

Staging the Other – Regarding the Negotiation between Spectatorship and Critical Citizenship in the Performance *Third Generation*

Tine Byrdal Jørgensen

ABSTRACT

Through an analysis of the performance of *Third Generation*, this article discusses the ethical claim activated in documentary theatre and has the encounter with the Other as its leitmotif. *Third Generation* puts a Gordian knot between Germany, Israel and Palestine into relief by bringing actors from these three countries – each with their own individual family history of violence – onto the stage. The article identifies the critical potential of the staging by exploring how the performance offers the audience two contrasting modes of perception. One of which is trying to create and maintain the illusion of authenticity that is produced by the biographical elements. The other challenges this illusion. In dialogue with Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance*, the author points out how the interplay between the two modes of perception creates an increased awareness of the act of perceiving the Other. Via Derrida and Butler, this perceiving act is then set in relation to Lévinas' ethical concept of the subject as a host(age) – the subject as held captive by the Other and as a hospitable host for the Other. Offering this ethical frame for the analysis, the article traces how and by which means documentary theatre rearticulates a complex ethical relation between the Other on Stage and the eye (I) of the spectator. In conclusion, this potential is discussed in relation to critical citizenship.

BIOGRAPHY

Tine Byrdal Jørgensen holds an MA in Theatre and Performance Studies; her final thesis was entitled *Encountering the Other – Ethics, Subjectivity and Critique in Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, University of Copenhagen 2012. Currently she is working as a freelance dramaturge and writer in the field of performance and theatre. Most recently, she has been a dramaturge on projects with Global Stories, NoCanDo and Gritt Uldall-Jessen.

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In this era of globalization and mediatized culture, where the mobility and the dispersion of people throughout the world are perhaps greater than ever before, the concept of identity, be it social, national, cultural, personal etc., is to a large extent addressed by critical observation. As a possible reaction to this, during the last fifteen years or so, we have seen an increasing amount of theatre productions, which have as their main theme the encounter with the Other. In various ways, these productions have attempted to bring actual lived life into perspective with socio-political mechanisms in the formation of identities.

Through the means of biographical material or social interactions framed aesthetically, art activates real political and social relations. This raises a range of ethical challenges to the theatre. As I see it, the performing arts have the potential to critically engage with and negotiate the manner in which identities, social positions, and histories are performed, remembered and represented in today's mediatized society. However, by putting biographies, private experiences, different bodies and voices on stage in an eagerness to give the scene to the underrepresented, the theatre also runs the risk of repeating trauma and reaffirming spectacular narratives of victimisation so dominant in popular discourses.

By using biographies, documentary theatre moves into the treacherous terrain between spectacle and critique. From this fragile position, the staging of the Other confronts us all – the artists, the audience and the critics – with the open question: How can I encounter and relate to the singularity of

the Other represented on stage? Obviously, this is not just about the nature of the Other. It is as much about the eye of the beholder. Who or what shapes my gaze at the Other? What are the implications of spectatorship, critical citizenship and social responsibility when the Other, on stage, presents more or less traumatic stories from real life, thus turning personal memories into social memories? Bearing these questions in mind, and in the hope of not just reinforcing the spectacle/critique binary, I will analyze the performance *Third Generation*, in order to discuss how the performance (re)activates and handles the complex relation between spectatorship and critical citizenship.¹

THIRD GENERATION

Third Generation is a performance directed by the Israeli director Yael Ronen. In the programme, Ronen introduces the production as an investigation of a Gordian knot between the three nations: Germany, Israel and Palestine.² As the performance proceeds, this alleged Gordian knot unfolds based partially on history, partially on speculation: had it not been for the Holocaust, which accelerated the establishment of the state of Israel, the conflict between Israel and Palestine would not have been as strained as it is today and the Arabic (right-wing extremist) anger towards the West might have been less radical. This, of course, is contra-factive thinking – and perhaps more than anything else, it is an aesthetic provocation, which serves as an incentive for reflections. *Third Generation* creates and explores the Gordian

knot with its complex and ethical conflicts founded in history by bringing performers from each of the three countries on stage; all of whom have their own family history of violence and suppression to tell.

