REGIEBUCH 2 (Situating the Director)

Reinventing *Regietheater*

The Actor-Director Relation in Rehearsals

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PhD candidate: Johannes Maria Schmit

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Principal Supervisor: Jon Refsdal Moe
Supervisors: Josefine Wikström, Juliette Mapp

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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.

Table of Contents / "Written Part of the Thesis"

Table of Contents / “Online Resources”

Please note that in the case of the most common references to the online resources I use the abbreviations indicated below.

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REGIEBUCH 2 (Situating the Director)

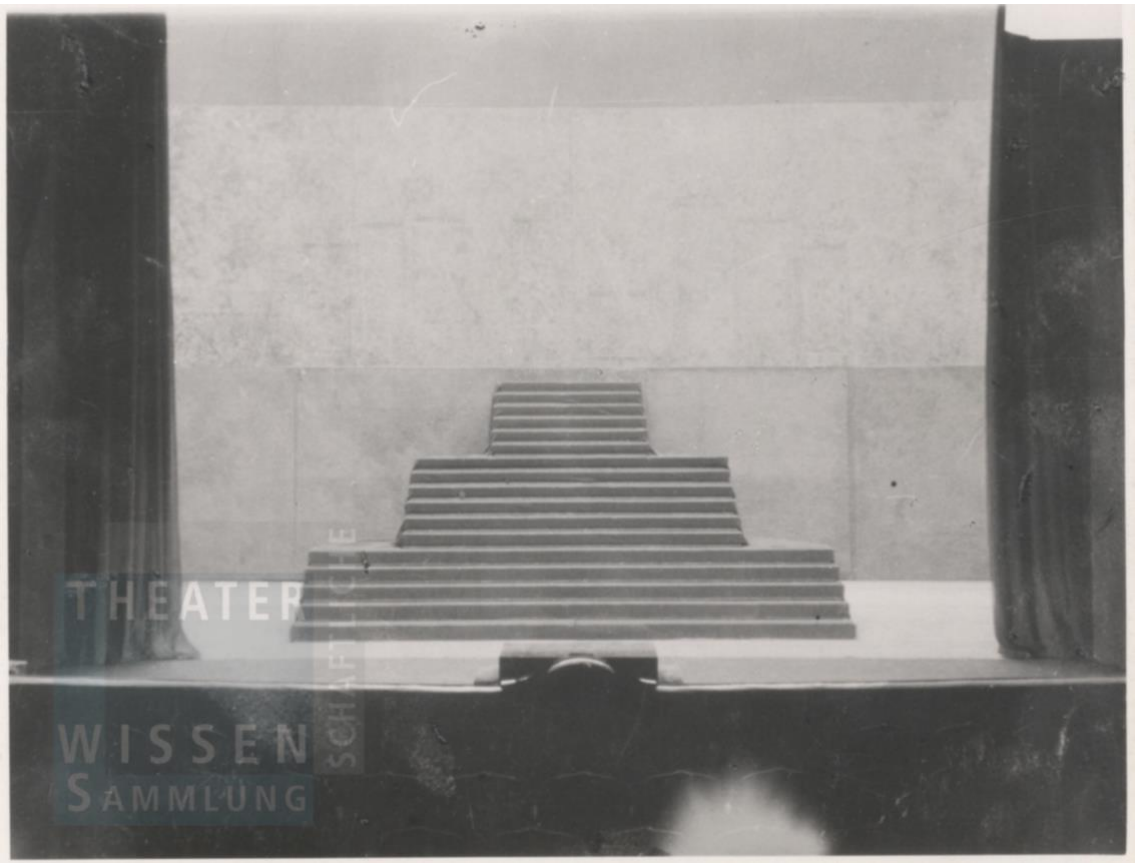

Figure 1: Terracing of the territory: *Stufenbühne* [step-stage] by set-designer Emil Pirchan for *Richard III.*, Berliner Staatstheater, 1920. (Courtesy of Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung der Universität Köln, Schloss Wahn)

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".[61] For the most part they are written as personal, non-fiction literary essays, snatched from the realm of "memoir" by means

[61] 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."[62] 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][63], 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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[62] 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.

[63] 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 "lorded 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 20th 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 theatral 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.[64] 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.

[64] 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.[65] 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.[66]

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[65] 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)

[66] 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[67]; 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.[68] 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 *re*construction by

[67] 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.

[68] 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[69], 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.*[70]

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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[69] 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.

[70] 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)[71]). 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"[72], 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 19th 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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[71] 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)

[72] "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 20th 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 choses 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 20th-century experience as such.[73]

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?[74]) 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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[73] 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?

[74] 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)[75].

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

[75] 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[76], 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.[77]

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).[78] By illustrating his distinction between "glorious" and

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

[77] 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.

[78] 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[79]. 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 20th century art, it simply *is* the intellectual framework that captures my own experience of *Regietheater* in its

[79] 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.[80] 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

[80] 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_2." (Malm 2016, 290)

policies as well as epistemologies.[81] 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.[82]

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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[81] 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)

[82] 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[83] – 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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[83] 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.[84]

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

[84] 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).[85] 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

[85] 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.[86]

There are various ways to explain this cultural transference of which many will lead to the very blunt 19th 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.[87]

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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[86] 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).

[87] 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 flyktning 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 20th 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.[88] (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

[88] 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][89], 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.[90]

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.

[89] 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).

[90] “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.[91]

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.[92] The specter of *Volksbühne* is, in that sense, of a special, most productive kind: it did not start haunting only

[91] 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)

[92] *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.[93] 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.[94]

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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[93] 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.

