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AUDIENCE ACTIVATING TECHNIQUES AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL EFFICACY

by Edyta Lorek-Jezinska

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to examine audience activating techniques in recent performance with a longer view of establishing a correlation between participation and real life educational efficacy. The paper examines such types of spectator involvement as invisible theatre, community and creative participatory projects, and bartering, all of them exploring the liminal or rather the liminoid sphere between life and theatre. They are exemplified by three projects by a Polish theatre company, *Akademia Ruchu* (*The Academy of Movement*). Environmental and invisible theatres require active spectators who contribute to and participate in activities located in the liminal sphere between life and art. Employing various audience activating techniques, the company stimulates responses to different situations, training spectators in active participation. These effects of transient involvement in artistic activities fall under the heading of the audience animation whose ultimate aim is to generate a sociopetal experience. **Key words:** audience participation, educational efficacy, invisible theatre, bartering.

Author's biography

Dr Edyta Lorek-Jezinska teaches at the Cultural Studies Section of the Department of English, Nicholas Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. After her 1993 MA on *The Semiotics of Samuel Beckett Plays*, she completed her Ph.D on 'Hybridity and Multimedia in Polish and British Environment-Oriented Theatre', both from Nicholas Copernicus University. She also possesses a Certificate in British Cultural Studies (University of Warwick). From 1994-1999 she co-ordinated and participated in students' theatre projects (e.g. *Kobotyncfer*, *Tacuara Nod*). She has published articles on British and Polish alternative theatre and British drama and presented papers on this type of theatre in Poland and abroad. Her book entitled *The Hybrid in the Limen: British and Polish Environment-Oriented Theatre in Theory and Practice* will come out in 2003.

AUDIENCE ACTIVATING TECHNIQUES AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL EFFICACY

The main objective of the present paper is to analyse audience activating techniques employed in some recent performances with the focus on authentic participation and its role in educating active audiences. The paper primarily examines environmental projects with the elements of community events and invisible theatre, both exploring the liminal or rather the liminoid sphere between life and theatre. They are exemplified by three projects by a Polish theatre company, *Akademia Ruchu* (*The Academy of Movement*). Environmental and invisible theatre require active spectators who contribute to and participate in activities located in the liminal sphere between life and art. Employing various audience- activating techniques, the company stimulates responses to different situations, training spectators in active participation. My analysis of the audience participation is based on Victor Turner's idea of 'liminoid optation', and the notions of 'deep' and 'shallow' play.

The notion of optation, or the operation of choice in communal events, was originally employed in the discussion of the differences between the spheres of the liminoid and the liminal, for which readers unfamiliar with Turner's definitions are referred to the original. Turner (1982:53-55) attributes obligation to the liminal phenomenon of social rituals and optation to the liminoid sphere of activities primarily associated with leisure, entertainment and art. Liminoid events are governed by optation: one chooses whether to participate, how and when. They can be purchased like a commodity, whereas the liminal is a matter of group loyalty and obedience.

Although optation is claimed to be common to all liminoid phenomena, many patterns of human behaviour limit individual choices. Certain fashions and trends create behaviours substantially resembling ritual codes; even with no uniform obligation to follow them; optation is very much limited. Mainstream theatre- or opera-going also reinforces the extensive influence of structure on leisure, as reflected in its social stratifications and accepted codes of behaviour. Its ritualisation, however, becomes most distinct in the semi-ritual purification based on empathy demanded and experienced by most spectators. Furthermore, optation is restricted also as a result of social and cultural boundaries and divisions whereby experimental or alternative forms become inaccessible to certain groups of people, thus restricting their power to choose and decide or act.

Similar considerations of social efficacy relevant to audience participation can be found in the theories of deep and shallow play coined by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (cited in Carlson 1998: 24). These two notions are applicable to the examination of the type of the audience's involvement in performance, including their critical distance from the represented events. The potential of shallow play for reflection and a critical approach is contrasted with the impossibility of detachment in deep play, in which participants may be so much involved that they lose their critical distance. Participating in deep play resembles the experience of 'flow', another term used extensively by Turner and his colleague Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, denoting in general the feelings experienced by players absolutely involved in an action over which they have total control, in which they lose a sense of separation between themselves and the surrounding, between cause and effect and various time dimensions (Turner 1982:55, 56). On the one hand, shallow play with its critical distance increases the audience's awareness of certain phenomena while deep play may intensify the experience of them. Depending on particular circumstances, both have a significant educational value.

