Passionate Amateurs
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The thing about Yetis is that no one knows what they want. They come from nowhere and return there. Not only do they live outside human society, but they are unconstrained by historical time. They are, of course, the productions of a utopian imaginary, mysterious inhabitants of a Shangri-La preserved among snowy peaks against the contaminations of capitalist modernity. So when they intervene onstage in Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s B.#03—setting up picket fences, kissing, performing an act of resurrection—part of their affective charge (their charm, perhaps) arises from a sense that they have no stake in human affairs. Their intervention appears amiably disinterested, as though they were purely and simply the hominid embodiment of the “unsentimental . . . pedagogic love” that Walter Benjamin recommends as the appropriate disposition for the leader of a proletarian children’s theatre. Yetis are neither professionals nor amateurs—these are categories that only make sense in a human economy in which one works for one’s living—they are the pure act of redemptive love itself. They are the possibility to which the amateur might aspire in the devotion of her energy to a labor that is its own reward and to which the revolutionary might aim in her visions of a humanity liberated from the alienation of wage labor. So while they may not be counted in the brief taxonomy that follows of the figure of the passionate amateur in the theatre, their fleeting and improbable appearance on the stage in Berlin in 2003 illuminates both the possibilities to which the work of passionate amateurs is directed and the impossibility of their realization, even within the imaginary worlds of theatrical production. What was so strange, and so utterly astonishing, in the appearance of the Yetis in Berlin was not that their intervention violated accepted norms of plausibility, but rather that it transgressed codes of theatrical or dramaturgical viability. Astonishment arose not from the failure to conform to a credible representation of “real-life” logics or likelihoods, but rather from a leap beyond what even the theatre might normally allow. For all those passionate amateurs who are not yet Yetis, the problems of what theatre
allows (what one can do with it, within it) and what it does not (what it cannot do, what cannot happen there) are the stuff of everyday life, determined by needs, interests, and historical circumstances. Notwithstanding their passionate attachments to values that challenge those established by capitalist exchange—most of them are, after all, “romantic anti-capitalists”—none of them very fully lays claim to a Shangri-La beyond Marx’s realm of necessity. All of them live and work on the inside.

Before proceeding to the substance of this final chapter, then, I offer a brief recapitulative summary of the various passionate amateurs whose historical circumstances and theatrical actions have figured so far. Theatre in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century experienced a process of industrialization and specialization in which there emerged, as an increasingly dominant figure, the “professional”: the worker who combined his or her livelihood with a commitment to wider social or cultural objectives. The “professional,” as either doctor (Astrov) or manager (Stanislavski), is thus this book’s first contradictory figure of the passionate amateur. She is the worker whose “love” is subsumed within capitalist production but who is also the bearer of “romantic anti-capitalist” values. There then followed a political response that involved an attempt to free recently professionalized and industrialized activities, including education and theatre, from their subsumption by capitalism and to repurpose them in the interests of a revolutionary politics. In the case of Walter Benjamin and Asja Lacis, the proletarian children’s theatre was a practice that sought to actualize in the present a communism that Soviet-led orthodoxy was systematically consigning to a perpetual future. This orthodoxy, as Susan Buck-Morss has shown, brought Soviet communism and western capitalism into mutually reinforcing alignment for most of the rest of the twentieth century. Economic growth and technological progress were to be secured on the basis of a compact between capital and labor in which the exploitation of labor required for the constant production of surplus would be ameliorated by social welfare. As the terms of this compact began to unravel in the avowedly capitalist West, groups of workers and trainee workers (students) started to articulate demands that exceeded its terms by challenging not merely the conditions under which work was performed but the centrality of work itself. The student members of Godard’s theatrical-revolutionary cell in La chinoise go to work in their summer holidays to make a theatre in which it might somehow be possible to live one’s entire life, in a fictional project that could almost be a reenactment of Benjamin and Lacis’s unrealized “program.” In the post-Fordist moment of No Dice, the actors of the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma
work constantly in the hope of getting work, redeeming the boredom and frustration of meaningless employment in an attempt to hold a conversation that the structure of the theatre simultaneously suggests and prohibits. They can talk to us about how important it is to talk, but we don’t, or won’t or can’t, talk back. Unless, of course, we write. The spectator who writes rather than the spectator who participates is therefore the subject of this final chapter. The spectator who participates—the spect-actor of Boal’s theatre or the convivial enthusiast of Bourriaud’s relational art practices—might be said to join the conversation by becoming part of the event itself and may even be understood to experience some feelings of being part of a community constituted by the event. The spectator who writes—often understood as the critic—is normally understood to stand entirely outside the event and to perform a number of mediating functions, from scholarly interpretation to recommendations for a good night out. In practice most professional spectators—including those who choose to write about events in which they participate—move between the fictional polarities of community and detachment, principally because, in order to perform their professional function (as academics or journalists, for example), they generally need to enter into the relationships offered by the event on the same terms as all the other spectators with whom they share the experience (or at least try to do so, whatever the various complications offered by personal or professional relations with the producers). Thinking about the professional spectator as someone who does for a living what most people do mainly just for the love of it invites comparison with the figure of the passionate amateur, who may be doing out of love something from which others make a living, even if she may not always do so. In both cases clear distinctions between amateur and professional activity are hard to make, and it is vital to the formation of both categories—the professional spectator and the passionate amateur—that this should be the case.

Terry Eagleton identifies this confusion as constitutive of the historical formation of criticism as practice and institution:

The contradiction on which criticism finally runs aground—one between an inchoate amateurism and a socially marginal professionalism—was inscribed within it from the outset... The eighteenth-century gentleman was of no determinate occupation, and it was precisely this disinterested detachment from any particular worldly engagement which allowed him equably to survey the entire social landscape. The gentleman was custodian of the
comprehensive view, representative of a many-sided humanity which any specialist expertise could only impoverish.  

