

**SOS! THEATRE**



As I am writing this, I sit on a padded black chair, slightly bent over a wooden desk. There are some spots from paint and glue on the surface. The desk stands with one of its short ends to a wall.

This room, like most rooms, has a floor, a ceiling, all held together by four walls. (All are painted black.)

But this room is not like other rooms: the purpose of this room is to contain many other rooms, worlds, people.

I am sitting alone. With the constant humming of the neon working lights as the soundtrack of this emptiness, I imagine the tribune, with four rows, right behind me, facing the now devastatingly empty stage.

The notion of theatre as a safe and social space has been shook up in the 2020 pandemic crisis. Debates about the relevance of theatre 'for the system' led to insecurities - professional, emotional and financial. Theatre stands under pressure as its core idea - people gathering - is now deemed a high-risk activity. All of a sudden, theatre is a non-place, a dangerous site. The vanishing of culture, arts and theatre from public life has left a great void.

In 1904, the German Imperial Marine developed the Morse code SOS to quickly communicate in cases of life-threatening situations. Since then, the code has often been read as 'save our souls'. This reading of SOS might help to fill the current void in cultural life: Theatre is our soul food nourishing our emotional and intellectual selves.

I imagine the front-of-house personnel quickly peeking in through the door, checking in if the audience may enter now. Yes, please. Let them in.

The first one to come in is an older lady. Her elegant appearance and fine jewelry tell she has put on some extra zhuzh for the occasion. Now, the empty room steadily fills up with people.

The next one to enter is you. Feel warmly invited into our imaginary theatre. We would have loved to welcome you for an event we have been planning at Turteatern. As the situation forbids we meet in person, this zine is an attempt to create a safe theatre visit that happens in your imagination.

You and I, we build, construct, tear down this theatre together. Read, use, and interpret this zine as you wish. Some of the texts contain hands-on scores that you can either perform at home, or just read as text.

Come inside and let this imaginary theatre be your heart defibrillator, your emergency telephone, your life buoy, your safe shelter.

Tunnelbana, green line.

You get off at Kärrtorp, turn right immediately after the exit.

Walking through snow slush, you leave the little square

in front of you: the theatre.

Maybe you already start to fumble for your ticket in your pockets.

As you open the glass door, you are encompassed by a wave of warmth.

Around you, excited chatter and the tingly sensation of anticipation in the air.

Who are you with?

Are you alone, with a friend, a partner, a family member, a colleague?

Theatre is full of playful exploration and nourishment.

It is a social place where people and ideas meet.

During the pandemic, this social aspect became the pitfall of theatre.

Theatre has quite literally become a utopia

- in the sense that it is a space that must not be, and thus does not exist.

The pandemic has forced a retreat into the private sphere.

As life focuses on the domestic baking and cooking become popular activities to get our minds off the constant news feed of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Chop the onion, sauté with a dash of olive oil in a deep pot.

Which performance are we attending tonight?  
Have you read up on the author, the context of the production  
or do you like to just be surprised?

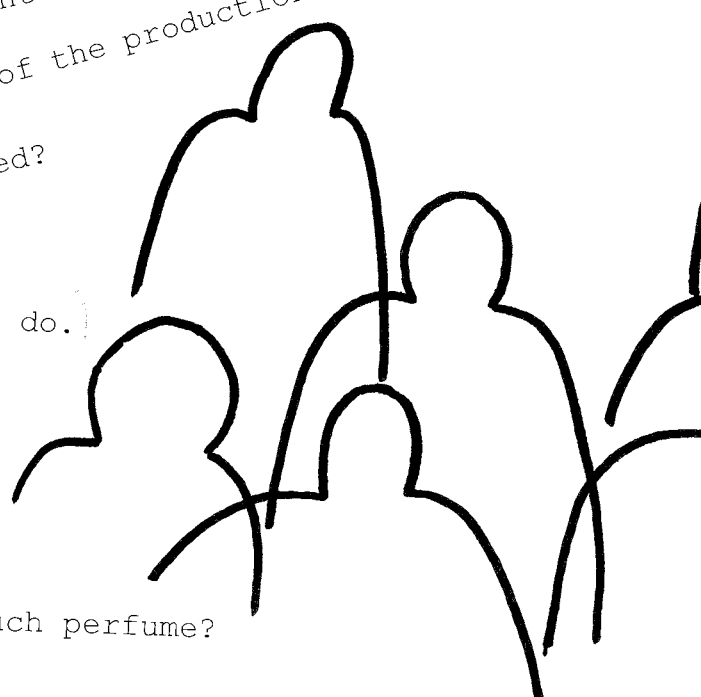
I certainly do.

Add pumpkin, slightly roast.

What do you smell?

Has the lady in the queue put on too much perfume?

Add diced potatoes and hot water, let simmer.





Are you puzzled by the performance?  
Does it grip you, or do you contemplate on  
what to eat when you get home?  
Blend, season with salt.



# IN CASE OF SOCIAL HUNGER

→ chop, stir, blend  
→ theatrical cooking

Did you dress up especially for the occasion?

*(I am sporting my Pjamas tonight.)*

Serve soup.

As you sit at the dinner table, feel the chair you sit on.

You are sitting in the theatre auditorium.

Maybe your neighbor s l o w l y unwraps a hard candy.

Maybe you will be thinking about our theatre visit days after.

(Or as soon as the lights go on, you will forget about it.)

Maybe the coughing of another visitor in the last row for one second catapults  
you out of immersion into what is happening on stage,

making you realize you are

here,  
right now,

with a bunch of

t o t a l strangers.

