

growth (Roth 1983). Whether consciously or not, those who integrate performance into everyday life are picking up the torch of life/art experimentation that has interested avant-gardists throughout the twentieth century.

References

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Augusto Boal

INVISIBLE THEATER

**B**OAL IS THE BRAZILIAN CREATOR of Theatre of the Oppressed, an arsenal of dramatic techniques that function as rehearsals for personal and social change. He created *invisible theater* to stimulate debate on political issues while living in Argentina in the 1970s, when overt political theatre was impossible. Answering the charge of manipulation, Boal emphasizes that the consequences of invisible theatre are real. He does, nevertheless, add a safety net: 'warmer-uppers' get people involved in invisible theatre, and 'cooler-downers' guard against unforeseen danger in doing these acts as reality in public.

*Invisible theater* . . . consists of the presentation of a scene in an environment other than the theater, before people who are not spectators. The place can be a restaurant, a sidewalk, a market, a train, a line of people, etc. The people who witness the scene are those who are there by chance. During the spectacle, these people must not have the slightest idea that it is a 'spectacle,' for this would make them 'spectators.'

The invisible theater calls for the detailed preparation of a skit with a complete text or a simple script; but it is necessary to rehearse the scene sufficiently so that the actors are able to incorporate into their acting and their actions the intervention of the spectators. During the rehearsal it is also necessary to include every imaginable intervention from the spectators; these possibilities will form a kind of optional text.

The invisible theater erupts in a location chosen as a place where the public congregates. All the people who are near become involved in the eruption and the effects of it last long after the skit is ended.

A small example shows how the invisible theater works. In the enormous restaurant of a hotel in Chiclayo, where the literacy agents of ALFIN<sup>1</sup> were staying, together with 400 other people, the 'actors' sit at separate tables. The waiters start to serve. The 'protagonist' in a more or less loud voice (to attract the attention of other diners, but not in a too obvious way) informs the waiter that he cannot go on eating the food served in that hotel, because in his opinion it is too bad. The waiter does not like the remark but tells the customer that he can choose something *à la carte*, which he may like better. The actor chooses a dish called 'Barbecue à la pauper.' The waiter points out that it will cost him seventy *soles*, to which the actor answers, always in a reasonably loud voice, that there is no problem. Minutes later the waiter brings him the barbecue, the protagonist eats it rapidly and gets ready to get up and leave the restaurant, when the waiter brings the bill. The actor shows a worried expression and tells the people at the next table that his barbecue was much better than the food they are eating, but the pity is that one has to pay for it. . . .

'I'm going to pay for it; don't have any doubts. I ate the 'barbecue à la pauper' and I'm going to pay for it. But there is a problem: I'm broke.'

'And how are you going to pay?,' asks the indignant waiter. 'You knew the price before ordering the barbecue. And now, how are you going to pay for it?'

The diners nearby are, of course, closely following the dialogue – much more attentively than they would if they were witnessing the scene on a stage. The actor continues:

'Don't worry, because I *am* going to pay you. But since I'm broke I will pay you with labor-power.'

'With what?,' asks the waiter, astonished. 'What kind of power?'

'With labor-power, just as I said. I am broke but I can rent you my labor-power. So I'll work doing something for as long as it's necessary to pay for my "barbecue à la pauper," which to tell the truth, was really delicious – much better than the food you serve to those poor souls. . . .'

By this time some of the customers intervene and make remarks among themselves at their tables, about the price of food, the quality of the service in the hotel, etc. The waiter calls the headwaiter to decide the matter. The actor explains again to the latter the business of renting his labor-power and adds:

'And besides, there is another problem: I'll rent my labor-power but the truth is that I don't know how to do anything, or very little. You will have to give me a very simple job to do. For example, I can take out the hotel's garbage. What's the salary of the garbage man who works for you?'

The headwaiter does not want to give any information about salaries, but a second actor at another table is already prepared and explains that he

and the garbage man have gotten to be friends and that the latter has told him his salary: seven *soles* per hour. The two actors make some calculations and the 'protagonist' exclaims:

'How is this possible! If I work as a garbage man I'll have to work ten hours to pay for this barbecue that it took me ten minutes to eat? It can't be! Either you increase the salary of the garbage man or reduce the price of the barbecue! . . . But I can do something more specialized; for example, I can take care of the hotel gardens, which are so beautiful, so well cared for. One can see that a very talented person is in charge of the gardens. How much does the gardener of this hotel make? I'll work as a gardener! How many hours work in the garden are necessary to pay for the "barbecue à la pauper"?''

