

DORA GARCÍA AND OTHERS
THE BUG (AFTER MAYAKOVSKY) [\[1\]](#)

PITCH: THE BUG (After Mayakovsky) is a collective reading, studying and performance process.

This process started with a seminar at the IUAV Venice, Theater and Performative Arts, Curriculum Performative and Gender Studies; continued with a course for MA and BA students in KHiO with a public presentation at CARTA festival Antwerp; and closed with two public performances at Centro Cultural Conde Duque, Madrid (November 2022) and Es Baluard Museum, Mallorca (November 2023). A new process will start at the end of 2023 in Uniarts, Helsinki, Finland.

INSTITUTIONS COLLABORATING IN THE PROJECT: IUAV Venice, Italy; DeSingel & M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium; KHiO, Oslo; Centro Cultural Conde Duque, Madrid; ES Baluard, Mallorca, Spain; Uniarts, Helsinki, Finland.

Participants: MA and BA students, Kunstakademiet, KHiO; Dora García (Norway), Simon Asencio (France), Adriano Wilfert Jensen (Denmark), Marnie Slater (New Zealand), Michelangelo Miccolis (Italy), Persis Bekkering (Netherlands), Castillo (Spain) & Krõõt Juurak (Estonia); MA and BA students in Uniarts, Helsinki, Finland.

BUZZWORDS: collective research, time travel, audience participation, performance and politics, disappearance of the audience, biomechanics, new formats of relation to the audience

1. How it all started

Researcher Dora García was invited to Venice in January 2022 to lead the seminar, "The Bug" using a theater play written by Vladimir Mayakovsky in 1929, with two elements that, to the researcher, seemed fundamental in the area of **performance and politics**: one, **time travel** as a device linked to the creation of utopias and the criticism of the same utopias, and two, **audience participation** in the form of *audience disappearance*, paradoxically, by asking them to *play audience*.

2. What is at stake

The Bug (originally, *The Bedbug*) by Mayakovsky is not only a magnificent, bitter comedy as a performed text, but also a revolutionary "mise en scene" - the action happens among the audience, breaking the separation between proscenium and auditorium, the same bright light everywhere unifies all the areas of the play, there is a permanent breaking of the fourth wall, and the actors give tasks to the audience to perform themselves "better".

The stage directions of the original *Bedbug* were under the command of Vsevolod Meyerhold, creator of **biomechanics**, or the idea that movement creates emotion and not the other way around. The music was created and directed by Dmitri Shostakovich. Such an excellence was not to save the authors from Stalinist violence - Mayakovsky committed suicide a few months after the première, Meyerhold was tortured and killed in 1940, and Shostakovich fell in and out of favour all through his life. These background stories led us to

study together the relations of art to institutions and to politics. The fact that the Mayakovsky bitter criticism of The Bug was addressed to a future Socialist Paradise was used as a springboard to examine our disappointments with the welfare state.

3. Development

This collective reading, studying, establishing of multiple connections, and eventually performing of the text "The Bug" by Vladimir Mayakovsky started as said at IUAV Venice on January 2022, and continued with a course at KHiO in February 2022, where guest performers Adriano Wilfert Jensen (Denmark) and Simon Asencio (France) joined Dora García to lead MA and BA students through the nine episodes of the play, working together through movement, music, stage design, character development, etc.

This same team, AWJ, SA, DG, + MA and BA students, were joined by several new performers for our first public presentation during the CARTA festival in DeSingel, Antwerp, March 2022. Together we finalised the stage design, re-wrote the text to make it more contemporary, adapted some sections that crashed against our contemporary sensitivities (the racism, the imperial aspirations of the USSR), added music and created choreographies.

This Antwerp episode was named "**open rehearsal**" and indeed the audience of the CARTA festival joined to participate in the discussions and even to take up some roles in the play. This constant experimentation with **new formats of relation to the audience** was central to the project.

The funding of KUF was used to make possible the Antwerp episode, the travels of the students and the fees of the technical helpers.

Some months later, the same crew minus the MA and BA students premiered THE BUG at Centro Cultural Conde Duque Madrid, to great critical and public acclaim (see <https://www.tea-tron.com/condeduque/blog/2022/10/03/entrevista-a-dora-garcia-et-al-sobre-el-bicho/>). One year later, the same team presented the performance in Es Baluard Museum, Mallorca, Spain.

Finally, uniarts Helsinki has invited Dora García to carry out a similar seminar as the one which took place in KHiO in February 2022. This seminar or course will take place in December 2023. This new course presents now a multidisciplinary approach that includes film analysis of some of the science fiction classics that have been found to have a connection to the Mayakovsky's texts through the research carried out in the last two years: Aelita, Queen of Mars (1924) by Yakov Protazanov; W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism, (1971) by Dušan Makavejev; The Sleeper, (1973) by Woody Allen; Logan's Run, (1976) by Michael Anderson.

[1] *The Bug (After Mayakovsky)* is a performance adaptation of one of the last plays by Russian futurist Vladimir Mayakovsky. The play introduces (1929) a science fiction plot popular already then and used many times since: a visitor to the future coming from a past that is our present. In Mayakovsky's bitter and comic play, a soviet revolutionary is frozen in 1929 and reawakens in 1979 - by accident, a parasite accompanies him in this time travel. Using Mayakovsky's play as a guide, a collective author wants to analyze questions such as: What happens in a time lapse of 50 years? How to explain 50 years to someone who spent them in a coma? Is it true that history moves in cycles and there is an eternal return? Could we speak of glitches in this infinite repetition, and could we liken the glitch* to THE BUG? The shared disappointment of the man projected into the future and the inhabitants of that future forced to confront their original past is what helps us analyze our present moment in terms of repetition, melancholy, and action. The development of the project aims at studying and understanding collectively created and performed theater / performance, forming a collective made of different ages, experiences, and disciplines; the idea of collective going even beyond the artists' group. THE BUG (After Mayakovsky) adopts a format, the public rehearsal, that allows for instant feedback from the audience, and no one present is out of it, approaching even the assembly format.

*A glitch is a short-lived fault in a system, such as a transient fault that corrects itself, making it difficult to troubleshoot. A glitch, which is slight and often temporary, differs from a more serious bug which is a genuine functionality-breaking problem.

The production of the new performance is a collaboration between M HKA, DeSingel (Antwerp) and Oslo National Academy of the Arts.