You all share this moment.

Now it has passed.

The lights go off.

The lights go on:





### IN CASE OF HYPERCONSENSUS

- critical theatre
- negotiating,  
demonstrating,  
disagreeing

Marc-Antoine Vumilia Mukindo

## DISAGREEING THEATRE

I am meeting Julia, Lolita, Isabella, Yichan and our supervisor Meike at Turteater at 4pm as we are preparing our curated event. And I am lost in the tunnelbana, but I don't know it until I start crossing the city from center to north then from north to south, jumping from red line to green, from train 17 to 18. As I travel to find the right direction, concepts keep crossing my brain as well. At times, they don't cross at all. They take control, they dance, they jump, they shout. They play comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, Tanztheater, musicals... My brain is a stage, my brain is a theatre, and I watch concepts as they are performing, my brain is a theatre of conflicts, a theatre of concepts and I am trying to conceptualise the theatre and the city, the urban body, theatre as a survival strategy, democracy, post-democracy, public sphere, negotiation, agonism, Antigone, consensus, political theatre, critical theatre... They are as many as the tunnelbana stations my body is crossing inside of the noisy womb of the urban body. It seems I am having a guilty pleasure getting lost in the tunnelbana as I am hunting for concepts in my mind.

It has been said that we are living in a post-democratic society, that we have entered the era of post-politics where a dominant discourse has proclaimed the need to go beyond left and right towards a consensual politics of the center. The center of what? Probably the center of nowhere, the center of itself, the hegemonic center. It has also been said that there is no longer politics, but technical issues to be technically solved by rational minds, because we are rational people and that when we decide thinking as such, we always come to a reasonable consensus, no matter if that consensus might harm some, as long as it is technically working.

But what will it be done with those who do not agree with this? Those forsaken by the consensus. Who wills to hear what their say? This consensus that has been built upon a mountain of silences, the silence of women the silence of blacks the silence of majorities that that have been reduced to silence until they became a minority, the silence of the jobless, of the workers, of the peasants, of the queer, of the children... The fact is that there is no consensus without exclusion. *Ding, dong!* Instead of the electronic voice announcing the station, I hear the voice of Chantal Mouffe. She says: "Every political consensus is of a hegemonic nature". And she explains that, when passions are silenced in order to privilege a consensus in the center, so they cannot be mobilized by democratic parties, when a society starts to avoid a real confrontation among a diversity of democratic political identities, this is when those passions transform themselves into violent and fundamentalist movements, that love of a nation turns into hatred of the others, that religious, racial, cultural, nationalistic identities are essentialized until they become prisons, and this is when the bridges to any kind of negotiation are broken. Many do no longer vote because they do not fit in the system, and these are really many. The few who still go voting do whatever they can to keep the worst away. The elected institutions are representative of nothing but our fears, not our choices.

As I start reflecting on this, I find myself traveling back in time. Paris, May 20, I am on vacation. I have just settled in Sweden two years earlier, but I already miss my new homeland. I turn on my computer, I type *Stockholm* on Google and I search for live videos. This makes me travel to... Husby, a suburb of Stockholm. S.O.S! My country is on fire! For three days, cars have been burning in the streets, projectiles are being thrown at the police, the inhabitants with fear in their stomachs are hiding in their houses, while the violence is spreading to the surrounding neighborhoods. The event that set the fire was the death of a man of foreign origin during a police intervention at his home. Rationally, one could say that there is no causal connection between this incident and the violence that followed. But if we remember that Husby was abandoned by the authorities for many years, if we add up the frustrations accumulated by the people of foreign origin who live there, and the lack of dialogue between these populations and the authorities, then we understand that the violence in Husby finds its explanation in the very structures of Swedish society.

Let's move again: Stockholm Central Station, June 2019, on a Saturday afternoon. Members of the anti-immigrant group known as the Soldiers of Odin, are physically attacking any Arab-looking young men around. The latter are accused of defiling the purity of the Aryan blood by raping the "sisters" of the soldiers of Odin. By sister, you should understand any ethnic Swedish woman. Now, what is in common between, on one side, the young Arab or African immigrant in Husby burning cars, and on the other side, a Soldier of Odin or a neo-Nazi member of the Nordfronten attacking the Arabs? They are all excluded from the debate! Society tries to make them invisible without taking the time to listen to them. Society is ashamed of them and seeks to get rid of them as one would hide dirt under carpets, until someday it all ends up smelling bad as the whole house starts

Back to the tunnelbana inside the womb of Stockholm. *Ding, dong!* The train slows down. I lift my eyes: "*Universitet*"! This means that I took the red line instead of the green one. Okay, I will change at T-Centralen. Still I can hear the haunting voice of Chantal Mouffe, but I am not surprised, because I spent the night trying to understand her concept of agonism. Yes, because as we were preparing this event, Meike suggested that I read about agonism. "Maybe it's going to be helpful", she said innocently. Then I almost got possessed by the spirit of Chantal! I hear her explain that agonism thinking recognises that social order does not just happen from nowhere, on the contrary it affirms that social order is always constructed. Listen: "What is at a given moment considered to be 'natural' order, (...) is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices; it is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity outside the practices that bring it into being." Isn't this deep and beautiful?

But what does this all have to do with theatre?

As the politics shapes society, there is a liminal and unstable space where both politics and society meet, it is a place for negotiation. The theatre could be that place. The theatre is potentially that space. Why?