In order to methodically comprehend the ethical claim activated in *Third Generation*, I will first investigate how the performance produces a play with – and against – authenticity. Secondly, I will discuss how this play activates a negotiation of the relations between spectatorship and critical citizenship. I am borrowing the term ‘critical citizenship’ from Paul A. Konczal’s “Critical Citizenship: A Theory on the Foundations of Legitimate Government”, to conceptualize the role of the political spectator. The basic idea is that as citizens we are obligated to obey the laws of a legitimate government (the government representing the voice of the community), but we also have a right to disobey unjust laws. Furthermore, we have a moral duty to participate as political subjects in processes of deliberation, because deliberation is the key to the continuance of legitimate government. Strictly speaking: If the government operates in an unjust way, critical citizenship “is a call for individuals to make a difference.”³ In this perspective, the performance may serve as ethical reflection calling for individual engagement.

As is also the case with many other performances dealing with this subject, my claim is that one of *Third Generation*’s most effective tools is that it offers its audience two contrasting modes of perception. One of which is trying to create and maintain the illusion of authenticity that is produced by the biographical elements. Another of which challenges the illusion of authenticity by laying bare its construction. I will argue that it is precisely this dialectic which creates a sense of ambiguity in the viewer’s perception, and that it is in this ambiguity that we find the critical potential of the performance.

POSITIONS AT PLAY

Third Generation can be divided into three different staging strategies that together produce the play with and against authenticity.

1. The use of biographical materials (or testimonies) in scenes where the performers share details from their lives with the audience or re-en-

act experiences from their own lives.

2. Scenes in which the performers are playing with and against their social and national identity in stories and situations from ‘real life’ that clearly have more fictional elements and a staged dimension.
3. The staging of a personal, ‘spontaneous’ and often highly polemical comment. In the role as ‘themselves’, and often frustrated, the performers interrupt each other’s scenes to comment or to contribute a new perspective to the story and its claim to truth.

With this analytical division of the strategies in mind, let us take a closer look at some specific scenes.

AN ODD INTRODUCTION

Aarhus Theatre, 12 May 2011. A woman from the group organizing the international theatre festival, ILT-2011, is delivering the festival’s opening speech on the main stage. Ten plastic chairs are placed behind her; I assume these chairs provide a somewhat sparse set design to the performance of *Third Generation*, which is the festival’s grand opening performance.

After the woman has been talking for some time, a nervous-looking man peeps out from the wings of the stage. Barefoot, he steps onto the stage, wearing grey tracksuit bottoms, a partisan scarf around his neck and a red T-shirt with the inscription “3. G”. He interrupts the woman apologetically, then presents himself as Niels Bormann, one of the show’s German performers, and asks for permission to say a few words before the beginning of the actual performance. The woman leaves the stage seemingly confused, and Bormann thanks her for her kindness. Now, addressing the audience, he apologizes for tonight’s performance’s lack of costumes and props and explains this is because the show is a work-in-progress production. Then he begins to talk about the idea behind the performance, the process and especially his own experience of meeting actors from Palestine and Israel. His appearance is friendly and gesticulating; his language, however, is sometimes both inappropriate and embarrassing: “I attempted to encounter my colleagues with re-



Third Generation. From left to right: Yousef Sweid, Karsten Dahlem, Ishay Golan. Photo: Heiko Schäfer. Courtesy: Schaubühne.

spect and consideration in this working process, but I was faced with a completely different work culture. It was interesting to see how different the skills of the individual actor within the group were, which is probably rooted in differences in education systems for example. [...] And for me personally, it was nice to see that actually the Israelis are exactly like we are in Germany. Only they are smaller and darker.”⁴

Although the light is still directed at the audience, it soon becomes clear that the show has already begun. Bormann’s behaviour is clearly theatrical and exaggerated. At times, he appears reflective, and at times, naïve and embarrassing. Furthermore, he delivers his presentation in such a manner of humour and self-irony that we cannot be in doubt as to whether or not it has been rehearsed. We laugh, well aware that it is permissible, although, at the same time, we are also painfully aware of the seriousness of the situation. During Bormann’s opening monologue, the theme of the relation to the Other becomes clear. At first, the stage is set for a friendly

exchange between three nations in what seems to resound with a cultural-political promotion of the cohesive forces of art in times, when cooperation between nations is less promising. However, as the performance proceeds, it is not long before good intentions breed more conflicts in the meeting between individuals whose personal voices are caught-up in rigid and conflicting discursive patterns beyond their control.

