

received, the policeman kept half of these for himself, and gave the other half to the human pyramid which had produced it. Opposite, in the line, men and women awaited their turn to join the pyramid, to start working, to get half the crumbs of the loaf. (For more examples of Image Theatre, see pp. 164-201.)

## FIRST EXPERIENCES WITH INVISIBLE THEATRE

One point must be clearly understood: Invisible Theatre is theatre; it must have a text with a scripted core, which will inevitably be modified, according to the circumstances, to suit the interventions of the spect-actors.

The chosen subject must be an issue of burning importance, something known to be a matter of profound and genuine concern for the future spect-actors. From that starting point, a small play is constructed. The actors must play their parts as if they were playing in a traditional theatre, for a traditional audience. However, when the play is ready, it will be performed in a place which is not a theatre and for an audience which is not an audience. In the course of our European experiences, we did shows in the Paris Métro, in ferries, in the restaurants and streets of Stockholm, and even on a stage, in a theatre where a conference was taking place.

I repeat again: in the Invisible Theatre, the actors must perform just like real actors; that is, they must live.

### Examples of Invisible Theatre

#### 1 Sexual harassment

This invisible play was performed three times in the Métro in Paris, on the Vincennes-Neuilly line. Our chosen theatre was always the last carriage before the first-class section, in the middle of the train.

##### 1st action

The group (apart from two actors) got on at the first stop; the scene-setting took place at the second. Two female actors remained standing near the central doors; one actor, the Female Victim, sat down, with the Tunisian on the next-door seat, the Mother and Son a little further away, and the other actors scattered around the carriage. Through two stations, nothing abnormal took place; they all read the papers or engaged in minimal conversation with the other passengers, etc.

#### 2nd action

At the third station, another actor, the Male Aggressor, got on board. He sat down opposite the Female Victim, or, if the seat was taken, stood beside her. After a little while, he started nudging his leg against the young woman's, and she immediately began to protest. The Aggressor said he hadn't done anything, it was an accident. On no occasion did a single passenger ever defend the young woman. After a short interval, the Aggressor returned to his task, and this time didn't stop at leaning his leg against the young woman's, but openly placed his hand on her thigh. The latter became indignant, but no one backed her up. She got up and crossed to the other side of the compartment, where she remained standing. The Tunisian grasped the opportunity to stick up for ... the Aggressor. That concluded the second action.

#### 3rd action

At the fifth station, the Male Victim got on, a very handsome young actor, the best-looking man in our group (- we were no James Deans!). He had barely entered before the two women by the doors, the Feminist and her Female Friend, started airing various opinions on this young man's good looks. After a bit, the Feminist addressed the Male Victim, asking him the time. He answered. She asked him which station he was getting off at. He objected:

Look, what's with the questions? Have I asked you anything, have I asked you what station you are getting off at?

If you had asked me, I would have told you: I'm getting off at République, and if you'd like to get off at the same place, we could 'get off' together.

As she spoke she caressed him, under the outraged stares of the passengers (who must have had some difficulty believing this unusual scene). The young man tried to escape her clutches, but she hung on to him:

Are you aware that you're a very handsome man? Do you know, I have this terrible urge to kiss you ...

The young man tried to flee, but he was hemmed in between the Feminist and her Friend, who were loudly asserting their right to kiss

him. And this time the passengers did make a stand ... against the women.

Several passengers had already intervened directly in the action. The Male Aggressor had leapt to the defence of the Male Victim. The Female Victim had taken sides with the Feminist, explaining that when she herself had been assaulted a few moments earlier, no one had defended her, and that if a man had the right to assault a woman, a woman must also have the right to lay hands on a man she found attractive.

#### 4th action

The Female Victim, the Feminist and her Friend together tried to attack the Male Aggressor, threatening to strip him naked as a punishment, but he disappeared. The other actors stayed in the carriage to listen to what the passengers said, and also to direct the conversations gently on to the barbarity of sexual harassment on the Paris Métro or anywhere else for that matter.

In order to be sure that the whole carriage would know what was going on, the Mother asked her Son what it was all about. The boy watched, and delivered a vocal commentary (in such a way that everyone could hear) thus 'broadcasting' the action unfolding further away.

In the course of these scenes, there were some delicious episodes. For example, the old lady who exclaimed:

She's absolutely right – that young man really is rather handsome.

Or the man who vehemently defended the male's 'right':

It's the law of nature; that's the way men are, and there's no getting away from it.

For him, male advances were a law of nature, but the same gestures made by a woman were an aberration. Worse still, another man added that when a woman is sexually assaulted, it is because she has 'done something' – it's always the woman's fault!

One of the two men defending this strange theory was sitting right next to his wife at the time. The Tunisian didn't waste this opportunity:

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D'you think so? Do you think that men have the right to touch up women in the Métro?

