



A JOURNAL OF NATURE, CULTURE, HUMAN AND SOCIETY

id#: m&ss.2301.02110

CULTURAL WORK



REVIEW

Sascha Freyberg and Stefan Paul Trzeciok (conceptualization and performance). 2022. *ExHuman—Die Postapokalyptische Late Night Show mit Ewald Ilyenkow* [ExHuman—The Post-Apocalyptic Late Night Show with Evald Ilyenkov.] Theater Expedition Metropolis, Berlin, November, 20.

Bastard Homosapiens or Universal Emancipation? An Evening with Evald Ilyenkov

Dennis Schnieber

ON NOVEMBER 20, 2022 *Theater Expedition Metropolis*, a small community theatre in the urban area of Berlin-Kreuzberg, became the space for reflections about the work of a great, but little-known, Soviet philosopher. It is located in a gloomy brick building of the former *Alte Desinfektionsanstalt* (a place where all kinds of things and beings were deloused and disinfected, later on in particular parcels to the eastside of town), which was a fitting surrounding although we rather came to be infected (see Fig.1). The announcement claimed the start of a new format, a series titled *ExHuman—The Post-Apocalyptic Late Night Show*, with the explicit aim to ‘look for traces of thought and its place in the universe’—as if the actual catastrophe already happened. As we learned later, that task was inspired by the philosopher the first event was dedicated to: Evald Ilyenkov (1924–1979). The performance then was going to oscillate programmatically between documentary theatre, academic presentation, staging and improvisation, TV parody and discussion forum.

Schnieber, Dennis. 2023. “An Evening with Evald Ilyenkov: Bastard Homosapiens or Universal Emancipation?.” Review of *ExHuman—The Post-Apocalyptic Late Night Show: Evald Ilyenkov*, conceptualized and performed by Sascha Freyberg and Stefan Paul Trzeciok, *Marxism & Sciences* 2(1): 191–199. <https://doi.org/10.56063/MS.2301.02110>

- Correspondence: Dennis Schnieber, Humboldt University.
- e-mail: dennis.schnieber[at]gmail.com
- DOI: 10.56063/MS.2301.02110
- Received: 11.01.2023; Accepted: 20.01.2023
- Available online: 15.02.2023



Figure 1. Theater Expedition Metropolis (Photography by Paolo Grazzi).

While everyone still was getting into the shape of an audience, scenes from a famous Soviet cartoon series called *Nu, pogodi!*, about a rabbit and a wolf (with an episode featuring a rabbit robot), flickered in a continuous loop and we were soon to find out that Evald Ilyenkov had dreamed of becoming a cartoonist himself. But before, we were met with a warm welcome by a *conferencier* in a suit (see Fig. 2), who declared the start of the series and prepared the audience, hinting at some of the issues that will be touched upon, like: what is thought? what is human? and could all of that be somehow connected to our understanding of each other, our future and our past?

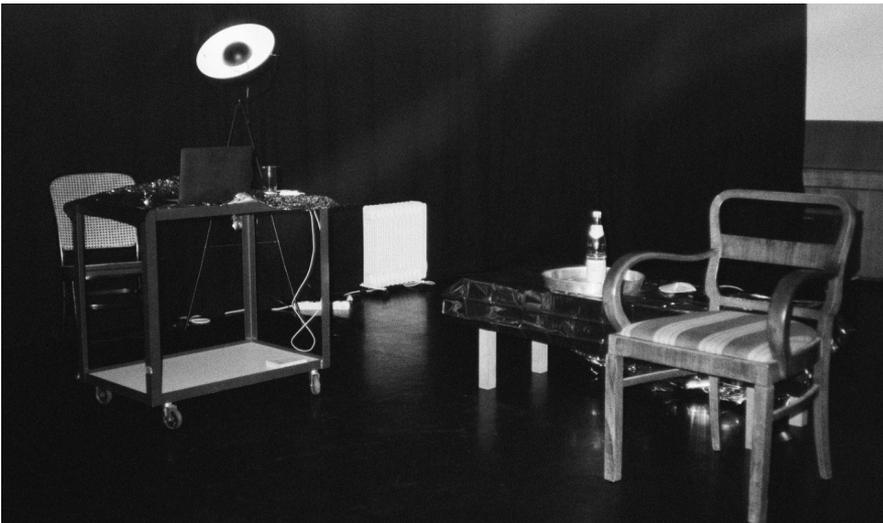


Figure 2. The suit as the stage (Photography by Dennis Schnieber).