First, the theatre makes visible in flesh and blood and in a compact format the antagonistic oppositions that are part of society. In the theatre, conflicts of society are expressed in a peaceful and productive way thanks to the alienation effect of the *mise en scene*. Antagonistic destructive struggles are therefore transformed into agonistic ones, that means that once staged, antagonistic conflicts are still there but enemies have been transformed into adversaries who recognize the legitimacy of the presence and of the discourse of each other, even though each one keeps their own conviction. This is what Chantal calls agonistic struggle. In fact, this is what I think that she thinks.



*Shores/The Ground is on Fire, by Nassim Aghili*



*Ding, dong! From T-Centralen, I take the green line, number 18.  
I should have taken 17.*

Second, the theatre is itself a world of negotiations and therefore, is a kind of training camp for the social and political negotiation on a larger scale. Let me explain. Theatre institutions permanently negotiate with various partners. For instance, the programming of a theatre season is the fruit of negotiations between opposing interests like the imperatives of cultural politics imposed by the public authorities, the expectations of sponsors, difference of tastes among the different segments of the audience, the ambitions of the artists etc. Even inside the artistic circle the negotiation process goes on: during rehearsals, the performers negotiate with the stage director a space to express their own feelings and interpretation of a play, the latter negotiates with the text/the dramatist, while the audience negotiates with all the previously named to create a meaning of the performance that fits their own reality, and the battle even goes on among critics and scholars. This situation mirrors the conflict that exists between antagonistic interests in society. Therefore, theatre can work as a training camp for everyone to learn how to negotiate.

*Ding, dong! Högdalen... My goodness, this is line 19! I must step out, travel back to Gullmarsplan, then...*

The politics of the hegemonic consensus ignores that, society is plural, and plurality is the possibility of antagonistic conflicts between irremediable positions that no consensus might pretend to resolve. Only when we will be able to take into account the diversity, the plurality, and the conflictual state that this infers, that we may be able to create a 'we' that is really inclusive. This is what Chantal Mouffe calls *agonistic pluralism* and this is how we transform enemies into adversaries. Theatre should be that space where the social body expresses itself in its plurality, its diversity and is not ashamed of its conflicts. This is a way of negotiation; this is a way of creating understanding. Purists might say, "Yeah, this is a speech about political theatre!" But let me surprise you, I don't believe there is political theatre on one side and apolitical theatre on the other side, nor even politics on one side and art on the other. Let me quote again Chantal Mouffe one last time: "One should not see the relation between art and politics in terms of two separately constituted fields, art on one side, and politics on the other between which a relation would need to be established. There is an aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension in art. This is why I have argued that it is not useful to make a distinction between political and non-political art. (...) Artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order or in its challenging and this is why they necessarily have a political dimension. The political, on its part, concerns the symbolic ordering of social relations what Claude Lefort calls 'the mise en scene', 'the mise en forme' of human coexistence and this is where lies its aesthetic dimension."

*Ding, dong! This is it. Now I take 17 straight to Kärrtorp.*

We should rather differentiate between critical and non-critical theatre, critical theatre being the theatre that questions the dominant discourses and makes visible what the dominant consensus has obliterated, the theatre that gives a voice to the silenced ones. Theatre today has the choice between looking like the social body itself and reflecting our diversity, our conflicts, or rather being content to reproduce the self-satisfied consensual discourse. The more the theatre will be critical, the more it will participate in the agonistic project of a democratic society where differences and conflicts are recognized as part of the landscape that does recognize differences and conflicts as part of the political landscape, instead of being covered under the scarf of consensus. This is the way in which theatre would work as a place of dialogue and negotiation and this is how negotiation through the theatre can work as a strategy to protect the urban body from extremisms of all kinds.

I walk quickly, so I start sweating, from Kärrtorp to Turteatern following the female voice on Google Map. *Ding, dong!* Hej! The theatre is not open. I know, I am meeting Julia, Lolita, Isabella, and our supervisor Meike... Oh, yes, from Stockholm University? Varsågod!

# LET'S DISAGREE TOGETHER!



## Characters:

Mayor of Stockholm  
Police Chief  
Theatre Director  
Goddess of Disagreement  
An artist  
Citizen  
The moderator

*Stockholm, 2984. The New Party of Law and Order has taken power in Sweden. The action is taking place in the last independent theatre of Sweden. A theatre performance of Antigone has just been brutally stopped by the police because the new authorities considered it subversive. A riot broke out following the police intervention. The mayor of Stockholm and the Police Chief conceded to hold a discussion with theatre workers and some citizens. The mayor, the police chief, and the theatre director are on a stage.*

*The moderator is in-between, and the artist is in the audience. They are the only characters performed by specific participants. The other interventions are made by any participant in this way: the participants who want to read a line of the performance put their hands up and the moderator quickly points to the one who will speak.*

**THE MODERATOR:** *freely introduces to the participants how the performance will be conducted.*

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a popular debate. Feel free when you do not agree with something to say "no", and when you agree, you can freely say "yes" as the debate goes on. Now, I ask all of us to say aloud five times and even more "We want freedom", and then we clap our hands as we make some noise?

**ALL:** *except the Mayor and the Police Chief.* We want freedom! We want freedom! We want freedom!

**POLICE CHIEF:** Silence, please! Silence, please! Discipline! Ladies and gentlemen the mayor of Stockholm and myself as representing the police, have exceptionally agreed to have this talk with you. We want to make sure that you understand why in the name of the New Party of Law and Order, we could not tolerate that in this year of grace 2984, a representation of a subversive play be delivered to our population. This performance that they call uh...

