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CONTENTS

A Basic Human Need:
the Spectacle

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Abstract

We understand *spectacle* and *spectacular* as referring to anything that captures our attention, but this view is correlated to *spectacle* as in *arts of spectacle*. In this paper, we point out the presence of spectacle in everyday life and in human creativity. We illustrate the power of theatrical and film metaphors. We show that *to be spectacular* is not a binary predicate, but a matter of degree. We sketch a typology of spectacle, in contrast with the largest part of our life, which is *routine*. But, beside the good, normal routine, there is also the bad routine, related to the black holes of human life, among which *boredom* is the most frequent and most dangerous. Their main source is failures in education. A consequence is the low cultural level of many spectacles put forward by the *mass media*. When we pay attention to those spectacles, we risk missing, as prisoners of routine: a child's smile, the satisfaction from drinking a glass of water, walking, seeing a human face. The great challenge, long neglected, to reach the spectacles of scientific creativity, begins to excite consideration.

Keywords

two kinds of spectacle, good and bad routine, atomic spectacle, education, boredom, universal paradigm

THREE STAGES IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE THEATRICAL PARADIGM

Traditionally, the word *spectacle* is related to a theatrical performance or, more generally, to any performance involving stage direction, a scene or a screen and intended to be shown to an audience, such as a circus, film, dancing etc. They are called usually by the generic name the *'Arts of Spectacle'*. Much investigation has been devoted to this way of understanding a spectacle, a typical example being Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory* (1988, 2004). Many of these studies account for the

mentality according to which the theatre and, generally speaking, the *'Arts of Spectacle'* deserve to be considered and investigated as *'A World in Itself'*. It was an earlier period, before the twentieth century, when theatre had to be *'A Mirror to the World'*.

But now we are in a third stage, in which we also stress the way the arts of performance, mainly theatre and film, are metaphorically projected beyond their territory, to cover the quasi-totality of human and social knowledge and action. So, we are able to look at the world through the glasses of the arts of spectacle. This fact legitimizes reference to the theatrical and film paradigm as a *universal paradigm*. We will illustrate this aspect in a subsequent section.

ANOTHER WAY TO UNDERSTAND SPECTACLE

There is, however, another way to understand spectacle, which may include the previous meaning, but which extends to various other spectacles, from any aspect of human and social life, nature or culture, science or art.

What we are proposing can be considered a consequence of the third stage in the evolution of the arts of performance, when the spectacle paradigm is separated from its artistic dimension and is considered something deserving our attention, irrespective of its correlation with a possible aesthetic function. As we will see, this separation is imposed solely by the way people today use the word *spectacle*. In order to reach this second way of understanding *spectacle* and the *spectacular*, we must pay attention to the various meanings of the respective words in the process of everyday communication, in the mass media and in different domains of activity. Consider the following.

SPECTACLES EVERYWHERE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

A building is on fire. A hundred people are there, ten of whom are fire fighters, the others for the spectacle. Two people are fighting – another spectacle. 'Why are so many people at this burial?' asks somebody, and a woman answers: 'Only a few of them are here for the burial; the others are here for the spectacle.'

A football match between Chelsea and Bayern Munich is usually appreciated as a spectacle, as is a tennis match between Djokovic and Federer. Parliamentary life abounds in spectacle: a television channel may report that the motion of censor has been a real spectacle. A novel or poem may become spectacular for some readers, as may a play.

We admire the spectacle of the celestial vault, the first snow or the rainbow. A television channel such as Animal Planet frequently offers real spectacles. Solar or lunar eclipses are sometimes highly spectacular. And natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcano eruptions, floods and tsunamis may be spectacular, albeit unpleasant.

SPECTACLES OF HUMAN CREATIVITY

Scientific, artistic, philosophical and engineering human creativity are rich sources of spectacle, displaying the splendors of the human spirit. Mathematicians describe a theorem or proof as spectacular. In fact, the Greek etymology of the word *theorem* means *spectacle*. The spectacle is at home in domains such as Relativity Theory and Quantum Mechanics, where our empirical perception is no longer valid and the paradox becomes powerful. How could we ignore the spectacle of some chemical reactions, of the Mendeleev table, of chemical isomerism, of the world of crystals, of the biological cell and the human brain? Medical surgery, a liver transplant, may be a spectacle. The spectacular potential of the Internet has not yet reached its limit. History offers huge spectacles, such as the Fall of the Roman Empire or the Second World War in the twentieth century. The spectacular potential of ancient myths, aiming to bridge Anthropos and Cosmos, is proportional to their cultural significance. The

succession of geological eras is highly spectacular, as is the history of the universe. The unconscious mind is another great spectacle, whose secrets have been investigated by Freud and Jung. The *double bind* phenomenon in psychotherapy is very spectacular. Needless to say, all great works of music, poetry, literature and visual arts have an important spectacular dimension.

THE POWER OF THEATRICAL AND FILM METAPHORS

There are significant reasons for the increasingly theatrical structure of human knowledge. There is a general move from static and substantive aspects of reality to structural, dynamic and interactive aspects. This trend underpins the appearance of conflicts and paradoxes. The failure of the traditional scenario, observation-hypothesis-experiment-induction-theory and again experiment, so successfully applied in Galilean-Newtonian science, led to the development of a new methodology, whose protagonists are cognitive models and metaphors, which are hypothetical explanatory *scenarios* about the functioning of reality. They are highly spectacular, in view of their conflictual nature. Any such model or metaphor aims to accomplish two opposing tasks: to be as similar as possible to, but also to be as different as possible from, the phenomenon to which they refer. The theatrical, spectacular dimension of this enterprise is augmented by the increasing role of their strategic game component and of the subject-object circular interaction between the observer (researcher) and the observed reality, in new situations where there no longer exists a sharp distinction between subject and object (as it was in the Galilean-Newtonian period of science). In this spirit, the convergence process in Mathematical Analysis, in the epsilon-delta variant of the nineteenth century, is described as a game with two characters, the second having to face the challenges of the first in *What is Mathematics?* by Richard Courant and Herbert Robbins. Eisenstein's *vertical montage* imagined in connection with film also becomes a characteristic feature of mathematical language.

Prospective studies are dominated by the idea of *scenario*, also powerful in psychology (for instance, in Eric Berne's *Games People Play*, and in political sciences (Lance Bennett, 'Political scenarios and the nature of Politics'). Lucien Tesnière in *Elements de syntaxe structurale* introduced a theatrical perspective in linguistics, namely in syntactic analysis, while Claude Levi-Strauss put forward a similar perspective in his investigation of the canonic formula of myth, as a synthesis of all mythical narrative works. Very significant examples of the use of a theatrical perspective are Erving Goffman's investigations in sociology, such as *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, *Behavior in Public Places* and *Relations in Public*.

WHAT IS A SPECTACLE?

What is common to all these kinds of spectacle? Do they have a common denominator? The answer is the same in the old *Larousse* and in the recent *Wikipedia: anything that captures our attention is a spectacle*. Whose attention? The attention of an audience, which may vary to a greater or lesser extent in different situations. Looking at the examples above, we observe that some spectacles address a simple public, with a very low level of education, while others require a high-culture background or are for those from a particular professional domain.

If your professional activity involves situations in which you address a certain kind of public, then your aim is to make a spectacle from your job, i.e., to persuade your audience to pay attention to you. If you are a pianist, a violinist, a priest, a teacher, a lawyer, a public prosecutor, a writer, a painter, a composer, a scientific researcher, an author of a school or university textbook, then your job is to produce a spectacle, whose quality will be transferred to your work.

Education is a failure because most teachers do not manage to capture the attention of their students, i.e., they are not able to transform their teaching into a spectacle. For similar reasons many school textbooks are a failure.

TO BE SPECTACULAR IS NOT A BINARY PREDICATE, BUT A MATTER OF DEGREE OR/AND TYPOLOGY

Let us try to detail the nature of a spectacle. Capturing attention can take the form of a state of enchantment, of detachment from the contingent life, sometimes reaching a state of giddiness or vertigo, but it may also lead to fear and horror (like, for instance, in the case of a tsunami); it may be a mixture of several things, such as freshness, curiosity, wonder, bewilderment, perplexity and surprise. But all these psychological states are mainly qualitative, i.e., they cannot be evaluated in terms of a binary logic and it may be that they are not at all measurable. *To be spectacular is not a quality in itself; it is one that a situation may acquire with respect to some people and lose with respect to others.*

TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF SPECTACLES

So, it is clear that spectacles can be classified in many ways. According to the three developmental components (reptilian, palaeo-mammal and neo-cortex) of the human brain, a spectacle can address mainly instinctive behaviour (as in physical fights, including between wild animals), it can address mainly emotional behaviour (like theatrical melodramas), or it may address mainly cerebral behaviour, based on arguments and reason, ideas and beliefs. Each kind of spectacle determines its audience and each kind of audience is looking for its appropriate spectacles.

If television is ruled by ratings, this means that its spectacles are built according to the assumed cultural level of its potential audience.

In order to increase the chances of high ratings, most television channels screen spectacles of a low cultural level, requiring as little intellectual effort as possible, as one can see mainly at weekends and during the summer, when people are supposedly beset by laziness.

The great challenge for the mass media is to decide to what extent they consent to come up with spectacles that chime with the way entertainment is conceived by a large part of the public, oscillating between functional illiteracy and limited cultural education, or whether they aim to educate people, by trying to attract them to another type of spectacle, involving the great cultural achievements of humanity. But here we need a deeper level of analysis, to which the next sections are devoted.

MUCH OF OUR LIFE IS ROUTINE

Health requires regularity in the way we rest, sleep, eat and take care of our body and clothes, to adapt them to the changes of climate. There is a strong trend towards an algorithmic behaviour in most acts of our daily life. We carefully follow rigorous rules in using an elevator, crossing a street, shopping, using public transport, making telephone calls etc. All these things belong to routine. We must not blame it.

Behind routine is much human knowledge. To be privy to this knowledge is a matter of education, whose role is, among many other things, to transfer to the new generations our cultural heritage and the rules of civilized behaviour. These rules take the form of routine. So, routine behaviour is a way to incorporate and use the intelligence of other people. There was a time when people, like animals, had to work hard to acquire the necessary food to survive. Routine was very powerful, dominating human behaviour.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SPECTACLE

But in contrast with animals, it seems that human beings were never entirely at the mercy of routine. From time to time there is an explosion of humanity's need to look around and contemplate the horizons, to raise its eyes towards the sky, to remember its past and imagine its future, to be impressed by and react to natural disasters, such as solar or lunar eclipses, to be impressed by and react to the birth

and death of a human being or animal. This is the emergence of the spectacle as a basic human need. The old Latin slogan *panem et circenses* can be separated from its initial interpretation and understood as *bread and games* or *bread and spectacle* (see the Spanish version *pan y toros* and the Russian one *chleb i zrepitsa*). We may go farther and interpret *bread* as *routine*, if we think of the routine work leading to the product called *bread*.

TWO KINDS OF ROUTINE; ATOMIC SPECTACLES

Like cholesterol, which is of two kinds, good and bad, routine is also of two kinds. The aforementioned one, reflecting our need for order and hygiene, is necessary and beneficial. But there is another routine, malevolent and harmful, against which we should fight. Moreover, this fight should be inculcated in children as a component of their behaviour. I refer to many *atomic events*, occurring at each moment, such as the act of respiration, drinking a glass of water, eating an apple, looking at a human face, at a bee, ant or butterfly, the possibility of capturing the infinite variety of sounds, the chance to distinguish music from noise, the possibility to see, to contemplate a blade of grass, a flower, the sunrise, a snowflake, the simple fact that we can walk and have the chance to meet a child who gives us a smile. Are we able to feel such events not as ordinary, routine things, but as potential spectacles – I would like to call them *atomic spectacles* – just because their duration is only of a few seconds and they require no preliminary learning process, but are a direct consequence of the elementary fact that we are humans? Do we realize how such atomic spectacles may become the daily food required by our soul? Literature and art frequently find their source in such atomic spectacles. To see with fresh eyes so many apparent common things – this is the message of all great scientists and artists. But if putting such an enterprise in a creative work is the privilege of a small elite, then training in the capacity to enjoy such events, to see in them a reason to enjoy life, to make of them spectacles is or should be a basic part of education for everybody.

SPECTACLE BEGINS WHEN ROUTINE STOPS; SOME BLACK HOLES OF HUMAN LIFE

Although it has an important positive role in human life, routine, even of the good kind, may have a negative influence on our state of mind, because it favours mechanical thinking and behaviour and discourages imagination and invention, without which we are not trained to face exceptional events, so frequent in contemporary life, and we remain frustrated in our access to the great achievements of human creativity.

Routine work is frequently assimilated with boredom, which can be considered the main illness of contemporary society. But boredom is only one of the black holes of human existence; bad routine is another. There are also laziness, languor, torpor, insipidness, dullness, vice and stress, to which we have to add pain and the derisory. All these states make the spectacle impossible or reduce its probability of occurrence. But, because the need for spectacle is organic, pushing people to seek the spectacular by all means, the solution is assent to kill time in the most trivial way. The mass media offer a lot of options in this respect. From the moment when modern society, with its high technological level, permitted most people to benefit from increasing free time, the great, still unsolved problem, is how to use this time.

There are 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, four and a half weeks in a month, 12 months in a year, decades of years in a life, and each moment our brain is working, our body is functioning. How could we make meaningful so many moments of life, how can we manage to cope with so many moments of time? When we are not able to answer this question, boredom is unavoidable.

FEW CAN SEE THE SPECTACLE IN A CULTURAL ENTERPRISE

There is a way to solve this problem. For refined people, with a rich cultural background and extensive intellectual training, the choice of ways to spend their free time is so large that they never know boredom. The great problem for students is how to avoid boredom and stress in the learning process, if you are required to learn things you don't understand or, if you understand them, that you don't like? The problem is also for people obliged to practice a profession they don't like: how can they avoid boredom and stress? Ultimately, for both students and adults, the problem is how to create conditions under which learning and the practice of a profession become a spectacle. The tragedy of education is that poor teacher-student interaction and the bad quality of the curriculum and of textbooks mean classroom life is dominated by boredom, if not by stress. Education fails to transform its action into spectacle. A similar tragedy occurs in the professional life of a lot of adults, which fails to attain a spectacular dimension. So, adults are pressed to retire as early as possible and become unhappy when they have to work beyond the age of 60. If education and professional life fail to reach a spectacular dimension, if boredom is the dominant mentality, then all these people with a limited cultural background will look for spectacle in the derisory and trivial aspects of life. The phenomenon is visible in the mass media, in television programs, mainly at weekends, and in magazines with provocative pictures and slogans. Too many people are looking for spectacle where physical violence is the main ingredient. Seeking spectacle in the mean, petty aspects of life is a clear sign of the degradation of a society which is not yet able to allow most people to enjoy the splendour of science, art, philosophy, the huge victory of technology, culminating with the emergence of the Internet.

Despite this generally negative picture, there are some signs of hope. In recent decades, great scientific results in biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics and computer science and great scholars in these fields have become topics of interest in some novels, plays and films. If this trend develops, we can dismiss the fear expressed by Eugene Ionesco at the end of the book *Between life and dream; talks with Claude Bonnefoy* (the French edition was published in 1996 by Gallimard, Paris) that literature and theatre may face a pronounced fall in audience numbers, because science and technology are more imaginative. There are signs of a bridge between the two ways of understanding spectacle.

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Self-Development as a Social Component of Stanislavski's Performance Practice

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Abstract
This research deconstructs the central idea of Stanislavski's body of theory and practice, the self-development of the actor as a necessary condition for the creation of his/her art, under a phenomenological framework, trying to locate the social component within the patterns of the dynamic process that is the System. Drawing upon the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Maria Shevtsova, the analysis focuses on the translation of the semiotic processes as social processes that occur at the moment of stage creation and communication. The paper also addresses socio-cultural influences that determined the chronotopic specificities of Stanislavski's theory.

