**WARWICK 2014**

‘Applied theatre’ suggests approaches to social issues through transferable methods of critical reflection and performance skills. It is arguably the fastest growing strand of performance studies and involves cross-disciplinary typologies such as communal, educational and political theatre (Nicholson 2005: 8), participatory strategies in theatre ‘for’, ‘with’ and ‘by’ target audiences (Prentki and Preston 2009: 10), forms of project ownership relayed by facilitation, participation and intervention (ibid: 11) and, not least, alternative attitudes to dramatic instantiations in just about any site except conventional ones (Prendergast and Saxton 2009: 11-13). And yet there is no given link between all these approaches and any consequential social, institutional or political efficacy. As earlier research in the field has indicated, the complexity and vastness of social or political processes will always leave the matter of change through theatre “open to debate” and merely permit indications of discrete interventions to be parts of a “general efficacy” (Kershaw 1992: 252).

In the light of the evaluative difficulty and in the wake of post-cold war ideological dichotomies, a de-politicized phase is currently dominating applied theatre research. This is a part of an “affective turn”, especially in the UK which is the country behind the institutionalization and label of “applied theatre” and where “the end of effect” has given way to various affective theatre practices and discourses (Thompson 2009) as well as utopian imaginations of discrete projects and sites (Nicholson 2011). So it would be quite natural to appreciate the shift from effect to affect due to immeasurable estimates and far-fetched interpretations of political change if it wasn’t for all the political changes that are currently taking place by performative means around the world.

The affective turn has coincided chronologically with exceptionally effective actions in connection to the Arab spring, the occupy movements, a surge of political campaigns through social media and a variety of cognate political activism mixing bottom-up facilitation and horizontal organization with impact through tactical media, street performance and the formation of social movements. The latter examples are of course only the most noticeable cases that have emerged in mainstream media, research or on the streets in the Northern hemisphere. In places where applied theatre has a history as long as the UK although without a label like ‘applied theatre’, let alone an effective publishing industry or resourceful higher education institutions, issues like poverty, health, armed strife, globalization effects, corruption and other issues have not waned in significance in socially engaged art and performance. The world is certainly not lacking political problems, nor political resistance – in fact it is fair to assume that oppositional activities to the economic and military world order is more prevalent today than, say, in 1968 or 1989. However, the political strategies have undergone a gradual change, or at least generated alternative tactics, from fringe positions of hegemonic systems where the main purpose was to set up resistance against something that groups and individuals did not want to become to initiatives that offer affirmative alternatives to hegemonic regimes, either outside or right inside systems. These positions might be termed intratactical and paratactical strategies. In what follows I will link intratactical strategies to interventions inside dominant systems, whilst paratactical strategies will be discussed in terms of instantiations outside systemic spheres.

A noteworthy intratactical practice can be seen in the interventionist activism by the American performance and media group The Yes Men. The duo, consisting of Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno (which are their activist alter egos), has become recognized for their masquerading acts as corporate representatives and fabricated messages through media events which subsequently must be renounced by the corporations’ actual representatives to the detriment of their corporate profiles. The outcome of the interventions of the Yes Men is almost always that corporations or other organizations must take back a positive and humanitarian piece of news. One of the most renowned examples occurred in 2004, twenty years after the Bhopal disaster in India where thousands of people died after an explosion at a chemical factory plant. Bichlebaum acted as the spokesman for Dow Chemicals (now owner of Union Carbide, the company responsible for the disaster) spokesman Jude Finistrerra on BBC World with a potential audience of more than 200 million viewers. Finisterra pledged on live television to liquidate Union Carbide and compensate the victims of Bhopal, sanitize the factory grounds and finance research into other chemical risk products for a total of $ 12 billion. In about 20 minutes, Dow Chemical’s share price fell on the Frankfurt stock exchange with over 4%. By the use of tactical media and performance, The Yes Men managed to get inside and have an effect on three concurrent systems: global media, politics and finance. Their actions may be viewed as the ultimate Situationist prank (*détournement*), although with inside macro-perspectives and effects that the 1960s avantgardists could hardly have imagined.

