

AN EXPLOSIVE GENEALOGY: THEATRE, PHILOSOPHY AND THE ART OF PRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT: Not only in its conceptual reconstruction but also in the straightforward application of Badiou's thought its problems and tensions come to light. This paper thus sets out to identify a generic truth procedure in the domain of art; specifically within theatre starting out from the Meyerhold-event and tracing enquiries in the work of Artaud and Brecht. It turns out once one follows the lines of further enquiries one ends up sketching an explosive genealogy that gives rise to the concept of an art of presentation transgressing the boundaries of theatre, art and philosophy.

KEYWORDS: Badiou; Theatre; Truth; Genealogy; Meyerhold; Brecht; Artaud; Presentation

'Il n'y a la peste,
le choléra,
la variole noire
que parce que la danse
et par conséquent le théâtre
n'ont pas encore commencé à exister'
—Antonin Artaud, 'Le Théâtre de la cruauté', 1947¹

It is not only in the conceptual reconstruction but in the straightforward application of Badiou's thought that its problems and tensions come to light. When things are no longer quite so straightforward perhaps we can start to think. The purpose of this paper is thus to identify a generic truth procedure in the domain of art; specifically within theatre. It turns out that in doing so one ends up sketching an explosive genealogy whose effects cannot be easily contained.

I. THE HISTORICAL SITUATION

Where to start? The question of origins is tricky in Badiou's thought and not only

1. Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. XIII, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, p. 105-118.

because the temporality of a truth procedure is that of the future anterior. For the sake of the argument let's start where Badiou's theory of praxis appears to start: with the existence of a historical situation in one of the four conditions of philosophy.² For us: the situation of theatre at the turn of the twentieth century. Given Badiou's ontology, we know that this situation is an infinite multiplicity, and that any attempt to circumscribe it linguistically presupposes the excess of its being over any specification of its properties. Thus we should not be embarrassed by our historical situation traversing national and European cultural spheres to include that of Russia which itself includes elements of India (the influence of Hindi philosophy and yoga on Stanislavski).

II. THE EVENT

It is evident that what goes under the name of 'theatre' today is far more varied than what went under that name in the late nineteenth century; thus a certain transformation must have taken place. The problem is where to situate *an* event that marks the beginning of that transformation. I hold that it is the Meyerhold-event—the *dual* advent of Meyerhold's scandalous and innovative productions *and* his writings, which occurred at the beginning of the transformation of the situation called 'theatre'. There are four reasons for this:³

1. In Meyerhold's work the plasticity of the acting body is liberated from the constraints of mimesis via the exploratory system of exercises called 'bio-mechanics'.
2. Meyerhold consciously worked to liberate theatrical space from the box-set with its illusional painted scenery and proscenium arch.⁴
3. Meyerhold named the fourth wall as an obstacle to be dismantled insofar as

2. It actually starts with the axioms of set-theory ontology; to be specific the axiom of infinity is fundamental because a *finite* truth procedure would be indistinguishable from the unfolding of state knowledge. For the vexed question of the interdependence of Badiou's set theory ontology and his theory of praxis see Ray Brassier, 'Presentation as Anti-Phenomenon in Alain Badiou's *Being and Event*', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 2006.

3. Why not call Stanislavski Moscow Art Theatre's productions, especially the 1898 production of the *Seagull* an event? It does seem to be an event insofar as Stanislavski imports Eastern techniques such as yoga to transform his actor training. Of course, one could argue that these techniques are appropriated and employed in the service of mimetic naturalism which was not a new orientation in Western art. On the other hand, the effects of such importation were not necessarily predictable or containable; once these exercises and techniques of corporeal exploration are introduced, they inevitably break the bounds of naturalistic acting. I think Stanislavski's fundamental innovation, and this is obvious in the work of his disciples Eugene Vakhtangov and Michael Chekhov, is the introduction of the laboratory model of rehearsal. The final objection, however, to there being a Stanislavski-event in Badiou's sense is that he installs and reinforces the very fourth wall between the actors and spectators which so many twentieth century directors attempted to dismantle.

4. 'Meyerhold fut sur le point de réaliser un théâtre conçu sur ce principe: forme ovulaire, double aire de jeu, amphithéâtre enveloppant un plateau d'ailleurs relié à la salle par des passerelles... le projet manqua de justesse'. In Mikhail Barkhine and Serge Vakhtangov 'Le bâtiment théâtral moderne vu par Meyerhold', *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, 1967-4, p. 350.

the spectator was to be transformed into a co-creator.

4. The mask is reintroduced as essential to theatre along with clowning, mime and play-acting.⁵

All of these elements were present in Meyerhold's work from 1907 onwards, over a decade before he attempted to create a proletarian theatre in line with the October revolution.⁶ In Meyerhold's essays he names his own productions as evental, claiming that his work along with that of a few other directors constituted 'the stylized theatre' that answers the demands of the age. Thus the Meyerhold-event—which is fragile, note, *not just ontologically* but in its very mode of appearance; the ephemerality of performance—is named in polemical writings which then circulate amongst theatre practitioners.

