

# ABOUT A POSTDRAMATIC ATTEMPT

*A look back at Shakespeare im Park, Strength and Health March*

*(This text is a homespun translation of the [original French version](#). The English version is informative and pompous. If you want to penetrate our souls, please learn some French. Thanks to Liz for her help.)*

*We took part in the Ten-Minute-Play Competition organized yearly by the English Theatre Berlin. Our text (Lass die Nutten tanzen) has been selected along with 4 others by 3 members of the collective Shakespeare im Park (Katrin Beushausen, Maxwell Flaum et Brandon Woolf) and performed 7 times, between March 8th and 16th 2013, by the collective under the title Strength and Health March. After the production, we asked Brandon Woolf and Maxwell Flaum to do an interview with us about questions borne out of their staging of the play and our impressions as part of the audience. As we couldn't get a positive answer, we decided to formulate an answer to our own queries. Of course we have the feeling that we wrote too much for such a small thing, that we might have built ourselves a titanium leg after a bump on our little toe. Here, have another pancake.*

Antoine Hummel & Jacques Pradillon

## **Strength and Health March** includes

<i>Symphony of Everyday Life</i>	by Claire Delaby & Alberto Di Gennaro
<i>Culture</i>	by Emal Ghamsharick
<i>Physical Exercises</i>	by Marie Hoffmann
<i>Fluffers</i>	by Harvey Rabbit
<i>Lass die Nutten tanzen</i>	by Antoine Hummel & Jacques Pradillon

<b>Performed by</b>	the authors Peter Priegann Sebastian Rein Errol Shaker Shakespeare im Park Berlin
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**Premiere** 8th March 2013, English Theatre Berlin

**Performances** 9th to 12th, 14th and 16th March 2013

*The following pictures are from [Olga Baczyńska](#), unless otherwise specified.*

# I/ FACTUAL GRINDER

## THE COLLECTIVE SHAKESPEARE IM PARK

Shakespeare im Park ([site>about](#), DE) is a collective, that produces multilingual plays and perform them, generally outdoors. S&HM is their first indoor production. Their approach to the text is completely open. We haven't seen their previous productions.

## THE COMPETITION

The competition is not vulgar for the amateurism it inevitably imparts to the proposals -- that would actually be its nicest side --, but more for the patronizing position assumed by those who place the order, who often seem not to see in these proposals full contributions to the programming of a place / a work of a collective. On ETB's website, the invitation to participate in the competition confirms unfortunately the dreadful tendency of places, scenes, institutions to see themselves as service providers :

A wonderful opportunity for new and emerging writers to have their work read by theatre professionals as well as the chance for the 5 finalists to engage in their work being produced, from inception to stage.

The *wonderful opportunity* is all to the advantage of the emerging writer, this guy we imagine being as busy pushing his work as laboring over its emersion. We never read that this competition could also be a wonderful opportunity to discover texts written out of the complacent circuit of orders. It is however the case, and the possible criteria of these texts' technical imperfection (their unconsciousness towards constraints linked to production, for example, of their ignorance of the "text's status" in today's theatre) is in itself indicative of the competition's mission of validating these forms, which, without its consent, would be condemned to amateurism.

## THE EMERGING WRITER

From where does an emerging writer emerge ? What is the name of this void he appears from ? Is emerging a bureaucratic procedure, a technical achievement, or the namesake of a literary condition

equivalent to that of being a beached, waterbellied Dutch tourist in Phuket ? Is “emerging” the lowest level on the scale of a “career” ?

The word connotes to us the least likeable relation a stage can have to its text, a relation of proprieties. The need for immediately writing the economic scenario of what happens, following a plan of production that poses as the criteria of sharability, is the most unacceptably naturalist sign of the market : an emerging writer, just as an emerging country, is the name kindly given to those who agree to the terms and conditions.

The use of this expression, from the very beginning of the project, even if it is just a publicity detail, amuses and challenges us like a customs control order. We can finally notice that its matching piece, the “emerged writer”, doesn’t have the same success.

## THE THEME

The competition’s theme is as follows : *Berlin Was Yesterday: Expatriate Traffic from the Kaiser to Kotti*. The collective SiP told us they received cca. 40 contributions (80 in 2012, 30 in 2010, according to [this article](#), DE). Let’s admit the difficulty of having to chose five of them and work with the writers as if each piece was valuable. If the theme is enigmatic, the title is kind of curious : *Strength and Health March*. Unless we miss a reference : it doesn’t seem to distance itself from the object of its irony (supposedly a fitness center programme, or its monthly publication). The teaser of the play is also a bit abstruse :

Five new pieces have been selected to form one closed-circuit loop of teeth grinding, bone bending, flat out hoofing-it through 15 cherry nooks and crannies of tender proscenium-sirloin and leaky backstage-gut. This is no Schabernack! Just as Frederick the Great dunked strapping young Dutchmen into his mud-swamped Prussian backwater to erect a delightful Baroque period French knockoff and characterized it “Frederician Rococo,” ETB is bringing in big, bulging guns for its fourth annual Ten Minute Play Competition. So put down the pot-stickers and hoist up your dumbbells for seven evenings of performance, all of which look even better in the buck.

