STUDIA UBB DRAMATICA, LX, 2, 2015, p. 9 - 26
(Recommended Citation)

Strategies for the Embodiment and Disembodiment of Spectatorship: Don't Cry Baby *and* Hotel *by Eugen Jebeleanu*

MIRUNA RUNCAN*

Abstract: This paper will emphasize a series of negotiation and renegotiation strategies for the corporeal-cognitive relationship between the actor and the spectator in contemporary experimental theatre. To this end, I have chosen two performances with totally different narrative and performative structures (a verbal one and a nonverbal one both staged by the same director, Eugen Jebeleanu and his team Compagnie 28: *Don't Cry Baby*, a play by Catinca Drăgănescu, based on the typologies/situations in Charles Perrault's *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *Hotel*, a free adaptation on F.X. Kroetz's *Wunschkonzert*. The paper mixes the descriptive analysis of Jebeleanu's performances with theoretical and applied perspectives from the fields of cognitive psychology and neurosciences, as well as of semiotics and pragmatics. The hypothesis I am trying to verify is that experimental shows performed in small spaces combine the corporeal-empathic and the cognitive challenges exerted on the spectator, sometimes turning the experience of the latter into a participatory game that involves an enhancement of one's proprioceptive internal sensations, a stronger perception of one's own body being alive and a participatory attendance.

Keywords: Spectatorship, Theatre, Performing Arts, Body Perception, Audience Response, Neurosciences

"Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence."
(Merlau-Ponty 1964, 164)

The simplest conceptual description of the experience of theatrical action is perhaps the semiotic structure proposed by Erika Fischer-Lichte (1992, 401). The *Spectator* (S), by using the *Character* interface (X – a semiotic

* *Professor PhD at Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Theatre and Television, Cluj-Napoca, Romania; e-mail: runcan.miruna@ubbcluj.ro*

construct), engages in communication with the *Actor/Performer* (A – who "embodies" the fictional entity X). In an article published several years later (Fischer-Lichte 2008), the prominent theorist elaborates upon the simple equation S-X-A, by stressing that the semiotic perspective is limited only to the mechanisms of meaning production. This perspective is completed by various univocal or combined angles of investigation which, in the last three decades, have tried to circumscribe spectatorship from historical, sociological, phenomenological, pragmatic and especially neuro-psychological points of view.

It is indeed noteworthy that the last decades have generated huge changes in the field of reception studies, with the most spectacular ones produced by the exceptional headway made by neuro-sciences and mainly those dedicated to the brain functions, which were the immediate beneficiary of the advantages prompted by the new technologies. By means of applied research and by theoretical syntheses, neurologists themselves eagerly approached the spectator's experiences, especially in the field of visual arts and of cinema, with outcomes that can be described as at least interesting (and often even revelatory) (see, for example, Freedberg D. and Gallese, C., 2007 and Raz, G. et alii, 2013). Researchers and analysts specialized in cinema or other arts showed a mutually increasing interest for using the new theories founded on the findings of neurosciences or even for taking part in interdisciplinary projects. From this point of view, the environment of theatrical research turned out to be, paradoxically, slow in joining in – unlike dance, where studies, colloquia and conferences on corporeality, perception and empathy in the performer-spectator pair are numerous. We must nonetheless admit that psychological-neurological experiences and applied studies that focused on the theatre spectator have been, until recently, almost inexistent: while complex equipment and computer programs were designed (see, for example, Raz, G. et alii 2013) for the measurement of the empathic processes experienced by the film spectator, the exploration of theatre spectatorship continues to be problematic. The space dedicated to the theatre audience is a shared one, while film can be watched in isolation, and the equipment will not bother other spectators. Furthermore, technological management seems more difficult in the live reception of a show. For this reason, the theatrical researchers' and theorists' references to this field of knowledge are still largely speculative.

We will try, however, to examine the empathically corporeal involvement processes experienced by the theatre spectator, using multi-tiered references that converge towards a (hopefully as clear as possible) picture of the interactions of sensations, emotions and meaning creation. For this analysis, we have chosen as

applicative models two markedly experimental independent performances of the same company - Compagnie 28, and of the same Romanian director - Eugen Jebeleanu.

