

## *The Displeasure of Implication in Fix & Foxy's Dark Noon (2019)*

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### **Abstract**

In their award-winning and still touring 2019 performance *Dark Noon*, the project theatre Fix&Foxy, led by Danish director Tue Biering, creates a theatrical space in which the audience are implicated in the hypercomplex relations between violent colonial oppression and the entertainment industry. What appears through the staging is the indirect complicity of the present White European in the long-distance and long-term atrocities of colonialism. Drawing on, amongst others, Michael Rothberg's theory of *The Implicated Subject*, the present performance analysis will describe and discuss this unpleasant dramaturgy of implication in *Dark Noon*, and more specifically, how it works through a complex play on non/identity between the actors, the spectators, and the characters of the performance.

### **Keywords**

Fix&Foxy, *Dark Noon* (2019), implication, implicatedness, implicancy, performance analysis, political theatre, postcolonialism, spectatorship, emancipation, Jacques Rancière, Michael Rothberg

In their award-winning and still touring 2019 performance *Dark Noon*, the project theatre Fix&Foxy, led by Danish director Tue Biering, creates a theatrical space in which the audience is implicated in the hypercomplex relations between violent colonial oppression and the entertainment industry. The performance unfolds as a montage through which an ensemble of South African actors tells the story of the colonization of the North American continent and the development of “Western Civilization”, using tropes from the American Western genre movie. The dramaturgy involves a very complex use of space, mediation, and audience participation to place the primarily white audience in an uncomfortable position – a point that is also made in the existing discourse on Fix&Foxy and the performance, not least by Laura Luise Schultz<sup>1</sup> and Erik Exe Christoffersen.<sup>2</sup> What appears through the staging is the indirect complicity of the present White European in the long-distance and long-term atrocities of colonialism. I argue in this article that the displeasure of implication in this performance is not primarily produced by the interpretative openness of the performance or by the confrontation of historical inequalities with basic assumptions of equality, but rather by calling out the present unequal relations of the participants (audience as well as makers) to the problems posed by the performance. At the same time, the dramaturgy of the performance produces a representational logic of non/identity that counters the solidification of positions of victims and perpetrators and hopefully allows for solidarity and responsibility across such unequal positions.

Fix&Foxy developed this dramaturgy through several productions over more than a decade. A remarkable example is the 2012 performance *Viljens Triump*, where they involved the audience in recreating the 1935 Nazi propaganda film *Triumph des Willens* by Leni Riefenstahl, ultimately nudging the audience into performing the image of marching and saluting Nazis. What is exposed here is – like in the Alexander Grasshoff movie *The Wave* (1981) – the non-difference between the distant demonic other and the present unattached self. Fix&Foxy are not “offending the audience” like in the 1966 play by Peter Handke, rather

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<sup>1</sup> Schultz 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Christoffersen 2022.

they are entertaining the audience with the disconcerting recognition of their status as what the American memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg terms “implicated subjects”<sup>3</sup> in matters that are far beyond their control, but arguably not beyond their responsibility. Maybe this is exactly the kind of displeasure needed to stir up the political consciousness and solidarity of a population living complacently within the “Crystal Palace”<sup>4</sup> of Scandinavian welfare states. Fix&Foxy does not seem to be the only theatre makers in Denmark that are developing political theatre along these lines. In Denmark, the work of Christian Lollike, Julie Maj Jacobsen, and Madame Nielsen comes to mind, and Maaïke Bleeker has, in a similar vein, pointed to makers such as Julian Hetzel and Dries Verhoeven.<sup>5</sup> The present article will describe and discuss this unpleasant dramaturgy of implication in *Dark Noon*, specifically how it works through a complex play on non/identity between the actors, the spectators, and the characters of the performance.

### *Implicated Methodologies*

This article presents a performance analysis of Fix&Foxy’s *Dark Noon* (2019). The production was made in Copenhagen at the theatre Republique on the Revolver stage, where it also premiered. In 2021-2023, it toured venues in France, Germany, Spain, Denmark and UK, and in 2024 it visited Charleston and New York City in the USA. I experienced the performance in Aarhus, Denmark, in September 2022, where it was performed in a film studio in Filmbyen (“The Movie Town”), close to the industrial harbour. Immediately after the performance, I wrote down my main impressions, and I organized my first thoughts on the experience through a review I wrote for the Danish academic journal *Peripeti*.<sup>5</sup> I have subsequently revisited the performance by watching and re-watching a video recording made in 2019, supplementing my notes accordingly, and by reading reviews and academic articles on the performance. This analysis will focus on the dramaturgy of the staged performance.