To supply a familiar example, deep play can be found in the cathartic experience of the audience watching a performance based on Aristotle's principles. Relying on empathy, the crisis is generated and resolved within the play, culminating in purging one's emotions. The crisis can produce powerful emotional responses; it can even lead to hysteria, but at the end of a performance emotions reach equilibrium. The cathartic structure refers not only to classical tragedy but is discernible in many other cultural products, including horror films and literature, police series, thrillers, melodrama or advertising. Even if the audience experiences a flow-like condition, it can never feel in control of action which is determined by the artists. Shallow play is exemplified by Brecht's model of epic theatre and the Alienation Effect (excluding several debatable suggestions of how to achieve it). In a model epic performance a spectator is made to assume a questioning and critical stance to the event (Brecht 1997:99). The absence of the purely empathetic involvement allows for reflection, which is to stimulate intellectual awareness and understanding, possibly leading to action. A model epic play should thus be potentially radical and innovative.

As the projects to be analysed in this paper are closely related to the notions of the Theatre of the

Oppressed, brief reference will be made to three types of theatre: Aristotelian, Brechtian and Theatre of the Oppressed, with its focus on the audience's active participation. According to Augusto Boal, who developed the strategy, neither Aristotelian nor Brechtian theatres are capable of action and actual change. The former can be identified as the theatre of oppression, to use Boal's terminology, in which spectators are absolutely passive and their intellectual and acting energies are devoted to the characters; revolution occurs only in fiction, being consumed within the performance (Boal, 1979:47). The latter activates the spectators' intellect but its acting energy is delegated to the actors; in this way an epic spectacle intellectually prepares the audience for action and a real change but cannot effect them (Brecht, 1997:97). The two theatre types, Aristotelian and Brechtian, may be contrasted with the Theatre of the Oppressed, in which the spectators think and act for themselves. Here theatre means action, thus bringing about change and training the audience in active contribution. Several types of Boal's people's theatre (1997: 86-95) e.g. newspaper theatre, photo-romance, myth theatre and analytical theatre, are based on alienation devices which turn the inconspicuous elements of everyday life into the target of analysis and criticism. Flow is almost impossible as most of these activities involve dissecting the myths, symbols, messages and the structures of the dominant system, which often have been accepted without reflection. On the other hand, invisible theatre, one of the six types of the Theatre of the Oppressed, is based on deep play. It is defined as enactment of a scene in a non-theatre setting in front of the public who are unaware of being performance spectators; the performance is prepared in detail in order to account for all possible interventions on the part of the audience who cannot be aware that the scene is enacted (Boal 1997: 87). The audience's involvement in the scene is so deep that the border between fiction and matrixed (figurative) acting on the one hand and reality and non-matrixed (non-acted) action on the other is annihilated. Matrixed acting, familiar to orthodox theatre actors, is characterised by the actors' pretending to be someone else, in locations and situations different from real ones. Non-matrixed performing refers to the elements of performance which do not comprise the informational structure of a spectacle but belong to its visual presentation (Kirby 1987: 4). In invisible theatre acting becomes action. The liminoid is channelled into the structure and interacts with it; passive leisure becomes active work. The witnesses participate in the scene and co-create it, which grants them much more creative freedom than spectators can receive in most performances. However, the belief that the scene is real imposes on the audience an obligation to react; no artistic choice is given. Only the awareness of an event's fictionality could grant the audience the authentic freedom to decide upon participation. Therefore, it seems that invisible theatre has to be accompanied by reflection. For spect-actors, both deep and shallow plays are indispensable to generate active and conscious participation, and both should be offered to them in theatrical experience.