Keywords
acting, spirituality, social processes, yoga, the self, Moskow Art Theatre, Chekhov, the System

PREMISES: THE SYSTEM AND ITS SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

1917 was a crucial year for the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT). The social transformations generated by the October Revolution brought about a big shift in the structure of the audience, and therefore the ensemble had to face a mixed public, formed not only of members of the *intelligentsia,* but also of workers, peasants and ordinary people who up until then had not had the chance to lead a cultural life. A new mission was then set for Stanislavski and the other members of the theatre: beyond educating their new spectators and teaching them to behave properly in a theatre, they had to activate and set in motion the founding principle at the basis of their longtime work – to bring people together and create 'a general, group feeling that sharpens their insights' (Stanislavski 2008: 320). History had put the MAT, unwillingly, face to face with its own desideratum. Having to communicate to a wider, more heterogeneous and unsophisticated audience was a test, and the decision to show them a poetic play[1] in which external physical actions were replaced by internal, subtle energies simmering inside the characters, a play that was foremost a visionary illustration of the social inversion that was going

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on, was in itself an act of courage. And, most of all, it was an active assumption of the MAT's role as a social (and now historical) catalyst.

The ensemble was successful, and the fact that those tense nights, teeming with the pressure of the change, reduced the audience to a deep silence was not by pure chance. Since the opening of the theatre in 1898, Stanislavski's work with himself had been doubled by the continuous preparation of the members of his troupe to fulfill their potential as actors and empower each of them with acting that could bring 'the life of the human spirit' (*ibid.* p. 239) to a role onstage. As a consequence, or rather as a premise, a state of communion with the spectators was perhaps attained that night and their subsequent uplifting – intellectually and spiritually – achieved through an act of pure presence. As the leader of an ensemble, he instilled the state of mind that art and life cross-pollinate one another and have a symbiotic quality: in art one must seek truth and life; likewise, in life one must benefit and get inspiration from the states of grace brought forth and developed by art. He strengthened this belief by discipline and hard work.

Stanislavski's research invested theatre with a higher meaning, determined by the social and cultural realities of his time and place: the older theatrical traditions, the predispositions of the audience, the social and spiritual realities in Russia at the turn of the century and the people he met and worked with.

This paper's aim is to emphasize that these quests and discoveries in the process of actor training, unprecedented at that time in Europe, are not a random, isolated phenomenon. They are sociologically rooted, in that they have a dialogical relation with their specific social environment which shaped them and towards which they, in a continuous exchange, redirected the results. On one hand, trying to avoid the 'arbitrary formalism' to which Pierre Bourdieu drew attention, which might occur if we ignore 'the systems of social relations within which symbolic systems are produced' (Bourdieu 1984: 140), I will develop all these ideas in an analysis of the chronotopic specificity of the elements that made the system come to life. On the other, with the help of the Bakhtinian trans-linguistic semiotic system set in motion by Maria Shevtsova's semiotics of theatre, I will show how 'sign processes become socio-cultural signs' (Shevtsova 2009: 11) in Stanislavski's body of work. I will do that by unfolding the mechanics behind the creative state of an actor, and his/her ongoing development as a human being in order to enhance concentration and stage presence to attain communion with the spectator.

THE ACTOR'S SPIRITUALITY AS A CHRONOTOPIC SPECIFICITY

First of all, let's discuss the problems that Stanislavski identified and against which he decided 'to take a position' (Bourdieu 1984: 140) in the field of theatre. What prompted him to break away from the tradition he was so bitterly against? Beyond bad habits like gossip, a chaotic lifestyle, lack of discipline, selfishness, quest for stardom, lack of work ethic and poor working conditions (such as tiny, airless, filthy dressing rooms), he first and foremost discredited the existing style of acting, which was characterized by '*theatricality*, spurious emotion, declamation, overacting, (Stanislavski 2008: 166). It was this superficiality in which previous generations found their refuge, and Stanislavski detested it. He started changing things by imposing a new attitude towards theatre and asking the right questions: what is the purpose of actors on stage? Is it possible to have a technique through which they could reach a creative state at will, repeatedly and not accidentally? These were problems never raised so seriously before in European theatre, and Stanislavski, who started his journey in childhood as an *amateur* actor, always strived to hit the perfect note and never stopped searching for answers.

All the paths he tried in this quest for 'the truth' led him towards the idea of the importance of the development of 'the spirit, the inner content' (*ibid.* 184), as continuous, internal preparatory work for actors who should pursue an ever-evolving process. He thus advocated a holistic approach to the art of acting, dreaming, along with Leopold Sulerzhitsky (the administrative director of First Studio,

the laboratory division of the MAT, founded in 1912 by Stanislavski), who was initiated in Eastern spirituality, to found a 'spiritual order of actors […] with a knowledge of the human heart' (*ibid.* 304) This was in fact the main idea behind the ensemble he formed at the MAT – a team whose members should work together, respect each other, grow together and think about art as a task greater than themselves and above self-interest. These profound spiritual grounds of Stanislavskian performance practice have, in fact, if we were to follow Émile Durkheim's socio-religious system, a social premise. We'll see later why and in which way.

But what is this *truth* that must be sought on stage and why must it be sought? How does it put the inner and the outer dimensions of the actor in relation and what is its importance in the actor's relation to the spectator?

When he talks about the need to develop a new style of acting, Stanislavski raises the idea of 'the falsity of the *actor*'s state' (*ibid.* 256) – meaning that his/her craft is to outwardly show what he does not inwardly feel, somehow a state of dislocation of mind and body, judged in relation to the everyday existence. To avoid artificiality, harm and torment in this creative process, and make it positively genuine and repetitive, Stanislavski says that one must look for *aliveness,* not mechanical imitation, nor must one wait for inspiration. Therefore he delineates the physical and mental stimuli that could enable actors to access the subconscious, as the source of the vital force, from where the life on stage emerges. This state, which he variously calls the 'creative state', 'spiritual mood' and 'life of the human spirit', is characterized by the total concentration of the mind and body, their connection, awareness and pure presence. This is how one avoids mechanical representation (hence the empty imitation of gestures and external behavior in the naturalistic aesthetic) in favor of discovering in oneself the natural processes of life, meaning 'the truth of my feelings, mental and physical, the truth of the inner creative fire' (*ibid.* 261). Therefore, through constant practice, actors activate 'a mind-body-spirit continuum', as Sharon Marie Carnicke remarks (2008: 3), one of her arguments being that the Russian noun *chuvtsva,* 'applies equally to the five physical "senses" and to emotional "feelings", but its verb, *chuvstvovat,* is remarkably extensive in its possible meanings: "to feel", "to have sensation", "to be aware of", "to understand"' (*ibid.* 268). In reference to that, I will draw attention to Stanislavski's remark about this total union of being: 'Continuing to observe myself and others I understood (i.e. felt) that being creative is above all the total concentration of the mind and body; it includes not only the eye and the ear but all our five senses. Besides the body and thoughts, it includes intelligence, will, feeling, memory and imagination' (Stanislavski 2008: 258).

YOGIC INFLUENCES ON THE SYSTEM

Now it is easy to notice the Far Eastern spiritual influence in this statement. As R. Andrew White notes, in the Russia of the mid-1800s to the beginning of the 1900s we find an abundance of spiritual organizations, and a trend among intellectual elites to pursue mysticism as an alternative to the expanding capitalist life (2006: 76). In this context, Stanislavski reconsidered his system and deepened it with yogic elements – especially during his Finnish trip. Many of his exercises are drawn from a series of books found in his library written by an American metaphysician, Yogi Ramacharaka, but these were not his only source: in 1916, while working on an Indian play by Rabindranath Tagore (a production that was eventually cancelled), Nemirovich-Danchenko brought a Yogi to speak about Hinduism to the members of the ensemble. Stanislavski combined ideas from different sources and reinforced his experiments with concentration and breathing exercises meant to increase *prana* (the Hindu term for vital force). He said that in the process of stage communication, 'the invisible rays we emit and receive' (Stanislavski 2008: 247) should be discovered and used. Also influenced by yogic practices, Stanislavski spoke about the exploration of the creative possibilities of the subconscious, the

place where self-consciousness is effaced at a mental and corporeal level. This type of training, which had to continue for long periods of time, was meant to develop actors gradually in order to help them attain a deeper and deeper immersion in their characters. As A. L. Fovitzky observed:

> In this way there goes on a sub-conscious development of the role – just as fruit develops in external nature; that the conceiving and maturing of a role demands a certain time, just as does that of a baby. This explains why the roles at the Moscow Art Theatre are learned a little at a time' (Fovitzky 1923: 45).

When a certain level of connection with the circumstances of a role is reached, when mind, body and feelings are one, Stanislavski talks about *Ia esm* ('I am'), a state in which 'you have experienced a portion of yourself in the role and the role in yourself' (Stanislavski 2006: 87). In other words, this is simultaneously a subjective and objective moment (being oneself and the role); going deeply within (the subconscious), it becomes possible to access a super consciousness, which 'transcends the individual' (*ibid.* p. 86). This idea of transcendence or higher consciousness, attained in religious practices through meditation (Buddhist, Hindu) or prayer (called *hesychasm* in Eastern Orthodoxism), is very interesting in the actor-audience relation – because at its very core lies the lack of distinction between the self and others (the basis of all these religions), and along with immersion in the role, the actor attains a similar state, opening widely and selflessly his/her whole being to the spectators. He/she thus acquires a sort of totemic status, becoming the catalyst of that state of effervescence generated by the collective life of the group. In that, first and foremost, Stanislavski's performance practice can be considered social.

ART IN LIFE AND LIFE IN ART; COMMUNICATION IN ACTING, SIGNS AND SOCIAL PROCESSES

This very important point brings us back to our main interest, which is to detect traces of socio-cultural signs in Stanislavskian performance practices and see how they 'go back and forth between performers and spectators' (Shevtsova 2009: 11), as the main connection between art and social life, said Clifford Geertz, 'does not lie on such an instrumental plane, it lies on a semiotic one' (1993: 99).

Stanislavski believed that this process of being-in-the-moment is what determines an actor's access to imagination and all the forms of communication that happen on stage: the dialogical relation between the actors on stage on one side, the actor and the public, on the other, and within himself, which he referred to as the act of self-communication or *samoobshchenie*, the union between mind and heart. In each of these cases, a 'mutual, two-way communication' (Stanislavski 2010: 236) has to take place.

Being one with the role makes life on stage truthful and spontaneous – which implies a continuous flow of unpremeditated responses that lies at the very reason of existence of live dialogue. The same thing happens with 'anticipation'. As Bakhtin writes: 'The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. […] Such is the situation with any living dialogue. The orientation towards an answer is open, blatant and concrete' (1981: 279-280). It is thinking of a future reaction that persuades us to communicate something and it is the unpredictable, live response that makes us reply. Stanislavski named this flux 'mutual, unbroken communication' (2010: 236), which could never occur without a sympathetic audience which functions as a 'psychological acoustic. It registers what we do and bounces its own living, human feeling back to us' (*ibid.* 238). To continue the Bakhtinian approach, this communication doesn't only happen at a verbal level; it spans the entire presence of the human being – to include movements, gestures and facial expressions. Therefore the

actor is a vehicle through whose intensified presence the audience gets stimulated via an invisible energy, and receives signs that could be socially recognizable and interpretable. These theatre signs or 'sign processes' are social, because in order to be recognizable, they use the signs of society, as Maria Shevtsova emphasized in order to show that there is a dialogic, not a dichotomous, relation between the two (2009: 72). What should be emphasized here is the fact that Stanislavski did not talk much about his public, in the way that he seldom discussed his aesthetic choices as a director/actor in direct relation to his spectators. When he mentioned his audience, he did it mostly with a theoretical purpose – for example when he talked about the process of communication on stage – or to highlight its specific characteristic or qualities as homologies in relation to his thinking. Along the same lines, I have no wish to discuss specific translations of sign processes in social processes in particular theatrical performances of the MAT, or to analyze the specific reception process. The focus of this paper is to underline the strong social component inherent in the philosophy of the System[2] – seen as a series of techniques for the continuous evolution of the actor – and, in direct relation to this, to delineate the patterns of communication as they occur within its dynamics. I am therefore interested in extracting the semiotic processes that ensue from the overall view of the system on a conceptual level rather than within the work-in-progress (exercises and performances) from which Stanislavski drew his conclusions.

His conception of art was not as a means in itself, but as a continuation of life, a transformation of it. It re-shapes and re-forms the signs of society and returns them in a sublimed form. And this could only happen in the encounter between the actor and the public, an encounter which the former should never attend unprepared. Like Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*, the actor has the role of guiding the spectator into the depths of his/her own reality as a human and social being. It is in this idea too that this craft has a non-representative function, and we go back to the actor as a symbolic human being living a concentrated life at full potential (with energy, senses, mind, will, emotions and body as one) in a symbolic place and time that encompass the social time and place from the 'outside'. And this is possible only because this '*outside* world is inside the theatre' (Shevtsova 2009: 10). While in this complicated process, the spectator, as the only reason for the existence of the theatrical encounter, helps the actor to forget himself/herself as 'self'[3], the actor establishes a spiritual connection with the spectator awakening in him/her the inspiration to evolve, to become a better human being.

PUBLIC AND REPERTOIRE – THEIR SPECIFIC INFLUENCES ON STANISLAVSKI'S ACTING THEORY

In the same way that art was moving towards people to help them grow, the particularities of the audience at the beginning of twentieth century Moscow facilitated this communication. Stanislavski talks at a certain point about a specific attraction of that simple, uneducated public to wise things: 'An ordinary Russian audience loves a play in which it can weep, talk about life, hear clever things, more than a noisy *vaudeville* which leaves you empty when you leave. The essence of the plays in our repertoire was unconsciously absorbed by our audience. […] We realized that people came to the theatre not to be entertained but to learn' (2008: 319). In this atmosphere Moscow Art Theatre believed in its public and in the infinite potential of humanity. Moreover, in the early plans the MAT was meant to be a 'popular' theatre, which everyone could afford to attend, but because the repertoires of popular theatres were restricted by censors, Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavski stuck with the term 'open'. Failing to attract funding with the name 'The Moscow Art Open Theatre', in the end 'open' was dropped as well.

The entire repertoire staged there went beyond the immediate, primary need of entertainment – the ensemble was aiming to touch a metaphysical chord in the human spirit, and that required a

proper understanding of the art of theatre and theatricality in all departments: stage design, lighting, costumes and music. Of course, all these had to be executed in such a way that it could highlight the living vector of this art: the actor, whose presence on stage had to powerfully embody the new ideas about living a better life, the ever-evolving possibilities of the human condition. Breaking with tradition meant changing the message and the way this message was to be transmitted, which led to a strong connection between Stanislavski's seminal performance practice and 'the essence' of the plays in the repertoire of the MAT, especially Chekhov's plays. They were an immense contribution to the new ideas about staging and acting, and a rejection of the old, superficial way of understanding theatre, and an old way of life.

