

Silvija Jestrovic

The Theatrical Memory of Space: from Piscator and Brecht to Belgrade

In this article, Silvija Jestrovic introduces the notion of spatial inter-performativity to discuss theatre's relationship to actual political and cultural spaces. Focusing on the Berlin of the 1920s in performances of Brecht and Piscator, then on a street procession of the *Générik Vapeur* troupe that took place in Belgrade in 1994, she examines how theatrical and political spaces refer to and transform one another. Silvija Jestrovic was a SSHRC postdoctoral fellow at York University in Toronto, and has recently taken up an appointment in the School of Theatre Studies at the University of Warwick. She is currently working on a book-length project entitled *Avant-Garde and the City*.

THROUGH its capacity for doubling and 'ghosting' (Carlson), theatre establishes relations not only to other texts and performances, but to actual sites, past and present, that it recreates or renegotiates. Relationships between theatrical and 'real' spaces are both diachronic and synchronic – a theatrical performance can refer to or even spring from an actual contemporary site whose history is still in the making. A space used, recreated, or alluded to in a theatre production might not yet be fully 'haunted', but might be an integral part of the audience's contemporary cultural and social experience. In that case, the real space takes shape as its theatricalized double unfolds. Just as the reality and instability of a historical space influence and alter the meaning of its theatrical renderings, the theatricalization of an actual space reshapes its future meaning in cultural memory.

I will call this complex phenomenon *spatial inter-performativity* – identified, in the broadest sense, as a theatrical allusion of a visual, aural, or verbal nature to a cultural space outside designated theatrical and cultural institutions. In other words, spatial inter-performativity allows for the sounds and sites of an actual locale iconically or symbolically to infiltrate the fictional world of a theatrical performance. Closely connected to the political and cultural life of a city in which the given performance takes place, spatial inter-performativity relies on the col-

lective knowledge and memory of shared urban spaces – their history, meaning, and function in the life of a community.

The focus here is on two aspects of spatial inter-performativity: as a means of politicizing theatre through inscription of urban sites with relevant socio-political significance into the fabric of a theatrical performance; and the role of the audience as the decisive link in the dialectical relationship between reality and performance, and between outside and inside. In order to examine the 'dialectics between outside and inside' (Bachelard) of spatial inter-performativity, my examples are drawn from historical performances of German political theatre during the 1920s and early 1930s and, specifically, concern Bertolt Brecht's play *The Mother* and Erwin Piscator's production *In Spite of All!* Albeit via different routes, both plays brought street life – from the sounds of car horns to the sounds and images of political demonstrations – to the stage. To elucidate the discussion of the role the audience plays in the phenomenon of performing political memories of space, I will also consider a street performance of the French troupe *Générik Vapeur* that I witnessed at the Belgrade International Theatre Festival (BITEF) in the autumn of 1994.

An examination of spatial inter-performativity is inevitably connected both to specific theatrical performances and to the

'outside' world of political, cultural, and urban experiences that they embody. Therefore, I will not only be looking at certain historical and contemporary performances that illuminate the notion of spatial inter-performativity, but also take a brief 'stroll' through the cities where the performances in question took place – the roaring and politically dramatic Berlin of the 1920s and the no less politically dramatic and violent Belgrade of the early 1990s.

Dialectics of Outside and Inside

Although set in pre-Revolutionary Russia, the production of Brecht's didactic play *The Mother* that premiered on 17 January 1932 at the Komödiehaus (Theater am Schiffbauerdamm) alluded to many politically relevant issues of Brecht's Germany – from workers' wages and unemployment to the danger of National Socialism. The play is an adaptation of Maxim Gorky's famous Soviet classic about the mother Pelagia Vlasova, who undergoes a transformation from an apolitical religious person to a proletarian activist.

According to Helene Weigel, who played the leading role, the performance was staged in order to be easily mobile, with just a single backdrop, and props and costumes that could fit into a car. The performance was often presented outside designated theatre venues in proletarian districts of North Berlin or in former bourgeois theatre buildings rented by the troupe for the evening. To perform an agitprop play in such a theatre building was a political statement in itself – a symbolic act of taking over the cultural space that used to belong to bourgeois theatre and its audience.