The general purpose of the present analysis is founded on the broad hermeneutic tradition

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<sup>3</sup> Rothberg 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Szatkowski 2019, 10 – with reference to Peter Sloterdijk.

<sup>5</sup> Nielsen 2022.

that aims to produce understanding of complex cultural phenomena in their historical context and which warns against overconfidence in methodological procedure<sup>6</sup>. It is also grounded in a systems theoretical thinking that conceives of scientific effort as *observation of observations* and holds itself accountable for the distinctions that it reproduces in order to make observations.<sup>7</sup> Methodological rigour is then to account consistently for the applied distinctions and their motivations, and to mark their limitations. This epistemology also implies – in line with the current trend of new materialism – that the observer is not an abstract entity outside of the world, but situated, engaged, entangled in the network of phenomena that they are observing.

In context of the present topic, it is relevant to note that the authoring subject of this article is a White male in his early forties with a tenured position at a Danish University. I observe and participate from a position of privilege. My perspective is not representative of the general hybrid post-migrant European audience of the performance, and I refrain from making assumptions on how this performance can or should be interpreted from other positions that are no doubt present, but not directly available to me. I contend however that my position of privilege is not just an individual and special circumstance, but something that is directly encountered and challenged by the dramaturgy of this performance, and that the observation of this situation thus has relevance beyond being a methodological reservation. My focus on the concept of implication is generally motivated by the intuition that this concept can help to describe how theatre in a privileged corner of the world is trying to retain progressive political responsibility without denying its complex relations to the injustices that have been and still are conditions of its existence. How and to what extent this motivation is also grounded in the culture and biography of the authoring subject is perhaps less relevant at this point.

This analysis will take the form of an iterative meditation on the cultural significance of *Dark Noon*, progressing through different conceptual foci that correspond to the general

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<sup>6</sup> The main inspiration being Gadamer 2004 (1960), cf. e.g. Martin & Sauter 1995 for a theatre studies interpretation of this tradition.

<sup>7</sup> Nielsen 2011; Szatkowski 2019.

principles of the staging. Erika Fischer-Lichte defines staging as “the strategies used in advance to fix the time, duration, and manner of the appearance of people, things, and noises in a space”<sup>8</sup>, partly corresponding to the French term *mise-en-scène*, defined by Patrice Pavis as “a *synthetic* system of options and organizing principles (...)”.<sup>9</sup> An important phenomenological development of the term is offered by Martin Seel<sup>10</sup> who emphasizes that staging is an *Erscheinenlassen*; a process of letting-something-appear to an audience in a striking way. I will argue that the dominating staging principles of *Dark Noon* that let the implication of the audience come into appearance is: (1) the transformation of space as narrative, (2) the system of casting and gesture of “*white facing*”, (3) strictly framed audience participation, (4) live projection and “mediation of mediation”. These organizing principles are core structuring elements in the dramaturgy,<sup>11</sup> the “work of the work of actions”, of the performance.

I will address these four staging principles through the next three sections: First, I will give an elaborated account on the spatial dramaturgy of the performance. This also serves as an exposition to the reader. Secondly, I will account for the special type of displeasure produced by the performance through the significant casting concept and the specific framing of audience participation in the performance. Thirdly, I will address the complex interplay of media and modes of mediation in the performance. The performance is a “mediation of mediation”, a theatrical mediation of the cinematic mediation of the myth of The Wild West. In the final section, I will synthesize the observations of these staging principles on a poetological level in the light of, not least, Rothberg’s theory of the implicated subject, and discuss how one might distinguish Fix&Foxy’s dramaturgy of implication from a dramaturgy of emancipation.

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<sup>8</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2014, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Pavis 2003, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Seel 2015.

<sup>11</sup> I generally subscribe to the complex conception of dramaturgy developed in Szatkowski 2019, in which dramaturgy is conceived both as the dynamic structuring of the forms of communication in a theatrical practice that aligns modes of reception (aisthesis), modes of production (poiesis), and poietic values (Szatkowski 2019, 88), and as the theoretical reflection on such structuring processes. Playing on the etymology, dramaturgy is then the (reflection on) the “work of the work of actions”, a second order version of Eugenio Barba’s (1985) idea of dramaturgy as “actions at work”.



Figure 1: *Fix&Foxy*, Dark Noon. Photo: Søren Meisner / CC BY-4.