**AN ARTIST:** Antigone

**POLICE CHIEF:** Anti what?

**MAYOR:**...gone!

**POLICE CHIEF:** Yeah... So, this show that preaches disobedience does not meet the standards consensually adopted by our government.

**AN ARTIST:** As an artist and as a citizen, I consider Antigone is a story about freedom of conscience. We live in democracy, right?

**MAYOR:** Wrong. Better than democracy, now in 20984 we live in post-democracy, we live in an era of post politics.

**POLICE CHIEF:** This is the reason why theatre must reflect the new order, the order of a rational consensus.

**CITIZEN:** Does this make any sense? What do you mean?

**MAYOR:** I mean that politics is dead. We only have technical issues to be technically solved by technically well-trained and rationally formatted minds. I mean that if we all act rationally, we always come to a rational consensus. No need to fight, no need for disobedience! This is what theatre must mirror: unity and consensus.

**CITIZEN:** Who decided on the terms of this so-called consensus? Sorry but I

was not there when you guys voted. A consensus that ignores the diversity of the society and harms the weak? What will you do with those who do not agree with your idea of a consensus? I do not believe in a consensus that is built upon a mountain of silences, the silence of women the silence of blacks, the silence of majorities that have been turned into a minority, the silence of the jobless, of the workers, of the peasants, of the queer, of the children...

**AN ARTIST:** You think this is a natural order? There is no natural order. No, there is nothing like a national and rational brain or impartial algorithm somewhere above there that could coldly bring technical solutions to all our social, political, and existential problems. There is no social order that is not politically decided.

**CITIZEN:** When they see us, we are just a society of independent individuals gathered at the centre of nowhere.

**POLICE CHIEF:** Cool down!

**MAYOR:** Much ado about nothing! I only mean that we need to go beyond left and right, beyond the woman and the man, the poor and the rich, we need to go towards a consensual politics of the centre.

**CITIZEN:** The centre? the centre of what?

**CITIZEN:** Probably the centre of nowhere, the centre of itself, the hegemonic centre.

**THEATRE DIRECTOR:** I am the director of this theatre which is the last independent theatre of Stockholm...

**POLICE CHIEF:** You mean a clandestine theatre.

**AN ARTIST:** We mean the theatre of the poor.

**THEATRE DIRECTOR:** When you ask people to silent their passions and quarrels, because of what you name the "consensus at the centre", what you are really doing is just that you are trying to avoid seeing the true face of society. That face that you don't want to be shown in theatre is a face made of diversity, permanent change, migrations, racial, sexual, and political anxieties, and passions of every kind. If you cover up all these passions, all this energy, that is where you get right on your face the stinking explosion of extremist, fundamentalist,



obscurantist, racist movements. Look at the national theatres and see how empty they are! People stop going to the theatre the same way they have stopped voting.

**MAYOR:** Why?

**CITIZEN:** Because we feel that we don't fit anywhere. Your theatre is a theatre of consensus, your politics is a politics of consensus, but no one really asked us what we think about all this. Definitely, this consensus looks more like a con than a census.  
*The participants laugh.*

**POLICE CHIEF:** *shouting.* Discipliine!

**MAYOR:** But what does this all have to do with theatre? I mean the true and pure theatre? Isn't theatre all about aesthetics, poetry, dreams, illusions, society... Not the politics!

**THEATRE DIRECTOR:** Maybe. But there is a small and unstable space where both politics and society meet. It is a place for negotiation. The theatre could be that place. The theatre is potentially that space.

**MAYOR:** Come on...What do you mean?

**THEATRE DIRECTOR:** First, the theatre makes visible in flesh and blood the oppositions that are part of society. In the theatre, conflicts are expressed in a peaceful and productive way thanks to the alienation effect of the *mise en scène*. Once staged, struggles become symbolic. Conflicts are still there, right? But enemies have become simple adversaries like we are now during this discussion. No one contests the legitimacy of the presence and of the discourse of the other, even if each one keeps their own convictions. This is what I call agonistic struggle. Second, the theatre is a kind of training camp for social and political negotiation on a larger scale. Let me explain. Theatre institutions permanently negotiate with various partners. For instance, the programming of a theatre season is the fruit of negotiations between opposing interests like the imperatives of cultural politics imposed by the public authorities, the expectations of sponsors, difference of tastes among the different segments of the audience, the ambitions of the artists etc.

**AN ARTIST:** Even inside the artistic circle, we keep on negotiating. During rehearsals, the performers negotiate with the stage director a space to

express their own feelings and interpretation of a play, the latter negotiates with the text or with the dramatist, while the audience negotiates with all the previously named to create a meaning of the performance that fits their own reality, and the battle even goes on among critics and scholars and so on. My point is that the theatre has the experience on how to manage conflicts.

**MAYOR:** This is not far from what I was talking about.

**CITIZEN:** Never! Your consensus ignores that, society is plural, and that plurality means the possibility of struggles. From what kind of consensus, for instance, comes the fact of putting on stage blond Othello and Bérénice, while our schools of acting are full of people of different origins? From what kind of consensus comes the fact that always the same people can pretend to be able to tell not only their own stories but also the story of everyone else?

**POLICE CHIEF:** Are you promoting jealousy, and a battle opposing social classes?

**AN ARTIST:** I was tempted to answer yes. Theatre should be that space where the social body expresses itself in its plurality, its diversity. This is a way of negotiation; this is a way of creating understanding.