Criticism seeks to establish its objective and autonomous status as a disinterested practice free from either state or commercial control, and, in doing so, to help to legitimate literature, art, theatre, and music as autonomous activities too. The drive to autonomy is a self-contradictory one for both kinds of cultural producer, for artist and critic alike, as it encourages the very specialization that makes cultural production subject to the social division of labor, above which its claims to inhabit the realm of freedom might seek to elevate it. This involves a lived tension very similar to that articulated by Chekhov’s Dr Astrov, between an impulse toward a commitment to universal human values on the one hand and the professional forms in which such values can be made useful in real social situations on the other. As Eagleton observes:

Either criticism strives to justify itself at the bar of public opinion by maintaining a general humanistic responsibility for the culture as a whole, the amateurism of which will prove increasingly incapacitating as bourgeois society develops; or it converts itself into a species of technological expertise, thereby establishing its professional legitimacy at the cost of renouncing any wider social relevance.  

Eventually, according to Eagleton’s historical narrative, the figure of the critic (who for Eagleton is primarily if not exclusively a literary critic) is able to secure this “professional legitimacy” in the university, as the “humanist” higher education generally associated with the “Humboldtian” university and its antecedents takes shape around the end of the nineteenth century. This incorporation has contradictory consequences, one of which is to provoke the mixture of conservatism and radicalism that characterized Walter Benjamin’s critique of the university in his earliest writings. Eagleton sees the security achieved as a form of “professional suicide” in which criticism’s “moment of academic institutionalization is also the moment of its effective demise as a socially active force.” But in order to resist or mitigate the effects and affects of this self-negation, criticism within the university seeks to develop and maintain a range of institutional conventions, variously substantial and fictional, to preserve the impression of autonomy. “Academic freedom” is one of the most powerful ideological tools in this process: it might be regarded as the central tenet of a “professional humanist” attempt to recreate the bourgeois pub-
lic sphere to which modern criticism likes to trace its descent and to do so, as Eagleton notes, “from within the very institutions which had severed criticism from it: the universities.”

In her study of the disciplines of theatre studies and performance studies, Shannon Jackson traces a very similar pattern in the history of the American academy, drawing productively on Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich’s theorization of the “professional-managerial class”: “salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist relations.” Jackson writes of the work of members of this professional-managerial class in the academy:

Many academics, meanwhile, worked to maintain a separate professional position outside relations of capitalism and commerce, sometimes by adopting explicitly socialist language, other times by calling for the safe preservation of moral and cultural inquiry. Humanities professors in particular tried to create a separate sphere of cultural capital while simultaneously legitimating themselves curricularly and institutionally within professionalizing terms.

We might consider that a significant factor in the complex set of circumstances leading to the university becoming the focus for anti-capitalist protest in the late 1960s was that a new crisis was taking shape, in which the “safe preservation of moral and cultural inquiry,” or “the bourgeois public sphere” as recreated within the university, would face a powerful challenge from a drive to subsume education more fully to the requirements of capital. With the Fordist-Keynsian compromise under threat and a concomitant demand for a technical-managerial workforce, governments launching neoliberal projects would see the university as vocational training for immaterial labor. This would not, in the end, involve the expulsion of the critic from the university, of course, but would lead instead to the formation of a new set of contradictions in which the romantic anti-capitalist professional spectator in the academy would be seduced by the idea that the culture and creativity he or she supposedly espoused could be leveraged in a new economic compact between capitalism and its internal critics under the name of “creative industries.” The make-believe revolutionaries of Godard’s *La chinoise* now look, with hindsight, like the first generation to intuit the terms of this new deal.

This book concludes therefore with three acts of criticism, each of
which, whatever claims it may make to being a labor of love, constitutes an instance of professional activity. That is to say (that which normally goes without saying) that its communication with its “community” of readers and other writers is sustained and facilitated by institutions of higher education, professional associations, and processes of industrial production and distribution of what is sometimes called knowledge. As well as placing its producer in a condition of debt, acknowledged here as a matter of professional etiquette that can often overlap with expressions of what is sometimes called love, these conditions of production involve the expectation that some of the cultural capital accruing from publication will be traded in an economy of professional advancement. Each of these three acts of criticism seeks to account for specific feelings and experiences encountered in the contemporary theatre. A professional commitment to protocols of knowledge production in capitalism conspires here with affective affinities forged in these encounters, and others like them, in the form of an obligation to attend to the three theatre works discussed here as meaningful and intentional acts of communication in their own right. The very same commitment and affinities also require that this attention to their singularity should be articulated in relation to the broader argument or “contribution to knowledge” that might justify the publication of this book. Each of these accounts of moments in performance might therefore be understood as part of an examination of the place of theatre spectatorship in the romantic anti-capitalist subjectivity-formation of the professional-managerial class. In other words, they briefly sketch some of the contours of an affective affiliation with communism, not constructed as a utopian imaginary outside capitalist relations, but nurtured deep within the cultural form— theatre— that most often reproduces them. Each of these moments involves an experience of solitude in relation, the difficulty of which might also be captured in the idea of communism on your own.

**LOVE AND ILLUSION**

The first of these three moments is the briefest and serves as a prelude to two more substantial accounts of performance. It involves an apparently trivial error toward the end of a performance given at the 2005 Venice Theatre Biennale by the Slovenian collective Via Negativa. The error was both trivial and perhaps only apparent: its consequences were entirely in keeping with the logic of the production. The piece in question was *More,*
and it was one of seven productions that formed part of a cycle of works by Via Negativa based on the seven deadly sins. More was ostensibly a performance about gluttony, although this thematic sin, like the other six in the cycle, may best be understood as subsidiary to an exploration conducted across all seven pieces into the nature of theatrical communication. As Tomaž Krpić observes in an article on the company’s work, this interest in theatre as a “sphere of communication” rather than as an aesthetic medium takes some inspiration—and hence the name of the collective project—from the practice of Jerzy Grotowski. Unlike Grotowski, however, this project is interested in what happens to acts of communication between individuals when they are performed in a theatre, rather than in how theatre might help make community of any kind. More is composed of a series of twelve solo performances, each of which appears to involve some kind of personal narrative, confession, or ordeal. Something about the sociality of this particular theatrical set-up, however, works to turn this familiar and individualizing device into a reflection upon the extent to which it might be possible to establish anything collective on the basis of relations between individuals. In this respect it is interesting that Tomaž Krpić comments on the composition of the audience for Via Negativa performances as one way of distinguishing the work from projects that seek to realize a theatrical community: 

I am not saying that the aim of the theatre project Via Negativa is to raise a community or a collective consciousness in the traditional manner of speaking. Some of the spectators are friends or acquaintances of the performers; some are professionally interested in the work; many are cultured theatre-goers; some are just casual visitors.

