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# SEMESTER

## The labour of attention

KONSTANTINA GEORGELOU

### WAYS TO BEGIN

As a way to begin, imagine a small lecture hall with rows of chairs facing a whiteboard. A man stands with his back to the whiteboard. He introduces himself as Billy Mullaney, and the performance, called *SEMESTER*. As he explains, this is only the first part of *SEMESTER*, for which he is ‘memorizing a semester’s worth of quantum mechanics lectures and then performing them. What is about to be performed is lecture one.’ He doesn’t know quantum mechanics, Mullaney admits, and he has no idea what it is that he will be saying. He does know exactly what he is saying, he rephrases, but he does not understand it. This lecture was originally ‘performed’ by Professor Alan Guth at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2008, as part of the course ‘Relativistic Quantum Field Theory I’, Mullaney explains. The notes of the lecture were retrieved from the Internet. Because he does not understand the lecture, he had to memorize it in a very disciplined way in order to be able to reproduce it – that is, word-for-word and equation-for-equation, phonetically alongside the movement of chalk on blackboard. He calls this a choreographic way of learning. Mullaney says that he was a maths instructor for six years in the United States, where due to testing conditions he often felt he had to teach maths ‘mechanically’: students would memorize steps to solving equations without necessarily understanding the operations in a greater context. In so teaching, he would muse to himself that he might as well be teaching them quantum theory. In response, he started studying quantum physics in a mechanical way as well, aiming to prove this point by passing a quantum mechanics test. But then he realized, Mullaney states, that the standard of mastery for education is not to simply pass a test but rather to teach an entire course. So, he decided to do the latter.<sup>1</sup>

As a way to begin again, let’s consider the theatre as an engine of theatricality. If theatre is where ‘the theatrical’ is at work, in the sense of the ‘made-up’ or the fake, then theatricality is the process of generating the theatrical, which amounts to becoming implicated in specific processes of perceiving, experiencing and understanding reality as constituted and situated. The perplexing relationship between the real and the artificial, presence and representation, self and other, has been at the core of scholarly attention on theatricality.<sup>2</sup> Following the same line of discussion for *SEMESTER*, however, does not seem sufficient for describing how one is invited and expected to attend to it if they, like Mullaney in effect, do not understand quantum mechanics. At the same time, *SEMESTER* does not really adhere to the format of a ‘performance lecture’, which could provide a way to situate it in the context of performance. That is, it does not seek to demonstrate what is being lectured, to show its thesis and make a point in order to produce knowledge on theatre and performing, as it often happens with performance-lectures.<sup>3</sup> And, similarly, it does not adopt the format of a lecture for a performance as a way of reconsidering the performativity of scholarly and scientific practice (Bleeker 2012). It rather reproduces, in an overly disciplined manner, an existing scientific lecture available on the Internet, and performs it as and in theatre. *SEMESTER* behaves like a conduit, channelling the performance of what is largely considered as the standard of mastery over quantum mechanics into the realm of theatre and thus generating questions about spectatorship and attendance and, eventually, inviting reflection on the value of theatre as such.

*SEMESTER* underlines the theatricality, as in ‘stagey-ness’, of scientific knowledge while also appropriating and mediating the labour of knowledge transmission, which includes memorization, abstraction, lecturing and writing.

<sup>1</sup> Billy Mullaney is an Amsterdam-based artist working in theatre, choreography and performance art, whose research particularly focuses on modes of spectatorship that are conventionally engendered in representational practices of and in various sites of performance. [www.billymullaney.com/](http://www.billymullaney.com/), accessed 19 March 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Adrian Kear (2019) provides an overview of these different approaches to theatricality, proposed by Tracy Davis, Josette Féral, Hans-Thies Lehmann and Samuel Weber, among others.

<sup>3</sup> This is particularly the case with performance lectures as they have appeared in the context of choreography. See Georgelou and Żmak (2015).