SHIFTING FROM ONE STAGING STRATEGY TO ANOTHER

The appearance of a theatrically framed play between the personal voice and the discursive patterns is a central part of activating the ethical appeal of the work, and it is closely linked to the shifts in the three mentioned staging strategies. The following example of establishing these shifts makes it possible to analytically scrutinize the critical strategies of the performance. We are at the beginning of the performance in the middle of a humoristic tour de

force presentation of each of the performers. In presenting himself, the German performer Bormann has just told the audience that he personally adores Jews, and that he even had a Jewish boyfriend once. Now, we are presented with a situation between him and his Jewish ex-boyfriend, played by the Israeli performer Ishay Golan. The scene develops from a quarrel about an old love affair to accusations of how it is typical of Germans not to want to confront the past, and typical of Israeli people to batten on the Jewish history of suffering and religious status as the chosen people, since they are always seen as the persecuted and by definition never the persecutors. This quarrel is followed by Bormann accusing Golan: "You are so racist! You can laugh about the Nazis, but you don't reflect on what you Israelis do to the Palestinians." A statement which leads to a massive protest from the Israeli performer Orit Nahmias who has been watching the scene from a distance along with the other performers. She interrupts with the injunction: "Do not compare!"

Sitting on a chair in the middle of the stage, and directly addressing the audience, Orit now delivers one of the performance's more forceful monologues presented like a personal comment:

"I know it's tempting [to compare]. The Germans would like you to believe the Holocaust could have happened anywhere. The Palestinians want you to compare because they want to show the world that the Jews didn't learn anything. The Israelis say you shouldn't compare, BUT they always compare to show the world that the Arabs only want to finish the job for the Germans. So let's not compare."

You may accuse Orit's comment of being didactic, and of course, you also have to take into account that her reprimand ends with Orit sitting on stage as a representative of the Israeli voice proclaiming: "The Israelis say you shouldn't compare." Perhaps these words remind us that there might be a reservation to her enunciation. Her statement leads us into a position where we as spectators are reminded that in theatre as well as in public debate, we must reflect on the credibility as well as the hidden intentions and interests that are at stake in the public production of the Other.

As it emerges from the abovementioned scenes, including the opening speech, *Third Generation* is

characterized by letting the Other appear on stage somewhere in between personal appeal and a highly staged and calculated discursive framing of the performer's account.⁵ For example, when the performers, in performing themselves, are drawing on rhetoric known from public debate, it becomes clear that they are strategically performing conflicting public discourses: for instance, a Western imperialistic discourse, a Palestinian propagandistic discourse or a discourse closely interwoven with an institutionalized culture of Holocaust memory. Yet, at the same time, and because of the audience's awareness of how the performers' personal voices and bodies are marked by history, the performers do not come across as only performing competing discourses. Therefore, Orit's injunction not to compare the Holocaust with the Israel-Palestine conflict does not only appear didactic but also exposed. Her injunction seems to expose a personal voice that meets the audience with an appeal to be aware of how the Holocaust is still a trauma; a wound that can easily be reactivated in people who have had their own 'family body' affected by injustice.

STAGING REALNESS

As it is the case with much contemporary theatre, *Third Generation* strategically exploits and exhibits the interplay between fiction and reality. In his book *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann puts it this way: "It is concerned with developing a perception that undergoes – at its own risk – the 'come and go' between the perception of structure and of the sensorial real."⁶ A special characteristic of contemporary documentary theatre is that it uses the performers' social position to activate the act of perception between proximity and critical distance to what is presented. Thus, documentary theatre, which explores the encounter with the Other, borrows from performance art's tradition of the performing subject investing herself directly in the event.

In *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Erika Fischer-Lichte argues that one of performance art's central strategies in addressing its audience is to let the performing subject appear in the exchange between the material body and the staged body.⁷ A classic example is Marina Abramović, who, in *Lips*

of *Thomas* (1975), exposed her own body to real pain, which eventually led some of the spectators to break the aesthetic convention of the audience position and interrupt the performance by carrying Abramović's 'injured body' off the stage.

As it is apparent in my examples from *Third Generation*, it is not so much the performing body's physical vulnerability in the theatrical 'here and now' situation which destabilizes representation and makes the relation between ethics and aesthetics vibrate anew. It is more a case of how the spectator's consciousness perceives the performing subject, with her own body and voice, as simultaneously being inside and outside the theatre space, which realizes the stage as a real battlefield for the production of the Other.⁸ In documentary theatre, it is thus the ancient paradox of theatre, which is exploited to activate the ethics in the aesthetics; the relation between what is perceived as the performer's personal body/voice and *the staging* of this body/voice in a semiotic sense. The ethical claim is emphasized, as the staging is extensively saturated not only by the battle of identity and politics in the theatrical 'here and now' situation, but also by the reality outside. With ethics as my focus, I will now continue the analysis of *Third Generation* and later, I will return to Fischer-Lichte's theory of performance.