Chekhov, like Stanislavski, was a visionary who, above the fact that he understood theatre (and culture in general) in its highest form as a channel for evolution[4], knew the depths of the human spirit. Stanislavski noted that he so 'thirsted after life and culture' and so strongly believed in 'the future of Russian and universal human culture, both metaphysical and physical (Stanislavski 2008: p. 238)' that when he was told that a new building was replacing an old, ugly one, he would talk enthusiastically about it to anyone. He foresaw the fomenting of the Revolution and was one of those who prepared the ground against the 'inertia, the passivity, the listlessness of the '80s' (*ibid.* 239). His progressive ideas found resonance in the MAT's program, where Stanislavski intended to 'contrast a theatre of the revolution, which showed people's experience of events, with a 'revolutionary theatre' (constructivism), concerned with formal experiments, in which the actor was reduced to a mere cipher, a feature of style' (Leach and Borovsky 1999: 274). The fact that he was looking forward with hope, and not back with nostalgia, is an element that always has to be considered in his plays. The work that his characters mention so often is no different than the work Stanislavskian actors had to do with themselves – a never-ending inner discovery and evolution as a personal and nevertheless social instrument to move on. 'If you want to work on your art, work on your life,' he said. But as in any period of rupture, when 'the transformation of the instruments of art production […] precedes the transformation of the instruments of art perception and the transformation of the modes of perception cannot operate but slowly'[5], Chekhov's new types of drama were misunderstood. Accusations such as violation of the laws of drama, lack of action, excessive dialogue and boringness were common, and not even Stanislavski fully absorbed his ideas until Nemirovich-Danchenko revealed him the true meaning of the plays. Chekhov advocated a new way of acting that, exactly like his plays, could lay bare the subtleties and nuances of the human soul, the atmosphere, 'the mood', expressed in Russian through the word *nastroenie*: 'where – in streets and houses – do you see people tearing about, leaping up and down, and clutching their heads? Suffering should be expressed as it is expressed in life – i.e., not with your arms and legs, but by a tone of voice, or a glance; not by gesticulating, but by grace. Subtle inner feelings, natural in educated people, must be subtly expressed in an external form. You will say: stage conditions. But no conditions justify lies' (Allen 2000: 7).

The same quest for truth animated Chekhov's artistic beliefs as well as Stanislavski's and it was with this idea – that theatre was considered the 'quintessence of life' (*ibid.* 17) and followed the rules and processes of the outside world, rather than copied it as it was – that the Moscow Art Theatre pursued its non-naturalistic approach. Likewise, lighting and sound effects were used to enhance the inner drama of the characters, playing 'an equal, if not greater part in creating the overall impact of the scene' (*ibid.* 15).

An even more symbolic stylistic was sought by Stanislavski in his work on Maurice Maeterlinck's texts, which he approached at Checkov's urging. Working on some of his plays, he aspired to 'make the un-theatrical theatrical' (Benedetti 1999: 152): it was with *The Blind*, *The Interior* and *The Intruder* (which, grouped in one staging in 1904, did not enjoy much success) and *The Blue Bird* (1908), his 'most famous production' (*ibid.* 183), that he developed the notion of *motivation*. It is widely known

that Maeterlinck was interested in occultism and metaphysics and his theatre of silence and dreams found profound resonance in Stanislavski's spiritual interest in finding the immateriality of the physical form and transcending corporeality: 'why can't we, dramatic artists', said the latter, 'be detached from our physical body, why can't we be bodiless?' (2008: 244)

THE SPIRIT OF AN EPOCH: MEETING EDWARD GORDON CRAIG AND ISADORA DUNCAN

Important meetings with other international practitioners had a great impact on Stanislavski's thinking about acting. On one hand, Edward Gordon Craig, with whom, working on one of the most discussed productions in the history of modern theatre, *Hamlet* (1912), confirmed to him that although a stage design could fulfill a theatrical function through abstraction, the interpretation of the actors should be directed towards internally justified action. On the other hand, in 1907 Isadora Duncan brought her dance to Moscow and amazed Stanislavski with her natural understanding of bodily rhythms and the way she listened to inner impulses, looking for the 'creative motor'. It was the equivalent of what he wanted to achieve in acting, which prompted him to say: 'when I had become familiar with her method, […], I understood that in various fields, in various countries, people were looking for the same orderly, creative principles, born of nature' (*ibid.* 285). From the other side, Isadora wrote to him: 'You have shattered my principles. After your departure, I kept looking in my art for the thing you have created in yours. It is beauty, as simple as nature' (Seroff 1971: 131).

CONCLUSION: WORK ON ONESELF AS THE REPRESENTATION OF A SOCIO-CULTURAL REALITY

All these meetings and influences shaped Stanislavski's ideas about the need to work on oneself as a condition to work on one's art. These ideas form the range of performance practices known as the System, which changed the face of modern acting. But thinking of it not just as a phenomenon enclosed in the field of theatre, we discover it as a chronotopic representation of a socio-cultural reality, which absorbed, transformed and questioned the characteristics and natural processes of the concrete world on a metaphysical level. Stanislavski's conception of the physical body, mind, feelings, emotions, will – in short, the human being in its wholeness and truth – reflects a monistic understanding of the reality. As R. Andrew White noticed, quoting A. L. Fovitzky, this vision is connected to a specific of the Russian soul, in which there lives an Oriental element dating 'back to the age of the Scythians and the early invasions of the Huns, Avars, and Khazars. In so doing, he reminds us that, while Russia is geographically a portion of Eastern Europe, certain aspects of Far Eastern spirituality are embedded within its culture' (White 2006: 78). Nor can we overlook the reflection of a turn-of-the-century period caught between belief and science, mind and heart – and we can see that in the fact that Stanislavski's ideas weren't always understood in their true meaning and were altered in a dichotomous reception. Richard Boleslavski's conferences in America distorted the way the Western world received Stanislavski's work while Soviet censorship obscured important religious and spiritual references in his books and replaced them with more concrete 'equivalents' (for example, the Hindu term *prana* was replaced with 'muscular energy').

His fluid writings have many facets. They are explorations on different paths, different periods of creation, and do not pretend to give a definitive answer; they reveal the natural winding road of the process of self-accomplishment. They are the proof that, although they have different rules and conditions of existence, 'art' and 'life' cannot be separated and that the former sublimes 'the patterns of experience' people have and want to share – because 'no man is an island but a part of the main' (Geertz 1993: 96).

NOTES

1. *The Cherry Orchard* was performed at the MAT two weeks before the October Revolution.
2. The philosophy of the System is analyzed as a process developed over the years rather than as a finished product.
3. Yogi Ramacharaka, as quoted by R. Andrew White, says: 'The actor, or preacher, or orator, or writer, must lose sight of himself to get the best results. Keep the Attention fixed on the thing before you, and let the self take care of itself' (White 2006: 85).
4. 'We mustn't bring Gogol down to the people but raise the people up to Gogol', he said in one of his letters to Nemirovich-Danchenko (Chekhov 2008: p. 280).
5. Works produced by means of art production instruments of a new type are bound to be perceived, for a certain time, by means of old instruments of perception, precisely those against which they have been created' (Bourdieu, 1984).

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Balancing the Power Relations Between Dyads and Triads Depending on the Use of Objects

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Abstract
Harold Pinter cunningly understood the significance of relevant details. In some of his plays *(The Homecoming, Tea Party, The Basement, Landscape, Silence, Night, That's Your Trouble)*, he highlighted the conflicting nature of relationships by focusing on rooms, furniture, silence, and disrupted, absurd dialogue. In his book, *The Contradictory Reason*, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger dwelt upon the importance of the three-sided connections as opposed to the two-sided ones. In a triangle we have a more complex dialectic, with an executioner and a scapegoat. Meaningfully, Michael Billington, in his massive study dedicated to Harold Pinter's works, underlined the terroristic approach of some characters when it comes to their relatives or friends. A cup of tea, a sandwich or a vase can overthrow the balance of power in a couple or a family. Pinter's world is an incessantly boiling war of lies and treachery.

Keywords
scapegoat, silence, absurd, domination, treachery, Pinter, Beckett, Ionesco

INTRODUCTION

This article is the subject of a *tour de force* in terms of interpreting a classicized absurdist play with the help of contemporary French philosophy. The theoretical approach acts, thus, retroactively and engenders a totally new perspective on the violence specific to the theatre of the absurd.

There are two ways of staging Harold Pinter's plays: either a humorous, paradoxical one, or a gloomy, speechless and menacing one. Before becoming a playwright, Pinter had acted in many plays. Thus, although he despised theory, he understood the suggestive power of body language, moments of silence and objects on stage. The epithet *'Pinteresque',* already included in *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary,* captures exactly these qualities. Probably his new approach to the dramatic action, besides the important influence of Samuel Beckett's literature, was generated by the dramatist's multicultural origins.

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The Pinters had roots among the Polish Jews, then in Odessa, and, in this way, they grouped easier with Ashkenazic rather than Sephardic Jews. Owing to this, some of the recurrent themes in his plays are evacuation, loneliness, separation and violence. He even admits to a guiding line borrowed from William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, where civilization yields in front of instinctual impulse. Michael Billington, Pinter's biographer, noticed the will to power which pervades his plays: 'Pinter's vision of human relationships as a quest for dominance and control in which the power balance is capable of reversal' (2007: 56). Most often than not, a woman will arbitrate the relation between two men. Gender power, which is above sexual power, originates in the predominance of the verb 'to have' over the verb 'to be'. What matters is not love or, at least, physical attraction, but the acquisition of a new supporter in the strife to obtain a space and break a will.

LAYOUT: THE MARK OF DOMINANCE: THE PARALLAX

This double opening of Pinter's plays results from his peculiar understanding of the absurd. Unlike Samuel Beckett, he doesn't dehumanize his characters by transforming them into some automata. The characters in the absurdist theatre are constantly waiting for a saviour, for a meaning-producer. With Beckett, for instance, the unfulfilled expectation creates, in turn, a desperate or a prostrated state of mind. While waiting for Godot: 'Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful' (Beckett: 41). In the absence of a spiritual guide, people become robots emptied of human cerebrality. Abolishing rationality and imagination, *Molloy* sucks pebbles which are transferred from one pocket into another. Time is felt like an oppressor, life is nothing else than an exhausted loitering. Waiting is a persistent *activity* in Pinter's plays. To fill the temporal gap, the characters focus on objects, even fight over them. In *The Homecoming* the dialogue is assembled from prolonged monologues due to the fact that the brothers living under the same roof are fed up with each other. Maybe the most important phenomenon in many of his plays is the *parallax*: an 'apparent change in an object's position due to a change in the observer's position' (*Collins English Dictionary*). For instance, in *The Caretaker*, Aston, who had been checked into a mental hospital and given electric shock therapy, wants to finish a shed in the garden before leaving to search his persecutor. The shed would repair his pride and bring back his strength. A glass of water in *The Homecoming* is a perfect pretext for sexual invitation. Sometimes objects are used as signifiers without a signified. They only act as bumpers which are meant to absorb the implicit clashes between protagonists. That is why the apparently inoffensive, even dull dialogues, are tense:

Max: There's an advertisement in the paper about flannel vests cut price. Navy surplus.
          I could do with a few of them.
(pause)
          I think I'll have a fag. Give me a fag.
(pause)
          I just asked you to give me a cigarette.
(pause)
          Look what I'm lumbered with.

                                                                          (Pinter 1997: 16)

CATEGORIES OF SILENCE AND DESPONDENCY

Although a Beckettian way of dealing with words is conspicuous, the British dramatist relies on the suspense obtained with the help of silent moments. In *The Postmodern Turn* Ihab Hassan described the literature emerging in the 1950s as a literature of silence (1987: 6). There are different types of silence. In Beckett's plays there is a lot of talk, most of which is gibberish. It is like a hurly-burly

coming from a hurdy-gurdy. Some of his plays, taken as a whole, leave the impression of a talkative silence. The chatty mood and the exasperated waiting for something or somebody have the paradoxical effect of suggesting a chronic crisis.

The impending crisis is not Pinter's hallmark. Pinter is not fond of realism and finds any kind of orthodoxy repugnant. He praises ambiguity without favouring metaphysical drives. What Ronald Knowles remarked about this kind of choral theatre is true: 'we are drawn into the endless permutations of possibility' (Raby 2009: 79); but these permutations never presuppose the reification of man. The same author considers that 'in *The Homecoming* all cultural values are deconstructed by the visceral, atavistic animality revealed by the reaction to Ruth' (*ibid.*). The point he misses is that if in the beginning femininity is degraded by approaching it as an object that must be possessed, tamed, in the end Ruth has all the machos in the family kneeling at her feet. The context indeed is aggressive and filthy, but Max, the father, scolds one of his sons in the first act with a prophetic replica: 'Go and find yourself a mother' (Pinter 1997: 24). This line will prove to be illuminating for the whole apparently despicable action. A son returns home after many years. In the meantime, he has become a doctor in philosophy. His father and brothers belong to the blue-collar classes, with all the incumbent mentalities and behaviours. For example, the father says about his sons and stepsons: 'Look what I'm lumbered with. One cast-iron bunch of crap after another. One flow of stinking pus after another.' (*ibid.* 27). The confrontation between the new-comers and the owners of the house will not be an open one from the start. Only later on the blue-collars will try to defile the woman by treating her as a prostitute. A prostitute, in the end, is a 'lendable' object destined to provoke physical pleasure. Besides, in this family, woman-beating is a boasting opportunity. To make things more bizarre, Ruth, who admits having been 'a photographic model for the body' (*ibid.* 65), stirs the sexual impulses of her husband's brothers. She leaves the impression of surrendering to their instincts but, eventually, turns the table on them and from the status of a sexual object suddenly she evolves to the rank of a mother-queen. An implacable queen, because at the end of the play the in-laws are reduced to the role of her toys and subjects. This is not a really *deus ex machina* ending. A possible explanation is that she only simulated submission, objectification. Lenny, one of the seduced brothers, complains to her strongly complacent husband: 'What do you think of that, Ted? Your wife turns out to be a tease' (*ibid.* 74). Ruth knows that, in order to manipulate people, one has to foster their illusions. The ridiculous team of men envisage a profitable future for them as a result of sexually exploiting their temptress. They even decide for the husband to be his own wife's pimp and attract professors from The United States back to his family's brothel. This 'diseased imagination' (*ibid.* 86), as Max unconsciously calls it, is broken when they get subjugated by Ruth's authority: 'She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it!' (*ibid.* 89). As a matter of fact, the characters in Pinter's plays don't wait for a saviour, but for a victim who, finally, proves to be an executioner. The one waited for gets to be waited upon! As Michael Billington put it with a biographical hint, 'Pinter's own secret planet turned out to be a cratered paradise destroyed by the serpent of sexuality and the desire for domination' (*ibid.* 26).

BLINDNESS AS SELF-DELUSION

In a certain way, what happens with Pinter is similar to what happens with Mircea Nedelciu, who disputed the natural, not to say basic functionality of the objects in his novel *Zmeura de câmpie (The Field Raspberry)*: 'the unmatched beauty acquired by *an object* originally deprived of any aesthetic qualities, but which knows how to stay within its functional frontiers whatever may intervene around it'[1] (my translation) (1999: 13). In *Tea Party*, for instance, the walls of the setting are papered with Japanese silk. The interior, thus, creates a cosy and exotic atmosphere. Several lines below, we understand that the lavishly decorated walls belong to an office suite. All of a sudden their beauty becomes

sheer queerness. The office looks more like an alcove where the boss can indulge in complementing his newly-employed secretary. Pinter's irony, highlighted by the objects placed on the stage, is explosive. Disson, the courting boss, is described, on the occasion of his marriage, like living in conformity with 'austere standards of integrity' (Pinter 1997: 100). This fame helps the manager to take himself for a strong, efficient man. He pretends to be free of the need to be loved. Like with the teacher in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, he relies only on facts. But his utilitarianism is a fake. Everything around him must reassure his manly attributes. The above-mentioned austerity is compensated for by the carefully dusting of a tiny yacht placed on a mantelpiece. Disson craves for power, money and pleasure. When his second wife – who brings up his two boys from a previous marriage – discovers him on his knees on the floor of his office with a scarf tied over his eyes and waiting for his secretary to give him a massage, he cuts short any explanation: 'How dare you speak to me like that? I'll knock your teeth out!' (*ibid.* 119). Next time when they resume the office-game, he will find out that the chiffon stinks. This could be said about all his life. The chiffon blinds him objectively. In time, blindness becomes voluntary. Although Disson doesn't acknowledge it, his fits of blindness protect him from the dissipated milieu of his family. He is not sure anymore whether his brother-in-law is the real brother of his wife, he cannot rely on his secretary's faithfulness to him.

