



# EMERGENCY

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## THEATER OF WAR



Theatrical performance and theater of war share a set of basic elements, from space and time to conflict and observation. In tracing the lines of the emergence of these two ideas, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari outlined a number of traits that separate the State (city) from the War Machine (idea of war): the city is immobile, war rapid; the former is based on interiority and enclosedness, and the latter thrives on exteriority and openness; the city is based on rules of publicity, while the war bases itself on secrecy.

Paul Virilio argues that the post-WWII era introduced another radical change in the nature of war. According to him, with the invention of the ultimate weapon, the war lost its ideological essence and stepped outside of the realm of politics. The Cold War era introduced the idea of war as technological race, of warfare as deterrence, and of war without the battle. Virilio argues that, with the detonation of the atomic bomb, there was a shift in the theory of war from strategy to logistics, which was defined by General/President Eisenhower as "the procedure following which a nation's potential is transferred to its armed forces, in times of peace as in times of war."

This change in the nature of war has far-reaching consequences. In theater, they are reflected in two ways. First, the spatial component of war has been diminished in favor of time. The theater of war has been displaced into its temporal dimension, and this displacement is probably best captured in a report sent by a British combat pilot during the Falkland War: "Fire and forget." The war overtakes itself: as soon as it happens, it is displaced into the past. Theater as a medium becomes antiquated. Faced with the contemporary war of speed (and war AS speed), theater seems stripped of its primary dimension: time. More importantly, war became permanent and ubiquitous.

For Virilio, total war is continued in what he calls Total Peace: "the perpetuation of war is what I call Pure War, war which isn't acted out in repetition, but in infinite preparation." Deleuze and Guattari argue along similar lines that "total war itself is surpassed, towards a form of peace more terrifying still" or "the peace of Terror or Survival." How, then, is theater to respond to war that identifies itself with peace? The war does not annihilate all theater; it annihilates theater concerned with war, theater that, as it were, declares war on war. From this follows an even more disconcerting question: what are the expressive possibilities of theater in addressing the war which is outside the sphere of ideology and politics? Theater has to learn the new language of war.

Gunter Berghaus' analysis of public performances in the European states under fascist and Nazi regimes in the 1930's and 40's reveals that "a good 90% of theatre performances in fascist States were non-fascist in form and content, although their function was firmly integrated into a

wider fascist concept of ritualism." One of the most alarming aspects of fascist regimes is their ambition to conceal monstrosity behind the appearance of banal statistical accounts.

The statistical breakdown of theater politics in fascist states is shocking not only for what it reveals, but even more for what it tries to conceal. The remaining 10% of total theatrical production was fascist in nature, which means that there was no anti-fascist theater in fascist states. Although 90% of theatrical productions were not fascist, they were apolitical; they silently approved the fascist order and fascist ethics. They were not fascist in form or content, but they were political by implication. This specter of insensitivity came to haunt all post-WWII theater. Postmodern theater of the last three decades of the twentieth century was repeatedly identified as apolitical and, in a certain sense, was approving of the existing state of affairs.

In his last book published during the Cold War (1988), Virilio predicted "the ascendancy of the 'reality effect' over a reality principle." Following a similar line of argument, Baudrillard announced famously that "The Gulf War did Not Take Place" (1995). War as a media event, as a non-event, is already a representation. War has emerged as a mass media decoy, a representation which escapes representations in other media, including theater.

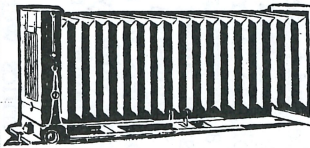
On January 13, 2000, American TV reported that Staff Sergeant Frank J. Ronghi of the 504 Parachute Infantry Regiment stationed near the town of Vitina in Kosovo had been charged with the rape and murder of an 11-year-old Albanian girl. The official military report of this gruesome act was read by a female officer filmed under a tent furnished with mobile, uniform furniture and equipment. The TV camera recording the event swept over avenues of tents pitched in the frozen fields of Kosovo, with US Postal Service mailboxes scattered across this ephemeral city. The report exposed this commonly neglected fact: in Pure War there is no place for exceptional individuals. It is not a war of heroes, but of an armed bureaucracy.

