Staging the People: Performance, Presence and Representation

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---A 'people' … is not an assemblage of social groups and identities. It is the polemical form of subjectification that is drawn along particular lines of fracture, where the distribution of leaders and led, learned and ignorant, possessors and dispossessed, is decided (Rancière 2011, 15).

---Because "the people" does not exist. What exists are diverse or even antagonistic figures of the people, figures constructed by privileging certain modes of assembling, certain distinctive traits, certain capacities or incapacities (Rancière 2016, 102).

The Play of Presence and Representation

This chapter aims to explore a question at the heart of Rancière's conception of the inter-relation between politics and aesthetics: the demonstration of the inevitable gap and recurrent tension between presence and representation made manifest in the internal contradictions of the 'distribution of the sensible' (2004, 12) and the 'division of the perceptible' (2011, 14). It maintains that the relationship between presence and representation is primarily a *theatrical* question, with the theatre operating as a site for investigating the politics of their co-appearance. This is because theatre relies upon the constant modulation and inter-animation of presence and representation for both its material condition and formal operation, with the inter-play between them co-determining not only what it might mean but who is there and how they are seen. Specifically, the chapter seeks to examine how the aesthetic practice of 'staging the people'—a title drawn from two volumes of Rancière's writings investigating the post-revolutionary aesthetic regime of representation and political apparatus of subjectification (2011; 2012)—is central to imaging the political figure of 'the people' in representative democracy and to managing their 'political claim' (Rancière 1999, 87—88). The chapter investigates how the consensus logic of democratic representation – and the representational regime – is dependent upon the exercise of an imaginary political claim to represent 'the people'; and, coextensively, how aesthetic practices of 'staging the people' might open up its normative operation to dissensual intervention and re-imagining the 'sphere of appearance' of 'the people' as the site of a political invention. Accordingly, the performative

construct of 'the people' is shown to be reliant on the aesthetic logic of representation and its capacity to frame, codify and remediate the presence of people *per se*.

And yet, in this representational configuration the people are also precisely what is missing, rendered absent by their very invocation as a figure. The figure of 'the people' at once seems to open up a space in which the people appear as significant, and at the same time closes down the possibility of their actual irruption or intrusion into the representational system which necessarily displaces their presence as its trace. In this way, 'the people' are necessarily *theatricalised*: staged as a figure whose very staging articulates material presence to representational practice and empties out its manifest content. The more 'the people' are spoken of, named and claimed by the machinations of 'representative democracy', the more the 'post-democratic' apparatus appears to render obsolete actual people as such. They become an image, and image material, tied to the political imaginary as if always already represesentation (Didi-Hubermann 2016, 68). The people are missing from this political operation because, as Deleuze contends, the people 'no longer exist' and never did as any unified totality but only as a diverse, co-existing plurality. Accordingly, there is no majoritarian conception of the people that isn't predicated on their erasure, 'because the people exist only in the condition of minority, which is why they are missing' (2013, 215—7). The figure of 'the people' is never coextensive with the material reality of actual people, and the inevitable non-equivalence between presence and representation remains the recurrent ground of political and aesthetic tension. However much managerialist accounting or populist rhetoric attempts to close the gap between them—covering over the construction of the people and their missingness as the contested site of politics as such—the practice of 'staging the people' continues to operate as the locus for articulating competing representational claims, including that of bringing the people into being. Enacted through representation—recalling Marx's dictum in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* that 'they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented'—'the people' remain different from any particular representation or mode of representation; acting as its constitutive exclusion or ontological excess. As Rancière insists, 'the people' are 'always more or less than the

people'; the locus of an 'internal division' and index of the unbridgeable gap between presence and representation that constitutes politics' primary condition and site of operation (1999, 22, 87).

This gap, the chapter argues, appears and *re-appears* in the current conjunction as a tear in the very fabric of the visible; as a crisis of representation 'in representation' (Frank 2010, 35) that exceeds and undermines the normalising effects of politics as either a post-democratic show or populist theatrical spectacle. It investigates aesthetic practices of 'staging the people' that serve to question the rhetorical and imaginary privileging of the figure of 'the people' and point towards the people's missingness from the aesthetic-political regime. Further, the chapter examines performance's re-opening of the gap between presence and representation as the ground of *the political* as such, and as the site of its re-appearance within the otherwise bounded theatricality of the representational regime.