After this, you expect something like a baroque project, with burgeoning organic beings (as confirmed by the naked bodies on the poster), and in fact the show proposes a disconcerting variation of this esthetic (functional gluttons with ironically hieratic acting).



*The poster of Strength and Health March ("Various Ladies", Mark Mulrone, 2012)*

## OUR TEXT

We wrote *Lass die Nutten tanzen* within three days, after Brina Stinehelfer (actress and co-producer of [Exposure Berlin](#)) told us about the competition. We considered the writing of *LdNt* as a *wonderful opportunity* to work together for the first time, in the frame of a larger French-based project, *Schlob*, a sort of repertory of gestures (Brecht) and language situations (Barthes via Adamov). *Schlob* would be the reprise of a mother tongue that has become for us a minority language, during which its miserable conventions appear more obviously. Or just some of those secret role-playings Brecht tells about in his *Arbeitsjournal* :

Die Gelegenheiten aufsuchen, wo im täglichen Leben Theaters gespielt wird. In der Erotik, im Geschäftsleben, in der Politik, in der Rechtspflege, in der Religion usw. Man

müßte die theatralischen Elemente in den Sitten und Gebräuchen studieren. [...] Aber dazu müßte das alltägliche Theater studiert werden, das die Individuen ohne Publikum machen, das geheime “eine Rolle spielen”.<sup>1</sup>

*LdNt* is a quite classical dialogue between a Berliner Turk of German language and an international Thing of Notsomuchian language. Both idioms (local lazy German and global lazy English) are full of misuses and mistakes. Briefly, the stage directions draw a relation between the two actors that the weakness and the banality of the verbal interaction contributes to undermine. Gestures and words flow on an uncertain line of familiarity that only finds its anecdotal resolution at the very end of the sequence, when it becomes obvious that they both are regulars of the Kneipe : the first one lives upstairs and complains about the noise made by those he calls *Nutten* (“whores/bitches”), whom the other one frequently sees. It’s never really clear whether *Nutten* implies, in the complainer’s discourse, neighbours who actually have a commercial sexuality, or simply neighbours who have a frenetic but free sexuality. A series of little misunderstandings fuel this global undecidability, which is a way of playing with the hackneyed dramatics of theatre of “situational suspense”, when the most important aspect is portrayed by postures, gestures and their pantomimesque execution (extreme uptroke / extreme technicity; hygienism, clearness, mannerism / carelessness, confusion, unpolishedness) We reproduce below the short notes submitted to the production regarding the characters (notes that were then read aloud, treated as the rest of the text) :

OKTAY, German guy of turkish origin, in his late thirties or beginning of the forties, seated at a table. In front of him lies a big beer mug with big earlike handles, full of an opaque beverage, a nebulous broth on a Kneipe coaster, probably experiencing the hard knock life. He is poorly dressed, mainly with overused leathers. He’s got lapel badges as military gallons, wears the physical stigmata of his wrecking his own health : mop of hair, nest of laces. He looks shackled, tangled up in something, moves his hands a lot. He’s a bargained talking mime. He’s a kind of an epileptic dog, albeit a tired one.

LESTER, always a bit bleary, always stands, the hips forward, a crooked back, in his hand is a giant oblong cocktail glass; a bouquet-cocktail full of a sort of a thick tomato-carrot juice, with an outrageous tone, from which emerge big celery twigs. An impeccably designed beverage, a concept-drink that denotes health. He is young, controls his appearance: wears an excentric hat, reminding of a pointy helmet, and clothes (anliegende Kleidungen) that evoke the uniform and the overtechnical sports outfit at the same time. A urban combination of overtight ski pants and wide black boots. He’s a neat guy, with perfectly cut hair, clear shaved. He’s got huge glasses, speaks a really bad German, his accent is barely identifiable, but really strong. His body language is discreet, light, but precise. He’s also a kind of a dog, but another kind.

A ROBOT-HOOVER, wireless, remote controlled from backstage, that comes and goes with LESTER.

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<sup>1</sup> Seek out the occasions where theatre is played in daily life. In eroticism, in business life, in politics, in the administration of justice, in religion etc. One would have to study the theatrical elements in manners and customs. [...] But besides, the everyday theatre that individuals make without an audience, the secret “playing of a role”, would have to be studied.