THE LANGUAGE OF OBJECTS

A key-object in the play is the beautifully wrought mirror Disson installs in his house. He takes the object inside only when he has symptoms of transitory blindness. Thus, the mirroring effect is annihilated. Disson manages to see only what he wants; and he wants to admit only happiness and success in his life. Even the function of the mirror is twisted. Disson belies the lies in his life of a would-be model-father and irreproachable husband and employer. Pinter read Eugene Ionesco's *The New Tenant* at the beginning of his playwright career. The Romanian-French dramatist used objects to form sepulchral clusters. Basically, the new tenant hires two porters to carry an infinite range of objects. The result is a suffocation of the traffic in the whole country. If Ionesco favours hyperbole and metamorphosis, Pinter prefers the litotes and the personification of his characters' obsessions. Leo Schneiderman noticed: 'His characters engage in repetition and incantation, always with the same spare vocabulary, until the audience begins to see beyond the stage and to literally visualize the character's obsessions, which are localized in rooms, buses and other places experienced in the past' (1988: 187). The objects are only an interface for a repressed communication. But every character knows how to look through this interface.

But, as Mircea Nedelciu cleverly noticed, we live in 'this century in which objects look different, are changing their role, their voice, and their function'[2] (my translation) (1999: 47). In *Tea Party* the objects are sometimes only heard. In their turn, they point towards a humanity who prefers to communicate through the language of inanimate existences. In addition, the language of objects works like a refrain, being resumed periodically. For instance, the sentence 'soft clicks of the door opening and closing, muffled steps, an odd cough, slight rattle of teacups, whispers' (Pinter 1997: 134) intervenes repeatedly in the otherwise dull dialogue. The sounds mingle with human voices and the result, paradoxically, is a vibrating silence. Actually, objects send more information than words. Beckett too resorted to this strategy from time to time; with him such a device enhanced desolation: 'Beckett leaves us with a world so depleted of life that nothing short of a cataclysm can renew it; we are close to the absence of the outrage' (Hassan 1987: 6). For Ihab Hassan the outrage was the symbol of apocalypse. If Beckett and Pinter herald a lurching apocalypse, Eugene Ionesco simply triggers it, although his fictional world is, or seems to be, more relaxed. He does this sometimes in spite of his characters' obstinacy not to recognize the catastrophe. In *Rhinoceros* Bérenger, the Logician, and

Botard reject the sheer evidence; they refuse to accept what they have just seen or simply try to belittle the weird apparition of an African or Asian animal on the streets of the city. Silence, with Pinter, functions as a respite for reorganizing and reviving communication. The result is disappointing, as the antiheroes don't admit to any mistakes in the past informing their present. In these circumstances, silence is only a simulacrum, pretending to shelter some important meanings. In the end, it works as a deluding calibration: 'literature strives for silence by accepting chance and improvisation; its principle becomes indeterminacy' (*ibid.* 10).

THE INTELLECTUALS AND THE ARCH-OBJECT

Unlike Beckett's characters, Pinter's are very often failed intellectuals. The cultural background doesn't shield them from the basic necessities. In *The Basement*, Stott and Law evoke the glorious mental feats of the past:

> Stott: Remember those nights reading Proust? Remember them?
> Law (to Jane): In the original.
> Stott: The bouts with Laforgue? What bouts.

(Pinter 1997: 154)

But this is not culture – it is only information. In the end, the three friends sharing a cosy home undermine each other by forming unstable and aggressive dyads. The one not summoned in the dyad will play the role of the scapegoat. The fight for supremacy consists in moving objects in the house or simply removing them. Thus, the taste is an excuse for bullying the other two protagonists.

Pinter's 'settings belong to the minimalist tradition, but their effect is to evoke compelling images of loneliness, conflict, and insecurity. The basic element in Pinter's stage settings is a room that invariably suggests ominous possibilities of desolation and trauma' (Schneiderman 1998: 186). Thus, the room is the arch-object in his plays. The secluded space offers the protection of a mother's womb but, in the same time, when there is more than one individual inside it, it aggravates dire instincts and aggressive paranoia.

In *The Birthday Party* Stanley, the gloomy ex-pianist, is so jealous of his small room in a shabby boarding house that he doesn't tolerate any intruder. Aggression and politeness are signs of frailty in this world. Assailants like Goldberg and Stott instinctively feel the tragic flaw and snip at it. It's better to keep silent and study your adversary: 'silence develops as the metaphor of a new attitude that literature has chosen to adopt towards itself. This attitude puts to question the peculiar power, the ancient excellence of literary discourse – and challenges the assumptions of our civilisation' (Hassan 1987: 11). Of course, the enemies of silence and cosy seclusion could be identified with the characters' subconscious fears and hopes. Especially that most of them are fragile or perverted. But these minidramas are imbued with 'the yearning for some lost Eden as a refuge from the uncertain, miasmic present' (Billington 2007: 82). It results that Pinter's dramaturgy turns around two typologies: the strong and perverted on the one hand, the weak and suspicious on the other hand. The representatives of both categories are sensitive to a past golden age. This is their only similitude, but as their happy memories don't belong together, communication is impossible.

THE BLURRED MEMORY OF THE RECENT HISTORY

Pinter's plays are an analysis of the need to communicate no matter what. This irrepressible drive constituted the core of Beckett's *Happy Days*, where a woman buried up to her neck in the desert talks incessantly. The absurdist vein is conspicuous in Pinter when he assembles dialogues that function

like monologues. In *Landscape* people accomplish a certain recitative without paying attention to the others' words:

> Duff: I should have had some bread with me. I could have fed the birds.
> Beth: Sand on his arms.
> Duff: They were hopping about. Making a racket.
> Beth: I lay down by him, not touching.

<div align="right">(Pinter 1997: 169)</div>

Famous for his musical silences and repetitions, Pinter hardly ever writes symphonic plays. The quiet intervals recharge energetically the exhausting conversations but, simultaneously, enhance the imprecise threat. Even when they keep quiet, the protagonists attack each other or get ready to strike back if necessary. Mutual understanding and confidence are illusions. Because of the high-pitched tension, nobody pays real attention to the external present-day events. The ensuing effect is an all-embracing alienation. In *Landscape* beings are taken for objects and then degraded:

> Beth: I've watched other people. I've seen them.
> *(pause)*
> All the cars zooming by. Men with girls at their sides. Bouncing up and down. They're dolls. They squeak.
> *(pause)*
> Al the people were squeaking in the hotel bar. The girls had long hair. They were smiling.

<div align="right">(Pinter: 182)</div>

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Because of this abstract-mindedness, nobody is able to master their fresh memories. It is only the remote, happy times that are embedded in their high-definition memory. In *Silence* Ellen admits that: 'often it is only half things I remember, half things, beginnings of things.' (*ibid.* 204). Having no common remembrances, the characters communicate in instalments. Between these instalments there is silence or daydreaming. The former is toxic most often than not, as Michael Billington perceives it: 'Silence as a weapon of control' (Billington 2007: 57). *Silence*, staged in 1969, is a series of crisscrossed monologues delivered by a three-character cast: Ellen, Rumsey and Bates. Such talkative 'silences' are made possible with the help of 'repetition and incantation' (Schneiderman 1988: 187). The dialogue is a failure because the characters expect nothing more from the present; they 'evoke the past by recalling visual images of idealized harmony and security for regressive or compensatory reasons' (*ibid.* 188). This defeatist attitude is characterized by Leo Schneiderman as a 'pattern of oedipal-defeat-without-a-battle' (*ibid.* 193). The same researcher considers that Pinter belongs 'to the fraternity of Beckett and Ionesco, whose male protagonists are beyond the reach of maternal love, romantic passion, or even human charity. These antiheroes are defeated from the start' (*ibid.* 194). Such an utterance should be taken *cum grano salis*. At first sight, the differences between Beckett and Pinter are less conspicuous than the resemblances. However, one thing is sure: Pinter's characters are punished for any slippage into sentimentality. The victim can become torturer if given the chance. Happiness is localised into an intangible past. If Beckett staged the 'failure of the language to mirror "reality"', as Marjorie Perloff considers (Bloom 2010: 18), Pinter staged the failure of confronting reality and the twisted functionality of objects. Stanley in *The Birthday Party* is offered a drum, although he pretends

to have been a pianist. The drum is a military, harsh instrument. It commands discipline, strictness and aggression. Objects in Harold Pinter's theatre are an opportunity to transmit ideas, desires or threats. The victim is the one who fails to correctly interpret the language of objects and of details. There is an unexploited ore in terms of the theatre of violence which should be exploited in the future.

NOTES

1. *'inegalabila frumusețe pe care o capătă un obiect lipsit, la origine, de orice calități estetice, dar care știe să rămână în limitele lui funcționale orice s-ar întâmpla în juru-i'* (Nedelciu 1999)

2. *'acest secol în care obiectele arată altfel, sunt în schimbare de rol, voce și funcție' (ibid. 47)*

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Steps to Parnassus: Stage and Agency in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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Abstract

Theatre pays a lofty price for the sake of Prospero's omniscience and the subsequent logic of events revealed in *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's choice of showing certainties in the manner of the magic theatre dismisses the ethic and the aesthetic of catharsis, and sweeps fate away from the dramatic stage. In Shakespeare's last major play, the denomination of the present is always determined by dynastic interests: the errors and terrors of the past command that the future be always held in check. Such poetic, theatricalized formula of a representative certainty is given at The Whitehall, together with *The Tempest*'s first representation in front of King James, in the form of a pervasive, insidious *as if:* Prospero's island is a fiction meant to make visible a new strategy of power for the ruler's third eye, it scaffolds a private theatre for the aristocrat - with no other rooms for public participation except for the remote gallery.

Keywords

Winter's Tale, Theater, Prospero, Northrop Frye, Jonathan Hart, Couliano, Magic, Andrei Zlatescu

Northrop Frye's reads *The Tempest* as a late romance, in which Shakespeare creates amenities for a different theatrical space. First, Frye writes, the play can be read as Shakespeare's exit from the world of theater, a play where Prospero's magic should be read as Shakespeare's metaphorical farewell to a stage of invention. Uncommonly short and displaying a strict unity of times, the folio could be read as an unconventional mystery-play, where the language of magic celebrates peculiar religious rites. *The Tempest's* alleged strangeness, Frye seems to imply, might have seemed a common thing to the seventeenth century audience, who lived 'in a more intellectually tidied up world than ours,'(Frye 1986: 8) a psychological climate that still took the earth as 'the center of the whole cosmos' and nature as 'intimately related to man' (*ibid.* 8). *The Tempest* is matchless heteroclite experiment, a stage- play where 'the illusion of reality and the reality of illusion' (*ibid.* 12) are generated within the same

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rhetorical figure. _The Tempest_, Frye writes, 'is more haunted' (_ibid._ 178) with the passage of time than any other play. As a meta-theatrical magician, illustrating the playwright's condition, Prospero has to watch time intimately. Tragic, evil, and comic actions, all bound to their own pulses are all subdued to this greater meaning of temporality, which regulates its pace in accord with Prospero's occult work of re-establishment as a ruler.

If I were to expand on Frye's argument here, I would say that the Duke of Milan holds the keys of morality and foreknowledge, acting as an art director on stage. He punishes, cures, and dismantles narrative potentials that can be without approximation defined as 'the alternate futures.' In addition, Ariel represses all those virtual outcomes that are not substantial with Prospero's enlightened vision of order. This is what, I assume, inspired Frye to write that _The Tempest_ is a play replenished with 'stopped action' (_ibid._ 179) and temporal switches in a text where the logic of reconciliation has to do away with the potentials of rebellion. In fact, the wavering essence of Neoplatonic nature can partake of metaphorical logic of spatial and temporal transformations on stage – an assumption, which in this case, proves productive for the inventive logic of _denouement:_

> The total effort of Prospero's magic, then, is to transform the Court Party from the lower to the higher aspect of nature, reversing the tragic movement that we found in King Lear. In this stage play, reality and illusion are vacillating, sometimes interchangeable, notions. Illusions as such are not void of formative aspects and, in this contextual exchange, reality 'seems to be merely an illusion of greed' (_ibid._ 182).

Given the reversible course of raw energy and spiritual elevation, nature itself becomes a material in the hands of the wizard-politician, who binds nature in its low potential and releases the island's guardian-spirits only after the shifting course of events on stage has found its resolution. This is what also makes Frye affirm that 'the action of the play is the transformation within nature'. (_ibid._ 180)

In _Theater and World_, Jonathan Hart produced an in-depth analysis of the semantic tensions between the assertions of truth in historical narratives and the ways specific of historical drama. One of the scholar's chief affirmations is that the collation of episodes, time, and temporality in conjunction with the conventions of theatrical representation can bring to the fore different aspects of historical experience. Hart sees the 'generative' vision of history as:

> …a story, a narrative act, an emplotted discourse… The shape of history, the genre it adopts and the effectiveness of its tropes govern its meaning and success. The virtuoso analogical and anecdotal performance gives its new history its narrative drive. Its pleasure becomes its instruction. If there can be no truth, or if truth remains so refractory as to seem darkness invisible, then the delight of the myth seduces the reader into further delights (Hart 1992: 257).

The message expressed by the aging Shakespeare in _The Tempest_, performed on the stages of Whitehall and of the New Globe, seems to inaugurate a new philosophy of outcomes, entirely ascribable to political agency. The reconciliation of government and naturalness are the dream of Hermetic renovation, and this hope corresponds to the aim of occult philosophy, namely the return to a prelapsarian harmony by means of enlightening politics. Thus, if the true action of the play displays such magic alteration within nature, one has to take into account the effects of statesmanship in conjunction with the knowledge of the occult. Aristocratic weddings, such as the occasion for which _The Tempest_ was first staged at Whitehall (1611) are such turning points in the economy of 'the natural,' marking

events in which the world of autocracy can take benefit of the powers of generation. The betrothal Masque in Act IV – presented by the island's spirits led by the three goddesses of the earth, the sky and the rainbow–is a crowning symbol of the plasticity of nature (when) subjected to Prospero's magic power. Ferdinand's mention of 'paradise' is also suggestive for the language of Hermetic reformation, which dreams at a renewal of Creation through spiritual elevation, a new earth adorned with the attributes of heavenly order.

The Tempest's structural oddness did not reside in the presence of a magician king as the main character, but in the distribution of events within their 'magic' framing. To quote Peter Greenaway's opinion, Prospero in *Prospero's Books*, an alleged alter-ego of the playwright himself, a creator and manipulator of figures, 'is the last major role that Shakespeare invented, reputedly, in the last complete play he wrote, and there is much, both in the character and in the play, that can be understood as a leave-taking of the theatre and a farewell to role-playing and the manufacturing of illusion through words' (Greenaway 1991: 9).

The implausible conflict (furnished with the magic spells that Shakespeare evokes in the play) requires from contemporary critical responses awareness of a modern logic of episodes and correspondent narrative agencies. Undoubtedly, the duke of Milan tattooed his lips with cabalistic symbols and sullied his forehead with celestial inks. Visionary and vindictive, his sorcery is essentially an apotropaic act, a wager with time itself, given in the lines of conversion between Prospero's recuperative work and the legitimizing ends of the royal performance. And the inventive techniques devised on stage at either The Whitehall or at The Globe empowered the representation of omniscience as effective differential positioning of 'generative' narrative agents. More explicitly, the *deus ex machina* effect was supported by spectacular feats that involved elaborate backstage aggregations of wheels, ropes and pulleys. As John Demaray emphasizes:

> During the first vision, Prospero is said to be 'on the top (invisible),' that is, in court theatrical terminology, at the highest, most commanding position in the Whitehall scenic heavens wearing iconographic 'weeds' designed to signify invisibility. Apparitional shapes on the stage below – shapes that the iconography implies are subject to the Magus's power, given his 'top' hierarchical position – carry a banquet into view and then, with inviting motions while dancing, beckon the conspirators forward toward false delights which remain out of reach (Demaray 1998: 58).

Still, the manner in which Shakespeare chooses to present Prospero as the legitimate ruler implies the effective re-territorializing of the Duke's prerogatives on the cloudless island. Because the Milanese survivors did not settle as colonizers on the island, Prospero's jurisdiction does not attempt to redeem the whole atoll, neither would it invest excessively in Caliban's potential humanization. After trying to rape Miranda, the monster's presence is tolerated by the princess merely because he chops logs for the fire and brings water from the hidden spring, a secret that Caliban attempts to barter each time he looks for another master.