According to Richard Schechner, participation constitutes the most significant technique for the development of contemporary theatre (1994: 60). Undeniably, by annihilating the distinction between the creator and the consumer of art products, it represents one of the most vital elements of exploring the boundary between life and art. Through participation, an artistic event often turns into a life situation: participation entails a radical change in social order (Schechner 1994: 82). Although loaded with political radicalism of the sixties, the claim that the audience's participation in art becomes socially significant exposes its potential as anti-structural in relation to real life. Therefore, the participatory element introduced into an artistic process alters the status of the event, placing it in two spheres: artistic and social. The spectators' active involvement in the creative process is counteractive to the autonomy of artistic creation and its separation from everyday life; it turns into a social act (Schechner 1994: 40).

Nevertheless, not all participatory performances can be classified as socially radical; genuinely participatory events arise only when the audience's active involvement in the creative process forms an authentic and integral element of the performance structure. According to Schechner, participation is legitimate only if it exerts impact upon the tone, rhythm and the effects of a performance; otherwise, it functions as an ornamental element and a deception perpetrated against the audience (1994: 77). However, the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate participation proves insufficient for examining the audience's status in a performance. Instead I will refer to the concepts of authentic and inauthentic participation. These two types of participation and the remaining ones are placed on the following continuum:

A-----B-----C-----D-----E-----F-----G-----H

A = authentic participation B = legitimate participation C = invited participation D = token participation
E = active viewing F = symbolised participation G = controlled verbal reaction H = non-participation

The audience's authentic involvement concerns authentic optation, in other words, a genuine ability and right to make choices about the creative process and its outcome. Optation, which can adopt various forms, ranging from creative choices in most environmental and community projects to the choice of perspective in street performance, is always inscribed in the structure of the event itself. Primarily extraneous to a performance event (a decision to see a spectacle), freedom of choice proves much more limited in the mainstream conventional theatre as it admits variation only on the level of emotional and intellectual responses.

Optation is linked to participation; environmental projects very often involve authentic participation on the part of the spect-actors. The term spect-actors' employed by Augusto Boal (1992: 2) to describe active spectators in the Theatre of the Oppressed who co-operate with performers, co-create and perform together with the actors, defines the role of the non-actor/spectator in many environmental projects more accurately than the traditional terms. Influencing the tone or the rhythm of performance, classified by Schechner as legitimate participation, brings the audience's status only slightly closer to that held by the performers. In contrast to authentic involvement, legitimate participation is characterised by a limited optation within a creative process but unlimited freedom to make decisions about the participatory parts of a performance over which the performers hold no control, or very little. Active viewing, which constitutes one of the essential elements of environmental theatre, grants the audience freedom of choice only within the sphere of voyeurism, allowing for walking around the acting space, taking various vantage points, choosing the distance from performers and other viewers as well as forming relationships within the audience (Schechner 1994:78-79). A variety of spatial arrangements into which the spectators can enter allows for the alternation of deep and shallow play (Carlson 1998:24), of empathy and distance, which is vital for audience activating.

Inauthentic participation embraces, among others, Michael Kirby's categories of passive involvement: figurative, token, and processional participation (Kirby 1969:160). In the first of these, the audience is acknowledged and forms part of the mise-en-scene. The second type, token or selected involvement, consists in asking the spectators to perform certain unimportant activities which belong to the performance while the third, procession or parade, limits the audience's role to passive walking. Controlled verbal reaction, which is very close to non-participation but frequently proves sufficient for some critics to classify a show as a participatory event, involves prescribed responses from the auditorium with an anticipated content allowing for the undisturbed continuation of a performance. It represents the most treacherous case of illegitimate participation as it deludes the spectators into believing that they are involved in an artistic activity. Although partly subverting the audience's passive voyeurism, such involvement is primarily illusory and manipulative.

However, audience animation, although granting only an illusion of participation, cannot be totally disregarded. The animators' primary aim is to involve the entire audience in the game and to open people up to performers, one another and themselves (Mason 1992:37). In the context of culture and everyday life dominated by events and experiences that keep people apart and include many instances of voyeuristic performance, the animators' action being primarily aimed at holding people together should be considered as anti-structural. Audience animation suspends the audience's passive and inhibited attitude and trains them in group integration and openness to other people.