**MAYOR:** I am sorry, but I think this is a speech about political theatre! We don't need this today, do we?

**POLICE CHIEF:** We don't even need politics any longer.

**THEATRE DIRECTOR:** There is no political theatre on one side and non-political theatre on the other side, nor even politics on one side and art on the other. The politics try to fabricate a society according to its own fantasy, so we can say that politics conceives a *mise en scène* of our lives. This is the aesthetic dimension of politics. Artistic practices on their side are never neutral. As an artist, whether you contribute to create and maintain a given political order or challenge it. In one way or another theatre does politics. We should rather differentiate between critical and non-critical theatre, critical theatre being the theatre that questions the dominant discourse and gives a voice to the silenced ones.

Theatre today has the choice between looking like the social body itself and reflecting our diversity and our conflicts, or rather be content to reproduce the self-satisfied consensual discourse.

**CITIZEN:** The more the theatre will be critical, the more it will participate in the democratic project of a society that embraces differences and conflicts as part of the political landscape, instead of covering them under the scarf of consensus. I think that this is the way theatre would work as a place of public dialogue and negotiation and this is how negotiation through the theatre can work as a strategy to protect the urban body from extremisms of all kinds.

**MAYOR:** I do not agree, I find this completely absurd!

**CITIZEN:** Of course, you don't agree. I don't agree neither with you and your New Party of Law and Order. But at least, let us agree that we can meet and talk about our disagreement.

**MAYOR:** Let it be clear. The purpose of this meeting is pedagogical. I wanted to inform you on what the authorities of the New Party of Law and Order have consensually agreed: Antigone is a gone case. Any agreement besides this will be taken as disagreement, and disagreement is not allowed.

*Lightning covers the backstage then appears a huge human-like shadow accompanied with the sound of thunder.*

**GODDESS OF DISAGREEMENT:** Behold, stiff-necked people! I am the Goddess of Disagreement, the one whose left hand holds a tongue of fire, the one whose right hand contains lightning and thunder. I have been slandered amongst thee that I am a vile demon, simply because I set fire upon thy tongues and hearts. But I did teach thee the path of disagreement, quarrelling and fierce discussion, so thee avoid devastating riots, endless wars, and bloodshed in thy cities. But since the strongest amongst thee has chosen to silence the weaker, a volcano of violence and despair did start raging inside Mother Svea's womb. It is about to erupt and blast now. A mysterious disease shall devastate all Svealand and beyond. Thy precious elders, the keepers of wisdom and experience shall be stolen by death from amongst thee. Thee shall becometh a society of orphan children and foolish. Nurses shall slit the throats of patients on their hospital beds and firefighters shall becometh arsonists. Thy streets and villages shall be raised by riots, until thee understand that a good dispute is better than the domination of a single thought. Then, and only then shall thee cometh to thy senses, and thee shall learneth to disagree and loveth at the same timeth.



Theatre has the right  
to interrogate, expose  
and purify

the urban archive of feelings resulting from our common experiences, our failure or success as a society. Theatre can raise communal feelings through embodiment on stage and therefore is calling on our topics in the social memory. The most sensitive topic of our present time is the Covid-19 pandemic that had the power to completely change our lives. We are faced with difficult moments, experienced tragic events in our daily lives. One of the most difficult issues of the pandemic is the fact that many old people have died of the virus in homes for elderly people in 2020 in Sweden, because they were refused intensive care. I am proposing a theatrical homage for these women and men. Theatre/performance hence involves in the fight against an invisible enemy. Not only by being a mirror of reality, but also by providing a cathartic cure to heal from the present tragedy. What can we do for those who are not among us anymore? How can we ourselves survive this tragedy?

This is, first of all, a message of love, compassion and gratitude for those who passed away. They are our tragic heroes, those who disappeared from the stage of life. Here, we can create a moment of mourning, of love and forgiveness,, a cathartic remembrance, a performance of hope, compassion and social responsibility. In three scenes, we shall develop a cathartic symbolic travel: *Breathing, Identifying, Commemorating.*

BREATHING

IDENTIFYING

COMMEMORATING

Isabella Draghi



The concept of catharsis in theatre/performance seen through the lenses of Aristotle, Lessing and Freud outlines the conceptual framework of this event. Taking into account Aristotle's concept of catharsis as well as Lessing interpretation of catharsis as *Mitleid*, we can explore various subtleties regarding the psychological processes behind this phenomenon, making appeal to a Freudian interpretation. In which way can catharsis in theatre be a survival strategy in the context of the tragic events in Sweden related to the pandemic and the old people who died in elderly homes?



## HEALING THEATRE

Catharsis in theatre can bring communion, compassion, and gratitude and thus can empower individuals living in a community. If in antiquity, staged tragedy affected catharsis as a purification and climax of the performance, like Aristotle developed in *Poetics*, today, the real tragedy of everyday life requires that theatre and performance respond to the social trauma. Theatre thus becomes a witness and an emotional discharger, a source of catharsis for our present times. In the pandemic, the tragedies of our daily lives can make us fail or allow us to take a step forward to acquire new forms of knowledge, responsibility, and maturity.





## IN CASE OF SOCIAL TRAUMA

- theatrical catharsis
- breathing, identifying, commemorating, healing

### Step 1: Breathing

Turn off the light, close your eyes, and listen to your breath. Listen to the rhythm of your heart, take your pulse. You are alive. Life, the priceless gift, makes you feel, have joy and love, think, create, experience. Slowly the sound of life comes in. You hear street noise, cars, voices, trains, sounds from happy or sad events, such as a funeral, music, rhythms. In your head, you see pictures emerge of those who died from Covid-19 in retirement homes in Sweden. You face them one by one. Then documents appear, newspaper clippings asking questions about responsibilities, alternative solutions, measures that could and should have been taken.