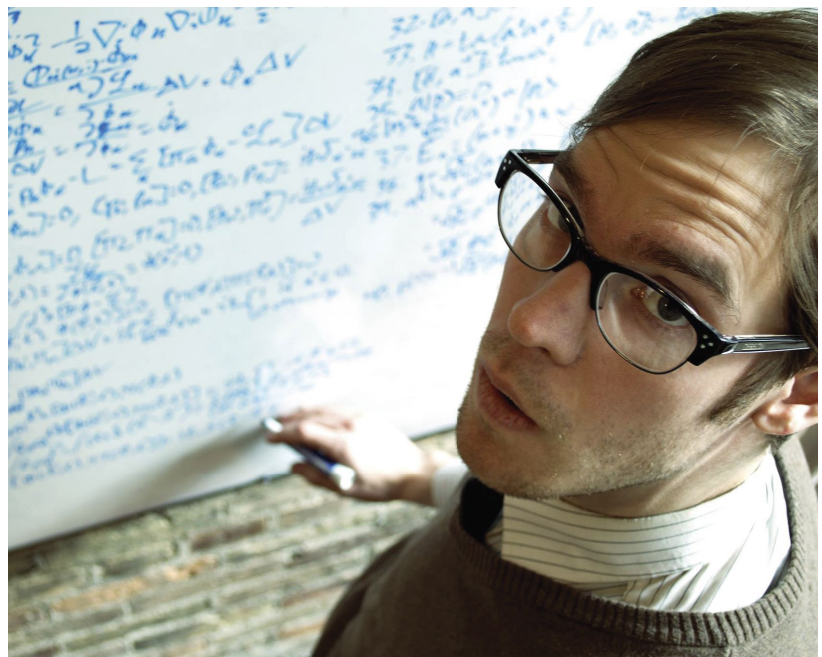
Assuming that most of the audience of this work is not able to understand the mathematics of quantum theory maximizes theatricality. What keeps audiences in their seats watching and Mullaney delivering the lecture, seems to be a sort of unspoken agreement to pretend that one does know. Or, to look for ways to attend to what one does not know. Or, to act as if one knows something else, if not the mathematics. This something else is, I propose, the theatrics, the exaggerations and mechanisms of theatre, which in this case the audience is invited to reflect on, affirm and attend to, even if none is realized. To be precise, Mullaney does not pretend that the audience is a group of students. He does not ask whether they have understood what he is saying or pause as if to allow the audience to take notes. In the same way, he does not act as if he understands what he is explaining. But he also doesn't act as if he does not understand, by making comments that would make this clear, for example. The agreement to occupy the interdependent positions of the lecturer-performer and student-spectator in this work seems to be taking place through the common sharing of the immaterial labour (of performing and of attending) that defines all those positions. In other words, theatricality, and the labour it entails, conditions and defines the way one performs and is invited to see and attend to *SEMESTER*. Theatricality becomes the common denominator for both performer and audience and perhaps even the only way for one to remain in their seat and stay with the troubling state of not-knowing evoked by the performance. As I will argue in the course of this article, theatricality here is bound to how *SEMESTER* simultaneously and excessively demands as well as sabotages an absorptive mode of attention, which results in a process of noticing and displacing practices of attention that are habitual to lecture and theatre settings.

There is certainly a lot to say about how the production, transmission, performance, measurement and representation of knowledge are being critically tackled in *SEMESTER*. For the purposes of this article, however, I will primarily concentrate on the relationship between theatricality, performance and attendance – that is, on how the performance of a lecture that one