A KNEIPE, a thick wood table, at which is seated OKTAY. On display are also two or three agonizing plants, cabinets saturated with Hummel figurines (dogs, children) and other random objects (old pirate gun, promotional ashtrays). The wall is covered with football club flags.

A GRANDFATHER CLOCK, of which we can only hear the tick, a bit slower than usual, but sharp and precise.



*Lass die Nuppen tanzen, in Strength and Health March*

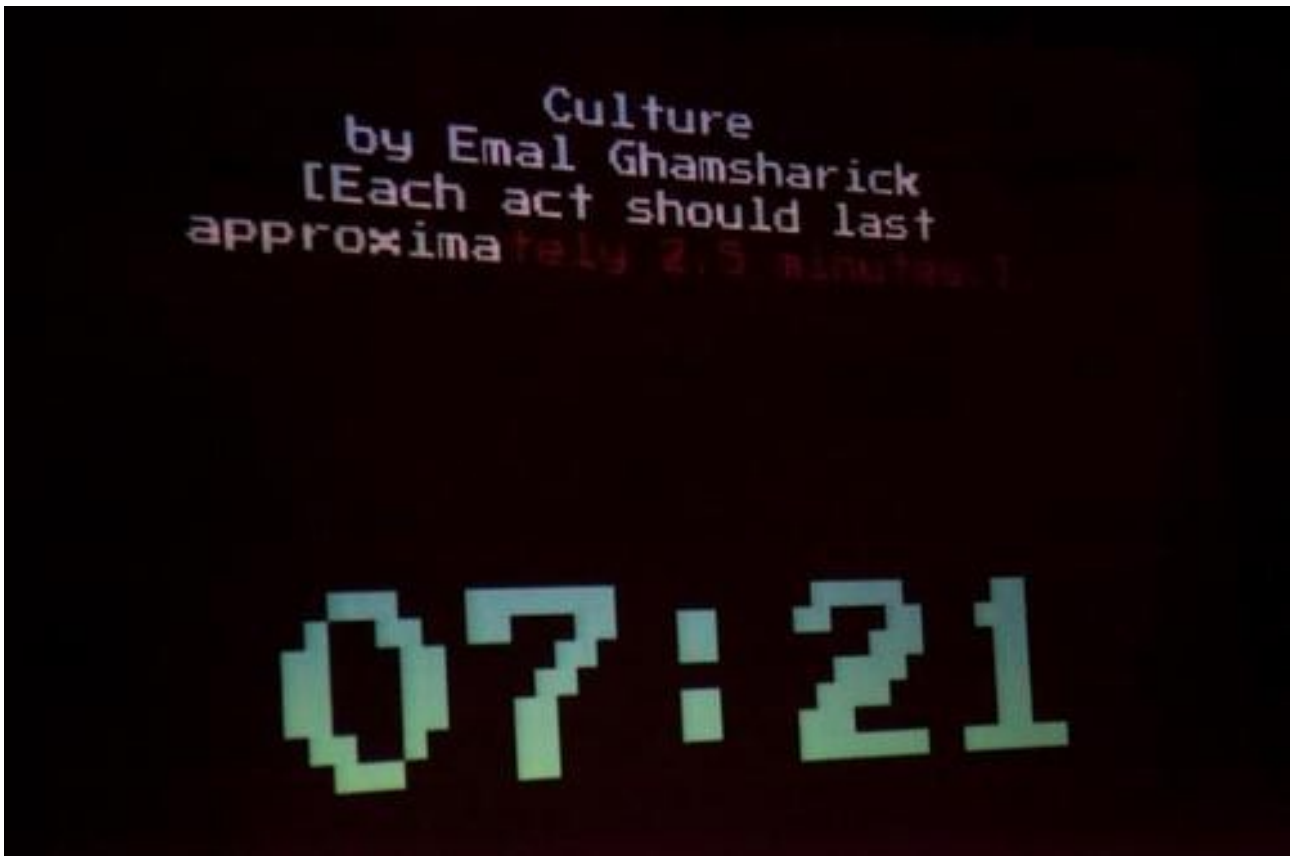
## THE OTHER TEXTS

Despite several requests, we've never been allowed to read the other selected texts. As spectators, here is what we gleaned from them.

