

Sasha Ramm Critical Reflection on *Activoté*

In the beginning of November I took part in a second tour of the Activote project. The age of voting in the UK has been lowered to 16 instead of 18 recently which raised a concern within the education community. The project itself was created to encourage young people to learn more about politics and make sure that they understand that their votes can make a difference to their communities.

It feels like a complicated performance to produce, however, Sasha Boner, the director, managed to do it with her team of actors. In my opinion, she made a lot of strong decisions regarding the creative techniques that were crucial for the project. One of them was participation: in the moment of a branch in the story the young people were asked to vote by their hand (thumbs up and thumbs down hand gestures) on the outcome they felt more driven towards. The decision of the majority influenced the narrative directly (or that's what the young people thought!). Another technique was using gibberish instead of English. It formed an inclusive environment where people with English as a second language or with learning disabilities could participate without losing any understanding. The last technique I'm going to mention is the decision about the end. It was dark and unexpected for most young people in the audience. It reminded them that sometimes power could be usurped by the authorities and the people could be left without any right to vote (or the voting itself becomes pointless). I strongly believe that situation (even if in theatre only!) should provoke people of every age into thinking.

I am a director myself, studying in the University of East London. This project inspired me to take part in it as I could understand from the beginning that it has an important mission. It is vital to notice that I arrived when the project was already done. I was helping mainly in the rehearsals with exercises and bringing fresh ideas as a second director in the room, assisting Sasha. To add to that, I helped with setting up, recording the show on its final day at the Source in Stratford and editing it later.

Now I feel inspired to create an educational theatre project on my own

Francisco Morais BRANDAO DE OLIVEIRA Critical Reflection on *Activoté*

Activoté resonates with me not only as an MFA student at the University of East London but also as a South American artist whose political consciousness was shaped against a backdrop of social inequality and contested democratic rights. Working on the production assisting the director allowed me to experience first-hand how theatre can function as a transformative social force one that speaks directly to young people about power, participation, and the fragility of democratic freedoms. In Latin America, the consequences of disenfranchisement, political manipulation, and authoritarian shifts are not historical abstractions but everyday risks. Bringing that awareness into the rehearsal room deepened my commitment to supporting a piece that uses humour and ensemble devising to make such themes accessible without diluting their urgency.

Shooting the two final performances at The Source, where we welcomed around 140 schoolchildren from across Stratford, representing an extraordinary diversity of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds was a powerful reminder of why this

production matters. Watching their reactions as the narrative shifted from anarchic comedy to a darker, more unsettling exploration of rights being stripped away in real time affirmed the piece's pedagogical power. Their engagement, discomfort, and excitement revealed a generation that is far from apathetic: they are attentive, curious, and actively searching for ways to understand their place in systems that often exclude or underestimate them.

My involvement alongside director Sacha B., my colleague Sasha R., and the cast, one of whom I had already directed in my MA final project, expanded my understanding of collaborative political theatre-making. Our collective choice to develop a performance language that included non first-language English speakers, and the symbolic use of apples and oranges as stand-ins for votes and rights, offered a playful yet potent vocabulary for engaging young audiences. These objects were not simply tools to "feed" the starving characters but served as metaphors for democratic participation and its possible withdrawal.

Activoté's creation through consultation with Newham youth echoes community-based art practices I have encountered across South America, where artistic processes are inseparable from collective empowerment. Yet here, the work unfolded within a distinctive institutional ecosystem: students, university professors, The Source's team, and the audience, who, as our director often reminded us, functioned as our "fifth character" all contributed to the piece's dynamic evolution. This transnational resonance between my own cultural background and the local context of Newham strengthened my conviction that political theatre must be rooted in lived experience while remaining alert to global patterns of power, inequality, and resistance.

Ultimately, supporting *Activoté* affirmed my belief in theatre's capacity to cultivate critical consciousness, particularly among young people navigating increasingly complex political landscapes. The urgency of its themes youth enfranchisement, the erosion of rights, and the responsibilities of collective decision-making felt deeply personal to me, reflecting the struggles of the communities I grew up with and the challenges faced by young people in East London. The project not only advanced my artistic development but also reaffirmed my commitment to creating work that bridges cultures, foregrounds marginalised voices, and treats the stage as a space where democratic agency can be rehearsed, questioned, and reclaimed.