

NTGent

WHY THEATRE?



The Golden Books are a joint project by NTGent and the Berlin publisher Verbrecher Verlag. It is a series on theatre, aesthetics and politics as well as background pieces on projects by NTGent. A series on both the theory and the practice of an engaged theatre of the future.

For the 5th volume, after months of cultural lockdown, when live arts were in a state of emergency and the whole institution rethought their priorities, NTGent asked more than 100 of the most influential artists and intellectuals in the world the question: *Why theatre?* Why is this art form so unique, so beautiful, so indispensable? From classical theatre to performance art and dance, from activism to political theatre and the performativity of everyday life, authors of all continents and generations delivered short essays, memories, manifestos, letters. Moments of aesthetic epiphany meet strong emotion, critical insights into the problems of representation and populism compete with utopian texts about the theatre of the future: more than 100 voices about the state of performing arts in 2020.

WHY THEATRE?

NTGENT, GOLDEN BOOK V
EDITED BY KAATJE DE GEEST,
CARMEN HORNPOSTEL AND MILO RAU

Why Theatre? – Golden Book V
Published by NTGent

© NTGent 2020

Published by Verbrecher Verlag, Berlin.

© Verbrecher Verlag 2020

Proofreading: Eline Banken, Kaatje De Geest, Carmen Hornbostel,

Lesley Van Damme, Sophie Vanden Broeck

Layout: Nina Wolters

ISBN PDF: 978-3-95732-469-6

ISBN Print: 978-3-95732-458-0

NTGent

WHY
THEATRE?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	15
001 A constant journey of doubt and experimentation	
Mohammad Al Attar	16
002 Things I would miss	
Lola Arias	20
003 Theatre as a spiritual path	
Hector Aristizábal	22
004 The Lion King	
Back to Back Theatre	26
005 The Think Tank Theatre	
Yael Bartana	30
006 The same air	
Vincent Baudriller	34
007 Saving the world	
Jérôme Bel	36
008 Theatre humain	
Chokri Ben Chikha (Action Zoo Humain)	40
009 Why oh why?	
Bread and Puppet Theatre	44
010 Art is not about producing, it's about implementing	
Tania Bruguera	46
011 Suspension of disbelief	
Luanda Casella	48
012 The art of those who dare	
Nora Chipaumire	52
013 On vulgar acting	
Benny Claessens	54
014 About wild capitalism & its patriarchal performance in our lives	
Colectivo LASTESIS	58
015 Home	
Kelly Copper (Nature Theatre of Oklahoma)	62
016 A letter to dance	
Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker	66

017 I was theatre, but theatre was never me	
Mihaela Drăgan	70
018 "All the world's a stage," (really?)	
Radha D'Souza	72
019 Re: Theatre does not entertain me	
Tania El Khoury	74
020 Dinner is served	
Nicoleta Esinencu	76
021 Not even the dead will be safe if the enemy wins	
Douglas Estevam (MST)	84
022 One day we will all be free	
Tim Etchells (Forced Entertainment)	86
023 Sustaining the sky	
Cibele Forjaz	88
024 On theatre, absence, disappearance and bodies	
Oliver Frlić	92
025 You know you want it!	
Gob Squad	96
026 It has eaten up all the others	
Julien Gosselin	100
027 Together in the dark	
Sébastien Hendrickx (Extinction Rebellion)	102
028 For a life in action	
Florentina Holzinger	106
029 Living in theatre	
Hsin-Chien Huang	108
030 Need I say more?	
Isabelle Huppert	110
031 Wet dreams	
Manuela Infante	112
032 When we still do not know what theatre is	
Christiane Jatahy	116
033 Whatever you do is theatre	
Jojo & Joyee (House of Muchness)	120
034 Stop pretending	
John Jordan	122