[94] 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.[95])

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

[95] 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?[96]

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.[97] 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

[96] 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)

[97] 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.[98]

*

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

[98] "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."[99]

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

[99] 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.[100] 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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[100] 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.[101]

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

[101] 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.[102]) 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[103]; 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.[104]

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[102] 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).

[103] 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.

[104] 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. Hipler" (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

"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 21st 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.[105] 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.[106]

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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[105] 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.

[106] 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".[107] 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

[107] 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.[108] 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[109] 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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[108] 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.

[109] 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-securization[110]; 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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[110] 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.[111]

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 craftmanship of the many departments in a city theater they were entering, they indulged in the risk of "job cuts and liquidation".[112] 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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[111] 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)

[112] 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 20th 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 20th 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 20th 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.[113] 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.[114] The relative isolation of these university programs that combine theory

[113] 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.

[114] 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.[115] In the following I will therefore extrapolate a set of concepts introduced by Gilles Deleuze in his seminal essay on Leopold von Sacher-Masoch[116] *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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[115] 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.

[116] 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)[117]

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

[117] 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' 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.*[118] 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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[118] 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*[119] 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.[120] 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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[119] 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.

[120] 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 "repudiat[ing] 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[121], 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.[122]

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

[121] I have personally never attended Castorf's rehearsals (which might explain the transferential 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)

[122] 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.[123] 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 restitute him by alluding to a contemporary hierarchy of victimhood.[124] Obviously, social relations in De Sade's materialism are relations of domination, asymmetric and entangled; so in contrast to the

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[123] 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).

[124] 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 "repudiat[ing] 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.[125] In other words, by *taking space*, the director of the De Sadian genius paradoxically *creates*

[125] 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.[126]

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.[127]

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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[126] Maybe one of the meanings encapsuled in Antonin Artaud's formula of "a pure cruelty", a cruelty "without bodily laceration" ([1938] 1958, 101)

[127] 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[128] 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

[128] 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.[129] 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.[130] 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"

[129] 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 19th century finds his mistress by putting out small newspaper adds. "Les petites annonces", as it says in the original.

[130] 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 relationelle* (1998) – the book that rendered a whole practice of fine art-making intelligible – we see an installation by Rirkit Tiranvanja (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 relationelle* (© Les presses du reel/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).[131]

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)

[131] 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.[132] 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.[133] 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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[132] 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.

[133] 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.[134] 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 relationelle" applied in the performing arts?[135] In the following, I will try to answer this question by producing a more comprehensive

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[134] 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).

[135] 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. [136]

"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 relationelle* 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.

[136] 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 Rirkit Tiranvanja'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.[137] 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

[137] 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.[138] 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

[138] 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. [139] 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.

[139] 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.

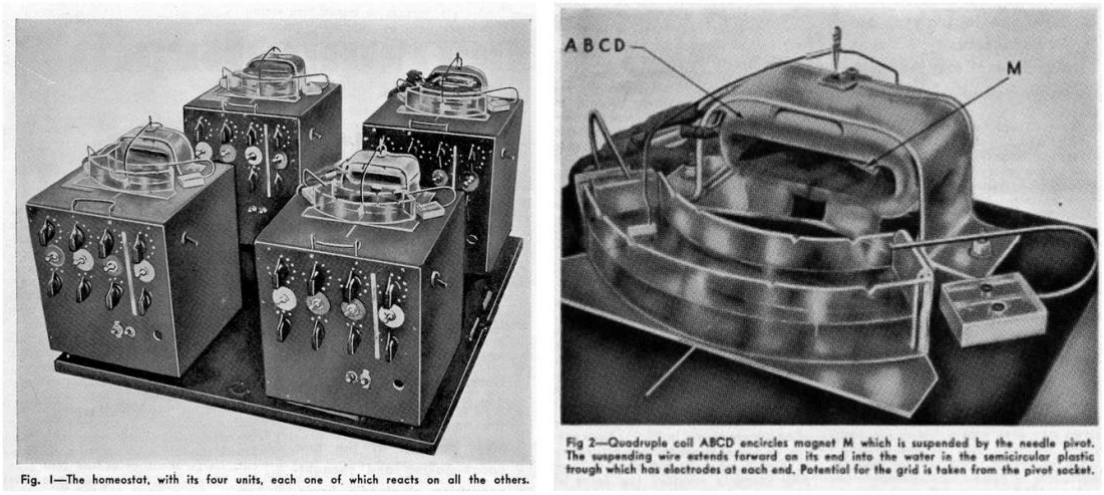

Figure 6: The first published account of the homeostat appeared under the title of "Design for a Brain" in the December 1948 issue of the journal *Electronic Engineering* (London).

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"*[140]– 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.[141]

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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[140] I owe the observation of this latest shift in parlance to choreographer and curator Erik Valentin Berg.

[141] 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.[142]

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.[143] 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 20th 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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[142] 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)

[143] 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 20th 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.

*"*Regie*rung" / 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[144].)

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

[144] 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 ac*count*ed 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.[145]

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

[145] 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.[146] 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 int 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[147]: 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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[146] 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.

[147] 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[148] 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

[148] 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.[149]

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.[150]

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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[149] 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).

[150] 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.

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[i] Jane Gallop, *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 56

[ii] Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction – Feminism and Psychoanalysis.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 73

[iii] 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

[iv] Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, 142

[v] Luce Irigaray, "The Limits of the Transference" in *The Irigaray Reader*, edited by Margaret Whitford (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell), 114

[vi] Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction*, 143

[vii] Ibid.

[viii] 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.

[ix] [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 (…) picket et eller andet op.

[x] 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.