

Excerpt form “Manual for Fight Club: A Chorus” by post theater [new york / berlin / tokyo]

The full length “Manual...” can be ordered from post theater via info@posttheater.com

0.1. Prologue

This is a very unusual book. It is actually many books in one. Maybe you just read it. Maybe it triggers a number of thoughts in your mind. Maybe it actually encourages you to act out ideas that are prescribed in it because it is a manual – a book full of instructions. Normally you encounter manuals when you purchase a new device. This manual is both things in one, the device and its manual. With this book you have all you need in order to create a performance: the performance of Fight Club: A Chorus. Apart from being a manual, this book is also a code – a body of rules and principles that you must obey if you stage the performance of Fight Club: A Chorus.

0.2. On Rules

Theater is all about rules. No art form depends as much on instructions, regulations and laws as theater because theater’s main ingredient, medium and substance is people. That which organizes a relationship between people is rules.

“A plays B in front of C” is the most often quoted formula for what theater is, meant to indicate that there are at least three different functions at play when a performance is presented. In the worst case, A, B and C are not all physically present (as in a rehearsal or a censored performance). In the best case, there are at least two bodies that meet –an audience member and a performer. Many define performance as activity executed in front of a spectator. The respective positions of those involved are – as in any social relationship – regulated, sometimes openly, by signs. They might include program notes, announcements or other well-known conventions. The audience usually knows, for example, to stay silent, refrain from smoking in the theater and show approval by clapping at the end of the performance. To adhere to these expectations, it usually does not need extra information.

The communications involved amongst those who put on a show are far more complicated before, during and after the actual performance. People with up to several dozen different professions and functions might interact with each other in very different ways. Much of their communication depends on orders. The number of people in a position to make decisions and the number in a position to follow orders varies depending on the type of theater. Some traditions are very much oriented towards one leader, while others involve several artists telling people what to do. In Western theater, an artistic director, usually called simply a “director,” instructs all other participants in what to do. A second voice has also traditionally assumed a lot of control in a production: the author. The first written documents of theater are the play texts themselves. These do not usually describe stage activity so much as they prescribe the direct speech of the characters involved. The number of plays in which stage activity is explicitly detailed has, however, steadily increased throughout the history of playwriting. These written instructions are usually called “stage directions.” Many battles have been fought with living playwrights or their heirs over the degree to which these directions must be followed and the original state of the play preserved.

According to most dramaturges from Aristotle onwards, drama is about conflict. Action is only interesting for an audience when it involves a conflict between characters or within a single character. Not only the play itself, but also its creation and production have historically entailed their fair share of conflict. This has usually taken the form of conflicting artistic interests – between author and director, director and actor,

choreographer and dancer and so on. One might assume that form and content should co-exist and blend together perfectly since the negotiation of rules, instructions, authority and thereby conflicts are what define theater more than they do any other art form.

Why do we begin a book that is labeled “a manual” with this short introduction on conflict and rules? Because the performance created with this manual is predicated upon a negotiation of rules. This manual is an accumulation of very many stage directions followed by very little dramatic text. This book is a director. Or rather, this book is a meta-director, since it even directs other potential directors. This book is an authority that knows it will be disputed. The very fact that you read this – and probably ponder its meaning and implications– is already an indication that you are following several authorities: the authors of these lines as well as the people who passed this book along to you (who may be one and the same).

You might be a professional or amateur performer. You might be an experienced public speaker or a shy administrator. You might be someone who loves movies and good food or someone who plays computer games all alone or has an eating disorder. You are, in any case, a potential or future collaborator in the production of *Fight Club: A Chorus*. Even as an audience member who may have watched the show and then purchased this manual, you have collaborated in the performance by virtue of your presence as an audience member. The very words written on this page involve you, and though you may have only intended to receive them passively, you could now be haunted by the thought of being part of this project. Now you are in it, even if just at a theoretical level. There is no escape. You are caught in the act.

0.3. Background Information:

The Source of Inspiration

Chuck Palahniuk’s famous novel *Fight Club* is a contemporary classic of Anglo-American literature and one of the cult books of the late nineteen nineties. Contrary to popular belief, it is neither about aggression nor about fighting, but rather about forming a group and creating a sub-culture. As such, it is a criticism of the contemporary service economy. The novel tells a tale about the transformation of “service-slaves” into “subversive elements,” of lonely individuals into team-players. Taking both the novel and the famous film by David Fincher as points of departure, the performance *Fight Club: A Chorus* deconstructs the social process depicted in the original story and translates it into a piece whose content and form mirror one another. The pre-production, casting and rehearsal processes of the performance resemble the recruitment, acceptance and indoctrination/instruction processes of the fictional *Fight Club*. In a way, the performance constitutes a “Non-Fighting *Fight Club*,” that deals with the tensions between and within individualism, social processes, contemporary work conditions, schizophrenia and the desire for stardom. As a formal background to the dance-chorus, one could draw from the methods of early 20th century avant-garde choreographer Rudolf von Laban. Laban’s interest lay in involving non-professionals in mass spectacles of modern dance. *Fight Club: A Chorus* transfers this principle to contemporary theater. The chorus is as old as theater itself and serves, most simply, as a representation of the public on stage. In *Fight Club: A Chorus*, it is the most important element of the performance, and in this manual, it is the feature of the play most thoroughly prescribed.

