

# Graduation essay by Tova Mozard (English)

Starting out from film and theatre, I will here discuss how artistic form relates to reality, and inversely how reality can be connected to illusion. I will also talk about how this affects the viewer.

In face of reality, what is this mediating work of the imagination?

## Film/Theatre

Films that show an affinity with theatre have a special relationship to the “natural”. In films that resemble theatre, spoken language and the use of spatial narrative are means of expression that often refer to theatricality. The language is often theatrical (high-flown, bombastic, poetic), the story may be restricted to one place, or in some other way relate to place as a set or a stage.

Some examples of directors who work in this way are Ingmar Bergman, Hal Hartley and Jean-Luc Godard. I think that they use the spoken language in a way that reinforces the content and meaning of the films. By giving special attention to language, they bring about an illusion of “truth” and a clear message. The messages vary, but one thing that these directors have in common is that they investigate the possibilities of language and film, and to some extent doubt the possibility to “tell everything”. The reason why this message reaches us as viewers might be that we listen to what is said without connecting it to the actor, the director or the narration. The words become ours and we reinterpret them to something greater than what is told within the framework of the film.

For this effect to arise we have to dissociate ourselves and begin to understand that we are dealing with fiction. Then we can take in what is said on a more “real” level, and in a more obvious way accept and to some extent disregard that it is fiction.

In a film that is theatrical, space gets another emphasis and can sometimes work metaphorically, or the choice of place is used to strengthen and describe a state of mind or mood. What makes a film feel theatrical and a play cinematic is that they borrow from one another’s registers, and in this way they can each employ their own assets on a broader level since there is an additional layer of fiction to work with. I think that this borrowing creates greater possibilities in understanding the fascination of entertainment.

The form of language and image in this kind of film sometimes leads to stiff and artificial expressions, perhaps owing to the encounter between the expected and the unexpected, the natural and the unnatural. Through this collision we see familiar things in a more penetrating and investigative way, and problems are viewed from different points of view and therefore at more depth.

Paradoxically, to use the language of the theatre in a film makes the distance between reality and film shorter. Through a filter of dissimulation reality appears truer. Pretence becomes natural.

To switch between the different languages of film and the theatre, to stretch their limits and find a new language that unites the two also leads to a focus on the audience and its presence. That

the work comes about in the act of viewing creates a feeling of significant presence – at the same time, the film lives a life of its own in a distant way.

I relate to the moving image in a way similar to stage work, or in a way that comments on it. My interest in the expressions of the stage comes from my experiences with dance and theatre. The reason why I have chosen to express myself in the medium of film is that its attitude mixes distance and presence in a way that I find attractive. I want my narratives to approach the viewer and their own existence at the same time.

In Chantal Akerman's film *The Eighties* from 1983, the language of the stage makes up the main theme and story. Here she deconstructs the structure of another film, *The Golden Eighties/Window Shopping*, which was released later, but was still the same film, though in a "complete" form. The film(s) is (are) a musical that takes place in a beauty parlour where people gossip, giggle, dance, kiss and sing in a clichéd soap opera. Akerman comments on traditional musical language as a form of entertainment, and on how the content and language shape the identity of the actors in this kind of film/stage form. Her characters manifest their own making as women in the film and in reality, and Akerman clearly shows that this creation is based on illusion.

The film also reveals itself as a construction by containing a number of "preparatory works", such as rehearsals, castings, the director both as instructor and actor. This anti-naturalist, obviously faked, partly absurd stage language makes everything much more clear as to what arises in some forms of expressions. The viewer is forced to be attentive and is also directed by the form of the film to be so. By using the narrative power of film, Akerman lets everything fall into place, and despite the experiment the film becomes a real film in itself and can avoid being defined in any other way.

Another good example of moving pictures mixed with stage aesthetics is the work of the artist Catherine Sullivan. Like Akerman she uses a form of expression she deconstructs and questions at the same time as she uses it and constructs a new (stage) art form. Sullivan is interested in the ability of actors to express and interpret emotions. She investigates different aspects of body language, often starting with films with strong psychological content. She works both with performance and video, but video is well suited for lifting out certain scenes and focusing on a single expression. The theory behind a certain expression merges with the performance of the expression.