Two performances, two opposed spatial and narrative strategies. A brief description

Don't Cry Baby and *Hotel* were created successively, in 2013 and, respectively, in the second half of 2014; the former is based on a text written by Catinca Drăgănescu (herself a director, but also a playwright) and it starts from the situations and characters in Perrault's *Little Red Riding Hood*. Nevertheless, it has nothing to do with a children's play; instead, it is a tragic and biting satire, with a particularly dynamic writing, of (Proppian) archetypal situations occurring in Romanian society: At the head of a single-parent family is the mother, a high-ranking civil servant who runs all sorts of shady affairs and neglects her child. Little Red Riding Hood / Sonia is a disoriented teenager who is constantly in search of money and who tries to get her mother's attention by opposing her demonstratively and even coming to loathe her. The Wolf is a small time crook who sells to the mother a stolen telephone which he later, by coincidence, tries to buy again from Sonia; this is the start of a series of events that will eventually lead to the tragic ending. The Hunter is a wretched unemployed man with a sick wife. He works several unofficial jobs, among which that of driver and handyman for the mother. Grandmother lives in another city; she is paralyzed and senile, which is why the Hunter is required to drive Riding Hood/Sonia, at weekends, to visit the old lady. At the end of such a visit, the Hunter catches the Wolf in the act of robbing the house and abusing the old woman and Sonia: in the struggle, the Wolf is accidentally killed. The media jump on the juicy drama, Sonia is in shock and does not want to recount what actually happened, which leads to the Hunter being convicted for murder. Sonia is forced by her mother to go study abroad, while the scandal expires.

Aside from these characters, the play has a presenter/commentator, whose role is both lyrical and structuring in relation to the mechanisms of the theatrical convention: he/she (Nicoleta Lefter) introduces him/herself with the director's name, announces the brief scenes and the characters who will engage one another, comments expressively on the characters' and, potentially, the spectators' frame of mind; he/she refers to current social and political circumstances, asks questions or suggests topics the audience could contemplate.

The playing field/stage space is narrow, a path of several meters in-between the two audience rows. The actors move in this field on wheeled office chairs; all of them wear black (with the exception of the commentator who stands at one of the ends of the playing alley). The performers are two women and three men and their clothes are as simple as they are mixed: one of the women wears trousers, one of the men a plunging blouse and high heels. The actors will exchange roles several times, from one scene to another, without taking into account the character's gender or they will confess, at a certain point, their own civil identities, in comments on the colleagues' acting or on the topics and secondary topics of the performance.

Fig. 1: *Don't Cry Baby*, © Adi Bulboaca

Hotel is a fully distinct nonverbal performance, a free adaptation of *Wunschkonzert* (*Concert on demand*) by F.X. Kroetz. In a small space, surrounded on three sides by spectators, a hotel room is almost naturalistically reconstructed. In the beginning, a young woman lives there (Camelia Pintilie); she is eagerly waiting for someone, but this person (lover?) is not showing up. At a point, an older woman (Emilia Dobrin) appears in the hotel room; she is someone

devoted to their own routines and excessively calm, who will try on several time the same new dress or will make her bed, prepare her medicines, glass of water, while trying in vain to fall asleep. The two women do not interact and do not see each other, their activities are simultaneous and parallel, which suggests different temporalities and manifestations that are overlapping in the same space. After a while, a third character enters the room: a transvestite (Ştefan Huluba), who seems to soothe his extenuation and depression in mechanical, unhurried, almost hallucinatory actions. The three characters materialize their existence, invisible to one another, through minor and natural actions that generate increasing tension. In the end, the young girl leaves unhappy, while the remaining characters discretely suggest, each, a planned/possible suicide.

