

The Accident

Characters

Antonin Artaud
Augusto Boal
Bertolt Brecht
Arthur Miller

I.

Augusto Boal: I can't see the sky. It fell from the horizon, like a broken heart.

Bertolt Brecht: Keep quiet, I'm thinking.

Augusto Boal: There's no time to be quiet, the sky is lost, like a forgotten child.

Bertolt Brecht: The idea of drama has not escaped you I see. Such flair for narrative.

Augusto Boal: Your understanding of the epic has become too abstract. Where is your proletariat today, your mother of courage, your great revolution?

Bertolt Brecht: I'm still thinking. How to react, how to find a place for action, where is our stage now?

Augusto Boal: It's in the backyards of Caracas, in the trash bins of Memphis, on the benches and grass of Munich.

Bertolt Brecht: But we're in Montreal, and I need to think, to relocate my senses – this takes time.

Augusto Boal: We have no time left, no space for discourse, the sky is lost, broken, like a dying ember.

Antonin Artaud: The embers... The embers.

Bertolt Brecht: Give me a pen, someone give me a pen.

Antonin Artaud: The pen... The pen.

Augusto Boal: Your pen is my enemy.

Bertolt Brecht: Wait, wait, I'm writing.

Augusto Boal: The time for writing is over. It's time for the Indian take-over. To become Cannibal and eat the heart of the Imperial enemy. I need to eat the sky before the Imperial ship crushes every cloud.

Bertolt Brecht: It's impossible to write with all this noise, all this traffic.

Antonin Artaud: The traffic... The traffic.

Bertolt Brecht: Montreal is a complex city.

Augusto Boal: Is this what you've suddenly discovered? Is this what your pen tells you?

Bertolt Brecht: No, the city tells me, it shows me its own language – we must read its signs, find its center and then and only then will we know its periphery, its margins.

Augusto Boal: The dialectical imagination – you Europeans are all the same.

Bertolt Brecht: History has shown the true colors of power.

Augusto Boal: It has also obscured the true power of the imagination.

Bertolt Brecht: Let us build a stage, here, right here, with all this traffic and city life.

Augusto Boal: A stage, a stage, we don't need a stage, we need a new blood.

Bertolt Brecht: The stage, here, as a sign for change, a potential for meeting, a new discourse.

Arthur Miller: The stage... The stage is already there, we just need to mark it. We need a line, a series of lines, to map the stage. People need to know we are here.

Augusto Boal: A new blood, an Indian blood.

Antonin Artaud: The blood... The blood.

Bertolt Brecht: Where is the city center, why aren't we in the city center – how are we to speak to the people from here?

Arthur Miller: We are already speaking, we are already somewhere. The media will come, they will pick up our words and deliver them across the city. That's the power of theatre, to transmit, to represent, to give an image and a voice of difference.

Augusto Boal: The city doesn't need another sign, another representation, another picture. It needs a new blood. A new rite of passage, it needs to see the sky.

Antonin Artaud: I will tell you something, I will speak as if from another body, because the body is already the site of difference and power. It is already here, on the skin and in the organs, and to give the city a new sign, a new language, and a new blood, one must first find a new body. The body needs a new shape – an electric body, a sonic body, a cruel body.

Bertolt Brecht: Are you speaking of rituals?

Antonin Artaud: I am speaking of disease, amnesia, aphasia. I am speaking of abuse, carnival, hallucination...

Augusto Boal: Of blood, of Indians.

Arthur Miller: But what of theatre? The drama of life – the small details, of waking up in the morning and going to work, of sitting in your car and driving and stopping at red lights.

Augusto Boal: Yes, the car can already be our stage, it is a microcosm, a site for transformation. It is the place where the individual is held by the greed of the car industry.

Antonin Artaud: And where freedom might wake up.

Augusto Boal: To drive faster. Yes, that's what we need, to drive faster.

Bertolt Brecht: That sounds like an amusement park.

Arthur Miller: Or like the American west.

Bertolt Brecht: I need to speak to the Mayor. To know the history of this city. I need information, I need to know more. I can't write anymore until I know.

Augusto Boal: Knowledge is not always the answer. Maybe we already know too much.

Bertolt Brecht: But education, what of education?

Augusto Boal: A tree may tell us more than your new book.

Bertolt Brecht: But the book may cause a revolution.

Antonin Artaud: To revolt... To revolt.