### *Culture* (Emal Ghamsharick)

Emal's text has a moral dimension, more precisely a parable dimension (briefly, slightly altered repetitions of a same setting -- a sort of Three Little Piggies reloaded -- presence of symbolized everyday attributes, presence of a tree and its cynical sowers, impeded theme of the feast, compared allegories etc.). Brecht sees in the parable the very mode of (epic) theatre that activates affective

and critical “temporalities”. In this sense, having used this text as the matrix for the rest of the installation seems enlightening. A family (Turkish-like, then Arabic-like, then German-like) cooks dinner in half-traditional outfits (attributes like a beard, moustache, head scarf, football scarf) and uniformly dips their meal into ketchup and mayo. At the end of the sequence, a hipster family (without particular attributes, except for half of an apple taped on top of a computer) yells in unison : “Culture, hahahahaha” for several minutes. This piece seemed brilliant to us in certain aspects, but it also reinforced the idea of a “major difference”, of a sphere difference (regarding ritual modes, even cheapened and drowned in ketchup) between those who, on one side, deal with local, ancient cultural references, even if they become derisory and decorative, and those who, purely uprooted, are united around a bargain nature. In more direct terms, there is in this play a kind of reactive aspect that revives the idea of a distinction between those who drown in their ketchup and those who have the choice to swim in it.



*The beginning of Culture, by Emal Ghamsharick*

*Physical Exercises* (Marie Hoffmann) ; *Fluffers* (Harvey Rabbit)

Two dialogues we couldn't grasp anything from, probably like most of the audience. It's also certainly the way our text was received (it bears, on top of it, the drawback in this configuration, of

being multilingual). *Physical Exercises* seems to stage a medical consultation. It deals with curing and optimizing the body, in a post-DDR background. *Fluffers*, according to its author's blog, is a dialogue between two female sex workers. It deals with body aesthetics.

*Symphony of Everyday Life* (Claire Delaby and Alberto di Gennaro)

Claire and Alberto's text is a cut-up of a chatlog, which includes images as well. It is visually divided in three columns that correspond to three different voices. It's a not so dense compost of daily, sibylline, banal talks, which forms a rhythmic suite of blasé utterances (a sort of dailynews repository), and finally, because some of these utterances are repeated (principally for their sound quality), constitutes an ensemble of autonomous signs (it should be noted that the recurrent whistling in this text is the single performed stage direction).

Except for Emal's text, on which we worked because it was the object of our interpretation in the toilets, and Claire and Alberto's text, which contains less words and in this configuration allows for a more comfortable reception, the texts only subsist in our memory in their flatly thematic dimension. Which is a problem, for a so-called postdramatic play.

## THE SCENOGRAPHIC PROJECT

From the first meeting with Shakespeare im Park and the other authors at Der Kanal (a collaborative atelier in Neukoelln's Weisestrasse), Brandon Woolf and Maxwell Flaum – after assuring themselves of our common rejection of usual clichés about berliner expatriation, around a collective reading of a NYT article – introduced the production's project as follows :

- Ambulatory and contagious scenography : The English Theater will be occupied from its lobby to its backstage toilets, and the main stage will only be one of the places of representation, among others that will spatially and dramatically communicate with it (in postdramatic language : *they will all make sense together*).
- Texts will be literally displayed as files (without cutting nor interpreting the stage directions, treated just like the other parts of the text) onto a wall of the theatre in a karaoke fashion.



- Authors will occupy the toilets of the theatre, transformed into a culture kitchen, and will be busy cooking for the actors; they will be filmed and their bustle will be broadcasted on a television in the lobby.
- The three actors will play a Rodrigo Garcia-like eating competition scene in four rounds, dressed as grotesque and colourful weightlifters (the absurdity of this competition's object echoes the absurdity of the writing competition).
- The production team (Brandon Woolf, Maxwell Flaum, Alberto di Gennaro) will read the texts displayed at the pace dictated by the karaoke algorithm in order to make them last precisely 10 minutes.



*Sebastien Rein, Errol Shaker and Peter Priegann during the eating competition*

- The setting of the space will allow very few possibilities of seating, the tiers will be covered with peanut shells (and become a literal peanut gallery); there will be a small wireless Hoover ambling about the lobby with the sponsor's flag attached to it (Curry 36, a historic *imbiss* of the hood), and a few upright vacuums, standing or hanging from the ceiling, will activate intermittently.



*The choir, almost out of sight of the audience*

The whole thing is tightly timed. Each play's 10 minutes are cut out into 4 chunks of 2'30.

After this first meeting, we are relieved (even enthused) to see we've not bumped into a troupe of naturalist theatre practitioners. We briefly speak about adding nine dogs to the whole set, which we forbid ourselves in an outburst of reason. We have the neat impression that the deal is open and that it's the beginning of a collaborative work on the basis of a free, fertile adaptation, and that's precisely why we got into the competition.