In 2011 Mike Bonanno of The Yes Men arranged a so-called Yes Lab with Amanda Newall and some of her students at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm along with a group of activists and the author of this article. In an arrangement that resembled an applied theatre project, Bonanno introduced a modern history of activism and his own group’s particular tactics and then gradually handed over the creative decision-making process to the rest of the group through dialogue and hands-on experiments. We had already decided to target IKEA due to the company’s history of tax evasion and, ironically, its increasing interest to invest into the public sector of Sweden, e.g., through acquisitions of residential suburbs in Stockholm as well as ventures in private healthcare companies. It was eventually decided that Newall would sew a multi-purpose jacket to fit a mock representative of the company, whilst others constructed a hybrid piece of furniture that joined a comfort chair with bicycle wheels which consequently turned into a DIY wheelchair for elderly and disabled. We then went out to Skärholmen in southern Stockholm which hosts the largest IKEA store in the world and let the spurious salesman in the yellow jacket [image!] demonstrate the product with the help of a perfectly designed pamphlet. It took about ten minutes before security guards interrupted the activity and by then a significant number of customers had shown an interest in our “Poäng Mobil”. After the interference we revealed our identities and purpose, let the jacket out with a large text saying “tax fraud” and spoke to costumers about IKEA’s dodgy affairs.

Around the time of the IKEA intervention The Yes Men had become influenced by Occupy Wall Street in New York, despite their dissimilar *modus operandi* to approach powerful systems and corporations. If The Yes Men used intratactical and sudden Trojan Horse-like intervention strategies to get inside the infrastructure of corporate cultures with the help of media [SvD, SvT, Moderna museet], the occupiers chose to stand outside the targeted systems over a long time – although with a similar intensity of mass media attention and performative maneuvers. Occupy Wall Street (OWS) spread to countless cities around the US and many other countries but were itself a reflection and manifestation of the democratic uprising that began in Tunisia in January 2011 and unfolded to what was to become the Arab Spring all the way to the Tahir Square in Cairo and other places in North Africa, Middle East and Persian Gulf. At the back of the great recession and its superimposed austerity programmes there had been significant occupations in Greece (Syntagma Square in Athens) andSpain (Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid; Plaça de Catalunya in Barcelona) before OWS. However, due to a well-designed organization along with the media presence and cosmopolitan appeal of New York, OWS managed to establish a global counter-discourse on finance, justice and democracy that is quite vibrant to this day.

So strategically OWS differs from fringe and intratactical movements, or, in other words, resistant or interventionist tactics, by pursuing an increasing degree of autonomy (in a more clean-cut arts context it might have been called originality). This is by no means an autonomy that allows instantiations to stand free or in any way neutral of social or political power structures, but rather what David Graeber (2013) would call a ‘prefigurative’ politics in a detached although charged relation to a nearby power centre. With “prefigurative politics” Graeber means “the idea that the organizational form that an activist group takes should embody the kind of society we wish to create.” (Graeber 2013: 23) According to Luke Yates “prefigurative forms of political action combine collective experimentation; the imagining, production and circulation of political meanings or frames; the creating of new and future-oriented social norms or ‘conduct’; their consolidation in movement infrastructure; and the diffusion and contamination of ideas, messages and goals to wider networks and constituencies.” To me that sounds like the vital components of an applied theatre project, but we don’t see too many of them.

The similarities to theatre is not so much due to the fact that there were several performance artists among the most active occupiers (Graeber 2013, p. 22, 30-31, 49), but rather because the mentioned framework of the occupation, not least by means of its close reading of scripted bill of rights and interpretations of laws in the legal system, helped establish a semi-autonomous staging of the occupation where a significant degree of performativity and *realpolitik* took *effect*. The micro-democratic experiment was arranged with stations like soup kitchens, libraries, educational sessions, counseling services, entertainment and, of course, political forums.