III. THE OPERATOR OF FIDELITY

But for a truth procedure to ensue from an event not just a name but an operator of fidelity must emerge, and this is where things get tricky. In the four constituent elements of the Meyerhold-event identified above there is a common phrase which could be taken as the operator of fidelity; the phrase 'liberate theatre from the constraints of X'. Any innovation in twentieth century theatre could thus be taken as faithful to the Meyerhold-event and as part of the truth procedure *if* it liberates theatre from a constraint. But then what do we end up with? A story of progressive liberation that looks suspiciously like Clement Greenberg's classic history of modernism as a teleological sequence of increasingly radical breaks. If all we can do after Badiou's conceptual fireworks is replicate Greenberg then we're wasting our time. In the introduction to *Being and Event* Badiou exhorts the philosopher to circulate through the referential of the four conditions. If one circulates through art nowadays, even just a little bit, one soon realizes that Greenberg's account is obsolete. The trick is to identify another operator of fidelity—in fact, the *re*introduction of masks and mummery already does not fit this schema of liberation. Evidently the operator has to be material, it has to figure within the situation to be transformed. It also has to be transmissible and it has to be general insofar as it can be used to judge the connection or non-connection of distant multiples to the Meyerhold-event. At present I hold the operator of fidelity to be the following sentence and in particular its last three words—found in a 1907 essay: 'We intend the audience not merely to observe, but to participate in a *corporate creative act*.'⁷ The operator of fidelity is actually a concept which does a lot of work in Badiou's theory of praxis, perhaps too much work; it alone determines the consistency of a truth procedure. Before going into this we need to determine where this truth procedure starts: what is the evental-site for the Meyerhold event?

5. Meyerhold attempts to reintegrate *commedia dell'arte* into high theatre. In his seminal essay 'The Fairground Booth' Meyerhold rehabilitates the following terms as key to his conception of theatre: *mummery*—ridiculous ceremonial, religious ritual which is silly or hypocritical, performance by mummers; *mummers*—actors in a traditional masked mime or dumbshow, poor actors, play actors; *cabotin*—strolling player, third rate ham.

6. See Meyerhold, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, trans. E. Braun, London, Methuen, 1969, p. 159-67.

7. Meyerhold, 'The Stylized Theatre', in *Meyerhold on Theatre*, p. 60.

IV. THE EVENTAL SITE

If a site, strictly speaking, is evental only insofar as an event occurs, then we can retrospectively read the site off the event. Given that I defined the event in four ways, its site can thus be identified in four different ways. Two of these turn out to be promising. On the one hand, the evental site for Meyerhold is the material space of the auditorium. The latter is definitely present in the situation of theatre, and its expressive capacities were inexistent according to established canons of theatrical practice. On the other hand, inasmuch as the Meyerhold-event also consists of his proletarian theatre, the evental site is social differentiation or class: again, necessarily an element of the situation of theatre, but one whose implications for theatrical practice remained entirely foreign to pre-WWI theatre.

How can these two different identifications of the evental site be reconciled?⁸ The operator of fidelity is—‘does this multiple make for a *corporate creative act*?’ Hence, what the Meyerhold-event does is transform *not just* the stage and its objects, but the *entire material space* of the auditorium *including* the audience members *into* the work. To backtrack, what marked Stanislavski’s reforms within realist theatre was that he sought to transfer the sovereign singularity of the art work—using the terms of classical aesthetics—from the play to the actor’s performance. Through the actor’s attainment of a ‘creative state of mind’ during their naturalistic performance, they intuitively add or modify tiny details such that each performance will be singular. The obvious trap with this ‘reform’ is that it leads directly to the star system: the play *A Streetcar named Desire* remains the same but people say the star, Marlon Brando, shone on a particular night. What the Meyerhold-event does—or starts off, because it is an infinite task—is far more profound: it seeks to transfer this singularity *from* the literary work or the actor *to the performance as a material whole* including the participant-audience members. In other words, the task is to create a ‘corporate creative act’, to integrate, however momentarily, an acting collective body that cannot be repeated. The evental site for the Meyerhold event is thus all the material elements in the auditorium inasmuch as they could become part—however briefly—of a transindividual act.⁹ A confirmation of this identification of the evental site is found

8. The identification of evental-sites is one of the most difficult challenges Badiou’s philosophy lays down to those who would work on it. Without the evental-site his ontology is merely a competitor to other formalist ontologies whose most striking applications are in database and intranet design. The evental-site is how Badiou anchors the possibility of change in being. Moreover, the identification of such sites counters the tendency of academic institutions to encourage eclectic individualism and specialization: thinking evental sites gives a tactical orientation to research, it connects it to spaces of potential praxis: spaces where thought as such is likely to emerge.