Staging the People

Staging the People is the title of Rancière's two-volume exploration of the relationship between 'the overly broad words of people, worker and proletarian', concerned with examining the differences within and between them as a 'space of dissenting invention' and creative resource for re-animating their political potential (18). Throughout this project, Rancière seeks to demonstrate the non-equivalence between the discursive construction of 'the people' and the quotidian practices and historically lived experiences of actual ordinary people, thereby pointing towards and making manifest the gap between reality and its representation *in* representation. In other words, his detailed analysis of the scenes and conventions of French working-class historical cultures serves to illustrate the reality *of* representation and its constitutive role in the construction of 'the visible and the expressible' (15). By contrasting the falsely homogenising and vacuously totalising discourse of representing 'the people' to more nuanced investigations of 'fragments of experience and forms of symbolization' (14), Rancière draws attention to the plurality of persons and modes of existence. He stresses that 'there are always several kinds of workers in the factory, several forms of movement in

the street, several audiences in the theatre' (15). This is not to create a set of social sub-categories

or cross-cutting identities but to argue that 'the people' are neither uniform nor unified but rather

appear as the site of a 'division of the perceptible' and the ground for the articulation of competing

political claims. Further, as Rancière insists, there are always 'several ways of occupying the site and

symbolizing its "normal" functioning' (15); recognising the plurality of aesthetic-political practices

that serve to contest the normalizing function of the regime of representation.

Staging the People meticulously exposes the gap between presence and representation but

at the same time explicates the constant interplay between them. Rancière repeatedly

demonstrates how the 'dominant fiction' of the social formation—the construction of 'an image of

social consensus'—is dependent on a 'privileged mode of representation' which attenuates the

presence of real people to a national-popular 'unamist fiction' whose dramaturgy stages 'the people'

in order to characterise them as such and thereby to invite identification with the image created

(2017, 5). The representational regime is thereby sustained through a repertoire of representations

and repository of images which serve to construct 'the people' as their aesthetic-political effect. The

material reality of the stage as offering an apparatus of appearance in which the embodied presence

of real people is attenuated to and codified within both the fictional framework of the dramatic

narrative and the social situation of the face-to-face theatrical encounter would seem essential in

this respect. In the first essay of the second volume of Staging the People, Rancière traces to

Michelet the national-popular project of constructing a 'people's theatre' in which 'the people would

perform their own grandeur for themselves' by enacting 'their own legend'. For Michelet, 'the

people's theatre' enables the representational function to 'feed the people from the people',

transubstantiating presence into theatrical representation and incarnating embodied actorly

presence as a seemingly 'democratic' representative form (2012, 9). To do this meant adopting the

egalitarian principle, 'abolishing class division' to ensure the unity of the people would be enacted

and enshrined in the very structure of the event. Only then would there be 'a theatre that is truly

that of the people', with the actors appearing on stage also being representatives of the community

they represent. In this respect, the theatre would act as a homology for democracy, suggesting a formal correlation between theatrical and political apparatuses of representation. Rancière calls this condensation a 'theatrocracy', repurposing the term used pejoratively in Plato's *Laws* to redesignate democracy as a political structure dependent on spectatorial enthrallment to display, deception and dramatization (10). For Rancière, the 'theatrocratic' operates as a principle of equality in producing a community of thought and action 'based on a spectacle that was fundamentally a self-representation' (10). Accordingly, the arrangement of the people's theatre envisaged by Michelet would instantiate a formal configuration of 'representation without separation' so that 'the people could view their own actions' on stage and in the auditorium. Its political aspiration was to ensure 'each half of the people was alternately a representation of the other' (10), thereby erasing the boundary between presence and representation through the logic and practice of participation.

Staging the People siutates this proto-modernist aesthetic desire to transcend the separation between stage and audience as a synecdoche of an egalitarian political objective to redress the foundational division constituting the social. In this respect, the theatre operates as 'the sphere of appearance of the people' by making manifest the gap between 'the people as community and the people as division' which constitutes the 'fundamental grievance' of *democracy* as an aesthetic regime and political distribution (Rancière 1995, 96—97). As Rancière elaborates, the modes of appearance of 'the people' under these conditions are dependent on the non-coextensiveness but inter-animation of presence and representation, in which 'it is not the king but the people who have a double embodiment' (97). Presence and representation are only ever partially conjoined in this performative suturing, producing a necessarily 'provisional and polemical' configuration which re-iterates the 'division of the perceptible' and its attendant 'ways of acting, ways of seeing and ways of speaking' (Rancière 2011, 14). Forms of representation—political and aesthetic—draw upon the material presence of actual people to produce 'the people' as a discursive effect, retroactively constituted, at the same time as mobilising its performative operation to normalise and regulate popular presence through the attribution and occupation of specific social

roles and cultural identities. Hence, according to Rancière, 'the people' is not an ontological foundation to be given a seemingly 'natural' political expression but rather 'a polemical form of subjectification'—a mode of production of individual people as well as 'the people' as a discursive formation—'that is drawn along particular lines of fracture, where the distribution of leaders and led, learned and ignorant, possessors and dispossessed, is decided' (15).