An idea by Sergey Eisenstein was mentioned, who once contemplated a *spherical book*, with starting points from all sides—and similar ideas were referred to as well (like Borges' *Chinese Encyclopedia*, Eco's *Labyrinth*, and the *Rhizom* by Deleuze and Guattari). However, we were asked not take these abstract references too seriously and not be confused, after all everything would be very organised, conventional and clear. The performance would last exactly 45 minutes, followed by a discussion with exactly the same length, and a short break in between, everything as usual, or so he said. No later, however, than when the spotlight revealed a gentleman wearing some plush rabbit ears in a swell golden waistcoat (played by *Stefan Paul Trzeciok*, see Fig. 3), that assurance was getting confronted with serious doubts. After a boom bap piece poured out of the boxes, telling the cruel story of mankind in a nutshell (*Bastard Homosapiens*¹ by Hiob and Morlockk Dilemma), the *Rabbit robot* began to repeatedly introduce himself ('*Mein Name ist Hase*,' a German pun suggesting a clueless being) and then induced a *Mr. Human* (played by *Sascha Freyberg*, see Fig. 4) to wake up, whom during the song interlude we could only see from behind dozing under a shiny rescue blanket.



Figure 3. *The Rabbit robot* (Stefan Paul Trzeciok). (Photography by Timo Krüger)

-
1.  **AUDIO** *Bastard Homosapiens* by Hiob and Morlockk Dilemma:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzFvr26jhl5>

The *Rabbit* reminded him about the show, so after waking up the *Human* excused to the audience, getting himself together while expressing thanks to the theatre for providing him with the robotic helper. He began to give a kind of lecture about the life and work of Evald Ilyenkov and claimed that the philosopher's thought revolved around thought itself and its intrinsic relation to universal emancipation.



Figure 4. *Mr. Human* (Sascha Freyberg). On screen a film from Zagorsk with Alexandr Meshcheryakov (second from right). (Photography by Timo Krüger)

Behaving like a confused scientist he mentioned peoples, books, a collective volume on Ilyenkov he is editing, the small community of people recovering the legacy, the no-funds situation, meetings, anecdotes and the film, we were about to see some snippets of. The whole thing seemed to be rather a parody of a lecture which was trying to put too much material into one presentation. Accordingly, the presenter repeatedly assured the audience that he was well prepared, incorporating images, documents, book covers into his digital presentation on a big screen. The film snippets were taken from the documentary *Ilyenkov*² (Russia, 2017) by Alexandr Rozhkov a friend of *Mr. Human*. Part of that film were scenes taken from 16mm reels from the 60s and 70s, as well as a collection of video tapes which, when found in the archives, were just labeled ‘*talking hands.*’ And

-
2.  **VIDEO** Trailer of the documentary *Ilyenkov* (Russia, 2017) by Alexandr Rozhkov: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dVAQn_O08

