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'Actors in the Same Tragedy': Bertrand Russell, Humanism, and *The Conquest of Happiness*

In *Writings on Cities* Henri Lefebvre calls for a 'renewed right to urban life'. He maintains that 'we must thus make the effort to reach out towards a new humanism, a new praxis, another man, that of urban society'. City spaces are used in a number of contemporary Irish site-specific theatre productions to explore histories of oppression and social injustice, and to imagine a new humanist praxis for society. The international multi-artform production *The Conquest of Happiness* (2013) was inspired by Bertrand Russell's commitment to human happiness in defiance of war and suffering in his book *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930) and in his many political and philosophical writings. In this article Eva Urban critically examines the ways in which the performance in Northern Ireland attempted to embody Russell's humanism and related critical concepts to encourage active citizenship. She considers to what extent the dramaturgical options employed in the production applied Russell's ideas and those of other thinkers by developing critical representations of inhumanity, challenging authoritarianism, and exploring humanist ideals. Eva Urban is a British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge, and an Associate of Clare Hall, Cambridge. She is the author of *Community Politics and the Peace Process in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama* (Peter Lang, 2011) and her articles on political drama and Irish studies have been published in *New Theatre Quarterly*, *Etudes Irlandaises*, and *Caleidoscopio*.

Key terms: political theatre, site-specific theatre, contemporary Irish theatre.

There lies before us, if we choose, continual progress in happiness, knowledge, and wisdom. Shall we instead choose death because we cannot forget our quarrels? Remember your humanity, and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new paradise; if you cannot, nothing lies before you but universal death.[1]

THIS STATEMENT by Bertrand Russell, published in the 1955 *Russell–Einstein Manifesto*, encapsulates his pacifism and universal humanism. The international site-specific theatre production *The Conquest of Happiness* (2013) attempted to give form to Russell's humanist ideas and pacifist commitment, as expressed in his 1930s book of the same title and in many of his other writings.[2] It was initiated and directed by Haris Pašovic of East West Theatre Sarajevo and Emma Jordan of Belfast theatre company Prime Cut, and co-produced by Mladinsko Theatre, Ljubljana.

The production critically framed a series of performances representing some of the most inhumane war episodes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, highlighting the universal nature of human violence and suffering, and advocating humanist concern for others. It enacted principles of critical theory in a complex collage of historical material, verbatim elements, critical concepts, dramaturgies, dance, and music. The greater part of the script consisted of extracts from a variety of textual sources, framed by original musical compositions by Neil Martin. These were mainly drawn from political and philosophical writings and speeches by Russell himself, but also included a number of significant complementary statements by Susan Sontag and Hannah Arendt, as well as sixteen hymns, national anthems, protest and popular songs.

These elements constituted a conceptual link between separate scenes that included

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X15000652 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dialogues in several languages, organized in a sequence of Brechtian episodes according to a non-Aristotelian structure. The performance shared its epic structure, dramaturgical and spatial complexity with the site-specific production *Convictions* (2000) at the Crumlin Road Courthouse in Belfast.[3] The text for *The Conquest of Happiness* included a short dialogue written by Northern Irish playwright Damian Gorman, who also contributed one of the seven independent short playlets, *Judge's Room*, that made up *Convictions*. In addition to a pattern of many Brechtian group tableaux, musical and multi-media elements, *The Conquest of Happiness* included abstract avant-garde contemporary dance scenes developed by choreographer Thomas Steyaert.

Rehearsals took place in Sarajevo and in Belfast in the summer of 2013. The production was first staged on Derry's Ebrington Square in September 2013 before touring to Mostar, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, and Belfast in October. It involved an international professional cast and community choirs including children, accompanied by a group of professional musicians recruited from the participating cities. The performances were situated in site-specific settings within significant city spaces; and communities and audiences from those cities were actively involved.

The Performance Space in Derry

The significant space chosen for the Derry performance was the former parade ground of a British Army barracks. Constructed in 1841, the barracks were used in recent years (that is, until 2003) as the base for the 8th Infantry Brigade and as the Northern Area Regional Command headquarters. Located outside the city proper, across the River Foyle and close to the Waterside, it is historically a Loyalist Protestant neighbourhood, adjacent to the new Peace Bridge, inaugurated in 2011 explicitly as a material and symbolic link between the historically opposed communities. The former parade ground was also redeveloped in 2011 as Ebrington Square and the whole site has been expropriated as a cultural campus for events and exhibitions presented as transcending community enmities and divisions, exemplifying to that extent Henri Lefebvre's concept of the reappropriation (*détournement*) of city spaces.[4]

For Pašovic's production, the former parade ground was enclosed by high wire fences, forming an alienating compound. The production was structured around three outdoor spaces, and similarly to *Convictions*, the audience was guided by actors from one space to another. For the opening sequence, spectators gathered on the top of a hill adjacent to Ebrington Square, facing a row of old military barracks. They were then led by the actors and community choir down to the main circular, fenced-in performance space. Within this compound, they found themselves surrounded by a circle of trucks and vehicles, forming a perimeter of performance platforms: in the middle of the compound, a large central stage.

