**PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY**

AN EARLY CONCEPT OF THE THEATRE OF INTERPLAY: THE RELEVANCE OF BRANKO GAVELLA'S THEORY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY[1]

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Branko Gavella (1885–1962), a well-known Croatian theatre director of late modernity, had a significant impact on ex-Yugoslav theatrical life. However, it is important to stress the fact that Gavella's formative years were spent in Austro-Hungarian cultural milieu: he defended a doctoral thesis in the field of epistemology under the title *Die Erkenntnistheoretische Bedeutung des Urteils* [The Epistemological Significance of Judgment] in Vienna in the year 1908, then he started contributing theatre reviews to *Agramer Tagblatt* in 1910, and he put his first theatrical production—Schiller's *The Bride of Messina*—on the stage of Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, in the year of 1914. Gavella had conceived the conceptual gist of his theoretical work in the early thirties (see Gavella 1934a, 1934b, 1934c), and it is beyond any doubt that his anticipatory theoretical insights into the phenomenon of acting make him a pioneer in the modern, and to a certain anticipatory degree, in the postmodern field of performance philosophy. Upon thoroughly reading the available material—Gavella's theoretical essays and fragments posthumously collected under the title *Glumac i kazalište* [Actor and Theatre]; exploring the wider context of his thought on theatre aesthetics as presented in the articles and pieces published in various periodicals and in his books *Književnost i kazalište* [Literature and Theatre] and *Hrvatsko glumište* [Croatian Stage]—we have for the first time extrapolated the theoretical and philosophical level of Gavella's approach to theatre performance, publishing our findings in 2001. The book *Kazalište suigre: Gavellin doprinos teoriji* [Theatre of Interplay: Gavella's Contribution to Theory] (Petlevski 2001) was the result of a multi-decade research recognized mostly nationally and regionally. The wider international audience had been informed about Gavella's theoretical work only recently, on a small-scale,

informative level (see Petlevski in Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2007; Blažević 2014). The aim of this paper is to contribute to the shift in the perception of Gavella's work, and to point to the relevance of Gavella's theory of acting for the autochthonous development of the European branch of the modern philosophy of performance, as an interdisciplinary field of research different from the methods traditionally employed by aestheticians of theatre.

The main reason for having renewed our research adventure into Branko Gavella's body of work was the need to demonstrate operability of his concepts—both theoretical and practical—in the context of some recent interdisciplinary insights into the performance phenomenon. Gavella's system is based on the phenomenology of intersubjectivity. The actor represents the spectator, so in a hermeneutic sense, there occurs a merging of actor and spectator, an inner interplay caused by the process described by Gavella as *the new experiencing of one's self*. Gavella's theory can clearly distinguish concepts that we bracket today under the rubric of meaning, as opposed to use, i.e. language-reference, as opposed to speaker's reference. Already in the 1930s, he applied the relation of semantics to pragmatics, as it would eventually be understood in speech act theory from Austin on, to the problems peculiar to theatre. We will elaborate upon what was stated above later in this text. Gavella's experience of analyzing the system of acting led him to expand the terms *role* and *mask*. Gavella transported these terms, seemingly specific to theatre performance, from the domain of theatre studies to the spheres of inquiry appropriate for the philosophy of language, cognitive psychology, and of what is now known as the theory of *autopoietic* systems. The core of this paper deals with Gavella's "speech situations", and the dynamism of exchange in the relational space of culture.

In order to reconstruct Gavella's incomplete outline for a *structural analysis* and situate it in its proper context, it was necessary to demonstrate the consistency of Gavella's analytical system first. To this end, we have compiled the *Glossary of Gavella's terms* (Petlevski 2001, 167–208)[2] as an indispensable guide for the study of the theoretical aspect of Gavella's aesthetics. While the maturity of conception underlying Gavella's thought on the theatrical phenomenon was never questioned, its systematic nature was customarily denied; faulted for "broadsheet haziness," it was relegated precisely to the category of thinking about theatre from which Gavella was most anxious to distance himself. In view of their importance within the system, detailed elucidation of the terms *aesthetic function, aesthetic value, aesthetic object, norm, aesthetic material, intention, the collective pole of reception and creation, experience, style, structure, collective pole of creation, collective pole of reception, dramaturgical exemplary formula, sign, Mitspiel,* etc. was sorely needed. The fact that Gavella never completed his projected study notwithstanding, upon determining the position of key terms within his aesthetic system, the consistency of Gavella's *structural analysis* can indisputably be established, followed by an inquiry into the possible links with related theoretical attempts of the 1920s and the 1930s.

The mainspring of Gavella's theoretical thinking lies in Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* (Husserl 1900/1901). His theory of acting is based on the phenomenology of intersubjectivity. The analysis of the immanently social nature of the phenomenon of acting, on the other hand, brings the papers of Branko Gavella, especially his so called "Czech manuscript", close to the poetics of the immanent

development as it was argued by the school of Prague structuralism. Gavella's theoretical reflections on the nature of the actor's phenomenon and theatre aesthetics are close to some reflections by German theatre scholar Max Herrmann: they share the idea of *Mitspiel* that applies to the reception interplay between actor and spectator, but Croatian theoretician is more radical in his "structural" hermeneutical approach. The result of Gavella's ambition to sum up the creative results on the modern national stage was a book titled *Croatian Theatre; An Analysis of the Development of Its Style*. Here Gavella traces historical and "structural" changes in the development of Croatian style of acting. The importance of that book for Croatian theatre studies can be compared to Herbert Ihering's *Der Kampf ums Theater* for German theatre studies (see Ihering 1922; extended version 1974). Concepts like: "rhythmisation of the artistic material" (Gavella) and "rhythmische Ablagerung seelischer Kräfte" (Ihering) and the concept of the "new pathos" (Gavella and Ihering) are highly valuable for contemporary insight into the phenomenon of acting.