THE USE AND EFFECTS OF TESTIMONIES ON STAGE

In contemporary documentary theatre, it is often through the use of testimony or witness that reality is invested in the theatrical staging. To approach the ethical claim in *Third Generation*, I will look into the use of testimony position in the performance. The testimony position refers to the (seemingly) personal accounts in the performance, often presupposing that the performers were also physically present at the events retold, or at least had a personal relation to the events. These accounts are now presented to the audience, i.e. people who had no prior access to the events in question.

In *Third Generation*, one example of using the testimony position is in a scene where the Palestinian actress Rawda, in a combination of narration and re-enactment, is performing her cousin's testimony

of Israeli soldiers' bombing of the cousin's parents' house in Gaza, which resulted in the death of her brother. Another example is in a scene where the Israeli actor, Ishay Golan, recalls a nightmare in which a ghost of a Palestinian, seeking justice for his death, haunts Ishay's dreams. Ishay claims to have shot the Palestinian in self-defence during the first Intifada, as he apparently mistook the Palestinian's can of cola for a hand grenade. Before looking more closely at the two accounts and their potential for critical assessment, I will briefly consider the testimony position from a theoretical point of view.

Documentary theatre often establishes the performance in the dialectic between personal accounts and archival material, photos, documentary film recordings, documents, statistical data, and other objects.⁹ It is clear that archival elements assist in producing effects of authenticity and the feeling of seeing something with your own eyes. In comparison, oral testimonies are more fragile, and the appeal to the audience depends on creating empathy and proximity with the performer.

The American theatre scholar Carol Martin compares this form of documentary aesthetics to how a lawyer uses evidence (documents, data etc.) and testimonies to state his case before court.¹⁰ Of course, our way of relating to a testimony depends on the framing of the event. Consequently, we relate differently to testimonies given in court, in the media, in personal relations and in art. Thus, the underlying intention and effect of crossing the line between facts and fiction separates the artistic testimony from the court testimony.

In *Third Generation*, the archival material is absent and the whole performance takes place on an empty stage, foregrounding the various oral testimonies, which are counteracting each other or set in other forms of juxtapositions (for example, up against the personal comment), all in order to constitute, as I will soon show, an ambiguous social and geopolitical space.

While the consequences of crossing the borderland between fiction and reality distinguish the artistic testimony from the court testimony, the effect and the quality of the performer giving testimony still depends on the fact that she is committed to a story or course deeply rooted in reality off-stage.

From an aesthetic point of view, the performative qualities of the testimony position draw upon the fact that the performing subject is personally marked by the very experience that is at the centre of the staged testimony. The audience's awareness of how the past event is vivid in the performer's memory invests her performing body with a personal appeal and produces a specific modus of perception. As Imanuel Shipper states, generating authenticity is an active act of the gazing subject; the use of testimonies and the performer's social positions in *Third Generation* enables moments where I, as a spectator, can produce authenticity on the performing subject, i.e. it generates effects of authenticity.¹¹

In the article "(Un-)glauben – Das Spiel mit der Illusion", German theatre scholar Nikolaus Müller-Schöll points to the strong tradition in theatre of seducing the spectator through illusion,¹² and he argues how the reality-affirming theatre of our time also creates a play with illusion. In this case, it is a play with the spectator's confidence in being able to distinguish fact from fiction and the feeling of being the master of her own act of perception. This disturbing and challenging of the spectator's aesthetic experience applies to the perceptual process of *Third Generation*. I will now return to analyzing the use of testimony in the performance.

The process of delivering the different testimonies in *Third Generation* never allows the audience to fulfil the act of imagination and self-projection, and thus, the catharsis that one might expect in fictional drama, is deferred. Coming to the end, Rawda's testimony of the Israeli bombing of her relatives' home is suddenly interrupted by one of the Israeli performers declaring this to be Palestinian propaganda. Also our proneness to believe in Ishay's nightmare account is shaken, although this time it is done by Ishay himself. Earlier, Ishay was defending himself against the Palestinian ghost's accusations, by emphasizing how Ishay was only seventeen years old, and how he was only following orders when he fired the shot in self-defence. Suddenly, the German performer Judith Strössenreuter enters the stage in the role of another ghost: Ishay's crazy grandmother. She supports Ishay and urges him to defend himself. The fact that it is one of the German performers, and not one of the Israeli performers, who is play-