A photo taken from the 1932 performance of *The Mother* depicts the actors grouped for the strike scene. In the centre, an actor holds a red flag, framed by Brecht's famous half-curtain, with an urban landscape of the grey apartment blocks of a working-class neighbourhood used as the backdrop. These featureless apartment blocks of Brecht's imaginary Russia worked as a scenic synecdoche within which Berlin's proletarian neighbourhoods could be recognized. Like the shots of unidentified working-class Berlin localities

depicted in Brecht's film *Kuhle Wampe* or the actual urban landscapes of Kreuzberg or Friedrichshain, Neukölln or Wedding, Brecht's backdrop could stand for almost any working-class district in the city at that time.

A more overt inter-performative reference was inscribed in one of the central events of Brecht's play – the May Day demonstration, which the heroine Vlasova had joined in the belief that it would be a non-violent protest. But the parade turned into a bloody confrontation with the police, and Vlasova's friend who held the red flag was shot. Performed in Berlin of the early 1930s, this scene was a clear reference to the famous Bloody May of 1929, when police fired shots at workers returning from the peaceful May Day celebrations. Fearing communist riots, Berlin police authorities forbade the May Day gatherings, but despite the prohibition workers still took to the streets.

That Brecht actually observed this *mise en scène* of political confrontation from the window of a nearby apartment building while visiting a friend may have inspired the strike scene in *The Mother*. The confrontation took place at Bülowplatz, close to the Volksbühne and the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus where the headquarters of the German Communist Party were formerly housed. When it turned out that the bullets that the police fired were real and not made of rubber, as had been assumed, the para-theatrical events of political demonstration and celebration quickly transformed the parade into a bloodbath.

May Day festivities and demonstrations were an important part of the German proletarian culture of the time. The scenarios of the festivities grew more elaborate over the years, involving performances created specifically for the occasion. Red flags and workers' choruses (*Sprachchor*) were the dominant features of the parade, while the *Internationale* and other revolutionary songs were an obligatory part of the repertoire.¹ In *The Mother* Brecht incorporated the iconography of May Day festivities and the *mise en scène* of the conflict between the protesters and the police. In the scene entitled 'Report on the 1 May 1905', the protagonists of *The Mother* embody the event as follows:

ivan: We marched in a quiet and orderly fashion. Songs like 'Arise, ye prisoners of starvation' and 'Comrades, the bugles are sounding' were sung. Our factory marched immediately behind the great red flag. . . .

anton: . . . Before we arrived at the Boulevard of Our Saviour we saw only a few policemen and no soldiers, but on the corner of the Boulevard of Our Saviour and the Tverskaya there suddenly stood a double chain of soldiers. When they saw our flag and our banners, a voice suddenly called out to us, 'Attention! Disperse immediately! We have orders to shoot!' And: 'Drop the flag.' Our column came to a halt. (Brecht, 1978, p. 24)

Although this description belonged to the fictional world of Gorky and Brecht, it was also a vivid inter-performative reference to Bloody May – still, at the time, very present in the consciousness of the theatre workers and audience members of the Berlin production. Sights and sounds from the Bülowplatz of 1 May 1929 pierced Brecht's dramaturgy of the Russian May Day protests of 1905 on the fictional Boulevard of Our Saviour.

Yet, both significantly and intentionally, Brecht's theatrical allusion to the given political event departed from the real-life *mise en scène* of the protest. The production did not aim to recreate the urgency and danger of the event it referred to. Rather, Brecht chose a metonymic approach depicting on stage the most representative elements of the actual protest and of working-class culture: a red flag, a working-class district as backdrop, and a few actors standing in for thousands of protesters. Nevertheless it took no time for police officials to decode Brecht's inter-performative reference. The authorities recognized the subversive dimensions of the production – from its proletarian propaganda to its allusions to Bloody May – and wanted to prohibit it. Weigel describes the show performed for workers in Berlin's proletarian district of Moabit on February 1932, when the game with the police turned into some sort of performance within the performance:

Even though there was a police permit, shortly before the performance we received a note from the fire department forbidding the show to go on, because the things in the hall were allegedly 'too

flammable'. We began despite the prohibition and the performance was constantly interrupted. At first we were told that we could not use our costumes, so we decided to play in our private clothes. Then they said stage movements were also not acceptable. Then we just sat and read the play. That too appeared to be a possible fire hazard. It turned into an indescribably comic and constantly interrupted performance, since the fire police constantly found new potentially hazardous things. (Weigel, 1973, p. 29–30)