A third actor, at another table, explains his friendship with the gardener, who is an immigrant from the same village as he; for this reason he knows that the gardener makes ten *soles* per hour. Again the 'protagonist' becomes indignant:

'How is this possible? So the man who takes care of these beautiful gardens, who spends his days out there exposed to the wind, the rain, and the sun, has to work seven long hours to be able to eat the barbecue in ten minutes? How can this be, Mr. Headwaiter? Explain it to me!'

The headwaiter is already in despair; he dashes back and forth, giving orders to the waiters in a loud voice to divert the attention of the other customers, alternately laughs and becomes serious, while the restaurant is transformed into a public forum. The 'protagonist' asks the waiter how much he is paid to serve the barbecue and offers to replace him for the necessary number of hours. Another actor, originally from a small village in the interior, gets up and declares that nobody in his village makes seventy *soles* per day; therefore nobody in his village can eat the "barbecue à la pauper." (The sincerity of this actor, who was, besides, telling the truth, moved those who were near his table.)

Finally, to conclude the scene, another actor intervenes with the following proposition:

'Friends, it looks as if we are against the waiter and the headwaiter and this does not make sense. They are our brothers. They work like us, and they are not to blame for the prices charged here. I suggest we take up a collection. We at this table are going to ask you to contribute whatever you can, one *sol*, two *soles*, five *soles*, whatever you can afford. And with that money we are going to pay for the barbecue. And be generous, because what is left over will go as a tip for the waiter, who is our brother and a working man.'

Immediately, those who are with him at the table start collecting money to pay the bill. Some customers willingly give one or two *soles*. Others furiously comment:

'He says that the food we're eating is junk, and now he wants us to pay for his barbecue! . . . And am I going to eat this junk? Hell no! I wouldn't give him a peanut, so he'll learn a lesson! Let him wash dishes. . . .'

The collection reached 100 *soles* and the discussion went on through the night. It is always very important that the actors do not reveal themselves to be actors! On this rests the *invisible* nature of this form of theater. And it is precisely this invisible quality that will make the spectator act freely and fully, as if he were living a real situation – and, after all, it is a real situation.

It is necessary to emphasize that the invisible theater is not the same thing as a 'happening' or the so-called 'guerrilla theater.' In the latter we are clearly talking about 'theater,' and therefore the wall that separates actors from spectators immediately arises, reducing the spectator to impotence: a spectator is always less than a man! In the invisible theater the theatrical rituals are abolished; only the theater exists, without its old, worn-out patterns. The theatrical energy is completely liberated, and the impact produced by this free theater is much more powerful and longer lasting.

### Note

- 1 Ed. note: ALFIN stands for Operación Alfabetización Integral, or Integral Literacy Operation.

## Adrian Piper

### from XENOPHOBIA AND THE INDEXICAL PRESENT II: LECTURE

**C**ONCEPTUAL ARTIST ADRIAN PIPER TOOK to the streets to confront 'interpersonal manifestations of racism rather than institutional ones.' This text was delivered as an illustrated lecture, which explains Piper's occasional reference to slides.

My area of interest is xenophobia and racism. Xenophobia is defined as the fear of strangers, but it actually is not just the fear of strangers as such; for example, xenophobia does not apply to people in one's family, relatives whom one happens not to have met, or to neighbors, or to other inhabitants of one's small town. Xenophobia is about fear of the other considered as an alien – someone who does not look the way that one takes to be normal. It's about the violation of boundaries, and I think that this perhaps has increasing resonance now in the European context, because of the demographic changes and waves of immigration that you are experiencing from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. My topic is racism because in the United States the analogue of your problem is the problem of racism and the integration of the slave population from Africa that has been in the United States for the last four hundred years.

Kant tells us in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that in order for us to make sense of experience at all, we have to categorize those experiences in terms of certain basic categories, which Kant thinks of as being innate. He says that categorizing experience in that way is a necessary condition for having a

unified and internally integrated sense of self, so that if we did not categorize our experiences, we would be confronted with total chaos. We would experience cognitive overload and perhaps enter a state of cognitive psychosis. We just wouldn't be able to make sense of anything.

