CHAPTER 1

Watch Out! Theatre Is Anywhere – Redistributing the Ethics of Arts Education and Applied Theatre

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Abstract: The intention with this study is to examine and develop the discourse of arts in education and applied drama/theatre in relation to democracy, in particular the concept of "post-democracy" (Crouch, 2004, 2016; Mouffe, 2009; Rancière, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2011). Post-democracy is a concept that holds a critical view on current societies, describing conditions of economic, ecological and social crisis including boredom, frustration, oppression, apathy, disillusion and violence. We have identified a few key characteristics and challenges within a post-democratic society, such as "consensus", "fictionalization" and "paradoxicality". In this chapter, we are interested to see how such characteristics may influence individual democratic life, and how drama/theatre in education can respond to those key characteristics and influences. We argue that such responses concern the working procedures and production formats, as well as the recognition of the social and political role of arts education. This relation of art and society asks for aesthetic platforms that allow young people to explore felt issues of (post-)democracy on the individual and/or the collective level. It furthermore asks for a social responsibility and an ethics which are autonomous to the critical, artistic participant, ethics perhaps different from the ethical expectations distributed by neoliberal society. This is shown by two cases of performance that also solve the potential relation and political role by blurring art and social activism.

Keywords: post-democracy, applied theatre, fictionalization, ethics, Rancière

Introduction: Applied drama/theatre and issues of democracy

> / … / the ability to create dialogue that challenges
> and critiques terrorism from within a felt understanding
> of its force and horror is the true democratic response
> to the great issues of the early twenty-first century
> (O'Connor, 2015, p. 145)

Issues of democracy are frequently addressed in many research reports and documentations of applied drama and theatre (Hughes & Nicholson, 2016; Noorani et al., 2013; O'Connor & Anderson, 2015; O'Connor & Neelands, 2010; Prendergast & Saxton, 2009; Prentki & Preston, 2009). Stakeholders of the field suggest that applied theatre practice may be acts of "radical democratic citizenship" (Nicholson, 2005, p. 24), through the ways in which theatre practice allows participation, plurality of voices, co-ownership and the negotiation of equality and difference. One might even assert that applied theatre follows a democratic ambition by its performative and agency-driven cultural production both on and off the formal art stage. This ambition is also the case for centres of applied drama and theatre research and practice in Norway and South Africa, which currently collaborate under the joint project umbrella of "Building democracy through theatre" (see editorial chapter). Democracies and democratic characteristics are obviously different in South African post-apartheid society and Norwegian post-industrial society, asking for different approaches when theatre is involved in or evaluated in social and societal contexts. However, human rights are a common global concern, as is the current state of post-democracy (Crouch, 2004; Rancière, 1999), since democracy that meshes with market liberalism seems to be flourishing on a global scale.

In other words, we assume that analyses of our post-democracies are highly relevant in fomenting a better understanding of the societies and living conditions where theatre is applied. Furthermore, we believe certain characteristics of democracy imply an understanding of the cognitive, the sensuous, the experiential and the ethical that may be paramount

to the approach of the theatre artist, teacher and therapist, influencing the quality of her work. Not least, the everyday experience of democracy is relevant material for the theatre participant and its audience. However, we carry no romantic or idealist conception of the harmonized, well-adjusted and responsible citizen which is negotiated through theatre; on the contrary, the courage to speak up, the staging of the marginal and the accepting and voicing of diversity are catchwords – at once more pronounced and needed – in the political critique we wish to address. This is a critique that also, through its performative orientation (see below, for example Swyngedouw, 2017) strongly relates to the aesthetic and theatrical potential of applied drama and theatre. We assume that a citizen's possible participation in the (re)building of democracy basically relies on a felt and critical comprehension of her democracy, as well as on the knowledge of how she may (counter)act, contribute and find meaning as a valued citizen.

Notwithstanding the great interest in democratic issues, we lack analyses of post-democracy in the context of arts education and applied theatre, and of how the arts may answer some of the specific challenges in post-democracies. This chapter aims to face this need by unpacking some of the characteristics of post-democracy. These are characteristics that will serve as issues for the discussion of ways in which theatre may approach the complex strategies of post-democracy. Theatre director Rustom Bharucha reminds us that "It is one thing to formulate democracy at a constitutional level, but it is quite another matter for people across the diverse class and social groups to actually perform its negotiations of difference" (Bharucha, 2014, p. 147). Hence, we are not primarily concerned with democracy as abstract system on the constitutional level, rather in identifying the specific conditions within the system, those which affect our daily life, those which we also recognize when listening to citizens who participate in theatre and performance.

