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Performance beyond Pedagogy: \"That Night Follows Day\"

In the ongoing collapse of political systems and ideologies the great stories and models of political theatre have lost ground too. And yet it seems hard to accept that theatre may be just a spectacle with almost no effect on the political consciousness, the attitudes or actions of their spectators. One of the last realms for pedagogical and moralistic strategies is theatre for young audiences, easier to be influenced and seemingly innocent. The normal setting consists of professional actors who play in front of young people or (sometimes) let them participate actively, but mainly in the tradition of dramatic dialogue and role play. This whole regnum of moral rules, make-believe and traditional aesthetics in theatre institutions for young people has been challenged by the performance “That Night Follows Day”, produced at Victoria (Gent) by Tim Etchells with 16 kids from 7 to 14 (for adult audiences in Gent and on tour, Festivals etc.). Already by its set (a sports hall) and its physical tension between individual and collective presence, this performance is paradigmatic as interregnum, where the authorities and the theatre of everyday life are temporarily suspended, where the separation of public and private space, artistic entertainment and social disobedience is questioned. My paper will discuss this production in the context of contemporary aesthetics of performance, referring also to Walter Benjamin’s reflections on theatre as state of exception and as performance of sovereignty.