### Step 2: Identifying

Now turn on the light and listen to *Adagio* by Tomaso Albinoni. Watch your face in a mirror. You grow older. In a second 40 years or more may pass.

Imagine now that you are old and alone, in a retirement home. Your children and grandchildren used to visit you every other week. Now, they are not coming anymore. They tell you that they are not allowed to be in contact with you. It's for your own safety. But how safe can you be when left alone? This is emotionally hard to bear, but you try to understand that this is a reasonable decision to contain the infectious virus.

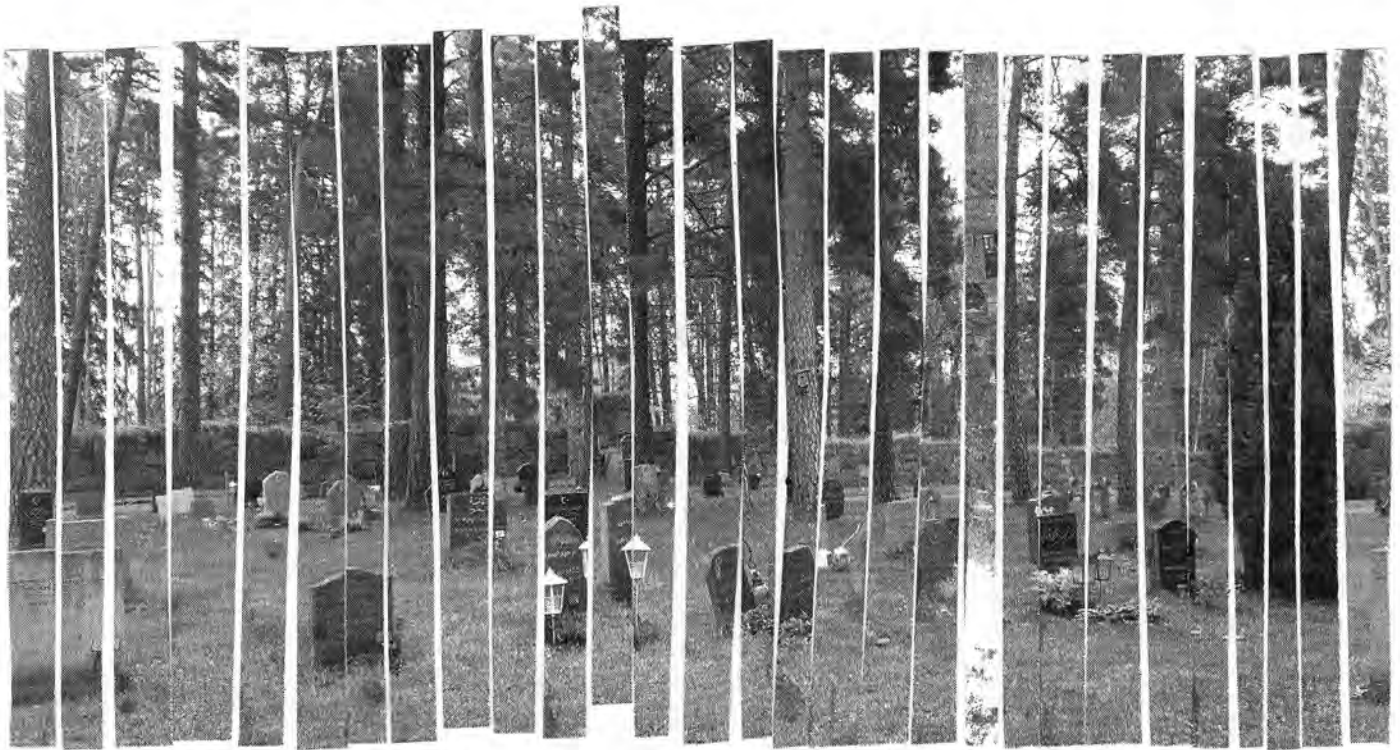
Nurses and doctors appear regularly. They bring you food, medication, sometimes even take a little time for a chat. But they try to keep a distance, you can sense.

Then the virus comes to your institution. One of the carers carried it with them without knowing. The fever sets in and immediately knocks you off your feet. You are in bed and feel that it becomes more and more difficult to breathe. You try to fight the feeling of panic rising inside of you. Breathing, in - out - in - out. Nurses and doctors try to help, they give you oxygen, infusions. You sense an atmosphere of emergency. You should go to the hospital. But the nurses and doctors are not calling the ambulance. They know about the regulation that someone your age would not receive treatment in intensive care. This morning, one of the carers that you like most looked at you and started crying. She said she wanted to help, but she cannot. You can't breathe anymore, you need air, just air.



You see four actors on a stage positioned in a line, looking at you. Music, a spot light on their faces. From one side of the stage, one of them slowly starts to bring up a photo portrait of an old person who has died in an elderly home in front of their face. You watch the actor with the photo mask. After 10 seconds, they give the photo to the next person who repeats the gesture in synchronicity, identifying with these people being portrayed. The first one takes a new photo, and so on. Passing, holding, staying.

How do you feel? They are you. You are them. I am you.



### Step 3 Commemorating

Open the computer and search for news, documents, official reports about the elderly who died during the pandemic in the retirement homes in Sweden in 2020. Thousands of pages of information. Unfortunately, yes, there is plenty of evidence on these tragedies. These people died. Who took their last chance of living? Who is responsible for these tragedies? How would you feel if it was... you or your father, your mother, your dearest person? How to deal with these feelings?