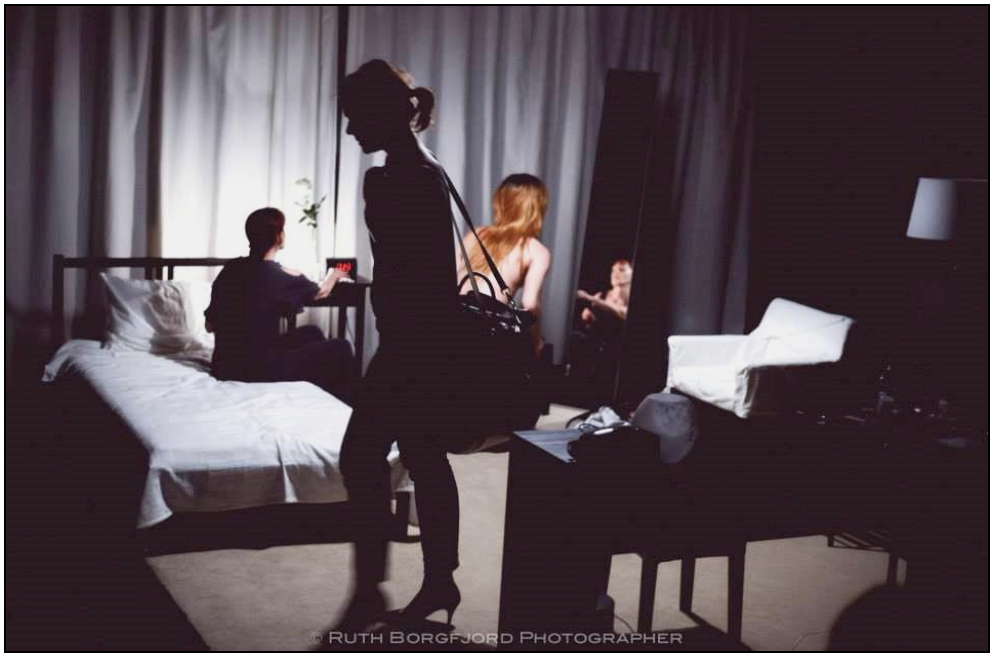

Fig. 2: *Hotel*, © Ruth Borgfjord

Engaging the character: embodiment and disembodiment of the spectator

In the already classic book *Engaging Characters. Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema* (1995) Murray Smith proposes, in manifest contradiction with previous theories on the processes of the spectator's identification with the

character[1], a formula for triggering cognition, emotion and imagination, structured on three tiers. The first step is *Recognition*, "... (the) spectator's construction of the character: the perception of a set of textual elements, in film typically cohering around the image of a body, as an individuated and continuous human agent"; the second step is *Alignment*, stemming from recognition, but meaning the spectator's harmonization with the character's credible structural coherence in the imaginary context. According to Smith, *Alignment* is obtained by, "...two interlocking functions, spatio-temporal attachment and subjective access…" (Smith, 1995, 83). Finally, the third tier is that of the investment of trust, *Allegianc*e, which "pertains to the moral evaluation of characters by the spectator" (Smith, 84). This means the exploration and assessment of the character's actions, based on the moral coordinates and the level of knowledge displayed by the character in relation to one or another dramatic situation. I believe that, if we look closely, this three-tier organization of engagement could equally be applied to theatre and not only to cinema.

In *Hotel*, the spectator's processes of engaging the characters are linear, on the one hand – the same actor plays one character, which means the established "*one actor: one character*" convention is maintained, and the stage actions are not interrupted by breaks or changes of setting. On the other hand, the absence of speech and the strictly chronologic observation of these actions unfolding, most of the times, in complete silence, lay a markedly high claim on the spectator's imaginative possibilities (in the narrative plane, the spectator is forced "to fill the blanks", between recognition and alignment). The spectator will have the freedom of (but will also be responsible for) inventing, step by step, an outer stage context and a virtual individual destiny that precedes the actions seen in the "present time" of the representation, which should allow him to reach a certain degree of *allegiance.* However, the apparently naturalistic convention gradually requires him to renegotiate the "realism" premises of this third tier, as long as the three characters do not engage with one another. The spectator's voyeurism is also overinvested and compelled to produce an additional convention, i.e. space oneness in a temporal discontinuity.

However, the performance does not prompt only this twofold semiological challenge: to a considerably more prominent extent, we perceive the occurrence of an open shift from the area of observation focused on the production of

[1] In the initial part of the volume, the author carefully contradicts the theses proposed by Nöel Caroll, 1988.

meaning by interpreting the observed actions, to the area of empathic, psycho-physical reaction, between the spectator and the actor; which means that, here, the character operates, to a great extent, as a mobile, unstable interface. When taking part, by means of perception and imagination, in the movements and actions of the characters embodied by the actors – several meters away – the spectator has an involuntary reaction which is both deeply subjective and intensely physicalized.

Neurologic theories on embodied simulation – ES – (Rizzolatti, G., Fogassi, L., & Gallese, V., 2001; Schwoebel J, Coslett HB; Freedberg, David; Gallese, Vittorio, 2007 etc.) help us understand from a more profound perspective that the reception of a (theatre, film) performance is not only an encoded game of searching for the global meaning layers of the artistic work, but also, to an amazing extent, an empathic induction that has both a physical and an imaginary response.