### *The Transformation of Space as Narrative*

The transformation of space (1) in this performance is not just something that accompanies the narrative (arguably, it seldom is), but rather a core structuring device and topic of the narrative. It structures the course of the performance on both a practical and a metaphorical level. The audience enters a sizable black box theatre space. The middle of the room is dominated by a very big square covered with orange dust. The square is surrounded on three sides with a few rows of seating for the audience. This places the audience very close to the acting space. A very big screen, placed above the fourth side of the square, announces the title of the performance in white letters. An ordered mess of inactivated scenographic objects is lined up against the wall under the screen: a costume rack, some furniture, and several unidentifiable wooden structures. The atmosphere is informal, but not without suspense. The buzz of arrivals makes the audience itself the first focus of the spectacle.

The opening scene is a pastiche over a well-known Western scene: the duel. The general



light is dimmed, leaving only one very big Fresnel lantern burning bright as the sun over the prairie. In the darkness, one of the actors (Joe Young) is whistling Ennio Morricone's famous tune from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966) into a microphone, as two actors (Mandla Gaduka and Siyambonga Alfred Mdubeki), wearing dusters and cowboy hats, slowly and silently enter the arena. A short stare down centre stage, while a fourth actor (Bongani Bennedict Masango) rolls across the scene like tumbleweed. In slow motion, with exaggerated big steps, the two cowboys move away from each other. They turn, draw, shoot: bang, bang. One falls. The big screen lights up, transmitting directly from a recording booth below. A fifth actor (Lilian Tshabalala) appears and speaks: "Once life was fragile, people lived by the law of the gun" and then she asks the actors to stand up and the audience to give a big round of applause to the "amazing South African actors" (Thulani Zwane and Katlego Kaygee Letsholonyana in addition to the five already mentioned). A playful atmosphere and the double fictional space – "The Western" + "The re-production of 'The Western'" – has been established.

The performance develops as they recount what they call "the myth of the Wild, Wild West" from the arrival of European immigrants to the present. Over the course of the performance, the space is filled with more and more constructions. On a fictional and metaphorical level, this represents the colonization of the American continent and the development of modern Western institutions. On a more literal level, the black box arena theatre is transformed into a combination of a film set and a performative installation. The action is structured by nine chapters, each marked by narrative interludes, audience applause, and titles on the screen. In the first two chapters, the stage is still bare while we are presented with the first wave of immigration from Europe (chapter 1) and the violent confiscation of land from the first nation people (chapter 2). After around half an hour, the first structure, marking a small hut – "The little house on the prairie" (chapter 3), is erected. This chapter also introduces the foundational premise of slavery.

The transformation of space accelerates with the discovery of gold (chapter 4). A mine is marked off at one end of the stage, and a railroad is assembled by "Chinese guest labourers"

across the space. The trolley placed on the railroad is soon utilized as a camera dolly. Chapter five adds a saloon to the space, marking the importance of pervasive intoxication, sexual abuse, and violence to this primitive civilization. In the following chapters (6, 7 and 8), further structures/institutions are erected: a church, a prison, and a bank. They serve as outward symbols of civilization, the taming of the wild, but they are soon revealed to be the continuation of intoxication, violence, and abuse through other means. At this point, the initial arena stage setting with its clear focus has dissolved into a chaotic multiplicity of spaces. Simultaneous action occurs across different locations of the set, reminiscent of the medieval principle of locus and platea. Audience members have been brought to the stage, serving as extras seen from those remaining on the outside, but also converting the space into something akin to a performative installation for the audience on the inside. The scenographic structures limit the point of view from all angles of the auditorium. Attention is split between the well-focused transmission to the big screen on the wall and the feverish action on the floor.

The final chapter returns to a kind of order by restoring a central perspective to the action, modelling something like a cathedral. At one end of the space, with his back to the big screen, an actor dressed in a Donald Trump-like orange wig and red tie controls the space behind a desk. From this throne of the Oval Office, he frantically and aggressively rambles: “We are the people, custodians of civilization. That is what we are!” At this point, a big part of the audience has been moved to benches in the middle of the space, as if they were sitting in the nave of a church turned towards the choir. The audience is clearly included in the “we”. A final break to the narrator projected on the screen, again Lilian Tshabalala, who announces “the end of the romance of the wild, wild west”. Blackout. The screen reads “The End”. Applause.