That work, leisure, and friendship rather than “community” are invoked here as motivations for individual attendance at Via Negativa’s performances suggests that the work itself may do something to encourage spectators to pay particular attention to the ways in which they differ from and relate to one another and the performers, rather than just what brings them all together for this event.

More is presented by a group of seven performers and a “moderator,” whose tasks include introducing the work, explaining the structure of the piece, and engaging the audience’s participation. The piece works like this: the company sets out a wide range of food products across the front of the stage, and, the moderator explains, it is the task of the audience to
nominate foodstuffs and, with the help of the moderator, determine which will be used in the performance. Each choice triggers a pre-prepared solo performance by one of the other performers, in which the selected foods are used: rice and sausage are eaten, fish gutted; a performer covers his face with cured meats; stories are told, memories recalled, confessions offered. The moderator brings the evening’s encounter to a close by soliciting our applause for each of the other seven performers in turn. This gives the audience a chance to express for the first time the warmth with which they had earlier responded inwardly to the work of the red-haired woman who ate the processed chicken sausage, and who smiled with such charm, and also to engage again in boisterous enthusiasm for the work of Grega, almost recapitulating the earlier chants (Grega! Grega!) that had seen him through his rice-eating ordeal. But the moderator leaves one of the performers out, failing to introduce her so she can receive our applause, and the audience quickly starts shouting back to correct his mistake. The woman with the black hair, who had earlier stood on one leg in a bowl of spaghetti soup and then filled her eyes and her underpants with chocolates, stands up now and laughs as she acknowledges the audience’s friendly applause. Her name is Barbara Kukovec.

This looks and feels like a straightforward encounter, a social transaction between people who have been in one another’s company for a while. It feels like saying goodbye to two or three people with whom you have shared part of an evening at a bar, but whom you had never previously met and may never see again (something that happens often enough at theatre festivals). But this feeling is, to some extent, founded in illusion. The encounter, however fascinating in its mimesis of the social, is somehow missed. Earlier in the day the show’s director, Bojan Jablanovec had said that the encounter between performers and spectators that their work sought to promote was not an encounter that looked to destroy the theatrical situation. Although the work would, he said, be “friendly” (no attempt to attack or expose the audience, for example), it would play with the conventions of the situation rather than attempt to do without them. That is why our feelings toward the performers, as people, are a little more complicated than at first they may seem.

Our relationship, such as it is, with each performer is one that has been mutually constructed from those materials that the performance itself has allowed to appear. Although some of the feelings toward the performers—which might take the form, for example, of a desire to meet them for a drink for part of an evening in a bar—may arise from projections developed by solitary members of the audience, projections contingent, per-
haps, upon appearance; they may also be understood as a result of the care with which the evening’s performance has been constructed. They are to do with the presentation of faces and the calculation of distances, rather than with the psychology of identification or empathy upon which many accounts of the communication of feeling on stage depend. All seven performers sit perhaps two-thirds of the way back on a very deep stage. As they sit, they adopt casual positions on their chairs, from which they are able to exchange glances with one another and that they are at liberty to shift, into new casual poses. Their faces are a long way away, still, so we are initially invited instead, I think, to “read” character (moral rather than fictional) from posture. As each performer gets up from this starting position to present his or her individual performance, the position each adopts relative to the depth of the stage looks like it has been measured with great accuracy, as though each position has been assessed for its potential for social or affective heat or rather, in this case, warmth.

The case of the woman with black hair whom the moderator forgot (whom we now know to be Barbara Kukovec) is perhaps particularly revealing in this respect, and I will try briefly here to track the development of her “relationship” with the audience, through her stage position and the availability of her face. She performs two of the twelve “acts” that make up the evening. In the first (spaghetti soup) she comes right forward to collect the pan of soup itself from the lineup of foodstuffs across the very front of the stage. She retreats to about the same depth as that adopted by the previous (and first) performer (who skins and guts a fish while talking about herself: “I am a good fish”). However, the “good fish” has by now retreated to a position a little further back, so when the woman with the black hair stands on one leg in the soup, head forward a little, perhaps to help her balance, perhaps to help her slurp the spaghetti into her mouth, she is closer to the audience than any of the others. She also addresses us directly (“My mother has the illusion that I love her, only when I eat her soup”) and in terms that already suggest that the generation of warm feeling between people may be constituted by action rather than, say, by something beneath the surface. We are invited, perhaps, to love her a little too, even though we know nothing of her, apart from the surface that she chooses to present to us in this performance. Next comes a development that reveals in a delightful impasse the logic of the show: the moderator returns to solicit the audience’s choice of the next foodstuff to be used. Chocolates are called for by the audience, but no one responds. Eventually it transpires that this is because the performer responsible for
the “chocolates” sequence is already engaged in a performance, and she can’t move on to “chocolates” until she has finished her soup. When she has finished with the soup, Kukovec gathers up each of the four or five mainly heart-shaped boxes of chocolates from the front of the stage and parades in a gentle parody of a strip artist, chocolate box pressed against a hip, as though she were naked and trying to cover herself, teasingly. Once all the boxes have been gathered and carefully laid out, she takes two chocolates and presses them into her eyes. She then spends the next few minutes stuffing chocolates into her trousers (perhaps even into her own body) while standing in an awkward unseeing stance, legs apart, torso leaning forward. Eventually she ceases to be the focus of attention. A parody of self-revelation is thus followed by an act that is simultaneously a closing up of the self, a cutting off of the performer from the eye contact that had previously constituted a key element in her stage “persona” and also a difficult kind of self-exposure, in which nothing specifically personal is exposed, other than, perhaps, the exposure of the personal as such, as something other than what it had seemed, back then, to be. She has performed an act of self-exposure, but that which has been exposed remains secret.