Ever since Austin, philosophy of language has been keenly aware of the fact that every speech act opens up the possibilities of its more or less predictable contextualization. Obviously, the more possibilities of contextualization there are, the less likely it is that each and every presupposition for the understanding of the speech act in question will ever be graspable. One of Gavella's most significant contributions—thus far unacknowledged and unappreciated—is his early recognition of the fact that the fundamental task of the actor is predicated on the ability to strike a balance between an unpredictable bodily induced understanding (what Shoshana Felman [2003] would term *the scandal of the speaking body*), and what Gavella called *the grammar of the inner experience of speech* (see Gavella 1967, 94, 95).

Gavella distinguished between *the form of belief*, on which the reception of a particular substances as mandatory is predicated, and *the form of trust* (Gavella 1967, 163), which results from interplay in theatre performance. This *form of trust* must be visible; it must find its expression in the actor's artistic interpretation so as to enable everything—voluntary and involuntary—to be received as a theatrical description of the world. From the theoretical standpoint, Gavella's insistence on the ability of the actor to bring his body into a state of *labile balance* is the most innovative (see Gavella 1967, 145, 156). This type of balance is a state of *active preparation* (see Gavella 1967, 141, 145) for merging with various individual movements that always have an emotional, physiological, and socio-cultural source in the personality of the actor, but also in the consensus of the interpretative community (in Gavella's terms, the "actual" community (Gavella 1967, 39), which brings actor and spectator together in the course of a specific, theatrical and hermeneutical interplay. Reflections of this sort, whether assessed against the achievements of theatre studies of today or the so-called theatre anthropology of the 1980s, create an interesting bypass toward the contemporary schools of acting, such as Eugenio Barba's, for instance.

Gavella is aware that a potentially "new work of art" can result from a disposition toward someone else's work of art. In this respect, his claim that every contact with foreign theatre life expands one's views thereby giving clearer perspective on one's own creation (see Gavella 1970, 144) is an interesting theoretical move. The terms of Barba's ISTA method, such as "the field of pre-expressivity" (Barba 1995, 104–108) and "transcultural behavior" (Barba 1995, 6, 9, 10, 41, 44, 116,

134); "transcultural milieu" and "precultural common ground" of acting techniques (see Pezin 1986, 171)—are to an extent comparable to Gavella's notion of theatrical "new vitality" (Gavella 1967, 25, 108, 109) founded in the contact between "native" and "outlandish" theatre life, in particular when we consider that this concept is a result of Gavella's efforts to bridge the gap between cultures by means of the universal roots of *internal speech*. It could be argued that Gavella remains an advocate of drama in the theatre, since for him the text is the "starting point" in search of a universal language that is prior to the realizations of dramatic ideas in actual national tongues. However, it is not only the dramatic text that is at issue here. Through his work on himself, the actor becomes *transferable material*, the creator of the *performance-dramatic significance*, and a mediator in search for the *internal speech* of mankind. It is the search for the transcultural, universally comprehensible language that also makes Gavella a hermeneutist of the stage text. This task would be inconceivable without a comprehensive pedagogy of acting.

Stage speech and stage movement both convey the *psychic correlates of reality*. The body of the actor in movement corresponds to thoughts, feelings, and different frames of mind. In this way, each *expressive gesture* is related to a phase in the process of experiencing reality. These are the points that make possible tracing Gavella's theoretical observations back to its sources in Platonic laws of correspondence. In no way does this undercut the modernity of his insights. For Gavella, *experiencing states* invariably comprise a *communicative impact*. Each gesture, whether deliberate or accidental, performed on stage, under specific conditions, in front of the spectator, becomes an *expressive gesture*. All movements appear to have been performed with a purpose in mind. It is the performance situation itself that imposes an interpretation of contingent as intentional. More than that, Gavella is aware that no actual comprehension of verbal utterances and stage performances can fully comprehend all the necessary conditions for understanding. Reception inevitably means that interpretation is to a significant degree arbitrary. While each gesture is expressive and "distinctively determined in quantitative and qualitative terms," such determination "never coincides with the approximate observation of the gesture by external observer" (see Gavella 1967, 50–53). Gavella derives the basic principle of performance from the tension that obtains in the relation of internal and external, defined and indeterminate, deliberate and contingent. He obviously believes in the acting technique aimed at revealing the rules of correspondence between the body, mind, and spirit, whereby the equilibrium of accidental and deliberate is realized in the interplay of actor and spectator. Contraries achieve a purpose in the equipoise of the stage text. This strand in Gavella's school of acting—which is in certain aspects akin to the theory of François Delsarte (see Delsarte 1882; 1893), once one of the most influential, and today all but forgotten teacher of acting—is borne out by his insistence that all of actor's movements, stances, and gestures actually have a purpose. Gavella cannot consider actor's work but in keeping with the aesthetic principles of nature, which he supposes to be universal and transcultural, even when partly realized through a set of norms that comprise the "sociality" of a particular community and period. Delsarte's and Gavella's considerations of the phenomenon of acting anticipate later developments as they both regard acting as a structurally determined system in ceaseless interaction with the medium in which it takes place. Many of Gavella's conclusions pointing toward the line of thinking that would, from the 1970s on, be advocated by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in theoretical biology and neurology, specifically in their thesis on living beings as