This is, however, only the end of the reproduction of the mythological Western. In an epilogue, with the stage and auditorium in darkness, each of the seven members of the cast appears on the screen by turn, projected from the recording booth below, where they give testimonies based on their personal experience of the Western movie and its cultural influence in South Africa. The testimonies focus on its direct relation to real violence and cultural



imperialism. The fun is over. The playful spirit of the performance was only ever a vehicle for the exposition of the lightness by which violence, racism, and oppression are turned into entertainment and – this is a main point of the testimonies – the lightness by which entertainment is turned into violence, racism and oppression.



Figure 2: *Fix&Foxy*, *Dark Noon*. Photo: Søren Meisner / CC BY-4.

### *Playful Displeasure*

As Laura Luise Schultz has pointed out, the “management of audience discomfort”<sup>12</sup> is a key aesthetic principle in many of Fix&Foxy’s works, including *Dark Noon*. With reference to Jacques Rancière’s proposition that the emancipated spectator is someone who is able to make their own interpretation in a “community of narrators and translators”,<sup>13</sup> Schultz argues that this aesthetic principle works particularly well in *Dark Noon* due to the openness towards a multiplicity of audience positions afforded by the work in comparison to some of their other

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<sup>12</sup> Schultz 2022.

works. However, Rancière's idea of intellectual emancipation reserves a generally more uncompromised position for the spectator, and by reading the performance through his perspective, I think we end up underestimating the trouble in which Fix&Foxy are placing the spectators.

I contend that the multiplicity of positions afforded by *Dark Noon* is precisely *not* due to a precondition of equality or interpretative openness, but rather due to the unequal relations of the participants towards the problems posed by the performance. The performance is assertive and unambiguous in its gestures towards our complicity in the reproduction of violence. The discomfort managed by *Dark Noon* is not just the unease caused by interpretative indeterminacy or by the graveness of the subject matter. It is the effect of the repeated production *and cancellation* of pleasure, and of the way the spectator is "cornered" as someone who cannot disengage or cut their ties to the matter represented on stage.

The main vehicle for this is the *system of the casting* (2) that is inseparably related to the initial gesture of *white facing*. Seven South African actors are performing a version of American mythology in the face of a primarily white European audience.<sup>14</sup> This triangulation of mythology, actors, and audience from three continents turns the table on the racist and colonialist material it reproduces. By appropriating and overturning the racist convention of black facing in front of the primarily (but not exclusively) white audience, in one single gesture the performance marks the contingency of racialization, recollects the history of racist entertainment, and casts the white members of the audience in an uncomfortable position of identification with the historical perpetrators. Nothing that happens on stage is unaffected by this premise.

The white facing gesture of the Black actors connects and confronts the White spectator with their implication in the legacy of racism. The blackface convention has a long history

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<sup>13</sup> Rancière 2009, 22.

<sup>14</sup> This is not the first time, Fix&Foxy use casting to implicate the audience in the topical problems of the performance. In one of their early performances, *Come on, Bangladesh, Just do it!* (2006), Fix&Foxy hired five actors from Bangladesh to play in the national romance *Elverhøi* (orig. 1828) at the Royal Danish Theatre. The money saved from the outsourcing was (allegedly) used to buy pizza and drinks for the audience.

but was popularised in New York minstrel performances in the 1830s, in which white actors blackened their faces with shoe polish or burnt cork and portrayed blacks as “lazy, ignorant, superstitious, hypersexual, and prone to thievery and cowardice”.<sup>15</sup> The convention has also been used in popular entertainment and commercial industry in Denmark even quite recently, for example in the Christmas TV shows for children, *Alletiders Julemand* (1997) and *Nissernes Ø* (2003). A Danish theatre audience would perhaps be reminded of the recent controversy caused by Madame Nielsen’s and Christian Lollike’s *Black Madonna* (2018), which critically re-appropriated the blackfacing gesture and was met with severe criticism for perpetuating racist practices<sup>16</sup>, despite its complex anti-racist statements.

In *Dark Noon*, the tables are turned on the white spectator. However, the triangulation of positions made possible by placing the mythos of The Western as an intermediary between the South African actors and the European audience prevents the distribution of roles in the theatrical situation of the performance from being stabilized in a simple victim-perpetrator configuration. Moreover, one of the South-African actors is white, and most likely more of the audience members will not be white (this was also the case the night I visited the performance). The us/them-distinction initially produced by the white-facing gestures dissolves into the mess of different actor and spectator “colours” and positions in the space. Our unequal and contingent positions in relation to the matter are made visible as a counterpoint to the reductive binary of coloured/white. This mess, I argue, is not the same as the *communitas* theorized by Victor Turner<sup>17</sup> and idealized by many avant-garde performance practitioners and adherents in which differences are temporarily dissolved. *Nor* is it the same as the equal community of narrators and spectators proposed by Rancière. It is a differentiated mess, a mess in which we are not free simply to pick our own position and interpretation as we want. We are faced with the faces of others, facing ourselves, and this facing of facing unfaces uncomfortable connections and differences.