9. Finally, one last way of identifying the site of the Meyerhold event is to say that it was Stanislavski’s rehearsal processes. Meyerhold started his theatrical career by spending four years acting in the Moscow Art Theatre. Stanislavski’s rehearsal techniques involved continual experimentation and a proliferation of exercises that were unpublicized and restricted to him and his disciples. What was at stake in these rehearsals was the creation of signifying bodies and non verbal communication between actors and audience. Again the crucial difference between Stanislavski and Meyerhold was that Stanislavski did not consider the potential creativity of the audience and the emergence of a collective which included it.

in the tale that, in one production, Meyerhold wanted to extend a flight of stairs across a picture box stage, have it sweep towards the footlights, pass them and continue down to the level of the audience. The producers vetoed this design and allowed the stairs to come as far as the footlights and no further. The material space of the auditorium was absent from the state of theatre at Meyerhold's time. The veto is a sign of this lack. In another paper I argue that one *can* identify a site without an event actually occurring due to the signs of lack and excess that emerge at the level of the state with reference to the site.¹⁰

V. ONE OR MORE INTERVENTIONS?

According to Badiou, for a truth procedure to occur not only must an event occurring at an evental site be named and turned towards the situation via the emergence of an operator of fidelity, but enquiries must be conducted into the multiples of the situation, determining whether or not they are connected to the event. Both the direction and the results of these enquiries cannot be predetermined: otherwise one would be dealing with the practical unfolding of state knowledge and not with a generic truth procedure.

What happens to theatre after Meyerhold? A whole number of different enquiries and explorations take place, some of them more or less simultaneously. I am going to focus on two names which crystallize innovation in the situation of theatre: Artaud and Brecht. These two figures respond to the Meyerhold-event—to its echoes—but in different manners.

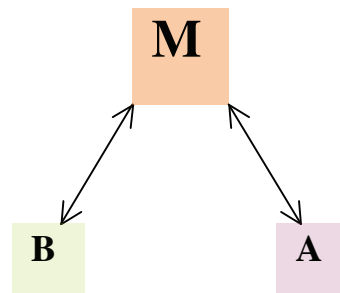


Diagram 1

How does Brecht work in theatre in fidelity to the Meyerhold-event? Brecht knew of Meyerhold's work—notably he saw one of Meyerhold's productions in Berlin in 1926 and cites Meyerhold in his writings— but this is not the point.¹¹ Brecht was faithful not to

10. See O. Feltham, 'Singularity happening in politics: the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Canberra 1972', *Communication and Cognition*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2004, 225-245.

11. Brecht refers to Meyerhold in relation to Stanislavski and Vakhtangov and as part of a complex of Russian directors, and also with reference to choreographic work in Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. J. Willett, London, Methuen, 1964, pp. 130, 134. Piscator refers to Meyerhold's *La Dame aux camélias* in April 1935 conversation with Brecht (see *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 76).

Meyerhold's directing style or productions, but to the 'Meyerhold event'. His fidelity lies in his investigation of what he calls 'the social function of theatre'; an interested investigation in that he seeks to dislodge theatre from what he calls its 'culinary function' of providing an evening's pleasure in the form of merchandize.¹² This displacement is carried out by exploring theatre's capacity to expose the existence of social classes. The idea was to interrupt and frustrate the audience's habit of identifying with characters and empathizing with their inability to change their fate—such, for Brecht, was the essential operation of what he called 'Aristotelian drama'; his name for that theatre which was not connected to the Meyerhold-event.¹³ Rather, the audience was to be encouraged to think about how characters choose to act in social situations. The horizon or promise of these interruptions and stimuli to thought was a possible politicization of the audience. Brecht's exploration led to a proliferation of new names, as Badiou remarks of all truth procedures: 'epic theatre', 'alienation or distanciation-effect', 'theatre of a scientific age', 'theatre for instruction'. Insofar as such names were and are picked up and reworked by other theatre practitioners they form part of what Badiou terms 'a subject idiom'. Insofar as the names can be used to regroup multiples encountered in the situation of theatre, they become part of the truth procedure's 'counter-state'.¹⁴

But Brecht is faithful to the Meyerhold-event in yet another manner: in line with Meyerhold's embrace of masks and mummery Brecht incorporates into the language of theatre complicated stage machinery, marionettes, and the projection of titles and pictures onto screens. For Brecht these devices, in particular the projections, were not mere aids but, 'organic parts of the work of art'.¹⁵ The third and perhaps the most important element of Brecht's fidelity is his critical interrogation of mass media which were rising in prominence in his time. It is this interrogation that generates a classic example of forcing for us.

What is forcing exactly? It is a relation between a statement concerning the situation-to-come—the situation supplemented with its generic subset—and a particular multiple which, *if* it turns out to belong to the generic subset, renders the statement true in the situation to come. In Badiou's metaontology—not in Cohen's maths—what determines whether a multiple belongs to the generic multiple is whether or not it is connected to the event. Therefore the concept of forcing provides a more complicated account of what happens in an enquiry. In an 1932 essay Brecht claims that one way of changing the social function of theatre would be to fuse it with the organs of mass communication; he considers the case of radio. At this point we already should note

12. Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre' (1930), in *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 36.

