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Assister au spectacle

Julia-Kristina Bauer (image) and Carl Lavery (text)



To attend a performance is not only to be there in concentrated expectation for a desire that is never ultimately fulfilled; it is to transform oneself via the aid that one gives to the performance, the show. We are there to concentrate, to provide the bodies in front of us – who take their place and do things - with sustenance, to bear them up.



In French, this nexus of meanings, this generous mutualism, is apparent in the phrase *assister au spectacle* – in English, translated as the more pragmatic, less resonant, ‘to go to the theatre’. If going to the theatre really is, as French insists, to assist the theatre, then to be a spectator, someone in attendance, is to engage in a process of reciprocal gift-giving. Only here the gifting is dependent on a willingness to renounce fixed notions of identity and to consent to being with rather than being on time.



This micro shift in propositional value is crucial.

To be with time is to assent to the possibility, or, better still, necessity of eroding and transforming, of affirming a kind of becoming, in other words. In contradistinction to Plato, the spell or sorcery of theatre produces a 'theatrocacy' of excessive giving, which, perhaps, explains the exhilaration one sometimes feels when the performance works its magic, and one says 'I was lucky to be there'.



Indeed in the theatre, when I turn my head, as I often seem to do, I have been struck with the thought that it is through ex-ile or ex-hilaration or ex-uberance or ex-cess that one discovers one's humanness, the *gens*¹ in generosity. I like to think of this ex – as a kind of communism, an affect that binds us together while keeping us apart.

1 In French, the word *les gens* translates as people.