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<sup>15</sup> *Smithsonian* n.d.

<sup>16</sup> The controversy was also related to the appropriation of racist language in the first version of the title of the performance.

<sup>17</sup> Turner 1982.

Still, the playful tone, the polite address of the narrators, the fast pace, the sensorial and semiotic richness of the performance, the humour of it all might deceive you. The performance is not unpleasant in the sense that it does not offer pleasure. Neither does it predominantly appeal to negative affects. It produces *dis*-pleasure in that it pleases in order to dismantle the mechanisms of pleasure. The dis-pleasure in this performance is a deconstruction of pleasure. This might sound more abstract than it is. The second chapter concerning the confiscation of land is framed like an American football match between “The Settlers” and “The Indians”. (The performance does highlight the derogatory colonial attitude in this nomenclature). One of the actors has taken a seat among the audience and is playing sports commentator together with a sparsely instructed audience member. Another actor is jumping around on the opposite side of the square in a cheerleader costume. In the middle of the stage, two teams of two actors represent the opposing sides in this gamified representation of the violent colonization of the American continent. The big screen alternates between a projection of the speed-talking commentator and his nervously smiling audience guest and the football game in the middle of the space. The game is choreographed mostly in slow motion, zooming in on the semi-violent interactions of the players and their comically distorted faces. The pulse of high trebled electronic music competes with the bawling voice of the commentator and the sound of cheers as “The Indians” increase their score. The points are counted in a computer game-like visual display at the top of the big screen. The energy of the scene culminates with a declaration of victory to “The Indians”. The audience all around seem captured by the playful energy of the performance, despite the dire referent of the game. Then a gunshot is heard. One of “the Indians” falls. A “Settler” is standing with a raised gun. Sudden silence, except for a few laughs in response to the surprising turn of events and the ridiculously slapstick character of the action. Then, the other “Indian” is shot by the “Settler”. “Ladies and gentlemen, the settlers have just gun-downed the natives” shouts the commentator. There is an awkward silence among the audience as “the Settlers” cheer for themselves. One of “the Indians” gets up but is immediately shot down again. This happens again. And again. And again. A few nervous laughs and coughs among the audience,

otherwise total silence. The vulgar comedy of the act clashes against the seriousness of the subject of representation. Furthermore, the audience is lured in and called out by the change in situation. The situation was about them the entire time: their pleasure in entertainment is dismantled and revealed as complicity in the re-production of violence as entertainment. “Are you still laughing now?!” is the silent subtext of the situation.

The displeasure is premised on the *strictly framed participatory* (3) theatrical situation that Fix&Foxy has become experts in utilizing actively and for specific purposes. In the example above, the audience are clearly participants in the reproduction of violence as entertainment, even while they remain in their seats as conventional theatre spectators. The participatory concept of Fix&Foxy’s theatre is not based on what Rancière calls the paradox of the spectator, the idea that “theatre is presented as a mediation striving for its own abolition”.<sup>18</sup> There is no attempt here to do away with the spectator. When the spectator is observed as an actor, the main “gain” is not the privilege of agency, but the burden of responsibility – even for actions for which they are not the direct cause. This is still the case when audience members are invited on stage as more than spectators.

In the third chapter, called “life on the prairie”, the actors call out for dancers in order to throw a party. A number of spectators from the first couple of rows are recruited. The men are given cowboy-hats and one of the actors leads the ensemble and the audience members through a line dance to happy cheers and applause from the rest of the audience. Afterwards, one of the dancing spectators is singled out as “the best dancer of the day” to the applause of the audience. They laugh when the actor starts complimenting the physicality of the spectator. Another actor makes a small black mark on the temple of this spectator, who is now the centre of attention. An initially odd and inconspicuous blackfacing gesture. The actor then starts the bidding at 10 dollars, and the spectator – along with several of the other dancers – are “sold” as slaves. People are still laughing and smiling as the Black, white-faced actors sell the White, blackfaced spectators on a fictional slave market. It is all done in a playful spirit; the turning

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<sup>18</sup> Rancière 2009, 7f.



point is surprising, and the irony of the situation is “funny”. But the irony has an unequivocal sting turned against the white members of the gathering. So, when Fix&Foxy bring the spectators on stage as actors, it is not in order to turn them into “active participants” or “spectactors” with the power to change anything. They are placed inside a configuration of action, where both their contribution to the immediate play of the performance and their historical entanglement with the subject of the performance becomes even more visible.