does not understand and by one who does not understand it, operates in the theatre in ways that keep an audience member in their seat attending to it. Ultimately, this article seeks to analyse *SEMESTER* in terms of the labour of attention that it evokes, while considering how it extends to and arguably interferes with today's intense, convoluted and highly aestheticized experience (Gilmore and Pine 1998) and attention economy (Crary 2013: 75). As another way to begin, then, let's consider that in the post-Fordist economy of performance without an end product, where immaterial and totalizing experiences, affects and attention are the primary constituents of labour and production,<sup>4</sup> theatricality needs to be re-articulated as a concept that not only demarcates the effect of 'making a disjunction in systems of representation' (Kear 2019: 301), but also insistently interferes with the performative, aesthetic and experiential regimes exerted today. Adrian Kear's definition of theatricality as 'the hyperbolic extension of the "theatrical"' (296), is useful in this respect. Taken as a mode of excess, which 'appears deliberate, calculated and self-knowingly "over the top"' (ibid.), renders theatricality a process of generating a surplus value of performance, experience, affect and attention. In *SEMESTER* this refers to the deliberate, arduous and 'over the top' appropriation and reproduction of a science

<sup>4</sup> Shannon Jackson characteristically writes: 'Indeed, in what philosophers such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Maurizio Lazzarato, Paolo Virno and others now call a post-Fordist service economy, labor spheres, both aesthetic and otherwise, are told to perform, that is, to reorient and retain their labor force to provide "experiences," "services," and "affective" relations as a primary product' (2014: 55).

■ Photo Jane Rennick



lecture to the theatre, where, very likely, no one understands its content. Such surplus of labour involved in generating ‘the theatrical’ is not only concerned with asking what the real or the subject *is*, but also with placing the spectator into the position of experiencing their own labour of attendance and attention that is entangled to the intellectual and physical labour of the performer. Here I allude to Bojana Cvejić’s approach to attending, which accounts for the attentive activity of the spectator not only in terms of visibility but as a durational perception of transformation of bodies, movement, sensations and affects. Through Cvejić’s concept of attendance, spectators are thus considered implicated in processes of transformation beyond the actual performance (2015: 25).

In *SEMESTER*, as it will be shown, there is a displacement of attention from the action that is being seen to the perception of attention as a product of specific practices and regimes, particularly from the realms of theatre and education. And at the same time, this redirection of attention is a rigorous and laborious one for those who do not understand the equations reproduced in *SEMESTER* and are struggling to configure how (and why) to continue attending it in the theatre. The labour of attending *SEMESTER* is entwined with the labour of performing it, and they co-dependently generate the surplus of ‘the theatrical’. In this sense, attendance is not solely associated to connotations of the ‘companion, the one who is present, assistant, guardian, caretaker, servant and so forth’, as Sergej Goran Pristaš has critically commented about this notion (2018: 208). Attendance comes closer here to a process of perceiving, sustaining and relocating attention towards the shared labour (of attending and performing) that generates the theatrical, which also means that the labour of attention – rather than the lecture – is in the end what one is invited to critically experience, as a process that transforms and that can be transformative.

#### THE DRAMATURGY OF ‘ATTENTION IN DISSONANCE’

Right after the introduction in *SEMESTER*, the first lecture on quantum mechanics begins. Only the sound of the marker is audible, as Mullaney

writes on the board ‘Quantization of the Free Scalar Field’. Mullaney then speaks the title out loud and starts reciting the equations, and the notes on the equations, while marking them on the board. For the next thirty minutes or so, he inscribes and recites sixty-three lines of equations, which are organized in four different sections and cover almost the entire space of the whiteboard.

In order to discuss how *SEMESTER* displaces and relocates attention, it is crucial to consider its dramaturgical operations. Writing from the position of someone who does not understand the content of this lecture, but to whom its reproduction has been suggested as a choreographic one, I feel invited to search for movement, patterns as well as for affective and bodily impact that this performance may generate. In effect, I am directed to look at a dance *while* and *by* attending to a lecture on quantum mechanics. This already produces an irregularity to the habitual operations of attention. Rather than demanding an absorbed or a fragmented mode of attention, which are two core practices in how attention has been historically experienced,<sup>5</sup> *SEMESTER* foregrounds exercising a dissonance in attention, while not dispersing it. The invitation is namely to pair the more scrutinizing, pragmatic and rigorous mode of attention proper to an academic science lecture, to an explorative, physicalized, spatial and intuitive one that can be considered as more fitting to choreography. Throughout the whole performance, the experience of these at least two distinct ways of (asking for) attendance needs to be constantly negotiated. There are cracks and moments of breakdown, but also of counterpoint and congruence in perception. In what follows I thus seek to point out those aspects in *SEMESTER* that evoke this experience and labour of attention and how they are entangled with the labour of performing, without aiming to understand the mathematics of quantum mechanics or to render it into a dance performance.

