paradox of having to reproduce certain actions at specific moments in time? What to make of the option of “change your mind anytime” that Martin stresses to be of importance for a successful consensual play? In other words: how does the Wheel relate to the mise-en-scène (as an agreement over time)? Can the “Wheel as rehearsal method” account for situations that are not based on improvisation but belong to the register of “repetition” (in the pragmatic, not the psychoanalytic sense)? Other questions: what happens when we move out of the one-to-one set-up and into the dynamics of the ensemble? The Wheel as a therapeutic practice certainly allows for a mirroring of the specifics of the actor-director relation, but how about the actor-actor as well as the director-ensemble relation? Practically speaking: how many rounds of clarifications/negotiations can we possibly go through – with how many constellations? – before we start rehearsing “the piece” we are commissioned to stage? Last but not least: what

is our hypothesis for the workings of the audience-ensemble relation within the logics of the Wheel?

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In my experience, the “Wheel as a rehearsal method” is not a “quick fix” or a “tool” to resolve conflicts in an artistic constellation that is about to disintegrate. Rather, I see it as a *premise* that committed communities of practice – be it city theater ensembles, independent groups, but also acting and directing education programs – can adopt as a premise. A shared language for asymmetry, a mode of creation that allows us to collectively go a step further.

When I introduce acting and directing students to this premise, they usually start to dream big. While they might initially have opted for my “consent in rehearsals” course with a vague idea of learning some kind of “martial art” that would one day allow them to fend off the “groping older colleague”, they suddenly start to see the possibility of a completely different institutional paradigm. They see a city theater ensemble, a rehearsal culture, possibly even their own educational set-up cohesively working with the organizing questions of the Wheel.

And while I can myself join in that *rêverie* of an institutionally transformed theater, I also know how hard it is to establish and/or maintain the *continuous work* of a community of practice that organizes around an ethical/aesthetic premise. With the processes of flexibilization still raging at the time of writing, an institution that would host such a community of practice (providing the reliable (financial) infrastructure to engage the technical apparatus of classical *Regietheater* as well as to maintain the disciplinary divide between actor and director while *simultaneously*

safeguarding the freedom to work beyond the canon of dramatic literature) seems almost out of reach.

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The premise of the “Wheel as rehearsal method”, however, sediments over time. And while it is certainly preferable to be in dialogue about it (with a group and context committed to it), I have already experienced its continuous integration into my own directorial practice. The embodied fact of *leaning* and *not leaning* is accessible to me in every rehearsal setting, and so are the questions of “May I?” and “Will you?”. To gain clarity on “Who is it for?” and “Who is doing?” (the directionality of “action” and “gift”, as it were) in regard to a specific rehearsal (tomorrow morning!) is always a productive analysis. It is also a conversation that can be conducted with the ensemble in a paraphrase, i.e. without the technical vocabulary of the Wheel.

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With the help of the analyses and methods suggested here, I thus hope to have contributed to the possibility of a *reinvented Regietheater* – a form of the performing arts where directorial agency and the singular voice that comes with it have their *legitimated* place. Put very simply, that means reigniting the ambition to create art pieces as radical as *The Idiots*, trusting that they do not have to come at the price of a questionable process. To play a fierce play with each other, safe and ecstatic.



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Last but not least – and first and foremost because the Swedish state will try to preserve this thesis “for eternity and beyond that, too” – I take the opportunity to address some few words to my future self:

If I should find you at some point looking back at this period in your life when you made an “artistic research dissertation” … possibly in your 50s by now, freshly divorced and definitely bald… if I then find you talking to a group of younger colleagues, tuning in to the chant of “*I had everything...* A beautiful wife, a wonderful kid, a steady job, A CAT, A HOUSE AND A CAR, *but I just wasn't happy...* We would be dancing in the kitchen while making pancakes in the morning, we would drive on the beach and hop into the ocean naked, we would burst into laughter to the A.I. songs our friend Kubo had sent and and … *but I just wasn't ...*”

Then let me stop you right here and say: “Shut the fuck up, my friend! These were some good seven years! (Possibly some of the best.)”