035 Because	
Stefan Kaegi (Rimini Protokoll)	126
036 A is not. Any more than B.	
Alexander Karschnia (andcompany&Co.).....	129
037 The infinite game of becoming	
Susanne Kennedy	132
038 The less good idea	
William Kentridge.....	136
039 Never becoming the concrete answer	
Amir Reza Koohestani	138
040 Our opera is a body, is a vessel, is a village	
Aino Laberenz	142
041 Born from the inside out	
Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui.....	144
042 Embodiment	
Ursina Lardi.....	146
043 I need company	
Jan Lauwers (Needcompany).....	148
044 Let us be invaded	
Marco Layera	152
045 Theatre belongs in a museum	
James Leadbitter (The Vacuum Cleaner).....	156
046 Why sea stars?	
Frie Leysen	158
047 About the ineffable: the mystical conception	
Angélica Liddell	160
048 Laboratories of the future	
Matthias Lilienthal	162
049 The suspension of freedom	
Édouard Louis.....	166
050 Theatre as assembly	
Florian Malzacher.....	170
051 Creating a climate of change	
Katie Mitchell.....	174
052 Forever changes	
Sanja Mitrović.....	178

053 A sort of genesis	
Ariane Mnouchkine	180
054 Technicians of Dionysus	
Ermanna Montanari & Marco Martinelli (Teatro Delle Albe)	184
055 Excursus	
Maia Morgenstern	188
056 The role of theatre in the struggle against neoliberal hegemony	
Chantal Mouffe.....	192
057 There will always be theatre	
Yolanda Mpelé	196
058 Between here and here	
Rabih Mroué	198
059 Exile and territory	
Kornel Mundruczó	200
060 Why as a responsibility to awe	
Ogutu Muraya.....	202
061 Second exit after the soul	
Nganji Mutiri.....	206
062 Theatre, because freedom	
Jeton Neziraj.....	212
063 Hello darkness	
Daniela Nicolò & Enrico Casagrande (MOTUS).....	214
064 Theatre of vulnerability	
Boris Nikitin.....	218
065 Why water	
Mamela Nyamza.....	222
066 Dear grandma,	
Markus Öhrn	226
067 Fiction coming to life and intercontextualisation	
Toshiki Okada.....	230
068 We sit as an audience in the now	
Suzanne Osten.....	234
069 States of emergency	
Thomas Ostermeier	236
070 Like breathing	
Bouchra Ouizguen.....	238

071	The grass is greener on the stage	
	Lies Pauwels	240
072	For God's sake why?	
	Luk Perceval	244
073	Nurture the audacity	
	Alain Platel	248
074	This is a recording	
	René Pollesch	252
075	Thinking of the end of the world in costume by the sea	
	Philippe Quesne	254
076	Indispensable ritual	
	Mokhallad Rasem	256
077	Theatre is a place of truth	
	Milo Rau	262
078	Put on another show	
	Falk Richter	264
079	To stay in life	
	Tiago Rodrigues	268
080	The curtain should rise on the right side	
	Kathrin Röggla	270
081	Piece of evidence	
	Pia Maria Roll & Hanan Benammar	274
082	Believing before seeing	
	Didier Ruiz	278
083	Creating a new world	
	Amir Sabra (Stereo48)	280
084	Why art, why now, why ever?	
	Farah Saleh	282
085	In closed spaces	
	Fabian Scheidler	284
086	Why, honey?	
	Dennis Seidel	286
087	Antibodies against lies	
	Kirill Serebrennikov	290
088	Slowly getting high	
	She She Pop	294

089	For as long as I can remember, I've been performing	
	Buhlebezwe Siwani.....	298
090	Lack of guarantee	
	Mårten Spångberg.....	300
091	Half world	
	Veit Sprenger (Showcase Beat Le Mot).....	304
092	Towards emancipatory performance	
	Lara & Jonas Staal.....	308
093	Ghost choirs	
	Botho Strauß.....	314
094	We got it all wrong	
	Tea Tupajić.....	316
095	Some call it universe, I call it theatre	
	Carole Umulinga Karemera.....	318
096	Confusionists	
	Igor Vamos (Yes Men).....	322
097	Art is a human right	
	Ivo van Hove.....	326
098	A world that needs ceaseless reconstruction	
	Gisèle Vienne.....	330
099	The condition of community	
	Dmitry Vilensky (Chto Delat).....	334
100	The fifth wall	
	Marc-Antoine Vumilia.....	336
101	Everything is open	
	Sasha Waltz.....	340
102	Why not	
	Miet Warlop.....	350
103	Tough love	
	Joanna Warsza.....	352
104	Incomprehensibility	
	Apichatpong Weerasethakul.....	356
105	Escalation!	
	Zentrum für politische Schönheit.....	358
106	The art of unmasking	
	Dominique Ziegler.....	360