## II/ CRITICAL GRINDER

*Our critical grinder will be that of spectators – what every one of us had the luck to be once, on the occasion of shifts, during which we could liberate ourselves from our toilet job in the space of a show.*

### TREATMENT OF THE TEXT

The texts are processed through a literal grinder : the original file is considered as the text to be treated. Is it a trick, a little trait of cynical virtuosity, or a signifying proposition in the show's global mechanics? Is it liberal humour, a wise-guy nudge, or a certain idea of theatrical text oriented towards something that doesn't actually anecdotize it? Have we got here a repetition of the tired motif inherited from art's institutional critique, where it was sometimes seen as radical to exhibit even the curator's expense receipts? Actually, whatever (the intention).

Treating texts of different natures (a parable, dialogued scenes, a cut-up log...) in such a uniform way is problematic in itself. It is not only to conceptually subdue an element of dramaturgy – it seems that we deal here with a non-dramatic project (post-dramatic if you wish) –, it is not even a virtuoso endangering of the “theatrical text” status, about which no one gives a damn any more (there is no pride to be gained from challenging the primacy of text, it is a choice that has since long lost its manifest-like value), it is more akin to a reduction of the performative ambition of the play to a flattening of material relationships by multiplication of contradictory spots of attention, of insignificant stimuli beseeching the public in its most passive configuration: that of a crowd of guinea pigs of *effect*. It is, in its conceptual version, a retrogradation to a dramaturgy of reaction, of *message*, of contagious communication.



*The public, caught in the cross-fire*

When Artaud sought to perform Elizabethan theatre “without caring for the text”, he pointed at an idea of theatrical text as “written argument” (Barthes) of the whole, of what is not necessarily performed on stage. It can be tried, even if it seems a bit daring in the context of a playwright competition. Now in *S&HM*, the screening of the texts is supported by a scansion of this continuous scroll behind the public, and that has the only effect of aggravating a certain bedazzlement, the unbridled pace of this reading discouraging all attempt at grasping anything, even by fragments, and emphasizing the idea according to which there is something *linear* to be grasped, confiscating the attention for anything else around.

This installation could have functioned, maybe, with texts written exclusively *for*, or modified in this perspective, but we had never been asked to adapt our texts in such a way. The last one, Claire Delaby and Alberto di Gennaro's cut-up, is, for that matter, relatively efficient in such a configuration, but it is a text whose visual qualities and general economy of sentences render it graspable by fragments. In such an apparatus, texts would have benefited from being more precise, wrinkling on the anecdotal, gnawing vocabularies or situations to the bone, vivisectioning their portion to the point of incredibility.

Supposing that the texts were not judged good enough to be performed in a different fashion, they could have been the objects of gestural, of theatrical comments, of formal subversions which would have reduced them to their absurd state of contestant machines. They could also have been united in a common cut-up, and that would have probably allowed this dissolution of context so dear to post-dramatic theatre (viz. among others Marinetti's fantasy of "squeezing all Shakespeare into one act"). We would have gladly given a hand to such an orchestral redaction of our texts: the object of the contest wouldn't have thereby been hijacked.

How does a theatrical project presented as inheritor of *Regietheater* come to the point of not undertaking, in the context of such a project, the usual reworking of the pieces? We would have preferred revamped but shirking texts (as in "really autonomous", not as in "formal slaughtering of the rest"), rather than unscathed but tamed (flattened and muddled).

But so it was, the "concept" required a faithful reproduction of the texts, and their use as artefactual proofs of dramatical text as such. The "concept" had to do with the draping of a hyperconscious irony, to an overtheatrical gesture veering into the order of little subjective comments on the world; the non-duped had to communicate their non-dupery at any price.

## **THE BESEECHING OF THE PUBLIC**

The attempt to extract a common social *gestus* from all the pieces seemed at first a good one, a sort of "anamnesis of drama" (Karen Jürs-Munby), of those non-dramas. But here, the texts weren't part of this exhumation of the *gestus*, of this subtle tapping of problems. They were like those brutish stage whispers signalling the artificiality of theatrical situations; and in fact, a bit like in recent works mobilising confinement and wandering apparatuses (one can here think of Tino Sehgal's "lyrical bunker", *This Variation*, during the Documenta 13), the *gestus* was in the last instance that of the spectator.



*The TV in the lobby, broadcasting the live feed of authors trapped in the toilets*

Our critique is not a critique of authors disappointed that their text wasn't treated in the framework of a linear and synthetic composition, thus matching the sense of a story or a fable (a disappointment expressed by [Harvey Rabbit](#) and [TheReaderBerlin](#), ENG). It is an observation of spectators that has to do with the finished work, not with the choices that motivated it or with its theoretical underpinnings: the work on rhythms and perceptive intensities condemned itself here to a totalising, a diluting transformation of the pieces. We would have enjoyed a staging that didn't spare itself a reflexion on perceptive dynamics. Now here, the screening of the text and the overacting of its reading are analogue "flat tints" that, so superposed, void each-other; they stand as two adjustment layers of a same formal inoffensiveness, which have little opportunity to populate the stage other than as the painfully sophisticated furniture of a little room of subjectivity. This is exactly what the (wandering or not) spectator feels from *S&HM*: he's held hostage in the house of frolicsome tricksters, and what is happening there is none of his concern, but is nonetheless submitted to his unconditional approval. And the direction of visit substitutes itself to the so dreadful sense of drama.