ing the role of a ghost of an Israeli grandmother, is of great importance to the different levels of representation put into play in this scene. In this way a complex conflict between representing layers is created, as both the 'voice of Germany' and the burden of the post-war German guilt are present through *Judith's* performance of the grandmother's voice. Thus, by virtue of Judith's tacit voice, the scene can be interpreted as an attempt to shake off the guilt after all these years. Even the victims of the past are now planning genocide. The equation is finally solved: the Holocaust was not an incomparable and unique phenomenon. At last, Germany can be free.

Obviously, the problem with the grandiose aspect of self-forgiveness (which Judith is about to perform in the scene mentioned above) is that Ishay does not want to be reduced to a puppet in the project of purification. He objects and stops the scene when he discovers that he is currently performing a situation where his own position is reduced; he feels that he is implicitly accused of the same wrongdoing as a German soldier during the Holocaust by simply following orders.

When Ishay interrupts, he also shifts more or less unnoticed from a testimony position to a position of enunciation that can be placed under what I have termed strategy three: the staging of a personal, 'spontaneous' and often highly polemical comment.

The question is now how and in what way the critical and ethical potential of the performance is connected to an act of perception where the spectator is thrown in and out of moments, where one is seduced by the story, and moments where one must question one's own perception and the performance's framing of the Other.

LÉVINAS – BEING HOST(AGE) TO THE OTHER

The English art critic Claire Bishop has warned against resorting to ethical parameters in the attempts of criticism to manage its role in socially engaged art.¹³ In spite of this, I venture to say that Lévinas' ethical philosophy can serve as a very useful analytical tool as we try to approach the critical potential in the perceiving act between proximity and critical distance to the representation of the Other on stage. In this context, I will make use of one of

Lévinas' key concepts: the subject as host(age) of the Other. In Lévinas' philosophy, the Other refers to alterity (from Latin *the other of the two*), i.e. the entity in contrast to which an identity is constructed, and to an infinite ethical obligation to 'receive the Other'.

Lévinas offers an ethical parameter of subjectivity in the space cleared by what he sees as the anti-humanist deconstruction of the subject.¹⁴ According to Lévinas, subjectivity is formed when the subject must respond to the claim and the addressing of the Other; a request it cannot fully meet and cannot completely avoid. Thus, subjectivity then means being *hostage* in a playful double sense of the word: as held captive by the Other, and as a hospitable *host* for the Other.

If the experience of an 'I' arises in and as a response to the Other's call, the subject cannot support itself auto-archically, i.e. in absolute rule of itself. Rather, the subject is dependent on preceding structures that it comes to know through scenes of address. Or as Lévinas puts it: "strictly speaking, the Other is the 'end'".¹⁵ This means that the subject's susceptibility towards the Other (or its ability to host the Other) precedes the subject and makes it realize itself. Nevertheless, the Other also confronts the subject with a singularity; "an absolute resistance to possession".¹⁶ It is from this conflict that Lévinas traces a complicated relationship between response and responsibility in negotiating what constitutes subjectivity in the meeting with the Other. In this encounter, the subject must open itself to the Other and, at the same time, also question its own perspective, gaze and identity formation.

Lévinas' ethics appear to me to be a defence of the subject's ability to retain its own interests during a 'face-to-face meeting', in order to relate to the Other as a responsible host. I see this as a regulatory ideal rather than something empirically proven. If we choose to believe in this, then the subject, in confronting the singularity of the Other, can meet the Other in an (imagined) community beyond consensus and alignment. This is not a matter of 'same-as-me' identification but in fact a counter-move to this logic. In view of the challenges of a global world, and the mass media's often simplistic positioning of the Other, the Utopian idea of the

subject's ability to receive the Other in spite of disagreement seems extremely urgent.

In *Third Generation*, none of the performers meet the Other according to Lévinas' ethics. The whole performance ends up in a big quarrel. Not only do words and accusations clash on stage but bodies, too, and the performance ends in a desperate brawl with the performers chasing each other off the stage. Instead of fulfilling Lévinas' ethical claim, *Third Generation* seems rather, at the representative level, to problematize the individual's inability to host the Other. Nevertheless, the encounter is theatrically framed and in addition to what unfolds on stage, the performance also implicitly challenges the audience, asking each spectator to respond to the Other's address (not by directly responding to the performers, of course, but respond in terms of ethical deliberations). It is exactly at this level that I will try, in the concluding part of this article, to locate the performance's ethical potential in the friction between spectatorship and critical citizenship.