Arthur Miller: I once knew a girl from Hollywood who would spend hours on the bus, each day, to work and to help her mother. She had no life, no opportunity. I met her one day and she told me her story, all these details. It frightened me. I don't know why. Maybe because suddenly I had her words, I had her whole story there, it was given to me

and I thought, this is how life is, to hold the small fragments of another, to witness and to observe. And maybe, just maybe, to retell. To tell the other's story.

Augusto Boal: Stories... Yes, maybe stories are the key. Not the book, but the story.

Antonin Artaud: The story... The story.

Bertolt Brecht: Then, what is our story, here, now?

Augusto Boal: Our story is the story of the city, isn't it?

Antonin Artaud: The city... The city.

Bertolt Brecht: The city has always served as the site for social and historical transformation. It is where all human struggles happen, where all strife and sorrow are born and where they die. It is the site for debate.

Augusto Boal: On the walls, in the gutter, in the alleys, that is where the debate happens, in the muck and grime, and in the energies that bring people together. The city is a social body.

Antonin Artaud: The body... The city is a body. And I speak from this body. I am already this body, speaking through its walls, its fluids. I am the honey of the city, a sap. The city gives me new limbs, new eyes and ears, it extends my body. I radiate through the city, like a sun in the asphalt.

Bertolt Brecht: Such mysticism... I grow weary now. I need to rest.

Augusto Boal: We've only just started.

Bertolt Brecht: I need to meet the Mayor. I need to arrange a meeting, to find out how to build our stage, here.

Augusto Boal: The Mayor is only another sign, an image – you respect the lines of power too much, you speak of a new language, a discourse, but you only replicate the existing system of power, of representation. I would rather eat the Mayor.

Arthur Miller: A festivity, maybe we need a festivity. To hold a banquet. Our stage should be a table, where all voices may gather, where eating and debating may go together. This could become a metaphor, for the city itself. A place of contradiction.

Bertolt Brecht: An arena?

Arthur Miller: A site for narrative.

Augusto Boal: But who writes this narrative, who comes to the table – the table is already a space of the civilized, a place of the Imperial discourse, a site for the language of the rich. I can't eat such rich food.

Bertolt Brecht: But there must be an object, a clear marking, a space.

Augusto Boal: The space is already there, on the street, in the heads of people, in the hearts of everyone.

Bertolt Brecht: But how to gather, to converse.

Antonin Artaud: The body will tell us.

Augusto Boal: The blood will give us the heart of such language.

Arthur Miller: Maybe it's not a question of an object, or a space, but more of movement. I think what I am describing is creating movement. A movement which is also time. The making of a time is what we need. To spend time, to create time, to give time.

Antonin Artaud: The time... The time.

Arthur Miller: Like the story, the story is not only a space, but it is a time. I tell the story and this makes a time, it marks a time, of telling, of sharing. Time is where power lies.

Bertolt Brecht: Like history.

Augusto Boal: Colonial history.

Arthur Miller: But where is time now? What time is this, we might wonder.

Augusto Boal: It is the time of the city. City-Time.

Arthur Miller: What kind of time is that?

Bertolt Brecht: It is the time of the revolution.

Augusto Boal: Or of making a new imagination.

Arthur Miller: Of resistance?

Bertolt Brecht: Of language.

Augusto Boal: Of blood.

Antonin Artaud: The blood... The blood.

Augusto Boal: City-Time is the time of the Cannibal. The city eats itself everyday. It opens its mouth, bites itself, devours itself, and then spits itself out. It regurgitates itself everyday, recreates itself.

Bertolt Brecht: The city is also a production of discourse, where language is born and thrives. That is why we need to debate and not only eat. City-Time is the time of the spoken, where we gather our voices and grab hold of the words.

Arthur Miller: But we are already speaking, now, here in the city. Our words are ringing through the streets, here, against the traffic. Does anyone listen? I speak and yet there is already so much noise here, so many plans already made, already decided. The city is a stage with many backrooms, and too many directors.

Augusto Boal: We must become delirious then, to become the city. There is no possibility for change without becoming the city. We are not only eaten by the city, we must eat the city in return.

Arthur Miller: To become city?

Augusto Boal: And more.

Antonin Artaud: To rupture, to break, to condemn, to challenge, to shatter, to unfold, to empty, to harness, to arrest, to explode, to excrete, to exude, to disappear...