*Sebastian Rein, between two rounds, and Errol Shaker, as leery aesthete*

Speaking of reception, one can discern, in Hans-Thies Lehmann *Postdramatisches Theater* (which constitutes without a doubt an inspiration for the Shakespeare im Park collective, Brandon Woolf having recommended it to us, may he here be thanked), the paradigm underlying this type of play. This paradigm is the object of an old antiphony of “post-” movements, always a bit intoxicated by technological accelerations, mimicking their alienating harassment of attention:

simultaneous and multi-perspectival modes of perception replace linear and successive ones. A more superficial and, at the same time, more encompassing sensibility takes the place of the more centralized and deeper one.

We have here a theoretical overview of the weakness of a certain post-dramatic theater which, even if it claims a filiation to Adorno, has a bit peculiarly digested his critique of the panesthesia/synesthesia of diffusion machines. Lehmann seems to consider the renewal of modes of perception as a physiological modification, and thus takes for granted the fact that one has to address himself to the dominating canal of this “airtime”. In a text of [reflexions on the spectator in pre- and post-dramatic theater](#), Lehmann goes on with the same laxness, leaving us perplexed as regards what could be the content of his deduction from such an absurd enumeration:

One thing is obvious: today, it is more and more infrequent that the potential spectator of a theatrical or choreographic performance, or of a “performance” *tout court*, will just have abandoned her reading of a classical piece of literature. She will rather have in mind a trip to the movies, will have had surfed on the Internet or watched a video, will probably not have been able to make her mind between numerous video channels, will have recently viewed a video installation or thought about buying a digital camera. Today's spectator is not what she used to be.<sup>2</sup>

Maybe Lehmann can convince one even better of the benefits of sacrificing drama only by the fact that he is, sometimes, in his theoretical work, the perfect incarnation of the verbose storyteller, sharing around the community's campfire the flatbread of obviousness. What can this little parable of the spectacle consumer at the time of abundance tell us about the activity of the spectator?

The craft of a minute protocolar determination of the stimulating and/or mind-numbing “modes of perception” is the play mat of the director. If he gives up the minimal ambition of abstracting the spectator to its condition of consumer, the chances are high that he will stage nothing but his hitting the mark, his little personal satisfactions.

### **STATUS OF TEXT ON THE WHOLE**

The wish to treat theatrical elements on an equal footing crashes here into its programmatic limit, in its quasi-incantatory and illusorily political dimension. It is a weak artistic wish verging on coquetry, especially when the idea is corresponding to the desire of instituting language itself as a protagonist. But the thing is that language is always a protagonist.

What kind of reactionary vision does this desire to finally reveal language in its rhetorical dimension betray? And what kind of protagonist can thus *dear language itself* be, if it is treated as a blinking input, instead of being treated in all its specificity? Is it reduced to a role of bare communication-vector?

Giving to text a minor importance in a whole that is addressed to an attention unsubdued to sense is of the domain of the obvious for a project of this type. Turning it into a boorishly dubbed telex is an aesthetic choice – a disastrous but conspicuous element – actually not so far from a deference to text as a literary marble block.

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2 Homespun translation from a French version that has itself been translated from German by Corinne Fournier Kiss.



François Tanguy, in a 1992 [interview](#) (FR) with Christian Prigent (in TXT 29/30), speaks of an “exposure time” to express the rhythmical management of a piece without textual beacons, that is to say, of a piece not performed in the limits imposed by text itself. He adds:

Theatre, under this guise, is less the business of representing a story, a form that would preexist through a text (a project the actualization of which will try to make visible the premisses, the implicit stakes), than of shifting to an open, operational temporality...<sup>3</sup>

One can imagine the space of possible games opened between the 10-minute constraint and a staging spread to such a temporality... The choice of production here has been to chop the show into pieces *by* the means of the texts themselves, used as mind-numbing *Schlägers*. Our point of view as spectators is that this is a choice that makes one more sensitive to the vain sneers of bullies treating with harshness the “status of the text” in a way that is not very positively disturbing at this specific level of interpretation, but really uncomfortable on the perceptive plane. There would of course be a lot to say on this dimension as an ethical value of provocation itself, but one can think that, in an equation where provocation is derisory and discomfort plentiful, the spectator has no choice but that of her alienation.