### **The stage – an elevation of reality**

The relation between the stage and the audience is more concrete and manifest than the one between the film and the filmgoer. The direct communication that arises has a penetration that other media lack. In some cases, the starting point for a performance on stage is a connection to the real/ordinary, or the personal. For example, this happens in stand-up, chat shows, poetry readings and autobiographical theatre. The stage is used as a practical means for being heard, and the message may be either personal or something personal in relation to society in one way or another. To be sure, all on-stage performances refer to a reality outside the stage, but they communicate by using fiction as a kind of "veil" for expressing what is most private. Here the need for live contact with people in an audience is obvious. What also happens is that the

illusion breaks something between the stage and the audience, and that the distance between them decreases.

Andy Kaufman made unconventional and creative stand-ups in the seventies and eighties in which he challenged and caught the attention of his audience. By not being funny and entertaining in any ordinary sense, he drew his audience's attention to a habitual behaviour in their ideas of entertainment and their own role as spectators.

Kaufman regarded life as a working material, objects for his imagination. A desire that things should not be fixed, controlled and superior but changing and easily influenced. Kaufman let his own life and his art merge by making them identical. His humour is related to improvisation theatre, street theatre (the clown in the street who walks behind people and imitates them), happenings and performance art.

Bertold Brecht's "Learning Plays", or "Lehrstücke", were about enlightening people about current political situations. They were supposed to be played by amateurs for educational purposes, and to show how the world had changed and could be changed. By working against a division between actor and viewer (their relation should be dialectical like the one between the actor and the text) he invites the audience to be critical about what happens on stage. He did not want to present an opinion or a truth about the world, but to invite the spectators to think for themselves. This also concerns the content of his material. When one of Brecht's pieces is staged today it is expected to be questioned anew.

In 1929, Walter Benjamin wrote "Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre", an analysis of the use of children's theatre in working-class education in Russia. By introducing theatre in school teaching he thought that children would confront the reality that the plays offer (Marxist political issues) through games, i.e. become acquainted with society by being collectively engaged without a leader, and to become class-conscious at an early age. Benjamin thinks that children will become "free" in this way, have a longer childhood and when the time comes form their own opinion about things. He claims that politics and ideology do not have power over children, and that a proletarian society cannot teach children about class issues without repressing their imagination and their original thinking. By looking at children's gestures, movements and language in relation to the dramatic exercises, there is an idea that one should be able to understand something about the future.

It is a clear here that Benjamin thinks that one can understand and come close to reality through games and fiction, that one can also approach truth by reacting and improvising.

Whereas Brecht started out from a text and its adaptation as a basis for interpreting and depicting various parts of society, Benjamin used that which is non-linguistic. What is common to both is a developed theory (a mix of theory and practice) that is supposed to make it "easier to deal with" reality. They saw the possibility of using theatre as a forum for asking questions and developing theories, a specially constructed situation that makes progress possible.

One example of a more personal development in theatre is the actor Spalding Gray's monologues on stage and television. He uses the stage to talk about himself and his experience in relation to both private problems and social phenomena.

On stage Gray plays himself and only communicates what he has experienced himself. But how can we know this? And are not all performances constructed or adaptations in some manner? In

this case, Gray stages his own act and controls all the roles in the play: he is the director, the actor and the model for the play. His views of the theatre and life are also mixed with one another.

Gray's acts hint at a therapeutic purpose, but he is at a stage where much has already been treated. His analyses are thorough and almost presented in a way that suggests that he is not concerned. He acts as, or is, both patient and doctor. But he does not wrap up what he wants to say in obviously visible theories, and manages to make us think about what he says with convincing sincerity. And it reaches beyond his relationship to the world. He does so by asserting his own position in a clear way.

Chantal Akerman, whom I have already mentioned, has a similar relation to her own work. Many of her films are autobiographical, and use her own experiences to talk about general issues. By not categorising herself as a filmmaker she manages to mix genres and also life and fiction. Gray and Akerman's positions are both personal and productive.

This particular way of working ties in with the personal and worldly and becomes a form of psychoanalysis. Here the natural characteristics and opposed ways of theatre and film stand for the individual connection with the surrounding. Distance and presence, audience and actor, all these positions help to deal with reality.

Now I want to go on talking about the personal in relation to theatre and compare the real reality of life with what we regard as staging.