Significantly, Caliban's betterment no longer preoccupies Prospero after their first educational failure, or maybe Prospero's magic reprisal places the depraved Caliban in the same frame with the drunken jesters, Stephano and Trinculo, secondary characters prone to desecration.

Finally, it is debatable if the monster is left alive to restore again his power over his domain, or, simply to witness the Duke's omnipotence over the inimical Creation. Creeping to and fro on Prospero's island, Caliban delineates the Duke's magic territory, embodying the fate of all those unfaithful to the Prince's protectorate.

In spite of its inherent pact with Neoplatonic causal chains, Prospero's power never abandons itself to ubiquity. As Bruno advised in his *De Magia* (III), 'it is essential that the performer of magic have an active faith and that the subject a passive faith' (passim). The bonding operation becomes possible grace to the bonder's exceptional mastery of his imagination. This is a four-step process, Couliano states; my decision to summarize these stages below reflects my intention to describe the logic of 'remote action' as a ritual in its own right, one that, in this play, penetrates the logic of dramatic coherence: the first [operation of bonding] is fastening the bond or chain [*iniectio seu invectio*], the second is the actual bond itself [*ligatio seu vinculum*], the third is the attraction resulting from it [*attractio*], the fourth is the enjoyment of the object that gave rise to the whole process [*copulatio quae fruitio dicitur*] (Couliano 1987: 96).

Likewise, Prospero's patience will make possible his magic triumph. However, before the magic resolution, his visionary dignity condemns himself to a sovereign immobility, which generates the 'alephic' point of his learnt art of omniscience. He is not, however, to be taken for an indifferent generator of outcomes. Prospero 'loves,' but he does it in his own way, mixing detachment and prevision. Again, Bruno's instructions are relevant: 'The love of the lover is passive, it is a chain, a *vinculum*. [*Est ille qui vincit*]. Active love is something else, it is power active in things and it is this that enchains' (*ibid.* 1987: 86-7).

Nonetheless, in anticipation of the boat's magic renovation, the exiled alchemist had to build a magic atelier: Prospero's cave can be metaphorically described as a Borgesian mirror, reflective and encyclopedic at the same time, an 'alephic' intersection of physical and metaphysical coordinates, bringing to his sight remote worlds. Prior to assuming the role of the judge, he is for now the unworldly seer and charioteer, the '*shasrāksa*' or 'thousand eyed,' reminiscent of either Cabbalistic illuminates or of Eliade's Ouranian sovereign. And, like prince Oberon – prospero's earlier magic alter-ego – The Duke of Milan enjoys unlimited benefits from mastery over the elemental spirits, yet, unlike his nocturnal predecessor, the Duke's motivation to conjure the magic bestiary resides in a provisory note: he will release the airy spirit, sworn to his authority as soon as his justice will come in its proper place, aided by their wizardry (a promise fulfilled in Act V, I, before The Epilogue). Dressed in stylish Venetian garments, apparently self-sufficient, invisible originator of all present and virtual occurrences, Prospero rather prefers to use his alter-ego Ariel's services for celerity, whenever distances limit his direct intervention into the collateral actions of the play.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare relies on Ariel's mercurial ubiquity more than he invests in Prospero's all-encompassing immobility. Ariel's cultural genealogy is ambiguous: he could be a spirit of the English woods, but most likely he originated in the oriental family of djinns, spirits capable of assuming animal forms and putting their magic knowledge in the service of potentates. Not only does Ariel listen to Prospero's orders, but - as a mercurial apparition with some psychopomp attributes (such as celerity, shape-shifting, trans-location in between the intra-mundane and trans-mundane domains, magic guidance and oniric intrusion) – he fulfils Shakespeare's needs as a playwright.

In comparison, Ariel's mischievous cousin, Puck of *The Midsummer Night's Dream* had enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy in thought and movement, and had a better knowledge of human nature: unlike Ariel, Robin - the fiend (Shakespeare's Puck) took active part in judging his victims and enjoyed a distinct theatrical destiny, relegated to his farcical vocation. Acting in sotto voce, or displaying limited mastery over spiritual creatures, Ariel merely acts as a narrative agent between the remote worlds put together on stage: Prospero and Miranda's cave, the wild island, and the cliffs where the Milanese and Napolitan courtiers were pushed by the magic wind.

None of these conjectures would have been possible without his inter-mediation, because Shakespeare assembled his plot around the assumptions of magic. In other words, he did not deliver

a single plausible episode with respect to the classical conventions of classical storytelling – unity of time, place and action – as relegated to the postulations of *thematic unity*, taken as the material of dramatic verity. And if the unities are still there, maybe more so than in any Shakespearean play, yet they are employed as the ligatures of a singular dramatic construct, a last provocation addressed to the Jacobean proto-imperial culture.

Despite its apparent structural unity, *The Tempest*'s narrative reveals that Prospero's logic of magic fully replaces the postulates of the Aeschylean tragedy, which required a dramatic action built in the confines of presence and a dialogue followed by a resolution in accord with the first. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the action as such is no longer held in play by the conflict of the actors: all the local discussions between the dramatic groups illustrate, beyond their dramatic flawlessness, a local determination of Prospero's providential will.

Nonetheless, if Shakespeare disengages the moral positions (taken by the characters present on stage, but always separated by a glass wall) there is no (evident) ontological hierarchy between the human and the fantastic instances dramatized on stage: the struggle between the moral instances of good and evil is determined as the magic war of those who manage the occult against those who are managed by the same magic powers, in a play of values where Shakespeare's recourse to the amoral plasticity of 'bonding' as the operation designed for the institution of religious orders seems the most valid supposition. Shakespeare's tribute to the logic of contiguity institutes a new equilibrium of forces between the present narrative instances and a different stake of theatrical representation.

I will analyze them in the following lines, while attempting to inquire into the possible consequences of such an inversion. Originating in classical tragedy, the classical drama had two traditional tasks: first, to represent a mythical narrative, second, to make the public community recognize itself on stage. In the Aeschylean tragedy the recognition was mediated by the comments of the chorus; in the Elizabethan drama it was either through a common knowledge of the sacred histories, or through public empathy with the characters' evolutions on stage. In both cases, the subject of the play hinted at a mythical past and a common sense of intuition about the moral implications of the history that the characters were continuing and alluding to on stage.

The transcendental value of justice resulted in the confrontation of the two concurrent perspectives: human fate tragically witnessed its non-conformity to the will of the gods. Thus, the drama of human destiny firmly interrogated the unrepresentable will of divinity, yet it rarely represented the Olympian gods other than through the oblique predictions of the prophet and the ascertaining resolutions of the chorus.

Two different layers of objectivity opened the ritual space of identification for the public: the prophet's mediation, which marked the disproportion between the divine perspective over time and the human destiny in history, and the chorus's accompaniment, which, without being able to change the course of the plot, 'is still acting in the drama, but at another level and at another distance from action' (Marin 1984: 68). Still, both functions, that of the choir and that of the prophet, were intended only to express the ontological layers of a dramatized ritual. Tyresias' blind apparitions expressed precisely the limits of a narrative agency that can only express a higher will without distorting the message or altering it through subversion. The choir's lack of power to change the course of events on stage stands at the other end of the ontological platform, since its resolutions always come after the resolution has been fulfilled. Human morality cannot concur with divine predicaments; kings do not raise their tombs on Olympian grounds.

Despite Shakespeare's earlier displacements of dramatic unities, no other dramatic experiment went so far as *The Tempest* in reversing the traditionally confined representative frames, spatial, temporal, or axiological. *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare's extreme heterogeneic experiment, limited its search to

the production of a novel (a romance), which beyond proving the superiority of the dramatic genre over its narrative source, did not launch particular strategies to deal with political power as such.

Originating in Robert Greene's *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* had to bridge two major gaps: spatial remoteness and the temporal lapse, both being overcome by means of the association of miscellaneous episodes written for the same cast of characters. Within a classical situational symmetry that starts in Leontes' misunderstanding, continues in his defiance of the oracle, and ends in his well-deserving repentance, *The Winter's Tale* conventional closure represents Time as a medium of (providential) displacement. Or, to quote Howard Pyle, 'besides stifling critical objections, Time is there simply to pass smoothly ('slide') from one side of the gap to the other' (Pyle, passim). Not only is Time itself cast, but the chorus carries within itself Shakespeare's self-justifying voice, apologizing for having challenged the taboos of the Classical stage: 'Impute me not a crime/ To me or my swift passage that I slide/ O'er sixteen years and leave the growth untried /Of that wide gap, since it is in my power / To overthrow law and in one self-borne hour / To plant and o'erwhelm custom' (IV.1. 4-9).

In this context, the choir's statement might bring forth more than an apology, the apology as an *ars poetica*, a meta-narrative consolation emerging in the very disparity of theatrical representation, stemming from the elapsed time of the dramatic stage. Indeed, Time personified, while not having the power to change the events, represents itself as the proper medium for providential reversals, bringing all the subsequent resolutions under its allegorical umbrella. I am also acknowledging my debt here to Judd Hubbert's suggestion in *Metatheater*…, where he advanced that:

> …in requesting the audience not to impute to the gap a crime, Time appears to hint that the stage need not always abide by mimesis and referentiality, a suggestion that he confirms in boldly asserting the idea of autonomy, either his own or that of theater, including *The Winter's Tale* itself, which owes much of its impact to the overthrow of law and the overwhelming of custom. Finally, 'the one self-born hour' can refer to theatrical time- self generated and self-generating -as opposed to the sixteen-years interval, henceforth relegated with fiction (Hubbert 1991: 108).

Otherwise, the order of time joins the logic of theatre, ascribing the order of events – following Perdita's unexpected survival – to its symbolic legitimacy. 'Natural' closures are no longer possible along this representational artifice: the breaches in time correspond to the gaps in performance, which, in change, require the playwright's fervent allegorization of voices. (This sort of schematization proves unproductive for the relation between the lifetime friends Polyxenes and Leontes – whose sole authenticity relies in the Sicilian's jealous misunderstanding.

The same recipe, along the second part, renders the Arcadian couple implausible and delivers their drama along intertextual clichés, such as Greene's popular novel.) Instead, Time's impersonation grants the character's agency unlimited pre-eminence over the moral course of action. Perdita's sixteen years' moratorium corresponds with her pendency (state of suspension, undecidability) between two fathers, the king and the shepherd, which determines her double-fold evolution on stage: neither princess nor shepherdess, she embodies Flora – bringing to life a bucolic Arcadian landscape populated by decorative pastoral groups.

Not last, Perdita's allegorical cast compensates Hermiona's absence and paradoxically stands for the mother's implausible return 'from the dead.' In dealing with the thematic difficulties of staging a myth, Shakespeare had first to split the scene, to play the plot at

two different levels of theatricality, then to invent two art directors on stage, Camillo and Paulina; finally, the playwright had to recant frames, twisting the initial orders of life and art, by bringing life back to the statue's (already fretting) nostrils. In doing so, Shakespeare showed more than that sculptures and scenic chimeras are both designed to imitate life; he designated mimesis as the pure ground of revelation, and he made the final reversal into a transposition specific to the status of fiction (Hubbert 1991: 127-30).

The Aristotelian 'limitations upon the poet' that require the artist to describe objects as they are, or as they seem or are said to be, is thus challenged in its very essence: transferring meanings *through* poetic confusion, Shakespeare does not close the text within its poetic confines, that is to say, consecrating its intentional allegorical construct, but makes use of poetry to restore the standards of political correctness, which follows, according to Aristotle, 'a different denomination of truth' (*Poetics* 1997: IV. 25).

As a meta-king, Leontes is given complete autonomy in relation to the constraints of plausibility; beyond elaborating his fictions 'from scratch,' *he visualizes his fantasies and tries to impose them on his counselors*; moreover, once his fabulatory potential comes to an end, Leontes, against any norm of decency in penitence, repents with each occasion he is given to restore his moral image, betraying at both sides of the stage his clumsiness in the 'fabric' of vision. Unlike Prospero, who seems to care more for his dynastic line than for his own 'vanity,' Leontes proves at every station of his role to be a victim of his own fantasy, in both its sad and happy occurrences. Furthermore, the Sicilian's fast-footed helpers, Camillo and Paulina, victimize their king to the extent that Leontes is manipulated unto his own benefit, a device that endangers the monarch's moral betterment. What saves Leontes from derision is the alternation of angles, the shifting of focus from distinctive nearness to general illustration and vice-versa–or, in Hubbert's words, 'a stereotypical view of the proceedings, capable of compensating for any deficiency in the narrative' (Hubbert 1991:113).

Finally, once Prospero's visionary interests obtain Ariel's mercurial help, the two poles of the dramatic intrigue and of its moral ending- as England understood the theatre by the late sixteenth century - were subverted and reverted. First, Shakespeare suggests that not only that the Prince is a prophet, but also that the nobleman has the power to revert history's course with the aid of magic instances. And, not accidentally, Prospero's designative position is articulated in the very antinomy of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.

If Oedipus gained and lost his throne from the uncontrollable character of fate, Prospero's visionary capacity appears as the true art of governing, known only by the true. Instead of apologizing in meta-theatrical stanzas for having provoked providence like Leontes, Prospero takes his scenic destiny into his own hands, proposing a different coherence of unities. Here, one can start fathoming the real price that sixteenth-century knowledge paid in exchange for Prospero's omnipotence.

The character Prospero – embodying two traditional poles of the classical tragedy, Tyresias and Oedipus – unifies narrative functions, those of the prophet and the king, that significantly oppose each other in classical tragedy. Oedipus was bound the power of fate through to the prophetic voice of Tyresias, the same predicting voice that had determined that his father, Laius, abandoned Oedipus as a child. In the Sophoclean tragedy, the unrepresentable character of fate made possible *narration*, while the elucidation of the human passions involved in the plot conformed to the metaphysical commandments of the oracle. The prophet appeared at the turning points of intrigue as an arbiter of Chronos: his task was to circumscribe the representable causes of human actions to the ungraspable reasons of the

divine will, thus linking the temporal sequence of moments with their connoted moral ends. In classical tragedy, the denotation of moments from the beginnings to the end of the play was announced and held by the apparitions of the blind prophet, whose indexical-finger kept and turned the pages in the right order.

And the right order, as we know from Aristotle's *Poetics,* always transcended the story presented on stage: the cathartic effect – pity and terror – is aroused by the spectacle of a man who 'is not pre-eminent in virtue and justice, and yet on the other hand does not fall into misfortune through vice and depravity, but falls because of some mistake, one among the number of the highly renowned and prosperous, such as Oedipus (Aristotle's *Poetics*, Epps' translation 1942: II. 11).

Subsequently, the Aristotelian catharsis is generated by the spectator's revelation of transcendental justice, a justice that 'was always there,' having the power to anticipate, determine the manifestation of and bring to a close the inherent mistakes of human acts. In Shakespeare's play, however, Prospero is both the victim and the redeemer of his own situation: he provokes actions that he has already programmed in his magic atelier, he brings to an end situations that he has already forecasted.

Nonetheless, within this programmatic heresy, Shakespeare challenges the classical rules of 'probability' and 'necessity' for the reign of an episodic arbitrariness, exclusively mastered by the-one-character's omniscience; finally the plot is no longer stretched 'beyond its natural possibilities, but, as part of a new normative, it is defined against the possibility of any 'naturalist' sequence (against *vraisemblance*).

The order of wonder competes with the order of nature: as *natura naturata*, the work of art as a meaningful imitation of nature abandons the traditional stage of mimesis for the modern age of representation that worships anew *natura naturans*, celebrating the demiurgic power of poetry, and discovering fairness within its poetic determination. Not only does Prospero create his own justice, he stands as the only source of legitimacy for the 'poetic justice' (a term proposed by Hart 1992: 15, 18-9) the Duke brings at his hand through the staging of mythological masquerades.