molecular autopoietic systems. When Niklas Luhmann applied his version of the concept of *autoipoiesis* to the theory of social systems, the outcome was a methodological turn in the field of cultural theory.

As some of Gavella's insights have only recently attracted the attention of theoreticians, considered in the light of recent theories of acting and other theatre phenomena, they appear in a new guise. Thus Patrice Pavis (2001, 13–27), for instance, concludes that what is at stake on paper, no less than on stage, is "a manipulation of bodies for the purpose of exploring the ways in which they think and make us think." When Pavis writes of the actor's "visible" and "invisible" work, it is the same split into a *technical* and a *normative personality* in the creation of a role, where, as Gavella would say, the *two aspects of the acting material* appear—the two functions of the body that thinks and makes us think (see Gavella 1934a; 1934b; 1967, 158; Petlevski 2001, 19–51). A new reading of Gavella's theory—free of unruly distortions, yet adhering to the premises of his theory and mindful of the context of his conclusions—presents a convenient starting point for a novel and rewarding exploration of theatre performance as the point where the intermediary nodes of several arts, a number of epistemological horizons, and scholarly disciplines converge. Today, Gavella's startlingly daring endeavor to join theory and theatre practice helps the students of theatre to realize the importance of checking the theory against the pedagogy of acting, all the while attuned to the historical moment and the cultural context in which every movement on stage "thinks" its time.

In the discussions of the so-called *metaphysics of performance* in the theory of acting, as exemplified by Charles Marowitz's *The Act of Being: Towards a Theory of Acting* (1978), considerations of the disparity in the effects achieved by impersonation in life and in acting, suddenly come to the fore. In contrast to everyday impersonation, i.e. pretending that one is who one is not, in the theatre, impersonation, as it appears in various systems of acting (for example, Stanislavsky's) means exactly the opposite. It means *becoming what you are*. When, in the act of theatre performance, the dramatic person uses the actor's body; it ceases to be something to which the actor would direct our attention—it becomes embodied by virtue of the *metaphysics of performance*.

The question as to how a subject with a singular consciousness can reach another subject, and understand him, in the first place naturally presents itself here. The Heideggerian immersion of the subject in the being-in-the world was an attempt at resolving this particular dilemma. In the 1980s, the theories of intersubjectivity discussed the "orientation toward the consensus"—what Gavella had much earlier called *the normal degree of orientation* (see Gavella 1967, 88; Petlevski 2001, 51, 77). On the other hand, as a theatre practitioner, Gavella was intensely aware that the background assumptions pretending to present the common social experience objectively are being furtively colonized by argumentative discourse. This discourse comes from various spheres, and a Foucauldian school of thought would assign to it a power stemming from the shared base of language, culture, class, and status. Today, we would add race and gender to these spheres of power bringing to bear all sorts of conscious and subconscious pressures to enforce commonality by means of norms, canons and conventions.

All meaning stages the framework of its understanding, and an act of telling is always an act of showing—Goffman would maintain in the 1970s. For Gavella, the "structural forms of speech" and the "structural forms of reality" coincide (see Gavella 1967, 85). The two meanings fuse in the person of the actor. Both the "extra-dramatic significance" (related to the actual events and the norms for orientation in a social context), and the "performance-dramatic significance" (related to the norms and conventions of drama and acting)—stage the framework within which the spectator understands the actor on stage as some sort of expression (see Gavella 1967, 78). By showing himself, the actor a) tells something *to* the spectator, and b) tells something *about* the spectator. This "staging" is a reversible process, implying the creation of the *internal spectator* in the actor, but also the *parallelism* of reaction in the spectator (see Gavella 1967, 167–168). A *form of trust* (Gavella 1967, 163) is established between them, which enables the presuppositions from the sphere of "shared knowledge" (see van Dijk 1998, 31) to be liberated, thereby creating the situation of communication, even if no actual information is exchanged. *Potential action* (Gavella 1967, 109, 167) produced in the spectator is actually a kind of performative understanding. Let us have a look at why this is so. Gavella's concept of *interplay* is highly complex (see Gavella 1967, 24, 151; Gavella 1982, 46; Petlevski 2001). Yet, it is in part (the part that refers to the cognitive-experiential process and the creation of aesthetic object as a result of the "co-operation" between actor and spectator) closely related to the later idea developed by van Dijk's that there is really no neutral, non-performative way of speaking of what is being performed (see van Dijk 1977). By their very form, utterances are able to create the framework-script within which their meaning as events takes place. This ability of utterances to create conditions for the "context of communication" by their form can, for example, transform a philologist into an actor (in the sense of someone who acts). The reception of the phenomenon of acting is much else besides, but its necessary condition is the ability for performative understanding.