> Our capacity to pre-rationally make sense of the actions, emotions and sensations of others depends on embodied simulation, a functional mechanism through which the actions, emotions or sensations we see activate our own internal representations of the body states that are associated with these social stimuli, as if we were engaged in a similar action or experiencing a similar emotion or sensation. Activation of the same brain region during first- and third-person experience of actions, emotions and sensations suggests that, as well as explicit cognitive evaluation of social stimuli, there is probably a phylogenetically older mechanism that enables direct experiential understanding of objects and the inner world of others. (Freedberg and Gallese, 2007, 198)

In this light it appears that the so-called "passivity of the spectator", a long-term unchallenged assumption of reception theories (as well as of late modernity artists) in performing arts, is devoid of any ground. Spectatorship can no longer be seen as a passive activity, but as a complex process of fully systemic activation of the mind and body together. It would therefore be appropriate to abandon for good the demeaning postulate of "passivity", as long as perception itself is conceived of as "simulated action". (Berthoz 2000, 10)

> Action observation causes in the observer the automatic activation of the same neural mechanism triggered by action execution. The novelty of these findings is the fact that, for the first time, a neural mechanism allowing a direct mapping between the visual description of a motor act and its execution has been identified. This mapping system provides a parsimonious solution to the problem of translating the results of the visual analysis of an observed movement – in principle, devoid of meaning for the observer – into something that the observer is able to understand. (Freedberg, D.; Gallese, V., 2007, 520-21)

In the relationship between the spectator and the actors in *Hotel*, the absence of any communication among the latter and the constant suggestion that the characters are not aware of each other's presence strongly enhance the embodied simulation reactions. Successively, the spectator (also "unobserved" by the actors) receives by transfer each character's anxious corporeality and he/she becomes hyper-sensitive to interception[2]. The spectator drinks the actress's tea, feels the touch of the make-up brush and the thickness of cream spreading on the cheek, smells the rose or feels the silk slide on the skin when the performer dresses in it. The feeling of "observable", immediate solitude, multiplied by three simultaneously imagined destinies, increases the personalized effect of materiality (and of guilty frustration) of the contact between the one who sees and the one who lets themselves be seen. This *physical analogue* which is the character (Smith, 26) becomes almost permeable for the spectator, in a both enticing and somewhat obscene way:

> We see that we are acted upon and we know that as part of this dialogical contract of interinanimation we too are doing the acting. In seeing acting we are also acting seeing. (Fenemore, 2007, 2).

As a result such a performing discourse strategy, I, the spectator, become, almost unknowingly, not only cognitively empathic toward the other's desperate loneliness, but also sensitive, by imaginative and mimetic transfer, to my own secluded corporeality. We do, however, note that the extent of *embodied simulation* (ES), like, in general, the empathic predispositions, are considerably different from one spectator to another and they are generally controlled/compensated by the neurologic systems accounted for in *Theory of Mind* (ToM)[3].

---

[2] "Interoception works along with proprioception and exteroception to provide the brain with a complete information about the rest of the body, and its cortical representation in the insula is thought to be part of a system for emotional expression and self-consciousness" (Berlucchi and Aglioti, 2009, 31)

[3] For a comprehensive applied exemplification with a potential for theory development, see Gal, Raz et alii (2013, 35): "Particularly – and to our knowledge, unprecedentedly – we found the dynamic patterns of connectivity of these circuits to be associated with empathy experienced under realistic situations. Furthermore, our data indicate a growing interaction of these circuits with a set of subcortical limbic structures during the intensification of empathic engagement. However, these findings also evince a context-dependent dissociation between empathy-related brain processes, suggesting that emotional sharing is based on the interplay between ES- or ToM-related processes, which may alternatively dominate empathic engagement."

Fig. 3: Hotel, © Ruth Borgfjord

While, with *Hotel,* the construction of significance is overtly and deliberately subject to the spectator's reactions of emotional transfer and unconscious embodiment, with *Don't Cry Baby* the aesthetic and communicational strategy comes from the opposite end. First, since the spoken text is extremely important here, its construction (with brief scenes, each of them illustrating only one situation, usually with two characters) is meant to organize the "cognitive act" witnessed by the spectator. The latter is challenged to use interactively the recognition and alignment processes, like pieces of a puzzle, while trusting in their own ready-shaped judgment (allegiance) of the fairy tale character's archetypal position. As we were saying, the titles of each scene and the characters' identity are (in a markedly Brechtian procedure) announced by the commentator. Thus, the character's identity is "stated" and wrapped into the archetype, and the purpose of this challenge is for the spectator to travel the reverse path: from the cultural meme to the social and psychological "embodiment" that relates to the local day-to-day life.

If the text and the performance had had only this target, they wouldn't have been unusual at all. The rewriting of myths and fairy tale situations from a contemporary perspective is a constant exercise of European modernity in prose,

theatre and in filmmaking. But in *Don't Cry Baby*, Eugen Jebeleanu proposes an additional challenge to engaging the character. He breaks the continuity of the actor-character relationship, going against the classic rule of "one character: one actor". Any of the actors can become, in turn, the Grandmother or the Wolf, the Hunter or the Mother, irrespective of their gender.