He also says that if perceptual data are presented to us that do not conform to the categories of experience, then we can't have any experience of that perceptual data at all. So what that means is that we essentially have to repress or ignore or dismiss anomalous objects that do not conform to our presuppositions of what experience should be like.

In the natural sciences we see this kind of attitude when scientists are confronted by new data that don't conform to prevailing theories. For example, scientists are very uncomfortable with the suggestion that psychic phenomena might be real, that mental powers have causal efficacy, because we have no way of explaining how that could happen. The result is that the data that seem to confirm those extrascientific theories are just ignored.

In the social sphere we see exactly the same phenomena, that is to say, individuals who do not conform to these categories of what a person looks like, what a person should be like; such individuals are systematically disregarded or exterminated or sent back to their countries of origin, or demeaned in various ways.

I would suggest that the basic tendency that gives rise to all of these areas of repression is the same. I think that Kant is right about this; there is an innate tendency to categorize, and if we did not do that, we would experience total chaos. So the basis of xenophobia is innate. It is hard-wired, and it is impossible to escape.

However, what counts as alien, what counts as fearful and unfamiliar, is entirely a matter of social context. If one is raised in a social context that has lots of different kinds of people in it, is very cosmopolitan, then one will not experience fear of other people, no matter how they look. If one is raised in a situation that is very provincial, very homogeneous, in which everyone looks more or less the same, then it is much harder, because any variation in appearance or dress or conventions or behavior will be cause for fear until one can grow accustomed to someone who has that anomalous or different appearance.

I would suggest that xenophobia does not arise only in these contexts but also arises in the most basic relations between human beings, that is to say, intimate relations. Kant also says in the first *Critique* that it is impossible to be a subject at all without dependence on the object of perception. So there is a kind of mutual dependence between subjects insofar as they perceive one another and conditions for the identity are established. There is often a period when we go into a relationship with someone, where we think that the person meets all of our highest expectations, our most romantic expectations about what our partner should be like. She is perfect, she is beautiful, he is handsome, he is everything we could possibly wish. That period may

last for a few months, a few weeks maybe, and as we get to know the person better, the difference between us and our partner becomes more and more salient. We start realizing that in fact he does not conform to our expectations. She behaves in ways we did not expect and do not particularly like, and we have to adjust to those idiosyncrasies, differences in behavior and temperament that may completely violate our expectations about what our partner would be like. My suggestion would be that this is not simply *like* xenophobia. This *is* a case of xenophobia, where we find ourselves reacting negatively to someone with whom we are trying to establish an intimate relationship. Exactly the same sense of fear, the sense of boundary-violation that may occur in one case in the international context, in a geographical context, also can occur in terms of physical boundaries – the boundaries of the body, also the boundaries of the self. Becoming intimate with someone means in a sense merging, it also means dealing with areas of difference, and of course this is where relationships either stand or fall. If we cannot achieve the acceptance and the tolerance of the other person, then the relationship is over; and of course many relationships *are* over.

But there is a kind of conversation that we have probably all had with our partners in intimate relationships where we are not referring to something outside ourselves, we are not referring to something external, to the situation, say, to the price of tea in China, or to the nature of abstract numbers, or to Medieval art in the thirteenth century; we are referring to the here and now: What is going on at this minute between you and me. We have these conversations that take a certain form, a very familiar form: 'You are not paying attention to me.' 'You are not hearing what I am saying.' 'Stop trying to pigeonhole me.' 'Don't tell me what I think.' These are very familiar utterances, and I would be very surprised if there were anyone in this room who did not have that experience at some point, of feeling as though she were being turned into an alien object somehow, that communication had broken down.

I am a methodological individualist, and so I believe that forms of institutional oppression ultimately devolve into individual relationships, specific concrete relationships between you and me. After all, institutions are not abstract objects; institutions are run by individuals, they are staffed by individuals, individuals make policy decisions that determine the lives of others, and so ultimately individuals have to be held accountable for any form of social oppression, and that is why my work, although mostly not autobiographical, is very individual. It is very personal. It concerns the immediate relationship in the indexical present – that is, the present of the here and now – between the art object and the viewer as a kind of medium for social relations.

My training is in minimal art, and although it is very hard for me to talk coherently about motivations, it seems to me not an accident that one of the major drives of minimal art is the idea of repudiating abstract aesthetic theory

and focusing attention on the individual, specific, unique object, reducing that object to a set of properties that reveal it simply as what it is: as an object in space and time, and not something that is full of external associations, suppositions, and preconceptions. If you think that xenophobia can be overcome by focusing on the specific, unique, concrete qualities of individuals, then it would make sense to think of minimal art decision-making as a kind of aesthetic strategy for drawing attention to the concrete, specific, unique qualities of individuals, and that is what my work does.