However, since I do not understand the meaning and purpose of the sixty-three lines of equations but I have knowledge and experience in dance, and since *SEMESTER* is presented in a theatrical context, the negotiation between

<sup>5</sup> This is how Jonathan Crary has studied attention, historically and conceptually demonstrating that the ability of modern subjects to isolate their focus on a reduced number of stimuli while disengaging from a broad field of attraction is not a ‘natural’ condition, but ‘rather the product of a dense and powerful remaking of human subjectivity in the West’ (2001: 1). As he has argued, norms and practices of attention as well as what we call experiences of fragmentation and dispersal have been developing reciprocally. In that sense, attention should be regarded, according to Crary, as a situated and not an autonomous field of study, which means that it is more a constellation of practices and texts rather than a question of looking or spectatorship.



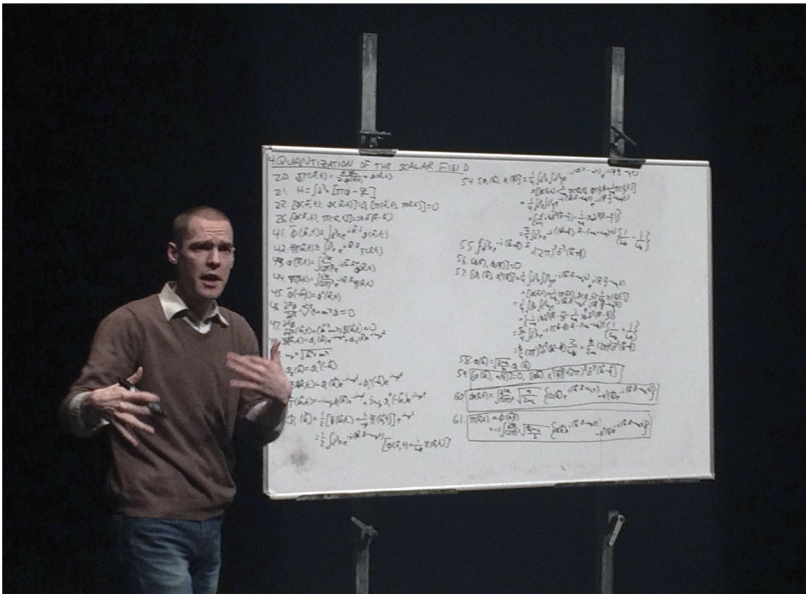
these two modes of attention (the rigorous, pragmatic one and the intuitive, explorative one) seems to be uneven. Despite the seemingly competing modes of address, the flowing lines of equations and the perplexing language channelled by Mullaney perform an intellectual rigour – and invite me to adopt this rigour as well. This intensity at times exceeds my awareness that this is ‘theatre’ at all (in the sense of its exaggerated but calculated stage-ness). So, what is it that one is able to attend to? Arguably, it is the temporal disjunctions in the ways that the audience is addressed by the original lecture notes and not through Mullaney’s delivery of the lecture; those phrases that are repeated or that stand out therein; those other phrases that one only partially understands; and, also, those that place one in the puzzling position of the student, the one who is assumed to understand *something* or at least to be interested in this field of knowledge; the effort, rhythms and movements of the performer, persistently producing the caesura between knowing and understanding. As a result, the analysis of *SEMESTER* that I attain here can only come in bits and pieces, which also underscores dramaturgy as the making and registering of experience, rather than as the arrangement of different layers of performative elements.