Bertolt Brecht: The Mayor, where is the Mayor, where is our agenda, our business. I have lost the thread, where is the map, our map, I need the line again, the script. Where are we going with this...

Augusto Boal: We are going where we should go, we must follow the clouds, not the lines and the script but the sap of nature and the desire of the body, we must dance.

Antonin Artaud: The dance... The dance.

Bertolt Brecht: But the text, we need a text. The semiotic, the signification, the lines... these are where we find our direction. The play, we need a play.

Arthur Miller: The play might be thought of as a gathering of different elements. I think that's what we have here, a gathering of different elements. The play, yes, the play might be a site in itself, a space and a time, for the body and for language. The play is the making of an allegory. Because we also need the public.

Bertolt Brecht: To create a stage is also to create a public.

Arthur Miller: To communicate.

Augusto Boal: The play, the stage, the public... These only duplicate what we are trying to undo. The system, the structure, the narrative, these must be pushed aside. We will only become slaves to the same old oppression.

Bertolt Brecht: But if we go to the streets, if we give up the script, the direction, the writing of the lines, there will be no change, no transformation, no story. Revolution only happens by giving people an alternative image, another language.

Augusto Boal: There is too much language already.

Antonin Artaud: The language... The language.

Arthur Miller: I think of the girl again, the one who told me her story. I think of her spirit, her energy, her emotion. Her story was not a play, there was no script. It was an experience from life, something made from flesh and blood, and the rawness of struggle. She was not acting, and yet her story, she told me and in that moment I became her public, her witness. I think we made that together, not her story, but the sharing. This is what we need, to share. More than language, more than blood, more than revolution.

Antonin Artaud: The sharing... The sharing... it comes from myself, and yet it leaves me behind. It ruptures the body, brings it out. Vulnerability... A new fragility.

Arthur Miller: Fragility.

Antonin Artaud: Vulnerability.

Arthur Miller: Togetherness.

Bertolt Brecht: Community.

Augusto Boal: Love.

II.

Antonin Artaud: I am in Mexico. No, I am in Damascus, sipping tea. The sun is bright, a bulb of hot yellow. No, I am in Memphis, playing guitar along the river. There are voices, like shattered glass into my ear. No, I am playing cards with a group of Indians in the Yucatan. The cards are all black, I can't see. I am blind.

Bertolt Brecht: No, you are in Montreal. There is no sun here, we're stuck, stuck up here against all this traffic, in this darkness. There's no room to move, to relocate. The days go by and still, we are here.

Augusto Boal: I need the sun, I need the sky. I need the moon, and the heat of the night. I am in exile, I have no brothers, no sisters. I am in the land of the colonizer.

Arthur Miller: This is where we are. In the land of the automobile, there are no more Indians, only asphalt. I was born near here. I visited once before, with my father. We drove up here, on a summer trip, eating popcorn and talking to truckers. And then the war came. Everything changed. The feeling for the future. Everything. My father loved this city.

Bertolt Brecht: Memories.

Arthur Miller: Stories.

Augusto Boal: Longing.

Antonin Artaud: The nerve endings.

Bertolt Brecht: This might be it, how to begin, the thread, the line.

Arthur Miller: A structure?

Bertolt Brecht: To reminisce.

Augusto Boal: I don't want the past, I want the future.

Bertolt Brecht: Not the past, but the present. A construction.

Arthur Miller: A construction site.

Bertolt Brecht: Yes, with a set of raw materials.

Antonin Artaud: Nerve endings.

Bertolt Brecht: A platform.

Augusto Boal: A counter-measure.

Arthur Miller: A proposal.

Bertolt Brecht: A diagram.

Augusto Boal: Without design, only practice.

Arthur Miller: A potential.

Bertolt Brecht: A becoming.

Antonin Artaud: A ghost body.

Bertolt Brecht: A tool, a set of tools.

Arthur Miller: To inspire.

Bertolt Brecht: For enactment.

Augusto Boal: Participation.

Arthur Miller: Story-telling.

Bertolt Brecht: Publishing.

Augusto Boal: Tearing down.

Arthur Miller: Rebuilding.

Antonin Artaud: A phantom architecture.

Arthur Miller: A city within the city.

Augusto Boal: A favela.

Antonin Artaud: To breathe.

Bertolt Brecht: To occupy.

Arthur Miller: To inhabit.

Augusto Boal: To gather.

Bertolt Brecht: To organize.