The performative operation of this 'double embodiment' is evident in the material arrangement of 'the people's theatre' as a space in which the people are supposed to appear to themselves as a people, and yet the condition of their appearance is contingent upon the theatrical apparatus and frame of representation separating actors from spectators, action from political agency. The representational effect of the staging itself appears as 'the setting up of a part of those that have no part' (Rancière 1999, 14). This 'setting up' is both an aesthetic-political apparatus of staging and the installation of a distributed ensemble of power relations across the social formation. As such, the theatrical relation supports and sustains as a mode of appearance which re-inscribes the 'imparity' between actors and onlookers; a structural division of the perceptible which remains evident even in forms of theatrical practice that seek to draw attention to its operation or celebrate its inversion. For Rancière, this optical bifurcation is integral to the theatre's role in revealing yet maintaining a certain 'distribution of the sensible' that partitions political roles and attributes these 'parts' to discrete social 'parties' (2004, 12), with the gap between stage and audience serving as an 'allegory of inequality' imbricated in the play of 'domination and subjection' (1993, 277). In developing his theory of emancipated spectatorship, he proposes a model of aesthetic experience that 'starts from the opposite principle, the principle of equality' (277). This entails rejecting the association of looking with passivity and the hierarchical organization of knowledge implicit in the apparatus of staging, whilst 'embracing the unreality of representation' as part of a 'poetic' capacity that enables us to see and imagine things otherwise. It also enables the recognition that spectatorship is a critical activity that confirms, contests and changes the 'hierarchy of intelligences' with which it is presented. In 'starting from the point of view of equality, asserting equality,

assuming equality as a given' (1995, 52), Rancière suggests that the theatrical relation may be reconfigured as a mode of *dissensual* engagement and *democratic* political potential.

Re-staging the People

Theatrical attempts to think through 'staging the people' might be re-approached as critical attempts to re-think the very logic of staging as that which 'determines the conditions for a constitutive rethinking' of aesthetic-political relations. This might entail acknowledging their 'restaging' of the very dynamics of representation in different forms and modes of representation, enabling a critical-poetic re-investigation of foundational aesthetic-political 'moments of thinking' and social formation (Rancière 2017, 91). In this context, the work of Quarantine (Manchester, UK), can be seen as providing a sustained interrogation of the staging of the people under the 'democratic' political regime and a series of theatrical attempts to re-balance the aesthetic priority of representation over presentation. Their first work, *See-Saw* (Tramway, Glasgow, 2000), offered something of an adumbration and re-examination of the principles of a 'people's theatre' outlined by Michelet. The show began with the audience sat in an auditorium facing a red velvet theatre curtain consistent with a conventional proscenium end-on stage configuration. However, as the curtain opened it revealed not a boxed stage 'in which the people could view their own actions' but an even more concrete illustration of the theatre as a 'mirror' of the people: another audience, facing its own image. Neither side of the traverse were performing, and nothing was being performed 'for' them. Nothing happened 'on stage' for at least five minutes, during which time the two audiences watched each other watching, simultaneously seeing and being-seen. Here in the theatre (where else?), a highly theatrical conception of democratic theatricality was being both advanced and exposed. With 'each half of the people' acting as 'a representation of the other' (Rancière 2012, 10)—without either 'acting' or 'representing'—the theatrical 'set-up' served to concretise the Enlightenment idea of the theatre of the people in the construction of a decidedly post-dramatic theatrical space. The theatrical image created of the theatre operating as a space of

the people appearing to themselves and as themselves could not be clearer. Accordingly, when the 'action' as such began, it compromised people within the audience presenting themselves to the other members of the audience rather than 'acting' in any demonstrably representational sense. The only directly imitative or characterological performance offered was that of an Elvis impersonator; and even so we see the impersonator over and above the impersonation in this frame. Whilst the audience and the actors might appear indistinguishable they are not in fact indivisible as their entry into the field of representation codifies their presence in differential ways. Although the people in *See-Saw* were directly drawn from the city in which it was performed, and in this respect could be regarded as being representative of it, it is not this that primarily matters in the *mise-en-scène*. It is rather the mechanism of staging itself—the apparatus of representation—that conditions their appearance in the field of the visible and *re*-produces the division between actor and spectator as both its effect and ground.

Interestingly, Quarantine's director, Richard Gregory, regards *See-Saw* as both setting in train the arc of the company's artistic enquiry and offering a point of potential return. He notes on the company's website: 'One day, knowing what we do now, I hope that we'll do *See-Saw* again, and see what happens…'. Arguably, though, the questions the work raises and the modes of practice it sets in play have never really gone away. For example, in the opening work of the 2017 Manchester International Festival, *What Is the City But The People*, Gregory and Quarantine co-founder and scenographer, Simon Banham, worked on a conceptual proposition by artist Jeremy Deller to enable some of the people who live in the city to take to the stage and present themselves and their stories in order to represent the city rather than the city's people being represented by actors within a dramatic representational form. That the title, *What is the City but the People?*, is a direct quotation from Shakespeare's great drama of political discord and division, *Coriolanus*, suggests that the question of the people's presence and representation in the body politic still sounds and resounds not only in the mouth of an actor playing Sicinius but across the cacophony of voices in contemporary democracy. The question asserts both the ontological existence of ordinary people