A little while after this she returns to her seat at the back and gets the chocolate out of her eyes. Then she leaves the stage altogether by a door halfway back in the stage left wall, perhaps to remove more chocolate from herself. Once she returns she sits and watches the performance and the audience, legs crossed, and with what looks like, from this distance, the expression of someone enjoying a familiar amusement. With every minute that passes her face becomes more enigmatic. The site on which we had been encouraged to “read” her has turned, perhaps, into precisely the kind of secret that her self-exposure had revealed: the secret that points to a particular kind of opacity of the human. It is perhaps a paradox typical of the theatrical situation, that a work such as this that appears to offer complete transparency—the lights are on, there is no pretending, the audience determines the sequence of events—should in fact turn out, in the most “friendly” way imaginable, to be a reminder of just how little we know of one another and, at the same time, of the pleasures of the kind of social relation in which solitude does not preclude an entry into some apprehension of collectivity. It is in this apparent confusion between relation and unrelation that we might come to understand something theatrical in Jean-Luc Nancy’s conception of “compearance,” introduced briefly in chapter 1, in which it is the spatial distance across which
one encounters someone else that permits or even produces relation. For Nancy this distance is both incontrovertible and necessary. In Being Singular Plural, for example, he writes:

Even if being-social is not immediately “spectacular” in any of the accepted senses of the word, it is essentially a matter of being-exposed. It is a being-exposed; that is, it does not follow from the immanent consistency of a being-in-itself. The being-in-itself of “society” is the network and cross-referencing of co-existence, that is, of co-existences. That is why every society gives itself its spectacle and gives itself as spectacle, in one form or another. To this extent, every society knows itself to be constituted in the nonimmanence of co-appearance, although society does not expose this as a “knowledge.” It exposes what it knows as its own stage and through its own stage praxis.¹³

This suggests that, in spite of any of the stories we tell ourselves about how community is founded in the theatrical-political-ritual togetherness that we imagine the Greek theatre to have been, and in spite of the fact that we recognize such stories as myth, we might yet make use of the theatre as a way of making known to ourselves the conditions of our being-social, understood not as a full community of individuals but as a network of relations of exposure, a “theatrical communism,” perhaps.

**CAT TIME**

The second of these three acts of criticism involves cats. The study of animals in performance has taken on a life of its own in the last decade, and in some of my previous work I have attempted to contribute something to this strand of thought.¹⁴ I suggested that there was no ontological distinction to be made between the functions of human and nonhuman animals in the theatre and felt fairly certain that the one thing they—animal animals, that is—could never be on stage was other, even if they seemed that way when imagined either to be or to stand for a natural existence outside the social relations shaped by capitalism. They could signify the conditions of labor in the theatre, they could nudge us into a consciousness of the history of their subjugation to human ends more generally (by making us think back to the substitutions of sacrifice), and they could stand in as figures for our own sense of what a life beyond our own might be or
might be like. But they could never really be that life beyond our own because the moment they set their paws upon the stage they had become part of it, however much romantic anti-capitalist animal lovers might wish it were otherwise. But certain affective experiences persisted, and one of these furnishes my second example.

In the summer of 2004 Societas Raffaello Sanzio presented the London episode of Tragedia Endogonidia at Laban. During this performance there was a scene in which Saint Paul cut off his tongue and fed it to a group of cats and kittens. The tongue was not real, but the cats and kittens were. I found myself trying to account for how intriguing I found the way they padded quietly about the stage. It was as though the cats were my own prosthetic device, a set of furry feelers launched into a virtual space to explore and map it for me, their paws transmitting back to me an account of its dimensions, darknesses, folds, and intensities that I wouldn’t have been able to pick up without them. I should make it clear at this point that I didn’t actually receive any data in this way. That I felt that I might do was what mattered.

My interest in this experience was reawakened a few years later while reading Daniel Heller-Roazen’s The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation. The first chapter concerns the Life and Opinions of Tomcat Murr, a novel, if we may call it that, by E. T. A Hoffmann. Murr is the author of a text that appears to interleave his own feline “life and opinions” with an account of the life of the musician Johannes Kreisler, a character around whom the composer Robert Schumann would later write a piano composition entitled Kreisleriana. Murr loves the feeling that he is feeling. He is skeptical of the reason supposedly located in the heads of humans: skeptical not so much of its existence as of its value. He speculates on the possibility of acquiring human consciousness but feels no need to do so. Heller-Roazen writes:

At night, at least, Murr knows nothing; in the apparent absence of representation and cogitation, the dark night of the cat remains, by definition, utterly “conscious-less.” The cat perceives “the principle that holds sway over us” not by the organ of reason “that is supposed to sit in the heads” of men, but by an irreducibly animal faculty, namely sensation, or, as Murr puts it, “feeling.”

In this Murr is like the ancient philosophers, including Aristotle, who do not speak of consciousness at all, but speak rather of sensation or the sensitive faculty, as that by which animals may be said to be (as opposed, for
instance, to plants, that have only nutrition but no sensation). Nonetheless, we recall, it was Aristotle himself who sought to make the distinction between human and nonhuman animals on the basis of reason and language, thereby distinguishing himself from many of the pre-Socratics, who, as Heller-Roazen notes, accepted “no such partition between man and other beasts.” What Heller-Roazen then advances, through a close reading of Aristotle’s *De anima*, is the idea that all animals, human and nonhuman, share a “common sense,” which is the sense of sensing. This is not really a sixth sense at all, but a kind of meta-sense that Heller-Roazen associates with Murr’s delight in feeling himself feel. The key moment in Heller-Roazen’s explication of Aristotle comes in relation to the philosopher’s resolution of an apparent contradiction in his account of the senses. Because each sense has its proper organ, medium, and object, according to Aristotle, no single sense can sense its own sensing:

If it is by the sense of sight that we perceive that we are seeing, he reasons, then the sense of sight must be said to have not one but two objects. The proper sensible quality of vision will be not only the visible, as he has until now maintained, but also the mere fact of vision, and it will be necessary to reject the doctrine developed in the preceding sections of the treatise, according to which there corresponds a particular quality, grasped by means of an organ in a medium at a point between two extremes. But if, instead, it is by a sense other than sight that we perceive that we are seeing, the problem still cannot be said to be solved. It seems, if anything, more pressing. For what will one say of this second sense: does it, too, perceive that it perceives the fact of vision?