Were it not for Gavella, but for some contemporary scholar, we would not hesitate to interpret the conclusions he draws in "On Criticism and Dramaturgy" in the context of contemporary theory. "The stance of the critic is not extra-artistic," Gavella writes (2005, 190). The essay about dramaturgy and criticism, published in 1952, was based on Gavella's theoretical reflections from the 1930s. In this text, Gavella discusses the concept of *preformed types*. Preformed types have a performative potential (in the language we speak, but also in the language spoken by our somatic organization). They contain in their structure "all the elements that can become the vehicles of the capacity of manifest intentions to be interpreted" (Gavella 2005, 111).[3] Gavella defines criticism as "the deep understanding of the conflict raging in the work itself between the preformed types and material tending toward schematization", on the one hand, and "the artist's aspiration to grasp elementary reality", on the other hand (see Gavella 2005, 189).[4] This tension, which Gavella elsewhere calls the *two-fold aspect of speech* (Gavella 1967, 85), exists within the artist, but it is also present in the critic who has the "need for a liberating new form" (Gavella 2005, 190). The critic is automatically transformed from the philologist into an actor, as there is no neutral, non-performative way for the critic to speak about what has been performed.

Some of the topics the contemporary theatre semiology finds interesting—were already solved in Gavella's theory in the 1930s. When Bert O. States maintains that the objects on stage are

assimilated by the imagistic nature of the performance text, he takes the example of a dog who, placed on stage, is "certainly an object", but he explains that "the act of theatricalizing it—putting it into intentional space—neutralizes its objectivity and claims it as *likeness* of a dog" (States 1985, 35). (Adding, of course, that in the theatre there is no ontological difference between an image and an object.) According to States, the same holds for the actor as "a real object on stage" (34), since s/he is not identical to the character, and presents images of human acts, including speech acts, which would be iconic replicas of actual speech acts. Strongly contesting States' simplification, Eli Rozik analyses the phenomenon of acting in four points, reaching the conclusion that since "the actor combines producer of images and image-text in the same body" (Rozik 1999, 203), he cannot be a case of iconic identity, and therefore cannot be reduced to a "ready-made" object on stage (see Rozik 1999, 198–211). In his capacity of the producer of signs, the actor uses the material of his body. The actor's body is a text—it is identical neither to the actor who forms it (and who inhabits the real world), nor to the performed character (who inhabits the fictional world). To anyone who has read Gavella's detailed analysis of the issue of the actor's body as material for the actor's aesthetic disposition, it is clear that he dealt with all these aspects already in the 1930s. According to Gavella, the "material normativity of acting" (Gavella 1967, 84, 113, 114) (acting being an art that uses speech as a means of expression) appears alongside various other social givens. Rozik's concern is "metatheatricality," (Rozik 1999, 207) defined by him as the experience of the body and the actor's awareness of this experience in acting a role. He is particularly interested in the "ontological gap" (Rozik 1999, 205) between the performance-text and the producer of signs, between the performance-text and the fictional world; the gap which reveals the fact that the theatre is not the world, but a description of the world—a cultural formation—in the same way in which this is the case in the media that do not stage similarity on material level. Rozik's question is: can semiotic methods deal with "metatextuality" in the first place? Further, he maintains that, due to the fundamental fictionality of theatre performance, the material text of the actor's body can be integrated into the overall metaphorical image of drama, and he therefore contends that the material component of the signifier is assimilated—"consumed"—by the representative function.

On the basis of his directing and teaching experience, Gavella sometimes arrives at more felicitous solutions than many a contemporary theorist of acting. The way he makes difference between the *two sides of actor's* personality—the *normative* and the *technical* one—(see Gavella 1967, 112, 113, 114) allows him to treat "acting material as a fraction of the sphere of general liveness of material" (Gavella 1967, 163). He analyses the points where a manifold consensus takes place between spectator and actor, in the form of understanding based on exchange among various cultural "structures of authoritativeness") (Gavella 1967, 85). The actor's awareness of his own body is of no less interest to Gavella than it is to, for instance, Rozik. Except that Gavella also confronted the same problem in practice, as a director, which, without any doubt, could only have served to enrich his approach. As soon as he defined actor as "a symbol of reality within the literary setting of drama" (Gavella 1967, 125), Gavella posed all the crucial questions in the contemporary theory of acting, as well as in the philosophy of language. At the beginning of the 1980s, the discovery of the part played by the body in speech (the body multiplying the assumptions for understanding verbal utterances and stage performances) was nothing short of a "scandal" (Felman 2003). Speech

categories, Gavella claims, are parallel to the categories of reality, which is why the gestures of the actor, whether voluntary or involuntary, performed consciously or not, are always directly related to internal substances. Gavella distinguishes speech as the material of drama from speech as the material of acting. He is firmly convinced that there exist "categories of speech for signifying speech situations" (see Gavella 1967, 64, 85, 92, 93) which appear both in the verbal material of drama and in the verbal material of acting. It is only the actor's intention that occasions "the transposition of verbal material from its actual representativeness into internal representativeness" (Gavella 1967, 92). The body on stage carries the awareness of theatre as a cultural formation over the fourth wall. One of the ways in which it does this is the deliberate stylization of gestures in acting. But it can also do it in an involuntary manner, through the disobedience of the body and its physiological givens which set the limits to the actor's creative freedom in manipulating his own physical material—voice, facial expressions, gestures, and body posture—with everything taking place on stage, whether intended or unintended. Anything that could appear on stage inevitably has the tendency to be taken as a product of an intention, as a "description of the world." Gavella claims that even the actor's involuntary gestures are "directly related to the inner substance" (Gavella 1967, 127; also see Petlevski 2001, 19–51). But is this relation predicated by the stage as a culturally given fact?