Johannes Maria Schmit, Stockholm and Tversted, November 2025

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<sup>i</sup> Jane Gallop, *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 56

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<sup>iii</sup> D.W. Winnicott, "Hate in the Counter-Transference." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* Vol. 30 (1949): 69-74. Quoted in *The Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research*. 3(4) (Fall 1994), 352

<sup>iv</sup> Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, 142

<sup>v</sup> Luce Irigaray, "The Limits of the Transference" in *The Irigaray Reader*, edited by Margaret Whitford (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell), 114

<sup>vi</sup> Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, 143

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> JEG FIK EN MÆRKELIG FORNEMMELSE AF ENSOMHED, som ... ja, man kan jo grine af det, men som var noget dybt fra barndommen med fester, som jeg har været med til, hvor jeg ikke deltog og ingen kontakt havde til nogen og sad og surmulede i et hjørne. Det oplevede jeg igen, (...) Jeg følte mig mere og mere skubbet ud på et sidespor, og min jalousi i forhold til alt, pigerne – og måske specielt Anne Louise, (...) – men i det hele taget i forhold til gruppen var helt enormt stor.

<sup>ix</sup> [o]g så havde hun en lang snak om sin barndom og alle mulige ting, og så gik der den lille terapeut i mig, for alle de snakke, vi har, bevæger sig hele tiden på kanten af det terapeutiske, og jeg har da også i min mangeårige erfaring med terapien (...)icket et eller andet op.

<sup>x</sup> Og lige da hun havde sagt [det] fik hun en lille tic, som var meget lille, men som jeg hæftede mig ved. Jeg tænkte, at det er klart, at det er sådan, terapeuterne gør – før man selv bliver bevidst om, hvad man gør, observerer de, de hører og ligger tingene sammen, og så ser de (...) hvad der bliver sagt uden at blive sagt og i virkeligheden er ubevidste.

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<sup>xi</sup> [vi kørte] et par gang mere med alle skuespillerne, sendte dem hjem, og så ville jeg lige pick-up på Karen og Susannes møde inde ved billedet af det døde barn. Der var ikke meget energi tilbage, så jeg havde ikke stor tiltro til, at vi igen kunne fiske noget rørelse og medlevelse op fra Anne Louises side. Men hun forsøgte at gå i enrum og fiske det frem selv, og pludselig lykkedes det over al måde. Jeg tror hun tudede i en halv time, og det var fantastisk.

<sup>xii</sup> Før påpegede jeg, at jeg meget meget let kunne aflæse, hvornår hun var til stede, og hvornår hun ikke var, på det faktum, at hun i sin naturlige tilstand – og i de scener hvor hun fungerer og er til stede – aldrig har lukket munden. Hun har en halvåben mund, lyttende og medlevende fuldstændig naturligt, men i de scener, hvor hun er blokeret, har hun bare en lukket mund og nogle nærmest porcelænsagtige kinder og øjenvipper, der er hundrede procent Bambi. Det er måske uklogt af mig at sige det, men det er et faktum (...)

<sup>xiii</sup> Men pludselig kunne hun og gav en storstået præstation her sidst på dagen. (...) Det var gribende at se og til stor værdi for filmen, så vi sluttede af i stor tilfredshed. Bagefter sad vi og drak et lille glas vin og glædede os meget over at det hele var overstået, og sagde farvel med maner. Det var lige før, vi blev gode venner igen og blev enige om at denne uges fjendskaber var unødvendige og bare havde været en pinsel for alle i gruppen og fuldstændigståbelige og til store skade for Susannes karakter i den tid.

<sup>xiv</sup> men at påstå, at ikke stort set samtlige kvindelige skuespillere har optrådt I mine seksuelle fantasier, ville være at lyve. Måske har specielt Anne Louise optrådt der med jævne mellemrum. Og sådan har det nok været på... ja, alle de film, jeg har lavet, vil jeg tro, når jeg tænker tilbage. Og det har jeg snakket om før, det er en del af det hele.