In the symbolic reversal of roles with *Fate*, Prospero becomes the unique knower, yet his knowledge knows only about its-own-self and brings each exterior viewpoint towards verisimilitude with its own: in this sense it owns – both its prerogatives as well as those to whom they are addressed.

Nevertheless, the absorption of functions that Prospero embodies produces a second paradox: Prospero does not belong to the time of his determinate condition as a shipwrecked, hopeless prince, he masters time and, implicitly, fate along his magic traces, being able to provoke his second coming into power.

Being a generator of events, he chooses to manipulate their course not only around his political enemies, but against Aristotle himself. *The Tempest*'s magic injunction suspends the 'real time' of the drama (as *vraisemblance*), imposing the virtual tempo of the magic spell: on the desert island garments stay new, plotters betray themselves in sleep, and Ariels are constantly at work, ready to take Sebastian and Antonio's daggers from their hands. In the disguise of Aeschylean theatre, a new principle of order articulates chronologically simultaneous moments: that of the sliding doors, namely the narrative agent's (Ariel, in this case) power to navigate to and fro – which is 'to pollinate,' to synchronize and to bring to a common end apparently disparate narratives (in the twentieth century, the formula was rediscovered by Hermann Hesse in *Steppenwolf*).

Shakespeare's last major play, one of the strangest dramatic works of its epoch, might be better deciphered when analyzed in relation to its exceptional festive destiny. Elizabeth Stuart's engagement to Frederick V Elector Palatine, the inheritor of the Bohemian crown, was such a unique occasion where the language of the occult philosophy was employable within the rhetorical figures of a political allegory, one that would be read by a contemporary anthropologist as a lesson in charismatic leadership. Given the encomiastic context, Shakespeare's scenic 'demonstration' needs to operate with symbolic paradoxes, considering that the said engagement branded a political alliance between royal houses with common interests, but different 'metaphysical agendas.'

Thus, *The Tempest's* unique styling can be understood as a result of a series of hazardous circumstances that can make the first productions of this play part of a theory of 'rare events,' where none of the traditional hermeneutic branches can give a satisfactory account of the play's hybridness. Here, the dependence upon former rhetorical and esthetic contexts becomes scanty, and originality needs to be defined as part of an innovative axiology, which justly places *The Tempest* within a complex hermeneutical and historical framework, based on the quasi-absence of historical truth and on the subsequent replenishment of the social need for meaning in the substitutive presence of the Protestant Crown's restorative glamour.

The Tempest's representational effect is meant to astonish the spectator, to embarrass the viewer for trespassing in the sovereign's magic atelier: the play refuses the spectator any possibility of identification with the shipwrecked sailors, nor would it allow the viewer's identification with Prospero. *The Tempest* articulates itself as a comedy of manners at the margins and as a drama of mysteries at the center. The implausibility of Prospero's apparitions could only amplify his mystery: for the aristocrat, the play furnishes a dramatic model for a new mythology of power, based on the remote management of symbolic prerogatives.

The Tempest brings on stage more than a theatre of the Prince's enlightened justice of absolution, the *futuribles*. It is the showing of a representational space where the future itself can be programmed and channeled through the art of politics, one that predicts that advent of modern media: on Prospero's planet, knowledge no longer searches for origins, but for effects of illusion towards unequivocal political targets.

My own analysis has suggested that the absolutist designs can be taken as alternative 'emplacements' displayed for a world that needs to know its political authorities by the 'magic' attributes of sovereignty, this is to say through the typical superlatives of sacredness manifest in the process of historical understanding. *The Tempest* brings resolution as reparation of an initial lack and makes reparation depend on the prince's *passe-partout* keys. Moreover, this resolution collapses the two narratives of myth and history into a single dramatic figure: the leader's omnipresent body, *un roi machine*, a terrifying, autonomous semiotic machine with demiurgic traits. In Shakespeare's second Globe, the seizure between conflict and its metaphysical background announced the theatrical age of politics and the modern ascendancy of the media, a modernity whose esthetic and proactive rearrangement of reality into pre-definite semantic nichés aims for the fashioning of social imagination in agreement with the agency of power.

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Raging Voices From the Wild East: the 'In-Yer-Face' Influence in Central And Eastern European Theatre

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Abstract

This essay explores the influence of the Royal Court Theater's aesthetic of the 1990s – commonly referred to as 'In-Yer-Face' using the coinage of Aleks Sierz – on the theatrical productions of Central and Eastern Europe. Referred to as 'New Drama', 'New Wave' and even 'New European Drama' the decade-long period starting from the late 1990s saw a shared interest in micro-sociality and quotidian life, irreverently decked with the shock-effect elements of crime, drug abuse and spiritual impoverishment. The article traces the cultural antecedents of the violent aesthetic in Central and Eastern Europe, such as the critical *Volksstück* in Germany, and the *chernukha* genre in Russia, arguing that the flamboyant theatricality inherent in the plays under discussion signals a unique relationship to the representation of violence on stage.

Keywords

New Drama, violence, In-Yer-Face, critical *Volksstück*, *chernukha*.

SETTING THE SCENE

In Peca Ştefan's 2009 play *Wire and Acrobats*, a young Romanian playwright meets with an American producer who wants to commission a play. Emil, the writer, is trying to pitch a diaphanous idea about a love story, a play 'about dreams'. Two lovers who can only communicate through song' (9). Only, this doesn't go with the planned festival entitled *Raging Voices from the Wild East*, and slowly and deftly the producer channels Emil into including 'fights with the gypsy mafia, fights with parents, prostitution, blood and death (9).' 'OK. OK. We have something here,' concludes the producer, 'Romeo and Juliet against the background of a changing Romania. This sells. A social realistic play. […] Like an Eastern *Shopping and Fucking*'(9). As Emil, a thinly veiled dramatization of Peca himself, tries to vocalize, by 2009 the producer's guidelines for plays from Eastern Europe had become overly familiar, and even clichéd.

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Referred to as the Central and Eastern European version of the British 'In-Yer-Face' brand of theater, exported through the influence of Royal Court workshops, residencies, mentorships and grants, the texts written by young playwrights from the region during the decade-long period starting from the late 1990s gained visibility under various denominators such as 'New Drama', 'New Wave' and even 'New European Drama'. Its chief characteristics are the portrayal of micro-sociality and quotidian life, especially from the world of youth culture, irreverently decked with the shock-effect elements of crime, drug abuse, spiritual impoverishment and a lush display of violence, manifested from the language itself, to the stomach-churning acts depicted on stage. *'Die starke Stücke'* as it is sometimes referred to in Germany, spawned considerable scandals in the popular press, incurring accusations of the cheap portrayals of irrational violence. As the antagonisms have often fallen along the demarcations of young playwrights and directors versus the theatrical establishment, 'New Drama' carries a flavor of generational struggle, servicing and gaining followers from a young audience.

To the detractors of the 'movement', if it can be called that, the violence always seemed tactless and gratuitous, and they accused young playwrights of childish tantrums, of following empty trends only for their commercial value, and of mindlessly copying external influences, mostly of the Royal Court brand. In *Wire and Acrobats*, Peca Ştefan sardonically comments on the detrimental aspects of the theater market demanding the ingredients of violence for the Eastern European drama recipe. While in the early 2000s, Peca was a leading voice of the Romanian branch of 'Generation Angst', by 2009 he recognized that everything that was new once eventually gets old, and seems especially moribund when it enters the mainstream art market and is celebrated in festivals such as *'Raging Voices from the Wild East'*.

But to judge the best products of 'New Drama' by the worst examples, as some critics do, by the countless imitations of angry violent scenarios once it became established as a trend, doesn't do justice to the authentic stances behind the original phenomenon.

CASE STUDIES

'Best of' examples include *Fireface* by Marius von Mayenburg (one of the first plays to be written in the genre in Central Europe), Przemyslaw Wojcieszek's *Made in Poland*, *Plasticine* by Vassily Sigarev and *Dead Dad* by Milena Bogavac. All of these plays had a great impact in their respective countries – Germany, Poland, Russia and Serbia – with productions that entered theatre history (at least the post-1989 chapter). None was written later than 2004 (*Made in Poland* and *Dead Dad*), with *Plasticine* being produced in 2002 and *Fireface* as early as 1997. The four scripts have more in common than the unabashed display of physical and verbal violence. Besides the use of street slang and compulsive swearing, and the portrayal of sexual abuse, deviant behavior and physical destruction, all four plays are basic coming-of-age stories about teenagers unable to cope with a perverse society. An eerie *esprit du temps* casts its evil eye, corrupting the smallest societal unit, the family, hence crowning the juvenile delinquent the hero of the stage.

These plays make for a good illustrative set, yet many others have been cast in the same mold, forming a veritable genre of deranged family dramas pitting elders against their offspring, which can trace its ancestry to Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*. Other contemporary examples run from Dea Loher's *Adam Geist* and *The Sexual Neuroses of our Parents* by Lukas Barfuss, to Biljana Srbljanovic's *Family Stories: Belgrade* and Bela Pinter's *Queen of the Cookies*, to Peca Ştefan's *Romania 21*. A simple enumeration makes the breadth of the 'genre', or 'trend' to use a word of lesser impact, obvious. The youth of the playwrights is another ingredient of this regional phenomenon, explaining in part the attraction to the coming-of-age scenario, and bringing to mind the dictum that first novels (or plays in our case) almost invariably run on an autobiographic engine, however fictionalized.

In *Fireface,* Kurt awakens to the first stirrings of his budding sexuality only to consummate it, repeatedly and with messianic fervor, with his sister Olga. Manifesting a complete lack of communication skills and a tendency to cut himself off from the world that gradually makes him renounce speech altogether, Kurt spends his time getting better and better at his one hobby: setting things on fire. From concoctions used to char the neighbor's cat, to those capable of blowing buildings into pieces, Kurt's talent escalates out of control. Not even burning his own face while putting together one of his homemade explosives can stop him. When things get so bad that even his partner in crime Olga starts to turn against him, he murders their parents.

Plasticine begins with the funeral of a boy who has killed himself, and whose ghost will haunt his schoolmate and central character Maksim for the rest of the play, encouraging him to join the dead. Sigarev's play portrays one long series of abuses suffered by Maksim, eventually molding the gentle soul of the hero into hardened delinquency. At the hands of teachers, neighbors and random thrill-seekers, including his best friend Lyokha, Maksim undergoes a martyrdom of verbal abuse, incessant beatings and heartless rape scenes. While the play ends with Maksim being dangled from a window, cutting off before we know whether he is murdered or not, at that moment he is certainly dead inside.

Bogus, the Polish youth in Wojcieszek's play, has a big tattoo on his forehead reading FUCK OFF in Gothic letters. His favorite pastime is strolling around armed with a baseball hat smashing up cars, telephone booths and everything else that makes a loud bang, while screaming 'Wake up, sons of bitches, wake up!' When he recklessly trashes the car of some mafia big shots, the real smashing begins.

Gang wars and mindless violence form the daily reality of fifteen-year-old girl Mali, the main character in Bogavac's *Dear Dad*, leaving her terrorized, irremediably scarred and broken forever. A murder at a soccer match, almost laughable in its stupidity, gets pinned on Mali's older brother, a twenty-something who supports his sister and their alcoholic mother on the proceeds of selling drugs. The real murderer, an old 'friend', the inherently aggressive Crni, uses and abuses Mali to get to her brother. By the end of the play, some are dead, some are in jail, and Mali is left in a correctional institution with nothing to hold on to.

OVERVIEW OF CRITICAL DEBATE

A sonorous voice excoriating such plays is that of the Croatian critic Sanja Nikcevic, who convincingly argued her views in a talk entitled *'How to Impose Violence as a Trend'* at the Congress of the International Association of Theatre Critics, held in Sofia, Bulgaria in 2008. Nikcevic exposes a narrative that locates the origin of 'New European Drama' in the influence of the Royal Court Theater in London. Finding no inherent literary or dramatic merit in the 'In-Yer-Face' plays, Nikcevic argues that the success of works such as *Blasted*, *Phedra's Love* and *Shopping and Fucking* is due to their shock value and the fierce debate they ignited, which propelled theater into the mainstream media – a rare occurrence. Kane guaranteed scandal, and hence publicity. Besides the subsequent Royal Court workshops organized in various Central and Eastern European countries, and the generous artists' residencies and exchanges with freshly democratic countries after the dissolution of the Iron Curtain, the most important factor for this violent trend to achieve wider European impact, according to Nikcevic, was its acceptance in Germany.

Part Two of Nikcevic's account latches on to Thomas Ostermeier's career at Die Baracke, the small venue of Deutsches Theater Berlin, where he staged 'In-Yer-Face' plays, gaining a coterie of fans who delighted in outrage and in venting their antagonism against an older, appalled, generation. As the trend travels eastwards, with the baton being taken up by Warlikowski and Jarzyna in Poland, Nikcevic continues to foreground the market value of violent plays and their role in a strategic intergenerational struggle where they serve to propel the careers of young theater makers.

To deflate any claims by the 'violent trend' to social and political relevance, Nikcevic argues that by showing a world devoid of any moral standards where humanity has depleted itself, one in which violence becomes 'the only possible way of communication, and pain the only real feeling'[1], 'New European Drama' stands as apolitical and pro-capitalist because it serves up an inherently violent human being for our entertainment, and offers no path to change. By commercializing and magnifying violence, the 'neo-brutalist' plays 'abolish the situation of injustice' (60) and contribute to maintaining and propagating the evils of society. At its worse limits, the public becomes inured to violence, and aggression on stage loses significant content to the point where you 'have to have rape, murder, suicide and drugs on stage to be modern' (59). When the theater market demands violent ingredients, the situation is bleak, as Peca Ştefan hints in *Wire and Acrobats*.

REALISM VS. THEATRICALISM

Undeniably, there is the danger of sensationalizing and commercializing violence on stage for the purpose of satisfying an appetite for disturbing entertainment. After a decade-long exploration of explicit content on stage, with depictions of crass violent and sexual acts, the impact wears off and the public consumes it passively, or even enjoys it. As its market value rises, it automatically loses any political or social relevancy. It comes as no surprise, then, that just when mainstream producers welcome New Drama with open arms, playwrights themselves feel it is time to move into different territory. As always, theater institutions lag behind theater makers.

That being said, Nikcevic's approach remains one-sided. If market forces play a role in theater production, so do theater artists. If the Royal Court influence is hard to omit from the discussion, the magnitude and sense of urgency with which violence was embraced on the continent means that it resonated with local realities. Nikcevic gives little consideration to the plays themselves, to their social contexts, or to how and where they fit into local theater histories.

Nikcevic groups together all New Drama plays under a generic typology of realism. To support the claim styling the trend as realism, meaning the calculated and deliberate mimetic 'mirroring' as faithfully as possible of the surrounding world in a stage reproduction, Nikcevic quotes Thomas Ostermeier. The German director once declared he was 'searching for new writing for theatre' that would be able to express 'new realism'. Another quote is lifted from an interview with Sarah Kane: 'From the beginning we decided to present violence as realistically as possible.' Putting Kane's assertion into context though, it's revealed that she is referring to the ending of *Phedra's Love*, which indulges in the interminable, exacerbated mutilation of bodies. Portraying such an intensified, almost surreal scene in a hyper-earnest realistic manner avoids the danger of falling into the ridiculousness of liters of fake blood by conveying a self-ironizing veneer, in which something from a Goth animation strip is represented live on stage in all seriousness. The intended result is not realism, but a self-conscious realistic effect.