EDITORIAL

Why theatre? We can't ask ourselves a more basic question than that and at the same time no question is harder to give an answer to. Why do we make theatre? What purpose does it have or does it even need to have a purpose? Usually, the answers are given by the making of theatre itself – but suddenly we find ourselves in a situation that has shaken up our ways of searching for the answers. In March 2020, NTGent was closed for an unknown period of time, like most theatres all over the world, due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

So we wrote the following letter to more than 100 artists and intellectuals all over the world:

“Dear friends,

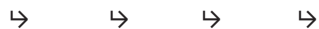
In times when theatre and performance as live art are in a state of emergency and societies rethink necessities, we ask you: Why theatre? For two years now, we have been publishing the series ‘The Golden Books’ at NTGent, together with the Berlin based publisher Verbrecher Verlag: books on the theory and practice of contemporary performance art, on individual plays and general social questions. In volume 5 of the book series we want to broaden the focus and ask: Why theatre at all? Why is this art form so unique, so indispensable? What is YOUR personal ‘why’ as a theatre-maker, spectator, activist, citizen – or simply as a human being? We are interested in the whole range of theatre: from classical theatre to performance art and dance, from activism to political theatre and the performativity of everyday life.

You determine the content and format of your contribution: whether you want to start from a concrete artistic experience as a theatre-maker or spectator, or write from a theoretical or utopian point of view. It can be a short essay, a memory, a manifesto, an invented dialogue, a poem, a letter to someone. A moment of epiphany, strong emotion, insight or confusion. A utopian text about the theatre of the future, post-capitalist theatre or one without any ideology, about Oedipus or the performance of birds outside your window. Whatever comes to mind when you ask yourself “Why theatre?”, whatever seems neuralgic to you or makes you feel confident.

With solidarity and kind regards,

Milo Rau, Carmen Hornbästel and Kaatje De Geest”

Why theatre? Because of all that follows...





**A CONSTANT JOURNEY OF DOUBT AND EXPERIMENTATION /
MOHAMMAD AL ATTAR**

When the world was seized by collective panic, I was left with the same nagging questions: Who cares about theatre? Who cares about culture at this point, in the middle of a pandemic?

I don't have easy answers at this time, so I would like to return to March 2011 when the Syrian revolution against the Assad regime started. Back then, I grappled with the same question: "Of what use is theatre today?" My answer was clear. This was not a time for theatre. Playwriting seemed a frivolous pastime compared to writing political articles and organising demonstrations. I held on to this opinion until, upon the urging of a few friends, I began writing the play *Could You Please Look Into the Camera?* As part of my research for the play, I interviewed 10 young men and women in Damascus, who had been arbitrarily detained by regime security forces during the first few months of the revolution. They all asked me the same question: "What's the meaning of dramatising our stories today?" My answers sounded confident. I highlighted the role of theatre as a witness, and its power to humanise our stories in a way that the dry prose of news media with its facts and figures fails to do. But deep down I was still searching for answers that could help dispel any remaining doubts about the work I was doing.

The answers emerged during the initial meetings I had with each of the individuals who narrated in detail the horrific experiences they had endured and that shaped the persons they had become. Our discussions about prison were accompanied by conversations about food, music, cinema, and love. The meetings helped me realise that the importance of the work lay precisely in those moments and not necessarily in the prospective act of performance per se. It lay in the participants' need to talk and my need to listen—in their liberation from unspeakable images and mine from the fear of sharing a similar fate, for it was merely coincidence that separated those who were detained from the ones who survived in Syria. That text later became the medium through which we all—the director, actors, technicians, and I—engaged with the events around us as the regime's brutality against the revolutionaries grew. Rehearsals became our only safe haven for discussions and arguments. Was our audience

able to register any of this later? I can't be certain, but I believe some of it must have been felt. Through our post-performance discussions with the audience in places far away from Damascus like Seoul or much closer like Beirut, I became convinced that as professionals in the field of theatre we still have a role to play in such a time of devastating wars and crises. And, so I returned to theatre after months of prevarication.