Spectators were able to move around freely as they observed a sequence of scenes highlighted by spotlights rapidly moving from illuminating one scene to another and from one truck or platform stage to the next. These scenes representing the structural similarities of occurrences of violence and suffering were grouped around a centre in several ways: literally so, in that they all related to the audience in the centre of the space with the effect that spectators were given a function within a shared structure – the role of bystanders in conflict and genocide situations. The performances were also built around Russell's political writings and their relationship with critical theory that lays bare totalitarian and authoritarian attitudes, based on economic structures, as the root cause of conflict, violence, and human suffering. This critical discourse, which contrasted with representations of Russell's humanist ideals of love, solidarity, critical citizenship, and internationalism, was an integral part of the production.

The Conquest of Happiness dealt with a wide range of atrocities across the globe, genuinely if not always successfully attempting to include criticism of a variety of conflicts and perspectives. It was perhaps the production's major weakness that its complexity – visual, spatial, textual, and musical –

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The performance space in Derry, a fenced-in area of the former army barracks redeveloped as Ebrington Square. Within the compound, the spectators moved around freely amidst the lorries, trucks, and watchtower scaffolds, but found themselves surrounded by a circle of trucks and vehicles, forming a perimeter of performance platforms: in the middle of the compound, a large central stage. Photos: Ciaran Bagnall.

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was in fact not immediately accessible in every detail without a reading of the script. This meant that spectators and reviewers could easily miss the diversity of the critical voices that were included around particular violent episodes, but often only expressed in a brief quotation rather than in a fully performed scene. A reading of the performance without consultation of the script could then potentially lead to reductive impressions of a work that undersells its critical intentions.

'Active and Concentrated Participation'

Crucially, the significant textual elements by Sontag and Arendt that were included in the speeches without clear reference were not picked up by most reviewers of the performance but were often simply attributed to Russell along with the rest of the material. Ironically, the production's complexity of structure simultaneously constituted a weakness and major strength, as it demanded the audience's full concentration and critical engagement with the performance.

This effect was increased by the manner in which spectators were compelled to move actively around the space, change physical positions, and were challenged towards praxis as they were forced to think: spectators had to turn their heads from one scene to the next, which provoked critical engagement, and they had to stay on top of what was going on to 'write' their own versions of the performance.

In some ways, the production could be said to correspond to Adorno's assessment of Schönberg's music, in which he describes it as demanding 'active and concentrated participation, the most acute attention to simultaneous multiplicity, the renunciation of the customary crutches of a listening which always knows what to expect. . . . It requires the listener to spontaneously compose its inner movement and demands of him not mere contemplation but praxis'.[5] The formal elements of musical composition and popular songs woven into the performance score of *The Conquest of Happiness* would clearly not lend themselves to Adorno's analysis. However, the complex composition or *montage* of many discrete elements of music, theatrical performance and dance, verbatim extracts, quotations, dialogue, the disruptions of the audience's spatial positions and spatial awareness, and the use of music and songs to counterpoint episodes of violence did, indeed, demand an 'active and concentrated participation, the most acute attention to simultaneous multiplicity . . . not mere contemplation but praxis'.[6]

Adorno's ideal – active critical thought processing aesthetic experiences – could be described as a humanist praxis. In *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology*, Tia DeNora quotes Adorno's assessment of Schönberg to argue against the separation of music and society into two categories and for an analysis of 'music *as* society'.[7] In *The Conquest of Happiness*, a counter-structure of musical elements and songs contrasted and disrupted the staged pattern of epic scenes of violence and atrocity with humanist visions that expressed Bertrand Russell's ideals. In a scene set during the Balkan wars of the 1990s, the cosmopolitan answer 'I am a musician' given by a musician character to the question 'Are you a Muslim or a Croat?' exemplified how music represented an ethos of communicative universalist humanism as developed in this production.[8]

By confronting the audience with other humans as 'fellow-sufferers in the same darkness; actors in the same tragedy with ourselves', this immersive performance directly staged Russell's philosophical assertion in his 1902 essay 'A Free Man's Worship'.[9] In this essay, Russell evokes a sense of cosmopolitan community that shares sufferings and seeks to overcome them by supporting all fellow human beings with courage, compassion, and love:

> One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death. Very brief is the time in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided. Be it ours to shine sunshine on their path, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instil faith in hours of despair. Let us not weigh in grudging scales their merits and demerits, but let

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us think only of their need – of the sorrows, the difficulties, perhaps the blindnesses, that make the misery of their lives; let us remember that they are fellow-sufferers in the same darkness; actors in the same tragedy with ourselves. And so, when their day is over, when their good and their evil have become eternal by the immortality of the past, be it ours to feel that, where they suffered, where they failed, no deed of ours was the cause; but wherever a spark of the divine kindled in their hearts, we were ready with encouragement, with sympathy, with brave words in which high courage glowed.[10]

The production of *The Conquest of Happiness* staged and represented many such brief moments where the 'happiness or misery' of 'our comrades' is decided before they 'vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death'. It staged moments in which people make life or death decisions for their fellow humans in that very brief period of time in which they 'can help them', moments in which the decision of one individual person can condemn another person to death or save them from violence, theatrical moments that show all humans as 'actors in the same tragedy'.