EXTENDING THE CIRCLE OF RECOGNITION

Through my analyses, I have tried to show how *Third Generation* creates moments where the performers shift between different positions of enunciation. These sudden shifts impel the audience to reflect on the framing of the Other. Retrospectively, the many interruptions made me reconsider whether the sympathy, often generated by a private testimony on stage, can in itself be an effective strategy to engage the audience with the Other, or if this production of sympathy instead risks placing the audience in a less reflective position. Is the audience encouraged to critically reflect on their own perception?¹⁷ As American writer and critic Susan Sontag points out, an act of critical engagement based on sympathy created within a frame of spectatorship can be fragile and ephemeral. An act of sympathy can be: "a way for us to feel, that we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence."¹⁸

In order for the audience to be moved beyond sympathy, we must be shaken out of our comfort zone. In *Third Generation*, the staging of constant clashes between competing contradictory discourses

provides us with a complex picture of a multifaceted conflict. Unsettling and contradictory space is created throughout the performance. Roles and positions are blurred when the performers slide from one enunciated position to another: here, the (seemingly) authentic account can suddenly transform into a calculated, staged and value-laden comment. Perhaps the audience is frustrated with the difficulty in determining what exactly the truth is, as well as determining the role of the victim and his tormentor. However, I would argue that the performance's critical potential is located in its capacity to challenge demarcation lines between conflicting positions. In creating levels of discomfort by means of the complex framing of the Other on stage and by the implications of the spectator's process of identification, *Third Generation* attempts to address us as political subjects by appealing to our political reflection. This call for a critical observation of how we perceive, produce and negotiate both the Other and the truth, depends on the fact that the testimony position is only one out of many positions of enunciation. The performers take on and shift between these different positions during the show, and the testimony position is therefore part of a staged polyphony, i.e. part of a critical aesthetic strategy to address the audience.

STRUGGLING WITH NORMS IN A DESIRE TO OFFER RECOGNITION TO A 'YOU'

The continuing shifts in the framing of the Other in *Third Generation* direct the spectator's attention to the dynamics of the perceptual process itself. This is also one of Fischer-Lichte's central points in *The Transformative Power of Performance*: "The more frequent the perceptual shift between the arbitrary order of presence and the purposeful order of representation [...] the more focused the subject becomes on perception itself".¹⁹ This focus on the perceptual process itself activates the ethical claim in the relationship between the spectator and the Other/the performer. In her theory, Fischer-Lichte further stresses the ethical dimensions by arguing how a raised awareness of one's own perception inevitably facilitates different emotional and physical outcomes (for instance, laughter and frustration

caused by being embarrassed with one's naivety etc.), which affect the relation between audience and performers, in what Fischer-Lichte understands as the energetic autopoietic feedback loop of the performance, and thereby making us aware of the shared responsibility of the 'here-and-now' situation. This seems to allow for the adoption of Lévinas' ethics as he emphasizes physical presence to be that which enables an opening towards the Other. I will, however, dare to suggest that the ethical claim in documentary theatre shows immense performative qualities because it confronts us with the spectrality of presence and therein, the spectrality of ethics. I use the term spectrality in continuation of Derrida and a post-structural conception of subjectivity; the subject is not a pure cogito of self-presence but is haunted by other voices, i.e. it is shaped by structures outside of itself.

To sustain the above mentioned claim, I will seek the assistance of Derrida, since he is in close dialogue with Lévinas.

Derrida's most consistent project has drawn our attention to the idea of how, "we are insofar as we inherit".²⁰ Any identity necessarily repeats and borrows from socio-historical discourses and traditions. There are already others present when an identity is formed, and it is related to these others, bearing them within itself. This means that a lot of external voices speak (from the past and towards the future) through the mouth of the subject on stage. Furthermore, it also means that the spectator's gaze at the Other is framed by discursive and often invisible mechanisms.