Figure 3: Fix&Foxy, Dark Noon. Photo: Søren Meisner / CC BY-4.

### *Mediation of Mediation*

As I have already indicated, the performance unfolds an explicit and complex engagement with media and mediation on both a thematic and formal level. Erik Exe Christoffersen has in several articles<sup>19</sup> used Richard Grusin and John David Bolter’s concept of *remediation*<sup>20</sup> to describe how Fix&Foxy, through their reproductions of movies and other popular fictions and

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<sup>19</sup> Most recently Christoffersen 2022.



through their use of cameras and live-projection, produce authenticity-effects. In a similar vein, one could point to Philip Auslander's theory on *liveness*<sup>21</sup>, challenging ontological distinctions between mediated and live performance and arguing that liveness is in this case produced as an authenticity-effect across media. Or, if one also wants to capture the intermedial dynamic on a content level, one could point to Henry Jenkins' theory of convergence culture,<sup>21</sup> which describes how media producers combine media to stay ahead of media users who are constantly chasing content across different media platforms in their search for entertaining experiences. These are pertinent perspectives, and the production of authenticity-effects through a shift between hypermediacy and immediacy are central to the dramaturgy of Fix&Foxy's work, as Christoffersen has repeatedly shown.

Still, if I agree with the flat ontology of these theories of liveness, remediation, and convergence, I also think they tend to flatten the analysis too much. They tend to de-politicize and de-differentiate their subject matter in order to argue for post-modern Man's promiscuous hunt for pleasure across media. Christoffersen is not blind to that. Like Schultz, he also points to the discomfort produced by the montage of the theatrical situation with the mediated realities, e.g. when he describes his participation as "nazi" in Fix&Foxy's *Viljens Triumf* (2012). I will argue that dis-pleasure is more integral to the mediation of mediation in Fix&Foxy's work than what can be grasped through the lenses of *remediation*, *liveness*, and *convergence*.

To be clear, by the *mediation of mediation* (4) in *Dark Noon* (2019) I refer to at least three specific aspects of the performance: (1) the reversal transformation of the film-studio to theatre space; (2) the technical mediation of events in the space on the screen through cameras and live projection; (3) the theatrical reproduction of a range of different media formats and tropes (e.g. the historical documentary, the sports programme, the spaghetti Western, the porn movie) as staging devices. The transformation of the space (1) is already described in an earlier section. What matters here is that neither the film studio nor the theatrical space presents itself as an

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<sup>20</sup> Bolter & Grusin 1999.

unmediated space. The theatre space (in the version I saw in Filmbyen) is already an adapted film studio to begin with, but even as the density of technological mediation and media references thickens during the performance, the space remains a theatrical mediation of these mediations. Within this performance, there is no time and place outside of mediation. Different mediations of mediations are what we have to deal with. But these differences make a difference!

A lot can be said about the use of cameras and projection (2) in *Dark Noon*. In the taxonomy of media projection effects suggested by Steve Dixon, we would be able to point out examples of all the categories of projection effects he labels.<sup>22</sup> With the remediation-perspective discussed above, we would place emphasis on what Dixon labels the “Synesthetic Pleasure Principle”; how the simultaneity of live action and live projection produce a satisfactory stimulation of sensations. Christoffersen<sup>23</sup>, coincidentally, also notes the disorienting effect this simultaneity has on the audience in combination with the audience participation.

For the present purpose however, the combination of the function Dixon calls “semiotics and politics” and the function he calls “ghost and doubles” are more relevant. The “semiotics and politics” function refers to the way the explicitly technical mediation of the body foregrounds the artificiality and mechanics of representation. Dixon aligns it with the Brechtian *Verfremdung-effekt*, and this heritage is also relevant here, if we take care not to assume too much about the special form of subjectivity produced by the distanciation. The “ghost and doubles” function concerns the uncanniness produced by displaying real-life bodies alongside their technical mediations, relativizing the presence or “a-liveness” of both. In the case of *Dark Noon*, it is worth noting that it is just as much the media that is doubled and re-presented by the actor’s bodies, as it is the actor’s bodies that are mediated by the technology. The artificiality and corruption of the media are revealed through the mediation of the technology in the space by the living bodies of the actors. Thus, the theatrical situation is haunted by the uncanny presence of ghosts such as the tropes and formats (3) of the spaghetti Western, the historical

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<sup>21</sup> Auslander 2008 (1999).

