

be a source of surprise for both the imagination and the understanding.

The writing of *Le Corps poétique* with Jean-Gabriel Carasso and Jacques Lecoq, the participation in the filming of *Les Deux Voyages de Jacques Lecoq* and then the creation of the DVD on Lecoq's pedagogy, have provided concrete traces, allowing us to measure the extent to which this confraternal collaboration enables the handing on to others of an artistic pedagogic system that links practice at the highest level with the necessary theoretical and critical distancing.

[Translator's Note: The original title of this article is 'Un compagnonnage pour approcher l'art de transmettre le théâtre'. The word 'compagnonnage' refers to a period spent by a medieval guild member with another master craftsman as a conclusion to his own qualification as a master craftsman. It thus implies the coming together of two experts in distinct but related fields. As there is no single word in English to convey the meaning of 'compagnonnage', I have left it in its French form in this text.]

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*Théâtre Aujourd'hui is available through the CNDP Scéren network – see [www.scren.fr](http://www.scren.fr) – and through Editions Théâtrales (contact [Pierre Banos pbanos@editionstheatrales.fr](mailto:Pierre.Banos@editionstheatrales.fr)). The DVDs are available as follows: Les Deux Voyages de Jacques Lecoq [www.scren.fr](http://www.scren.fr); Du jeu au théâtre [www.crdp.nantes.cndp.fr](http://www.crdp.nantes.cndp.fr); Lire le théâtre à haute voix <http://crdp.ac-dijon.fr>; Texte et représentation <http://www.crdp-reims.fr>*



## Radical Simulacrum, Regulation By Prank: The Oil Enforcement Agency

*Larry Bogad*

Pulling into the Ford dealership where you work, you stop short. A man in black – shirt, pants,

baseball hat, dark black shades covering his eyes – grimly signals you to stop, brandishing a badge in his other hand (see fig. 4). As you step out of the car, the authority figure briskly hands you some official papers, explaining to you that your lot is under investigation by the Oil Enforcement Agency (OEA). You have been subjected to an energy audit by the OEA's expert field agents, and they have found your lot in gross violation of the Agency's standards. The average fuel efficiency of Ford vehicles is nineteen miles per gallon, and you have some SUVs on the lot that get a mere twelve. By comparison, he says, the Ford Model T, back in 1923, got 25 miles a gallon. Clearly this is unacceptable. The polar ice caps are melting. The oceans are rising. You as a dealer have a responsibility to put pressure on the Ford Motor Company to start designing and making more fuel-efficient cars for you to sell.

You ask when the Oil Enforcement Agency started, as you hadn't heard of it. The agent tells you that, in his most recent State of the Union Address, President Bush stated that 'America is addicted to oil,' and that we must 'move beyond a petroleum-based economy.' The Agency formed to carry out the President's agenda, to save the economy and the environment from collapse.



Fig. 4 Two Oil Enforcement Agents doing the President's work. Photo: Sam Alcott or Erin Hamby

His badge and papers bear the OEA seal: A skull and crossed gas pumps (see fig. 5).

At what point do you realize this is an act? A prank? No – more than a prank – a radical, performative simulacrum?

Perhaps immediately. But maybe you read the information, maybe you consider the argument before the ‘Aha’ moment hits. And besides, you are not the only audience for this grassroots simulacrum of a regulatory agency. While the OEA may not have any actual regulatory power, it uses radical performance to ask: why not? Shouldn’t the government be doing something proactive to save the planet from global eco-collapse?

The OEA was conceived as part of Jumpstart Ford (now Freedom from Oil), a campaign launched three years ago by a coalition of the activist organizations Global Exchange, Rainforest Action Network, and the Ruckus Society. The goal of the campaign is to put pressure on Ford to use its technological capabilities to make more fuel-efficient cars – a goal that would be better for the environment, citizens, consumers, and even for Ford itself as less wasteful cars would be much more competitive on the global market.

Why pick on Ford, especially now that that corporation is in such bad shape? Creative activist Andrew Boyd (founder of Billionaires for Bush among many other campaigns) points out that, yes,



Fig. 5 OEA badge

Ford has the most fuel-inefficient fleet – but also, it has a classically American history of industrial ingenuity and innovation, a history that could be invoked in the name of fuel efficiency. Jumpstart Ford has created other mock-organizations such as OAA (Oil Addicts Anonymous), but after three years of somewhat effective action, the campaign was running out of steam, and its organizers hoped that some mass radical performance could re-energize and publicize the campaign. In essence, the Oil Enforcement Agency is intended to jumpstart Jumpstart Ford itself, and to help spread its critique into a wider campaign against all the major automakers: A campaign for Freedom From Oil.

