

The Return of the (Performance) Group

In a 1982 essay, titled “The Decline and Fall of the (American) Avant-Garde”, Richard Schechner points to the “dissolution of the groups” (36) as one reason for this waning. He writes: “very few groups still function as groups: as collectives or associations of people who share a common vision, who work together to make a recognizable style of performing” (37). For Schechner, it appears, the decline in collective creation is another inevitable result of the postmodern condition.

While the American performance groups gradually disbanded in the 1970s and 1980s, the Zik Group was founded in Jerusalem, in 1985, by graduates of the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, who have been working together ever since on many performance-based projects. It is probably the most durable collective of Israeli artists faithful to the idea of working in collaboration that has managed to survive the decadent 80s, the cynical 90s and the apocalyptic beginning of the 21st century. In recent years, however, more performance groups have been founded, such as Eifo Dana (2005) and Public Movement (2006). Apparently, the notion of the group as a preferable mode of work has made its comeback. In my paper I examine this revival as a reaction to the decline, particularly in Israel, of such ideals as the “collective,” the “group” and “consensus”, and, at the same time, the rise of globalization, privatization and consumerism. I claim that this revival is a performative recuperation of the long criticized notion of Utopia, which proved to be dubious and failing during the 20th century; it attests to the responsibility and urgency of a team working towards a shared goal that is realized in and as performance. These groups' collaboration emanates from, commits to and reflects the ethos of working together; suggesting that 1) the commitment to the making of art and the power to act is greater when working together; and 2) that working together, is what initiates transformations of matter/form/the world.

About the Author

Dror Harari, Department of Theatre Arts, Tel Aviv University