The relevance of Gavella's contribution to theory goes well beyond the local context of theatre studies in Croatia, especially when, in the analysis of the verbal aspect of acting, his interest lies in the relational dynamics including both the individual and the medium of its existence. Maturana's concept of "relational dynamics" (see Maturana and Varela 1980, 1987; Maturana 1978, 1990; Maturana and Verden-Zöller, 1993) refers to the definition of behavior that is not merely a property of an organism, but a "feature of its existence in relational space" as a space of exchange. Present-day readers of Gavella's writings cannot but be fascinated by the extent to which Maturana's claims concerning "relational dynamics" correspond to Gavella's remarks, especially in Gavella's text on the "Social Atmosphere …" (see Gavella [1952] 2005a, 103–132). In fact, this should not be surprising, since the most prominent sociological application of Maturana and Varela's theory of autopoietic systems (see Maturana and Varela 1980), proposed by Niklas Luhmann in his study *Soziale Systeme* (Luhmann 1984; see also Luhmann 1982) came about by a productive combination of the already developed phenomenological theory of meaning (itself thoroughly assimilated by the German philosophical tradition) with the recently adopted and considerably adapted systems theory of Humberto Maturana. The sources of Gavella's theory are phenomenological, and most consciously so—for example, the comprehensive theoretical introduction to the text on social atmosphere in the Croatian National Theatre is labeled a "phenomenological digression," which, Gavella claims, was necessary "lest the considerations of the role of language in social groups be beside the point" (see Gavella 2005a, 102–126).

Gavella analyzes the phenomenon of acting in order to show how communication functions as a selection from the indefinite complexity of the media into a definable complexity. His first task is to show the ways in which the position of the (inner) spectator is realized in the *two aspects of the actor-function*. Later, he elucidates upon the dynamics of exchange taking place in the relational space (the space of *interplay*) between the phenomenon of acting as a structurally determined

system, and the medium partaking of the exchange (a structurally determined social system). The fact that Gavella's interest in historical problems does not go beyond the level of conceptual models is the major deficiency, as well as the major advantage (within the context of local scholarship, it is in fact positively ground-breaking), of his attempts at studying cultural history. Gavella is not interested in historical facts as such, still less in the reconstruction of the chain of events offered by the approach to history-writing in the style of Ranke. He conceives of history as a *field of activity*, where no interpretation of past facts can claim to be "more accurate" (i.e. "more adequate") than any other. Facts are not discovered—since there is no independent standard of objectivity that would enable the preference for one reading of history over another; all that one can do is assume a certain position with respect to them (see Fish 1980). Conceiving of the standards of objectivity in the interpretation of history as relative (in Gavella's case, even subjective) follows quite naturally from the way the position of the *observer* is defined in the systems which the adherents of Luhmann's theory of social systems today would call *autopoietic*. Past and future exist here solely as *explanatory concepts* introduced by the observer. To repeat, Gavella is not interested in reconstructing history, but in the methods of cultural history—the historical perspective predicated upon the (interpretative) position of the observer (or, in the theatre, of the spectator) within the dynamics of exchange that emerges between social systems and their respective media.

Gavella's insight into the phenomenon of theatre performance abandons Kant as a philosophical starting point at a fairly early stage, bidding farewell first of all to the Kantian interpretation of the relationship of parts to the whole, in which the system is conceived as if the parts existed specifically for the purpose of comprising the whole. Thanks to his profound insight into the phenomenon of acting, Gavella is soon led to realize that the relating of parts to the whole becomes pertinent exclusively from the position of the observer. For the theorists of *autopoietic* systems, and to a significant extent for Gavella as well, the part-whole relation is, in Maturana's wording, but a metaphor for the observer's misunderstanding (see Maturana 2002, 9), a working concept necessary in order to understand the way in which the system functions. The emphasis is suddenly no longer on the components of the system, but on its dynamics—the ways in which the processes within the social network are being integrated into the spaces of exchange particular to their respective media. According to Maturana's analysis, behavior is not a property of an organism but a feature of its existence in relational space, with the dynamics of actual relations including both the organism and the medium in which the organism exists. *Autopoiesis* is not a property of living beings; it is a manner in which they exist. Human beings exist in and through language. The mind, as a "phenomenon of languaging in the network of social and linguistic coupling" is not something that lies within the brain (Maturana and Varela 1987, 234). In "Autopoiesis, structural coupling and cognition", Maturana says that we human beings "coexist as languaging beings with other languaging beings" (Maturana 2002, 27). The fundamental aim that Gavella set for his research consisted in discovering the particular features of the "process of our collective existence" wherever there obtains a specific "manner in which social formations exist" (Gavella 2005a, 106–107). Gavella observes that, because they are collective, it is characteristic of social phenomena that the *function* of such social formations is at the same time the *character of their existence*:

> As soon as, in the processes of our collective existence, it becomes a matter of someone trying to say something to somebody else in view of a particular purpose, these subjects, objects, purposes, and trajectories become constant in character. They are repeated as being the "verbal" signs of something that is repeated in various speech situations, thereby becoming constants in the variability of these speech situations. These constants are something common, identical, and general. In the multiplicity of individual existences aspiring to mutual understanding—groups are thereby created combining individuals into sets with relatively constant common elements. New creations come about, which are not dissimilar in character to the resemblances we notice in the faces of family members. This resemblance exists as something definite in those faces, yet not as something that would exist by itself apart from those faces. (Gavella 2005a, 106–107)[5]

Like Maturana, Gavella notices that what matters to the system is the manner in which it is realized, and not the components that comprise the system. Maturana provides examples for his argument that are not taken from biology. The first example is the tornado (see Maturana 2002, 10) that does not consist of the molecules of air themselves; tornado as a meteorological phenomenon is created by the manner in which the molecules of air flow through it. The second example is the club (see Maturana 2002, 10). This social phenomenon exists as a discrete conversational network realized by individuals that change over the years; the club remains the same, and its system works in the same way, as long as the conversational network obtains by which the club is defined, as long as it is *preserved* in the specific manner of interaction that persons who are members of the club in any given period of time engage in. On the conceptual level, Gavella says the same, but his examples are chosen differently, as it is only logical, since his aim is to discover constants in the historical development of social formations, while the primary focus of his research is the analysis of the phenomenon of acting. Gavella singles out "the partial analogy with the phenomenon of physiognomy as it obtains in particular faces" as being "one of the fundamental traits" of the "collective formations" of sociality:

> Their function, then, is the character of their existence, precisely 'to give character' to particular physiognomies. As a primitive example of this, I would cite the existence of resemblance that obtains among the individual family members. This resemblance means that all the individual physiognomies are characterized by having something in common. Furthermore, it is of importance that these collective formations assume some other marks of the individual faces. They also have their masks. (Gavella 2005a, 108)

For Maturana, the concept of preservation is of fundamental significance, with the understanding of the *dynamics of preservation*, by virtue of which biological evolution is a historical process, being preponderant. The notion of preservation, which, in the case of living systems, is made actual in two ways—through the *law of the preservation of autopoiesis*, i.e. through the preservation of the conditions under which living systems are possible as such, and through *law of the preservation of adaptation*—can be applied to social formations as well, due to the fact that autopoietic systems function in analogous manner. In Gavella's elaboration of the functioning of social systems, the concept of preservation is represented by the *phenomenon of the mask,* where the law of the

preservation of autopoiesis (the structure of the system and the manner in which the system exists is constant), and the law of the preservation of adaptation (the system is elastically variable; it adapts to the manifestational needs of the experiential system, thereby effecting movement on the historical axis) both apply:

> The phenomenon of the mask is for me the crux of the entire apparatus by means of which our beings manifest their experiential states; it is both constant in its material structure and elastically variable in its adaptability to all the manifestational needs of our experiencing. This experiencing can also have the intention to dissimulate, such physiognomic 'insincerity' leaving tiny, microscopic, yet still conspicuous manifestational signs on the mask. (Gavella 2005a, 111)

The "Social Atmosphere" is a theoretical work offering a rather concise and cogent summary of the results of Gavella's research on the speech act within the phenomenon of acting, with respect to the relation that obtains between the work of the actor and the historical moment. All the key concepts that Gavella had been developing in his theory of theatre since the early 1930s are to be found in this neglected text, which, never having received due scholarly attention, remains bereft of adequate interpretation to this day. It is true that its importance becomes apparent only after the function and role of all the major correlative terms in Gavella's theory have been established. It should also not be forgotten that Gavella's theory, while meticulously structured, was all but inscrutable as presented in the various writings from which it had to be reconstructed: in addition to comprehensive texts devoted to the specific aspects and details of the phenomena under study, there were also fragments, as well as several manuscript versions, with the often still baffling and unresolved resemblances and differences between the published and manuscript versions of the same text, not to mention the subsequently added comments written in the margin of published papers. Gavella had to wait over half a century for his scholarly intentions to start resonating within the Croatian academic community. The fate that befell his theory—to be accepted only belatedly and still not entirely—repeats the structural pattern of one of the key issues in social linguistics—brilliantly expounded in Gavella's "Social Atmosphere," and, of course, made famous as the argument John F. Searle proposed in his *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (1983)—the issue of the distinction between the *intention to represent* and the *intention to communicate*. This problem, which still remains the bone of contention for the theories of Austin, Searle, and Derrida, refers to the existence or otherwise of some "privileged contexts" on the basis of which certain speech acts could be deemed "normal" or "parasitical." Austin's theory of speech acts relates the concept of the "normalcy" of an utterance to the idea of an existing level of reality where utterances are verifiable on the basis of *denotata*. The context of speech acts realized in everyday communication, which, according to Austin, determines whether an order will indeed be an order, or a promise a "true" promise, depends on the *total situation*, the total context in which an order or a promise are being realized as speech acts. In Searle's speech act theory, it is the *intention* of the speaker (the author of the speech act) that determines whether a given speech act will be "normal" or "parasitic," that is, fictional, like an actor's "as if" propositions. Searle's argument is that it is possible for someone to intend to represent something in speaking, without necessarily having the intention of communicating anything. Hence, there is a distinction between the intention to

represent and the intention to communicate. The speaker represents the state of things, while that which is thereby being represented ("representation") can, but does not have to be, communicated (see Searle 1986, particularly the chapter on communication and representation). Let us have a look at Gavella developing a similar argument:

> First of all, we should be aware of how complex is the phenomenon of language, and to bear in mind that in it we find a speech intention with a tendency that does not go beyond internal fixation the sole purpose of which is to enable orientation in the course of one's experiencing, or a tendency toward external manifestations through various communicative characters and aims of materialized fixations; manifestations are further to be found by means of acoustic or optic symbols or other kinds of signs acting as surrogates for the verbal communicative tendency. (Gavella 2005a, 121)

Searle's "representation of the state of things," characteristic of *the intention to represent*, would correspond to Gavella's concept of the verbal (speech) intention helping the subject orient himself within his own experiential world, the intention which attains its purpose within the world of the subject's experiencing and therefore does not have to—although it can—realize the communicative purpose as well. Gavella is interested in this kind of intentionality of the speech act as forming the part of the "preparatory stage" in which "verbal reserves" are being created by means of "representational shortcuts" (Gavella 2005a, 122) The speaker uses these shortcuts in "effecting speech intentions" (122) that provide words with meaning, i.e. create a *role* within the communicative intention, or within the speech intention that creates a communicative situation even when there is no active exchange of information:

> The word 'mother,' for instance, has a meaning: it denotes a female, etc. However, it is only given sense when it is provided with a role, with a place within the effecting of a speech intention. Whether upon entering a speech series or in isolation, it is assigned the intonation of summoning, grieving, etc. In such cases the verbal trajectory of its meaning connects with the verbal trajectory of some speech-situation, such as the need for something, summoning or something else, creating a new verbal trajectory. (Gavella 2005a, 122)

Gavella lucidly observes that we enter speech as *"natives" of specific social groups* (Gavella 2005a, 124). The ostensible *normalcy* or *abnormalc*y of a particular speech act is only made actual in the context of the native world to which we belong. Already in the early stages of learning our mother tongue, we acquire a set of "already formalized and constant, already viable, trajectories." This "material for communication" with the environment is predicated upon "the convention of comprehensibility," to which, Gavella proceeds, "everyone who would aspire to making his speech comprehensible must become subjected" (see Gavella 2005a, 123; Petlevski 2001, 19–49, 191–192). Communicative intention—the actualization of which, in Gavella's words, depends on "the constant repetition of certain elements in certain situations"—is, however, not the sole feasible intention in speaking. As regards speech, normativity is but relative:

> Yet only in this relative normativity (which is indeed of extraordinary importance, since it represents social normativity of our life at its most elementary) does there exist the possibility of individual will asserting itself, the will to change these conventions, and to introduce new norms of understanding. (Gavella 2005a, 122)

Gavella does not overestimate "the will" behind the representative intention, but his theory takes it into consideration to a greater extent than do the speech act theorists of the early 1980s. This is easily explained by the fact that the primary focus of his interest was on the artistic utterance (as dramatic word and actor's speech). The analysis of the role of language in acting enhanced Gavella's theoretical considerations of verbal intentions. He is most keenly aware that the way in which speech is understood is determined by the way in which a word or a phrase is understood within a specific community, taking into consideration the fact that use varies depending on the differences of period and location. Austin did not venture beyond conventions; Searle was more preoccupied by the role of intention in speech acts, and Derrida's criticism of their theories foregrounded the impossibility of contexts ever being grasped in their totality. His theoretical analyses of the role of speech in acting, enhanced by the practical experience of teaching acting, enabled Gavella to assume (very early on) the—today we would say Derridean—perspective within which it is clear that it is impossible to comprehend the totality of situations in which speech act takes place. Gavella distinguishes between the "general verbal trajectory of actualized sense" (see Gavella 2005a, 123) and the trajectory along which the "realization of that actual sense prompted by the actual speech situation" moves. Of *speech situation* (Gavella 2005a 107, 122; see also Gavella 1967, 64, 92), he says that

> already by itself, in its complexity, it demands a combination of verbal trajectories for it to be exhaustively realized—as, for instance, the trajectory of asserting can combine with the trajectory of firmness of belief as regards the cogency of respective assertions, or the trajectory of interrogation can combine with the trajectory of earnestness, or of expectation of a certain answer, etc. And it is of utmost importance for these trajectories to have constant formulae of movement and amplitudes of oscillation. (Gavella 2005a, 123)

Gavella sets great store by the understanding of the dynamics of preservation of social institutions, as dynamically structured systems engaged in an incessant exchange with the medium they are embedded in. The dynamics of preservation is best seen in the example of speech acts that manage, from one moment on the historical axis to the next, to preserve the formulae of movement and amplitudes of oscillation of verbal trajectories that relate to specific stock situations within a closed circuit of "collective formations, sets, and means of social interaction" (Gavella 2005a, 109, footnote 13). Each of these formations—Luhmann would say "functional subsystems" (Luhmann [1984] 1995, 54)—has its respective specific medium of communication, which determines the manner in which the formation interacts with its environment. Theatre is an example of such a functional subsystem. Gavella is interested in "speech models," but he is even more interested in the way verbal intention is made actual in the sphere of artistic creation. He clearly sees that as soon as the sense of speech is being subjected to artistic creation, it becomes "altered".