and their right to be counted not just as material presence but as mattering socially and politicaly, as having a political voice. Its eponymous repetition appears to ask how, in a contemporary aesthetic-political frame, is this presence to be represented? How are the people to be staged, figuratively and materially? *What is the City but the People?* offers a subtle but significant reversal of the aesthetic priority of representation over presentation implicit in the apparatus of the drama itself. Its focus on ordinary people simply presenting themselves on stage obviates against the theatrical event taking the form of what Rancière calls 'the modern visit to the people' (2017, 28)—i.e. a touristic encounter with the lives of others of the kind facilitated through conventional narrative practices of dramatic fiction and filmic documentary. In contrast to these tendentiously 'political' modes of imaging the lives of 'the people' critiqued by Ranciere for their representational construction of imaginary worlds and fabulated figures, the presentational mode of the performance seeks to ensure that the people appear as themselves rather than as they have been represented. The seemingly simple dramaturgical configuration of their ontological presence on stage enables them to occupy the space of appearance as individual subjects and not simply the embodiment of a claim to name a collective subject, 'the people'.

The scenographic set-up of *What Is The City But The People* demonstrates that there is a very conscious *staging* involved in this presentational aesthetic. A large yellow runway constructed across Manchester's Piccadilly Gardens operated as a theatrical stage supporting the performers' appearance in the public domain, enabling this diverse group of people to simply move across the stage without the presumption of either artifice or absorption. Here they were, simply people: people aware of themselves 'performing'; people aware of themselves being looked at in an explicitly theatrical relation of viewing that nonetheless sought to resist their default theatricalization as 'other' than those doing the spectating. Small biographical details and fragments of personal stories were projected on large screens behind the people on stage, enabling the audience to imagine as well as see the performer's lived experience as well as live presence. Here they were, simply people: people aware of their own personhood; people aware of themselves

being looked at and inviting others to recognise them as such. Not 'the people', just people. People enacting their own presence, presenting themselves as existing; existing prior to, and in excess of, the deployment of their name as 'a claim to the political' (Butler 2015, 18). Judith Butler suggests that gathering together, the simple act of assembly, should be seen as in itself 'an embodied form of calling into question the inchoate and powerful dimensions of reigning notions of the political' (9). In stressing that 'forms of assembly already signify prior to, and apart from, any particular demands they make', Butler draws upon the logic of the Occupy movement to argue the primacy of presence over representation (8). In asserting that 'gathering signifies in excess of what is said', she foregrounds 'bodily enactment' as a constitutive mode of political signification indexing the foundational premise of representative democracy as a form of delegated authority (8). This material presence acts as a reminder of the 'constitutive outside' upon which the figure of 'the people' relies for its performative force and legitimating ground. The persistence of this presence would seem to insist that those assembled 'do something other than represent themselves; they constitute themselves as the people' being represented (2016: 51). Whilst Butler contends that 'this act of self-making or self-constitution is not the same as any form of representation', and is 'separate from the very representative regime it legitimates' (62), it is difficult to see how it is either foundational or refoundational in anything other than a narrowly constitutional frame. Butler's focus on embodied enactment seems to neglect the retroactive and recursive subjectivating effects of the apparatus subtending the actors' appearance on the political stage as such. As Rancière demonstrates, the act of staging itself serves the apparatus of representation, putting presence into play in a *theatrical* space of 'visibility and speech' which conditions and codifies its forms and modes of signification (2007, 88). The material reality of the stage thereby appropriates the materiality of the people it presents, fusing 'the drama of the ordinary life' to the 'sensible reality' embodied in the theatrical scene (Rancière 2013, 115). The theatre, then, continues its work *as theatre* by rethinking and reworking the relation and interpentration of presence and representation that constitutes its operation and modifies the heterogenous network of its effects.

Re-thinking Theatre's Representational Claim

At the same time, it is important to recognise the limits of the apparent homology between theatrical and socio-political discourses of representation. As Tony Fisher has argued, it would be something of a category error to conflate aesthetic and democratic representation as this misrecognises theatre's 'power of ventriloquism' and actorly surrogation that '"clones" the space of politics without thereby reproducing its effects' (2017, 8—9). This misrecognises the force of what Rancière calls the 'aesthetic cut' separating aesthetics from politics and preventing the cross-over and conflation of their domains of intention and effects (2010, 151). Although This risks, in other words, over-extending theatre's 'representative claim'—the role it plays in the the dynamic of representational practices which political theorist Michael Saward characterises as integral to the operation of democratic culture—by equating this mode of representation with the structural determinants of representative democracy (2010). In Rancière's terms, representative or representational claims can be seen to contribute to the lived experience and material practice of democracry as not simply a 'form of government' but a 'a style of life that is opposed to any well-ordered government of the community' (2006, 36). Democracy thereby 'implies a practice of dissensus' not simply a mode of governmentality, erupting as a disruptive energy 'that keeps re-opening' the gaps and contingencies 'that the practice of ruling relentlessly plugs' (2010, 54).