### **The quarrel as theatre**

When I try to find some kind of origin for my interest in theatre I often go to my experience of the quarrel as a form of theatre and entertainment. When I was a child I often witnessed quarrels that lasted for hours between my mother and stepfather. Sometimes these conflicts resembled long plays, constructed as narratives, divided into chapters, episodes, etc. The room where we were became a stage, and the characters often stopped to "pose" on the same spot before it was time for a change of scenes. I just came after as an invisible but unavoidable audience. During these fights the protagonists often meaninglessly and irrationally fidgeted with things, a kind of subplot that unconsciously revealed their thoughts and frustrations.

If I got in the way of the spectacle, and was noticed to boot, the protagonists in the drama and the words they uttered did not quite have any presence. The world of the quarrel and the real world did not quite connect. All the affected acts were revealed in a clash but also linked the drama to reality.

This reminds me of Robert Bresson and the way his "models" (his word) moved about and touched things. They had somewhat disengaged and mechanical way of relating to their surroundings. Bresson wanted to reduce the actor's acts in order to reach a more "true" expression. I compare Bresson's methods with my parents' actions since their acts become meaningless or are disconnected from a consciousness.

I still felt that it was instructive to witness these events, to see the spectrum of moods, reactions, individual ideas of things, and to hear new linguistic compounds, different ways of handling and controlling words, words squirting out like cascades. I eagerly tried to understand their meaning in order to follow the unfolding drama. After a while I learnt to recognise the patterns and moves

and to predict what was about to happen. This habit led to my becoming involved in the creation of these quarrel “pieces”, and I thought that I could influence them. But it was like trying to intervene in a play or a film: one’s voice is not heard. One has to learn the craft. But you feel that you have seen the film so many times, and its characters are so close to you that you develop an understanding for them, and if you could you would help them.

In many of his early films, Ingmar Bergman made his characters get stuck in the doorway, so to speak, on the threshold, often draped as if at the theatre, witnessing a dramatic course of events that they are both part of in the film and remain spectators to. This is similar to my experience of the quarrel as theatre. What I experienced was the creation of a distance to the same reality that I was part of, a kind of “Verfremdungseffekt” that taught me to handle the situation emotionally and analytically.

In Bergman’s film *Scenes from a Marriage*, the quarrel is clearly compared to a drama. Jan Malmsjö, who plays the husband: “Now it’s time for us to return home and end this scene. The end is usually not suited for audiences.”

This semireal emotional game. Why do we make this comparison? Do we find it hard to identify with this way of acting? We are forced to improvise, be prepared for surprises, attacks and take up different positions. And thereby we are inventive, make use of our sensations and perhaps need to imitate something we have seen, remember or have an opinion about. To be forced to play the part created by the quarrel also brings the possibility to dissociate oneself and thereby to control the situation better, see the whole and solve the conflict. That quarrels sometimes arise in situations of boredom gives them a function as entertainment and excitement. All these aspects resemble the actor’s work.

In *Theatres of the Mind*, Joyce McDougall compares the human psyche to the theatre. She uses this comparison because she finds that the language of psychoanalysis is insufficient to describe the personalities of people. She also does this in order to sound less definitive in her analyses and to avoid the claim that some people would be free from certain symptoms. She says, “Each of us contains an inner universe with a number of ‘characters’, parts of us that act in contradiction to one another and thereby cause conflicts and mental pain in our conscious selves. We are fairly unacquainted with these secret actors and their parts. Whether we want it or not our inner characters are in constant pursuit of a stage where they can perform their tragedies and comedies.”

## **Directing or taking directions**

The director’s work with his or her actors is an interaction between thought and performance, one person’s individual vision being translated and interpreted by another human being. This process is not simple or obvious in terms of communication or understanding. But the situation in itself can be a place where differences and pre-constructed ideas are revealed.

“Method acting” is a method used by film actors mostly. Originally it comes from Konstantin Stanislavski and his ideas that the actor should act as he/she does in reality and that it should come from within him/herself. He wanted to construct a method where “ordinary” people could

train to be a fantastic actor. He wanted to demystify the actor as genius. Everyone can learn to act???

These ideas were picked up in various quarters, most famously by Lee Strasberg, who in 1951 became the manager for the famous Actor's Studio in New York where method acting was taught. What distinguishes this method is the significance that is placed on the actor's own experiences. Here the actor learns to learn by him/herself through him/herself. Method acting is fixed and clear in its formulae and takes a long time to learn, apparently. When the actor has learnt it he or she is supposed to be able to reach certain emotional states quickly, enter a character and be able to picture a fictitious situation.