Inflaming the Authorities

The police intervention made this performance unique, since the show acquired a considerable degree of unpredictability and immediacy, typical of workers' guerrilla performances and street demonstrations. The police interruptions added a performative, non-rehearsed quality to the show, which could never have been fully aestheticized. Paralleling the action on stage, the fire department 'scenario' cut into the main plot and changed its course. Throughout the evening, the actors had to work against the notion of 'hazardous', 'inflammable' space that the police were imposing. The 'scenario' of police interruption turned the performance space into a 'silent character' (Hugo) of the show.

The need to prevent this potentially subversive show was a comic rendering of the same fear that had prompted Berlin police authorities to forbid the Workers Day celebration in 1929 – they too had feared that May Day festivities and demonstrations could 'inflammate' the streets of Berlin. The incident surrounding the performance of *The Mother* in Moabit exemplifies the notion that history happens first as tragedy, but repeats itself as farce. During Bloody May, the theatricality of street festivities and protests was suppressed by a violent 'performance' of political oppression. Revisited through inter-performative references in this particular performance of *The Mother*, the unrehearsed conflict with the police recurred in almost comic fashion.

Both the protest itself and the performance alluding to it involved a form of confrontation with the authorities; only in the latter case was the real gunfire replaced by a few absurd prohibitions from the fire mar-

shal. Despite the police interruption and the sense of unpredictability and immediacy, the theatrical event remained within the safe zone of role-playing, both on the part of the actors and on the side of the fire authorities.

A Map of Revolutionary Struggle

In the 1925 documentary performance *In Spite of All!*,² co-created with writer Felix Gasbarra and visual artist John Heartfield, Piscator depicted the struggles of Berlin workers – from the start of the First World War to the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht – through a scenic montage of authentic speeches, newspaper articles, flyers, photographs, and film footage of the war and of the November Revolution. While the live stage action depicted the individual protagonists in the drama of history, filmed images of dead soldiers in the trenches of the Great War, or of workers marching in protest carrying red flags in front of the Brandenburger Tor, placed individual destinies in a wider socio-political context.

In his comments on the production of *In Spite of All!*, Piscator wrote: 'For the first time we were confronted with reality experienced by us first hand' (Boesner and Vatková, 1986, p. 64). Theatricalizing history on Piscator's stage did not resonate as a process of 'ghosting', but as a way of coming to terms with urgent political issues that could be better understood if seen in their historical context. Piscator was not concerned with a mere re-enactment of history, but with the semantic effects that the given scenic montage had on the audience. Various documentary elements of the performance – from film footage to spatial inter-performative references – served not only to authenticate the theatricalized action, but also to place the actual political experience of the audience members in a wider socio-historical framework and to give meaning to their individual roles in the chaotic revolutionary events.

Brief summaries of each scene outlined in the programme notes offered both a scenario of the performance and a map of Berlin's revolutionary struggles from 1914 to 1918.³ Like an itinerary of a historic walk through

revolutionary Berlin, the programme became not just a performance document but a historic one as well, revealing the complex relationship between the city, its political life, and its theatre. Potsdamer Platz, for instance, is depicted in the first scene as the place where a *colporteur* shouts the latest news about the assassination of the Austrian archduke in Sarajevo. Later, it reappears as the site of numerous political events, including the 1 May demonstrations of 1916⁴ and the mass gatherings of the citizens and the proletariat on the eve of the 1918 Revolution. This spatial inter-performative reference was further reinforced through projections of documentary images of Potsdamer Platz crowded with protesters in the days of the Revolution.

The show's spatial inter-performative references complicated the dialectic between outside and inside. Bringing the streets of Berlin into a theatrical building in order to create the atmosphere and urgency of street protests – via documentary images, inter-performative references, sounds, and audience involvement – was one element of this dialectic. The other concerned the semiotics of spatial delineation in the scenario of the performance. The street was presented as a major site of revolutionary activity, a place outside the power structure and its institutions, where demands for change could be expressed openly and forcefully. The space behind the close doors of political institutions was shown to be the playground of an oppressive power structure where war-mongering policies were created and murderous plots devised as means to eliminate political opponents.