As Aristotle frames the problem: “Either the process will go to infinity, or there will be some sense that is [the sense] of itself.” This “common sense” is, for Heller-Roazen, not the candidate for the role of consciousness within Aristotle’s thought, as subsequent commentators have sought to promote it, but rather, a form of sensation. It is in the sensation that is this “common sense” or “inner touch” that we know ourselves to be ourselves. And this is what we share with all the other animals, rather than, as in the model in which this “common sense” becomes “consciousness” and enables rationality and language, that which divides us from them. It is not surprising, then, that Heller-Roazen, who is, after all, a translator of Giorgio Agamben, should think about this possibility as a way of showing up and evading, conceptually at least, the operations of what Agam-
ben has called the “anthropological machine” (the use of the exclusion of
the animal in order to produce the category of the human).\textsuperscript{19} The division
of the human animal from the nonhuman animal requires also the divi-
sion within each human between those qualities that are proper to the
human and those that are not, that are understood as the nonhuman or
animal within. The existence of this remainder—that which is left over
inside the human once its human properties have been established—
points, for Agamben and Heller-Roazen, to “a dimension of the living
being in which the distinction between the human and the inhuman sim-
ply has no pertinence: a region common by definition to all animal life. In
the idiom of classical philosophy the name of this shared region is ‘sensa-
tion’ (aisthesis).”\textsuperscript{20}

What happens, then, is that in the dominant tradition of classical com-
mentary the Aristotelian separation of humans from animals is shored up
by claiming that the sense of “sensing that we are sensing” is the property
not of all animals, as Aristotle himself has asserted, but the property of
human animals alone, as Aristotle has subsequently come to mean. What
matters for the present discussion is that it is precisely in the moment of
the invention of consciousness as a faculty apart from sensation, and as
something that will come to define the human, that upon which the hu-
man/nonhuman animal distinction is founded in classical thought, that
we may also find the very concept that might help us unsettle that distinc-
tion again. And that therefore, it might be in moments of shared, mingled
explorations of sensation that animal-human relations in the theatre
might offer, again, some way of thinking about labor and our desire to be
free of it. In the performance of the cats in the London episode of \textit{Tragedia
Endogonidia} it was perhaps my sense of their sense of their own and my
senses of sensing that made me sense the cats and kittens as my own or-
gans of sense. That what we had in common, in the theatre, was our sense
of sensing, in my human animal case heightened perhaps by the fact that
the theatre is an invention of my own kind expressly designed, one might
say, to help us sense our own sensing.

What does this have to do with labor? Returning to the idea discussed
in the previous chapter that the labor performed by performers in the
theatre might be exemplary of what is variously called “affective” or “im-
material” labor, we might inquire as to the affects or emotional experi-
ences that the cats produce in terms of our experience of work ordered by
time. The theatre involves organized time. It measures the work time of
its workers in relation to the work and leisure timetables of its consumers,
and it makes this measurement audible and visible. Most theatre then
involves the organization of time within that time: the time of dramaturgy; sometimes the fictional time that runs alongside but at a different speed from real time; sometimes simply real time made palpable in the measure of the musical performance and count of the choreography; or, in a most general sense, the organization of actions in and through space and time that constitute more or less anything that happens on stage, ever. Thus the theatre intensifies our experience of time as linear, progressive, and regular. The cats, and the feelings they provoke, undo this process. The cats do what the cats do, and they do it without reference to the temporality of either the theatre as workplace or the theatre as time-world. Or at least we feel this to be so. Imagine detaching your attention for a few moments from the forward movement of the action on stage, drifting away from the dramaturgy that is organizing the sequence of events in time, and allowing your experience to be governed by the furry antennae as the cats pad the stage, some with speedy paw-steps, some tentatively, sniffing out and peering into its folds and corners and darknesses. Are you starting to hollow out an experience of an extended presence in space but without measurement or regulation—a kind of cat time in which you can feel yourself slipping momentarily outside the time by which our work and leisure (and the performance itself) are organized? What is the quality or nature of this participation in the movement and presence of the cats? I’d suggest that we might think of this attention not in terms of our eyes following, tracking the cats, but, to follow through with the idea that the cats themselves function like antennae, as a kind of sensing more readily associated with listening.

This is where Jean-Luc Nancy makes his final appearance. For Nancy, listening is a turning of the attention and the senses toward both the world and the self. In fact he characterizes listening in terms that draw upon precisely the same concept of aisthesis, or sense of oneself sensing, that Heller-Roazen also takes from Aristotle. Nancy writes:

Indeed, as we have known from Aristotle, sensing [sentir] (aisthesis) is always a perception [ressentir], that is, a feeling-onself-feel [se sentir sentir], or if you prefer, sensing is a subject or it does not sense. But it is perhaps in the sonorous register that this reflected structure is most obviously manifest.²¹

And, formulated slightly differently:

To be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other
and from one in the other. Listening thus forms the perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (aesthetic) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion.\(^{22}\)

Listening, then, is the mode of attentiveness in which we simultaneously sense ourselves and ourselves sensing our relation with others. It is a mode of “compearance” and a becoming-audience. It might be practiced in the theatre auditorium as a kind of feeling-in-common that approaches but never closes into identification, participation, or community but that is also, nonetheless, a feeling-in-common of not being regulated by the temporality of capital. This experience might therefore be another specifically theatrical instance of Nancy’s “literary communism”: the production of a fragile being-in-common of singularities, produced, one might say, through the affective labor of the writer—and by extension the choreographer, the dramaturg, the actor, her soup, her chocolates, her face turned toward ours, our applause, her smile, her laughter, our love, and of course the cats. Such production might open onto the fleeting emergence of a feeling of feeling in which the temporality of work and leisure is undone, an emergence all the more poignant for its arising in precisely one of those places in which work and leisure articulate their relations with one another with peculiar force. To have such a feeling of liberation from the work-leisure dynamic in, say, a wilderness would be one thing. To have it in a theatre is quite another, especially as a professional spectator.