After reciting the title noted on the board, Mullaney says: ‘As we have already seen, a free scalar field can be described by the Lagrangian ...’, which is then followed by two equations. With this phrase, retrieved from the online notes of the lecture, attendants are directly placed in the position of those (students) who have prior knowledge and are able to understand quantum mechanics. This mode of address, on the one hand, can be regarded as a declaration of a secret agreement between everyone in the room (including Mullaney) that they will deliberately occupy the position of knowing. In a way, this seems to underline that such is the case with ‘everyday’ usages of language, as one enters into various consensual agreements with other people in order to uphold communication. It therefore discloses the made-up and playful aspect of any such situation, its theatricality. And on the other hand, this phrase inscribes a temporal disjunction because it assumes

a continuum that is not there – as if *SEMESTER* has already started before everyone gathered here. There are more such phrases that appear in the rest of the lecture, generating dislocations in how attention is orchestrated to tune in and out of the presently theatrical and the presumed academic settings. The text draws attention to the past, present and future of this lecture, and by extension of this performance, addressing the audience in ways that implicate them in a long-term endeavour. For instance, other phrases that are used are: ‘for most of this course, I will use ...’, ‘we will see later that [this] is problematic’, ‘Exactly like ... we know how to’, ‘for now, we will ...’, ‘We will return to the definition ... later in the course’. And also, words such as ‘naturally’ (in ‘this equation leads naturally to the ...’) and ‘obviously’ (in ‘the trivial commutation relations carry over trivially ... obviously’), which similarly emphasize an assumed capacity to understand for those attending.

While playing with the standards of mastery in education and alluding to ‘everyday’ usages of language, *SEMESTER* also foregrounds a particular scientific field that is thought to be exceptionally difficult and inaccessible to most. This maximizes the theatricality that the performance sets forth, placing the performer and the attendants into the position of studying not just anything, but quantum mechanics. Surely, quantum mechanics is a scientific theory that studies matter and energy and has been a fundamental source of inspiration for philosophy and art. And there could also be dramaturgical lines drawn between what *SEMESTER* ‘does’ and relativist theory as a theory that points to the structure of the space–time continuum and to how motion impacts our experience of time. However, the mathematics of it are not easily accessible. One consequence of this well-considered choice of discipline and knowledge representation is laughter – but it also provokes attendants to leave the performance altogether. In one of the performances that I have attended,<sup>6</sup> a couple of people stepped out, but one of the exits is particularly relevant to note here. Sitting in the front row, a woman got up a few minutes into the lecture and left the room saying to Mullaney: ‘Sorry, I do not understand.’ Mullaney replied without missing a beat: ‘Neither do I.’ This event

<sup>6</sup> This was in the context of *Icarus Festival*, on 1 September 2018 in Amsterdam. *SEMESTER* has been presented in various other contexts, such as universities (for students in quantum mechanics and in the arts), theatre festivals and conferences. The study of the specific characteristics of these diverse ‘sites of performance’ would need further exploration. However, the basis of this claim about how attention and labour are entangled through an excess of the theatrical, can arguably be generalized.



■ 'Come Together #4'  
Festival at Frascati Theatre,  
Amsterdam, January 2019.  
Photo Andrea Božić

<sup>7</sup> Especially with regard to recent views of choreography as an 'expanded' field (i.e. Xavier Le Roy, Bojana Cvejić, Mårten Spångberg, Mette Ingvartsen), which alludes to the engineering and organization of different situations, movements and strategies that span over artistic, social and political terrains alike, it is crucial to note how choreography preserves the kind of double-ness that Lepecki denotes.

can be thought as an infelicitous outcome of the effort to simultaneously exercise the above-mentioned modalities of attention. It is, possibly, also an event where the dissonant workings of attention fail to enter the field of perception and experience, as her exit seems to indicate her sense solely as being addressed as a student (and one who does not understand). Mostly, though, this event manifests how, despite Mullaney's direct address at the beginning explaining the concept, the process of attending to the labour that is shared in-between performer and attendants has misfired.