13. 'We are free to discuss any innovation that does not threaten the stage-apparatus' social function—that of providing an evening's entertainment. We are not free to discuss those which threaten to change its function, possibly by fusing it with the educational system or with the organs of mass communication.' Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre', p. 34.

14. New York performance artist Dan Graham used Brecht's alienation-effect to think his own work in the 1970s. See Rosa Lee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, revised ed., London, Thames and Hudson, 1988, p. 162.

15. Brecht, 'Notes to Die Mütter: the Indirect Impact of Epic Theatre' (1933), in *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 58.

that the generic truth procedure of ‘new theatre’ has proceeded *beyond* the bounds of the situation of ‘theatre’—by encountering the mass media. In this essay Brecht argues that radio as it stands has no ‘social object’ because it is unidirectional and the listeners cannot supply content. The public occasions it reports upon are not genuinely public because listeners cannot communicate themselves, only receive. The statement ‘the social function of theatre would be changed by fusing it with the organs of mass communication’ is thus not forced by the element ‘radio’, insofar as the latter does not belong to the generic multiple of ‘new theatre’. Why? Because it does not lend to the generation of a ‘corporate collective act’. However, Brecht then makes another statement that *could* be forced: if the radio apparatus were ‘changed over from distribution to communication (it) would be the finest communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be as if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship as well as isolating him’.¹⁶ What clearer anticipation could one want of contemporary debates around uses of the internet and grass-roots democracy.

However this example of forcing appears quite problematic. Given the statement, what is the related element which if it turned out to belong to the generic multiple would force the statement? Wouldn’t it simply be the existence of an interactive radio technology and the institutional means to put it in place? Surely such a multiple has turned out to exist: the internet. Then forcing would be no more than an avatar of Aristotle’s concept of actualization; an empirical fleshing out, an incarnation of an idea. Such a conclusion would be too hasty: what has to be decided is *what part* of the internet and its use is an element of the generic multiple; how is the internet—not all of it, perhaps very little of it—connected to the Meyerhold-event?¹⁷ But we are way ahead of ourselves here; on the outer limit of an explosion that we have just began to map. Indeed, to decide such a question by applying the operator of fidelity we would need to identify many more forced statements on the part of other practitioners which flesh out and qualify the sense of a ‘corporate creative act’. As Badiou says, an activist or an artist works according to truth as a process rather than the categories of knowledge, but they cannot afford not to know their situation and thus, here, the preceding enquiries.

Let’s turn to Antonin Artaud. Although Artaud’s primary references are to Appia, Craig and Copeau, he explicitly cites Meyerhold and other Russian directors with admiration for their combat—which he also sees as his own—against ‘psychological’ or ‘literary theatre’: he sees in their work a ‘theatre of action and of the masses’.¹⁸ He saw Meyerhold’s productions in Berlin in 1932 and scholars wager that he was aware of the

16. Brecht, ‘The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication’, in *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 52.

17. What actually decides whether a multiple belongs to the generic subset? Obviously in the case of the ‘new theatre’ it is not a particular production style being validated by its ‘success’ in commercial terms or even in terms of publicity. The Dadaists and the Futurists were criticized by art critics for seeking notoriety for the sake of notoriety. Evidently notoriety is available without art. I hold that the only viable criterion for belonging to a generic multiple is whether or not the multiple in question repeats and transforms in an unpredictable unsettling manner certain decisions and innovations made by other artists in other contexts.

18. In a 1931 text in Artaud, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. III, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, p. 216.

latter's Parisian tour in 1930. Artaud's thought responds in three ways to the event of new theatre. First he continues the enquiry into the plasticity of theatrical space towards a dissolution of the actors-audience distinction. At the age of twenty he already planned a 'spontaneous theatre' which would perform in the middle of factories.¹⁹ In *The Theatre and its Double* he speaks of using granges or hangars for theatres and developing a turning spectacle with the spectators in the middle.²⁰ Not only that but he also follows Meyerhold's reintroduction of masks and mummery by seeking to develop a unique concrete language of theatre that would include 'everything which can be materially manifested and expressed on stage' such as 'music, dance, plasticity, mime, gesticulation, intonations, architecture, lighting, décor', later adding masks and mannequins.²¹ Artaud understood the construction of this plural yet unique language as both a purification and an enrichment of theatrical practice. It was to be achieved by recourse to non-Occidental theatrical traditions—for example, the Balinese—and directed against the hegemony of the text or of 'articulated language' in European theatre.