<sup>22</sup> Dixon 2019, 137.

<sup>23</sup> Christoffersen 2022.

documentary, the sports programme, the live reportage etc.

This mediation of mediation produces a critical media reflexivity that is comparable to Brechtian poetics, but is something else. It *does not* offer a distant position for the spectator on the outside of the spectacle from where a course of action can be contemplated. Quite the contrary, the mediation of mediation constantly reveals the impossibility of any place outside of the mediation. In this sense, the poetics of *Dark Noon* is post-epical. The question then is not how to become an active participant responsible for a solution to the problem posed by the play, as Brecht – and later Augusto Boal – would want it. Rather the question is how to untie yourself enough from the stream of action and mediation to be able to see clearly, even when you are figuratively and literally in the middle of the mess. And what do you see when you see clearly? You see *the form* of your own implication.

### *The Implicated Spectator and the Staging of Non/Identity*

What does it mean to be implicated? The etymology of the word implication goes back to the fifteenth century, when it derived from Latin (*implicationem*) and referred to the action or condition of being involved, entangled, or entwined in something. Today, it also carries connotations from its use in logic, where it refers to a relationship between two propositions, where one proposition is by necessity included (implied) in the other. It also carries the connotation that this involvement or entanglement might be tacit or indirect (implicit). It is closely related to, but not synonymous with, the concept of complicity in which the involvement is explicitly negatively loaded. Contemporary cultural theorists such as Sarah Ahmed,<sup>24</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva,<sup>25</sup> and Michael Rothberg have used and developed the term to describe the complex, asymmetrical, and often indirect relationships all of us have to global historical problems such as structural racism and sexism, colonialism, climate change, etc.

Within theatre studies, Maaïke Bleeker<sup>26</sup> has used the concept in relation to her analysis of the functions of spectatorship in the work of contemporary artists.

In this article I have persistently argued that the main staging principles of *Dark Noon* (2019) serve to implicate the spectator in the action of the performance and in the global and historical atrocities that make up the referential context of the performance. Our participation as spectators in the performance mediates our complex long term and long-distance participation in a world order created by colonialism and turned into forms of entertainment, which perpetuates structures of colonial oppression under the guise of innocent pleasure. The performance does not equalize the positions of this participation, neither on a performance or historical level. The point is exactly that our positions in these structures are culturally and historically differentiated. Some are beneficiaries and perpetrators of these structures, others struggle against them, many perhaps do both. The interpellation of the performance is the unpleasant question it asks each of us: how are *you* implicated in this?!

In his book, *The Implicated Subject*, to which the present analysis owes a lot, Rothberg takes a lot of care to distinguish between complicity and implication in order to “move beyond victims and perpetrators” as the subtitle of his book states. “Yet, despite the important work undertaken with the concept of complicity, I suggest that implication is both a more capacious and a more fundamental term for describing the forms of indirect participation illuminated here in the book. Complicity presupposes implication, but implication does not always involve complicity”.<sup>27</sup> For Rothberg, this distinction serves to clear the way for more nuanced and differentiated discussions of the way the positions that we inherit from history are reflected in art and literature and to point to forms of responsibility and solidarity that do not confine us to the rather narrow roles of victims or perpetrators. I sympathize with that, but I also find it worth emphasizing that complicity is still an aspect of implication, and the line between the two is not always clear. The point is not to get us out of trouble, but to get us out of binaries that are petrifying for all parties.

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<sup>26</sup> Bleeker 2023. I have also been very inspired by a lecture Bleeker gave in October 2021 at Aarhus University with the title “On Being Implicated”.

<sup>27</sup> Rothberg 2019, 13.