Since that time, I have come to believe that answers will emerge from engaging with the work itself, and that our theoretical knowledge about theatre and its role is not sufficient during times of radical transformations. In the summer of 2013, during a theatre workshop that I held with a group of young people in Raqqa following the liberation of the city from the grip of the Syrian regime and only weeks before it fell under ISIS control, we found meaning in the friendships that developed among us. Theatre didn't change our lives or fates. Shortly after, one of the workshop participants was killed in a regime airstrike and, later, two others were kidnapped by ISIS fighters and still remain missing to this day. The rest of the group became refugees scattered around the world. All that survived from that workshop are the enduring friendships that have helped us live through the painful memories of loss.

In Beirut, while working on the play *Antigone* with some Syrian refugee women who lived with their families in squalid camps in the Lebanese capital, once again I struggled to answer the same question posed by the women: "Of what use is theatre today when we lack basic life necessities?" I decided to set aside the arguments I had prepared in advance and invited them to discover the answer together. And, so we did. During three months of working together, we discovered many answers—in their challenging of male authority, their reclamation of the narrative of the Syrian crisis, their growing confidence in themselves, their voices, and their bodies, and their grappling with the racism they had faced in a society dominated by a rigid, hierarchal class system. At the end of one performance, Wafaa, one of the performers, came up to me and, pointing at a group of elegantly-dressed women standing outside the theatre, said: "they used to see me only as another cleaner for their homes, but now they lavish me with praise for my stage presence." I asked her jokingly, "what about the other women who haven't seen the play?" She responded with a chuckle, "I don't care about that anymore—what matters now is how I see myself."

While I was in the midst of preparing for a performance of *The Factory*—a play about the scandal involving the French cement plant Lafarge in Syria—Muhannad, a worker at the plant who had suffered from the management’s mistreatment and neglect, agreed to speak with me after much hesitation. I asked him why he had changed his mind. He told me that even though he couldn’t retaliate against such a giant conglomerate that had joint interests with the governments of major powers, he wanted them to stand trial through the play. I explained that the play does not revolve around a trial nor will it be a substitute for one, but he insisted on telling me his story. Several months later, Muhannad attended a performance of the play in Athens. I received a short text message from him: “Yes your play isn’t a trial, but it’s my first step to seek redress.”

Recently, I have stopped keeping up with pandemic-related news. I have accepted that we will be living with the virus for a period of time. Theatres won’t be up and running any time soon and independent playwrights like myself will face difficulties in producing new works. Still, I find myself thinking about new projects that excite me. But how will this enthusiasm and belief in our need for theatre endure? Yet again, I do not have an easy answer. I know that we create theatre as witness in this post-truth era of declining politics and rising fascism. We create it as a space in which performers and audiences explore and deliberate on issues and questions to better understand ourselves and our world—and yes, we create theatre for the pleasure we experience during rehearsals or sitting there in the dark watching the stage. But I am also confident, that times of great uncertainty and change, like the ones we are living today, will bring new challenges to our understanding of the role and importance of theatre, and with them new answers—answers that can only come through experimenting and rumination.

Muhammad Al Attar, is Syrian playwright and dramaturge. He is considered an important chronicler of war-torn Syria. He works between the border of fiction and documentation. His plays like ‘Withdrawal’, ‘Could You Please Look into the Camera?’, ‘Antigone of Shatila’, ‘While I was waiting’, ‘Aleppo. A portrait of Absence’, ‘Iphigenia’, ‘The Factory’ and ‘Damascus 2045’ have been presented around the world.

↳ In the years to come, we will need to use all our creativity and joy of experimenting to deal with the repercussions that inevitably will come.

002

THINGS I WOULD MISS / LOLA ARIAS

coming into the theatre through the back door
the smell of reheated pasta from the *kantine*
the *inspizient's* voice over the speakers
the secrets in the corridors
the shadow of fear on the actors' faces
as they sit facing the mirror before performing
the technicians nipping out for one last smoke
the mini TVs showing the empty room
waiting in the dark behind the set before going on stage
the dance of the audience entering the theatre in little groups
those who come in twos
those who come with friends and loud chatter
those who come alone desperately seeking out their companion
the people who stand up to let people pass
the people who just sit there looking at other people's bottoms
the people who turn in their seats to stare at others
the restlessness before seeing something and I don't know what it is
the start of a journey to nowhere
the silence of so many people watching something they've never seen before
the breathing of so many people sitting close together
understanding collectively something that I couldn't have thought alone
the gestures that look like life but are not
the words that hang there floating like a cloud
the audience's faces lit up by the light from the stage
the technicians' faces lit up by the screens of their phones
the people who laugh out loud during the show
the laughter that makes you laugh
the laughter that splits the audience in two
the spectators who slam the door as they leave in the middle
the spectators who flee crouching in the dark
the spectators snoozing in their seats their heads drooping to one side
the thoughts
the telepathy of the audience when they think together
the fear that the play will end too soon