The production also affirmed how the sorrows of our fellow humans can be lightened 'by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instil faith in hours of despair'. The theme of an ideal of citizenship – a citizenship of agency, highlighting responsibility for actions and calling for 'high courage' – ran throughout the performance.

A thread of interrelated philosophical and political statements by Bertrand Russell, Hannah Arendt, and Susan Sontag commented on the episodes of violence. Russell himself was represented by the British-Sierra-Leonean actor Cornelius McCarthy, whose speeches formed another central structural element linking the various constituent parts of the performance and, in conjunction with the many musical interludes, functioned as distancing devices. The representations of violence included the Derry tragedy of Bloody Sunday in 1972, but did not include paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland. The eviction of Palestinian citizens from their homes in Israeli-occupied territories was dramatized in the opening sequence, and a reference to the 1972 Munich Massacre, where eleven members of the Israeli Olympic team were killed by Palestinian terrorists, occurred later in the text. Also represented were the military coup against Chile's government in 1973, the Cambodian genocide during the period of Khmer Rouge rule between 1975 and 1979, the killings of unarmed civilians by US soldiers during the Vietnam War, the genocide in Bosnia and the mass rape of Bosnian women during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, the genocide of the Tutsi population in Rwanda in 1994, footage of 9/11 and of the Guantánamo Bay detention camp. The performance culminated in breaking the taboo of representing the Holocaust.

Working against 'Dead Uniformity'

In spite of its verbatim elements (enactments and video footage of historical events, political speeches, dialogues, and interviews), this production was not in any sense a piece of documentary theatre attempting to deal with a range of specific conflicts and atrocities. Brechtian distancing devices and stylization effects such as chorus songs, dance patterns, and tableaux created an effective estrangement from the crystallized social relations depicted. The performance deconstructed patterns of power and the mechanisms of greed and corruption that unleash violence and perpetuate the failure to oppose it. The emphasis was on making explicit the suffering of all victims and therefore of universal humanity. In this sense, the production enacted both Bertrand Russell's humanist and cosmopolitan ideals and his critical analysis of society, economics, and the underlying mechanisms of power and authority.

In Russell's *The Conquest of Happiness* and *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, as quoted in the performance, Russell cites competition for money[11] and 'the worship of money'[12] as root causes of human unhappiness and inhumanity. 'The dead uniformity of character and purpose' that, as Russell argues, results

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from economic pressures also clearly relates to Theodor W. Adorno's analysis of an economic system that discourages citizens and communities from any attempt at exercising autonomous agency.[13]

Adorno offers an analysis of the psychology of authoritarianism that is similarly based on a concept of 'dead uniformity' as a result of economic necessities. He argues that if an individual's need for self-validation becomes frustrated, for example, during an economic crisis, the human narcissistic instinct may seek satisfaction through identification with a collective. Calculated manipulation of this psychological need leads to nationalism, totalitarianism, and fascism. According to Adorno, fascism grows from an economic order that, even in times of democracy and prosperity, fails to provide citizens with adequate security and agency. Instead, under changing economic conditions, citizens are forced to adapt:

> If they want to live, then no other avenue remains but to adapt, submit themselves to the given conditions; they must negate precisely that autonomous subjectivity to which the idea of democracy appeals; they can preserve themselves only if they renounce their self. To see through the nexus of deception, they would need to make precisely that painful intellectual effort that the organization of everyday life, and not least of all a culture industry inflated to the point of totality, prevents. The necessity of such adaptation, of identification with the given, the status quo, with power as such, creates the potential for totalitarianism.[14]

Such a critique of authoritarianism that builds on economic pressures and survival needs was a recognizable central theme throughout *The Conquest of Happiness*. The concept could be applied not only to the representation of Nazi officials in the Holocaust scene, but to all acts of violence portrayed that were committed through systematic compliance with orders. In many of the historical events performed, a causal chain could be observed: 'the worship of money' was linked with authoritarianism, and authoritarianism was linked with war and violence.

Each separate scene of the production dramatized in differing ways how the 'happiness or misery' of 'our comrades' is decided before they 'vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death'. Russell saw death as the ultimate military-style authority, seizing our comrades by its omnipotent 'orders', but he also emphasizes human responsibility for the consequences of one's own 'deeds' or lack of positive action regarding other humans. The performances demonstrated the destructive effects of authoritarian mind-sets that lead human beings uncritically to follow orders to commit violence against their fellow human beings and dehumanize them, and to fail to help 'fellow sufferers in the same darkness'. This lack of human agency exercised by 'actors in the same tragedy' and derived from authoritarianism was juxtaposed and challenged with several examples of courageous autonomous citizenship, and with speeches containing 'brave words in which high courage glowed'.

Memories of My Lai

These themes were most directly dramatized in a verbatim episode in which an American Vietnam veteran, Paul, explained to a friend his experience of killing unarmed men, women, children, and babies in the My Lai massacre. This was counterpointed with the pacifist song 'Give Peace a Chance', sung by a solo singer and the choir in the background, expressing contemporary criticism of the Vietnam War in which Russell's was one of the strongest voices.