Integral to the concept of attendance is a mode of perception, as pronounced by Cvejić, that explores movements, repetition, rhythm and affects. In *SEMESTER* such an engagement is invited by framing the performance's mode of production as a choreographic one. In that sense, the rhythm in Mullaney's talking and writing – steady, continuous, mechanical and rather monotonous – becomes the baseline for attending to the variations and patterns that occur. These are the repetitions and accentuations of words, terms and phrases: the 'Hamiltonian H', the 'commutator', the 'annihilation operator', the 'harmonic oscillator' and the recurring phrase 'is equal to ...'; the silences that happen every time the title of a new section is marked on the board; the occasional mistakes that are always accompanied by a quick 'excuse me'; and the physical labour of the human body memorizing

and writing incessantly on the surface of the board while also talking, stretching up and kneeling down in order to spatialize and organize the mathematical symbols.

Marked as a choreographic performance by Mullaney, *SEMESTER* also invites questions concerning the kind of choreography that is in mind here. André Lepecki has argued that 'choreography was invented in order to structure a system of command to which bodies have to subject themselves ... into the system's wills and whims' (2008: 3). Therefore, choreography is about the production of bodies that are able to carry out specific regimes and imperatives of movement.<sup>7</sup> It is, therefore, no wonder that choreography 'initiates, immediately and alongside its project, all sorts of resistances and counter-moves, anti- and counter- and meta- and conceptual- and carnal-choreographies' (ibid.). In this sense, Lepecki has nuanced choreography both as a disciplinary and as a transformative field of operation, an incongruity that is apt for describing *SEMESTER* as well. Mullaney's virtuosity in the performance of the lecture is the outcome of a disciplinary and laborious exercising of attention to the movement and sound of the chalk on blackboard, as he has explained at the outset. Through its performance, however, and because of the particular dramaturgical operations on the field of attention noted here, the disciplinary activity extends into a choreography of perception, where the labour of the attendant amounts to that of the performer, continuously negotiating with the intense and often conflicting modes of being addressed in and by the performance.

One phrase in *SEMESTER*, which derives from the footnotes of the original lecture notes, seems to capture the dramaturgy of the performance as I propose it here: 'this approach is useful for intuition but it is not mathematically rigorous', Mullaney says. If this phrase expresses the break between intuition and rigour as ways of performance, address and attendance in *SEMESTER*, then attending to a lecture on quantum mechanics *and* to the dance that it choreographs suggests that one needs to constantly displace and relocate one's attention while experiencing the shared labour that is involved in making it happen.

While there is dissonance, the above-mentioned modes of attending also seem to have a common denominator: the possibility of absorption. Both constitute modern cultural practices through which bodies learn to perceive and pay attention in particular ways, which is also to say that they ‘train’ attention to be perceived and to perform in particular manners. Theatre is significant to examine in this respect because it specifically points to the complex relationship between the one seeing and what is being seen, as Maaïke Bleeker has argued in her research on visuality in the theatre. Bleeker has convincingly shown how theatre and performance provide exceptional cases for understanding the historical, cultural and embodied aspects of visuality, and has studied dance and theatre performance cases that demonstrate how absorption and theatricality allow critical explorations of visuality. As she writes, theatre

presents a model for understanding these practices as ways of organising the relationship between the one seeing and what is seen, while at the same time theatricality (and by extension the theatre itself) is what has to be repressed in order to safeguard the illusion of the seen as evidence. (2008: 165, 166)

Therefore, she continues,

The theatre does not discipline its audiences; it does not turn people into disembodied subjects ‘just looking’. Rather, it presents its audience with an address that resonates with the implications of already internalised modes of looking ... the theatre responds to culturally and historically specific spectator-consciousness. Either by supporting and reconfirming the expectations, desires and presuppositions as they are part of a spectator’s mode of looking, or not. (166)

Bleeker has thus underlined the corporeality of visuality as well as the cultural and historical inscriptions of attention. In the case of *SEMESTER*, the practices of attention detected are affirmed and reconfirmed, in the sense that Mullaney reproduces in all detail an existing academic lecture and he is presenting it in the theatre. Embedded in those practices (academic and theatrical) is thus, culturally and historically, the premise of full concentration, where student and spectator can be absorbed by what is being delivered/performed through specific devices

and strategies that are at work. The operation of theatricality is key to understanding how both ‘theatre’ and ‘lecture’ modes of attention are manifested in *SEMESTER*.