“Occupy,” Graeber states, “was and remains at its core a forward-looking youth movement – a group of forward-looking people who have been stopped dead in their tracks.” (Graeber 2013: 69) While Graeber is talking about young people playing by the rules of society, investing huge amounts of money in student loans only to face long-term unemployment after graduation and whilst watching “the financial class completely fail to play by the rules, destroy the world economy through fraudulent speculation, get rescued by prompt and massive government intervention, and, as a result, wield even greater power and be treated with even greater honor than before.”

**TANZANIA**

This makes me think about another youth movement that have invested just as much personal and social stake in the creation of public opinion, namely the East African youth I researched in community-based theatre against AIDS a few years ago. [Compare student loan crisis with the overwhelming quest for education in Tanzania.] There are lots of comparative aspects to be said about these youth movements, but here I want to focus on the paratactical qualities of the community theatre. A quite obvious example took place in the village of Likokona in southern Tanzania [show and describe].

**AUSTRALIA**

A somewhat similar phenomenon can be found in Australia where the indigenous populations have had a so-called tent embassy in the capital of Canberra since 1972 when they raised claims for land rights and got rejected by the then Australian government. The tent embassy was and remains a response to a gross colonial misrepresentation by the English and, today, Australian regimes.

When I entered into a double artistic residency at the bioartistic institute of SymbioticA at University of Western Australia and Fremantle Arts Centre in 2012, a conflict was escalating in Perth regarding the compensation for colonial land appropriation. The white government offered the Nyongaar $1 billion and it didn’t take long before the offer was met by sceptical responses [specify how little this actually is over the time of compensation]. The most radical response was the establishment of a tent embassy on H. Island in central Perth by indigenous people [cf. occupation]. The immune system:

* Epitomizes our personal integrity by protecting us from external threats, but it also indicates which cultural groupings and networks that we belong to.
* I love the paradox that the encounters with strangers pertain to the most critical function of the immune system and that it behaves extremely aggressively against pathogenic aliens and intruders at the same time as this is the way it grows stronger; the more strange encounters an immune system copes with, the more robust it becomes.
* So I look upon the immune system as a sort of dramaturgical blueprint of the human condition.
* I also perceive the immune system as a conflictual model of potential democracy, or radical democracy in the terms of Chantal Mouffe – where the democratic process… **cite!**

**CONCLUSION**

This paper started by calling for a resumption of performed *efficacy* in applied theatre. To this end, two applications of activist performance have been exemplified: on the one hand, interventionist or intratactical performance and, on the other hand, instantiating or paratacical performance. All the examples I have given of these approaches enact affirmative stances that relate directly with power relations and bring about performative changes from within power structures or outside them. This is part of a longer trend that goes back to phenomena like feminist activists, ACT UP, culture jamming, the reclaim demonstrations and by the time of the build-up and launch of the Iraq war: Not In My Name.

In terms of effect, the critical mass of discursive and attitudinal determinants are gradually having an impact on larger political shifts, almost like cultural memes to borrow a term from Dawkins and this is of course what Kershaw implied in his book on radical theatre in the 1990s. But over time, as things evidently are not really changing by either right wing or left wing governments in our neoliberal era, interesting tendencies of progressive performance have assumed inside and outside perspectives towards hegemonic structures – and by that I don’t mean in relation to military dictatorships or harsh conservative regimes, but representational democracies such as the US, Australia and Sweden! And this is where OWS and similar long-term and site-specific processes come in as a new, radically democratic mode of performance. However, as far as I can see there are also some fairly old aspects to these practices, where the emphasis lies on the side of post-production to speak with Bourriaud, and which have to do with the macro-political pull of the interventions and instantiations – and, in particular, the gravitation towards *social movements*.

I think this can happen by innovative facilitation and curating of long-term arts projects that are situated in the node between higher education, the art world, creative industries and public life. And that means to mix the vital ingredients for a social movement with activist tactics.