In the course of Paul's recollections it emerges that, since he dared not resist the dominant authority in charge at that particular moment, he followed orders which he knew to be inhumane. Paul justified his inhumane conduct by what he perceived as his duty to suspend his independent judgement. His recollections and discussion with his comrade Mike were accompanied by a metatheatrical performance on the platform stage in the centre of the circle which created a *Verfremdungseffekt*: a soldier threatened a man with a machine gun and chased his victim through the audience. The discussion of the two soldiers on the truck was then interrupted by musical intervals and by

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enactments of the remembered incident by other actors.

This created an effect of estrangement: the audience had to turn their heads away from Paul, who sat with Mike on the truck on their right, and instead face the other two men, who represented Paul's superiors, Second Lieutenant William Calley and the Warrant Officer One, pilot Hugh Thompson, at My Lai, on the central platform stage. It emerges that Paul's superior, Calley, when challenged by Thompson, also justified his actions as following orders from above, through enactment of the following historical dialogue:

THOMPSON: What is this? Who are these people?
CALLEY: Just following orders.
THOMPSON: Orders? Whose orders?
CALLEY: Just following –
THOMPSON: But these are human beings, unarmed civilians, sir.
CALLEY: Look, Thompson. This is my show. I'm in charge here. It ain't your concern.[15]

In the Brechtian *Gestus* that reconstructed for the audience Paul's memory of the decisive moment in which he chose to obey orders against his own better judgement, it was clear that what leads to inhumanity is not forcibly a lack of moral principles, but often just the failure to summon the courage to defend these principles. Phillip Hansen has well summarized Hannah Arendt's analysis of how it is not a belief in particular value systems that makes people resist inhumanity, but rather the capacity for independent judgement:

In discussing personal responsibility under totalitarian rule, Arendt argues that those most willing and able to stand up to the Nazi regime and its inhuman demands were not those who had well-developed and articulate value systems or who had an unshakable commitment to norms and standards. These qualities bear the form of thought and judgement, but not necessarily the content – in short they are compatible with ideological reasoning. Rather, the sceptic able to think and judge for himself or herself is more likely to resist.[16]

Paul acted against his own principles, as he felt compelled to suspend his independent judgement and obey his superior. His unquestioning act of obedience was effectively contrasted with an enactment of the intervention by the My Lai heroes Hugh Thompson, Glenn Andreotta, and Lawrence Colburn to stop the massacre. After a swell of music the metatheatrical *Gestus* was framed again by the continuation of the conversation between Paul and Mike, who remained seated on the truck facing the central platform stage. Mike asked Paul why he did it, and Paul replied: 'Because I was ordered to do it.'[17]

Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge

This theme was repeated in the episode immediately following about the Cambodian genocide, which began with an abstract contemporary dance of prisoners to the sound of drums. In a stylized manner, actors thus representing the collective compulsion of the Khmer Rouge enacted the execution of the prisoners. One of the killers, when asked about his motivations, replied with the same response as the American soldier in the previous episode that he was following orders:

JOHN: Why did you kill these people?
KILLER: Pol Pot commanded to kill all these people.[18]

At the end of the episode, Cornelius McCarthy in the role of Russell highlighted the citizens' responsibility for such atrocities by failing to prevent them. A speech of a few lines drawn from Russell's 1953 'Address on the Tenth Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising' challenged global citizens' complicity in the Holocaust, with an explicit reference to the failure on the part of the human actors in this tragedy to act to prevent it:

One cannot help but feel that there should have been a moment, there should have been an act, which could have made things turn out differently. And I can never rid myself of the feeling that everything horrible that happens in the world *is*, in some degree, my responsibility.[19]

In his 1953 address, Russell goes on to maintain that 'One ought to have found something to say to mankind, something to do that would have prevented such a horror as you are here to mourn tonight.'[20] In this context, he also highlights that human

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inaction in the face of cruelty and the failure to act is what he *feels* as 'the tragedy of human *life*'.[21] He emphasizes the structural similarities and repetitive nature of human cruelty, violence, and the failure to act against atrocities by arguing that 'it *isn't* only this or that. We here tonight are dealing with one of the most dreadful things that has happened in human history. But other dreadful things have happened; I am afraid other dreadful things will happen. Mankind has an extraordinary capacity for brutal cruelty.'[22]

This capacity for brutality dehumanizes mankind, in Russell's eyes, as he argues that 'the man who inflicts the damage' is 'more injured than one is by death or torture or anything. He is degraded from the level of a human being to the level of a brute beast.'[23]

This address strongly resonates with the following speech by Vladimir in Act Two of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the opening performance of which was given in the same year. Like Russell, Vladimir calls for action in the face of inaction:

> Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! (*Pause. Vehemently.*) Let us do something, while we have the chance![24]

Like Russell, Vladimir emphasizes the common responsibility of all mankind in its failure to prevent inhumanity:

> To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us![25]