[. . .]

In the [. . .] series [. . .] called *Catalysis*, [. . .] the basic idea was that an object can be a catalytic agent and can make a change in other sorts of objects without undergoing change itself. This was done on Fourteenth Street in Union Square in New York, and I really did paint my clothes with wet, sticky, oil paint and simply walk down the street. One important aspect of this format was that I never violated any codes of behavior in these pieces. The idea was to behave normally and simply alter my physical appearance in the way that one would sculpturally alter an object with respect to material. As you can see here, I was, in the immortal words of Michael Fried, 'activating the space around me'; people were making wide circles as I walked through. Here's another one in that series. There I am sitting on the Second Avenue bus with a towel stuffed in my mouth. In fact, although I was still thinking very formalistically and abstractly at this point, I think that the symbology of these pieces had a lot to do with my emerging sense of myself as a woman, as having been silenced in various ways, as having been objectified and as being a black person as well.

This is another series of street performances that I started in 1973; this is called the *Mythic Being* series. In this series I dressed in drag as a young black male; as you can see, I am wearing an Afro and a moustache. I basically invaded various contexts within New York cultural life. I went to the opera; I did all the sort of things I normally did except with the masculine guise. I was thinking a lot about specific alterations in physical subjectivity, particularly as a way of bringing out aspects of my own identity that are not readily available – not only the fact that I am black, because many people do not realize that, but also that I have a very strong masculine component to my character. I wanted to be able to explore that. It was just great to be able to take the subway late at night and not worry about being mugged or raped. To be able to sit on the subway, the way guys often do, with their legs wide apart, kind of making room for their genitals. They take up a lot of space. Whereas we women don't. We scrunch up and crouch in. So it was really great to be able to make room for my genitals in that way. That part was really wonderful; the sense of freedom that I experienced in doing this work was a real revelation to me. The bad part was that I got to experience what it is like for visibly black Americans to simply move through the world in



Figure 16.1 *Catalysis IV*.

any social context that is primarily populated by white people, and because I was showing certain visual cues of a black person, I was responded to in that way and it was truly horrible: I felt objectified over and over again in subtle ways that I, to this day, believe people have no control over. I do not think that anyone intentionally rejects or dismisses or ignores or objectifies another person. I do believe that it is completely an innate uncontrollable fear impulse, and if you are not used to seeing black people in your environment, that is the way you are going to react. There is just no other solution but to bring black people into your environment so that they will not seem so strange. That was very much a conclusion of doing this work, for me.

[. . .]

This, *The Mythic Being: Getting Back*, is a continuation of that series of performances; it was done in 1975. I had left New York in 1974 and had

moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to do a Ph.D. in philosophy at Harvard. This was on the Cambridge Commons. This is a friend of mine who is a collaborator and does not realize what is about to happen. The piece is called *Getting Back*. Essentially, I mug him and run off with his wallet.

Here is another one; this was done in Harvard Square. This one is called *Cruising White Women*. As you can see, there I am, cruising white women. Again, the idea is to not actually violate conventions of behavior but simply to set myself up as an altered object of perception and explore those differences.

[. . .]

This is a piece from 1986. It is a business card. It is two by three inches and it is called *My Calling (Card) Number One: A Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties*.<sup>1</sup>

Dear Friend,  
 I am black.  
 I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.  
 I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.

This is a piece that I started doing when I realized that there was no easy solution to the problem of how to deal with the kind of dissonance and disorientation I was causing, because I identify myself as a black person and to many people do not look black. White people have often made racist remarks in my presence, not realizing that a black person is present. They make a remark thinking that they are among themselves. This is, of course, very disturbing for me. One thing that I tried doing was simply confronting the person verbally and saying, 'You know, I am black and you are insulting me.' The problem with that is that first of all it really ruins everybody's evening. I am a nice middle-class person. When I get asked to a dinner party, I try to be nice and I try to make the evening go smoothly as everybody does, so the thought of disrupting everyone's evening by introducing something like this, by being the one to disrupt the convention that remarks like that are acceptable, is just too much for me. I tried it once, and it was just too upsetting. Another strategy that I tried was raising the issue in the abstract without identifying myself as black, but just saying, 'Well you know, that is a racist remark, and it is not nice and black people are not really jungle bunnies,' and so forth. The