Quarantine's critical-aesthetic enquiry into the ways in which the theatrical frame conditions and mediates the modes of appearance of the people who appear within it should therefore be placed in this context. Their theatre might be seen to not only re-stage and re-think the representative claim to 'the people' it otherwise appears to enact, but to open up the gap between presence and representation as a dissensual practice of democracy. Two important lessons from Rancière are worth recalling here: firstly, that 'the people' are 'always more and less than the people' (1999, 22), and as such cannot be simply 'counted' or rendered equivalent to their representation; and secondly, that 'the people' are only ever enacted through representation even

though, constitutionally and politically, they remain 'in excess of any particular representation' or representational regime (Frank 210, 3). As the political historian Jason Frank succinctly puts it, 'the people require representation in order to be enacted, yet this authorizing entity also—and by definition—resists the closure of representation. The voice of the people is a figure of impossible presence' (2010, 10). According to Rancière, it is because of this 'magnitude that escapes measurement' that 'politics exists' (1999, 15). As such, for Rancière, 'politics is the sphere of activity of a common that can only ever be contentious, the relationship between parts that are only parties and credentials or entitlements whose sum never equals the whole' (14). The ineluctable tension between presence and representation is thus evident in the very forms and practices of representation itself. As Frank puts it, 'democratic representation is always in part a crisis in representation' (2010, 35); a crisis of representation made manifest in representational forms. How, then, is theatrical representation implicated in rethinking the grounds of its formalisation?

Rimini Protokoll's *100% City* series of performance works might be regarded as an investigation of a crisis of democratic representation conducted through a rethinking of the seemingly homologous form of theatrical representation. Running since 2008, the *100% City* series follows a basic representational premise in order to show the people of each city it takes place in a stage picture of the city's population. The set-up of the work is simple: 100 people appear on stage, their presence corresponding to, and thereby seemingly directly 'representing', 100% of the city's population according to the demographic categories of the official census information through which the people are counted and made sense of statistically. The people who appear on stage are not actors—or at least, not professional actors endowed with the responsibility of representing—but amateurs—or, rather, ordinary people selected for their 'representativeness' rather than their capacity to represent. The theatre is thereby re-animated as a 'community' event, with ordinary people appearing on stage both as themselves and as the section of the community they represent, thereby enabling the city to appear to be showing itself to itself as a 'self-representation … a representation without separation' (Rancière 2012, 10).

As the title of the work suggests, *100%* both utilises and appears to question the logic of 'representativeness' as a political operation. It seeks to investigate theatre's 'representative claim' by interrogating who and what is considered to be 'representative' and how a seemingly 'democratic' representational form might be seent to function. In so doing, it opens up the question of the relationship between presence and representation, on stage and in the social formation, and seeks to examine how ithe logic of staging is implicated in the politically subjectivating apparatus of democratic representation.

In *100% City*, the democratic, or perhaps more explicitly, 'theatrocratic', logic of the work appears to situate presence and representation as always already existing in dialectical tension within normative systems and forms of representation, and so self-presentation necessarily takes place within the existing frame of representation. This is perhaps most directly evident in the economic division and labour relations underlying the work's mode of production and operation. Whilst the name of the company, Rimini Protokoll, accompanies the work in each city in which it appears, the work of organising and orchestrating the performers within in the pre-established *mise-en-scène* is sub-contracted to local theatre professionals. The claim to geo-locational specificity is thereby cross-cut by the pre-determination of the dramaturgy, and the desire to enable community self-presentation is limited by the theatrical mode of appearance as 'a limit of the theatre itself' (Rancière 2012, 34). Likewise, whilst those appearing on stage, simultaneously presenting themselves and representing the people of city of which they are part, do so 'voluntarily', without pay, as citizen-amateurs, those orchestrating the theatrical event are paid professionals engaged by the absent theatre artists to deliver their work and realise their vision. A highly stratified 'hierarchy of intelligences' and socio-economic partitions thereby underpins and undermines the claim to totality and inclusivity implied by *100% City*.

The division of socio-economic labour in *100% City* indexes a division in the distribution of power in the geo-political formation it represents. The theatres of the thirty-five cities in which it has

been performed are not, however, simply franchised factories producing goods to set a blueprint as the people who appear within them differ between as well as within themselves. Their presence is not simply material for representation; it is representation's constitutive ground and domain of performative effects, demonstrating the retroactive production of the very things it appears to 'represent'. In this respect, the act of 'staging the people' in *100% City*—putting ordinary people on stage and on show as the embodiment of abstract or even arbitrary demographic categories—has to be understood as connected to the political-aesthetic process of staging the people in order to constitute them as such. These people, as much as 'the people', might therefore be regarded as a representational construct; and representation might be seen to lay claim to and 'produce' the very people it represents. 'The people' are thereby not only the locus of a 'representational claim' (Saward 2010); they are the product of an apparatus of representation that presumes to speak in their name. Representing 'the people', as the aesthetic-political form espoused by *100% City* attests, is therefore a way of counting, and accounting for, people as units of social organisation and attenuating their public appearance to their role in the political 'distribution of the sensible'. It is part of a political apparatus that turns people into 'the people', re-subjectivating political subjects as inevitably subject to politics and its inexorable counting—and miscounting—of the community's parts (Rancière 1999, 10).