In order to illustrate this theoretical introduction, I will analyse three performances by *Akademia Ruchu* in respect of the audience activating techniques they employ. An invisible theatre event is juxtaposed with a participatory community project and a street action. The analysis is based on the video recording of the first performance (*Akademia Ruchu* 1978), a published report on the second (*Akademia Ruchu* 1979:133-139), and an oral description of the third project by the company's director, Wojciech Krukowski, during the post-performance meeting with the company organised by Krakowskie Reminiscencje Festival, Cracow, (1996). My own position in all of these is standing outside the theatrical activities, a position that can be compared to shallow play.

As two of the performances analysed in this paper are either based on or contain the elements of invisible theatre, this subject needs further consideration. Although Augusto Boal stresses that invisible theatre is theatre, that it contains all the ingredients of theatre and is performed as theatre (Boal 2002:277), how it is received remains a controversial issue. Performed as it is without theatrical frameworks or signals, invisible theatre is always double-edged; it encourages authentic participation on the part of the audience on the one hand, yet on the other, it is based on ultimate deception. If the cause to which an invisible theatre project is devoted is not serious enough the spect-actors may find themselves very uncomfortably duped. The rationale for invisible theatre is to prepare its witnesses for active intervention in the case of similar occurrences in everyday life - in other words, to train people in social and political activities. Invisible theatre increases people's awareness of certain problems,

familiarises them with certain situations and encourages them to formulate independent opinions. However, the deception on which invisible theatre is based can prove counter-productive. Once involved in such a deceptive event, spect-actors may become distrustful whenever a similar occurrence happens to them.

Invisible theatre illustrates a tendency in contemporary theatre - which is not restricted to participatory events - namely the analysis of the ethics of voyeurism. This includes the question of the responsibility of the spectators for the depicted events and characters, in performances of companies like *Forced Entertainment* and the works of many dramatists connected with 'in-yer-face theatre'. Censorship, reviewing, criticism, financial considerations as well as poetic licence partly obscure the reverse side of this problem: the artists' ethics and their responsibility to the viewers. From the perspective of the artist who is an actor in invisible theatre and who performs fictional actions, one might defend artistic freedom and claim that art is under no obligation to any authorities. However, from the spect-actors' point-of-view invisible theatre might be perceived as trickery, manipulation or even treachery. In certain cases, this manipulative element in invisible theatre becomes a central device through which the artists try to convey the sense of manipulation in everyday life. Invisible theatre situations imitate everyday events in which various persuasive techniques are employed, consciously or not, to influence people's behaviour. Invisible theatre might also make the viewers aware of certain customary ways of acting, which point to standardisations of responses, stereotyping, being trained to act in certain ways, etc. In these last two cases, the manipulation to which invisible theatre resorts serves certain purposes that might to some extent justify the means through which they are achieved.

Invisible Theatre - *Akademia Ruchu: The Urban Action* (1978)

Akademia Ruchu's untitled urban action, organised in Łódź (a Polish city) in 1978, was performed in various parts of the city over approximately twelve hours. Merged with the everyday routines of the city life, the activities performed by the actors included creating queues, stumbling, conversations in gateways, buying a newspaper or cleaning bus windows. However, every action was either exaggerated or displaced, thereby attracting the public's attention. The queues were formed in absurd places, repetitive stumbling was performed over non-existent obstacles, and newly-bought newspapers were discarded immediately. With the public unaware of the theatricality of these situations, the project can be classified as invisible theatre.

Akademia Ruchu's urban project entered directly the profane sphere of the workaday city, avoiding artificial theatrical or leisure frameworks. The performers were as anonymous and inconspicuous as other people in the street. There was no signal for the scene to transform into spectacle; all the stimuli were read as real life situations open to chance and unusual coincidences. In some cases, the enacted activities provoked people's authentic reactions - stumbling on the flat surface of a pavement, for example, where the onlookers received it as a real action, provoking them to approach and inspect the stumbling spot. Artificially created queues, to supply another instance, were often joined by the passers-by, even in the most absurd places.