> Of course, given the 'one performer: one character' convention has been almost universally upheld throughout the history of cinema, it is, for us, second nature: but it is *second* nature, a convention. The convention is not, however, arbitrary, it is motivated by both the function it performs and the material conditions of its making. If the goal is the presentation of concrete persons, then the 'one performer: one character' convention suits the task well, since it fits with the assumption that concrete individuals are possessed of one body and only one body. But other conventions can perform this function, and certain conditions will lead to the adoption of a different convention, even where the same representational goals prevails. Small theatre companies, for example, often use a 'single performer: multiple character' convention, in which each performer undertakes a number of roles... (Smith, 28-29)

Certainly, in the performance we are considering, the small number of actors and the strategy of role exchange from one scene to the next are not dictated by "economic" reasons, but by reasons that are equally aesthetic and ethic. Following the mental negotiation of the trans-realistic convention (one character: multiple bodies), the spectator will focus, this time, on each actor's performative ability to reconstruct without causing discontinuities in logic, in the narrative or in relational verisimilitude the character left behind by another actor. This "physical analogue", this interface that is the character will also obtain each time a new image-dimension that will not dissolve, but, quite the opposite, will add to the archetype's "material" (social, pragmatic, experientially "recognizable") weight. Or, to quote Murray Smith again;

> These texts do not attempt simply to re-create the conventions of medieval allegory, but rather set up a field of tension between the very different functions of the individual human figure in realist fiction, on one hand, and allegory, on the other. Form, in these instances, 'roughens' our perception of function. (29)

Here, the process of enhancing the plasticity of our capacity of perception overlaps, I believe, with a rewriting of the relationship of induction and transfer from the actor to the spectator. This time, the spectator is constantly invited to participate in the hide-and-seek game with the character, that becomes more than an interface meant for the empathic transfer: the character's successive re-embodiment displaces the spectator's attention from the ES controlled empathic zone to the one controlled by ToM: in other words, from the natural-

unconscious tendency to "experience" the character to the observational control of one's own opinions, beliefs and cognitive decisions regarding the "solution" given to the plot by its performance. We could say we are dealing with an extreme application of Brechtian theses on distancing: the spectator goes, together with the actor, towards the reconstruction of the contact "with the character", without falling deeply, cathartically, "in the character"[4].

Caught in the web of theatrical action, the spectator empathizes with the ethic-aesthetic construction model, without denying his own interoceptive reaction, but merely placing it in parentheses, disembodying it. He/she does not necessarily reject a sympathetic relationship with the actor, but his/her reception focuses on the interpretative challenge of the incredibly dynamic two-layer game proposed to him. Thus, the performance introduces a strategy of fractal-like representation of the artefact that is the character; through this strategy (which alludes to the one in a Role Playing Game), we go back,

Fig. 4: *Don't Cry Baby*, © Claudiu Popescu

[4] To this end, see the final hypotheses of the experience by Gal, Raz et alii (37), based on the measurement and comparison of brain reactions to viewing two films with tragic topics, *Stepmom* and *Sophie's Choice*.

on the one hand, to the allegoric generalization, and, on the other hand, to the perception of the unstable survival values of our everyday life. Anyone can be the executioner, even the very victim, irrespective of gender or of the prefabricated image. Paradoxically, it is precisely by the successive role reallocations that the character packs a strong abstract-symbolic aura, and the actor-spectator relationship reaches a level of reciprocity, of honest and most unusual communication.

This is also why the authors (Drăgănescu/Jebeleanu) needed an apparently neutral character, the commentator. Although her role is unique (in line with the established convention "one character: one performer"), her functions are multiple, in reverse agreement with the entire structure of the play. From the very beginning, the commentator introduces the rule of the game of symbolic "indifference" to gender: she is played by an actress who introduces herself as Eugen Jebeleanu, the director. Successively, she is charged with introducing the scene titles and characters (with an effect of maximum "bookish" distancing, that builds the theatrical discourse in plain sight); she also voices a series of personal, often nearly poetic thoughts on the other characters, on political events or on how they are approached in the media, on statistics and their significance, on the heroes' later fate etc. The strategies of "in gaming" disembodiment and distancing proposed by the fictional/dramatic context of the plot are thus countered and compensated by this declaredly subjective voice, which produces an invisible bridge "in progress" between the author (in the end, also an artefact) and the spectator. The spectator's self-reflexive "power" position is, therefore, assimilated to the auctorial one: the author's assumed voice has become a possible embodiment of the spectator's (inner) voice, in the shared space of the theatrical representation.