The news reports of the first *pax Americana* rape in Kosovo came in the middle of the run of The Wooster Group's NORTH ATLANTIC. The striking resonance between the two stories arises from their common concern with the unspectacular and almost invisible side of the war: maintaining and providing peace. NORTH ATLANTIC is a performance about the life of the military personnel aboard an aircraft carrier located in the North Sea off the Dutch coast. It tells of a floating community of professionals, about an armed diaspora on a mission of "armed observation."

Conceived and first performed in 1984, under the dark shadow of Orwell's prophecy and of the imposing threat of global nuclear annihilation, re-staged as the Warsaw Pact was

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## Nō: HOLDING BACK



**TANIKO**  
Japan Society  
April 4-8.  
Closed.

The Japan Society in NYC presented a most extraordinary programme in April: Tessenkai, a Japanese company, performing a Nō play called TANIKO ("The Valley Rite"). It was coupled with the Kurt Weill operetta DER JASAGER ("The Consenter," literally "The Yes-sayer"), which is based on TANIKO, performed by a company assembled by the Japan Society.

The Nō developed in the medieval period as theater for the ruling class, the samurai. Traditionally, the theater programme would contain perhaps a dozen plays (TANIKO is seventy-five minutes long), and last the day. The form offers not a trace of verisimilitude; its conventions are meticulously artificial.

The visit of this Japanese company is an event of the first magnitude. It introduces a stage grammar unlike anything we have. The actors enter with regal, unearthly slowness, with the dignity, the gravity of a shogun. They don't lift their feet; they glide, as if they've surrendered themselves to a spell. The costumes are so stunning, so complex, that we feel we haven't had the chance to see

them thoroughly; one actor has pants so long they run under the his feet and trail two feet behind him. The god wears a red fright wig over the fiercest possible mask; I've never seen a creation more alien or more frightening.

The stage is nearly always static. Twelve actors form a sort of chorus, kneeling stage right. When one actor finally breaks into movement, he scurries; it's a rhythm unknown in our theater, if it's a rhythm at all. Individually, the actors don't exactly speak; they growl the Japanese, slowly. An actor keens, groans, whines behind the choral odes, without words, beating a drum; another musician plays a flute. When the chorus vocalize their long passages, they drone in the style of Tibetan monks, creating the same sort of trance.

The stylized gestures are exquisitely detached and precise: the hand raised before the eyes in grief, showing four fingers. The god tosses an enormous sleeve, suddenly, but with great deliberation. It doesn't matter if we know the meaning of the gesture; it's the way of expressing meaning that keeps us fascinated. Throughout, the form exhibits a scrupulous reserve: "Move seven if the heart feels ten" was the advice of Zeami, a fourteenth century Nō actor.

Steve Capra

## Ruminations on the April 16 Revolution



A first-person description of the Mass Nonviolent Direct Action to Shut Down the IMF/World Bank. Washington D.C. Apr 16-17, 2000.

I am the protester with the bike helmet. The one pictured in THE WASHINGTON POST about to have his arm caved in by a marauding pig. I was beaten, pepper-sprayed, tear-gassed, arrested (in that order). I was not hit by a car or run over by a motorcycle, I was not kept shackled wrist to ankle for hours, I was not held incommunicado for days without food water dry clothes—although friends of mine were.

But that's not important. State repression is not new[s], although perhaps it is when targeted against white youth. You've heard about the threats, the terror, the intimidation, the violence. I want to tell you about the dancing, the singing, the loving, the revolution.

April 16: the performance of liberation. 9:15 am, corner of 14th Street and New York Avenue. I was coming off of a barricade being held by RECLAIM THE STREETS NYC (one hundred revelers/protesters in tuxedos and shark helmets), when I stumbled across the BLACK BLOCK: a loose coalition of anarchists, anarcho-communists, and other revolutionary anti-capitalists from around the country. They had just raided a construction site, poorly secured; scrap metal in the streets, blocked the major north-south artery through D.C. for five intersections.

We held that barricade for over forty-five minutes, repelling waves of flics. Not by linking arms and locking down, not by throwing bottles and Molotov Cocktails (do such

things truly exist, outside of the paranoid imagination of police and corporate media? I saw not a one, but Ramsey Chief of Pigs says they were ubiquitous). This is what democracy looks like...

We held those barricades through our performance. We chalked messages of love and power into the streets and onto the buildings. Everything was a drum and everyone was drumming. Moving bodies to the primal beat of streets—ours, not our oppressor's. Liberating territory, freeing the city, taking the power back. The giant puppets came and we cheered them. THE RADICAL CHEERLEADERS. THE ART AND REVOLUTION BRIGADE, the performance cluster. It was innovative, it was entrancing, it was truly free.