Authentic involvement consisted of non-voyeuristic procedures and increased optation. Similarly to Boal's invisible theatre, the onlookers become active participants in what they perceived as real-life situations. Therefore, they acquired considerable freedom in co-creating the scenes. However, activating audiences relied on deception or an absolute illusion different from the effects achieved in the mainstream illusory theatre. This illusion allowed for identifying fiction as reality. In this respect, at least some of the activities performed by *Akademia Ruchu* in Łódź bordered on trickery and practical jokes. There arose a serious danger that they would be perceived as such by participants since invisible theatre made them involved in deep play which they took for reality. The moment of discovering the true nature of the situations in which they took part was more likely to generate embarrassment than a reflection on reality or an action to change it. Furthermore, partaking in an invisible theatre event on the level of deep play distracts the participants from other anti-structures presented in it. Having realised that one was standing in a fictional queue can direct one's attention more to the trick itself than to the reconsideration of queuing and its function in life.

Notwithstanding these ethical reservations about invisible theatre, the project did address significant issues. It signalled the parallels between the manipulations of reality by invisible theatre and certain absurdities and imposed patterns of everyday life. The year 1978 was one of the first years of economic crisis in Poland, preceded and followed by social unrest and the change of everyday habits. Long queues in front of shops were to become a landmark of Polish cities and towns for many years to come. Because of scarcity of almost all products, many Poles habitually stood in any queue they encountered in order to buy anything. The artificial queues formed by the performers multiply the

indexical signs of the crisis, signal the gravity of the problem and show to what extent rational behaviour can be altered under the influence of the critical situation. In this socio-economic context, even a person who has been tricked into joining a mock-queue might end up reflecting on how the dominant structure trains people in the mindless activity of joining a queue. A passage from deep to shallow play (that is from participation to realisation of the trick) should in most cases cause some reflection on the absurdity of human behaviour under extreme circumstances.

In the context of the social and political situation in Poland in the late seventies, even the stumbling scene can acquire anti-structural significance. The scene discloses the mechanisms of ideology and indoctrination in imposing imaginary elements on reality and repeating them. The simple technique is so persuasive that despite the unquestionable smoothness of the surface people inspect it for possible irregularities. Once the deep play yields to reflection, the spect-actors may become aware of the power of manipulation. Likewise, in the simple scene of repeatedly buying a newspaper and immediately discarding it, the witness's bewilderment and subsequent inspection of the contents of the discarded newspapers become significant in a non-democratic country in which freedom of the press is violated. In 1978, such a scene might be interpreted as a commentary on the quality of news reported in newspapers. However, the witness's disbelief and astonishment testified to a rather different interpretation of the performers' strange behaviour. The passer-by was looking for a particular piece of information as a cause of the performers' actions, whereas the intended message was supposed to come from reflection on the connection between newspaper news and rubbish.

In almost every situation created by *Akademia Ruchu* in this project, it is possible to discern at least two types of reaction, namely, participation and observation. While the former is inherently non-voyeuristic, the latter consists in physical passivity and voyeuristic pleasure intensified by the consciousness that one has noticed something unusual about seemingly commonplace phenomena. In the stumbling scene, for instance, a group of young women noticed repetitive stumbling of the passing people in a specific point on a smooth pavement, which made them laugh, wonder and exchange remarks, as well as wait for the next stumbling to happen. Their everyday voyeurism resembled the theatrical kind, with the difference that, unlike conventional theatre audiences, they were free to analyse, comment and predict events actively and simultaneously with the observed action, they could move and stop watching the scene whenever they wanted, or else they could enter the scene themselves and check the spot on the pavement (which one of the passers-by actually did). Furthermore, the distance of a voyeur allowed for the perception of the whole scene. In the queuing situation, for instance, voyeurs noticed both real and alternative queues; the observers thus become aware of both the structure and the anti-structure.

Environmental Performance - *Akademia Ruchu: Dom (The House) (1978)*

The project was conducted in a Polish town (Olesnica) in 1978 in an old tenement building, and lasted for almost a week. Most activities were initiated and performed in the yard which constituted a threshold between the public space of the street and the private space of one's home. The central transformation of the found space took place in this in-between area, but many negotiations, and many provoked and enacted events, happened within the private spaces of people's flats. The windows overlooking the yard became significant mediators between the home and non-home. Thus the yard and its major extensions (the windows) became the space wherein the project brought the inhabitants of the house together.