Characteristics of current post-democracies

Post-democracy denotes a supra-national condition or a current regime which is "the depoliticized state of liberal democracy" (Toplišek, 2018,

p. 8). The current situation of democracy has turned into a defence and promotion of neoliberalism, a situation where democratic government and liberalism have meshed (Crouch, 2015). Instead of liberalist attempts to protect the market economy from democratic governance, post-democracy is the polity in which "all institutions of democracy and constitutional order are in place, but where the creative energy of the political system, at least for economic affairs, has passed into the hands of a politico-economic elite" (Crouch, 2015, p. 122). Neoliberalism is thus understood as a governmental rationality that manages the market economy through a complex nexus of political knowledge and institutions, which operates across the political/economic division prevalent in former political economies. Colin Crouch defined this new regime as follows:

> While elections certainly exist and can change governments, public electoral debate is a tightly controlled spectacle, managed by rival teams of professional experts in the techniques of persuasion, and considering a small range of issues selected by those teams. The mass of citizens plays a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part, responding only to the signals given them. Behind the spectacle of the electoral game, politics is really shaped in private by interaction between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business interests. (Crouch, 2004, p. 4)

Following Toplišek (2018), post-democracy's support for neoliberalization has recognizable effects. One effect is a fall in support for, or at least an increase in distrust of, political parties, not least the parties that defend the welfare state. Furthermore, there is a political alignment around the neoliberal consensus of the governing economic rationale. This also fosters political space for unrepresentative institutions that are empowered by elite business interests. Politics, including its expensive election campaigns, is professionalized. There is an increase in the polarization of politics and protest activity. Additionally, Kingwell (2012) suggests that both increased wealth inequality and an empathy deficit are notable features of post-democracies.

Neoliberalism becomes one of the key drivers of de-politicization of politics into a "polis" state where governmental decisions and strategies become a managerial approach for the marketization of society,

such as in New Public Management (Crouch, 2015). The economy is thus de-politicized (Bourdieu, 2002; Swyngedouw, 2011), protecting the economic rationale from political dispute. This creates a "terror of neo-liberalization" (Giroux, 2015, 2018). What we name and see as politics is actually not real politics, but a masque of "democratic" against "republican", or "bourgeois" against "socialist", disputes on the surface, only to make available options too complex for ordinary citizens to conceive, or to conceal the existing basic alignments across parties. The apathy of ordinary people with respect to democratic political processes is noted but banalised as not central to the "proper" functioning of democratic institutions (Vergopoulos, 2001). Crisis and turmoil in Greece and the yellow vests protests in France, and more recently the storming of the United States Capitol, exemplify some of the consequences.

Traces of post-democracy in the arts in education – implications and challenges

It may be argued that the field of art and arts education is not exempt from the condition of society and democracy. The aesthetic is also part of a "distributed" polis society (Rancière, 2004), implying that the arts are controlled, made predictable and de-politicized in Western democracies. This is partly done by stimulating the theatre industry as compensatory, non-binding entertainment and, as a consequence, muting the educative and political potential of theatre by attempting to remove or relocate aesthetic performance and theatricality from the social sphere to an institution of the unreal and fictitious (Rasmussen, 2017). In arts education, similar de-politicized strategies can be found in the position of the arts in the curriculum in many Western countries. Gert Biesta (2018) describes it as the presence of instrumental justification, a tool for predetermined goals, meaning that engagement with the arts is useful because of its significance for or in relation to something else – for instance, as a way to learn language or mathematics, or to develop desirable qualities and skills, such as empathy or creativity. We acknowledge, following Rancière, that both the "representational" and "ethical" regimes are operative within a post-democracy. Furthermore, we think arts in education, theatre in

general, and its participants are influenced by more specific characteristics of post-democracy. In the following sections, we will shift our focus to three key characteristics that are valued, but also have an impact on the individual citizen and cause challenges and difficulties, namely: "consensus", "fictionalization" and "paradoxicality".