I am interested in this kind of theatre because so much, if not all, of the actor's performance is based on his or her own life. There is a natural understanding for this way of working. Whose experiences can we gain something from if not our own? But I wonder how stable and reliable our memories and emotions really are. The only thing that actors who work according to this method can trust completely is that the memories and feelings that they connect to a particular experience remain the same or accord with collective ideas. The actor's experiences are useful in this case only if the actor has control of the use of them and makes the "right" comparison between the original emotion and the fictive emotion. Is theatre an attempt to control reality? The raw reality that offers truth?

I have wanted to find out more about an actor's relation to his/her part. In my work with Russ Kingston, an extra in LA, I could answer and try out some of these questions. Russ is a very dedicated and hard working extra who takes every opportunity in front of the camera to train as an actor. For a long time I had wanted to work with someone who worked with film but who had a certain distance to his/her part and who had certain needs of his/her own.

Our co-operation resulted in a number of exercises before the camera. These exercises consisted of rehearsals, story telling, gestures and mimicry, empathy, private (documentary) confessions to the camera and attitudes to various settings. Through this meeting I could practice my curiosity, which largely was about finding a way to expression. In this case the line between Russ in private life and Russ as an actor was erased. He found himself in a borderland, which is interesting enough.

**Bresson: "It is not about directing someone else, but about directing oneself."**

When I work (with film people or with the process of acting) I often find that I am involved in a drama that I also observe. I am often not aware of this participation. When I am absorbed by my own fascination and to some extent identify with the people I work with, the situation becomes hard to grasp. But I think that it is about finding oneself in the middle of something magical, again a mix of distance and presence that arises in a situation where one creates something that is happening by itself. Sometimes I wonder if I am returning to a childhood state of passivity when I film, that is, work from a constructed naive unconsciousness that makes it easier for me to get in touch with the things I am trying to get at.

Bresson talks about the actor's "seeming to be" and the model's "being". As if the model in his/her unconsciousness and purity could show a truth about the essence of man more clearly than actors can. This "authentic" expression always seems to be found between two ways of

being. Completely unconscious, almost like a child, or the opposite, so conscious as to reduce everything unnecessary and affected.

Bertold Brecht's attitude towards the work of the actors is that they are forced to portray someone without pretending to be. His solution is to make the actors understand their part as actors when they are ordinary humans in everyday life. They should always keep a distance and a theoretical attitude to their work. He regards the actor as someone who represents and this shift from subject to actor becomes visible, but the two never merge.

## Posing

To pose is to struggle to conceal and make a show of oneself, to take control of the exposure of oneself. Posing is something we recognise. We see the artificial deportment, the kind of pose someone has taken up, perhaps even the intention. We also become aware of the camera (if this is the case) and possibly also the relation between the poser and the photographer (director). Posing can evoke a feeling of theatricality and imitated fantasy, but also the opposite, something that we sometimes call the "authentic" or the unaffected.

For me posing is always linked to humour, a humour that is not completely identifiable. Perhaps this kind of humour has to do with transience, a feeling of being tricked by the poser, not knowing exactly if we see a truthful picture, or if it is role-playing.

This is probably not clear to the poser either, which makes it even more comical. But a portrait also reminds the viewer of the mortality of the person in the picture. That the portrait could say anything about the person on the picture as a living human being makes the thought of death and the closeness to laughter seem to coexist in an uncanny way.

Automatism, or the habit, in certain forms of behaviour (posing) is said to be something that blocks or represses. Nine tenths of our movements belong to habit and are automatic. It is against nature to try to subordinate them under the will and the mind. Every movement reveals us but only if it is done automatic. In his book Proust Beckett says that Proust deals with this idea in *Remembrance of Things Past* in the episode when the Madeleine cake helps him break his habit and makes him remember, question, reflect about his childhood. The taste of the cake makes him want to go back and investigate parts of his life. Do we repress much without being able to do anything about it, without even being aware of it? And is what is most self-evident that which should be questioned?

In method acting an exercise called "affective memory" is used, in which the actor recalls an event from his or her life. The event is described in detail in a hypnotic state in order to form it and adapt it to the situation of the character. This is like being hypnotised by oneself and to relate to this state through acting. When the actor recreates this real event, he or she does so, for example, by describing the material in her clothes, the smell in the room or his/her heart beats. The situation they describe is constructed in a recreated situation. When the actor gives an oral account of the memory, I think that they convince themselves that that was what really happened while they in fact create a new event.