Take a candle, light it for them, for these tragic heroes. Say a prayer or a good word for their souls, if life after death exists.

You pick up a stone. You hold it in your hand. Write your thoughts for them on the stone and put it near the candle. We erect a shrine in the theatre



It can be a city or its noises, crowds of strangers, particular architecture or space. People are surrounded by unpredictable situations which stress and exhaust them. But we are always searching for ways to come to terms with this challenging reality and to balance our life. Through its transformative power, theatre can provide a tool to overcome these maybe frightening situations and incidences, and can support you in the struggle with bad feelings.

*What worries you during the day? What gets you scared?*



We all might have different experiences with theatre (or maybe no experience at all - and it's alright). Despite how often the person has visited a theatre in life, one thing is certain - a theatre is a special place. I actually think that theatre is a wonderful place! When I was a kid, theatre for me was associated with a musical box which I had at that time. That box was very old but every time I opened it, I was so hypnotized by what was happening inside. The movement of the small figures and music which went on and on had a real effect on me. No wonder how amazed I was later in the real theatre where everything was so big, so different and so real!

*Now, I would like you to take a pause here and try to imagine what*

*theatre looks like for you? What memories or associations do you have? You can close your eyes if you want and try to draw a picture in your head or just look at what surrounds you. Maybe you will see something which reminds you of the theatre. Do you associate theatre with a certain smell? For me it's a smell which I remember by sitting in the hall: a little bit of dust, a little bit of antiquity and the aroma of perfume.*



Well, I fell in love with theatre not only because of its charm and smell but I have realized what an exceptional transformative power it can have. Theatre has always provided opportunities for escaping from the toil of normal life. As a powerful and energetic resource theatre can help to heal and cure our souls, to make us stronger and at the same time more empathetic and humane. It is like a home for our soul. Today during the pandemic times when our life has been turned upside-down, I think theatre has become especially relevant as it can provide a safe place for adaptation and transition. Theatre can help transform a feeling of anxiety into a non-threatening experience and therefore give you agency to determine how to face stress, exhaustion and aggression. Transform, reshape, empower.

The transformation of the threat happens through mirroring the threat and then turning the whole situation upside-down. Change the setting, imagine feasible alternatives. Instead of accepting the threat, you adapt the situation to your needs. Through its potential to provide you with a liminal experience, theatre offers resources for experimenting with a possible transformation of frightening and threatening incidences.

You may wonder, what is a liminal experience?



While the term has its roots in anthropology and is closely connected to rituals, theatre scholars have adapted the concept for performance analysis. Liminality can be defined as an in-between condition of somebody or something being, sort of, in transition. They have already lost their previous status but have not acquired a new one yet. In 1964 in his book "The Forest of Symbols", Victor Turner described three-stage patterns of the rituals that he called respectively as "preliminal", "liminal" and postliminal". Turner was particularly interested in the transition from one social identity to another. He connected these personal transitions with performance and performative events. A liminal experience can take place in the performance space that has the possibility of to realize potential forms, structures and conditions. Turner realized that the liminality could contribute to the development of new social realities through its transition state and creativity. He states that the liminal phase creates an experimental and innovative sphere for cultures insofar as "in liminality, new ways of acting, new combinations of symbols, are tried out, to be discarded or accepted".



Theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte in her book "The Transformative Power of Performance" identifies liminality in the performance experience as "a change to the physiological, energetic, affective and motoric state". Fischer-Lichte understands though that these performances do not affect participants in the way that rituals do, as their social statuses remain unaltered. However, when the audience is participating in the common action it creates these liminal moments when "established standards of behaviour are no longer valid and new ones not yet formulated". This opens a window for the transformation. This transformation is based on the effect of the emotion that participants (and people in general) have towards an object outside of themselves. Therefore, for performance, a participatory practice with another participant or performer is crucial to transformation.



As you might already see for yourself, the practice of the liminal experience and transformation can be seen as a way to connect people through theatre and, for instance, initiate a process of transformation of a possible threat, a feeling of anxiety. It is this transition of our mind and feelings happening during such experiences you need to keep in mind when you will start the imaginary theatre travel that I will offer to you soon!

The last but not the least theatrical name that we need to deal with to complete the transformation is Augusto Boal who introduced us to practices of the "Theatre of the Oppressed". It is a theatrical practice to encourage and support a body in refusing to be victimized or oppressed. This strategy aims to prepare for counterstrike, to mirror situations that make you feel stressed or oppressed in any situation. This practice can become a method of overcoming the disturbance and also a way to solve the conflict and bring balance to your life. According to Boal, the oppressed are virtually all of us because an oppressed person does not have the opportunity to express their opinion and, as a result, loses the ability to speak. This vicious circle can only be interrupted by the theatre that is in each of us. Boal is also telling us that theatre is life because in every second a performance is played out in front of us and we can choose whether to remain in the role of an audience or to go on stage and act. You are the creator/actor of your own life!



***Does this make sense to you? Take a pause, relax, let your eyes look in any direction until something will catch your attention.***

Theatre is not only found in large-scale dramatic performances, passions, intrigues but also in ordinary everyday rituals that we participate in. "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances" - wrote William Shakespeare. In order to only passively contemplate what is happening, no special skills are needed. This is a normal behaviour that is instilled in us by our family and society. To become a participant, an agent in the performance, you need to find your "voice".