The value and challenge of consensus

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière is just one of many political scientists, philosophers and sociologists who for the last 30 years have reported how late modern democracies have faced a new global environment, an expanding information society and market globalization in general. Following Rancière, efforts of de-politicization are enforced by certain consensus strategies. People are invited to have different interests:

> /.../nevertheless there is one unique reality to which everything must be related, a reality that is experienceable as a sense datum and which has only one possible signification. The context that is invoked to enforce the ideas and practices pertaining to 'consensus' is, as we know, 'economic globalization'. (Rancière, 2010, p. 152)

While economic growth, or an overall economic rationale, is one "agreed" condition, others may be sustainability, competitiveness, creativity, responsibility and participation. A flourishing liberalism upholds a plurality of opinions and interests – the freedom of expression and of the press, the right to association, human rights, gender liberalism – at the same time as democracy is a "tightly controlled spectacle", often in favour of consumerism and corporate interests, and consequently causing harm to the very sustainability, human rights and human values it claims to promote.

Rancière's thesis of consensus rests on the discursive phenomenon of "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière, 2010, p. 45) – that is, arrangements of selective sensibility that also maintain and produce inequality which, according to Rancière, not only implies cultural practices, but eventually leads to hate and violence in a democratic "polis" society (Rancière, 2006). Democracy has become both an excuse for and an aim of a neoliberal agenda, which includes the free flow of global capital

(Chaturvedi, 2008). Such a consensus-driven society has little place for "otherness" and this may lead to violence: " … /violent encounter remains one of the few courses open for the affective staging of active discontent" (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 373).

Since disagreement is encapsulated within the distributed order, there is no escape or gateway from a consensual mode of governance other than violence, exclusion or the "inclusion of different opinions on anything imaginable – as long as it does not question fundamentally the existing state of the neoliberal political-economic configuration" (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 371). Problems are never the result of the "system", but are blamed on the otherness that can be marginalised or cut loose without affecting the functioning of the (economic-managerial) system (Swyngedouw, 2010). Following this line of argument, neoliberal post-democracy therefore causes repression on the individual level, through an inability to act, or paralyzation, a repression perhaps more sophisticated, internalized and irreproachable than in tyrannies or distinct apartheid regimes. We are reminded by theatre director Augosto Boal and his European experience of participants having "a cop in the head" (Boal, 1995). Boal suggested that theatre may empower those that are repressed by society. However, we still doubt that his aesthetics of the theatre of the oppressed can grasp the current paradoxical nature of post-democratic repression. The paradoxical nature of consensus in the post-democracic world makes an important backdrop for participative and ethically framed forms of theatre. More specifically, it may reopen a discussion about the convention of consensus-ridden negotiation within forms of participative arts education.

The value and challenge of fictionalization

The concept of fictionalization stems from literature and rhetoric but is implemented in a variety of other areas such as performance studies, communication on social media and in politics (Behrendt, 2015; Jacobsen et al., 2014; Knudsen & Krøgholt, 2019; Walsh, 2007). Fictionalization can be described as an action in which you intentionally do something to reality, with the purpose of sending a concrete message. In *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, Richard Walsh (2007) describes it as a communicative

strategy that differs from fiction as it does not represent a specific genre or act as a marker of something "made up". Fictionality is a communicative quality that can be applied to a wide range of different forms of narrative: "The rhetoric of fictionality is brought into play whenever a narrative is offered or taken as fiction, regardless of issues, of form, style or reference" (Walsh, 2007, p. 44). Walsh argues that the distinction between fiction and nonfiction rests upon the rhetorical use to which a narrative is interpreted – either one or the other. Hence, the interpretation operates with a categorical distinction which is framed within the context where it is received. For the receiver, strategies of fictionalization are ways of signalling that the narrative does not refer directly and referentially to a fictional or non-fictional world, but instead invokes the recipient to perceive the narrative as fictional without it being a lie. For the sender, fictionalization allows him/her to mediate between a narrative and its cultural context.