In exposing who is counted and what is made to count, *100% City* might be regarded as a theatrical elaboration of those forms of 'post-democratic' representation which appear to eliminate political differences precisely by accommodating and aestheticizing them. According to Rancière, this is consistent with 'a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount, and dispute of the people' by expanding its appropriative mechanisms and anticipatory practices of inclusion, thereby 'making the subject and democracy's own specific action disappear' (102). The logic of *100% City* would seem consistent with this neutralization of the demos as the site of the political, as it presents everything and everyone as not only already counted but as infinitely countable. The process of accounting for presence through representation thereby appears as a totalizing field,

enabling people to be aligned with 'the people' by simply rendering them visible *as people* in this seemingly self-presentational post-democratic form. *100% City* does this by deploying an already partially deconstructed and seemingly non-representational post-dramatic theatrical aesthetic which allows the people on stage to appear as 'ordinary people' rather than actors explicitly inhabiting a space of representation. This appears as something of a conjuring trick, inviting the audience to look away from the mechanism and simply focus on the image created. The question concerning the role of the apparatus of representation in producing the appearance of self-presentation persits despite this sleight of hand. The people presenting themselves and representing 'the people' on stage remain subjectivated by the apparatus of representation that stages them, their conditions of appearance determined in advance by a prestidigitation (look away now) that would otherwise enable the apparatus of appearance itself to appear.

Despite the work's apparent adoption of the post-democratic 'consensus' correlating demonstrable 'identities and alterities' with the political apparatus' capacity to identify and produce the 'modes of subjectification' which support and sustain it, how presence is rendered as representation—how representation *represents*—remains at the heart of the aesthetic and political questions raised by *100% City*. Through investigating what Rancière calls 'the set of relationships that the *we* and its *name* maintain with the set of "persons"'—the representative configuration through which certain people are designated as embodying 'the people'—the performance becomes 'implicated in the demonstration' of the practices through which these relations are constructed and 'defined' (1999, 59). Its very operation as performance reminds us, above all, that 'politics is a question of aesthetics, a matter of appearances' (74). In this respect, its deployment of 'amateur' performers, whose 'ordinary' status appears to provide the very ground of the claim to their representativeness, raises the question of the extent of their apparent non-knowingness about how the theatrical machinery of representation operates – how it produces them as subjects (subjects of representation, and subject to representation), rather than simply serving transparently to enable their self-presentation and its extension to representing 'the people'. The mechanisms through

which the apparatus of staging itself stages and subjectivates the people within it becomes increasingly visible as the theatre's representational dynamics—explicitly conjoined in *100% City* with the dynamics of 'representative' politics—performatively produces people as 'the people' through the constitutive mode of performance itself. Their very *theatrical* presence in the aesthetic-political apparatus of representation allows for this double valence, producing the 'double embodiment' of material presence and the materiality of representation.

The labour conditions and professional divisions in *100% City* repeat and reinforce the expropriative mechanisms which instrumentalise politics into a set of class relations, with professional politicians claiming to represent 'the people' whose enunciation both escapes and exceeds their own enactment. Marx's coruscating critique of representative politics—its insistence that the people 'cannot represent themselves, they must be represented'—seems to persist even as the performers of *100% City* appear to be representing themselves, as their mode of appearance is not itself made to appear. Their action, even their 'acting', is over-determined by the apparatus that makes it visible and allows them to be seen. This was evident in some of the performances in *100% Salford* (The Lowry, 7 May 2016). The performers' seemingly naïve (or perhaps resistive) relation to the apparatus of representation was made manifest in a lack of awareness (or perhaps hyper-awareness) of their own being on stage. This assumption of an unmediated presence (or perhaps the recognition of the ascription of an impossible presence) seemingly misrecognises the theatrical relation made manifest in the divide between stage and audience. Their performance is, of course, structured by the frame of representation and its role in maintaining and supporting the existing aesthetic-political regime. In this respect, the theatrical frame already operates both aesthetically and politically as the key modality through which presence is attenuated to, and turned into, representation. The theatrical relation constantly mediates presence, continually producing and circulating representations and their constitutive relations. In other words, it serves to construct the 'we' who are there, on either side of the divide, through our very being-there. Its material is both

presence and representation: never exactly coextensive, never precisely coterminous, but also never entirely distinguishable.