The action contained one element akin to invisible theatre, namely, the actors initially made the inhabitants believe that they were a television crew recording a film about their house. This procedure turned out to be an effective ice-breaker. However, at some stage of interaction and involvement, invisible theatre becomes impossible and either succeeds in transforming reality or has to admit its own fictionality. In *The House*, the deceptive element of invisible theatre turned voyeurs into the objects of gaze, whereas its original purpose had been to instigate partnership and participation; it was thus soon abandoned. The initial manipulation of invisible theatre showed the extent of the power of television to influence people's behaviour; however, in this project disclosing the mechanisms of behaviour and the influence of ideology were not of primary significance. Its ultimate aim was to activate the inhabitants artistically, to co-operate in a community event and encourage further activities of similar kind. Achieving this aim would have been impossible if the elements of invisible theatre had been preserved. Therefore, it can be assumed that invisible theatre can be effective only in a short-lived project or a single event.

The private and the semi-public 'found spaces' underwent a number of transformations in the project, among which the most significant include activating a non-artistic audience 'the tenement inhabitants'

and generating anti-voyeuristic responses (inherent optation, trading, acting). The project dissolved or sometimes played with the division between the actor and the voyeur, reversing and inflecting the traditional order. The action inverted the usual practice of going to the theatre: the performers came to the spectators in order to persuade them to undertake the creators and actors' roles.

At the initial invisible theatre stage of the project, the company's members 'preparing to film' resulted in the inhabitants intensifying their daily routine activities, through curiosity. People looked out of the windows, discarded the rubbish in the yard, walked the baby across the yard several times, thus creating routes and patterns of everyday activities in the semi-public threshold space of the yard. Initially not intended for artistic appreciation, the activities were framed by the company members as performance, being later transformed into fully acted behaviour. This initial provocation already changed the status of the spectators, turning them into performers. Despite the absence of a film in the camera, for an inhabitant to come out and appear in the yard was a conscious decision to participate in the project. As the actions they performed were mostly spontaneous, the critical distance from their own acting was as yet limited. The further step towards complete acting involved the actual mock-filming without a tape in the camera. The company pretended to film exactly the same activities as the ones that had been performed in reaction to their presence. Although fundamentally realistic, the actions were enacted for artistic purposes instead of real motivations. Several alterations were suggested by the inhabitants, aiming at making aesthetic the non-aesthetic reality; one of the participants, for instance, packed the rubbish in a different way so as to make it more suitable for a film. The inhabitants at this stage already took the initiative and contributed their own ideas within the company's general and flexible outline of the project. During this task they had to pass from deep to shallow play, distancing themselves from their own actions and adopting a critical point of view.

The project imposed a new social and personal structure on the existing relations. Creating a community response constituted a significant change. Personal dislikes, inhibitions and old quarrels gradually disappeared or decreased under the influence of co-operation with the company members. For the first time in many years individual inhabitants entered neighbouring flats for social meetings, crossing everyday boundaries. Because of its location in the yard, the project managed to achieve its purpose to bring people from individual flats together. Moreover, the project subverted the established division between active work and passive leisure, as the company's interference into the private environment activated leisure creativity, merging it with an artistic effort and work. The inhabitants' scarce experience of active participation in artistic activities was the essential feature of the project's environment. The lack of theatrical preparation decreased traditional performance expectations from the company, but the task of activating such a passive group could have presented many problems.