Finally, and most importantly, underneath the names of the 'theatre of cruelty' or 'Balinese theatre' or 'metaphysical theatre', Artaud thinks theatre as an immediate act of communication which directly affects the spectator's sensibilities, a transfiguration of their state of nerves akin to a disaster in its intensity. Hence his long exploration of the metaphor of the plague, itself drawn from St. Augustine who deplored theatre as a form of mental infection.²² It so turns out that it is none other than Meyerhold who lamented in 1907 that theatre was losing its power of *infectious transformation*.²³

However, at a certain point in his thought Artaud distances his conception of theatre—a magical metaphysical event—from the 'Russian' conception:

I consider as vain all those attempts made in Russia to place the theatre at the service of immediate political or social ends. This is the case however new the staging procedures employed. These procedures, insofar as they wish to subordinate themselves to the strictest givens of dialectical materialism, turn their back on the metaphysics that they scorn, and remain scenic staging following the most vulgar sense of the word.²⁴

The distance that Artaud thus places between himself and Meyerhold is commutative insofar as it is the same distance which is normally understood to exist between Artaud and Brecht's political theatre.²⁵

19. Alain Virmaux, *Antonin Artaud et le théâtre*, Paris, Seghers, 1970, p. 29.

20. Artaud, 'Le Théâtre de la Cruauté (Premier Manifeste)', *Oeuvres Complètes IV*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 115.

21. Artaud, 'Le Théâtre de la Cruauté', pp. 58, 47, 111.

22. Artaud, 'Le Théâtre de la Cruauté', p. 32.

23. Meyerhold, 'The Stylized Theatre' in *Meyerhold on Theatre*, p. 60.

24. Virmaux, *Antonin Artaud*, p. 138.

25. 'Schéma banal et simpliste: Artaud représenterait un théâtre de participation, de frénésie, d'irréalisme; Brecht, un théâtre de 'distanciation', le didacticisme, d'insertion dans l'histoire. Bref, deux pôles, deux univers inconciliables. En fait, les positions ne sont pas si tranchées et les passerelles ne manquent pas d'un univers à l'autre, même si la tentative du 'Living Theatre', jouant l'*Antigone* de Brecht, paraît décidément

Nevertheless, Artaud's thinking of theatre did remain faithful to the Meyerhold-event: witness this extract from his last letter on theatre, written in 1948, two weeks before his death. He reflects on what he saw as the complete failure of his censored radio programme 'To have done with the judgement of God':

...I will never touch Radio again
and from now on I will consecrate myself exclusively to the theatre
such as I conceive it
a theatre of blood
a theatre that, in every performance will have caused to gain
corporeally
something as much the one who performs
as the one who comes to see performing
besides
one doesn't perform
one acts
theatre is in reality the genesis of creation...²⁶

Here Artaud's fidelity to the idea of theatre as a 'corporate creative act' is evident.

'Artaud' and 'Brecht' thus name diverging exploratory transformations of the situation of theatre, both of which are faithful to the Meyerhold-event. It is already clear that Badiou's theory of praxis does not lead to a uni-linear account of modernism: we already have two diverging lines with independent chronologies.²⁷ Moreover, not only do these particular lines continue and fork in the work of other theatre practitioners, but these are not the only lines that emerge from the Meyerhold event.

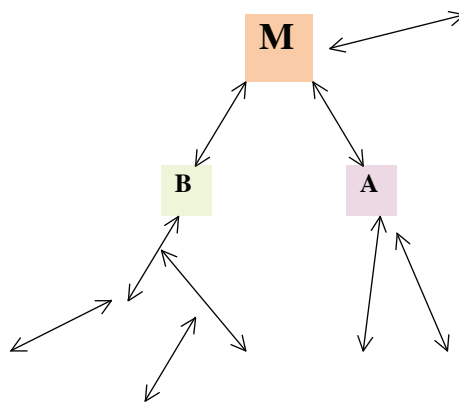


Diagram 2

insuffisante à combler la fossé. Qu'on relise plutôt le livret *d'Il n'y a plus de firmament* (II, 9): dans l'animation des foules, dans la montée de la révolte contre les possédants, on trouve des procédés et des accents qui semblent repris des grandes oeuvres de Brecht. Virmaux, *Antonin Artaud*, p. 139.

26. Virmaux, *Antonin Artaud*, p. 279.

27. In any case, to criticize a theory of change for being 'linear' and reductionist in contrast to the virtues of the 'non-linear' is to betray an impoverished understanding of the nature of line, especially in the field of art (the line outlines strata and opens up universes).

Explosion: the truth procedure proceeds multi-directionally into different domains via forcings

What is at stake here is the mapping of a generic truth procedure. No doubt this is an oxymoronic if not moronic activity: the generic does not let itself be diagrammed, only written mathematically. For the sake of communication, let's say this is a rough sketch, not a map. To sketch a generic procedure one can either identify a sequence of enquiries via a proper name or indicate forcings to which proper names may be attached. At least six general statements can be identified which force the 'new theatre'.