By letting the Other appear on stage somewhere in between her personal appeal and external voices, *Third Generation* reminds us that receiving the singularity of the Other is an ambiguous and a spectral act, sending us into an infinite self-reflective work with our perception. With regard to Lévinas, maybe this quote from Judith Butler can capture the aesthetic experience in the perceptual act between proximity and critical distance to the representation on stage:

"If I understand myself to be conferring recognition on you, for instance, then I take seriously that the recognition comes from me. But the moment I realize that the terms by which I confer recognition

are not mine alone, that I did not single-handedly devise or craft them, I am, as it were, dispossessed by the language that I offer. [...] Though I thought I was having a relation to 'you', I find that I am caught up in a struggle with norms."²¹

In *Third Generation*, I first and foremost see people who are struggling to give an account of themselves, and sometimes even trying to address themselves from self-reflexive positions (cf. Ishay in his account of the nightmare), but who are constantly contradicted in their attempts at self-understanding. For my own part, even though my own response to the Other is silent during the performance, I find that my gaze is taking active part in the struggle between the speaker and the listener in acts of identification and recognition (cf. Butler). As I see it, the performance does not seek to evade normative structures and psychological mechanisms such as sympathy and antipathy, but place these structures within a conflicting relation to the imperative of Lévinas' so that they can expose each other. Therefore, in spite of the performers' failure in *Third Generation* to receive the Other, I believe that addressing the audience as participants in the above-mentioned acts of recognition paves the way for ethical reflection regarding how we encounter the Other, not only in theatre but in life. As Butler points out, when we fail to offer recognition to another person, we might call into question the social dimensions of the normative frame that governs the scene of recognition and constitutes any encounter. Thus, echoing Derrida, allow me to suggest that the Other might emerge in glimpses during the failed encounters in *Third Generation*, in the not yet articulated haunting flow of discourses in constant collective interactions, constellations and infinite contexts. To be precise, the ethical claim is to some degree deferred in *Third Generation*. Its Levinasian imperative is postponed, thrown into the future so to speak, in the hope that it may operate in the next encounter with the Other, or the next time we listen to a testimony from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

CLOSING REMARKS

In *Third Generation*, the continuing questioning and negotiation of how the Other is represented on stage directs our attention to the ethical relationship between the Other and the gazing subject, between spectatorship and critical citizenship. The project of the performance is not an unmediated encounter and not an attempt to completely collapse spectatorship and critical citizenship, rather, it is a strategic negotiation between what Rancière describes as the two contradictory poetics of the aesthetics, i.e., art longing to dissolve itself in everyday life and the need of art to offer its own aesthetic sphere, thus offering the audience a twisted view on private, social and political life.²² By the complex framing of the matter of authenticity, *Third Generation* places itself in the middle of these two poetics. It is exactly in the movement between proximity and critical distance to authenticity that the performance is able to gesticulate at the utopia of the subject's ability to host the Other (cf. Lévinas), while simultaneously exposing that our gaze, of necessity, will be discursively coded (cf. Butler). By offering the spectator an aesthetic experience of the working of the discursive structures, the performance establishes a sphere in which an ethical desire to offer recognition to the Other can be cultivated or practised, thereby potentially opening up the individual towards an engagement to the common good.

I am now able to return to my opening question in this article. What are the relationships between critical citizenship, spectatorship and social responsibility in documentary performances having the encounter with the Other as leitmotif? I believe that the theatre is one sphere amongst others where critical citizenship can be practiced – i.e. it can contribute to the processes of deliberation. Documentary theatre addresses political and social issues in a very direct manner. To borrow the words of Janelle Reinelt: "it contributes its special [aesthetic, red.] métier as part of democratic processes that are already or simultaneously put in train by other means."²³

The conflict between Israel and Palestine makes the relationship between critical citizenship and social obligations particularly complicated. I see it not only as a conflict regarding the two countries,

I see it also as a conflict in which the West carries responsibilities since the UN in the wake of the Second World War was part of establishing the borders defining the territories.

Third Generation exposes social responsibility, which is one of the key elements in critical citizenship. Through aesthetical means, *Third Generation* sets in motion ethical appeals between nationalities having different experiences and views upon the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The theatrical frame allows the audience, from a distance, to observe and experience opposing perspectives on the conflict. This in return does one of two things: either it will strengthen the spectator's confidence in her opinion about the conflict, or it will change her opinion.

Either way, if Lévinas is right, it is in the meeting with the Other that an ethical subjectivity can be formed – and to cultivate ethical subjectivity is the key to the continuance of critical citizenship. To further clarify: It is in the meeting between individuals that new sets of values and self-comprehension are formed and it is in this process that the respective horizons of individuals can be opened up towards mutual interdependence and obligation.