Luhmann's distinction between system and environment, as expounded in *Reden und Schweigen* (1989) is based on a conceptualization that defines *environment* (Maturana's *medium*) as the remaining quantum of something from which the system needs to separate itself. An environment is always an environment, never a system. Each re-duplication of the schema has to retain the specificity of differentiation (in particular its asymmetry). The repetition of the schema multiplies distinctions, but it does not create a new system. Luhmann sets up the analogy: psychic systems come about by producing thoughts, while social systems come about by producing communication, with both thoughts and communication creating meanings in the same way. People are within the system as performers, but they do not form a constituent part of the system. The factors determining what counts as communication to a great extent partake of the immediate situation, such as the previously actualized instances of communication, which are themselves the outcome of a constant process of communication as it takes place from an instant to the next, in a temporal sequence, as opposed to the specific traits of the psychic system of an individual. Speech, for instance, offers its elements the structural possibility of being separate from that which they designate: the same elements can refer to different things, indicate various semantic fields, or be related to diverse intentions. Speech functions perfectly in the absence of referents: moreover, it does not need neither speaker, nor hearer, it can be comprehended even when the speaker is wrong, tells lies, or when, for example, an actor utters correctly a line of dialogue in a foreign language of which he does not have a good command.

Already in the 1930s, Gavella applied the relation of semantics to pragmatics, as it would eventually be understood in speech act theory from Austin on, to the problems peculiar to theatre. Not only that, his experience of analyzing the system of acting led him to expand the terms *role* and *mask*. Gavella transported these terms, seemingly specific to theatre performance, from the domain of theatre studies to the sphere of research in philosophy of language, cognitive psychology, and the theory of *autopoietic* systems. The term *role* appears in the discussion of language-use, as the "effecting of verbal intention," which endows language-meaning with a "sense," whereby the verbal trajectory of meaning merges with the "verbal trajectory of the speech-situation" (Gavella 2005a, 122). Describing this apparatus amenable to "all intentions of manifestation," Gavella also employs the term *manifestational mask*, which as a result of "certain material permanence" guarantees "the certainty of interpretation" (see Gavella 2005a, 111), with the nature of interpretation itself being determined by the type of relations that are established "among persons interested in this interpretation" (see "Social Atmosphere" [1968] 2005a, 103–165). In this manner the material of experiencing acquires "stability in its congruence" (see "Reverberations of October in Croatian Cultural and Political Life" [1952–1953] 2005a, 85–103), the mechanism enabling communication by means of a scale of "preformed types" (see "Dramaturgy and Criticism" [1952] 2005a, 187, 193). The conclusion that in creating his mask the actor does not use raw material but "a mask that is already socially prepared for manifestational ends" is of cardinal importance for Gavella's theory:

> The principal medium of our communication, language in the narrow sense of articulate speech, and language as spoken by our entire somatic organization (facial expressions, gestures, stance, body posture), would have to include in its structure all the elements capable of being conveyors for the interpretability of manifestational intentions. The degree to which these elements will be

interpretable, the wealth of interpretive nuances, will in turn depend on the cohesion of the groups in which they are deployed, on the intricacy, multiplicity and significance of the objects which represent the common interests of these groups, as well as on the degree to which they share common interests in general. (Gavella 2005a, 111–112)

Gavella is fascinated by this structure of repetition, of which Derrida would say that it concurrently implies identity and difference. A sign that would appear but once and never again—would not be a sign at all. Identity, in fact the typical identity of the sign (see Derrida 1973) is that which—whatever it may be—remains in repetition. Gavella's view of history is always motivated by the search for the relation of identity and difference in social groups displaying a specific structure of repetition over decades or centuries. This is a structure that, we could perhaps say today, in the function of the survival of the *autopoietic* system, subsists in the cultural space of exchange.

Notes

[1] This work has been supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project number IP-2014–09–6963.

[2] The Glossary (included as an appendix to my book on Gavella's performance philosophy) had been compiled and published before the revised edition of Gavella's theoretical works from the year 2005 edited by Batušić and Blažević. This is one of the reasons why in this text I quote from previous editions of Gavella's theoretical works edited by Batušić, and from his original manuscripts.

[3] Originally, the text where Gavella develops this idea, "Social Atmosphere of Croatian National Theatre and its Relationship Towards its Theatrical Neighbourhood", was accepted for publication by Jugoslav Academy of Arts and Sciences in November 1960 and published in 1968.

[4] Originally, the text was published in Zagreb under the title "On Criticism and Dramaturgy", 27 May 1965, *Vjesnik* 2264:2.

[5] All larger quotations from Gavella in this text are taken from the selection of his papers collected under the title Branko Gavella. *Dvostruko lice govora* (2005a). As stated before, the core of his theoretical system was conceived and written down in the early 1930s, and the elaboration of his theory, combined with cultural history approaches, was completed in the early 1950s.

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Biography

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