1. *The space of performance, including the audience, is totally mobile and plastic.* This forcing may be traced from Meyerhold to the 1918 outdoor reconstruction of the October revolution with 8000 actors, to Brecht's stage machinery, to Grotowski's complete integration of stage and auditorium and it evidently includes street theatre and happenings but not all of them and perhaps very few.
2. *Actions which make up a theatrical work may be non-intentional and subject to chance.* See the function of improvisation in Artaud's early thought, the work of John Cage and Allan Kaprow's happenings.²⁸ However, not all collective events involving chance and presentation belong to the new theatre; chance is staged in commercialized sport.
3. *In the age of machines, theatrical movement—whether of puppets or humans—must be mechanized to the point of blurring the organic-mechanic distinction.* In 1908 Edward Gordon Craig calls for abolition of the performer and his or her replacement by an ubermarionette. The Futurist Prampolini repeats this call in 1915 but actually builds and uses marionettes.²⁹ Marinelli writes of the metallic mechanic Dance of the Aviatrix. Meyerhold developed a biomechanical theory of actor training. Erwin Piscator, Brecht's early partner, used marionettes in Berlin, Artaud calls for them in his 1932 'Theatre of Cruelty' text. Again, the use of marionettes does not per se guarantee that a work belongs to the 'new theatre'.
4. *Actors do not have to present well-rounded characters or roles, but functions.* In 1934 Brecht says, 'the people were just cyphers serving a cause'.³⁰ In the late 1950s, Jerzy Grotowski abandons characters and coherent roles. Nevertheless, *not all* collective presentations in which people do not present individuality belong to the new theatre (Nuremberg rallies).
5. *A theatrical and musical language incorporates the noise of the modern world.* See the Futurist Russolo's 1913 manifesto *The Art of Noises*; Dada's use of 'bruitist' poetry in the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916;³¹ Artaud's call for the use of

28. I owe the reference to Allan Kaprow's work to Barbara Formis who is a specialist in the area of fluxus, happenings, contemporary dance and the Judson Dance Group.

29. Goldberg, *Performance Art*, p. 22.

30. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 66.

31. Goldberg, *Performance Art*, p. 67.

cries and intonations in his ‘Balinese Theatre’ and ‘Staging and Metaphysics’ in 1932; and John Cage’s 1937 manifesto entitled ‘The Future of Music’. The new theatre thus includes the enquiries of contemporary music.

6. *The mass media can be appropriated and diverted to critical ends.* See Brecht on radio as mentioned above but also on film in 1931.³² Brecht met Eisenstein in 1929. Thus the exploration-transformations of the ‘new theatre’ could then include certain enquiries of film, and more recently, as I suggested earlier, parts of mass media movements such as open-source and creative-commons on the internet—but not all of them, perhaps even very few.

Note that none of these statements *per se* identifies a subset of the generic multiple ‘the new theatre’: the deciding factor is whether particular multiples related to these statements—performances, works, schools—turn out to be connected to the Meyerhold event or not. Hence not all and perhaps very few uses of chance and noise will turn out to belong to the ‘new theatre’.

With this caveat, each of these statements can be said to serve as a synecdoche for a trajectory of enquiry which can be traced to the Meyerhold event. The problem, however—and this is only a problem for the strict application of Badiou’s philosophy of change—is that these enquiries take the ‘new theatre’ truth procedure into other domains than the original situation. Many of the artists I attached to these statements appear to belong to other situations, if not other truth procedures such as ‘Performance art’, ‘visual art’, or ‘dance’. Indeed, once one identifies these forcings it is evident that the exploration-transformation of the new theatre passes as much through Futurism and Dadaism as it does through Brecht’s theatre. The genealogy—and genealogies are usually selective—thus explodes from original situation of theatre out into different realms.

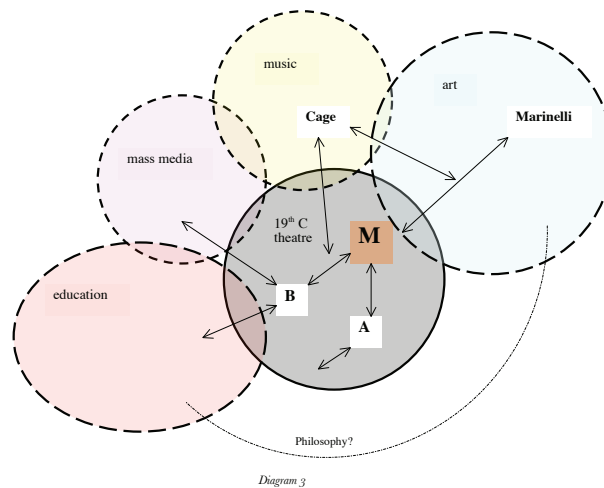


Diagram 3

32. See also as a line of enquiry the function of masks in Meyerhold, ‘The Fairground Booth’, 1912, Cabaret Voltaire, 1916, and Edward Gordon Craig’s influential magazine on theatre called *The Mask*.

We could blame such multiplicity on our choice of artform; unlike Badiou's favourite examples of artistic truth procedures, music, poetry and painting, theatre is already a *hybrid* art, combining painting, sculpture, literature, and music. But this is not enough. We could divide the 'new-theatre' up into political theatre, avant-garde theatre and art-theatre, but this would be mere academic convenience. If the 'new-theatre' invades spheres of art, performance art and even cinema, then the obvious question is raised of whether the Meyerhold-event is its unique source of fidelity. What is usually called 'performance art' is usually traced back to *Marinelli*, not Meyerhold, if not back to *commedia dell'arte* and Roman circuses. Via forcings the explosion thus rushes outwards and then chronologically backwards to secure new sources of fidelity. For example, Dario Fo—whose work is definitely part of the 'new theatre'—explicitly rejects avant-garde theatre in order to return to the popular theatre of scandalous Medieval mystery plays.