In *Dark Noon*, the triangulation between the South African cast, the American fabula, and the European audience, and the playful appropriation of blackfacing does exactly that. Imagine if the performance had instead explored the colonization of Africa or if the cast had been European actors. The first situation would have solidified a simple binary between the audience as perpetrators and the cast as victims. The second would potentially create a communion of “white penitents” who would savour in confronting the sins of their forefathers, elevating them above both victims and real perpetrators outside of the theatre. Much less would be at stake. As Sarah Ahmed points out, “[a]ssuming one’s criticality can be a way of not admitting one’s complicity. I think complicity is a *starting point*. We are implicated in the worlds that we critique; being critical does not suspend any such implication”.<sup>28</sup>

In this way, the poetics of *the implicated spectator* breaks with the poetics of *the emancipated spectator*. It does not build on the idea of transforming the audience from one state (passive) to another (active), but neither does it start from Ranciere’s presupposition of equality. It turns the activity, reflection, and history of the audience towards itself as someone who is always already the audience *and* participant. This reflexivity is not in itself an emancipatory gesture; it reveals how we are tainted by our roles as participants and spectators in the world. Transformation is irrelevant, and presupposing equality of intelligence is insufficient. Reflection on forms of implication is all.

In *Dark Noon*, the form of implication is directly based on the forms of identification. Do I identify with the White Man or with the Black Actors? This is not just a question of individual choice or an effect of the psychological construction of the characters. It depends on the way that forms of identity and non-identity between the performers, the audience, and the characters of the fabula are *staged, how they come* into appearance and are made observable. Seen from the perspective of the European white spectator: I am not The White Man, the American, the perpetrator of the story and of history. I am also not *not* the White Man; it all points back to Europe, and I cannot completely disentangle from his heritage. I, the white spectator, am also

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<sup>28</sup> Ahmed 2013.

not the Black performer, the enactor of the story, the stand-ins for the victims of history. Neither am I not *not* the performer; the staging makes me feel part of a kind of “we”, and we are in this together. Rothberg would probably favour these calls to responsibility and solidarity.

The “not not” formula is well known in the tradition of theatre theory, perhaps especially through Richard Schechner’s formulation of acting as restored behaviour, “Olivier is not Hamlet, but he is also not not Hamlet”.<sup>29</sup> Here, I would rather invoke Jacques Derrida’s idea of inescapable repetition, the impossibility of pure identity and presence, which he presents through a critique of Artaud in *Writing and Difference*.<sup>30</sup> Dark Noon clearly does not aim to realize Artaud’s vision of a theatre of pure presence. It stages the representation of representation, it produces an excess of representation, both in the German sense of Darstellen and Vertreten. What becomes present through this excess of representation, is what Derrida calls the “closure of representation”: “Closure is the circular limit within which the repetition of difference infinitely repeats itself”.<sup>31</sup> In light of this, Dark Noon does not move beyond the binary of victims and perpetrators criticized by Rothberg in order to create a common safe ground. Instead, the identity and non-identity between the white spectator and the white perpetrator are infinitely repeated. This deconstruction of identity is not a postmodern declaration of freedom from “grand narratives”, including History or Representation. Quite the opposite, it reveals the impossibility of escaping History and the systems of representation that we are always already implicated in. At the same time, the gesture towards the possibility of displacing one difference with another, black facing with white facing, makes new forms of non/identity available in the perpetual closure of representation. If an emancipatory gesture remains in the dramaturgy of Dark Noon, this is where it is to be found.

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<sup>29</sup> Schechner 1985, 110.

<sup>30</sup> Derrida 2001 (1967).

<sup>31</sup> Derrida 2001 (1967), 316.



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### *Performances*

*Black Madonna*. Sort/Hvid. Script: Madame Nielsen. Director: Christian Lollike. Performed 30.4 – 19.5.2018 at Sort/Hvid, Copenhagen.

*Come on, Bangladesh, Just do it!* Fix&Foxy and Royal Danish Theatre. Director: Tue Biering. Text: Jeppe Kristensen. Performed 3.3 – 13.5.2006. Turbinehallerne, Copenhagen.

*Dark Noon*. Fix&Foxy. Director and scriptwriter: Tue Biering. Co-director and choreographer: Nhlanhla Mahlangu. Set designer: Johan Kølckjær. Sound designer: Ditlev Brinth. Light designer: Christoffer Gulløv. Props designer: Marie Rosendahl Chemnitz. Cast: Bongani Bennedict Masango, Joe Young, Lillian Tshabalala, Mandla Gaduka, Siyambonga Alfred Mdubeki, Katlego Kaygee Letsholonyana and Thulani Zwane. First performed 11.5 – 1.6.2019 at Revolver at Republique, Copenhagen.

*Viljens Triumf [Triumph of the Will]*. Fix&Foxy. Directors: Tue Biering and Jeppe Kristensen. Performed 1 – 20.11.2012. Old factory building in Copenhagen.