The dialectic of outside and inside also marked the political dynamic and curve of the conflict in the show. In the first part of the performance, political opposition still communicated with the institutions of power. After Liebknecht's arrest during the 1916 May Day demonstrations, the rift between revolutionaries and the regime – between the street and the official political institutions, the outside and the inside – became unbridgeable.

The last scene depicted the assassination of Liebknecht in Berlin's famous Tiergarten

park, followed by a march of proletarians shouting, 'Liebknecht lives!' (Boesner and Vatková, 1986, p. 70) The location of the march was unspecified, creating the illusion that the revolutionaries – 'in spite of all' (*trotz alledem*) – took over the city, blurring, in a symbolic victory, the dividing lines between outside and inside. In the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, reviewer Jakob Altmeier described *In Spite of All!* as a show that put the audience right into the actual reality of the city.

According to Altmeier, after the shows of Leopold Jessner and Max Reinhardt, as the audience walked out of the theatre and into reality, 'the city feels like an ancient forest where one gets utterly disoriented' (Boesner and Vatková, 1986, p. 65). In contrast, after watching *In Spite of All!* 'one feels refreshed. Invigorated! Swims and roars through the city. Traffic and lights, noise and technology all start to make sense' (Boesner and Vatková, 1986, p. 65). In this show, the entire city of Berlin with its streets, squares, and buildings turned into the stage on which a dramatic and violent history was played out.

Heartfield's complex geometrical set was not a photographic reproduction of the city, but still sprang from the iconography and architecture of a modern metropolis. His set of abstract yet highly functional shapes, displaying traces of cubist, constructivist, and Bauhaus buildings, could fit easily into the urban landscape of Berlin. Creating an almost self-contained modern, urban, and highly politicized world, Piscator staged not only dramatic historical events, but also the city itself. By means of spatial inter-performative references, his show became both architecturally and thematically organic to Berlin's political life and culture.

The Emotional Journey of *Bivouac*

Spatial inter-performativity is fully realized in the reception process as the audience makes the decisive link between theatricalized and real space. In some cases, the audience is able to establish spatial inter-performative references even when creators and performers have not consciously intended to do so. This form of audience 'concretization' most often

occurs when spectators have a richer experience of the place than the performers who theatricalize it. In such cases, spatial inter-performative references are established almost solely through the audience's memory and become the performative equivalent to dramatic irony.

To illustrate this point, I want briefly to recollect a performance of the French troupe *Générik Vapeur* that I saw in Belgrade in 1994 – for only an eyewitness can testify to the existence of this type of spatial inter-performative reference. The performance, entitled *Bivouac*, and translated in the Festival programme as *Emotional Journey*, began in the heart of the city by the monument of Knez Mihailo across the street from the National Theatre. The performers were dressed in blue body-suits with blue make-up on their faces.

As a moderate crowd of theatregoers gathered, the performers started to roll huge empty barrels, while punk music blared from loudspeakers. They took the assembled spectators to the city's main pedestrian zone, leading to the Roman fortress of Kalemegdan. As the procession progressed, the music became louder. The performers, as street clowns and acrobats, climbed the fountains and street lamps; curious passers-by joined the procession; the audience multiplied; walking turned into running and finally into a stampede. The theatrical procession overtook this part of the city, making any other street activity impossible and creating a truly carnivalesque atmosphere.

The procession quickly erased any demarcation line between the audience and the performers, temporarily freeing the street from its daily routine and order. It ended on the top of the Roman fortress overlooking the river, where the performers stacked the barrels into the shape of a pyramid and, cheered on by the audience, set fire to them. As the procession neared its end and the energy-level of the participants reached its zenith, a feeling of liberation overcame the spectator-participants as if they had undergone a ritual of political decontamination.

The Marseille-based troupe is committed to street performance that makes everyday

sights and sounds of a city strange. Génèrik Vapeur turns ordinary street life into a liberating chaos inviting the audience to experience a familiar urban landscape in a new way. Their performances are based on flexible scenarios that allow the city not only to become a theatrical stage, but to define the final shape to the performance.