According to Badiou's philosophy of change *a* generic truth procedure proceeds within *a* historical situation. It separates out, in fidelity to *an* event, *its* generic submultiple and then adds it to the former situation. The schema in diagram 3 is a twist on Badiou's set-up. Not only do we have multiple historical situations—art, music, cinema, etc.—but we may even have multiple events.³³

It is here that Badiou's theory of generic truth procedures can be supplemented. What is required is a more complicated account of forcing and of the development of a counter state. I hold that within the domains of art and politics one can think a counter-state as a collective assemblage of enunciation which reinforces and unfolds the truth procedure by a number of typical operations. It is these operations which allow for the multiplication of the procedure's situations and for its possible *convergence* with *other* truth procedures, in the realm of dance or music for example. One of these typical operations is *the renaming of the whole*. It occurs frequently in the 'new theatre' truth procedure: Meyerhold attempted to name the new theatre as 'stylized theatre'; Brecht as 'epic theatre' or 'theatre for a scientific age' and these names can be used to multiply the domains of the truth procedure. Brecht speaks of cinema as an ideal vehicle for epic theatre. In other words, if a historical situation—*theatre*—is slowly transformed by a truth procedure, then evidently its name and its boundaries have to change. The philosophical question of what distinguishes one artform—such as theatre—from another artform—such as sculpture or performance or dance is in fact an *immediate practical question* insofar as the reworking of these boundaries is precisely what the truth procedure does in its renaming of the whole.

In my work on the Jacobin assemblage of enunciation in the French Revolution I identify three typical operations: catachrestic metonymy (the renaming of a whole by a part); centrifugal translation (Jacobin spokesmen travelling to outlying villages and translating the law passed by the *Assemblée nationale* into local dialects for the resolu-

33. The irreducible multiplicity of the arts is precisely Jean-Luc Nancy's question in *Les Muses*, Paris, Gallimard, 2001. What we have is Meyerhold-event not as absolute source but as an early knot/conjuncture/transistor which concentrated and then exploded out lines of energy. We also have a series of event-knots in Futurism, Dada and post-Schoenbergian music that lead to converging truth procedures.

tion of disputes) and centripetal incarnation (Robespierre's attempt to let the people speak through him). I mention this to indicate the kinds of operation—which are not just rhetorical but also technical and physical—which could be active in the new theatre truth procedure. To round off this preliminary investigation let's mark some unexpected effects of this explosive genealogy on both theatre and Badiou's philosophy.

VI. THE EMERGENCE OF A GENERIC ART OF PRESENTATION

As for theatre, the multi-directionality of the truth procedure means whatever the setbacks of, say, political theatre, the 'new theatre' continues its exploration-transformations in other directions. Its inclusion of certain enquiries in the realm of mass communication enables it to expand beyond the trap called the 'death of theatre'. Its inclusion of work which abandons aesthetic autonomy and seeks to integrate itself into ordinary practice means that it doesn't so much surpass the 'end of art' trap as envelop and enfold it. Ultimately what is at stake in these multiple enquiries is not so much a new *theatre* but the unfolding of a *generic art of presentation*: *generic* insofar as it links up all of these arts—time-based, visual, sonorous, tactile or odorous—which appear to be distinct to theatre; *indiscernible* insofar as *not all* of the work in these fields (perhaps *very little* of it) belongs to it.³⁴

But then how does this generic art of presentation carve out what belongs to it? Earlier I suggested that the operator of fidelity—that which decides whether a multiple is connected to the Meyerhold-event of not—was the idea of a 'corporate creative act'. Yet isn't this, at least in the realms of art and politics, another name for any generic truth procedure: a 'corporate creative act'? Perhaps Badiou's philosophy itself has been conditioned by the 'new theatre' truth procedure.

Before exploring this possibility, let's step back in history for a moment. Long before Badiou's work, philosophy had already been conditioned by theatre as a truth procedure. If we look at the intraphilosophical effects of Greek tragedy in Plato's work we see that in fact it is precisely there that philosophy comes closest to thinking the generic *avant la lettre*, before Cohen, and before Meyerhold. In Book 10 of *The Republic* Plato thinks the being of the mimetic actor-poet as that presentation which both appears to occupy *every (professional) place*, and which, insofar as it does not maintain a proper relation to knowledge and the Idea, *does not occupy any place whatsoever*. The other moment in which Greek philosophy comes *close* to thinking the generic is in its examination of matter and change. Not to mention the *chora* in Plato's *Timaeus*, if we turn to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, we can see that he is led to think being, *ousia* (substance), not only as definable form and as composite substance—form plus matter—but also as *hypokeimenon*, the material sub-