Space, hyper-proxemics and body movement

Most of the time, we give only a fleeting thought to the fact that spectatorship is also, to a great extent, an experience of our body in space. In performance reviews, the spectator's immersion in the fictional space of the representation is not the object of analysis; the critic may at most be interested in the stage design and the costumes. With the exception of the cases where, as spectators, we are required to physically cross a number of spaces of the performing action, traditionally we have only one fixed angle from where we can configure, by observation, the "place" or "places" of the dramatic context. Moreover, European theatre has kept a net separation between the

dynamic space of the representation and the audience's neutral/ static one, by favoring, until recently, the distribution of the performers and actors, as compact groups, on one side and on the other of the "stage mirror". Of course, the distinction between "space" and "place" relates to Certeau's thesis (1984, 117) according to which *space* is a vector field created by the movement of bodies/objects, while the *place* is a field of the view, which results from the coherent coexistence of some objects/bodies.

From such an angle, together with what we already know (experimentally or only theoretically) about the neuro-psychological mechanisms of perception and orientation of one's own body in space, spectatorship is neither univocal, nor passive. In fact, the relationship between the spectator and the space of the performative actions is both a specular one – of semiotic and empathic knowledge of the "place" – and a vector one – of placing an imaginary movement of one's own body in the "space" thus configured. Even if his studies relate to film only, I believe Antunes's observations on vestibular perception are as convincing as they are applicable to theatrical reception:

> I infer that remaining still in a chair does not diminish our capacity to engage with a film in an embodied, and particularly vestibular, fashion. In a nutshell, the vestibular sense can help us understand the generation of meaning derived from the embodied relationship between the spectator and the film, between the mind and body, and between the self and the outside world. (Antunes, 2012, 526)

The only aspect shared by the two performances we are examining here is that they take place in small spaces rather than in traditional theatre halls; thus, the distance between the spectators and the actors is reasonably small (with *Don't Cry Baby* no more than 1.5m between the first row of spectators and the performers, on both sides of the acting space; with *Hotel*, a maximum of 2 meters on three sides between the first row of spectators and the configured limits of the room). We first need to consider the profound changes in reception prompted by this hyper-proximity between the actor and spectator:

> To compensate for a reduced physical impression, the actor in a large space performs in larger-than-life manner.(...) Thus when a performance occurs in a small theatre, especially one where the ludic space is not architecturally divided from the watching space, the proximity of A's body is the dominant physical impression made upon S. While distant views of a proscenium performance normally affect only the eyes and ears, keeping the danger of A's body at bay, the corporeal contiguity of small space performance can affect the range of senses. The results are not necessarily pleasant –especially when touch and smell are involved – but they provoke the audience to recognize that the actor is not merely a walking shadow. (...) This is one of the chief reasons why a strictly

> semiotic view of the spectator's condition is insufficient, since the intimate and adjacent presence of the actor conveys so clearly the paradox of the theatrical double: the actor's otherness is both aesthetic object and human incidence, both signifier and corpus. (Kennedy, 2009, 138)

Without lingering strictly in the semiotic field, we cannot but note, however, that hyper-proximity has immediate effects on both of the participants to the theatrical communication: the actor is required to control more rigorously his verbal discourse, voice amplitude and corporal/mimic discourse, because any detail of his acting and presence is visible and significant, the spectator's eye operating like a camera lens that frames either in wide angles or in close-up. The spectator is also subject to greater corporal and mimic constraints, whether being aware of it or not. While in a 500-seat room the spectator could fidget, or nibble (discreetly, we hope!) on a piece of candy or wave a hand-held fan – let alone receive and send text messages –, in a small space any such gesture would disturb the stage action and would divert the other spectators' attention. Hyper-proximity has an effect that triggers in the spectator, to a consistent extent, the suspicion that he/she also is (or could also be) the object of another's gaze, be it that of the actor or of the other spectators. This doubly oriented tenseness does not only have semiotic-aesthetic effects, it also has neuro-psychological, corporeal effects on the general proprioceptive processes in the spectator's mind.

In *Hotel*, hyper-proximity to the naturalistic design of the room, as well as the natural, silent movement of the actors markedly suggest that the characters do not expose themselves, but they are caught at the deepest level of intimacy and mechanical routines. Focused, tensed attention acts almost directly, analogically, by embodied simulation (ES) mechanisms on the spectator's body and on his vestibular system, which makes him/her move, at an imaginary level, both "with the character" and "in the character", to paraphrase Gal et alii.