The Struggle for Change in Serbia

Bivouac was created in 1988 and since then has toured numerous European cities as well as in Japan and China.⁵ Each performance is different, since the show's *mise en scène* depends to some degree on the street architecture – the fountains, statues, trees, and street lamps that the performers use as set and props – where it is performed. The performance is further shaped by the street's culture and history through the energy and the shared urban experience of its inhabitants.

As its subtitle in the Festival's catalogue suggested, *Bivouac* aimed to take everyone involved on an 'emotional journey' and to create the atmosphere of a rock concert and a sense of bonding among the participants. In some other city, this street procession would have probably been just a highly entertaining and carnivalesque event. In Belgrade in 1994, however, the performance fortuitously took on striking political dimensions. Since 1991, the part of the city where the procession took place had been associated with political protests and with riots against the regime of Slobodan Milosevic.

Searching for the most suitable spot for their street theatre to unfold, the performers accidentally chose the itinerary of the political protest that took place on 9 March 1991 in Belgrade – the first riot of the Serbian opposition against the ruling regime. Just like the performers and audience of *Bivouac*, protesters had gathered around the monument of Knez Mihailo three years earlier to demand that Slobodan Milosevic and his regime step down. When the police used tear gas and water cannons, the protesters ran down Knez Mihailova Street smashing windows and street lights in anger and despair. The protest itself was a violent collision of

political and theatrical life, both metaphorically and literally. When the police tried to prevent the leaders of the democratic opposition from addressing the crowd, the artistic director of the National Theatre, Vida Ognjenovic, opened the door of the building, enabling the protest to continue from the theatre's balcony.⁶ In order to quell the riot, the regime deployed the army, sending tanks into the streets of Belgrade. Two people were killed on the first day of the riot – a young protester and a policeman.

In the days following this event, mass protests continued in the heart of the city around an improvised stage, where a leading Serbian actor served night and day as M.C. Other local artists joined him, keeping the protesters' spirits high and the constant threat of Milosevic's police and army at bay. When Génèrik Vapeur came to Belgrade, the events of March 1991 were still vivid in the memory of the citizens regardless of their political orientation. It was the first mass anti-regime protest, whose violent *mise en scène* and tragic outcome confirmed that the struggle for political change in Serbia would be long and difficult. For the democratic opposition and its supporters, the event left the bitter taste of defeat.

A Street of Conflicting Cultures

The pathway and drama of this riot was to be relived in many more political protests to come, including the student protest of 1994 that had ended just a couple of months before the French performers brought their street spectacle to the main pedestrian zone of Belgrade.⁷ Many of us who ran enthusiastically after the Génèrik Vapeur performers, overcome with the illusion that the street was ours again, had run down that same street many times before, chased away by tear gas, water cannons, and police batons.

This had been the favourite city strip in times of peace, but – as traces of urban civic culture had been largely erased during the war years – even on quiet days citizens could easily have felt strangers. Knez Mihailova Street, with its nineteenth-century façades and modern galleries, bookstores, and cafés,

was one of the places where both the city's mainstream and its counter-culture were created and shaped. At one end of the street stands the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences – the keeper of cultural tradition, which in the late 1980s became increasingly nationalistic. At the other end is the nightclub *Akademia*, the cradle of the city's alternative rock-and-roll culture in the 1980s.

In the 1990s, as the search for national identity got out of control, street musicians played jingoistic songs under the balcony of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Science and 'turbo-folk'⁸ – the preferred music of the new crowd of young war profiteers – silenced rock-and-roll in the *Akademia*. The proponents of the counter-culture were exiled from the street, and Knez Mihailova Street was packed with street vendors selling nationalistic insignia and war uniforms. From some of the nearby cafés, 'patriotic' songs that called for hatred and killing were played.

In contrast to these street sights and sounds, a group named Women in Black gathered every day around noon in front of the Knez Mihailo monument, in silent protest against the war and the regime, steadfastly enduring insults from 'patriotically' inclined passers-by. Although this daily performance was an act of civic resistance and disobedience, the marginalization of this group, overpowered by the blustering iconography of the street, also signalled the seeming helplessness and futility of all attempts to make change in society.