Furthermore, fictionalization becomes a signal to the receiver that the message does not necessarily describe the world as it is, but rather an exaggerated kind of world. When implemented in a post-democratic society, fictionalization challenges the concept of objectivity, as well as the subject's understanding of the world. For instance, in everyday life on social media, the *influencer* is a person who can spread his/her message (good or bad) to thousands of followers within a second. However, the ability to reach a huge audience, combined with the sophisticated repression that occurs in post-democracy on the individual level, can be dangerous.
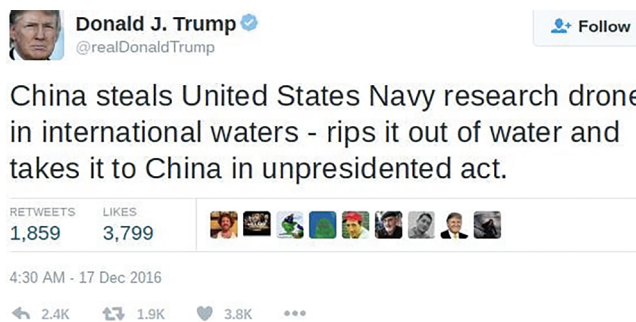

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump
    👤+ Follow

China steals United States Navy research drone in international waters - rips it out of water and takes it to China in unpresidented act.

RETWEETS 1,859   LIKES 3,799

4:30 AM - 17 Dec 2016

↩ 2.4K   🔁 1.9K   ♥ 3.8K   •••

Figure 1 Donald Trump used Twitter as an active platform for spreading his political messages and statements

In the last few years, several incidents, such as the 2016 presidential election in the United States, the #metoo campaign and the hearings against Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, have shown that communication on social media holds numerous pitfalls. Another example is the use of Twitter as a communicative platform for various demagogues in democracies around the world. As such, the content communicated on such platforms can be characterized as fictionalization. Intentional communication does not correspond with empirical facts or intersubjective knowledge; in fact rhetorical persuasion is valued in liberalist-corporate democracies. The performative nature of drama and theatre allows for playful, educational and political investigation into fictionalized communication. Reminded that fictionalization is part of the social discourse, theatre communication also becomes part of social-political discourse. In applied drama/theatre this may include the citizen who is non-certified in theatre skills, however skilled in fictionalized social communication.

The value and challenge of paradox

What can make post-democracy incomprehensible, impenetrable and irreproachable is the complexity of its many occurring paradoxes. We have already pointed at the discourse stating that everybody's opinion is heard, everybody has a chance to succeed, while many in fact experience repressive marginalization. Furthermore, the democratic virtues of freedom and equality also appear to be paradoxical virtues (Mouffe, 2000) that are discursively acclaimed, only to allow individual freedom to rule over social equality in neoliberalist societies. In fact, it seems as if paradoxical communication is a major discursive power tool used to uphold democracy as a neoliberal regime. What this means is a kind of "sales talk", a positive distributed discourse of pluralism (Mouffe, 2000) and diversity that evokes consent and attraction, only to hide the less positive implications, for example concerning "sustainability":

> / ... / the post-democratic turn / ... / mobilises democratic values and redeploys decentralized, stakeholder-engaging forms of governance as a tool for legitimizing and stabilizing the politics of unsustainability. (Blühdorn, 2013, p. 18)

There are several other examples of this strategy of power by way of paradoxical communication. First, the label of democracy itself can be used to legitimate non-democratic power, as when cultural imperialism, colonialism, apartheid and business obtainment are enforced and protected by virtues of democracy. Secondly, it occurs when there is no separation between market economy and political governance even when this is stated to be the case. Thirdly, it occurs when democracy promises human rights and equality, while it synchronously fuses with economic power that works against equality, shaping the environment according to the dreams, tastes and needs of the economic, political and cultural elites (Rancière, 2006). Fourthly, it occurs when there is bragging of the welfare state, altruism and common good, while those in power are really stimulating individual consumerism, egocentricity and greed. Fifthly, it occurs when a corporate social responsibility is introduced, but only as a cover-up and excuse for replacing political power with corporate power, to prevent criticism when, for example, business corporations engage local community participation only to exploit land or cheap labour.[1]