**SOLITUDE IN RELATION**

Chris Goode steps out onto the stage of the small upstairs theatre at the Oval House in London. He steps up from a seat on the front row stage right, to stand in the light in front of a full house of around sixty people. “So I step out onto the stage,” he says, speaking of some other stage in a vast auditorium in front of a thousand people.\(^{23}\) As he stands there, on this grand, heroic utopian stage, behind him there are children and foxes and squirrels, he says, and, as he opens his arm, snow falls. This, he will soon reveal, is the first of two dream sequences in this evening’s performance. “I’m Chris,” he announces now, in the kind of conversational but partly public tone of someone used to weighing and choosing every word. In tonight’s show he is going to tell us about some things that have been going on in his life recently. It’s not that these things are any more important than whatever might be going on in our lives right now, and, he even
suggests to the audience, some other time we might all come round to “your place,” and “you” can tell us all about “your” stuff. But tonight we’re here, in this theatre, it is just us and this theatre, and although some of what is going to be said might be hard to say, and hard even to listen to, it is “just stuff.” Theatre, Chris tells us, is where he comes, or what he uses, to think about things; it makes more sense to him, he tells us, to make that thinking social, than it does just to sit at home and write things down. And so that he is not entirely alone tonight—the life of a solo performer can be difficult—he has a guest who will join him on stage, a different guest each night, who will sit with him, listen, talk, and perform parts of the show with him. On March 12, 2012, his guest was Karen Christopher; on March 15 it was Theron Schmidt. Chris welcomes his guest to the stage, and the two of them sit down on straight-backed upholstered chairs on either side of a low table. Behind them a stretch of color-dappled flooring rises up to extend into a kind of backdrop, the kind that might look inoffensive on camera. There’s a bookcase with a number of small objects on it. We are flirting with the format of the daytime talk show. At Chris’s prompting his guest talks about how the two of them know each other. For a while it feels as though Chris is the host, and the show is really about the guest. Of course the idea that a talk show might ever really be about the guest is a fiction in which we all collude in order to make it happen.

He says that what he is going to tell us will be the truth. He has changed a few details to make things work better, but nothing significant enough to make what he will tell us anything other than the truth, the truth about himself, the only thing about which he thinks he is able to know the truth. He also wants this to be part of a social interaction. Although the show varies from night to night, not least because of the unpredictability of the interaction with the guest (which is in any case quite carefully orchestrated and prepared), it is, straightforwardly, that kind of theatre that is composed of a series of repeatable events, carefully organized in advance, and, very clearly, not the kind of theatre that is going to try to coerce its audience into extensive participation. So the extent to which the thinking in this theatre is going to be social is going to be shaped by qualities of mutual attention rather than any attempt at improvised conversation. In place of the false excitments of joining in, we are simply invited to give our attention, to assist, by means of our presence, at the making public of what might otherwise have been thought and imagined in solitude, in the hope, perhaps, that the simple but difficult act of making it public in this way, the act of offering it for the attention of
others, might place that solitude in new relations. Or, in other words, that the person who speaks to us from this stage, who says “I’m Chris” tonight, and the next night, and the night after that, to different people each night, might be both Chris and “Chris,” where the difference between them, and their truths, is so infinitesimal as not quite to matter, while, at the same time, so real and substantial and immediate and significant as to make this event just theatre enough. It is in the fine judgment of what it takes to make theatre just theatre enough that this performance finds its remarkable poise and communicates—however hard and painful its subject matter—a kind of quiet public joy.

Chris Goode is a theatre-maker working as a writer, director, and performer in a diverse range of projects. He has recently formed Chris Goode and Company with his producer, Ric Watts, having previously worked as artistic director of Camden People’s Theatre in London (2001–4), as well as leading his own company, Signal to Noise, beginning in 1999, with which he presented a mixture of large-scale works for theatre spaces and more intimate pieces for performance in domestic spaces. He is also a poet and gives public readings and performances of his own poetry, as well as that of other experimental poets. Even when he works as a solo artist—in situations, like God/Head, that look like “one-man shows”—it is always clear that performance is understood and undertaken as a collaborative project. Both God/Head and his 2012 touring production of an earlier “one-man show,” The Adventures of Wound Man and Shirley, originally created in 2009, are directed by Wendy Hubbard, one of a constellation of artists who, so it seems, are going to be providing Chris Goode with his “and Company” in forthcoming work. From 2006 to 2011 he was the author of a blog—Thompson’s Bank of Communicable Desire—where he wrote about “theatre, art, poetry, music, London, the weather, airports, sudden fury, different music, still not cutting down on sugary snacks, film, horses, people doing sin, incidents, refractions, the entire dark dream outside.” In an early entry on this blog he reports a conversation with “J” about the “blog voice,” which he describes as “the strange hybrid of private journalling and the performance of intimacy to an unknown public.”

The idea that theatre might be a way of giving form to acts of communication that might otherwise be impossible or at least uncomfortably difficult might even—with allowances for the convenience of narrative—account for Goode’s continued interest in theatre and performance in preference to the more obviously solitary path of the writer.

As asked about the “gregariousness and companionability” of the theatre-making process, in an interview with Chris Johnstone for the Argument
Room, Goode reveals, noting that “this is such a cliché,” that even as a child he was interested in “using constructed events that I can control to engage with other people.”