indeed, we saw talking hands, since these clips presented us the pedagogical-psychological work at a boarding school for deaf-blind people in Zagorsk, which Ilyenkov supported actively as well as theoretically. We were told about the philosopher's understanding of how the human consciousness and personality comes into being in relation to the world and other people around. However, as if the confusion of the *Human* was not enough, the presentation was constantly interrupted by bell-tapping of the *Rabbit* who wanted to ask questions. The *Rabbit* obviously wasn't that ignorant at all and knew a tremendous amount, probably everything that an artificial intelligence is capable of, but thinking *as such* remained a mystery to him. In the spirit of dialogue, the *Human* went along trying to find answers, with Ilyenkov. But it seemed that no answer satisfied the *Rabbit* absolutely, lacking certain experiences, like the connections between feeling and thought. Thus, the servant became the gadfly and an obstacle to simple answers and a smooth presentation. The dialectical spiral which emerged out of that constellation was suddenly interrupted by the break, with a song by Sun Ra. A self-imposed framing had arbitrarily interrupted *thinking* and the unfinishable lecture came to an interim end while we listened to *The Truth About Planet Earth*³ (“...it's a bad truth”). However, it was continued after the break quite contrary to the plan, and only then did we enter the discussion.

The audience's questions showed how unusual the whole topic and context were, and *Mr. Human* was forced to give more background information on his real self and the contexts of his work. Few had ever heard about Ilyenkov and so the question how one comes to know about and even work on a Soviet thinker was of quite some interest. As for me, I rather was concerned about how the essential matter or actual meaning of thinking itself remains quite hidden or even disregarded today, although people feel very much defined, even superior, by their way of thinking. However, that seems confused with opinion. Considering the context of current political issues as well, I wondered, what it is, that we never get tired of defending or what we demonize in others. Obviously we rather avoid thinking as an hindrance for easy (automatic) adjustment. Hence, confusion seems to be connected with thinking as contradiction with dialectics. While I was still contemplating the possibilities of ‘pure thought’ in robots, the discussion

-
3.  **AUDIO** *The Truth About Planet Earth* by Sun Ra:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxslhhoL17M>

ceased according to plan (*Falling*⁴ by Dudley Perkins and *Apocalypstick*⁵ by Jane Birkin were played as outro), and so the entire performance ended, as if some kind of cultural technique had set up a clockwork plan to be followed, no matter what. On the other hand, the scene seemed rather chaotic, a set up with little to no effort to create an ambience for quiet contemplation and reduced distraction (TV screen, rabbit robot, rescue blanket, bell). And yet, it also mirrored our everyday experience in a rather confusing world outside of the theatric black box chamber, where attention spans don't hold thoughts which try to unfold desperately. While the improvised character often showed itself, at the same time it created possibilities for understanding, which in the spirit of Ilyenkov were opened up to everybody. Watching a show starring a rabbit robot servant and a tousel scientist tackling the question of thinking, would be a gleeful experience even for little kids—I guess. So the lecture turned out to be a play, and it was *the Human*, as well as our thoughts about thinking that were played with.

Biography

Dennis Schnieber is working at a cinema and at the same time a graduate student in *Kulturwissenschaft* at Humboldt University Berlin. His research interest circulates around education and classism. He is also working in the fields of photography and graphics, being listed as one of Europe's 100 emerging photographers in 2022 by GUP Magazine Amsterdam. Beyond that, Dennis has been curating a small film festival in his former hometown near Berlin since 2015.

-
4.  **AUDIO** *Falling* by Dudley Perkins:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1f_Y8aTMKQo
 5.  **AUDIO** *Apocalypstick* by Jane Birkin:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPMvK8pANew>

ExHuman—The Post-Apocalyptic Late Night Show⁶ (ANNOUNCEMENT)

Technology leads us to salvation.

Technological progress is leading us towards doom.

Intelligence is artificial, the human being as a beta version of the thinking subject is overtaken.

Individuals are only as emancipated as their personal algorithm.

What is this doing to the way we conduct debates? What potential for discussion arises from this post-humanistic field of tension – what moral challenges and artistic perspectives?

With Robert Musil we claim: *If there is a sense of reality, then there must also be a sense of possibility.* ExHuman—this is the state of humanity after the revelation, after the cataclysm that has already happened. The buried ideal. ExHuman is looking for human traces in space and wants to exhume thinking.