On the individual level, such paradoxes create a range of conflicting affects. When the pronounced promise of freedom, equality and success clashes with experiences of inequality and being unsuccessful, frustration occurs, sometimes followed by self-blame and self-contempt. Moreover, when freedom is the stated principle, experiences of constraint are intangible. The public discourse of success and opportunities makes individual loss and failure unbearable. The digital exposure of the subject in the performative society (Kershaw, 2001; Knudsen, 2018) furthermore nurtures narcissism and sometimes possibly amplifies the feeling of not being seen. We wish to argue that ignorance and contempt is one possible outcome when the citizen has a right or duty to vote, but learns that nobody is listening to her voice. Many people experience no choice between unmediated repression, apathy and reluctant accommodation, on the one hand, and reactive desertion, destruction and violence on the other. When the citizen is faced by paradoxical discourse, drama/theatre

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1   As argued in the television documentary on "Norsk Hydro" in Brazil: https://tv.nrk.no/serie/brennpunkt/2018/MDDP11001118

and arts education has the potential and perhaps the responsibility to investigate, deconstruct, attack and unpack social communication critically, by way of the aesthetic and of symbolic media.

Theatre is anywhere – performing post-democracy

The selected characteristics of post-democracy presented above are frequently accompanied by performative concepts in political theory, such as "enactment", "choreography", "staging", "theatricality", "role" and "simulation" (Blühdorn, 2013; Rancière & Rockhill, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2011, 2017). This social and political application of the theatre metaphor is instrumental to understand the performative dimension of post-democracy, possibly reinforcing and legitimatizing the potential of educational and political applied theatre: "Political subjectivation unfolds in and through the staging/enacting of equality that exposes a 'wrong' in the in-egalitarian distribution of the sensible" (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 375). Swyngedouw refers to the performative act of Rosa Parks, who sat down in a bus seat for "whites", and became a telling case for realizing "the process of subjectivation that announces the new, interrupts the common sense of the situation, aspires to produce a new common sense, and transforms mere life into the possibility of more life" (Swyngedouw, 2017, p. 58). This eventually leads to the argumentation for the significance of the arts in education, as when Biesta (2018) calls for an understanding of art education beyond pure expressivism and creativity.

In the following, we look for cases that show cultural democratic approaches that seek to answer current political-aesthetic theory – that is to say, when culture "re-inscribes the equality of all in their capacity to speak and act" (Swyngedouw, 2017, p. 59). We have selected two cases of performance work that we think comply with acts of redistribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2004). This concept means acts of dissensus that work against the ways in which we are distributed in the polis democracy, and where art (the aesthetic regime) may have a renewed political role. They are neither examples of typical applied drama nor arts in education, but they are nevertheless chosen to discuss the interface for both art and

education, the real and the other real, the heard and the unprecedented, not least the ethical issues linked to the kind of autonomy that is insisted on in the two cases.

"Thank you very Nazis!" – applied theatre as activism

On the 3rd December 2018, the group *Zentrum für Politische Schönheit* (ZPS) invited journalists and photographers to attend a press conference about an artistic and political action called *Soko-Chemnitz*. ZPS is known to operate in the crossover between activism and performance and to be rather apathetic towards where the boundary between the two goes. Over the past ten years, they have "crowdfounded" a plane with Syrian refugees to Berlin and erected a false Holocaust monument in the Alternative für Deutschland politician Björn Höcke's backyard. Their purpose is to show that political decisions – or the lack of them – must not go unnoticed. The purpose of *Soko-Chemnitz, in particular*, was to systematically identify right-wing extremists who had participated in a violent conflict between neo-Nazis and refugees in Chemnitz in August 2018. During the press conference, the group announced that they had found and identified a large databank of potential suspects. The suspects' profiles and names were published on an open website for everyone to see. Two weeks later, ZPS revealed the mandatory "extra twist" of the action: "Thank you very Nazis. You fell into our trap and have helped us identify many more Nazis than our own research ever could." It turned out that the action was designed as a so-called "honey-pot", an IT-technical method that aims to get people to do things online, without being aware of it. In this way, ZPS found a far larger network of right-wing extremists than they had already identified, as many people had searched this website – and thus revealed themselves as participants.

In relation to the characteristics of post-democracy, the ZPS can be described as an example of being in the frictional confrontation between the political and politics. Through strategies from the world of theatre and performative aesthetics, such as fictionalization, staging/enactment and the relation between actor and audience, the socio-spatial self-positing of

Soko-Chemnitz (right-wing extremism and lack of political engagement) becomes the stand-in for a generalized democratic demand ('Help us identify the Nazis in our society'), a stand-in for the people, thus enabling political subjectivation (cf. Swyngedouw, 2011, pp. 374–375). *Soko-Chemnitz* might also be interpreted as an example of how artists can stage equality in a way that exposes the wrong, the inegalitarian distribution of the sensible. However, in order to do so, they are questioning the ethical aspects of the performance. ZPS's "real" agenda is hidden from their audience, which is manipulated into participation.