Boyd and James Levy were presented with the name of the group, and hired to make the concept a reality... well, a convincing simulacrum of a reality at least. They became the co-creators of the Oil Enforcement Agency – its brand, its look, its ‘training manual,’ and its first creative component, a ‘mockumentary’ film that pretends to ‘uncover’ and dramatize the controversy around this shadowy organization. This film was created to be launched on YouTube and similar sites, where it will hopefully be passed around and downloaded in an attempt to build the myth of the OEA.

I had the pleasure of acting in this film – playing a quirky academic who had been studying the OEA ‘for years.’ (I hope this is not the start of a pattern for future typecasting.) Nevertheless, it was an enjoyable challenge to improvise my lines in an ‘interview’ format, voicing my actual analysis of the group, filtered through a more ‘objective’ character than myself.

Within the bigger picture of performance activism, the Oil Enforcement Agency represents a different category than the ironic satire of Billionaires for Bush, the open-hearted radical ridicule of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, or the stark visual confrontation of 1000 Coffins. The OEA is sincere in its pranksterism. Part of the joy of the OEA’s concept is that it is positive, proactive, and a vision of the world as it should be. It is an example of prefigurative politics, an experimental performance of a better possible role for government and a modeling of a more creative, participatory and nonviolent mode of citizenship. The performative utterance, the visionary gesture that sparks the OEA’s theatrical premise, came from the President himself in his above-quoted State of the Union Address. As Boyd says:

Instead of attacking the target, it’s taking the target up on its best rhetoric and saying, live up to it! Saul Alinsky would say Bush is being hoisted on his own

petard. Bush said ‘America is addicted to oil, we must move beyond a petroleum based economy,’ so we say, ‘All right, let’s do it! Hmm . . . you don’t seem to have set up much programmatic infrastructure or enforcement, so we’re going to step into the breach.’ I love that positioning. You can be sort of poking fun, chiding without being mean-spirited . . . just taking the President at his word! Giving him the benefit of the doubt . . . as the Billionaires, we were inhabiting the voice of our class enemy, of our target, amping that up and caricaturing it, a very effective rhetorical device, that was great and it allowed for a new way to message. But you get tired of that after a while, and what’s really nice about the OEA is, we’re inhabiting an almost superheroic role . . .

The OEA is also more tactically flexible than Billionaires for Bush – *because the theatrical premise allows for it*. I have performed, on the street and on the radio, as a Billionaire (‘Ollie Gark’), and I can agree with Boyd (‘Phil T. Rich’) when he says that

Unlike the Billionaires, the OEA is able, *within the theatrical conceit*, to engage in a whole escalating range of actions, in more confrontational and serious direct action . . . the Billionaires couldn’t really do a sit-in or civil disobedience, that wouldn’t really work with our character/conceit . . . but in this case we can! All sorts of different interventions. We can’t do a sit-in but we can do an occupation, where we’re acting as agents. We can give ‘tickets,’ regulate traffic, do various kinds of direct action – showing badges and stopping vehicles, taking over offices, staking them out, checking people’s ID . . . (author’s emphasis added)

While the Billionaires’ well-heeled, ruling-class appearance and demeanor yielded them a unique freedom from police harassment (see my earlier essay in *CTR Backpages* 15:1, pp. 164–168), it also made all but the most basic media intervention a bit out of character: billionaires would never get their hands dirty with a blockade or banner hang. (Although it might have been fun to disrupt or break that boundary or ironic pseudo-plausibility, the Billionaires never have). The OEA can disrupt public spaces in a more tangible way; indeed, their very reason of existence calls for it. After all, they are a regulatory ‘agency’ following the avowed mandate of the chief executive.

This doesn’t mean they won’t be arrested by the actual enforcers of public order, of course. It is this aspect of the simulacrum that will be put to the test

in tactical practice. Precisely how can the OEA speak and move without being found guilty of ‘impersonating law enforcement officers?’ How can they perform their authority as desired rather than possessed? This gets at the issue of audience interpretation: the Billionaires for Bush often enjoyed an ‘aha’ moment – that is, the moment when an audience member realized that they were being ironic, and that their group was in fact a group of merry pranksters making a point. With the OEA, there is also an ‘aha’ moment – however it is an ‘aha’ moment with a hopeful, indignant twist: ‘They’re not real – but wait a minute! Why aren’t they real? Shouldn’t they be real?!’

In the recent midterm elections of 2006, the Democrats gained control of the House of Representatives and the Senate, as well as a large number of state-level positions. This is hardly a blow for the relevance of the OEA. Bush is still President, and it will certainly take grassroots pressure to make Democrats act effectively on global warming and environmental regulation.