Apart from defining the excess of the theatrical, theatricality also refers to a mode of address that fails to convince of something as true. This aspect of theatricality has been critically discussed by Bleeker. Two crucial historical approaches to that matter have been proposed by Denis Diderot and by Michael Fried. As Bleeker has clarified, both Diderot and Fried argued in favour of absorption and contested theatricality because, according to them, theatricality de-naturalizes art by exposing the artificiality of the artwork to the beholders. However, each one had different ideas about how theatricality is in fact achieved. For (early) Fried, there is no relationship with the spectator assumed in the artwork and due to this absence of address the artwork does not expose its theatricality; whereas, for Diderot, there is always a particular address assumed by the work, but this can go unnoticed when it appears as a ‘*compelling conviction*’, organized ‘according to a logic that appears convincing as a “law of nature,” rather than as human invention’ (Bleeker 2008: 35). Adjacent to theatricality are also other concepts introduced by Bleeker, disclosing how the theatrical as ‘the fake’ has been at times contested and at other times affirmed, such as de-theatricalization, absorption, re-theatricalization and the gaze. De-theatricalization in particular enables absorption, Bleeker remarks, which refers to a sense of immediacy and closeness to what is seen, because it keeps the relationship between the artwork and the viewer obscured. For instance, absorption happens in perspective painting which, as Bleeker explains, draws the viewer into the represented world by suggesting the beholder to be absent (32). Perspective erases and obscures the framing devices through which the physical presence of the spectator is replaced by an ‘ideal’ looking position, the subject of vision. Absorption, however, is ‘the effect of the interaction between a work of art produced at a particular time and place, and to a historically and culturally specific viewer’ (22), which is also what Diderot was pointing to when calling this mode of address ‘*compelling conviction*’. Absorption, Bleeker maintains, is thus achieved

when the right conditions are fulfilled for the work of art to successfully persuade the audience of a truthfulness of representation and to erase the awareness of the relationship between what is seen and who is seeing (37).

Against this backdrop, *SEMESTER* appears to be on the one hand demanding absorption and on the other sabotaging it, exactly by operating through the hyperbole of ‘the theatrical’ (theatricality). The demand for absorption is even doubled because it is proclaimed through both the academic and the theatrical event that happen simultaneously. The precision of both practices – achieved by the highly disciplined memorization and reproduction of an existing science lecture as well as by the clearly theatrical context where it is presented – is overwhelming, but the intensity of their co-existence seems to cancel each other’s possibility for absorption. Theatricality is, thus, here not a symptom of the exposure of the artificiality of theatre. Rather, I would suggest, it is the result of dislocating the practices of attention from their habitual workings and, in addition, the consequence of a laborious process that *SEMESTER* takes one through in order for that to happen.

Throughout her study, Bleeker argues that vision is an embodied experience and it is relational, which is to say that what one sees is not only a matter of what is ‘over there’ to be seen but also of who is looking and how what is there addresses this seer. She proposes the term ‘seer’ because on the one hand it refers to the one inspecting and overseeing, and on the other hand to the one linked to insight, revelations and magic.

The term ‘seer’ is an acknowledgment of the fact that we always see more or less than what is there and that, therefore, seeing is always affected by ideas, values, presuppositions, fears and desires. (Bleeker 2008: 18)

Cvejić’s preference for the term ‘attender’ is grounded on the argument that Bleeker’s ‘notion of visuality still reasserts the visual primacy of spectatorship’ (2015: 70) even if it departs from a forthright critique on rationalist models of vision. Contributing to this debate and in view of the present analysis of *SEMESTER*, I would add that while both terms argue for the embodied and perceptive experience of spectatorship

they do not explicitly address the (shared) labour involved in processes of perceiving and dislocating attention.