Although the film-making motif was subsequently abandoned, its initial function had been to set up a process of bartering with the tenement's inhabitants. Because of the popularity of the television medium, the service of making a film about the house was exchanged for co-operation, help and finally participation. However ineffective in the long term, trading succeeded in creating at least a temporary balance between the two sides, the outside artists and the local non-artists encouraged to become creative. Such an approach helped to avoid passive voyeurism and consumer expectations of a finished product ready for consumption. Needless to say, the arrangement as such failed to eliminate voyeurism but rather, turned it into a transformed and integral structural entity. The final spectacle prepared together by the performers and the inhabitants of the house was founded on a paradox as it was largely based on the frozen images of people's voyeuristic reactions. Furthermore, the project involved several reversals of the roles of 'actor', 'creator' and 'voyeur'. In many respects, the company's members could be perceived as voyeurs (because they watched, observed and recorded the activities and situations created by the inhabitants) and actors (because they enacted the activities designed by the inhabitants). Similarly, the local people underwent several changes of role and status, from being initially voyeurs, through passive actors, to co-creators of the final spectacle and the exclusive authors of some scenes presenting the small mythologies of the place, consisting of gossip, sensations, tragedies or vital events, that were enacted by the members of the company. Voyeurism, which was never completely passive in this project, constituted the starting point for subsequent co-operation and participation.

Like many other environmental projects, *The House* offered its participants authentic optation, which was an integral element of the process. Its basic form entailed the choice of participating or non-participating, which was valid until the very end of the project. A more complex manifestation of optation was the

participants' freedom to decide on the way of performing certain set tasks, which was exemplified earlier in the text by the changes introduced by the performers to make the work more aesthetic. The

final, most complex form of optation consisted in the independent contribution of themes, scenes and characters on the part of the non-theatre participants. Thus the project progressed from token involvement, largely controlled by the company members, through legitimate participation up to authentic optation.

Akademia Ruchu: Sytuacja Miasto (The Urban Situation) 1996

In contrast to the previous project by *Akademia Ruchu*, *The Urban Situation* worked within a less stable environment, for it was conducted among the people encountered at several bus stops in a small Polish town (Ostręda) on a cold November day. Based entirely on trading - almost literally - the project consisted of offering a bowl of beetroot soup at tables covered with white tablecloth that had been installed at each bus stop in exchange for a line of poetry the passers-by would like to write. On the following day, the participants would find their contributions in texts projected on huge screens.

The everyday structure of the site was subverted through substituting poetry for money currency, and transforming the mundane non-activity of waiting at a bus-stop into a creative act and a community feast at beautifully decorated tables. Eugenio Barba employs the term bartering to describe the method of working with specific communities, which consists in exchanging a company's work for the local songs, dances or performances (1998:185-189). As he points out, such bartering proves very effective for cognitive purposes, yet rarely has any lasting effect on the local culture. In this project the company, instead of presenting their artistic activities, offered food for the community's creativity. Yet even in such a form, the project cannot be perceived in terms of a lasting transformation of the community's artistic passivity. However, during the project the everyday environment was transformed by projecting people's poetry on the grey, aesthetically sterile walls. Poetry was created by ordinary people and displayed in a public place where everybody could read it without having to pay for it. Quite ironically, poetry became functional as it was exchanged for food. The company managed to activate people's creativity, combating their passivity. Optation involved both the choice of active participation and the type of contribution the spect-actors wished to make. In this project the presence of the company was primarily functional: their only creative task, apart from inventing the situation, being their contribution in arranging the fragments of poetry into whole poems. The company's co-operation with young people from socially underprivileged groups added still another dimension to the contact with the passers-by. The tables gathered together people from various social groups and origins in a communal activity of food consumption.

In conclusion, companies dedicated to community work and activating people artistically, socially or politically often have to face audiences trained in passivity and voyeurism by the most popular types of mass entertainment and, to some extent, conventional theatre. Those companies interested in co-operation with the public have to cut through learned responses to theatre and re-train their audiences in active contribution, employing various activating techniques. The above example of *Akademia Ruchu*'s projects shows that a simple invitation to co-create a theatrical project is often insufficient. Under certain circumstances invisible theatre or bartering might prove effective as ice-breakers or provocations, although they limit authentic optation considerably. The limitations of invisible theatre based on deception make it unsuitable for a long-term cooperation with a community. Likewise, as bartering involves to some extent some kind of payment for the audience's participation, it is mostly effective on single occasions. However, in the three projects analysed in the paper, both invisible theatre and bartering managed either to engage non-artists in creative activities or make passers-by aware of certain aspects of living in a non-democratic country during an economic crisis.

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