> Embodiment theories of perception hold that this action-directed mode of visual perception is actually the dominant orientation we have to the world: "perception is simulated action" (Berthoz 2000, 10) (...) Simulated actions involve motor images, which are schemata of motor activity stored in memory. There are motor images for everything from the formation of one's hand needed for grasping a teacup to the lowering of one's legs into a cold swimming pool. Carried along with the motor processes in the how mode of visual perception are associated sensory qualities – the smooth texture of the teacup handle you grasp and the frigidity of the water into which you plunge your reluctant legs. (Esrock, 2010, 226)

On the other hand, the linear continuity of stage action and the rhythms of its unfolding (the characters are not hurried, their small gestures – undressing, dressing, putting on make-up, reading e-mails or a book, obsessive fitting of the new dress, combing, preparing and using necessary objects etc.) prompt in the spectator unconscious tactile urges, which we could validly enter in the category of the haptic dimension of images, as theorized – again in relation to cinema – by Laura Matks (2002):

> Haptic images invite the viewer to dissolve his or her subjectivity in the close and bodily contact with the image. The oscillation between the two creates an erotic relationship, a shifting between distance and closeness. But haptic images have a particular erotic quality, one involving giving up visual control. The viewer is called to fill in the gaps in the image, engage with the traces the image leaves. (Marks, 13)

Thus, by merging the motoric simulation that configures the space (turning it into a "place" that includes the viewer) with the haptic dimension of the images, the spectator is overwhelmingly "absorbed" in the characters whose prehistory and future he envisages simultaneously. The "place" becomes an epitome of his/her own (fleeting) occupancy not only of an ordinary hotel room, but of his/her own body: that which belongs to us, but it is also foreign to us, it is ours and, analogically, it is also the Other's. From this point of view, the spectator's experience in *Hotel* seems to prove, overall, the working hypothesis of Ellen Esrock's article:

> I suggest that the most obvious quality we associate with our inner body is the feeling of being alive, for interoceptive awareness of the body is an awareness of that which is animate, living. Integral to being alive is the capacity for self-initiated movement. There is also a self-referential quality to interoception. When we project the inner body and a sense of ourselves that goes along with this, we might feel ourselves located, in some fundamental way, in the artwork or reconstituted as the artwork. (229)

In *Don't Cry Baby*, the spectator's insertion in the space of the stage action is completely different from the one in *Hotel*; it is as (at first glance) simple as it is demanding and sophisticated. Here, the stage space is strictly conceptual (it looks like a very narrow alley between the two rows of spectators who can see one another) and there is no figurative element to visually suggest the "place" of the actions. Thus, the succession of scene-related "places" will be configured in full by the spectator, in an imaginary way, starting from the minimal information provided by the commentator

in the intertitles. The spectator's attention is focused, as we have shown in the previous chapter, on the text-contained and text-operation dramatic situations and on the actors' abilities to jump from one character to the next, as well as from the character to the exhibition of their own civil identity[5].

To make it possible for this type of involvement in the game of construction of situations and significations to occur, the team chose the ingenious solution of "sitting movement". The spectator rows are ranged in a mirror layout, and not only is the distance between the spectators and the actors unusually small – but, just like the spectators, the actors are sitting on chairs. They will only stand up in the rare cases where the conflict requires them to change their position or elicits violent attitudes. From one scene to another, they will cross the alley and reposition themselves only helped by the wheeled office chairs. Moreover, when two actors are performing, the other ones are still and look at them, just like the spectators, displaying relaxed, off-stage attitudes, and even sometimes commenting gesturally the acting of those who are involved directly.

This double constraint of the actor, who is thus coerced to build the successive character identities extremely carefully, with a very economic inventory of bodily-gestural means, reflects directly also on the spectator's system of motor/vestibular stimulation. On the one hand, to be able to perceive/observe correctly, the spectator will have to change successively the actual position of his head and even of his body, moving involuntarily according to the positions of the actors who, at this or that moment, are in focus, closer or farther away from him, at the right side, at the center or at the left side. On the other hand, the minimization of the space that separates the spectators' area and the performing area produces, within the spectator, interoceptive and proprioceptive reactions of embodied simulation, where the movement and spatial (vestibular) perceptions are transferred directly from the actor. Thus, the character has become some sort of transparent window where the spectator's physical analogue is the actor himself, as such. Metaphorically, the moving chairs in *Don't Cry Baby* do more than provide the spectator with an RPG space with multiple (disembodied/re-embodied) avatars; they also offer the experience of "occupying" the stage and of performing in his/her imaginary, at the same time with the actors.