Lee Strasberg recommends his actors to use memories that are at least seven years old in order to avoid psychological trauma. But as I have already said I am sceptical about the workings of method acting, not just as regards the reliability of memories and emotions but also about how real and important they are as time passes. Perhaps one's past is divided into

chapters where we pose at different stages of ourselves. Is it possible to understand the past or create a picture of events anywhere close to the truth?

In Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* the theatre director in the play tries to tell the "Father" that his character is an illusion. He, in turn, tries to plead his "authenticity" by comparing his real life with that of characters: "Just to get to know, you see, if you really can see yourself as you really are... as you can see things before you from the recent past, see yourself as you once were, with all the illusions you then had, with all the ideas you had about yourself and about the world around, and which then not only seemed real but also was so for you... don't you think... that this 'someone' that you at this moment think is you, all this reality of today, such as you see it, is doomed to seem an illusion to you tomorrow?"

Dance/dance theatre as a form of expression gives an ambiguous role to the play between bodily representation and the position of the subject. Here the dancer's self and her role on the stage become one and the same in an unavoidable situation. But how does the dancer behave in relation to this situation and what is the position of the choreographic material in relation to it? I am saying that the subject has a more obvious position and that the choreographic content is more open for discussion. Most of these pieces also come about because of an interplay between choreographer/artistic leader and the dancers, where parts of the content is based on the dancers' own experiences.

I will return to these issues in connection to Pina Bausch's works later.

## **The role of identity**

Identity: undecided, amorphous, unfaithful to any essence or truth. However close we come to a human being or the reproduction of him or her we can never be sure about his or her truth. Sometimes Andy Kaufman chose not to leave the character he had played but continued off stage in his private life. In this way he treated life as a stage and everyone he met as an audience.

In Bergman's *A Passion* (a.k.a. *The Passion of Anna*) from 1969, we see Liv Ullman in an extreme close-up talking about an unhappy marriage. This is how Bergman describes the scene:

"First she faces away and then turns around and she practically looks directly into the camera. It is fascinating... You can see the colour shifting, the tears that appear, the voice that starts to tremble; you see that she walks the tightrope between... between real despair and mendacity."

Liv Ullman's talent as an actor and her character's ability to act coincide.

Bergman uses the close-up to mislead the viewer, not to make things clearer. The face becomes a mask and therefore something false. Unlike in Hollywood, where this kind of close-up is called the "star shot", slightly eroticised, in Bergman it is de-identified and de-objectified. In the case of Bergman, the close-up shows whether we can trust a facial expression or not.

In one of Brecht's learning plays, *The Measure Taken*, the actors have to play many different characters with widely different opinions. Not to be able to stabilise the identity of a character



opens the different positions of the play to scrutiny, and by not identifying as an actor nor as a spectator the course of events can become understandable.

Sometimes Bergman let his actors (in addition to their regular part) play the part of spectators before the action on stage. Then they became very visible in their invisibility, a kind of move that throws light on the manipulation of the stage. Sometimes he just let them stay on stage without being “in character”, and then had them make visible entrées. These actors were thus a kind of on-stage audience. These double-dealings, the actors’ transformations into and out of character, make the actor’s relations to the characters they play more visible. The audience can see what was “not intended”. This resembles Brecht’s method and his “Verfremdungseffekt”, where both the actors and the audience are asked not to lose themselves in the play, but to be critical of the drama as an illusion. Brecht is primarily interested in the production of meaning in theatre and how meaning is understood. The Verfremdungseffekt, or alienating effect, is intended to make everyone involved “think”, and not to “feel” so much through identification. What happens is that the actor transforms into character and demonstrator/actor at the same time. He/she is not one with what they represent, but almost. Nor is the audience passively entertained. They actively help to produce meaning and understanding.

Stanislavski talks about authenticity in connection with the actors’ transformation into character. This transformation involves a transition from one reality to another, and this creates a time pocket that lets us see another reality. He also has a theory of the actor entering into the characters to such a degree that they forget that they are on stage. They enter another just as real life. The previous life is no more and the one that is coming is dead. This is the opposite of Brecht’s theory. The actor as a kind of healthy schizophrenic.

## **Language and truth**

A phrase from Bergman’s *A Passion*: “Language is terribly deceitful, ambiguous, evasive, secretive, falsifying...”

Language ties us to reality and to one another, making the separation between the inner and outer world seem less untreacherous.