In the process of closing Thompson’s Bank of Communicable Desire he wrote about the way in which his various commitments to collaborative theatre-making had coalesced into the decision to create Chris Goode and Company as a way of sustaining a kind of discursive plurality of which theatre might be capable, but that a blog, he felt, can only rarely achieve:

For now there are two things that feel profoundly important. One is to keep remaking and rethinking theatre as a polyvocal space, a social space, a space that’s scrupulously hospitable to difference but also in itself a place we can hold in common. The other is to refuse—and to offer a welcoming alternative to—what we seem to see more and more, all over, which is the simulation of participation: whether that’s about theatre that presents itself as interactive but actually has no room within itself for a consequential or causative interactivity, or about the free-reign multivoice playgrounds of below-the-line territories in blogs, on news sites and so on, in which contributors are reduced to one-person mobs, bullies enraged by their own impotence and by the apparent impossibility of being part of a virtual discourse that can ever, ever amount to anything, or would even wish to.

Many of his recent works are much more self-evidently “poly-vocal” than God/Head: in 2011, for example, in a project called Open House, Goode and four other performers spent a week in a rehearsal room at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, to which they invited anyone who cared to do so to join them and contribute to the making of a piece of theatre, from scratch, to be shown at the end of the week, which culminated in a one-off collaboration involving sixteen performers. But for all its similarity to the “one-man show,” God/Head is quite clearly a social act, one that, as I hope to suggest in the discussion that follows, makes the question of social relation its most pressing preoccupation.

The sense of public joy that I have suggested the piece might be contributing is partly, perhaps substantially, a matter of attending to our attention to one another, and one of the key functions of the show’s guest seems to be to draw attention to this attention; an ancient enough device, of course, with which an onstage surrogate allows the spectator to exam-
ine and calibrate her own responses to the action. If we are to imagine ourselves as having dropped in at Chris’s place to hear about his stuff, it helps to have a plausible placeholder for ourselves, anchoring the social thinking in something that at least looks like a real conversation between two people, of the kind in which the truth might indeed be told. Sometimes it looks that way because that is precisely what it is, particularly in one exchange between Goode and Theron Schmidt, in which Schmidt, his speech fraught with hesitations and all the while acknowledging the particular difficulty of saying such things in public, says to Goode that he sometimes thinks it might be a better if he spent more time with other people and less time on his own. It also helps that the guest makes visible the relational nature of the whole enterprise, so that no member of the paying public can quite absorb themselves into the illusion that what Goode has to tell is for their ears only: if we have come round to Goode’s place for the evening, it’s more like a small party than a tête à tête.

So, after the dream with the squirrels and the stage and the snow, and after the explanations of what’s going to happen, the introduction of the guest, and some conversation between host and guest, the main event of Goode’s show is broached. It’s a story from the everyday life of a writer. He’s starting work a little late, on a day in April 2011, and after a little bit of faffing about, he decides he should do some grocery shopping before settling down to work. He is opening a show in a week’s time, and he still hasn’t finished writing it, and he has another show to write too—“the deadlines are piling up”—and so he doesn’t have any time for either “monkey business” or “shenanigans.” It is on his way back from the supermarket that it happens. He feels it “here” (he touches his chest, perhaps a little above the level of his heart) and “maybe here” (he touches his chest a little lower down), and here his speech slows as though it were absolutely necessary that precisely the right words should appear: “That there is nothing bigger and realer and more vivid in the world, in the world of my perceptions in this moment, there is nothing realer than the presence, the immediate and total presence of God.” He pauses. “In whom I do not believe.”

We will hear this story four or five times during the course of the rest of the evening. On each occasion Goode retains the rhythm and intonation of this first, very careful, clear telling, as well as the slightly apologetic gesture—two fists shaken from side to side at ear level—that accompanies his use of the phrase “mixing it up” to describe his occasional use of an alternate route between his home and the supermarket in Stoke Newington. But on each occasion there are variations, as aspects of the
story only touched upon in its first rendition are opened up and amplified. Perhaps the most significant amplification is his account of the show he’ll be writing once the show he’s about to open is finished. This is a play he has been asked to write, and he’s decided that it’s going to be about a boy of thirteen, alone in his room, who’s maybe queer and maybe not sure whether he knows it yet and who might—that is, if Chris Goode chooses to write it that way—be harming himself in some way. Another expansion of the story of the encounter with God in Stoke Newington involves an account of a visit to the doctor in Leytonstone ten years ago when it became clear to Chris that everyone else in the waiting room (which was itself merely a stage set) was a member of a religious cult, armed with knives and ready to kill him. Chris recalls his rationalization of this experience some ten minutes after leaving the doctor’s surgery: of course it wasn’t a stage set, of course no one was plotting to kill him, it was just his brain doing something funny, something chemical. Except, and again of course, he realizes that it could be the brain chemicals now, tricking him into believing that no one really had any knives. We will hear, too, about a second epiphanic moment, several months after the first, which took place on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh as Chris was on his way, uncharacteristically a little late, to the theatre at which he was performing in the Fringe Festival, and with the assistance of his guest, we will witness a re-enactment of his conversation, in a dressing room at Bradford’s Theatre in the Mill, with an academic psychologist who gently suggests that the epiphanic experience may have a neurochemical explanation and that it may also have been precipitated by the encounter between Goode’s own “suggestibility” (he is an actor, after all) and the psycho-physical triggers of the trance music and inspirational self-help material he had been listening to through headphones on the two occasions in question.

But the either/or scenario seemingly suggested by the dialogue with the psychologist is not the scenario that Goode’s performance is exploring. Whatever else it may be, God/Head is not really a piece about whether or not God exists, and it is most certainly not the kind of science-versus-religion discussion you might hear on BBC Radio 4, even if, as Goode suggests at one point, this is what he first thought he might come up with when he considered what he might make in response to the invitation from Oval House. Goode’s scenario has more to do with relations between people: it is, in a sense, about its own attempt to make relations between people, but to do so from a position of solitude. Because it is played out in a theatre, that scenario is always curiously subjunctive. For the event to make sense its audience has to experience what Chris or
“Chris” presents as sincere and truthful and also to hold it at the very slightest distance; to take each act of communication as an experiment in communication, as an invitation to consider how it might be if someone were to say something like this:

But turning love chemicals into love songs is a billion miles away from how basically fucking angry I feel about, um . . . the medicalizing of sadness: turning the fundamental sadness of being alive and being ultimately alone and wanting to fight that aloneness with love and art and fucking and being friends and hating capitalism and sometimes sometimes wishing you were dead, how angry I feel about a multi-billion dollar industry which depends on turning that reality into an illness that can be cured. That can just be suppressed.