In response to Vladimir's question 'What do you say?', the stage direction stipulates: '*Estragon says nothing*.' Estragon's silence is a damning indictment of all human beings' failure to react. In contrast to Russell, Vladimir differentiates between the capacity of wild beasts to intervene in support of their congeners and the procrastination, exemplified by Hamlet, of the human species. He interprets the failure to act responsibly as a conscious choice and therefore a negative action of which brute beasts are not capable. To Vladimir, it is impossible not to act; the question is what kind of action one chooses in the human tragedy in which all mankind are actors: to act or not to act, that is the question. In that sense, the human tragedy consists of actors who act by failing to act, while constructing a justification for their non-action:

> What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come.[26]

Towards Responsibility and Courage

Russell's analysis of citizens' responsibility and complicity in violence was dramaturgically evoked throughout the production, as the fourth wall was continuously suppressed to involve the audience. Spectators became bystanders to acts of violence, watching the scenes passively and thus becoming aware of their passive witnessing of such events as 'actors in the same tragedy' who fail to act to help their fellow human beings. In the opening sequence they watched a man struggle alone against a bulldozer and watched him being killed before the bulldozer mowed down his home.

A quotation from Russell's last statement on the Middle East, dated 31 January 1970 and read after his death on 3 February 1970 to an International Conference of Parliamentarians meeting in Cairo, commented on the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes. In the performance, Cornelius McCarthy, representing Russell, accused the audience of standing idly by, watching these events unfold, and appealed to them to accept their responsibility as citizens to engage with issues of injustice on a global scale:

> How much longer is the world willing to endure the spectacle of wanton cruelty?[27]

Adverse views were articulated in attacks made on Russell by actors in the audience, transcending the threshold of the performance, and heightening the sense of participation in debate.

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The threshold between performance and audience was further blurred as, following the actors and the community choir, the audience found themselves in the midst of an enactment of the 1972 Derry Civil Rights March and the Bloody Sunday killings. The staging of the killings was theatrically framed by an activist speech at the beginning of the episode and, at the end of the scene, by the haunting song 'He Moved through the Fair', sung by the figure of Chilean political singer-songwriter Violeta Parra.

As an international female counterpart to the structural role of Bertrand Russell in the performance, Violeta Parra was also cast as a political activist, performed by the Bosnian actress Mona Muratovic positioned on a truck. She addressed the audience as civil rights protesters, while 'voices of hundreds of people' were heard, and while actors playing soldiers moved around menacingly in the background.[28]

The figure of Violeta Parra also represented women philosophers and political activists Hannah Arendt and Susan Sontag. Her speech included an extract from Arendt's 1942 text 'Moses or Washington', which asks all citizens to participate in efforts to create a better future for humanity by careful remembering of the past, and thus to use

Above: the bulldozer scene with Bertrand Russell, played by Cornelius McCarthy, accusing the audience of standing idly by. Below: 'He Moved through the Fair', sung by the figure of Chilean political singer-songwriter Violeta Parra for Jackie Duddy, the youngest Bloody Sunday victim. Photos: Ciaran Bagnall.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X15000652 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their knowledge of history as a weapon against the recurrent threat of oppression and inhumanity.[29]

The Struggle for 'Global Resonance'

Another example of citizens accepting personal responsibility was given with a long extract from Sontag's 2003 speech 'On Courage and Resistance' in honour of Israeli soldiers who refused to act violently against Palestinian civilians in occupied territories beyond the 1967 borders. The speech demands of the audience that they have the moral courage to act according to their principles, and resonates with Russell's earlier call for 'brave words in which high courage glows' in his 1902 essay 'A Free Man's Worship':

The perennial destiny of principles: while everyone professes to have them, they are likely to be sacrificed when they become inconveniencing. Generally a moral principle is something that puts one at variance with accepted practice. And that variance has consequences, sometimes unpleasant consequences, as the community takes its revenge upon those who challenge its contradictions – who want a society actually to uphold the principles it professes to defend.[30]

The speech asks for an upright citizenship with a cosmopolitan dimension and underlines the necessity of active political rights: it merges Sontag's statement that 'All struggle, all resistance is – must be – concrete. And all struggle has a global resonance'[31] with Arendt's argument in *On Revolution* (1988) that 'political freedom, generally speaking, means the right *to be a participator in government or it means nothing*'.[32] This was counterpointed with an enactment of the Bloody Sunday killings, at the hands of the British Army, of peaceful protesters who demanded citizens' rights. The shooting of seventeen-year-old Jackie Duddy (Dermott Hickson), the first of the victims, followed by Father Edward Daly's (Saša Handžic) iconic act of courage, attending to the man under threat of gunfire while waving a white handkerchief, was directly re-enacted:

A soldier comes out from cover firing. Jackie falls on the ground. Father Daly runs towards him waving with a white handkerchief. A few other young men run towards them. Father Daly gets on the ground, kneeling beside Jackie, trying to stop his bleeding with a handkerchief. Jackie is holding Father Daly's hand and squeezing it. . . . Jackie is not responding to reanimation. He is not moving. The four men are taking Jackie off the ground and run carrying him. Father Daly is running before them waving with his handkerchief, now soaked in Jackie's blood.[33]

Although Father Daly could not save Jackie Duddy's life, his act of 'high courage' staged in the performance, clearly represented Russell's ideal of care for our fellow humans in the brief moment 'in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided', as 'one by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death'.