In the case of *S&HM*, dispatching the text between what is read and what is heard would have probably contributed to a dynamization of its grasping by the public. On the contrary, the performance as it was, ended up squeezing the spectator in a visual space structured by textual overdose and gestual underdose, and in dipping her in an aural environment saturated by vociferations. The only graspable moment of intensity is the ritual of the authors, extended from the toilets to the main stage. Not because it, at last, displays a bit of “performance in motion” (no more because our jolly mugs are on display), but because they enrich the space with a circulation, not only with an occupation which freezes spectators to whom the program ordered contradictorily to “move throughout the entire space” :

For total comprehension, you **MUST** be moving throughout the entire space : Foyer !  
Main stage ! Backstage toilet !

By contrast, staging a disconnection between the only three professional actors, those who wear the brightest costume and are perched on podiums, and the text, is a good idea. But the unfettered reading of the texts falls back to a certain extent in the pitfall of a good old declamation, something that it seems, had to be avoided at any price.

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<sup>3</sup> Le théâtre sous cet aspect est moins une affaire de représentation d'un récit, d'une forme qui préexiste à travers un texte (projet dont la réalisation va essayer de rendre visible les prémisses, les enjeux), que de bascule dans un temps ouvert, opératoire...

## THE CRITICAL RECEPTION

The [laudatory but collusive article in the Tagesspiegel](#) (DE) is the only one bearing a critical dimension (the others either simply reproduced the press release, interviewed the production crew, or neutrally reviewed the event with the manifest intention to support the English Theatre). Its author is Patrick Wildermann, who is apparently on non-neutral terms with the collective. Flaum said in [an interview](#) that he asked Wildermann to be part of the jury:

Some members of the Shakespeare im Park Berlin team are coming in to choose and produce and direct the pieces, Katrin and Brandon and myself, plus we hope to have Patrick Wildermann of *Der Tagesspiegel* (sic) on the jury as well.

This journalist's name finally did not appear on the jury's list (he was part of the [2011 edition](#)), but he is the only one, in his article, to give an account of every text with a certain precision, suggesting that he could have had access to them by other means. The point of view expressed in this dithyrambic article is not invalidated, but a bit suspect of connivance (*Mitvaterungsfall*, brand new word).

### III/ POLITICAL GRINDER

#### ALIENATION, CONSUMPTION, DIVISION OF LABOUR

Let's make a long story short. In the play, the actors dressed as weightlifters do nothing but eat, the authors cook in the toilets where everyone alternatively holds each position (cooking, composition, service, rotations signalling). Their texts are processed through the ultra-rapid meat-grinder of a karaoke machine that the producers, dressed as choir boys, try to declaim at imposed pace.

The limited roles assigned to the actors (the confined space of their podiums, a cutlery improper to the dishes served to them), the repartition of tasks in the whole play, the service here devoted to mutant capacities and technically absurd gestures, and the contrast with the omnipresence of the laxest of entertainments (TV, karaoke, globalised food) draws a vain map of social utility: the circuit of production is, as a whole, directed towards the satisfaction of a meal performance serving the performance of the body.

The figuration of a strict division of labour, where mass distraction is the immediate product of the different poles of production (familial-cultural fast-food with continuous staff rotation, cowboy cattle calls bordering on monodic singing or reggaetón) suggests that the only hysterical moment of production is consumption.

To put forward a hysterical recast of consumption in act (to make visible the deregulation of a system in its consequences only), is akin to enjoy the fact of being on the good side of the gaze (L.L. de Mars on Rodrigo Garcia, FR). The *Feierabend* will have the taste of a comfortable conclusion. One will be happy with the status of whistleblower of good class-consciousness. And finally, having taken care of not resorting to dramaturgy, one will have provided the support for an “unproblematic consumption of fables” (Lehmann), an unwritten fable, but one that is *a priori* shared by everyone attending.



*The dishes, always the same, in various configurations*

More positively, we here witness a figuration of production, of a configuration of labour that we could take as the monstrous passage point between fordism and post-fordism. Here is exhibited a sphere where the segregation of entertainment and “necessary” labour-time is no longer clear. Sphere that is nonetheless not the one in which we, Berliner “creative types”, produce. A sphere in which the time of life as a whole is integrated to capitalism's process of valorization.

### **THE AUTHORS, TRAPPED IN THE TOILET ZONE**

Here, a lot of questions remain unanswered. In the play, are the toilets an exposed backstage zone, an alternative scene, an engine room? Or are toilets the extension of cooking by other means? In the social theatre, are the culinary toilets the sordid backstage of hygienism, verging on an exposition of hygienism as a way to be dirtily clean? Is there here a statement as simple as one according to which the refinements of consumption are ultimately destined to trash?