the fear that the play will never end
the strange time between the play ending and those who were on stage
disappearing
and coming back to wave and bow
the spectators roused by the applause
the applause that sounds like things falling
the slow-motion applause of the disappointed
the fatigue in the body after you've been on stage
the awakening of the body after watching in silence
the players smiling as they wave because the play has now ended
the time to speak again after so long in silence
the people meeting again in the foyer after the performance
seeking out someone to talk about the play with
having nothing to say after a play
feeling like you've time travelled during a play
feeling like you've aged during a play
feeling like you're someone else after a play
the life lost in the theatre
the things lost in the theatre
the endless nights
the smell of the empty dressing rooms

Lola Arias is an Argentinian writer, theatre and film director. She is a multifaceted artist whose work brings together people from different backgrounds in theatre, film, literature, music and visual art projects. With her film 'Theatre of war' she won i.a. the CICAIE Art Cinema Award at Berlinale, Movistar and Prize for Best Documentary Film at Documenta Madrid and Best Director Award at the BAFICI Festival in Buenos Aires.

003

THEATRE AS A SPIRITUAL PATH / HECTOR ARISTIZÁBAL

Theatre has run throughout my entire life. At university, while I was studying psychology, I would dedicate all my nights to the collective creation of plays that addressed social issues. As actors, we decided to support the revolution in Colombia from the stage.

As a psychology student, I started using improvisation to submerge myself in the themes that interested me. In the shoes of characters like Zicotico, I walked the streets of Medellín like a psychotic wanderer, getting into the sewers of my city, waking up with the bastards and the prostitutes in parks and on dirty sidewalks, gathering in my body and soul the social and emotional world of what many treated as human garbage.

A lot of them were characters that I created in my desire to understand the human soul in constant struggle with the social conditions of growing inequality and violence. The public space was taken over by the war between various guerrillas, paramilitary groups, the police and the army at the service of power and the new cocaine mob with its armies of young men ready to kill and die at any cost. Life lost all its sacred value and chaos took over our lives. We made theatre to keep the soul alive, even if very few people came to see our plays.

In 1982, I was arrested and tortured by the army on the accusation of being a guerrilla. I survived and resisted some more years until the assassination of various friends forced me to leave the country. The fate of destiny led me to the United States, the imperialist country that caused the majority of our problems. Without money, without knowing anyone, while I was learning English, theatre allowed me to start working in schools. I fell in love, had two beautiful children, returned to university, made theatre in schools, then in prisons, and with TAYE'R performance collective and the use of grants, I directed and created numerous community theatre plays.

In 1990, in Omaha, Nebraska, at a conference on Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed, I met Augusto Boal and my life changed drastically. As a psychologist, I immediately started using the Rainbow of Desire, which, combined with psychodrama, now gave me a powerful methodology to move from the intrapsychic and the intersubjective to the social. I directed numerous forum plays with gang members, with people affected by HIV/AIDS, with torture survivors, immigrants and in prisons.

Meanwhile in Colombia, in 1998, my brother Juan Fernando was abducted, horribly tortured and killed by paramilitary groups. Pain, anger, helplessness and hatred took over my psyche. In a way, I was experiencing symptoms of PTSD, I didn't seem to find a way out. The pain and the murder of my brother and my childhood wounds being reopened led me, together with a group of friends, to create the monologue *Nightwind*, in which I talked about my torture by the Colombian army in 1982 and the abduction, torture and assassination of my brother by paramilitary groups. I was tortured when I was 22 years old and 22 years later, I was able to summarise that experience in a play. It was my ritual way of becoming the author of my life, and not the victim or the survivor. Theatre once again literally connected to my life in a totally organic way by integrating and redefining the most traumatic aspects of what I was experiencing.

I was invited to universities, symposiums about torture, social organisations. Eventually, with ImaginAction, the company that I founded in 2000, I started giving trainings in the use of the techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed in pedagogical and therapeutic work and in activism. I designed trainings for psychosocial teams in war and post-war zones and in areas with natural disasters or extreme violence.