Directors such as Buñuel, Lynch and, again, Bergman use a cinematic language that stresses the difficulty and uncertainty of linguistic representation. Not having to motivate everything makes language rich. We take much of the characteristics and “rules” of language as something given and accept its limitations, and we have also learnt to react and be affected accordingly. We often repeat ourselves in relation to language. Language has a hold on us and to change its power we have to develop new methods.

Antonin Artaud (French poet, director, actor and writer) was interested in what language could do for and with people. He thought that language as we use it is a method for generating effects and to make the links between things in the world clear. He thought that the relation audience/stage was undeveloped and that the theatrical language was too realistic and the text too much at the centre. Therefore he developed a way of acting that was based more on events and expressions of various kinds. He tried to create a kind of “total theatre” that focused on the creation of action rather than on the work with the text. In “The Theatre of Cruelty”, Artaud describes this as a chaotic performance where the audience is tied to chairs in the middle of a

room and various actors move around them and communicate with gestures, grimaces, sounds and lighting experiments.

Through such a complex theatre, where emotions and events develop unpredictably, he wants to get at something beyond the text. He compares it to waking up one morning and finding that everything we once knew has ceased to exist, and only a pointless physical disorder is left. To understand is an emotion and comes from the exposure to a multiplicity of expressions, through which we will find out that we can act and say something for ourselves. As a consequence Artaud believes that some kind of non-linguistic communication is necessary, which does not limit, is not self-referential and in a cruel way (cruel because it creates something new and because the audience is not prepared) makes us conscious of the fact that it is we who decide the meaning of things.

The biggest problem is that we both use and adapt to what we are given. To challenge language may seem simple but we are probably not always aware of how dominated we actually are.

“... I abandoned the stage because I realised the fact that the only language which I could have with an audience was to bring bombs out of my pocket and throw them in the audience’s feet with a blatant gesture of aggression... and blows are the only language in which I feel capable of speaking.”

Every day I feel that I control my use of language and how others see it. Sometimes what other people say does not ring “true”, seems not to be “real”, a feeling that I associate with the stage. The trustworthiness of language is connected to theatricality. The feeling of authenticity is opposed to dissimulation. That we sometimes talk in a feigned way might come from personal views about how language can and should be used. Are we constantly training to learn it “by heart”, in order to be able to use it in the way that is expected from us and according to what we need in various situations? To “come into being” through language?

To relate, repeat or read other people’s texts (not only in connection with the theatre) make the need for control less. It is not just the sender who has the responsibility for the message, something that also automatically reduces its trustworthiness. All forms of authentic documentation (diaries, journals, video recordings, etc.) are always second-hand information and are therefore met with scepticism. In my video version of Beckett’s Krapp’s Last Tape, I try to show a relation to the autobiographical material as ambivalent. I choose to bring together the character of Krapp with that of the actor. I compare their situations to one another, because they both have to confront versions of themselves.

On stage, a number of languages and signs mix and leave a stamp on how we understand the text, for example, body language, tone of voice, music, lighting, the set design, characters, action, etc. Everything that happens on stage is a sign that works with other signs. These signs start to work long before we sit down in the auditorium. The smallest sign that we are in a borderland between fiction and reality, and everything around us becomes part of the transformation. Program, ticket sale, the foyer, everything is a sign that forms the language of the theatre, something that turns those of us who are there into co-creators and co-actors in the transformation of reality. A usual phenomenon lately is that parts of the performance interact with people in the audience, something that I have experienced in the last few performances that I have attended, mostly modern dance and theatre. Often this interactive dimension works

on a meta-level that comments on the performance and breaks down the distance between the stage and the audience. But also in order to “reach” a reality beyond the stage and therefore also the audience in a more direct way (a milder version of Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty).

Pina Bausch, a German choreographer and dancer, often works in this way. She questions the relations of power between herself and her dancers, and between the dancers and the audience. She lets the dancers be more than instruments. She gives them a voice and a place, where they can describe their positions as dancers in private life. And here the whole performance, the task of the dancers and the expectations of the audience are questioned. Bausch takes up the role as therapist both for the dancers and for the audience. She turns the whole idea of a performance on its head.

Time after time her dance pieces seem to take up the search for man’s “true” self and its relation to society and how society influences the “self”. The dancers communicate this construction and other related issues by both demonstrating and deconstructing them.