0.4. Plot

The main focus of Palahniuk’s tale is the plight of the alienated individual, Jack. Jack works in a completely boring office job and has no emotional connection to his work. As a result, he is increasingly haunted by

insomnia and apathy. He eventually finds a way to regain emotional activity by joining self-help groups for ill individuals. His next move is to actually form a group himself, the Fight Club, in which men act out their aggressions violently and experience physical pain. Over time, this club turns into a terrorist group, the so-called "Project Mayhem". Jack's partner in heading the Fight Club is Tyler Durden. Tyler is everything that Jack wants to be: reckless, cool, smart, attractive and charming. At the novel's end, the reader learns that Tyler is Jack – or rather, Jack's alter ego.

0.5. Schizophrenia and Fame

Fight Club is about schizophrenia. Fight Club: A Chorus transfers this schizophrenia to its cast. All performers are Jack, a.k.a. Tyler Durden. The performance deals with the tension between protagonist and chorus by jamming the two together. Schizophrenia is not so much demonstrated as a psychological phenomenon, but as a metaphor for the longing for another identity. What kinds of identities do different working conditions create? What other identities do people long for? One identity – the celebrity – is the most frequently promoted "role model" in our society, and not just amongst teenagers. Mass media has made fame into an inescapable and seductive ideal. Fight Club: A Chorus consciously grapples with this phenomenon; in it, the famous "15 minutes" of fame that Andy Warhol once coined is reduced to one minute of special attention for each performer before she or he blends into the chorus. The action of the show is the build-up of a massive, powerful chorus, the transition from an empty stage to a completely full, overpopulated tableau of 48 bodies.

0.6. The Concept

The basic scheme is very simple: every minute, a performer walks on stage and presents his or her lines, after which those performers already on stage repeat parts of this text fragment. Every repetition by the chorus is an amplification of the words spoken. And just as the physical presence of bodies on stage increases over time, so too does the volume of vocal projection rise. When a performer first comes on stage, he or she enjoys a certain degree of freedom of expression for the 30 seconds of fame. But immediately thereafter, the performer blends into the crowd. The architecture of bodies – the way the bodies are arranged on stage – is carefully choreographed. There is no stage design / set as such, only the bodies of the performers. This concept will be explained in detail later on in this manual.

0.7. This Manual

"The first rule of Fight Club is don't talk about Fight Club."

The first rule of staging Fight Club: A Chorus is don't stage Fight Club.

Fight Club is about rules. Power is about rules. Directors and choreographers are about rules. The project Fight Club: A Chorus is an encounter between artists and non-artists who collaborate on a live art piece following certain guidelines or, in other words, rules.

From its inception, post theater has always questioned the conventions that govern not only WHAT happens on stage, but also HOW it is done. post theater frequently challenges the hierarchies that are typical in theater. It has worked with terms and ideas such as, amongst others, "concept director" and "rehearsal director," "original direction" and "re-direction."

As a theater company with neither ensemble nor permanent performance space, post theater has researched and experimented with various forms of collaboration. In consequence of the peculiar nature of

Fight Club and post theater's particular mission and experience as a performing arts office, Fight Club: A Chorus features an entirely novel form of collaboration between post theater and other artists.

The performance is a post theater [new york / berlin / tokyo] concept. post theater provides a detailed set of rules for its production – namely, the “manual,” which you have in your hands right now. This manual consists of detailed instructions for all persons involved: the local director(s) / choreographer(s) / dramaturge(s) / technician(s) / designer(s) / PR person(s) etc., as well as for all 48 performers. It does not script every movement of every performer in painstaking detail, but does provide the principles and structure of the piece. Fight Club: A Chorus is very formalistic. Dry and rational as it is, it expands upon post theater's vision of international and intercultural collaboration insofar as it questions the ephemeral nature of performing arts by coming equipped with a physical pre-production instruction book and requiring very detailed documentation of its staging.

In the following pages you will find:

- 1) a proposed example-script for 48 characters.
- 2) the rules of how to implement / structure the performance and use this script.
- 3) identification of those “blank spaces” in which local production teams will be able to exercise freedom in adapting the performance to its specific context.

This manual is, among many other things,

- 1) the membership card to the production team of Fight Club: A Chorus.
- 2) a tool / instructions for the artists involved in the staging of Fight Club: A Chorus.
- 3) an artwork / reward / souvenir / piece of merchandise for the cast / crew or audience.

This manual will be personalized for each recipient by the local director and distributed to cast and crew at the beginning of production preparations. The director will indicate in each individualized manual the tasks for each collaborator.

The performance Fight Club: A Chorus will be an adaptation / interpretation of the “Manual for Fight Club: A Chorus,” rather than an adaptation of the novel or movie Fight Club.