I want to tell you. Off-off-Broadway is dead. Delancey Street is dead. Whatever you've been doing for the past few years is dead. It is no longer enough for performance to engage with revolution. Now, it is time for performance to engage in revolution. Don't just raise the consciousness of your audience to the struggle; do the work of the struggle! And your audience will cease to be an audience, it will be a community in revolt.

Actors of all kinds: Stop thinking of yourselves as a troupe, start understanding yourselves as an affinity group. Join us in New York City on May 1, for another festival of liberation (<http://www.mayday2000.org>).

We have moved beyond local struggles for global justice: this is a global struggle for local justice. This is what democracy looks like...

Danny the Red





disintegrating, and performed for the third time after the winner in the Cold War successfully engaged in a series of local wars, NORTH ATLANTIC addresses the war in its MODE OF PRODUCTION. The mode of production of Pure War is not ideology but precisely the opposite: its emphasis on efficiency. The hubris of a tragic protagonist is replaced by a bureaucratic non-character. This mode of production is best represented by the figure of displacement. According to the logic of Pure War, displacement does not only pertain to rapid transportation in space of enormous numbers of manpower and weapons: it is an essential displacement of the war itself from the battlefield to the banality of the everyday.

If, as Virilio argues, the war stepped outside of politics, how is theater to respond to it? Does it require an apolitical response? What is the form, then, of apolitical response to Pure War? Can theater bring Pure War to the sphere of politics?

In pre-modern warfare, the warrior caste engaged in battle, leaving to non-warriors the role of the observer (hence the phrase "theater of war"). The modern military class blurs this distinction between military and civilian; it is a vast bureaucracy engaged in the Pure War without necessarily participating in its battles (if and when they occur).

The protagonists of NORTH ATLANTIC, Captain Roscoe Chizzum, General Benders, Colonel Lud, and word-processor Ann Pussey are not warriors. They are members of the military class on rampage: they are spying on the enemy, interrogating the natives, telling bad jokes, engaging in murky business operations in order to make some retirement money, and above all, they are struggling to achieve promotion, that ultimate goal of any bureaucrat. The military class, like any other bureaucracy, does not recognize the aesthetic values of performance. Its sole concern is the efficiency of performance. Bureaucrats don't live, they perform. This efficiency may be mindless, but it is not absurd. It is intelligent and deadly.

In 1985, Arnold Aronson correctly observed that, from the very beginning, "the [Wooster] Group's pieces have been 'about' performance itself." NORTH ATLANTIC is, in this sense, not "about" war and its perils, but about the military class' performance that constitutes the mechanics of the war. The Wooster Group's piece conducts an investigation of military "performance."

Gender relations are posited not only as a metaphor of military hierarchy, but as a questioning of the general militarization of culture. In NORTH ATLANTIC, the men have microphones while the women do not. The impersonality of the female voice is emphasized by the high pitch and choral delivery of the female characters' lines. Individual and singular voice belongs to the male officers who issue orders and engage in verbal duels. Female conscripts only provide information, responding without engagement and answering to orders and inquiries diligently and dutifully. The "eternal couple" of a strong soldier and an airhead blonde is the paradigmatic image produced by Broadway and Hollywood, and it has been drilled deeply into the audience's consciousness.

In NORTH ATLANTIC, the performers' actions often seem halfway between military exercise and rigorous theatrical performance. This tension between DRILL and FLAIR is revealed in the performers' use of gravity (vigorous sliding down the steep platform; dance as spectacle of legs dangling behind the table), in their performance of standardized military gestures, in their use of more personalized, but still highly quotable tics and eccentricities, and in the manipulation and distortion of voice (microphones, choral speech, military orders and greetings in formal address, vulgarities in private conversations). The Wooster Group simultaneously appropriates and critiques certain aspects of military behavior.

In order to examine the interchangeability in NORTH ATLANTIC, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between two species of performance: artistic (or theatrical) and bureaucratic (or industrial). In his investigation of the use of the word "performance" in these two contexts, performance artist and scholar Bruce Barber points out that the main difference between the two types of performance is in utility and uselessness.

On the one hand, in artistic performance "the independent activity, 'thing done' or simply 'doing' for the ultimate completion or fulfillment of an act becomes the operant condition." On the other hand, outside of artistic context "we have [...] a clearer sense of one thing acting upon or in consort with another; or functions being integral to other functions, functionaries to other functionaries." In short, while in theater and visual arts performance is the object of representation and therefore complete and done, in the

bureaucratic context performance is always related to permanence, incompleteness and utility.