In short, the question for a dissensual theatre practice emerging from the analysis of *100% City* is whether its post-dramatic presentational form sufficiently explicates the theatrical apparatus as being intrinsically imbricated in the political apparatus of 'democratic' representation. To what extent does the post-dramatic aesthetic dovetail with a post-democratic fantasy of 'democracy *after the demos*' (Rancière 1999: 102) in which the people appear not as the site of political division or dispute but as the sociological legitimation of a consensus operation? And to what extent does the concomitant post-democratic evacuation of politics see it return in the space the post-dramatic aesthetic leaves open between performer presence and the apparatus of representation?

Re-Populating the Stage

In contrast to Rimini Protokoll's *100% City*, Quarantine's *Quartet* (*Summer*, *Autumn*, *Winter*, *Spring*; 26 March 2016, Old Granada Studios, Salford, UK) offers a post-dramatic event that constantly accentuates the material presence of the theatrical apparatus as the very machinery producing the appearance of people both on stage, and in the audience. It begins and ends with the recognition of audience presence, and with an insistence on the singularity of both performers and audience as people. Any sense that these people—the people assembled here, gathered together onstage, in front of the other people assembled here, as audience—are somehow 'the people' is rendered primarily as representational *effect* rather than content. That is, as an effect of a representational practice that is foregrounded rather than denied.

In *Summer*, performer presence is always shown as mediated, 'performed'. From the outset, the task-based dramaturgy of instruction and interview is made visible, and rendered explicit, as constructing and conditioning the mode of appearance of the people on stage. As the side-lighting bar goes up to signal the start of the show, ELO's *Mr Blue Sky* is played over the sound-system; a visual theatrical joke signalling the indexical presence of the theatrical mode of representation

throughout. Over the course of the first 'scene', forty or so people come on stage and follow the explicit 'First instruction: Look at us whilst we look at you' which is there in the 'surtitles' for all to see. The basic materiality of the theatrical relation is thereby drawn attention to, and through it we see the self-awareness of the performers' knowledge of themselves as *performing*. Accordingly, the presence of ordinary people here on stage, as themselves, is rendered as a *co-presence* with the audience and presented as *constructed through the material fabric of the stage apparatus*. To put it slightly differently, the ontological presence of the people on stage is articulated to, and through, the specific ontology of 'staging' as such. 'Staging the people' thus appears as an aesthetic practice as well as political operation. Presence and representation appear here in close relation, so that the lives presented on-stage are framed and staged through the material conditions of live performance. In other words, *Summer* – and the rest of the works in the *Quartet* – is as much about interrogating and articulating the specific conditions of theatrical appearance as it is about examining the everyday lives of the performers who appear as its manifest 'content'. Take, for example, the predomination of mode of the interview in *Summer*: performers are asked primarily about what they do … Any sense of who they are is articulated through activity, action, dramaturgy. The 'who' always appears as a performative construct, an effect of performance, always performed and performing, always framed through the theatrical mode of seeing. As, for that matter, are the objects assembled on stage. Initially primarily personal—these things appear as being significant to these people—they are 'rearranged' in the space of the theatre under the instruction: 'try to make sense of it all'. Sense-making is of course what theatre—as an apparatus of representation—does, and we do, as audience, whilst watching.

The situating of co-presence as the condition of the theatrical relation and the foregrounding of the co-construction of both the *mise-en-scène* and narrative meaning as an integral part of the activity of spectating is continued in *Autumn* as the explicit ground of the theatrical encounter. Here, the scenography reconfigures the audience as participants in the event rather than simply on-lookers (or, rather, draws attention to spectating as a mode of aesthetic participation and sense-

making rather than a 'passive' relation). The task-based dramaturgy of *Summer* is extended and explicated as a set of tasks audience members are invited to undertake: making samosas for the next performance; re-telling the history of the world; discussing the nature of identity; exploring significant books to the company; engaging in tarot reading/fortune-telling; playing table-tennis; placing yourself on a pin-board of degrees of separation. Through these activities, the audience become the event; appearing to ourselves through occupying the space of appearance and being explicitly staged as co-present along with the performers, technicians and company members. Whilst apparently avoiding the 'theatrical' division between action and audience by making the audience the action, *Autumn* in fact demonstrates that the audience is effectively divided within itself—simultaneously doing and watching, seeing and being seen—much as the performers themselves were staged in Summer's opening scene. In other words, the logic of participation—much like the logic of presence—remains framed and mediated by the theatrical relation rather than simply appearing to 'overcome' it through some empty gesture of emancipation. Here, the intrusive, recursive nature of representation makes its presence felt again – enabling the set-up of *Autumn* to be read not as the overcoming of a division but as the ground of its re-inscription. Perhaps my own decision to retreat to raked seating of the auditorium, resuming the 'spectator position' was testimony to that effect? Perhaps this move simply reflected the re-assertion of what Rancière calls the 'theatocratic' organisation of democratic participation, installing 'a community of thought based on a spectacle that was essentially a self-representation' (2012, 10).