By using a theatrical language where gestures, looks, words and songs are mixed with dance, social constructions, private relations and clichés become more apparent. The stage becomes a place where one can behave in ways that one would not in real life. Members of the audience recognise themselves and everything on stage is mirrored in their private lives. Pina Bausch shows man’s way of relating to his or her own truth and by way of this truth to the truth of other people. She also seems to claim that this is something constructed that partly harms us without us being aware of it. What we see as authentic is in actual fact only the construction of a truth.

The whole idea of a true and authentic “self” that is supposed to exist independently of what we do is questioned. Do we come into being through others and through already given frameworks? Are my emotions, memories, thoughts real or just a part of a performance where society is the audience and my creator?

Nietzsche in “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”: “Truths are illusions about which we have forgotten they are illusions.”

## **The phenomenology of theatre**

According to philosophical phenomenology all forms of observation or attempts to create meaning come from the consciousness and experience of the individual. Language is used as a tool for understanding and this understanding is a mental phenomenon or a sensory experience. Phenomenology is the search for understanding man’s relation to the world.

When we watch theatre our senses are activated. We see and think, produce a kind of meaning. Hereby we can reflect about our relationship to the world. Here communication comes about when we as spectators let our understanding of the world of the other (the theatre) enter our own world. This transference makes me receive a new world bodily, giving my world a new meaning. Understanding changes and so do we. There are constantly new modifications.

All attempts at expressing ourselves to one another are made because we want to say something about the world we live in. Life is thus a collective event where everything that happens is interplay. And a theatrical performance becomes a mini version of the real theatre of life. The world can express itself through fiction.

Fiction in all these forms distorts reality and makes the feeling of things more visible, letting us see life in a new way. When we stand in front of this possibility, our inner world mixes with the outer reality and a third reality comes about, the one created when we observe or participate in the creation of art. I regard this third state as a result of an involvement in something unknown and hereby we come in contact with a side of ourselves that moves between dream and reality.

As human beings we live together with other people and everything in the world is available for everyone. We are never just individuals or just members of a community. The bit that is social and which makes up the collective consciousness must partly be stable to affect us as individuals. What exist outside of these social norms are forms of madness and the state of being an outsider. If one takes Artaud's view of language as insufficient and carries it to its extremes, it is the social outcast that is the alternative. He believed that other ways of giving and receiving information will fill those who surrender themselves to this new form of language, and eventually they will have nothing more to say. Another way of being, in which language as we know it becomes useless.

One way of bringing together life and people with theatre is Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed. Just as Bertold Brecht he was critical of the locked positions in the theatre. Brecht managed to make the audience think and judge for themselves, but Boal took this a step further and also made them act. He wanted his theatre to be revolutionary and pave the way for the revolution in various ways. An exercise that is described in Theatre of the Oppressed is "invisible theatre", where actors gather at a restaurant and one of them orders food that he/she cannot pay for, which lead to a loud discussion between the other actors about wages, poverty, prices and the right to food, etc. Eventually other people in the restaurant join in the discussion and thereby take part in the performance. This can be compared to a debate on television but here actors bring an unannounced debate to the people. No one needs to know that it is theatre or if it even can be called theatre. It is just a slanted reality.

Another exercise is "breaking of repression", which consists of a person in the audience describing a situation where he/she has felt repressed and wished that he/she had acted differently. The actors play the scene once and then a second time but with a new turn where the repression is resisted and is broken. This exercise has great similarities with Brecht's play *Der Ja-Sager/Der Nein-Sager* (The No Sayer/The Yes Sayer), which is played with two endings. Here it was children that got to decide what ending they preferred after having judged the moral content of the play.

## **Concluding remarks**

In this text, I have given examples of a number of different ways of relating to theatre. In my art I have been influenced by and commented on them all. I have gathered my fields of interest here in order to get a clearer grasp of their common denominators and come closer to my interest in narrative art. But, above all, it is the dissimilarity between the various attitudes that interests me. What these artists do, which is also my starting point, is to link art to life, and to make it urgent for the audience.

[A]nd I will devote myself from now on  
exclusively  
to the theatre  
as I conceive it,  
a theatre of blood,  
a theatre which at each performance will stir  
something  
in the body  
of the performer as well as the spectator of the play,  
but actually,  
the actor does not perform,  
he creates.  
Theatre is in reality the genesis of creation:  
It will come about.

Artaud, Letter to Paule Thévenin.  
Tuesday 24th February, 1948.  
(Schumacher, 1989, p. 200)

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