Father Daly not only tried to stop Jackie's bleeding with his handkerchief, but he also attempted to 'lighten' Jackie's 'sorrows by the balm of sympathy' to 'instil faith in hours of despair', and Jackie is shown to respond by squeezing Father Daly's hand. Furthermore, Russell's humanist ideal of a 'free man's' 'new vision' which is 'with him always, shedding over every daily task the light of love', was directly quoted at the end of this scene, and was dramatized through the musical framing device already mentioned of singer Violeta Parra (Mona Muratovic) representing Jackie Duddy's beloved singing the traditional Irish love song 'He Moved through the Fair' as he came towards her through the crowd in his bloodsoaked shirt. The performance of the song and the quotation from Russell's 'A Free Man's Worship' double-framed the stylized prelude narration of the event, as written by Damian Gorman and performed by four actors, who alternated in their telling of the tragedy, and who appeared to reflect on it from four different backgrounds.

This performance highlighted the common human theme of a union of love, and the ultimate despair of tragic death and loss that all of humanity shares. It also expressed Russell's hope for universal love based on a union of all humans 'by the strongest of all ties, the tie of a common doom', underlined with Russell's own words:

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United with his fellow-men by the strongest of all ties, the tie of a common doom, the free man finds that a new vision is with him always, shedding over every daily task the light of love.[34]

The Use of Music

In several episodes, musical themes that expressed ideals of love, community, humanism, and peace effectively counterpointed scenes of war and violence. For example, as noted above, the song 'Give Peace a Chance' was used to contrast with the performance of the My Lai Massacre.

In another episode, an immersive musical performance of intercultural community that blurred the threshold between performance and audience was performed by actors and chorus who danced through the audience hand in hand singing the hymn 'Yugoslavia'. Musical interludes contrasted with scenes about ethnic cleansing. The failure of UN intervention to prevent genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s was dramatized in a long collage of metatheatrical enactments framed by political statements. The massacre of Srebrenica was shown by separating male members of the choir from the women as they were forced to get on an actual bus, while the rape of Bosnian women was represented by an abstract dance performance in a Pina Bausch-style pattern of disrupted repetitions.

The Serbian song 'Nedelja' ('Sunday'), which expresses a young soldier's realization of the horrors of war, of his inability to explain his own violent actions to his family, and that he shall never return to share a Sunday gathering with his family again, was sung in the Serbian language by Irish actor Shane O'Reilly.[35] It was set to a recurring waltz motif that was repeated four times and broken in intervals by a twelve-tone theme played to a fast drum rhythm. During the song soldiers alternated between tenderly waltzing with a woman and violently throwing her around the stage floor, thereby symbolizing the perversion of all ideals of humanism and love in a war where the violent rape of Bosnian women by Serbian soldiers was used as a tool of oppression.

This highly stylized performance was the most dramaturgically complex and effective scene of the production and it achieved some sense of aesthetic distance in its depiction of violence, functioning as a *mise-en-abyme* for the production's overall challenge to the audience to engage with the performance, actively and critically, both in their reception of the musical composition and the dance.

Another scene documented French responsibility for the Rwandan genocide. Here the sense of a betrayal of French republican ideals of brotherhood, citizenship, and human rights was communicated to the audience through Edith Piaf's song 'Padam, Padam', which includes the line 'Des "Je t'Aime" de Quatorze-Juillet' ('Shallow love pledges given on 14 July').[36] In this scene, the song's disabused reference to false promises and republican celebration was highlighted by a Brechtian tableau of a pile of bodies created by a group of performers on the central stage.

In the episode about Pinochet's military coup in Chile, the violent oppression of citizens was juxtaposed with the defiant repetition of choral performances of the songs of Chilean political activist Victor Jara. This emblematic singer, songwriter, theatre director, and university teacher had famously given expression to socialist-republican ideals of fraternity, liberty, and equality through his singing and songwriting. A concept of humanism and free active citizenship against fascist oppression was represented by Jara's songs 'Canto Libre'[37] and 'Manifesto',[38] sung by the Belgian actor and choreographer Thomas Steyaert in the role of Jara and by the community choir.

Following Pinochet's military coup, Jara had been imprisoned and tortured alongside many other civilians at Chile's National Stadium. This is where he wrote his last poem 'Estadio Chile', rendered in Spanish and English in the performance:

> How much humanity
> exposed to hunger, cold, panic, pain,
> moral pressure, terror and insanity?
> What horror the face of fascism creates![39]

Shortly afterwards Jara was shot dead in front of other civilian prisoners at the stadium (now renamed Estadio Victor Jara). Before

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his assassination, the military had commanded Jara to sing for an audience of other prisoners, and he responded defiantly by singing the hymn of Popular Unity, 'Venceremos' ('We Will Win').[40] As the audience demonstrated their support for Jara by joining in the singing, the military turned their machine guns on them, too. This event was represented in the production by the community choir and by the actual audience present assuming the role of Jara's supportive audience in the national stadium.