<sup>xv</sup> og som jeg netop snakkede med Bente om, så har jeg i begyndelsen af min karriere haft et meget meget besværet forhold til skuespillerinder. Jeg har altid været nærmest på krigsfod med dem (...) Det forhold ændrede sig lidt allerede på 'Riget' og i særdeleshed på 'Breaking the Waves', og jeg er naturligvis faldet i præcis den samme ... fælde vil jeg ikke kalde det, men i den samme automatik som de fleste andre instruktører, netop at man opnår en eller anden form for instruktør-forelskelse i nogle af personerne. Det er vigtigt for mig at bruge ordet forelskelse, for det er så det, det kommer tættest på, og jeg må sige at jeg... på 'Breaking the Waves' har det været Karin, som spillede Dodo, som jeg ligesom har ... havde ... jeg var vanvittig jaloux på næsten stort set alt, hvad

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hun foretog sig, andet end være med i filmen, og det var vel også en forelskelse. Det har det været, og nu det samme med Anne Louise.

<sup>xvi</sup> Men jeg kan se, at det i virkeligheden er præcis det samme, der foregår i en hvilken som helst instruktionssituation, og det, som jeg har konkluderet mig frem til – og det er måske en efterrationalisering for at få tingene til at se påenere ud – men det er, at det i virkelighed er et meget meget sundere forhold at have til skuespillerinderne end det fjendske – og måske er det to sider af samme sag. (...) jeg prøver bare at forsøre de følelser, jeg kan få over for medvirkende. Jeg ved ikke, om det kan forsvares, det kan det muligvis ikke. Ja, en hvilken som helst følelse, man har, er jo god nok, det bliver jeg ved med at sige til mig selv. Måske er det i hvert fald naturligt, at det sker i forholdet instruktør/skuespillerinde.

<sup>xvii</sup> Jeg ved ikke... hele lortet kører oppe i hovedet på mig, og jeg gider ikke være ... nu er det ubehageligt. Jeg vil hverken have, at hun skal være såd ved mig eller dum ved mig eller noget som helst. Jeg vil bare have, at det skal være overstået med denne her film, så jeg kan slippe for at se hende. Og det er helt åndssvagt, for hun går jo bare rundt og er fuldstændig... ja, hun gør ja ingenting.

<sup>xviii</sup> En eller anden dum filmforelskelse, det er for barnligt. Jeg er jo ikke engang forelsket! Det er ikke engang en realitet, men for fanden bare noget jeg bider mig ind oppe i min knold. (...) Man kan sige, at følsomheden er et værktøj, men det er eddermame ikke et værktøj, som det er særlig behageligt eller let at have med at gøre. (...) Nu kommer avisens, klokken er tre, og jeg kan ikke sove, og jeg må overveje at spille den af for femte gang for at falde i søvn... Min stakkels, stakkels, stakkels pik. For helvede...!

<sup>xix</sup> Jeg har været en bedre instruktør som beundrende end som afskyende, betydeligt bedre. Så bortset fra, at følelserne er en bivirkning ved jobbet, kan man sige, at følelserne - hvor ubehagelige og utilsigtede de end kan være - også bliver et arbejdsredskab på den måde, at tingene bliver bedre, meget meget bedre.

<sup>xx</sup> Mødte i går Anne-Grethe og i dag Anne Louise og konstaterede, at fremmedgørelsen indtræder omgående efter et arbejde af den type. Det var stort set som at møde et par gamle tanter, man ikke havde set længe og ikke havde noget specielt ønske om at møde. Det understreger det vanvittigt professionelle i denne her vildt hysteriske branche. Det er specielt interessant, når man tænker på, hvor relativt tæt vi er kommet i den ovenfor beskrevne sindssyge proces. Tankevækkende og ganske uhyggeligt.