The show offers numerous scenes of solitude (of “being ultimately alone”), each of which is experienced specifically in relation to theatre: there is the boy in his room in the play Chris is writing; there is Chris himself as a man at home with his theatre-writing deadlines; Chris on the way to his own performance, listening to music and speech through headphones while moving through public space; Chris in that peculiar airlock between the public and the private (the dressing room), conducting a conversation about the inside of his own head that he will later reenact in the public space of another stage in another town. At the same time it is a show structured around the deeply disturbing experience of not being alone, of having one’s solitude interrupted by the perception of a relation to the absolute. One aspect of the epiphanic encounters with the reality of God is that “God can see me. God can see inside me, see through me. Can see me. For myself. All that I am.” God, then, is the overwhelming sensation of no longer and never being able to feel alone. An exposure so total that appearing in public to speak truthfully about oneself will, by contrast, feel like the most blessed solitude. Theatre emerges here as a paradoxical place of revelation; as a practice that makes it possible to say things in public but to do so in a sort of private capacity, to make disclosures without fully embracing them as one’s own. Theatre figures as both refuge and liberation, as the place where one might go to satisfy a longing to be able to speak with the conviction that everyday life seems not to permit; to command a kind of certainty and the eloquence that goes with it; to possess the cadences of the preacher, the inspirational speaker, the self-help guru: in short, to emulate the example, in Goode’s case, of Iyanla
Vanzant, whose appearances on the Oprah Winfrey show have awakened in him an enduring admiration and to whose words he was listening through his headphones on that morning in April when he encountered God in Stoke Newington. Which is precisely what happens here, as Goode announces that he “can feel the language that’s been forming in my mouth,” which, at the very start of the show, in the first dream, he was “not quite ready to speak yet.”

It all comes together as ecstasy. Standing, as it were, to one side of his own show, producing from within his own show what the show itself seems to have been about the struggle to produce, Chris sets up a music stand in a kind of gear change that gently but firmly articulates the distance between him and his audience to perform, in the role of poet and preacher in one, a text whose materials are familiar to everyone who is listening, a recomposition of the words and phrases he has used so far, to talk about his epiphany, about his childhood dreams and his favorite book, about his hypno-therapy, and about his work in theatre:

Look up, my friends! Look up at the sky!

There is no shit-slinging dream monkey in the sky.

But the stars are interconnected and the snow is really coming down and the sky is falling in. And the truth is in action and we showed up to work.

Link this on! Link it on!

Here, and now, in this place, yield to the truth.

Our bodies are sad and we are separated from each other and our hearts are falling down. Link this on!

We are naked in plain sight. In our own sight of ourselves. Open your mouth. Open your fucking mouth! The stars are intimately connected. And this page is best.

The effect is stirring and beautiful and possessing. And “stirring” and “beautiful” and “possessing.” Let the music stand between him and the audience, stand for and stand as the articulating of a distance between people who, however “intimately connected” and “in plain sight” of one
another they may be, are also always “separated from each other” even in this moment at which Chris performs being so triumphantly beside himself for them. Let it stand also for the fault in the whole setup that, in the second and final dream of the show, makes a mystery of what the theatre does for communication. In this second dream Chris is in a huge theatre again, but this time he is in the auditorium rather than on the stage, close to the front of the stage, where eighteen actors, men and women, some dressed, some naked, stand in a line at the back of the stage looking out at the audience. One after another they run toward the front of the stage:

And when they get to the front edge of the stage, they jump into the air.

They leap into the air. Into the darkness of the auditorium.

One after another. Running to the edge and leaping.

And another, and another. Running to the edge of the stage and leaping.

But the thing is . . .

There’s a fault. There’s some kind of fault in the dream.

Because I don’t know what happens when . . .

I’m watching them running and leaping but I don’t know . . .

I can’t tell . . .

I don’t know whether they . . .

The “fault” in the dream is the gap between stage and auditorium imagined as though the theatre possessed a kind of inaccessible fold that prevented anyone from passing across it. It is a fold in which we can only imagine that something might be going on, through which something might be communicated, if only we could get to the place where it was being communicated, if only it weren’t always disappearing, out of our grasp, into the fold. Chris leaves the stage. His guest opens an envelope and follows some final instructions to tidy up the space and leave. The
audience applauds. They don’t come back. They will never know whether they.

The things that Chris might say or want to say can only be said this way because of the possibility that it is only “Chris” saying them or that he might just be “saying” them. The theatre protects us from full communication, from the “immanence” that is the communion of community. This is maybe why it is one of those odd places outside the most intimate of personal relations where it is possible to attempt such communication. The theatre is where solitude in relation can begin to approach the experience of communism on your own. It is precisely because there can in fact be no community here in the place where it is always presupposed that the experience of listening among others acquires a peculiar condition, in which the intensities of both solitude and relation are amplified, so that inside a theatre auditorium one feels oneself both more alone and more related than one does on the outside in so-called real life. If the professional spectator has any special access to this experience, it may be due to a special kind of receptivity: not some special sensitivity, sensibility, or expertise, but rather a disposition arising from the extent to which the division of labor constitutes a more decisive element of the experience than it does for someone encountering such an experience in their leisure time. The feelings I have tried to account for in these three acts of theatre criticism are ordinarily thought either to exceed or to stand entirely outside the “realm of necessity,” participating instead in the “realm of freedom” as love, friendship, and sensual perception. We are used to thinking and feeling that such feelings are authentic rather than commodified and, if we are romantic anti-capitalists, to value them accordingly. To experience something of such feelings within the realm of necessity—as part of one’s professional activity, that is—is to enjoy (if that is the right word) a momentary disruption of the normal relations between freedom and necessity. It is to love one’s work through the work of another, to find real pleasure in the manufacture of that love as a commodity.