An exhibition entitled *Art and War* by the designer and writer Dragan Todorovic opened in spring 1994 in the gallery of the Belgrade Cultural Centre, which is also located in Knez Mihailova Street. This project attested to the devastating effects of this new kind of street culture as well as to serious political polarization in the society. Todorovic gathered and exhibited a variety of ready-made objects that could be bought on the street, including Disney figurines dressed in the uniforms of Serbian paramilitaries, liquor bottles in the shape of Serbian monasteries, and war uniforms for two-year-olds.

This bizarre installation was juxtaposed with photos from the war in Bosnia and

Croatia, showing how seemingly comical and innocent objects had become deadly weapons of jingoistic hatred and propaganda. Art critics and regular gallery visitors loved the exhibition, but the proponents of the new street culture of Knez Mihailova did not, and some even threatened to blow up the gallery.

Political Catharsis

The unbridgeable gap between two city cultures – the cosmopolitan, pacifist, rock-and-roll culture on the one side, and the nationalistic, warmongering, turbo-folk culture on the other – reflected the two major political streams in Serbia that often collided in street protests. In the city's vernacular, this social and political gap was labelled as a rift between 'urban' and 'rural' culture.

The performance of *Générik Vapeur* temporarily cleansed the street from the vendors and singers who had been trying to capitalize on nationalistic frenzy, strengthening the illusion that the urban culture of the city had finally prevailed. Moreover, it tapped into the mythology of Belgrade's 'urban' culture, mixing the two strongest ingredients of the collective 'emotional journey' that Belgrade's 'urban guerrilla' had undergone in the past few years – the energy of a rock concert with the atmosphere and rebelliousness of a political protest.

The theatre critic Aleksandar Milosavljevic described the effect the French performers had on the spectators-participants in the following way:

Indirectly, energetic street performers of the *Générik Vapeur* troupe spoke about us and our reality as if they knew that in the past few years (from 1990 to 1994) the heart of Belgrade had become ruralized – a provincial mentality took hold of the city, systematically destroying its urban culture and consciousness. The French performers ran through the centre of Belgrade emitting powerful rock-and-roll energy, which reminded us that this city used to belong to its citizens before it was taken over by sellers and buyers of nationalistic insignia, who now dance to turbo-folk tunes on the Kalemegdan fortress.

(Milosavljevic, 1994, p. 186)

When *Générik Vapeur* came to the Belgrade International Theatre Festival, the troupe

found itself in a 'haunted' performance site. Unexpectedly, their street procession evoked a strong sense of symbolic political cleansing from oppression as well as the illusion of reclaiming Belgrade's favourite street.

This performance, however, which had so easily erased the barrier between audience and participants, creating the atmosphere of a carnival, was clearly not intended to be politically relevant. The audience, who had lived through a highly politically charged reality at the given performance site, read into the show an inter-performative reference that the actors had neither planned nor been aware of. Certainly, the theatre troupe found in its Belgrade spectators an enthusiastic, energetic, and highly responsive audience, but the Génèrik Vapeur performers never really learned of the profound *political catharsis* that they had provoked in that audience.

This type of catharsis springs from the sense of oneness with the performance event and a larger historical picture within which the performance becomes inscribed. Moreover, this cathartic experience requires a shift in focus from the spectacle to the spectator. As the anthropologist Marc Augé notes in his reflections on place:

The individual feels himself to be a spectator without paying much attention to the spectacle. As if the position of spectator were the essence of the spectacle, as if basically the spectator in the position of the spectator were his own spectacle.

(Augé, 1995, p. 86)

The recent past of the city and the everyday political reality of its central street asserted itself on to the body of the Génèrik Vapeur performance as a palimpsest. In other words, the French troupe inscribed its performance codes onto a pre-existing text of political struggle, violence, and despair strongly imprinted into the cityscape of the time. The performers, however, did not know how to read this palimpsest, and were probably not even aware of its signs and codes that had penetrated their street spectacle. In return, for the audience-participants the actual performance became a tool to reach and confront the underlying text within which their

own history was being written. Yet in this highly performative encounter, the two texts – that of the city and that of the French performance – altered one another, making the spectatorship the most important part of the spectacle.