Figure 2 The QR code leads to the movie *The Yes Men Fix the World* on Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajkItiDgTLY)

On January 16, 2019, thousands of people in Washington, D.C. were handed a fresh edition of the Washington Post, only it was dated May 1, 2019. The front-page headline said Donald Trump had fled office. This was not the first time the Yes Men had presented a "false" newspaper, aiming to communicate "stories that are more reasonable than the current reality".[2] The Yes Men consists mainly of two satirical performers and activists who have interfered in business and politics for almost twenty years in the United States. By impersonating representatives of corporations in conferences or sales events or by running "false" press conferences, they publish radical "news" such as billion dollars compensation from the chemical corporation Dow to the Indian Bhopal victims of the chemical disaster in 1984. What is presented as radical real "good" news for some people affected by corporate power is eventually revealed as a hoax. When these performers' actions then release only temporary happiness in India, or unmask unethical business interests, they are themselves accused of being unethical by spreading lies and cheating gullible participants of a framed set-up of "invisible" theatre. These "lies" are, however, only means

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2   The Yes Men blog; https://theyesmen.org/democracyawakensinaction

to present a different truth, a new possibility that is generally concealed in the real social sphere of communication. The blurring of fiction and reality is highly successful due to their mastery of digital communication and propagation, their political insights and skilled use of disguise, and their identity shifts and acting, along with construction of props and devices. Lately, their work has achieved increased political influence by meticulously publishing responses and events online, by networking and through the recruitment of many followers and voluntary activists.

To sum up, neither ZPS nor the Yes Men can be described as "applied" or arts educational practices. However, both examples hold some artistic strategies or poetics that can be explored further in relation to arts in education, such as manipulation and blurring the lines between fiction and reality and the relationship between audience and actor. We do acknowledge that the implementation of these strategies into an educational context will challenge ethical considerations, and, furthermore, question the way ethics and values are distributed in arts educational practices. However, in order to get the ability to create dialogue that challenges and critiques post-democratic ethics and values from within a felt understanding of its force (cf. O'Connor, 2015, p. 145), we think that engaging in new ways of art and performance might be a way to question such practices.

Redistributing the ethics of arts education and applied theatre?

While none of our selected examples of performance activism is taken from the realm of arts education, the urge to break down the political segregation between non-political fiction and non-fictional fact is common to both applied theatre in education and performance activists. When fiction and reality become blurred, ethical dilemmas occur when socially provocative or "false", even "unethical" behaviour is enacted or allowed under the umbrella of "just art", or when social participants are lured to co-act on "false" or unknown premises. The accusation of "unethical" behaviour of political performance work is, however, counteracted by a defence for the "unethical" by current aesthetics. Again,

following Rancière (2006b), art has always been part of an ethical ambition by being committed to social mediation and repairing social bonds or by (only) witnessing the catastrophes of the world (Rancière, 2006, p. 10). This is done by two seemingly opposed strategies, both serving the polis state: the one being the "soft ethics" of consensus when art dismisses itself (auto-suppression) and becomes part of polis society, and the other the "hard ethics" of aestheticism and autonomy which does not affect the polis distribution. We think our shown examples, and many cases of applied theatre, point at a different route, seeking to avoid both of Rancière's deadlocks by staging a concealed form of repressed ethics that does appear as unethical. No one should question the strong ethics behind the political actions of ZPS or the Yes Men.

Following this line of argument, arts in education and applied theatre might reconsider what is considered ethical in arts practices in post-democracies. We have presented a selection of three aspects of neo-liberalist post-democracy that seem to be established values to ensure post-democratic life and business: consensus, fictionalization, and paradoxical communication. We think that it is ethically incumbent upon us to question practices formed by post-democratic values and their associated ethics. We argue that we can question those values and even re-install alternative values for the democratic citizen through art and performance. In this way, art, applied art and arts education can work to redistribute the ethics of art and society.

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