Leading the audience into a reflection about one's own capacity to relate to the Other is no simple task at a time permeated by political spin and where many states and organisations try to legitimise their own acts (of violence) through a rhetoric that seems to cultivate fear and images of enemies. A testimony of war can be (mis)used in many ways, and comes without any guarantee of how it is received. The risk of merely reproducing already existing hierarchies is at the heart of every aesthetic engagement, but so is the hope that something might slip through the economy of repetition.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 The English art historian Claire Bishop has criticized what she calls the ‘ethical turn’ in critics’ attempt to respond to the ‘social turn’ in contemporary art. Bishop argues that the ethical parameters with which we judge a given work of art are often incapable of honouring art’s potential for contradictory experiences. She warns against submitting aesthetics to ethics. See Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents” in *Artforum*, February 2006. Partly, I agree with Bishop; too often the ethical art debate in the media – at least in Denmark – has been reduced to trivial estimations about right and wrong. However, as I argue in this paper, I do think ethics can offer a helpful and necessary vocabulary and an analytical framework as we try to approach the ethical claim in contemporary art and theatre.
- 2 *Third Generation* is a co-production between the Berlin theatre Schaubühne and Habima – the National Theatre of Israel. Since its premiere in 2009 at the Schaubühne, the performance has toured Europe. I saw the performance at Aarhus Teater, 12 May 2011.
- 3 Paul A. Konczal, “Critical Citizenship: A Theory on the Foundations of Legitimate Government” in *Res Publica – Journal of Undergraduate Research*, vol. 2 no. 1, 1997, p. 48.
- 4 “Ich habe versucht bei dieser Arbeit meinen Kollegen mit Respekt und Achtung zu begegnen, aber ich wurde mit einer komplett anderen Arbeitsweise konfrontiert. Es war interessant zu sehen, wie unterschiedlich das Niveau der einzelnen Schauspieler innerhalb der Gruppe ist, was sicher unter anderem mit einer anderen Bildung zusammenhängt. [...] Und für mich persönlich war es schön zu sehen, dass die Israelis eigentlich ganz genau sind wie wir sind in Deutschland. Nur sind sie kleiner und dunkler.” (Translation: TBJ.)
- 5 I owe my thanks to Cecilie Ullerup Schmith who drew my attention to the conflict between internal and external carrying voices in contemporary documentary theatre. See Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, “Carrying Voices – Producing Subjects on Stage in Reality” in *Who’s There? – Subjects on Stage in Reality*, the Danish National School of Theatre – Continuing Education, Copenhagen 2011.
- 6 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, London & New York 2006 [1999], p. 103.
- 7 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance – A New Aesthetics*, Routledge, London & New York 2008 [2004], pp. 88-93.
- 8 See also Ullerup Schmidt, op. cit., p. 22.
- 9 See Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art: Supporting Publics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2011, pp. 163-81.
- 10 Carol Martin, *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010, p. 20-1.
- 11 Imanuel Shipper, *Perspectives on Staging Authenticity*, Dramatikens Hus, Oslo 2012 (lecture at *Monsters of Reality*).
- 12 Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, “(Un-)Glauben, Das Spiel mit der Illusion” in *Theater und Medien*, Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld 2008.
- 13 Bishop, op.cit.
- 14 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, pp. 127-28.
- 15 Ibid., p. 128.
- 16 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1990, p. 8.
- 17 The fear of the theatre’s pacifying effect has a long tradition and is rooted in Plato who was skeptical towards the theatre’s invitation to remain a passive spectator when watching the pain of others. In the twentieth century, the discussion about spectatorship and passivity resurfaced with the historical avant-garde, in Brecht’s poetics, in the experimental theatre of the sixties, to mention but a few, and, lately, in relational art. For a critical investigation of this tradition of seeing the spectator as passive, see Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Verso, New York, 2011.
- 18 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York 2003, p. 102.
- 19 Fischer-Lichte, op. cit., p. 150.
- 20 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, Routledge, New York 1994, p. 54.
- 21 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Fordham University Press, New York 2005, p. 26.
- 22 I owe my thanks to Solveig Gade who drew my attention to the negotiation between the two contradictory poetics of art in a lot of contemporary performances. Gade, *Intervention og kunst – socialt og politisk engagement i samtidskunsten*, Politisk Revy, Copenhagen, p. 110, 126-54.
- 23 Janelle Reinelt, “Towards a Poetics of Theatre and Public Events: In the Case of Stephen Lawrence” in Martin, op. cit., p 38.