Efficiency and simplicity make the movements, gestures and other elements of the actors' performance in this piece highly quotable. However, NORTH ATLANTIC as a theatrical production is in no way complete. This incompleteness points towards the technique of quotation which, while always present in The Wooster Group's work, in NORTH ATLANTIC becomes the main organizing principle.

The two "returns" of NORTH ATLANTIC, separated by more than a decade (1988, 1999-2000), are neither re-stagings nor revivals of the 1983 production. In theater, revival and re-staging always involves a certain amount of adaptation of the original material to new circumstances. Revival always has, to a certain extent, qualities of a version and a sequel. What is curious about NORTH ATLANTIC is the absence of this kind of actualization and use of the previous production as the only point of reference. While other Wooster Group pieces have been in a seemingly endless work in progress, in the case of NORTH ATLANTIC the "progression" of the piece has been severely limited: its most recent staging can be seen as a quotation of the 1988 production, itself a quotation of the 1984 "original."

"A quote brings the past closer to us," says Mikhail Iampolski, "but cannot make it part of the present. The present is in fact further distanced from us by quotation." NORTH ATLANTIC has the look of a film quote as described by Iampolski.

On the ramp that faces the audience there are pieces of military equipment operated by female conscripts: corded telephones, huge headphones, reels of magnetic audio tapes, recording equipment, even a turntable with an LP record on it. In NORTH ATLANTIC, the outdated technology plays a specific role; it shows the aging of the piece without turning it into a theater museum. This technology pointedly lags behind the image of the high-tech military portrayed in television ads and in television reports from the Gulf War and the air campaign in Yugoslavia.

With NORTH ATLANTIC, The Wooster Group addresses war without falling into the traps of twentieth century political theater. NORTH ATLANTIC is not a didactic performance, but a performance which is a statement and a diagnosis. It was Walter Benjamin who said that epic theater, that most recognizable

form of twentieth century political theater, is based on "the dialectic of recognition and education." Action itself is the third element, the synthesis, in this dialectical process. In this light, it is interesting that Benjamin paid special attention to Brecht's theory of quotable gesture (the performer's action).

The Wooster Group's practice of quotation in theater is more reminiscent of another theory of citation offered by Benjamin. In his essay on Karl Kraus he calls citation the "basic polemical principle." Polemicists quote each other in order to make an argument. Quotation is not only the instrument of instruction, but also an instrument of confrontation and clarification. "In citation," said Benjamin, "two realms—or origin and destruction—justify themselves before language." Citation, like polemics, destroys the original context and at the same time preserves a fragment of the original. This openness of polemics belongs to NORTH ATLANTIC. The argument of this performance is not scripted in Strahs' text and then delivered on stage. It has been developed over years of performance, and each of three stagings—or the original and the two total quotations—represent only one half of the polemic. The other half belongs to the audience.

The permanence of The Wooster Group's argument was met by a



**LISTINGS**

**VOLCANO**  
Christy Hutchcraft's new play, dir by John Maloney. Apr 27-29 at 8pm, Apr 29 at 3pm. Horace Mann Theater, 120th & B'way, 854-3408. FREE!

**THE FIVE HYSTERICAL GIRLS THEOREM**  
Target Margin Theater presents this new play by Rinne Groff, directed by David Herskovits. Thru May 13, Tue-Sat at 8pm, Sun at 7. Special performance Sat, May 6 at 3pm, followed by a discussion. Connelly Theater, 220 E. 4th St., 368-3657. \$12-\$15.

**THE COLLAPSIBLE GIRAFFE**  
A work-in-progress showing. Text from many sources, including Fassbinder's "Pre Paradise Sorry Now" and Valerie Solonis' "SCUM Manifesto". Apr 27-29, May 4-6 at 9pm. The Radiohole, 193 Berry Street, #7, Brooklyn, www.radiohole.com.

**NEW STUFF**  
Four new pieces by developing choreographers. Apr 27-30, Thu-Sun at 8:30. PS122, 150 1st Ave, 477-5288. \$12.

**THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS**  
George Tabori's text is staged by Berliner Ensemble director Holger Teschke, with NYU grad acting students. May 2-6 at 8PM, May 6 at 2PM. The Provincetown Playhouse, 133 MacDougal St. \$7.

telling constancy in critical responses. In his review published in the February 18, 2000 issue of THE NEW YORK TIMES, Ben Brantley calls his readers to remember "those classical musicals that seemed to mirror the strapping, restless soul of the United States—Rogers and Hammerstein shows like OKLAHOMA and SOUTH PACIFIC." He then announces that The Wooster Group's new piece is "a robust song-and-dance spectacle with the contrarian name of NORTH ATLANTIC that does indeed bring to mind the keystone works of the American musical theater."

Sixteen years earlier, Frank Rich concluded his review of NORTH ATLANTIC on the pages of the same influential daily: "But it's unlikely that even the most spirited musical numbers in NORTH ATLANTIC will make anyone forget SOUTH PACIFIC." North and south, Pacific and Atlantic, fire and forget. In the year 2000, as in 1984, theater critics forgot that the phrase "North Atlantic" is not only a "contrarian" reference to a musical about marines who lust after Polynesian women, but that it also refers to the most powerful planetary military apparatus, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Thus, in 1984, critics were shockingly insensitive to the Cold War and to the fact that NORTH ATLANTIC was conceived and developed

**GODARD**  
Robert Woodruff wrestles Jean-Luc Godard, with graduate Columbia acting students filling out the ranks. Apr 25-May 7, Tue-Sat at 8, Sat & Sun at 3. Ohio Theater, 66 Wooster St. 854-3859. \$15/\$10 stds.

**SLOVENLY PETER & WORKS IN REGRESS**  
Puppeteer Preston Foerder presents two adult puppet plays: one based on Dr. Hoffmann's German cautionary tales & the other using 5 different styles of puppetry across 3 stages. Apr 28 - May 14 (Fri-Sun) at 7pm. HERE, 145 6th Ave, 647-0202. \$15.

**CHARLIE VICTOR ROMEO**  
Recently nominated for 2 Drama Desk Awards, this off-off hit features text taken from "black box" cockpit voice recorder transcripts of six major airline emergencies. Thru May 27, Thu-Sat at 8. Collective: Unconscious. 145 Ludlow St. 254-5277. \$10.

**TRUTH/KISS**  
Two one act plays. One, by David Finkelstein, is an abstract remembrance of childhood. The second, by Ian W. Hill, based on early 70's glossy Euro softcore/horror films. Apr 25-May 3, Tues and Wed at 7:30. NADA, 167 Ludlow St., 420-1466. \$12.

at the peak of pacifist protests against the installation of mid-range nuclear warheads across Europe. Now, in 2000, critics were equally insensitive to the NATO air war across the Atlantic that happened less than a year ago.

SOUTH PACIFIC is not only "the keystone work of American musical theater." It is a part of a complex cultural code. From James Michener's novel, THE TALES OF SOUTH PACIFIC, to Rogers' and Hammerstein's Broadway musical based on the novel, to the 1959 film version of the musical, we see a cultural code belonging to a complex culture which is all but dead.

In the first decades after WWII, when this culture emerged, SOUTH PACIFIC described an island, a peaceful oasis in the midst of total war. This oasis of peace confirmed the totality of war.

At the far end of this dialectical procedure is NORTH ATLANTIC which posits floating islands of war in the civilization of Total Peace.

Branislav Jakovljevic



Sources:  
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Savran, David. BREAKING THE RULES: THE WOOSTER GROUP 1975-1985.  
Virilio, Paul. PURE WAR and THE VISION MACHINE.

**AGAMEMNON 2.0**  
The breathtaking text by Charles L. Mee, directed by Tali Gai. May 10-13, 17-20 at 8pm, May 14 & 21 at 2pm. Access Theater, 380 Broadway (2 blocks south of Canal), 591-0202. \$10/\$8 stds.

**PSOY KOROLENKO & COMMISSAR VANISHING**  
New York and Moscow musicians explore and modernize the Russian *Skomorokh* performance, a pre-Christian minstrel show. May 5 at 9pm: CBGB Gallery, 313 Bowery. \$7. May 6 at 3pm: 6B Community Garden, Ave B & 6th St. FREE.

**ROBERT BECK MEMORIAL CINEMA**  
SMALL GAUGE JAPAN  
Joss Winn (Japan) has organized yet another intriguing series of new Japanese experimental films, this time all originating in 8mm. Tuesday, May 2 at 8pm, Collective: Unconscious, 145 Ludlow, 254-5277. \$5.