[5] ".....the actor on a bare stage, especially when partly surrounded by spectators and untrammeled by decorations, is chiefly perceived as a body speaking text. In a small theatre the spoken word becomes as intimate as environment, insidious, urgent and intrusive". (Kennedy, 139)

To sum up, we could state that the performances we chose to analyze bring forward, effectively, by their purposefully different aesthetic strategies, some of the deepest motivations that bring the spectator inside the space of theatrical communication: the pleasure of the mental-cognitive game and the pleasure of experiencing alterity, physically and emotionally. The latter, as we hopefully have demonstrated, is equivalent, to a great extent, with taking possession of one's own body, even at an unconscious level. Therefore, the aesthetic experience is proven to be a fundamentally existential one: when the performance is vibrant and incisive, it does not only make us "witnesses" to the story in progress in front of us, but it also increases the plasticity of our self-perception. It challenges us to perform it, because we own it.

References

ANTUNES, Luis Rocha, 2012, "The Vestibular in Film: Orientation and Balance in Gus Van Sant's Cinema of Walking," *Essays in Philosophy*: Vol. 13: Iss. 2

BERTHOZ, Alain, 2000, *The Brain's Sense of Movement*, translated by Giselle Weis, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press

BERLUCCHI, Giovanni; Aglioti, Salvatore M., 2009, „The body in the brain revisited", *Expanded Brain Research*, Springer-Verlag, p. 25-35

CARROLL, Nöel, 1988, *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory*, New York, Columbia University Press

De CERTEAU, M., 1984, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press

ESROCK, Ellen J., 2010, Embodying Art: The Spectator and the Inner Body, *Poetics Today*, 31:2

FENEMORE, Anna, 2007, „On Objects' The Pleasure of Objectification: A Spectator's Guide", *Performance Research* Vol. 12, No. 4

FISHER-LICHTE, Erika, 1992. *The Semiotics of Theatre*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press

FISHER-LICHTE, Erika, 2008. "Sense and Sensation: Exploring the Interplay between the Semiotic and Performative Dimensions of Theatre", *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Vol XXII, no 2

FREEDBERG, David; Gallese, Vittorio, 2007, „Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience", TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences, Vol.11, No.5

Gal RAZ; Yael Jacob; Tal Gonen; Yonatan Winetraub; Tamar Flash; Eyal SOREQ; and Talma Hendler, 2013, „Cry for her or cry with her: context-dependent dissociation of two modes of cinematic empathy reflected in network cohesion dynamics", Social Cognitive and Affective Neurosciences, (7) 2013, p. 30-41

KENNEDY, Denis, *The Spectator and the Spectacle. Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity*, Cambridge University Press

MARKS, Laura, 2002, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, University of Minnesota Press

SMITH, Murray, 1995, *Engaging Characters. Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*, Oxford University Press

MIRUNA RUNCAN *is a writer, a theatre critic and a Professor PhD of the Theatre and Television Faculty at "Babeş-Boyai" University Cluj, Romania. Co-founder (with C.C. Buricea-Mlinarcic) of Everyday Life Drama Research and Creation Laboratory (awarded with a three year National Grant for Research in 2009). Author of* Modelul teatral românesc *(The Romanian Theatre Model), Bucharest: Unitext Publishing House, 2001,* Teatralizarea şi reteatralizarea în România. 1920-1960 *(The Theatricalisation of Romanian Theatre.1920-1960), Cluj: Eikon Publishing House, 2003,* Pentru o semiotică a spectacolului teatral *(For a Semyothics of the Theatrical Performance), Cluj: Eikon Publishing House, 2005,* Fotoliul scepticului spectator *(The Sceptical's Spectator's Armchair), Bucharest: Unitext Publishing House, 2007.* Universul spectacolelor lui Alexandru Dabija *(The Universe of Alexandru Dabija's Performances), Limes Publishing House and Camil Petrescu Foundation, Bucharest 2010.* Bunjee-Jumping. Short Stories*, Cluj: Limes Publishing House, 2011;* Actori care ard fără rest *(Enlove with Acting: 12 Actor's Portraits), Bucharest: Limes Publishing House and Camil Petrescu Foundation, 2011;* Signore Misterioso: anatomia spectatorului *(Signore Misterioso: An Anathomy of the Spectator), Bucharest: Unitext, 2011;* Critica de teatru încotro? *(Theatre Criticism. Whereto?) Cluj University Press, 2015*