#### THE VALUE OF THEATRE BOUND TO THE LABOUR OF ATTENTION

Discussing the labour of attention in theatre against the larger context of the ‘attention economy’ inevitably leads to a reconsideration of the value of theatre. Jonathan Crary has vividly described how the global corporations of twenty-first century have been conceived as ‘those that succeed in maximizing the number of “eyeballs” they could constantly engage and control’ (2013: 75). In the spirit of constant effectiveness and functionality, Crary has referred to how the movement of the eyes are localized and targeted to make profit. Human attention has become a core part of capitalist production and exploitation, and as such demands a specific form of labour and control. Although it is crucial to historicize the notion of labour beyond theatre discourse, due to the limitations of this article I will only conclude with a short overview of recent conceptualizations of the labour of attention in performance discourse and how these, arguably, signal a reconsideration of the value of theatre.

Bojana Kunst has written about ‘the working spectator’ in view of the increasing number of participatory performances in art institutions. As she rightly argues, many of those performances proclaim the activation of the spectator and seek to be considered as democratic and based on equality. However, she writes,

This experience of work can only be shared if the artwork itself actually disappears, if the artistic event is reduced to the sheer display of problematic sociality, which cannot really be judged; it is continuously disseminated, accumulated and shared as an immaterial experience of social relations and abilities. (Kunst 2015: 70)

The production of sociality and communication is, therefore, translated into economic value also in the practice of theatre, for Kunst. To stress the significance of securing the ‘in-betweenness’ of the artwork and the spectator, she accurately cites John Cage who, with his work *4’33”*, stated, ‘The performance should make clear to the listener



that the hearing of the piece is his own action – that the music, so to speak, is his, rather than the composer's' (cited in Kunst 2015: 71). In this light, the attendants, as I have been calling them here, are rendered responsible for negotiating how their attention will be experienced and (dis)located on the basis of the artwork itself. This is considered to be their labour.

From another perspective, Ana Vujanović has diagnosed a crucial shift in dramaturgy in view of current developments in contemporary performance. She has rightly observed that we are witnessing a return to the notion of 'the landscape'. Nowadays, Vujanović argues, this notion can no longer be analysed by means of semiotic categories and separate theatrical elements such as text, music and the body. Rather, she notes, landscape dramaturgy 'today implies the organization of experience' (2018: 7) where the sublimation of the landscape is associated with 'an indifferent "thingness" of the world around us' (1). Against the backdrop of technological developments and how time, attention and experience are organized through the use of the Internet and social media, Vujanović has underscored the ways that the temporal logic of these devices influences how performances are also organizing experience for and with the spectators. She refers to several performance and dance artists, including Mårten Spångberg, Doris Uhlich and (La)Horde, which she describes as not needing a focused attention. But, according to her, they are also an invitation to the audience to 'spend time with' and to decide for themselves how they are 'to exercise contemplation, consumption or absentmindedness' (7). As she has written, they 'indicate a concern about how to navigate through the world that is not there for us and, eventually, imply ourselves in it' (6). In other words, Vujanović seems to suggest analysing and reflecting on performances in terms of how they organize attention and experience, as these have become the 'tissue' of performance and also address attendants by means of their abilities to understand, practice and reconfigure experience and attention through art.

To end, I will agree with Pristaš who straightforwardly makes a plea for the value of art to be considered through the value of the

artwork itself (rather than other side activities of the artists). In order to re-evaluate the value of theatre it is, perhaps, time to reconsider how the theatre public can 'take on' the labour of attending, through their diverse practices of looking, perceiving and experiencing. As Pristaš writes, the function of the public in theatre is 'to highlight the variation of reality ... to verify it, to facilitate its validation' (2018: 208). The need to render this shared labour public and part of 'the public' is what *SEMESTER* seems to insistently and laboriously remind us.

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