The Potential for Change

The experience of political catharsis enables the seeing of oneself as an important part of a dramatic historical process, one which has the potential to change the course of political reality. The scene of the 1 May demonstrations in Brecht's *The Mother*, Piscator's depiction of workers' political struggle in Berlin, and the street procession of Génèrik Vapeur in Belgrade all caused the audience to relive a dramatic political experience that marked their recent pasts and was still resonating in their present realities. Through intentional and, in the case of Génèrik Vapeur, unintentional spatial inter-performative references, these performances evoked not only a kind of emotional 'cleansing' from political trauma, but also a feeling of political empowerment.

In Piscator's 1925 performance, a proletarian spectator might have experienced a triumphant moment (or rather, the illusion thereof) while watching the worker-performers as they marched and took over the stage with shouts of 'Liebknecht lives!' The citizens of Belgrade felt a similar kind of empowerment in 1994 as they ran down the street following the Génèrik Vapeur procession. In both cases, the performance gave the audience a sense of reclaiming their cultural and political space, whether it was the Berlin of the 1920s that Piscator transposed onto the theatre stage, or the heart of Belgrade in the 1990s that a French theatre troupe temporarily 'decontaminated' from oppressive politics.

Commonly, Piscator's performances ended with the audience joining in with the actors to sing the *Internationale* in a moment of political catharsis. The Belgrade audience, recognizing in the physicality and raw energy of the Génèrik Vapeur's performance the emotional *spiritus movens* of their own political struggle, had a similar cathartic

experience. Through very different means and in quite different eras, both audiences experienced a utopian moment, embodied not only by the sense of oneness with the theatrical event, but by the illusion of an unquestionable political victory.

References

- Augé, Marc, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).
- Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
- Boeser, Knut, and Renata Vatková, ed., *Erwin Piscator: Eine Arbeitsbiographie in 2 Bänden; Band 1: Berlin 1916–1931* (Berlin: Frölich und Kaufmann, 1986).
- Brecht, Bertolt, *The Mother*, trans. Steve Gooch (London: Methuen, 1978).
- , 'Anmerkungen zur Mutter', *Stücke*, Vol. V (Berlin, 1957).
- Carlson, Marvin, *The Haunted Stage: the Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).
- Hornauer, Uwe, *Laienspiel und Massenchor* (Köln: Prometh Verlag, 1985).
- Hugo, Victor, 'Preface à Cromwell', *Oeuvres complètes*, 18 vols (Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1967).
- Jestrovic, Silvija, 'Theatricalizing Politics/Politicizing Theatre', *Canadian Theatre Review*, No. 103 (2000), p. 42–7.
- Milosavljevic, Aleksandar, 'BITEF je gotov – sezona je pocela' ['BITEF is Over – Theatre Season Begins'], *Teatron*, No. 89 (1994), p. 185–91.
- Vidal, Sara, *Bivouac: Générisk Vapeur* (Paris: Seus et Tonka, 2000).
- Weigel, Helene, 'Erinnerungen an die erste Aufführung der Mutter: aus einem Gespräch', *Materialien zu Bertolt Brechts 'Die Mutter'*, ed. Werner Hecht (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973).

Notes

1. For more on May Day and other workers' celebrations, see Hornauer (1985).
2. The title for the show *In Spite of All!* was borrowed from Karl Liebknecht, who had famously used these words as a revolutionary call.
3. The notes are published in *Erwin Piscator: Eine Arbeitsbiographie*.
4. As part of the May Day demonstrations of 1916 Liebknecht gave a political speech and was arrested.
5. In 2000 Sara Vidal put together a monograph dedicated to the *Bivouac* performance.
6. When the protest was over, Ognjenovic, a distinguished theatre director and playwright, was forced by the authorities to resign from the position of Artistic Director of the National Theatre. In post-Milosevic years, she became Serbia's ambassador in Denmark.
7. Among the most notable political demonstrations that followed the events of 9 March 1991 was the three-month protest that took place in the winter of 1996–97 in the same part of the city. Milosevic and his regime were finally overthrown on 5 October 2001. For more on theatrical elements of the student demonstrations of 1994 and on the 1996–97 protests, see Jestrovic, 'Theatricalizing Politics/Politicizing Theatre'.
8. Turbo-folk is a type of commercial music played in Serbia and other parts of the Balkans. It mixes traditional folk tunes with rhythm machines, and is set usually to sentimental lyrics. It became very popular in the early 1990s and is associated with bad taste, kitsch, provincialism, and a lack of political consciousness.