The Chill of the Holocaust

The most chilling episode was set in Auschwitz-Birkenau. This dramatized how Fredy Hirsch established a 'children's block' for the children transported from the Terezín Ghetto to the 'family camp' in Auschwitz, and his attempt at educating the children in order to shield them for a while from the horrors around them. The inhumanity of the camp was shockingly counterpointed with a performance of the cultural foundations of Western civilization and humanism: the children's choir were taught in Czech about ancient Greece, and they innocently sang the French children's song 'Alouette' and Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' in German. The audience was made to witness the deportations of the children and their families to the gas chambers on trucks driving around them in a circle to the haunting sound of the choir singing 'Hatikwah'. They were also forced to endure the painfully cynical sound of the German military marching song 'Erika' that included references to love and flowers.

This Holocaust episode formed the central, longest, most theatrical, and also most problematic episode of the performance. It raised issues of the ethics of performance as well as those of participation, particularly in relation to the role of the children's choir whose members in Derry were under the age of ten. Such attempts at representing indiscriminately a range of atrocities of different scales also raised the question whether this kind of performance risks becoming a spectacle of violence rather than engaging with suffering in a truthful and meaningful way.

However, the production did not 'reproduce the harmonious narrative of traditional realist forms', which is Adorno's criticism against a consumerist mode of realist representation.[41] It did, in some ways, through its formal and musical structure, 'express the rifts that realist mimesis represses'.[42] The critical and ideological content of the production also shared some of the concerns of critical theory, as described by Andrew Fagan:

> Taking a cold, hard look at the sheer scale of human misery and suffering experienced during the twentieth century in particular, critical theory aims to testify to the extent and ultimate causes of the calamitous state of human affairs. The ultimate causes of such suffering are, of course, to be located in the material, political, economic, and social conditions which human beings simultaneously both produce and are exposed to.[43]

It shared the principle of Adorno's argument in 'The Meaning of Working through the Past' in relation to a failure to fully remember and address the Nazi past in Germany. As Joseph Long argues. 'in Pašovic's international event, writer, artists, performers take on the task of preserving and respecting memory, of fighting off indifference and forgetfulness':

> In distant Kibuye, Rwanda, skulls of genocide victims are displayed in a church memorial, beneath the inscription 'Never Again'. *The Conquest of Happiness* forces us to ask the question, how often must we say 'Never Again'? Cambodia, Rwanda, Chile, Srebrenica. . . . Camus wrote that the germs of the Plague never die, they live on in the dark until indifference and forgetfulness call them out once more.[44]

The Nature of 'Modern Tragedy'

The manner in which the production grouped together different conflicts and different atrocities might be critically viewed for its failure to engage at a deeper level with each historical event in its specificity. It was also in some ways selective and inevitably informed by particular philosophical and political perspectives. In that sense, it was particularly uncompromising about its critique of state and military violence against civilians, and about the violence done to the humanity of soldiers who follow orders to commit violent

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Above: the execution of Victor Jara (photo: Ciaran Bagnall}. Below: under the bridge in the Mostar staging. The 'He Moved through the Fair' scene between Jackie Duddy and his beloved (photo: Dado Ruvic, Reuters).

actions. Its fundamental flaw was the failure to include a substantial critique of extremist terrorists who follow the orders of alternative military authorities to commit violent acts.

However, the focus of both Russell's texts and the production, even if not fully realized at every level, shared an ideal of universal humanism that does not allow for the denial of anyone's humanity and that critically engages with the 'radical disorder in which the humanity of some men is denied'.[45] It crucially highlighted the responsibility, choices, agency, and actions of citizens across the globe, and their tragic failure to act against instances of inhumanity.

In *Modern Tragedy*, Raymond Williams maintained that 'there can be no acceptable human order while the full humanity of any class of men is in practice denied'.[46] The 'idea of "the total redemption of humanity" is tragic' as 'it is born in pity and terror: in the perception of a radical disorder in which the humanity of some men is denied and by that fact the idea of humanity itself is denied':

> It is born in the actual suffering of real men thus exposed, and in all the consequences of this suffering: degeneration, brutalization, fear, envy. It is born in an experience of evil made the more intolerable by the conviction that it is not inevitable, but is the result of particular actions and choices.[47]

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A statement from Russell's lecture 'Social Cohesion and Human Nature' (*Reith Lectures 1948: Authority and the Individual*), quoted in the final scene of *The Conquest of Happiness*, proposes a concept of autonomous citizenship that might create the necessary foundation for a more positive future. This can also be interpreted as the production's statement of intent for the company's critically challenging, participatory, praxis-based performance and community intervention:

> We shall not create a good world by making men tame and timid, but by encouraging them to be bold and adventurous and fearless except in inflicting injuries upon their fellow-men.[48]

Emma Jordan herself would claim that the performance makers of *The Conquest of Happiness* did, indeed, consciously desire to encourage their audience 'to be bold and adventurous and fearless'. While she emphasizes that the production team 'really wanted to make a piece of work that would connect with the audience', she also acknowledges that, given the deliberately provocative nature of the work, they did 'expect more people to be resistant to the form, to want to leave that arena, to walk out'.[49]

Jordan's reflection on the production's principles and purpose corresponds to what Una Chaudhuri would define as 'an Artaudian assault on boundaries' with the spectator as 'embodied and performing coactor'.[50] Interestingly, Jordan's account does not acknowledge any contradiction, as Chaudhuri does, between the audience's active engagement with the performance and Schechner's concept of the audience itself as a 'major scenic element'.[51] Instead, by anticipating a provocative exchange with the audience precisely by making them 'part of the scene', and by seeking to challenge their critical faculties in this manner, Jordan highlights the essential political nature of theatre and so situates the project of *The Conquest of Happiness* firmly within this tradition of critical citizenship.