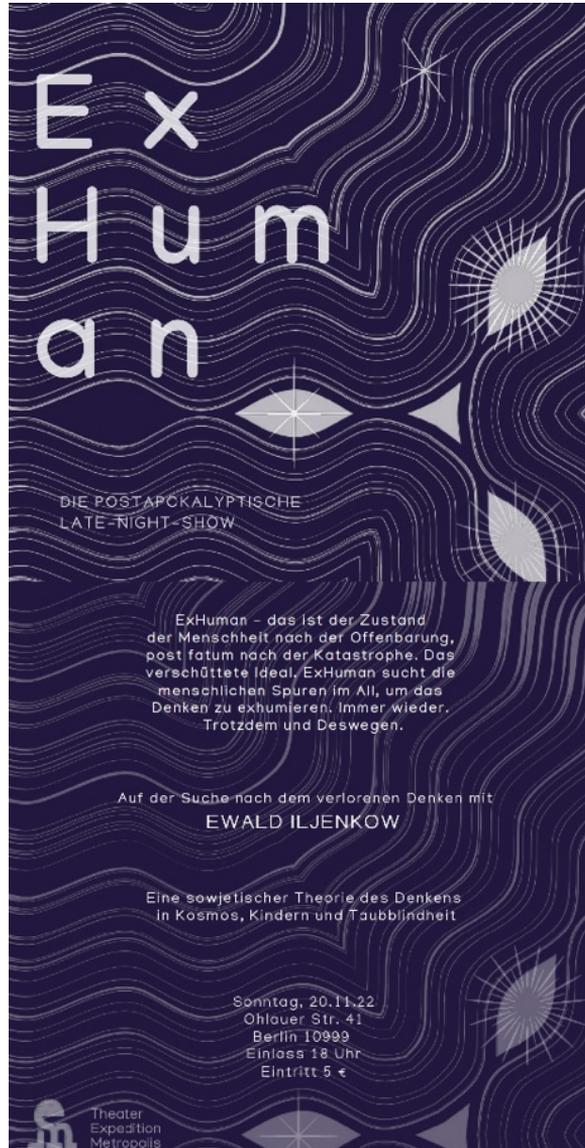
ExHuman: The Post-Apocalyptic Late Night Show invites you to join the conversation. Each theme asks about the exception that proves the rule, about accelerated repetition, about dead dogs and prevented, forgotten, embodied thinking. It is borrowed from philosophy, history, socio-culture, art and literature and uses an example—person, novel, film, album, event etc.—to open the discussion. Changing guests are planned.

6. <https://expedition-metropolis.de/exhuman-die-postapokalyptische-late-night-show/>



ExHuman—The Post-Apocalyptic Late Night Show: In Search of Lost Thought with Evald Ilyenkov⁷

Conceptualized and Performed by Sascha Freyberg and Stefan Paul Trzeciok



7. <https://expedition-metropolis.de/produktion/exhuman-die-postapokalyptische-late-night-show-gespraech/>

*ExHuman—this is the state of humanity after revelation,
post fatum after the catastrophe.*

The buried ideal.

ExHuman searches for human traces in space in order to exhume thought.

Again and again.

Nevertheless and because of that.

Probably the best-known Soviet philosopher of the post-war period dealt with a comprehensive deepening of Marxism in his work and was perhaps more Marxist than Marx himself. At the same time, he remained a communist who, in a strictly dialectical manner, demonstrated the contradictions of the Stalinist interpretation of communism. Ilyenkov was celebrated by a young student body for this radical approach towards thinking. His view of philosophy made him persona non grata for the nomenklatura. Instead of inner exile, he chose a new field of activity: At a school for the deaf and mute, he prepared the students for university and made it possible for them to enter academia. In doing so, he consistently followed his conviction that every individual can become self-empowered through thinking, always in relation with others and that philosophy is not an elitist doctrine, but a tool for the emancipation of the masses. His life ended tragically—albeit self-determined. His work fell into oblivion. Outside of the former countries of the Soviet Union, it was hardly received—in German countries almost not at all. We want to change that; together with you.