Arthur Miller: A construction site here, right here.

Bertolt Brecht: For productions.

Augusto Boal: Actions.

Antonin Artaud: Rituals.

Augusto Boal: It must be raw. Vibrations. Pure energy.

Antonin Artaud: Spirit.

Bertolt Brecht: Of the people.

Arthur Miller: And what of the politicians? They will surely come, to see.

Augusto Boal: To define.

Bertolt Brecht: All theatre is temporary. Like the city.

Arthur Miller: The architecture...

Augusto Boal: We only need the event, the example, the moment.

Arthur Miller: To give hope.

Bertolt Brecht: To give another image, a horizon.

Arthur Miller: For sharing.

Antonin Artaud: The event... The event.

Augusto Boal: But what of the future. Is the present enough, this construction site, this event, this hope?

Bertolt Brecht: It is everything.

Augusto Boal: It is something.

Arthur Miller: It at least opens the way, begins a process. It keeps the ending open.

Augusto Boal: Maybe it delays the inevitable decline, the loss.

Bertolt Brecht: You ask for too much.

Augusto Boal: I ask for celebration without end. For poetry.

Bertolt Brecht: The poetic is a word turned image.

Augusto Boal: It is a blood turned into body.

Antonin Artaud: The poetic... The poetic.

Arthur Miller: Where might we find poetry in the city, how might we create a link, a bridge, to counter-balance the system, the functionality?

Augusto Boal: We need to release the animals, to break open the zoo... The animals should be let go onto the streets.

Arthur Miller: Disorder?

Augusto Boal: Pure energy, a vibration.

Bertolt Brecht: An accident.

Arthur Miller: As the introduction of the new. The accident, this could be used, a kind of performative device. A character even.

Antonin Artaud: The accident... The accident.

Augusto Boal: To let all the elements out in the open.

Bertolt Brecht: To bring all the people onto the scene.

Arthur Miller: To make a scene for caring.

Bertolt Brecht: For humanity.

Augusto Boal: For chaos.

Antonin Artaud: The body is already a chaos...

Arthur Miller: Like the city?

Antonin Artaud: The city is the body and the body is the city. They are made from the same dynamic, of rupture and fragmentation, desire and loss.

Bertolt Brecht: The mending and the synthesis.

Augusto Boal: And the sky, always the sky.

Arthur Miller: The accident might be the scene bringing together variable elements, an indeterminate design. Is it a scene of crime, a site for new romance, a tragedy? The accident remains as a supplement, an inevitable outcome that nonetheless shocks, disrupts, by bringing together what should not meet. This might be a play whose language can only be written at the point of contact.

Bertolt Brecht: We arrange the ingredients, put the elements into movement, and let the city decide the rest.

Augusto Boal: It is a scene of energy, blood.

Bertolt Brecht: A semiotic of the collective.

Arthur Miller: But how to start, how to arrange the elements, the situation?

Augusto Boal: We are already here, here, at the scene.

Bertolt Brecht: In the city of Montreal, below the expressway, in the midst of traffic, the scene is set.

Arthur Miller: We need not do anything, in fact, but wait.

Augusto Boal: We should make the silence shudder.

Antonin Artaud: The silence... The silence.

Arthur Miller: The silence is but a frame, a moment of suspension.

Bertolt Brecht: It might be a sub-text, a device.

Augusto Boal: A form of take-over.

Antonin Artaud: I feel the silence, inside, a knot of pain. My mouth is full of silence, an emptiness, I can not speak, it empties my throat, pushes its way down, into my bowels. The silence is a cancer, and a beginning, of a new body.

Augusto Boal: A new form of celebration.

Arthur Miller: It reminds me again of the girl, the girl from Hollywood, who told me the story, that story. After she spoke, her tears were like diamonds catching the afternoon sunlight through the bus window. They sparkled into my eyes, like a magic charm, and I felt, I felt strangely content, complete, as a human being. I was there for her, that was my place in the world, there in the afternoon, and there was nothing to say. I had no words, and the silence was like a mark of our sharing. It was not a space, not a time, not a language. It was everything and nothing all at once.

Augusto Boal: A spell of the sensuous.

Bertolt Brecht: Where buildings and bodies, city streets and everyday struggle, find new balance.

Augusto Boal: New blood.

Arthur Miller: Let us wait then.

Antonin Artaud: The waiting... The waiting.