Scratching the surface of the so called 'new realism' reveals a highly metatheatrical genre underneath, always conscious of its own artifice. Its impulse is to reflect fundamental aspects of contemporary society, but the dramatic, exaggerated manner of representation points to the desire to sound the alarm, to scream warnings and to depict on stage the worst possible scenarios as an expression of deep anxiety about the future. The urgency of the message justifies the extreme measures by which it is delivered. The charge that New Drama is apolitical and pro-capitalist misunderstands the writers' intention, which is not to faithfully copy the surrounding reality on stage, but to comment upon it. They do not offer a vision of human nature as fundamentally and intrinsically violent and hence unchangeable, but of a world where violence dictates our environment. In *Dead Dad*, Mali's life is battered into shape by the surrounding war: her father runs away to avoid conscription, and her mother, left with two

small children to care for, resorts to prostitution. None of the protagonists – Kurt, Bogus, Maksim or Mali – is inherently deviant, but they are produced and aborted by their society. If the subject matter of these plays is realist or naturalist, their dramaturgy isn't. *Fireface*, *Made in Poland*, *Plasticine* and *Dead Dad* all carefully establish metatheatrical frames, signaling to the audience the way they should be perceived: as parables, illustrations of anti-utopias and alarm signals.

Mayenburg built *Fireface* out of short scenes with quick, sharp dialogue in telegraphic style, interspersed with introspective, ruminative monologues. The alternation between 'close ups' and 'long shots' is a dramaturgical strategy illustrating the desire of investigation, of composing a fictionalized account in a cool documentary style to reveal how young students can enter their schools one normal day and murder in cold blood whomever crosses their path.

The play attempts to understand the environment that produces the child terrorist, the kid who goes to school with a shotgun. Kurt's epistemological uncertainty and moral relativism in his incapacity to set boundaries reaches cosmic proportions and demands an apocalypse of renewal. The non-realist framework is reinforced by the sheer grotesqueness present from the very first page (Kurt remembering his own birth) to the obvious exaggeration of 'realist' occurrences. When the mother has her period, the whole bathroom is drenched in blood.

The irony and sarcasm of Wojcieszek's *Made in Poland* have the same distancing effect, pushing away from realist emotional identification into the morality play mode of analytical spectatorship. Exchanges such as these endearingly mock the 'rebel without a cause' stance: 'We have to revolt, we have to destroy everything! / Revolt against who? / Against everybody. / I don't know, that's a bit vague' (Wojcieszek 2004: 205). Conscious of its own sensationalism, the script toys with pastiche and offers a cocktail of pop culture. The gangsters copy Hollywood stereotypes, Bogus himself being a diminutive version of Brad Pitt in *Fight Club*. Bogus's two guardian angels – a teacher and a Catholic priest – could hardly be more symbolic for a Polish audience.

Sigarev's play is constructed around an overarching metaphor of 'plasticine', of getting molded into shape, and of the ways in which the environment distorts individuals. The play begins with one of the eerie scenes in which Maksim, like Kurt, experiments with clay and explosive concoctions. The recurrent Anarchist's Cookbook scene, and the dead boy haunting the play, should be enough to indicate that Sigarev is not emptily indulging in or condoning violence, but illustrating the hypocrisy and putrefaction of society, warning against its corrupting effects on children. Terrorism comes from the terror within. As to the linguistic violence of the play, in the Preface to *Performing Violence*, critic and translator Sasha Dugale points out the original effect: 'the obscenity of the language is also so extreme and heightened that in Russia's linguistically conservative theater tradition it seems grotesque, and even stylized' (Beumers and Lipovetski 2009: 21) Some of the play's artificiality gets lost in translation.

In *Dear Dad*, Bogavac carefully avoids cheap sentiment and realistic psychological drama. The stage directions ask for a minimal set, with walls covered in postcards, and occasional projected images of touristy, idyllic pictures of Belgrade. The real substance and subject matter of the play reside in the dissonance between Mali's dreams and her actuality, creating a theatricalist gap in which Mali can recite the numerous postcards addressed to her father through which she expresses her deepest emotions, fears and hopes.

The neo-realism of 'New Drama' unmasks the theatricality and artificiality of realism itself. The plays consciously expose and deflate realism through the virtuoso depiction of deranged individuals carrying out or suffering extreme violent acts, and intentionally betray realism through imperfections, irony, exaggeration and the magnification of effects. The playwrights aestheticize reality and its inherent violence. If Aristotle defined drama not as a reflection of how things are, but as they ought to be, these plays show things as they threaten to become.

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

As to the presumably overpowering influence of Royal Court violent aesthetics, one must point out that the success of Sarah Kane in Germany and Eastern Europe is at least partly due to similar local dramatic traditions, and to the timeliness of the introduction of 'In-Yer-Face' micro-sociality aesthetics. The impulse to unmask the truth of the quotidian lives of impoverished individuals behind the bombastic ideology of progress still upheld by communist regimes had been lurking in the shadows and waiting to erupt ever since the Perestroika era.

As early as 1986, a play like *Chicken Head* by Gyorgy Spiro brought a massive shift of style, mood and intentionality to the Hungarian stage. By portraying the penurious lives of a motley assortment of Everymen and Everywomen cooped up together in a typical living compound of rationed flats, and weaving a story of disillusionment delivered in 'unliterary' street language, Spiro was at the avant-garde of a revolutionary change.

In Soviet Russia too, writers of both plays and fiction such as Venedikt Yerofeev and Ludmila Petrushevskaya, who set their work in the present, dissecting it with satire and irony, were not necessarily published, but were increasingly read and fervently consumed through the samizdat 'press', achieving cult figure status. In *Overkill. Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Culture*, Eliot Borenstein talks about the *chernukha* genre of the late 1980s through the 1990s manifested in film and literature and characterized by 'the pessimistic, naturalistic depiction of and obsession with bodily functions, sexuality (usually separated from love), and often sadistic violence, all against a backdrop of poverty, broken families, and unrelenting cynicism' (Borenstein 2004: 16). An argument could be made that behind the Russian branch of New Drama lies the adoption of the *chernukha* genre by the theater, with the typical delay of the dramatic practice in adopting new styles. In explaining the allure of grim *chernukha* (from *chernyi* meaning black), Borenstein links it with an impulse towards social betterment by exposing and magnifying the truth: '*chernukha* functioned within a profoundly MORAL context, magnifying and exaggerating society's ills with the purpose of correcting them' (*ibid.* 19). These plays cannot escape their political relevance by portraying and inherently commenting on issues such as crime and poverty.

Interest in the common individual in everyday social environments gained momentum towards the late 1990s. Such a different aesthetic from the metaphorical style of the previous generation was sometimes consciously antagonistic. The everyday stood in contrast with the abstract, absurdist, mythological vein. An interesting parallel can be drawn between the strand of political engagement of the Bertolt Brecht-Heiner Müller type, fashioned on the macro-scale of Marxist thought and historical dialectics, and often drawing blood from mythological and literary sources, with the micro-politics of portraying private lives. From this perspective, another debt of influence of 'New Drama', this time of German origin, can be identified in the critical *Volksstück*.

Originally a populist genre, as its name indicates, the *Volksstück* denoted plays written for the common people at a time when divides between high and low culture were unwavering. In the twentieth century, by adding the adjective 'critical', the *Volksstück* started referring to socially minded plays that examined the lot of the common people. Susan Cocalis analyzes the critical *Volksstück* in an essay included in Sue Ellen-Case's anthology of German women playwrights, *The Divided Home/Land*. The appropriation and refining of the *Volksstück* in its critical embodiment was initiated by Odon von Horvath and Marieluise Fleißer in the 1920s, explains Cocalis, as an alternative to Brecht's recipe for artistic intervention in the political realm fashioned on the macro-level. In contrast, Fleißer depicted family relationships and quiet individual lives to unmask the oppression of ideology. The focus shifts to the domestic realm, yet at the same time the playwriting aims at an overarching political critique of the whole system.

Susan Cocalis sets precise demarcations of the genre. In the aforementioned essay first published in 1981, Cocalis reduces the genre to 'certain contemporary, socially critical West German plays written in dialect, cant or media jargon and treating the problems of the common people' (106). With a unified dramatic action (as opposed to post-modernist playwriting), the critical *Volksstück* tends to focus 'on the authority patterns in families, instances of moral rigidity, intolerance, servility, and obsessive concern with virility and sexual dominance' (109). The intention is to 'deliberately shock the audience through the deployment of brutal, violent, or obscene acts, which it would present as the truly natural, and thus sincere, basis for everyday life' (113). In summation, the main characteristics of the critical *Volksstück* are common lower-class characters, naturalistic use of everyday speech patterns, and ultrarealistic slices of private life in graphic detail. Cocalis paints a picture of a deeply violent realism, unmasking through the minutiae of the everyday all the sordid details of relationships reduced to a sub-human level. The political impact hits obliquely: 'the total absence of any political message in a brutally realistic work could be construed as a political statement in itself, insofar as it would impel the audience to change an absolutely inhuman world, to be indignant at a society that reduced people to brutality' (119): a realistic picture of everyday violence inciting people to action through indignation.

The recipe sounds bells of recognition, since violence and the everyday are conjoined twins in post-1989 dramaturgy. German playwriting of the 1990s tended towards a theater of micro-politics, depicting domestic stories on a small scale, and human relationships full of unprecedented violence. In the drive to examine social issues through a personal lens, and the interest in the lower end of the social spectrum, post-1989 dramaturgy can be seen as another wave of Marieluise Fleißer-style engaged playwriting.

CONCLUSIONS

While there are general pan-regional characteristics of the return to quotidian subject matter, every country imbues it with local flavors. Vassily Sigarev's brand of 'realism' explodes everyday experience with a poetical language and approach that calls to mind Venedikt Yerofeev's intoxicating accounts, and a *chernukha* impulse of unapologetically exposing the dirt of society with the desire to correct it. Marius von Mayenburg, in portraying everyday violence in glimpses of banal occurrences, traces his debt back to Marieluise Fleißer. Przemyslaw Wojcieszek, writing the funniest play among those discussed here, shows his affinity with the strong tradition of irreverent Polish comedy of Mrozek and Glowacki, tinging his portrayal of the quotidian with absurd details and comedic undertones. Milena Bogavac in *Dead Dad* doesn't let you forget for one instant that her family drama sucks at the sour breast of war, a palpable presence throughout the account.

The Eastern European version of 'In-Yer-Face' theatre had its moments of glory. By the late 2000s, though, the trend had started to wane, and playwrights began exploring different territories. Peca Ștefan's latest project involves site-specific pieces molded on the histories of chosen Romanian cities. Milena Bogavac's recent scripts are intensely experimental. From writing coming-of-age plays, she has moved into the more poetic, fragmented and enigmatic mode of *Gamma Cas* (2009). The everyday and a concern with violence remain of interest, but the dramaturgical approaches have diversified. It is increasingly hard to pin on the 'In-Yer-Face' influence the multiplying styles and themes of Central and Eastern European theater.

NOTES

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Politics as Comic-cum-Tragic 'Emplotment' in Molière's *Tartuffe*

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Abstract
Molière's *Tartuffe* falls squarely within the realm of politics. Absolute monarchy is the assertion of the divine right of kings, and theories of divine right which persisted in Western Europe until the French Revolution continued to exist in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia until relatively recent times, making *Tartuffe* an interesting dramatic transcreation. What matters in *Tartuffe* is that the pious Molière may well have been of the devil's party, siding with freethinkers in dismantling excessive piety, and that his final exaltation of a form of absolutism is itself an act of theatrical concealment and simulation in the context of Ludovican France.

Keywords
censorship, absolute monarchy, piety, hypocrisy, impostor, mask

COMIC-CUM-TRAGIC EMPLOTMENT

Molière's *Tartuffe* (1664 -1669), the well-known and fiercely contested play of the *grand classique*, is a comedy in that it has a happy ending. It involves the unmasking and punishment of Tartuffe, the obvious impostor, and it allows for justice to be served as Orgon, the deceived and foolish master, is allowed to keep his home and fortune by grace of the King's intervention.

Tartuffe's unmasking courts laughter and points to the sovereign's magnanimity in the achievement of vindication for Orgon and his bourgeois household: his young and pretty second wife Elmire, his adult son Damis, and especially his daughter Mariane and her lover Valère who are now free to marry each other without the fear of having Orgon give Mariane's hand in marriage to Tartuffe. Even Madame Pernelle, Orgon's humorously intolerant mother, who has been a strong advocate of Tartuffe's virtues and piety, ultimately 'stands aghast' at the latter's treachery and acknowledges him to be a base and vile creature.

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Yet as funny as the play may be in poking fun at religion and in being pointedly praiseful of the king's providential role, the comedy is plainly dark, and Tartuffe's dramatic fall and going to prison are not entirely a laughing matter. Nor can alert spectators take great comfort from the monarchic agency that abruptly brings about justice not only in punishing the impostor but also in forgiving Orgon for having kept in his home the compromising papers that a friend had entrusted in his care.

More to the point, the subtle criticism of Tartuffe's 'spiritual correctness' and the twist in the play's ending, which highlights patriarchal monarchy through the sovereign's benevolent actions, are not just moral; they are expressly *political* in that *Tartuffe* is an allegorical staging meant to undermine the absoluteness of Louis XIV's monarchy and the endemic Christian renewal precisely by magnifying the conflicts the play tries comically to resolve. Mentioned only once in the end, when his intervention restores the natural order the diabolical power disrupts, the King is endowed with godlike powers and deploys a panoptic power of vision. He punishes the wicked Tartuffe and, through the 'state of exception,' absolves Orgon for the crime of keeping under his roof compromising documents. Yet not all is well in spite of this reassuring finale, as the focus of *Tartuffe* seems to be truth and performance in unraveling the play's puzzles.

TARTUFFE AND THE PROFESSION OF HYPOCRISY

A master of deception, Tartuffe appears to be the embodiment of some of the most despicable vices. The great Mikhail Bulgakov sees him as 'the most complete and consummate swindler, liar, scoundrel, informer, and spy – a hypocrite, lecher, and seducer of other men's wives.' However, no matter how manipulative and dishonest Tartuffe may be, he is not the only character in the play who wears the mask of hypocrisy. After Orgon learns that Tartuffe has been deceiving him, he is told by Cléante, his brother-in-law, to learn to 'strip off the mask and learn what virtue means.' Orgon is clearly displaying a public mask of piety recognizable in the days when 'directors of conscience' like Tartuffe were installed in private homes to ensure conformity to Catholic doctrine in the days subsequent to the Frondes, when all the French bourgeois were expected to serve Louis XIV 'with wise and loyal heart.' Similarly, Elmire uses deception when warning Orgon that she will put on a mask of false passion with Tartuffe in order to 'lure this hypocrite to drop off his mask' and show his true intentions. Hiding and eavesdropping to protect the interests of her mistress Mariane, the feisty servant Dorine wears various masks, such as the one whose role is to remind young lovers how the world really works. And Mariane takes for granted that a woman is expected to wear the mask of indifference with a man she loves in order to conceal her true desire for him. She tells Dorine:

> But if I show defiance to a parent,
> Won't my love for Valère be too apparent?
> Shall I give up, for all his charms and beauty,
> The modesty that is a woman's duty?

Finally, when Valère and Mariane argue foolishly as they try to preserve feminine modesty and masculine pride, respectively, they attempt to conceal their feelings from each other for, as Valère tells Mariane:

> To show our love for one who's turned us down
> Is to be both a coward and a clown.

And how about Damis, Orgon's impetuous and immoderate son? Why is so keen on establishing Tartuffe's erotic designs on Elmire by hiding in her closet to spy on him? Could it be that his overly

protective behavior is only a mask hiding that he is head over heals in love with his step mother? Even the gullible Orgon acknowledges that possibility when he tells Elmire later on:

> Madame, I know a few plain facts,
> And one is that you're partial to my rascal son.

Tartuffe has been with the family long enough to know all their intimate secrets, including the very serious one of Orgon's concealment of the letters from an enemy of the King. So Tartuffe also pursues Elmire because he knows that she married Orgon when she was young and clearly does not love him, maybe even cheats on him with her step son. Tartuffe has some of the most moving lines in the play, as he is sincere in his declaration of love for Elmire which he ends by saying:

> It is, I know, presumptuous on my part
> To bring you this poor offering of my heart.
> And it is not my merit, Heaven knows,
> But your compassion on which my hopes repose.
> You are my peace, my solace, my salvation;
> On you depends my bliss – or desolation
> I bide your judgment and, as you think best,
> I shall be either miserable or blessed.