Yes, I do – they provoke us!

Then if you'll excuse me, that's exactly what I was about to do to your wife.

And he made as if to caress her.

We were within a hair's-breadth of a fight! The Tunisian had to make his excuses and get off before the intended stop.

At one of the 'performances' of this piece, there was such a great commotion that the Métro stopped at the next station and all the passengers came to watch. But the actors in the spotlight (the first Aggressor, the Female Victim, the Feminist and her Friend) hadn't bargained for the tube train stopping, they had only prepared their script as far as the station – thus they had to improvise for a good five minutes, without any preconceived plan, with the spectators/passengers urging the women to go ahead and strip the Aggressor ...

In this scene, the theme of the piece was clear enough: neither men nor women have the right to sexually harass anyone. However, for this piece to have a political dimension, fifty groups would have to play it five hundred times! In such circumstances, perhaps abuses of this kind would cease or at least become less frequent, and perhaps the aggressors might worry about the possibility of becoming victims of aggression themselves.

#### 2 *Queen Silvia's baby*

During the Skeppsholm Festival in Stockholm, I worked with several mixed groups of actors and spect-actors. I told them all about the Parisian experience, and they wanted to do some Invisible Theatre in the Métro themselves. We prepared a number of scenes, and chose 10 July 1977 as our 'opening day', a day on which several plays were to be performed in the festival.

But the news spread quickly; though we were rehearsing in 'workshop groups' (each being limited to thirty people), a number of people knew what we were planning. The result was that the next morning, the *Svenska Dagbladet*, one of the leading Swedish newspapers, published my photograph with an enormous headline announcing the 'première' of the Invisible Theatre in the Stockholm Métro, and

advising passengers not to let themselves be caught unawares by this new form of theatre.

We decided to change 'theatres'. Stockholm (Stock-holm, island of piles) is an archipelago – fourteen islands in the centre, and more than 24,000 in all. The ferry-boats are an important and efficient means of transport. So we decided to perform in a ferry-boat.

It was around this time that Queen Silvia's baby was due to be born. The group told me that there was a general feeling of discontent about the cost of the renovation of the hospital where 'the prince' – it turned out to be a princess – was to be born; four doctors had been assigned full-time to watching and attending the royal confinement! The Swedish National Health Service may well be one of the best in the world, but many Swedes still complain of shortcomings in that area.

#### 1st action

A young Pregnant Woman (complete with false belly) chats to a Female Friend and tells of her great admiration for Queen Silvia and her anxious wait for the birth of the heir to the throne. An actor, in the guise of a Random Passenger, doesn't agree and says so. Various details about the costs come out, the salaries, the advantages of the royal family, republic versus royalty, medicine and socialism, etc.

#### 2nd action

The young Pregnant Woman feels the onset of labour pains. Immediately an actor playing the part of a Doctor appears and offers his services to help her. She refuses his help:

So where have you suddenly appeared from, Doctor?

I'm on my way back from the hospital. I have been working there all night. I have already attended five births today, and as far as I'm concerned, one more birth is no big deal –

That's precisely why I don't want your help. When I had my first child the doctor who looked after me was so tired that he ended up doing an unnecessary Caesarean on me, just because he wanted to finish as quickly as possible and didn't want to wait around. [I should say in passing that this had really happened to the 'pregnant' actress.] This time I want the person who takes care of me to be one of the Queen's four doctors – you know,

the lot who have been waiting around there for the past several weeks, they'll be well rested by now. Who'll take me there? I want someone to take me to one of the Queen's four doctors.

The scene carried on, and the actors argued with the passengers about the Swedish hospital system, which was the subject of the piece. At least half of the passengers joined in the discussion; the other half followed the debate attentively.

#### 3rd action

On the Djurgården-Slussen line, the journey takes seven minutes, which was exactly the duration of the 'show'. By the time the boat docked, the crew had already warned the hospital by radio, and there was an ambulance waiting for our Pregnant Woman. As the actors had foreseen this eventually, we also had a car at our disposal and the young woman refused the ambulance and set off in the company of her friends while the discussion continued on the quayside.

#### 3 *Racism I: the Greek*

This piece was played in two different restaurants, both open-air establishments. The theme, put forward by the actors, was obviously of enormous importance in Sweden, where there is considerable prejudice against foreigners. 'Dog's Eye' is an epithet applied to anyone whose eyes are not blue (in a country where the majority of the indigenous population do have blue eyes).

#### 1st action

The Wife and the Husband are seated together at a table, loudly engaged in argument. She tells him off for being too fond of (other) women, for not helping with the household chores, not taking enough interest in their son, etc. He tries to assert his 'man's rights'.