In *Winter*, the directly spectatorial relation is re-established through a film portrait of a woman with a terminal diagnosis. A large screen is wheeled onto the stage and set centrally. We watch as the stage space is framed as the site of a temporal encounter between the time of the filming (the presentation of live 'presence'); its direction towards the time of the future (the 'will have been' of time's passing, and her passing too); and the time of viewing (the audience's awareness of their own looking, looking back retrospectively though in sync with the narrative time of the viewing). The woman the film portrays is the aunt of a member of the company. The film provides a portrait of her

presence in the world—a testimony to the future of her having been. It records her actions, her thoughts, her presence; and, of course, mediates them through the aesthetic frame of the film itself, and through the representational encounter with the theatre audience. The film draws attention to the singularity of presence—the uniqueness of this woman, her non-reproducibility—within the apparatus of representation and its technology of reproduction. It therefore seems to be drawing attention to the way representation appropriates and expropriates presence, and especially the 'live presence' of people as such. Here the liveness of performance, its 'life', is tied to the aliveness – however temporary, however fragile – of the people who appear within it.

In *Spring*, the intrinsic 'doubling' of presence and representation, ontology and the apparatus of sense-making, is itself re-doubled. The work is performed by a group of nine pregnant women, whose own double-presence (as pregnant) mirrors their theatrical double-presence (as performing). The women respond to questions posed as questions to, for, and about their as yet unborn children, covering and uncovering their hopes, fears, expectations and future imaginings. The dramaturgy of questions is unrelenting. The questions appear to come from the outside – from the theatrical apparatus – remediating the performers' ontological presence as the ground of the representation (and its affects). Should these questions be answered? And whose labour is at stake in answering them? The theatrical pun here is doubtless intentional: the theatrical labour of performing redoubles the anticipated future labour of giving birth to, and bringing up, these children. The tension between the text, the task, and the 'person' performing them is palpable—it appears as the exacting work of performance itself. The work of performance becomes evident as that which takes place *between* presence and representation; *between* being-on-stage and the mediation of what that being-there amounts to *being*.

To what extent are the performers in *Spring* aware of how their ontology as pregnant women inflects their representation as performers? To what extent does their mode of appearance objectify them as women, as already doubled? How does the doubled body of the performer—both present

and representing—become redoubled when the performer is a pregnant woman, performing her own being-pregnant? Does this constrain and over-determine the mode of performing? Can they *only* appear, in other words, as pregnant women? Does this overly *ontologise* them as pregnant women (rather than as *working* performers, for example, who happen to be pregnant)? Are they simply being objectified, or does their 'double embodiment' draw attention to how 'the people' are continually de-/ re-subjectivated by the frame of representation and mode of appearance that stages them as such? And what are the boundaries between the theatrical frame of representation and the political modes of representation conditioning and constraining their appearance?

The specific ontology of these performers and the construction of a specific dramaturgy conditioning their mode of performing further draws attention to tension between presence and representation—appearance and the frame of appearance—at the heart of the representational regime. In this respect, the 'ordinary people' appearing on stage seemingly presenting themselves 'as themselves'—which appears to characterise a significant strand of post-dramatic theatre—serves to foreground a crisis of representation 'in representation' (Frank 2010, 35). The tension between the theatrical representation of performer presence and the presence of the performer through their self-presentation is a tension at the core of the political apparatus as well as the aesthetic regime. Rather than seek to 'overcome' it, the Quarantine works studied here serve to explicate, examine and situate this 'crisis of representation' within the sphere of theatrical representation rather than outside of it, thereby reiterating the interpenetration of politics and aesthetics in the 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière 2004, 12).

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a comparative analysis of contemporary theatre works explicitly concerned with 'staging the people', performed in the British post-industrial cities of Manchester and Salford: Quarantine's *Quartet* and Rimini Protokoll's *100% Salford*. Both works examine how the lived experience of everyday lives might be brought to the stage through an apparent logic of presentation rather than representation: by ordinary people occupying the space

of theatrical performance rather than seeing themselves and their lives represented by others. In so doing, they re-animate the questions Rancière investigates in *Staging the People* by situating the theatre as a site for the investigation of the political configuration of 'ways of acting, ways of seeing and ways of speaking' that seek to produce 'the people' as both their ground and effect. In particular, they re-visit and re-think what Rancière calls the 'theatocratic' organisation of democracy and the structures of democratic representation as the people's mode of appearance to themselves whilst recognising that 'the people' remain always more or less than 'the people', always different from a particular representation or form of representation, always the locus of the 'internal division' constituting the site of politics as such and never a totalization (1999, 87). This is because '"the people" does not exist. What exists are diverse or even antagonistic figures of the people, figures constructed by privileging certain modes of assembling, certain distinctive traits, certain capacities or incapacities' (2016, 102). In short, figures constructed through a certain apparatus of staging and the theatrical configurations of presence and representation. And yet, the people remain what is fundamentally missing from the scene of representation. In this context, the task of a dissensual post-dramatic theatre practice is not to elide their missingness with the evacuated political territory of the post-democratic, but to draw attention to the apparatus of representation as that which produces absence even as it claims presence as its effect.

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