Theatre of the Oppressed was complemented by Playback and above all by my meeting in Northern Ireland with Teya Sepinuck, creator of the Theatre of Witness. In this way, in the last 20 years, I have had the privilege of learning from communities in more than 50 countries. However, it is the work in war zones and post-conflict areas that has most marked my personal process. Working with ex-combatants in Northern Ireland, Guatemala, South Africa, El Salvador, Nepal, the Basque Country, Palestine, Israel and other countries was preparing me – without me knowing it – to be able to return to my country and face my own shadow again.

When the discussions between the FARC guerrillas and Santos's government about a peace agreement started to appear definitive, I took the decision to return and to completely dedicate myself to the process of peace and to offer the medicines that have helped me heal.

In 2016, I returned to Colombia and with a wonderful group we created a project called *Reconectando* to accompany the challenging work of the Truth Commission. The project invites 20 people, from ex-combatants of all groups, their victims, social leaders and other people interested in

003

participating in an intense 5 day-process, literally in the womb of Mother Earth. In these spaces we combine deep ecology, social theatre and healing rituals to connect us as people who have lived through war and are committed to peace through uncovering truth and creating conditions for coexistence and non-repetition.

Today, theatre is the way to connect with our ecological being, with what we have always been, daughters and sons of the earth, natural beings with the capacity to symbolise, biological beings with the capacity to make theatre. For many years, despite loving nature, I was trapped in anthropocentric paradigms that separated me from our essence.

All human beings come into the world to bring gifts, to deliver our medicine, which is unique and unrepeatable in the way it is expressed in each of us and which the world needs. Theatre is one of the medicines that houses my soul and that has allowed me to give my gift to the world and in this way participate in the constant creation of life. Theatre has been my spiritual path.

Хестор Аристизáбал was born and grew up in Medellín, Colombia during the civil war. He works all over the world in post conflict and war areas to help people tap the transformative power of theatre. He was honoured with the prestigious Otto René Castillo Award for Political Theatre.

↳ 078 What
kind of show
are you peo-
ple putting
on THE STAGE
OF OUR
PLANET?

004

THE LION KING / BACK TO BACK THEATRE

From Geelong, Australia, Back to Back actors Mark Deans and Scott Price discuss theatre with Artistic Director Bruce Gladwin. The conversation took place at 11:30am on May 18, 2020.

SCOTT If Mark was a Roman centurion, he would be called Marcus Deanus.

BRUCE Yeah. You'd be called Scotus Pricis.

SCOTT Possibly. Sounds more Greek.

BRUCE Or Scott Proscenium.

SCOTT Yeah.

BRUCE Mark; Scott and I've got some questions for you about making theatre.

SCOTT Yeah, we do, we do.

BRUCE Can we ask you some questions, Mark?

MARK Yes.

SCOTT Can you ask him first, Bruce?

BRUCE You go first.

SCOTT Mark what is ...

MARK What?

SCOTT What is art to you?

MARK What?

SCOTT Can Mark actually hear us?

BRUCE Mark, can you hear us?

MARK Yes.

BRUCE All right, let's try a different question.

SCOTT What is the most important thing in your life?

MARK Theatre.

SCOTT Okay. Why do you like theatre Mark?

MARK I've seen theatre.

BRUCE Mark likes *The Lion King*.

SCOTT Oh Bruce, am I allowed to ask this question – What is taboo for you? Can I ask that?

BRUCE Yes.

SCOTT I'm going to ask you a very provocative question. Mark, what is taboo for you?

MARK Mm...

SCOTT If you can understand that question?

MARK I don't know.

SCOTT Bruce, he doesn't have an answer.

BRUCE What about you, Scott? What are you not allowed to do?

SCOTT That is a really good question, Bruce. No, no, Bruce that is a really good question. Of course, you're not allowed to break the law. You're not allowed to get close to people. What else? You're not allowed to graffiti or shoplift. You're not allowed to hack into other people's computers or break into people's houses. You're not allowed to murder someone or touch someone else's genitalia. What else? I think that's the full list.

BRUCE You're not allowed to have sex with family members.

SCOTT You can call that incest.

BRUCE Yes.

SCOTT That's a big taboo.