problem with raising it in the abstract is that it then enables people to have an abstract discussion about whether the remark was really a racist remark, what their intentions were in making it; maybe it was a back-handed compliment, is it a terrible thing to be a jungle bunny? One can go on like that without really addressing the issue. So that did not work. I have also had friends try announcing in advance to the guests that there will be a black person present. The problem with that is that then everyone spends the whole evening making politically correct remarks and wondering who the black person is. That just did not work at all. What is nice about the card is that the only people whose evenings are ruined are mine and the person who made the remarks. Everyone else gets to carry on as usual, and if that person then wants to initiate a dialogue with me that is fine, but then the responsibility of ruining the evening is on them, it is not on me. Actually no one who got this card ever initiated a dialogue with me. They just read the card, did a double take, and withdrew. That surprised me.

I got the idea for this piece from an interview I saw with Esther Williams on *Entertainment Tonight*. The interviewer asked Esther Williams if she still swam, and Esther Williams started complaining about how she was always getting the same question all the time. She showed the interviewer this card she'd had made up – a small, gold-embossed business card that said, 'Yes, I still swim.' And she talked about how the next time she was at dinner, Henry Kissinger was sitting next to her, and he turned to her and started to ask, 'Do you still sw—' and she just gave him the card. I really liked that idea a lot. I stopped doing this piece a couple of years ago. I was at a party and got introduced to someone who looked at me for a long moment and said, 'You know, I'm trying to think of a racist remark so I can get one of the cards.' So that was the end of that!

Here is one for bars and discos, *My Calling (Card) Number Two: Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Bars and Discos*. This was about wanting to reclaim as a woman the freedom I'd experienced dressing in drag as a man as the Mythic Being, the freedom to just go into a public social space and be anonymous and undisturbed, to go to a bar and just sit and nurse my beer and read the newspapers, or go to a disco and just stand on the sidelines and watch people without being hit on. People assume that if a woman is alone in a public social space it's because she wants to be hit on. That's a really peculiar idea when you think about it. Actually this card was not as successful in bringing dialogue to an end. It tended more to encourage dialogue. Ultimately, I stopped going to bars and discos, and that solved the problem.

Here is an installation shot of those pieces from my retrospective when it first opened in 1987. The cards are printed up without my name on them, and the sign says, 'Join the struggle, take some for your own use,' which means that people can just take them and use them in any situation they encounter of this kind. I am very proud to report that at the end of every day at my retrospective these little card containers were empty, which means

that there are lots of people all over the world, lots of white people giving out these cards in uncomfortable social situations. I understand that in New York members of the gay community have printed up similar cards for use in situations when people make homophobic remarks about gay people. I really like this. I wanted to disseminate this idea as far as possible. [...]

### Note

- 1 Ed. note: Text from *Adrian Piper's MY CALLING (CARD) NUMBER 1*, 1986. Guerrilla performance with printed calling card, 2 × 3½". Reprinted by permission of Adrian Piper.

## Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman

from QUEER NATIONALITY

**B**ERLANT AND FREEMAN FOCUS ON the gay and lesbian political organization Queer Nation and its creative challenges to public spaces that claim neutrality but are, in fact, heterosexual and white. Earlier in the essay excerpted below, they locate Queer Nation's origins at an ACT UP New York meeting in 1990. Its aim was 'to extend the kinds of democratic counter-politics deployed on behalf of AIDS activism for the transformation of public sexual discourse in general' (198).

### Outside: politics in your face

On February 23, 1967, in a congressional hearing concerning the security clearance of gay men for service in the Defense Department, a psychiatrist named Dr. Charles Socarides testified that the homosexual 'does not know the boundary of his own body. He does not know where his body ends and space begins.'<sup>1</sup> Precisely: the spiritual and other moments of internal consolidation that we have described allow the individual bodies of Queer Nationals to act as visibly queer flash cards, in an ongoing project of cultural pedagogy aimed at exposing the range and variety of bounded spaces upon which heterosexual supremacy depends. Moving out from the psychological and physical 'safe spaces' it creates, Queer Nation broadcasts the straightness of 'public space,' and hence its explicit or implicit danger to gays. The queer body – as an agent of publicity, as a unit of self-defense, and finally as a spectacle