#### 2nd action

A young woman, the Husband's Mistress, comes in and sits down at another table. The Husband leaves his Wife on her own, in spite of her protests, and goes to sit with his mistress. An amorous dialogue ensues.

## GAMES FOR ACTORS AND NON-ACTORS

### 3rd action

Enter a young Greek man, who looks for a place to sit. The Wife invites him to sit next to her. To his astonishment, the Wife tries to seduce him.

### 4th action

The Husband sees that his Wife has company, he returns to her side and tries to get rid of the Greek. He attacks him on grounds of nationality. The Wife insists on the Greek staying with her. The waiter is forced to intervene, because the Husband asks him to throw the Greek out of the restaurant, and the Wife asks him to throw her Husband out. General argument. The Husband's rage is based not on the fact that his Wife is with another man, but that this man is ... a Greek. And he proclaims this fact to the assembled company.

On the two occasions on which this scene was performed, the public's participation was full-blooded. The second time, I was sitting next to a Swedish journalist covering the story. At a table some distance away were some of her friends. According to her, they were all self-proclaimed anti-racists. And now this racist scene was being played out in front of them, it was happening right there and then. And yet the only ones who didn't want to join in were these friends of the journalist. They were the exception – the argument was intense. Racism was not the only topic under discussion, but also a married woman's right to get her own back on her husband.

### 4 *Racism II: the black woman*

This piece was performed on a ferry-boat.

### 1st action

The group once again took the Slussen boat, but this time in the opposite direction, towards Djurgården, which is the zoological garden. The boat was packed. This was the most explosive of the Skeppsholm shows, the most violent show and also the one which provoked the most spirited reactions.

As the first move, a Black Woman actor takes a seat positioning herself strategically in a visible spot. An Italian man, a male Office

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Worker and a female Drunkard all sit or stand a little distance away. The Drunkard (an excellent actor) was one of the first people on board. Can of beer in hand, she solemnly greets every passenger who enters. She chats amiably to some, provokes others and generally outrages most with her behaviour.

### 2nd action

The boat leaves. After a few moments, the Italian approaches the young Black Woman and asks her what she's doing there; she, a black girl, is sitting, and he, a white man, is standing. Violent argument about racial rights. The angry Black Woman gets up and the Italian sits; he starts reading an Italian newspaper. The Drunkard, who has witnessed the scene along with everyone else, approaches the Italian.

### 3rd action

The Drunkard insists that the Italian get up and give her his place.

You said that this was a land for whites – fair enough, this is a land for whites, white Swedes; and you're Italian. Get out of that seat.

Further discussion on countries of origin, races and the rights of man. Finally the Italian leaves.

### 4th action

The Office Worker approaches the Drunkard. He insists that she get up and give him her place, because Swedish she may be, but she is also drunk and unproductive, and, in his book, the priority for seated accommodation is not solely a question of race and nationality but also of class: he is white, Swedish and a white-collar worker. General revolt.

The cumulative effect was extraordinary. A crowd of people defended the Drunkard, all arguing at once, for and against relative differences in rights for different nationalities, races or classes.

## GAMES FOR ACTORS AND NON-ACTORS

### 5th action

An actor pretends to convince the young Black Woman to return to her place. She refuses the 'charity'. Different actors seated around the place stand up to argue against prejudice, and each cites a reason: 'I am standing up because I am Brazilian!' 'I am standing because I am Indian!' 'I am standing because I am poor', etc.

The result was incredible and wonderful. Quite apart from the effectiveness of the discussion, it was amazing to see so many empty seats, vacated in token of protest, in spite of the fact that the boat was crowded and everyone was cramped.

After the show, the actor who took the role of the Office Worker, a professional with a long career behind him, told me that he had never been so nervous at an opening night, he had never been so terrified. But he also acknowledged that he had rarely been so glad to take part in a show.

### 5 Picnic in the streets of Stockholm

I have lived in São Paulo in Brazil for fifteen years. There the streets are right on top of each other, which means that people who live on the third floor sometimes have car exhaust pipes level with their windows; those who live on the first or second floor see cars moving around above them. That's why for me Stockholm is a nice city. But it's not the same for the people who live there. They say that the city was planned for cars and not for pedestrians. So they chose this as their theme and mounted the following play.

#### 1st action

A Family (Father, Mother, Son, Daughter) set out a table, complete with flowers, cups, a Thermos of tea, biscuits, etc., right in the middle of the pavement, and they start having tea. Three car-loads of actors park nearby and watch.

#### 2nd action

Two actors take the role of Passers-by; they grumble, saying that the pavement was made for people to walk on and not for people to set up tables and have tea on. The Family, after a short discussion, gives in.

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Since we can't have tea on the pavement, which is intended for pedestrians, let's have it in the middle of the road.