BRUCE What famous theatre show has an incestuous relationship?

SCOTT *Oedipus*.

BRUCE Yes.

SCOTT I'm damn serious, it's *Oedipus*. I mean, like, I'm like, yeah, that's a fancy shirt in your purse epic show from Ancient Greece.

BRUCE Mark, you said you've seen theatre before.

MARK What?

BRUCE You said you've seen some theatre.

SCOTT Did you see that Geoffrey Rush theatre show, *Exit the King*, did you see that one? Mark, it's *Exit the King*, did you see that one? Hello? No, he doesn't understand the question.

BRUCE Mark, did you see it, *Exit the King*? A very funny show.

SCOTT Yeah, I was going to say with Geoffrey Rush.

BRUCE Did you see that one Mark?

SCOTT Obviously, he didn't.

BRUCE Mark, what are you scared of?

MARK People.

SCOTT People talk to you?

MARK Yes.

BRUCE Mark's a good talker.

004

- MARK Yes
- BRUCE Mark's a good actor.
- SCOTT Sometimes he is.
- BRUCE Is it easier to talk on stage as an actor than in real life?
- MARK Yes.
- SCOTT It is. It really is. Here is something you don't know about me: I've had a knife pulled on me, twice.
- BRUCE Do you carry a knife yourself?
- SCOTT I actually don't, other than to cook. But no, I don't.
- BRUCE Twice, you could have ended up in tragic circumstance.
- SCOTT Definitely it could have ended with lots of blood, both times.
- BRUCE A Greek Tragedy.
- SCOTT More like a Geelong Tragedy.
- BRUCE What do you think our destiny is?
- SCOTT Death.
- BRUCE What about *Exit the King*? That's a story about a king who is about to die.
- SCOTT Yeah, it is. It is.
- BRUCE That's a show about death.
- BRUCE Yeah, it is. It is. I think it is.
- BRUCE Maybe all theatre is about death, what do you think?
- SCOTT *The Lion King* definitely is.

Back to Back Theatre is one of Australia's most globally recognised and respected contemporary theatre companies. Under the artistic leadership of Bruce Gladwin Back to Back Theatre creates new forms of contemporary performance imagined from the minds and experiences of a unique ensemble of actors with a disability.

↳085 Is theatre,
while our civilisa-
tion has started to fall
apart, going to find a
new language and
form? Or will it just
go down with all the
rest, wriggling and
shouting in closed
spaces?

005

THE THINK TANK THEATRE / YAEL BARTANA

As a filmmaker, I am used to having full control over the framing and the content of my art. The Think Tank Theatre gave me a new opportunity to create alternative realities in real-time. In theatre, everything is laid bare – there is no hiding of all the imperfections, accidents, deficiencies, and bluntness. In theatre, trust is required. I have to trust the moment of creation and have confidence in the invited participants to perform in a world that I create for them. It is compelling and cathartic to witness an alternative reality taking shape.

My first experiment with theatre took place in 2012, when I inaugurated the *First Congress of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland* (JRMiP), as part of the 7th Berlin Biennale. The JRMiP itself was founded in 2007 in the frame of my film trilogy *And Europe will be Stunned*, which called for the return of 3.3 million Jews to Poland as an act of reconciliation that also challenges the politics of memory. This first Think Tank Theatre project aimed to discuss and formulate the concrete demands of the JRMiP's members for a mutually envisioned future, not only in Poland but in Europe and the Middle East. I wanted to experiment with the movement's imaginary spillover potential and the public's capacity to respond to its activist proposals and to create a space for other voices.

The congress embodied a symbolic parliament of delegates that inspired a multi-faceted conversation, a lively exchange of thoughts, arguments, and ideas between invited guests, open-call participants, and an audience. It harnessed the power of theatre, which lies in the moment, in the actual meeting, and in the formation of a community, to trigger political imagination.

In my second Think Tank Theatre project, I wished to do more than give a fictional platform for a real debate. I wanted to create a direct collision between fiction and reality by mixing real people with made-up characters and relying on a semi-structured script.

This new large-scale project, *What if Women Ruled the World* (WiW), was an experimental theatre performance that took its inspiration from Stanley Kubrick's satire *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). In it, I tried to simulate a vision of women's power and emancipation in an all-women cabinet, in order to give internationally