It will be clear from the preceding discussion that Pašovic's production made exceptional demands upon the audience. Ian Shuttleworth, recognizing the uniqueness of the experiment and the scope of its vision, declares: 'This is not an entertaining evening. . . . It is unremitting stuff, perhaps too much so for more than two hours standing in a chill autumn.'[52] The extent to which the performance project succeeded or failed in its own terms, that is in remembering universal humanity, in forgetting human quarrels, and in promoting pacifism against violence and atrocities, has been the subject of debate.

Reception

Many reviews celebrated the production's universal humanism. In the *Irish Times*, Jane Coyle describes how

> under the guiding presence of Russell himself – played by Cornelius McCarthy, an actor from Sierra Leone – they expose not only man's inhumanity to man but also the human capacity for endurance, generosity, and happiness in even the most desperate of circumstances.[53]

According to Terry Blain in *The Independent*, 'the use of violence is measured and proportionate. The nauseatingly stylized rape of a Muslim woman by Bosnian soldiers is one enduring image. A truckload of young Jews (played by local Derry children) being carted away for gassing is another.'[54] In contrast, Blain points out that Pašovic's representation of particular events as 'emblematic' of some conflict 'will not please everybody'.

One review bluntly accused the production team of political bias: Lisa Fitzpatrick in *Irish Theatre Magazine* argued that 'the representation of the individual conflicts is clichéd, often biased', especially in relation to the performance of Israeli-Zionist violence against Palestinians, taking particular issue with the fact that 'the connections between the Holocaust, Zionism, Israeli aggression, and the role of the West in perpetuating the conflict were never explored'.[55]

Arguably, Fitzpatrick is looking for the comprehensive discourse of a political historian, in a creative project which had set very different targets for itself. She goes on to connect this criticism to her view of the production's representation of 'the war in the Balkans', arguing that 'Milosevič's important

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assertion of the significance of Kosovo and of Serbia in European history was dismissed with a comment about him being a "troublemaker" and quickly forgotten in representations of rape and massacre.'[56] However, it has to be pointed out that Milosevič was charged by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia with a breach of the Geneva Convention in relation to the mass rape of Bosnian women and the Bosnian genocide, as represented in this production by the universally condemned Srebrenica massacre.

While the economic structure of the working relationships between the various participants, professionals and volunteers, was problematic in some ways, the multi-artform production *The Conquest of Happiness* brought together a group of creative collaborators from a variety of backgrounds and nationalities as well as a diverse range of audience members. It was less successful in fertilizing cross-cultural dialogues with some countries and cultures than with others. For example, while there were many Bosnian and Slovenian members in the company, a lack of Serbian representatives did imply that old quarrels were indeed not forgotten.

Nevertheless, this site-specific theatre production, by translating Bertrand Russell's humanist ideas into a city performance, constituted an attempt at creating Henri Lefebvre's ideal of 'urban society and the human as oeuvre in this society'.[57] For the performance of *The Conquest of Happiness* 'a plurality of citizens joined in solidarity by a common world'– even if not truly as equals – as spectators and performers transcended traditional boundaries between audience and actors.[58] Not only were community choirs involved in the performance, but as the threshold between performance and audience was continuously blurred, the spectators also became participants to a certain degree. In this sense the event proposed a practical solution to the problem of the 'paradox of the spectator' as identified by Jacques Rancière. According to Rancière, viewing 'is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive. To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act.'[59] David Wiles explains that Rancière 'traces these objections to theatrical illusion from Plato and Rousseau to Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*', and he contrasts this with the ideal of an 'active citizen' as 'someone who joins the communal dance, rather than watch a performance'.[60] While those viewing the performance of *The Conquest of Happiness* did not, at any point, actively join in the communal dancing and singing or in the political speeches and acts of protest performed, they were continuously included in the performance and addressed as participants in a manner that disrupted any sense of mere spectatorship.

The opening performances were staged at Derry's historical Ebrington Barracks and on Ebrington Square in the Waterside part of the city, separated by the River Foyle from the old centre of Derry and the Bogside area, but physically and symbolically connected by the new Peace Bridge opposite the Guildhall. Not only was the production open to participation from community volunteers, but it opened out its civic vision towards other citizens of Derry and beyond, with the choice of an outdoor space large enough to accommodate many.

In Mostar, another city historically divided both by conflict and by a river, the production was staged beside the city's famous Old Bridge, which was rebuilt after the end of the Bosnian conflict. Despite the imperfections of the performance and the economic structures of the production, the very act of performing in these historic spaces with an international team and audience was in itself a civic act of a community of citizens. These citizens, at least to some extent, can be identified as 'actors in the same tragedy', sharing Russell's humanist ideals.

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