We are left wondering if it is possible today to make a theatre where actors are no longer those dummies prey to *Narrheit*, but characters with a thickness of will, of physical presence. In the third quarters of plays that we see, characters are specified by a powerless will, and by, say, an inaptitude for happiness or enjoyment (*jouissance*): they never have a practical use of their time and space. They are played. Can we stage figures that are not symptoms ? It is as if, like in the foucauldian characterization of Don Quichotte's silhouette as a lean letter escaped from an opened book, as a piece of writing wandering in the world and signifying the transition to the age of representation, figures were now constrained to embody an epistemic shift, and nothing more.

Lehmann's concept of *détachement/detachment*, just as the concept of *non-acting* (Michael Kirby), helps us process the activity of the actor as a rapid shift between the assumption of an "idiosyncratic physicality" (a rejection of the actoral draping as invisible texture of movement) and the exhibition of a synthetic physicality – in the Kantian sense as well – (an uptake of a peculiar "way of being" as an indexical of the show, among other things in its segregating dimension at the level of the gaze).

This is something that the Shakespeare im Park producers probably had in mind in their installation of bodies, even more if we think that the "contest" object constitutes in itself a perfectly adapted situation for such a shifting of attitudes, between idiosyncrasy and exposition (bearing in mind that it pertains to a demonstration of capacities). But the *directed* farcical configuration of attitudes, and the sometimes painful character of food quantities imposed to these bodies end up being the traditional torture victims of classical stage. And on the theatrical "oral book (theatre as performed text) - butcher's stall (theatre as exhibition of *écorchés*)" axis (Jean-Christophe Lauwers), the positioning seems to play on a pipsqueaky irony (which is not entirely irony if it enjoys the verification of its effect): to the excess of declamation responds the excess of the exposition of an overly-cinched body.



*The actors, actors and nothing more*

## **ENGLISH IN BERLIN**

Is the very fact of doing theatre in English an exemplar of cultural colonialism? The problem is, as often, best sketched from the point of view of the inscription of such a project in the local economy: if we consider that the whole *S&HM* enterprise is an expedient for revamping the tiresome competition form, in the aim of benefiting a precarious institution like the ETB, then we need not give too much importance to the linguistic question. We need not do this because in this desertion, no case of “provincialization” of anglophone culture is manifested: Kreuzberg, just like its neighbour Neukölln, is the stage of massive creative middle-class migrations, whose *lingua franca* is more that of Mark Zuckerberg than that of Kurt Tucholsky.

Moreover, we still have trouble to interpret the fact that the play has as a sponsor a business (Curry 36) entrenched in local folklore, in a Berlin of postcards, granted that postcard-Berlin is full of the irregularities, of the sexy dirt of its public space. Let's take for granted that it was a highly ironic move, as regards product placement maybe, but more importantly, as regards the over symbolisation of the city by one of its *loci*, namely the *imbiss* as place of minimal cultural crossover.

## AFTER ALL

We would probably haven't done any better than our companions of a couple of weeks in executing such a list of requirements. We were lacking everything, we wanted to work and see, to learn. We've overall been docile interns. Alas, we haven't learned a lot about the job. But in the space of a few weeks of preparation, we had plenty of time to witness a certain type of work relationships. The poverty of which, it is to be hoped, is also a disappointment for the Shakespeare im Park collective.

One can vouch that the little importance of the project led them to unwonted negligence. Should such a micropolitics be the counterpart of a critique of the author-function (which would already be a bit derisory considering our pedigrees), it wouldn't attenuate the feeling of having had, under the direction of Shakespeare im Park, a rather antidemocratic workgroup experience. If our last sentence could dispense with the reading of the twenty previous pages, let's say that it has been for us a bitter introduction to community theatre. And an incentive to do theatre, meekly, *shoveling it in*.

*Antoine Hummel & Jacques Pradillon*

## PLUS THIS, PLUS THIS

### *Supper*, by Robert Creeley

Shovel it in.  
Then go away again.  
Then come back and  
shovel it in.

Days on the way,  
lawn's like a shorn head  
and all the chairs are put away  
again. Shovel it in.

Eat for strength, for health.  
Eat for the hell of it, for  
yourself, for country and your mother.  
Eat what your little brother didn't.

Be content with your lot  
and all you got.  
Be whatever they want.  
Shovel it in.

I can no longer think of heaven  
as any place I want to go,  
not even dying. I want  
to shovel it in.

I want to keep on eating,  
drinking, thinking.  
I am ahead. I am not dead.  
Shovel it in.