34. These exclusions mark the difference between the idea of a generic art of presentation and the German romantic program of turning life into a work of art, which is I hold to be a illusory temptation and trap necessarily generated by the ambition of a truth procedure: Marinetti mistakenly imagined at one point: 'Thanks to us the time will come when life will no longer be a simple matter of bread and labour, nor a life of idleness either, but a *work of art*'.

strate *that underlies change* in his consideration of production (which is none other than the economic constituent of the *polis*).³⁵ The substrate has no properties in itself since it is the bearer of any property whatsoever and this is why it is not a definable ‘this’ (*tode ti*).³⁶

The result of this conditioning is that the Greek dispensation of the rapport between philosophy and theatre triangulates them by means of a third term, the *polis*. This is so not just for philosophy but also from the perspective of theatre—think of Aristophanes in *The Clouds* or *The Frogs*—insofar as both seek to monopolize the relation to the *polis* which they name *not* as mimesis but as education. However, education, in both cases, is thought under the rubric of presentation.

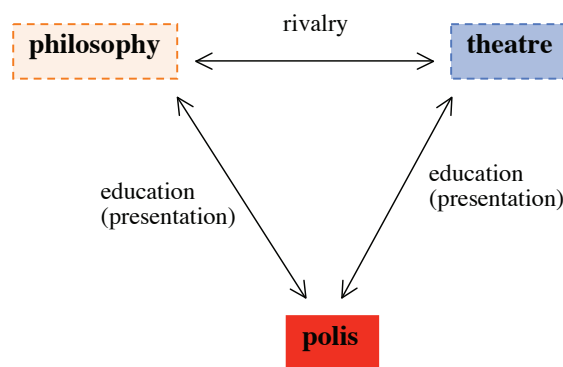


Diagram 4

If we return to the twentieth century it is obvious that certain enquiries of the ‘new theatre’ are not indifferent to this Greek dispensation: in fact, Brecht’s work transforms it. Already for Plato, thus from this viewpoint of philosophy the (pseudo) function of theatre is the presentation of society to itself via simulacra. The Brechtian twist is to argue that in doing so the only way can theatre avoid presenting simulacra is by not presenting society as a stable unity. That is, under Brecht’s directives theatrical presentation necessarily involves an identification of the social body but at the same time an exposure of its disjunctions *even if* only at the place of the gap between the subject of enunciation of the social identity and the enunciated of that social identity. Brecht thus thinks theatrical practice *as* the true installation of the reflexive moment within society.

This Brechtian dispensation immediately reveals the *intraphilosophical effects* of the ‘new theatre’ truth procedure: the explosion has reached philosophy and it has definitely conditioned the very model of change that we have been using to sketch it. These effects can be seen in three places:

35. For Aristotle, nothing can come from nothing. Moreover, a form is generated through the process of production—such as a table—which is different to the original form—separate pieces of wood—therefore there must be something which persists throughout the change of form but which is separate to form: this something is the material substrate.

36. See Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, p. 377 on being suffering neither generation nor corruption and on the inconsistent multiple as substrate.

1. First, for Badiou, the slow outlining of a generic subset involves traversing all of the properties of the historical situation—the situation is thus *identified* in its totality.
2. Second, the truth procedure is said to decide upon and measure the immeasurable gap between the situation and its state—thus the practice of reflexivity exposes and bridges the principle disjunction of the situation.
3. Third the structure of the event itself involves reflexivity inasmuch as it is a multiple whose name belongs to itself—thus a reflexive moment is at the origin of change.

The investigation of a ‘new theatre’ truth procedure via the strict application of Badiou’s philosophy of change thus bears strange fruit: the very *least* we can say, now, is that Badiou’s model of change is eminently theatrical, but in a completely reworked sense of ‘theatrical’. If Badiou’s concept of the event as appearing-disappearing is a result of his philosophy being conditioned by Mallarmé’s poem *Un coup de dès...* then the construction of a generic body can be understood as the intraphilosophical effect not only of Cohen’s mathematical inventions, but also of the art-of-presentation truth procedure.

But the consequences go further still: *if* it is the very nature of truth procedures to cross and redraw boundaries, *then* Badiou’s *philosophical* concept of a generic truth procedure could be understood as a *part of* the art-of-presentation truth procedure. Of course, Badiou, dealing with the spectre of fusion between philosophy and its conditions, calls for a strict distinction between philosophy and truth-procedures. I am no longer sure that this is the best way of thinking the real of an explosive genealogy. Insofar as Aristophanes, the Greek playwright, feels it necessary to *combat* the rival discipline of philosophy in the education of the city’s youth, philosophy itself could already be understood as an emergent *collective assemblage of enunciation* which *interferes with* if not *conditions* if not *takes part in* theatre. Then—and here the explosive genealogy carries right back out of the twentieth century and into the fifth and fourth century B.C.—the Greek philosophy machine itself could be thought to be part of the generic art of presentation; not all of it, perhaps very little of it, but definitely some of it.

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