Not only Tartuffe, but Orgon too knows that he is not loved – not by his son, his daughter or his wife. So he turns to Tartuffe and refuses to accept the possibility of betrayal until it becomes obvious. All along, however, Orgon is sincere in his love for Tartuffe, so sincere as to prompt an interpretation dramatized in 1962 by the French director Roger Planchon who argued that in his actions toward Tartuffe 'Orgon is not stupid but profoundly homosexual. It's obvious that he doesn't know it – the play would fall apart if he were conscious of it.' Molière could have conceivably envisioned Orgon as a latent homosexual of whose tendency Tartuffe takes advantage, for homosexuality certainly flourished in seventeenth century France. The man who brought Molière and his troupe to the attention of Louis XIV had been 'Monsieur', the king's younger – and gay – brother. Nonetheless, homosexuality, latent or otherwise, is far from the only explanation for the close attachment between Orgon and Tartuffe.

THE POLITICS OF LUDOVICAN FRANCE

A more plausible, though by no means exhaustive theory, seems related to the historical context. It may be important to mention that at the time Molière wrote *Tartuffe*, after the failure of the Frondes's long years of war (1540-1652) between Roman Catholics and Protestants, increasing pressure was put on all segments of society to conform and serve a central (Catholic) government, which was being built by Cardinal Richelieu. While consolidating his Catholic monarchy, Louis XIV, together with Richelieu's successor, Cardinal Mazarin, proceeded to reign over a 'spiritual correctness' which left little room for independent thinking and maintained the fear of heresy. Regarded as the main danger to national unity, heresy could be defined to be a mild view of Christian morality that looked benignly at human passions and values (theatre going, costly dress, dinner parties, salon chit-chat) as one acceptable view of God's creation – as opposed to an austere and severe view of the same morality which brutally condemned all forms of pleasure and worldliness. In this atmosphere of *police-state* that encouraged the emergence of Catholic brotherhoods, the infamous '*cabale des dévots*,' to enforce Catholic morality through lay directors of conscience like Tartuffe, Molière created the composite portrait of Tartuffe, whose dramatic

persona quite possibly echoed the case of such an individual, Charpy de Sainte-Croix, proven to have taken advantage of the faith of his patron to seduce the man's wife.

CENSORSHIP AND *TARTUFFE*

There is little wonder that censorship and Molière's *Tartuffe* have run hand in hand since the first production of the play, which scandalized ecclesiastical authorities to the point of banning the play for many years. After many trials and hardships that Molière underwent in order to stage the work, he had to rework the play three times over the course of five years before *Tartuffe* could finally be staged. In this context, the king's dismissal of law to pardon Orgon's grave offence in aiding an exiled enemy of the crown brings about ever so subtly the practice of the 'state of exception' and the related decisionist theory of sovereignty (Schmitt, *Political Theology*) which opens with a sentence that has become a shibboleth of Critical Theory: 'Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.' By placing Orgon above the law commoners obey, the King reveals the essential hollowness of the moral and legal order that masks the monarchy's true character and that Molière's *Tartuffe* craftily unveils. The semblance of harmony on which social order depends is a confidence trick. And what makes the trick work is our implicit satisfaction in having justice and order restore the ambiguous equilibrium Tartuffe's character engendered by scandalously breaking its rules to undermine the putatively historical justice of monarchy to which Molière, anxious to have his play staged, ultimately seems to pay homage.

The satisfying vision that the spectators take from *Tartuffe* is the imaginary projection of our at once psychic and ideological investment in not seeing what stares us in the face, i.e., in being complicit with some version of benevolent absolutism. And so Molière contrives to turn comedy into tragedy 'without changing a single word,' because tragedy bears the fruit of comic cunning. *Tartuffe* is both tragedy and comedy, and the one because of the other, displaying our very notions of tragic and comic alike. Absolute monarchy is the assertion of the divine right of kings, and theories of divine right persisted throughout Europe until the French Revolution. What matters in *Tartuffe* is that the 'pious' Molière may well have been of the devil's party, siding with freethinkers in dismantling excessive piety that had fallen into social disgrace after the official suppression of Catholic brotherhoods like La Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement by the Paris Parliament in 1660, but that he cannot ultimately refrain from exalting a form of absolutism. The play teaches us that the King as the *deus ex machina* is essential in the context of Ludovican France as incontrovertible proof of the triumph of good over evil.

Yet, a play like *Tartuffe* also shows that Molière inherited from the upheavals from which Western modernity was born, and that he had the theatre and the mode of experience comic theatre provides. The collective practical experience of putting on a play and the multifaceted negotiations this demands result in the experience of being of one mind in the shared humanity of the theatrical undertaking that *Tartuffe* shrewdly asserts: that in the problematic *denouement* by which the King's divine intervention makes things right on stage, Molière's genius filters the theme, precisely, of hypocrisy, of concealment and simulation which *Tartuffe*, both the play and its author, embodies.

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The Dramatization of the Great Novels

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Abstract
Dramatizing great novels has been a method that theatre practitioners always used in the modern age. Since the development of radio drama, up to postmodernism, adapting novels for stage became a generally accepted practice that large audiences always loved. The article focuses on some of the reasons that motivated its establishment and highlights the role of the story in this complex mechanism, leading to the conclusion that dramatizations may fill up a certain blank spot in the contemporary theatre phenomenon.

Keywords
dramatization, novel, playwright, radio drama, text, director, performing arts

INTRODUCTION

The performing arts practitioners have always been fond of dramatizing important novels. From Fyodor Dostoyevsky to John Steinbeck and from François Rabelais to Mikhail Bulgakov, the stage has proved to be an excellent place for novels to become alive, to turn into theatre. The audience and the theatregoers have an excellent opportunity: the novel can be seen and performed, not only read. This particular method of interpreting the novels and their texts, through the means of theatre and drama, proved widely popular and was an excellent opportunity for the author of the script to highlight specific parts of the complex universe depicted in the novel.

Of course, the reasons for the dramatizations of the great novels are all well known: the desire for staging minor or collateral aspects of the text, the need to emphasize a certain dramatic content of the novel, or the simple and most evident intention to visually illustrate the author's text. All these arguments have always been in a strict and tight correlation to various cultural and artistic variables, which influenced the dramatization and the final 'product' in this chain: the performance.

In this article I will try to concentrate on some details that were less discussed, concerning the reasons and the motivations of the dramatization of the great novels of all time. Furthermore, I will

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explain and prove how the current cultural and artistic context seems to encourage the staging of novels and the audience's interest in the story.

EARLY TIMES: RADIO DRAMA

As far as the development of the dramatization, I consider that the crucial point was the popularity of radio drama, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when authors and practitioners found themselves in front of a completely new and promising environment. Radio drama always promoted playwriting, but, as far as we are concerned, for the purposes of this article, it also focused on the dramatization of the great novels. I truly believe that radio drama has encouraged the shifting towards the novel, as it addressed very large audiences and it had to make a good point, culturally speaking. In short, it had to deliver the story to a large public, and this could only be done by means of dramatizing the original text.

The dramatization for the radio preceded the dramatization for the theatre stage, as it was more complex in terms of production, technology, audience and cultural impact. Of course, dramatization, generally speaking, not only for radio, has its specific problems, as Tim Crook points out when analyzing this technique: 'Dramatization as a writing function is very much a cultural representation of the time of the adaptation.

While European authors have celebrated the text of *Heart of Darkness* as one of the most influential books in the twentieth century, Nigerian author Chinua Achebe has condemned it as a negative stereotyping of Africans.' (Crook 2001: 190).

Of course, Crook is using a postcolonial author (Achebe) as a voice pipe for the cultural common denominator for the present days, but the problem he highlights is perpetual: what is the specific element that drives the dramatization of the novel?

As I just stated before, at the beginning of the twentieth century, radio was the main reason for dramatizing great novels. The stage as a place for performing the dramatization was a collateral space, as theatre halls did not gather large audiences and the effect could not be so wide open to the general public.

Technology has rapidly developed and radio drama soon started to decrease in popularity, as television made its way to the public.

Still, for the dramatization of the novels this was not a big issue, as TV series became more and more popular and many of them were based on novels. Providing examples for such cases would be completely irrelevant, as they are so many. The shifting was explicit: the focus of the dramatizing novels moved from radio to television with the same reasons and effects that were concerned primarily on the great audiences they gathered.

One of the most important characteristics that prose and radio drama share is that both must rely on words since neither has visual images.

They both involve the audience in a creating act by providing it with a 'text' from which its members make a complementary effort of imagination. The illusion is not externally constructed beforehand for them as it largely is in theatre, film and TV, but internally realized by them: because they are 'blind' media, both literature and radio can inhabit not only visible, but also invisible worlds, whether subjective or material, and make rapid switches of focus in time and space between speech and thought, consciousness and dreams (Crissel 1986: 14).

Still, there is the obvious and specific problem of dramatizing novels for the purposes of the stage. In this aspect, I think the main question that needs to be answered would be 'how dramatizing novels in order to be performed on stage is dealing with the current problems and issues of the contemporary cultural and artistic establishment?'

THE STORY: THE QUINTESSENTIAL PART OF THE DRAMATIZATION

In order to answer the question I think we need to concentrate on one of the main functions of a play: the story. The evolution of the playwriting during the twentieth century has been an abrupt journey towards the dilution of the conflict and of the story. Since the inter-war years and more visible since the theatre of the absurd, the dramatic text suffered great changes in terms of characters, action and conflict. Of course, these are very well understandable and are effects of the changes in society, but theatre soon became a place that was not comfortable any more: 'There is another important generalization that can be made about the absurdists: they are, almost without exception, ironic proselytizers. Their picture of the human condition, reasonable though it is, is not a popular view. If it was clearly put in a readily identifiable language, the majority of their audience would find the absurdist's view to be nihilistic' (Oliver 1965: 8).

Postmodernism has accelerated these metamorphoses and put an even longer distance between the story and the audience. Still, the dramatization of the great novels seems nowadays a perfect opportunity for both practitioners and audiences to focus on the story. For that purpose, it seems, somehow, that performing arts are going back to their origins. As we all know, one of the theories regarding the birth of the theatre is that of the primitive people that were trying to tell a story and had to *perform* it in order to make themselves understood, because of the lack of a complex verbal syntax. In front of the whole tribe, someone had to tell the story of a day out hunting, so this was the premise of his performance.

Later on, the development and degradation of the dramatic expression dissolved the premise and its functions, as it happened during the theatre of the absurd, when the story was an incidental aspect, outbalanced by the symbols and meanings around the play: the lack of communication and everything that derives from it, the drama of the modern man, the extinction of the hero, the mundane character who becomes the most important character and the drama of an everyday life in which there are no more sacred elements.

In this somewhat bleak and gloomy context, I truly believe that dramatizing great novels would be an excellent way to focus on what may be the central point in theatre – the story to be told. A brief and short look over the Romanian theatre seasons in the last decade confirms the fact that producers, as well as directors, have tried to make use of this method of working, in order to get close to the public. Furthermore, one should try to identify and outline a specific approach in dramatizing novels for their performance on stage, but this operation seems terribly difficult because of the extreme variety of techniques.

Since the novel is, by definition, a complex and ample work, the procedures in dramatizing its text depend on numerous factors: the producers' intentions, the director, the actors and, at long last, the audience. However, performing a dramatization of a well-known novel (such as *War and Peace* or *The Demons*) is provided with the vast universe of the text, from which the audience will have to filter, together with the artists, the specific message they need. It is a complex operation, of coagulating various aspects of the text in the specific script that will be provided to the actors, and this operation contains different, specific techniques that may vary according to the cultural context. The complexity of the situation is even more augmented by the modern theatre director, who tends to be the absolute creator of the performance. Modern audiences are not interested in, let's say, Goethe's *Faust*, but in Purcărete's, they care less about Chekhov's *Seagull*, as they care for Andrei Şerban's. Widening the circle, this situation is still standing for the dramatization of great novels: almost everybody has read them, but the process of presenting them on stage is very intriguing because of the selection that has to be made through the action itself.

On the other hand, the dramatization may also depend on a more specific aspect of the novel's text and that was highlighted by Georg Lukács almost a century ago, but seems to be forgotten:

> …the novel, in contrast to other genres whose existence resides within the finished form, appears as something in process of becoming. That is why, from the artistic viewpoint, the novel is the most hazardous genre, and why it has been described as only half an art by many who equate *having a problematic* with *being problematic*' (Lukács 1971: 73-74).

This particular process of becoming, as the critic calls it, is the very quintessence of the theatre, too, and seems to be the common denominator of drama and prose. As the large audiences are not always aware of this situation, the dramatization of novels and playwriting seems to be, at first sight, quite opposite. Still, as the story is the focal point of both novels and drama, the adaptation for the stage will set itself up as a procedure that will reveal to the public some special, not so evident sides of the universe depicted in the text.

As I said before, at the beginning of the article, it seems that the practice of the dramatization brings in front of the audience a mutation in the way the novel is evaluated. The whole procedure of dramatizing a long text in prose implies the idea of making a selection, of a somehow surgical procedure, by which the author and the artists will extract the precise features they are interested in, in order to deliver them further to the audience. This would be a special approach to the text, which is more suitable for novels than to dramaturgy. For example, it is easier to select certain aspects from *East of Eden*, let's say, than to have the same procedure on *The Dollhouse*. By definition, the dramatic text, as it is provided by the playwright, is somehow closed and finished. Any other operation of selection and of cutting it down would endanger its meanings and its message. In contrast, dramatizing prose is a somehow natural and spontaneous mechanism that rolls itself off, as the text is read and as the action unfolds.

As we all know, postmodernism is constantly preoccupied with the reevaluation of classic prose, which means that an analysis of the dramatization of great novels should reveal some interesting aspects, that concern both the place of the *story* in the contemporary world and that of the *dramatic text*. It would be an effortless acknowledgment of the problem to believe that there is a certain completion between drama and novel and the approach on this matter should be much wider. A great number of the most important contemporary directors and producers are interested in performing dramatizations of the great novels, and this means, of course, a plausible discontent regarding plays. The operation of deciding upon a novel and selecting one or more particular themes in it in order to have them later on stage implies a more personal approach on the fictional universe, that would deliver to the audience an individualized artistic product that may be more satisfying for the complex taste of the contemporary mass audiences.

CONCLUSION AND POSSIBLE WAYS OF DEVELOPING THE CURRENT RESEARCH THEME

To conclude, after determining the general context of dramatizing novels, I believe that a fair and wide approach on the problem requires further analysis that may lead to some interesting and surprising results, especially by correlating dramatizations with contemporary playwriting. The topics described in the article are just highlights of the current way of evaluating this problem and indicia that will, hopefully, attract attention to this practice.

As a possibility of developing the current theoretical research, I am taking into consideration the identification of some of the strategies in dramatizing great novels and have a number of case studies

on some particular performances and directors. In this case, I think the first step in this approach would be the elucidation of the reasons that generated the selection of the text and of the main dramatic cores that were to be developed on stage, into a dramatic form. Then, it seems mandatory to focus on the procedures the dramatist used and their effects on stage: the possible shifting in the structure of characters, the exposure of some secondary features in the text that were emphasized, the eventual adjustment in matters regarding time, sequence of episodes, ideas and message.

Romanian theatre has always been very interested in dramatizing novels and this is a somehow well-established method of approaching literary texts, especially for acting students, which are all required to perform such tasks. Of course, the next step for such a project would be to select certain theatre directors that used dramatizations and have case studies. Furthermore, it is not the particular method of dramatizing the novel that requires attention, but the reasons that motivate it in the current cultural and artistic background: the need for a story and the crisis of the contemporary dramaturgy.

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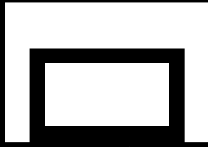
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