Dormant consciousness prevents us from becoming active participants in the play of life, but agency can and should be awakened. In order to leave the passive role of a subject controlled by the will of other people behind and to become a fully active participant, you need to know your body, realize that it has its own language, and let it speak. Theatre, according to Boal, is a way to express yourself with a wide variety of theatrical techniques, rather than a memorized, pre-rehearsed set of movements and replicas. I think that the Augusto Boal's practice of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" is a good example to get an impulse for transformation, to overcome disturbance and develop a sense of community.

**So? *Let's try!***

You can perform theatre at any place and any time - this is how wonderful it is! To start your little transformative journey, I would like you to find a place where you feel comfortable and secure. Augusto Boal created a theatrical game called "Human sculptures" where instead of being passive observers, people should try to act and find creative ways/solutions. Eventually, the whole situation will change its direction and what seemed to be a threatening situation becomes something surprisingly different.



## **IN CASE OF ANXIETY AND OPPRESSION**

→ theatrical transformation  
→ posing, sculpturing,  
changing, transforming

**Are you ready?** 🤔

## INSTRUCTIONS:

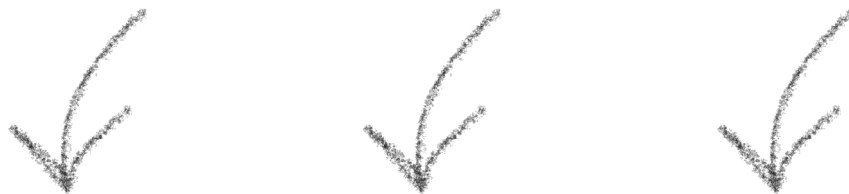
**Step 1** - Two participants are standing and facing each other, after several seconds they gradually start to shake hands.

**Step 2** - While shaking one person will freeze in a pose with an outstretched hand (like if you are just about to shake a hand), at the same time the second person is free to move and his/her goal will be to find a new pose around the frozen statue.

**Step 3** - A new pose toward the frozen statue should remind of the oppressed situation. It can be an imitation of the fist in the stomach or a pose with your arms crossed on the chest and turned away, it can be anything which reminds you of an oppressed situation.

**Step 4** - After the second person has become a statue the first person should create an answer to that pose. What can be an answer on the fist in your stomach? However, instead of finding a pose of defence here, a person should present a counterstrike or an active pose that will turn the harmful situation upside-down. For instance, you can stand next to the frozen statue and take the same posture with your fist extended forward like if you are about to fight back. Only it will turn out that you both are practicing martial arts/box and, therefore, the whole situation will take another angle.

**Step 5** - Continue to create an oppressed pose and a counterstrike answer to that pose.



Therefore, what looks like fate happened to be a space full of possibilities and different scenarios. Let "Human sculptures" become your training space to perceive situations in another angle, transform yourself and survive! I hope you will find this game enjoyable and helpful. Augusto Boal's techniques are famous for being tools to help people feel more secure, flexible and powerful when facing conflicts again. As Boal said: "The purpose of Theatre of the Oppressed is to rehumanize humanity".

# MISSING THEATRE

We all miss theatre, it's gone missing from our lives. SOS!

You will find here a video essay by Yichan Lee who contributed to our imaginary theatre travel from China:

<https://youtu.be/3lyY6jVGy1E>



## IN CASE OF LACK OF THEATRE

- theatre memories
- talking, remembering, envisioning

*Yichan Lee*



Every story comes to an end, so does our imaginary theatre travel. We hope that you got inspired by reading and imagining. You might have learnt new things because theatre is much more than just the stage, actors and acting. Theatre is not just a place where actors are playing on the stage and the audience sits back enjoying the show. Theatre is foremost a place for public dialogue and negotiation, a place where archives of feelings, memories and catharsis are united, a place for transformation but also warmth and belonging!

Before the pandemic when performances took place in the theatre and people gathered there - everyone had a magic moment within the first hour after the end of the performance. We call it so because we assume that during this time you are still full of emotions and impressions, you are energetically charged by performance and, of course, you cannot wait to share them with someone. It is as if there is an invisible window which is opening inside yourself. A window into another world.

We would like you to imagine what would be your thoughts and feelings after this theatre travel. Are you going to share them with your relatives, friends, partner or maybe write them down in your notes? Do you have unresolved questions and dilemmas? What are your questions? What are your feelings now when you have imagined being in the theatre? Are you sitting patiently on your seat and waiting while people around you start to leave or are you standing and going to pick up your clothes in the cloakroom?.....

We hope that we can soon welcome you in the theatre again.

Live or imaginary, let theatre become our survival strategy!

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We are a group of students from the international MA Performance Studies at Stockholm University. Part of our study program is to develop and curate an event at a cultural or arts institution. We had planned to create a curated event in collaboration with Turteatern that would present a mix of academic input, discussion and practical performance. The advent of Covid-19 in Sweden leading to the closure of all theatre stages made all our plans redundant. We were forced to rethink, rewrite, reorganise. But we didn't want to let go of the idea that theatre is a human survival strategy, particularly for urban citizens. So we wanted to keep a sense of theatre as it is happening, a feeling of the 'now' and 'here', an atmosphere of communicating with an audience in that particular space called theatre. Therefore we decided to create a booklet, a scrapbook, a theatre manual inviting you to an imaginary theatre travel. So, this is what you hold in your hands right now. Please use it with care, let yourself be guided by us, enjoy, interact, imagine.

Texts (in order of appearance)

Julia Stina Skoglund (Nourishing Theatre)

Marc-Antoine Vumilia Muhindo (Disagreeing Theatre)

Isabella Draghici (Healing Theatre)

Lolita Ekman (Empowering Theatre)

Video

Yichan Lee (Missing Theatre)

Supervision

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