

## Free State

### On Rehearsing Revolution by Authentic Boys

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Welcome to the political training ground, welcome to 100 minutes of free state. Come in, disguise yourself and grab the flag, take to the barricades propelled by the power of Chinese marching music. Observe, like the five hundred Rotterdam schoolchildren before you, the mysterious attributes of revolution. Experience its monumental rituals and allow yourself to be swept along by the dynamics of the many!

The meta-state of *Rehearsing Revolution* is founded on media images of the 'Occupy' and 'We are the 99%' demonstrations, established in a domain between performance, film and sculpture, spurred on by a total experience in which physical and mental movement are each others' prerequisite. What twist will you give to this double game? Will you go along with it, leave it, are you honest, do you cheat? To what extent are you indoctrinated, or are you a dissident?

The disguise conceals and, thus, actually makes you visible. Simple materials, a plastic bag, screws, some sticky tape, are enough to translate the topicality of Tahrir Square into a quick personal statement. And thus to link the media's representation of the revolution to the stage of life of this group of youths. The artists: 'The adolescents represent the struggle for a personal identity, which is also expressed in the profile photos on Facebook. They find themselves in a physical and mental transformation and seek ideas and ideals with which to corroborate reality.' The masses: that could be you. So it's your story that matters and that fuels the revolution. You can share it with 10 or 100 or with 1000s. The difference: that's what you make.

*Rehearsing Revolution* is a performance that plays on the senses, but also a participating project or an artistic strategy for the production of autonomous work. Above all, it is an artistic experience based on the principle of dialogue. 'It's about a dialogue. Between having control and losing that control. Between the possibility to affect people and an indifferent attitude. Between receiving and transmission in order to reach a moment at which an entirely subjective feeling of freedom can arise', according to the Authentic Boys.

The makers of *Rehearsing Revolution* stage their youthful protagonists and their personal stories. With this they refer to the conceptual view of theatre: the Ready-made performance as a theatrical analogy of Marcel Duchamp.\* This is based on everyday actions that acquire a different reality when isolated in a staged environment. Such an approach to performance entices the public through a disarming moment of unfiltered authenticity. The disguise concentrates the view and reveals the essence by concealing the superfluous.

In the Ready-made performance, truth and imagination are well matched. The performances place the artistic practice in everyday life. And conversely, they bring everyday life into art unconditionally. With this they address otherwise unquestioned social processes and mechanisms, exceed limits and convictions, broaden existing categories and imagine alternatives, as in *Rehearsing Revolution*, by reformulating the relationship between amateur and professional, or between artist and public, the dynamics between collective opinion and thinking individual.

The notion of authenticity on which the Ready-made performance relies is crucial in this. As a point of departure it is sworn to as a thing of unique value, only to subsequently be called into question again as an unchanging given. What is real, what is authentic, when the space between fact

and fiction turns out to be not a building, but a changeable construction? The Authentic Boys have programmatically written this question in their own name, which is not chosen without irony. It seems like a systematic method to find a way out of the personal comfort zone: 'How often do you confront yourself?' is the motto behind the Authentic Boys. In this respect, every work of the group becomes a personal revolution that questions, motivates, imposes itself, entices, and forces: to think differently. In the parable-like staging of *Rehearsing Revolution* this shows itself to be equally vulnerable and convincing.

*Rehearsing Revolution* is also a motto of the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, who rose to prominence in the nineteen sixties. When he performed with his group in the Peruvian countryside, where he called on the farmers in the play to demand their rights, the revolutionary spark appeared to have ignited. The farmers spontaneously decided to pick up weapons and asked the artists to do likewise:

*Horrified by his own hypocrisy, Boal swore to never again present or advocate on stage that which he himself could not support offstage. Theater itself was not a space to orchestrate revolution, he decided, but it could be a space in which to rehearse revolution – to imagine and practice possible forms of action that could instigate social change.” (Jill Lane, 2007)\*\**

Boal realized that the stage can primarily be the place to address strategies for social change, instead of organizing that change. Ready-made performances, and by extension the Authentic Boys, elaborate on this observation.

Not, however, without a fundamental change in the position of the public. In Boal's theatre the viewer functions less as a 'witness', but is encouraged to determine how the plot unfolds and to become an actor him-/herself. The Authentic Boys go one step further and fully democratize the existing division of roles in the genre by making the youths in *Rehearsing Revolution* the author and co-producer of the work.

In this way, Boal formulated one of the most important artistic answers to the then severe social tensions for Peru. And not just in Peru; here, now, in the Netherlands, Boal's answer reverberates in the title of the Authentic Boys. The commitment of the artists' group – to enable the youth to discover their own artistic, revolutionary potential in *Rehearsing Revolution* – places the Authentic Boys on a decisive track. On their way to their free state they sidestep with bravura the moment at which the often socially engaged position threatens to outstrip the autonomous work of art. With a wilful interpretation of 'performance' the Authentic Boys manage to occupy new land by formulating their own answer to the question of the current position of art itself: 'How could artists encourage people to trust and re-occupy those spaces as their own stages for active citizenship?' \*\*

\* The German experimental theatre group Rimini Protokoll introduced the idea of the 'ready-made performance' in 1998 with their production *Bei wieviel Lux schalten Banse und Pohl das Licht an?* (Frankfurt, Germany)

\*\* Jill Lane, 2007, *Rehearsing the Revolution in Peru* in: Journal of International Affairs; 8.1; International Module.