In fact, the OEA launched its campaign in a mass direct action at the Los Angeles Auto Show in December 2006. Plainclothes agents infiltrated the Toyota and Ford display floors. They quickly removed their jackets and donned hats, revealing their black uniforms. The ‘agents’ surrounded the largest and least fuel-efficient vehicles, taping them off with yellow ‘climate chaos crime scene’ tape. After several minutes of spirited discussion with a growing crowd of consumers, the security and police showed up, and the OEA cordially handed over the ‘crime scene’ to their brother officers’ jurisdiction and left the premises.

The Detroit Auto Show the next month was a different story. Having learned from the embarrassment inflicted in Los Angeles, corporate management hired private detectives to place the activists of the OEA under surveillance and track their activities. They provided the police with photos of the activists, and the OEA was quickly shut down, its agents arrested or driven off. Only a big green Kermit the Frog was left, standing outside of the Show with a sign that said ‘IT’S NOT EASY PRETENDING TO BE GREEN.’ Both sides had learned from this tactical interaction, and it remains to be seen where the OEA will next appear, and what measures they will take to avoid being shut down.

With organizations such as the OEA, the global justice movement can use serious play to create its own stories, its own myths that hopefully can ‘cross over’ from mere countercultural in-jokes to widespread, compelling, progressive fantasies. By em-

bodying and performing these prophecies, we hope to make them irresistible and self-fulfilling. The OEA will continue its mass prefigurative gestures, evoking a hopeful vision of a government and a social movement that takes responsibility for the environment and holds corporations accountable, an earnest vision that good-humoredly pierces the cynicism of the moment, a vision made flesh by a cast of thousands, including, Dear Reader, yourself.

- The OEA is accepting applications for Special Agents. Like the Billionaires for Bush, they have a website with a Do-It-Yourself kit so you can set up your own Field Office. For more information see (<http://oilenforcementagency.com>).
- For more information about the Freedom from Oil campaign, see <http://www.freedomfromoil.com/>.
- To read more about the Billionaires for Bush before they have to change their name: [www.billionairesforbush.com](http://www.billionairesforbush.com).
- On the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army: <http://www.clownarmy.org>

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## Free Theatre of Belarus

*Aaron Landsman*

Last Fall, I produced the first US readings of plays by dissident Belarusian playwrights, most of whom are part of a collective called Free Theater. On one hand, this was a simple act of charity, faith and empathy: I saw a compelling picture of one of their plays; I received a heartbreaking email from the group at a vulnerable moment; and I rallied together a lot of very talented willing people to help me do something in response.

On the other hand, the process was more of a learning experience that raised a lot of questions than it was a simplistic triumph of moral purpose – questions about how much one can accomplish

with art alone, about assumptions one makes when working at a remove from one's colleagues, about the ways aesthetics are affected by political strictures and freedoms.

In a way, it would probably be easier to see the spirit and energy I first saw in this work by watching the DVDs Free Theater sent me of their own productions, than you could just hearing the words, safe in the well-lit, well resourced confines of a New York City 'festival of political work,' like Culture Project's IMPACT!, which hosted the reading at Baruch's Nagelberg Theater. In the video you can feel how much the spare staging, stripped down production, direct address, the long silences and stillness, affect the audience, how the plays bring people together – literally and psychically. Onstage in New York, scripts in hand, the work has some power, sure, but it's hard to feel where it comes from if you're not really there.

In any case, the story starts in March of last year, when I was sitting with my wife at a hipster café in Austin, Texas. I was trying to decide whether or not to attend graduate school there; I was lamenting the lame-duck feeling of my theater career as well as the marginalized state of the arts in America; I might have even thought to myself that things felt very hard.

A month earlier, I'd started following a group in Belarus that called itself 'Free Theater,' because I had been attracted to a photo from one of their shows and an article I'd read on a website. The piece the article described looked raw, intelligent and funny, and the performance took place in someone's apartment.

For the past five years I've been staging my own plays in houses and offices for small audiences. But where I was making an aesthetic choice to do 'site-specific' theater as a way to create something more immersive than a proscenium allows, Free Theater was working at home out of necessity; under dictator Alexander Lukashenko they had been arrested, placed under surveillance and blacklisted from the state theaters.

I had tracked down a yahoo email address for the group and written them what I hoped was a charming letter, but I hadn't yet gotten a response. That weekend I was in Austin coincided with the most recent Belarusian presidential 'elections,' in which fraud was not only alleged but practically guaranteed. In response, a resistance movement had taken over the central square of Minsk, setting up camp in makeshift shanties, in sub-zero temperatures.

My wife and I were admiring our excellent hot drinks, the funky décor of refurbished industrial