#### 3rd action

The three cars move off together and the Family signal them to stop; the three cars stop. They block the road, bringing the traffic to a complete standstill. The Family set out their table, flowers, cups, Thermos flask and biscuits, in the middle of the road, and take tea, with an utterly British imperturbability. The actors in the three cars act like normal drivers and remonstrate with the Family; as far as they're concerned the road was made for cars and not as a place for families to have tea.

#### 4th action

A sort of contest develops between the Family and the Drivers, both parties trying to convince the spect-actors to support their cause.

In a matter of minutes, the road was chock-a-block with buses, taxis, cars, mopeds, all hooting their horns. The actors tried to persuade them to take tea with them. Some accepted. Others got annoyed:

Why don't you go and have tea at home?

Because we haven't got such a nice car as you. Because we haven't got time; we only have an hour's break from work, we work in Stockholm and live in Salsjöbaden, which is nearly an hour from here! Because ... etc.

The arguments raged. The actors were fired with enthusiasm and went on to improvise well beyond the bounds of their prepared text. As a result of the marvellous response from the spect-actors, the improvisation went on a further quarter of an hour, which is a very long time for this kind of theatrical event and in circumstances such as these. The arguments came thick and fast ... right up until the arrival of the police.

#### An unrehearsed action: the Police

Invisible Theatre almost always comes up against an important problem; safety. Invisible Theatre offers scenes of fiction. But without the mitigating effects of the rites of conventional theatre, this fiction becomes reality. *Invisible Theatre is not realism; it is reality.*

And everything that happens, happens in reality: a young woman kissing a boy in the Métro in Paris, an expectant mother feeling labour pains in a Stockholm ferry-boat, a black girl driven from her seat, a Greek man arguing with a Swedish husband over his wife, a family taking tea in the middle of the road – all this is reality, even though it has been rehearsed.

The family was a real family, the tea and toast were real tea and real toast – and the police who turned up were also real. They arrived with two cars and a police van. The Stockholm police have installed a network of television cameras, so that the strategic points of the town are continually under the surveillance of these invisible eyes. And the Invisible Theatre had been seen by these invisible cameras connected to the police's invisible headquarters ...

Had the scene run its intended course, the protagonists of the play would by this time have packed their bags and departed peacefully, 'with the Lord's blessing'. But as a result of the enthusiasm of both actors and spect-actors (who even went as far as forming a circle and dancing to the rhythm of the bus and taxi horns) the police had time to make their spectacular entry. The sergeant wanted to arrest 'the actors'; but how could he work out who was an actor and who wasn't? So he decided that everyone touching any part of the set (sitting on a chair, holding a cup of tea, or even eating a piece of cake) was an actor. Several actors were arrested – including a few charming ladies who were just passing by – and had their records checked over the radio. As they were not on a wanted list, they were immediately freed again.

One should never explain to the public that Invisible Theatre is theatre, lest it lose its impact. However, in this particular case, we had no option but to explain to the police. But I have a feeling that they still didn't really understand ...

### 6 *The audience's children*

For my last lecture at the festival, there were some 700 adults and at least 50 unruly children. In Sweden there is an incredibly tolerant attitude towards children; they're allowed to do whatever they like. In the course of the performances, there were occasions when they got on to the stage and, during a musical, even spoke into the microphone; nothing ever happened to them, not even the smallest reprimand.

In this last lecture, my task was to explain what Invisible Theatre

was, and to describe the pieces we had done. But the actors had a better idea; they prepared an Invisible Theatre scene about children. The result was fantastic.

#### 1st action

The actors were scattered throughout the audience. We arranged that when I was going to talk about Invisible Theatre, I would give a signal by putting my hands on my head. The moment came, I put my hands on my head. One of the actors stood up and proposed in Swedish (the conference was being held in English) that the children be removed from the room because not a single word of what I was saying could be heard, and this was annoying for the other people present.

#### 2nd action

A female actor defended the children and their right to participate in the conference even if they couldn't understand it. A male actor tried to eject a child from the room, another caught hold of the child and tried to stop him being ejected. From various parts of the room chunks of prepared dialogue were delivered, blending in with the audience's spontaneous interventions. I asked in English what was happening. Here once again was a situation which was explosive, a situation which involved the participation of everyone in the theatre.

#### 3rd action

At another signal given by me, all the actors got on stage at the same time, and I invited them to take a bow to the audience, just like in a conventional theatre. It was only at this moment that the audience realised that they had been involved in an Invisible Theatre scene. And it was then that they understood what Invisible Theatre is. There was no need to say any more ...

### FORUM THEATRE

In Invisible Theatre the spectator is transformed into a protagonist in the action, a spect-actor, without ever being aware of it. He is the protagonist of the reality he sees, because he is unaware of its fictitious origin.