

# DRAMATICA

STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI

2/2014



**MIND**

**BODY**

**VOICE:**

**WAYS OF THEATRICALITY**

**STUDIA  
UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ-BOLYAI  
DRAMATICA**

**2/2014  
October**



# STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI DRAMATICA

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*Mind, Body, Voice: Ways of Theatricality*

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## **STUDIES AND ARTICLES**





## *Reflections on Sound, Voice and Attention*

MARIAN POPESCU\*

**Abstract:** Sound, voice and attention are considered from both acknowledged artistic practices in theatre but also from a reflexive point of view about how the actors' training might benefit from a reconsideration of own vocal experience. Issues such as the aural context in which theatre audiences live and the practical questions of getting their attention point to a necessary reconsideration of how actor's training could restore a real sense of vocal experience of the body in our world.

**Keywords:** voice, interpretation, aural context, sound, listening, speaking body, sign language, actor

### *1. "The Right to Speak"*

Whenever we refer to Voice in Theatre we usually mean by that more than one thing. Voice means Sound, Breath, Diction, Speak, and Communication skills. In everyday life Voice is instrumental in Communication and Speak but not in Breath and some Communication skills (non-verbal communication). We deal with voice in theatre from a technical point of view but less from a spiritual one. An actor on stage is concerned with his/her voice, its power to transmit, its qualities fit to the character played and less with *commanding* the attention to *listen to it*. If in everyday life we are *judged* when we open the mouth to *speak*, on stage we are *appreciated* to different degrees and levels when we open the mouth to *voice the interpretation*. In her seminal book, Patsy Rodenburg examines not only the practicalities of voice training for professionals but also the wide range of phenomena voice and sound display when using them in the context of theatre. She considers the close approach of both body and mind

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when urging the actor to *know* what makes his/her voice *sound* in this or that way. More, she is keen on how to release “the terror of deeper habits” we all have and discover our *own* right to speak. (Rodenburg 86-109)

However, number of exercises, ideas in books by theatre directors and actors point to the importance of commanding the attention of the people in theatre to what’s being *said* on stage. It is not only the voice, the action, the lights or the set but also the quality of the attention targeted by the director and the actors. Attention is an intellectual act subject to the law of rhythm, as Théodule Ribot wrote more than a century ago (Ribot 21). And a theatre production is essentially centered on that. Training attention is, as well as training the voice, a physical act where muscles are concentrated to hold on for a temporary period. It has also to do with the aural concentration and training. Many points to the idea that we loose gradually the contact with the oral culture and the naturally-produced noise and sound context of our everydaylife and become more acquainted with the artificially sound and noise production both in indoor and outdoor contexts. In fact, sound became more or less a major characteristic of a *postproduction* human activity where natural sound is being mixed, altered ad re-created as to fit into the many of its usage’s levels.

## **2. The Need to Listen. (And they used straw on Greek stage.)**

The contemporary interest in sound and how we cope with an increasing presence of it in our everyday life are subject to review by experts from different fields. As one of them (Ihde 5) put it clearly

It is not merely that the world has suddenly become noisier, or that we can hear farther, or even that sound is somehow demandingly pervasive in a technological culture. It is rather that by living with electronic instruments our experience of listening itself is being transformed, and included in this transformation are the ideas we have about the world and ourselves.

Listening is an old experience in theatre. It has been challenged nowadays by the number of technical devices meant to produce, distribute, enhance, amplify and influence the way we perceive the theatre performance live on stage and the living presence of us in the auditorium. Sound means living bodies producing it but also spaces that can “speak”. We live and work not only in a sound pollution environment but surprisingly in an impoverished one, too (Blessner, and Salter 332):

Children who spend most of their time watching television and adults who sit at desk for thousands of hours each year have far less exposure to acoustic variety than those in many earlier cultures who grew up hunting in forests and on

mountains, tending farm animals after dark, navigating noisy towns with low illumination, or, in more recent centuries, attending dozens of opera and concert performances. Our children are acquiring their aural attitudes from the spatial and sensory legacy of now several generations of aurally impoverished listeners. It is up to us enrich that legacy.

From the enormous amount of literature published on sound, many articles and books concern the physical production of it, the circumstances of its production and the way sound indicate objects' presence in space. (Grassi, 2005) Recent scientific studies have concluded that "you can recover directly the size of an object from the sound of an impact" or tell the gender of passers-by from the sound they do when they go on the hardwood stage of a theatre. (Li, Logan, & Pastore 1991) At the same time, the acoustic signal of such an impact can tell about the source, the kind of physical event that generated the sound. Some of these experiments are or may be highly significant for actor's training. The way Viola Spolin, for instance, designed the point of concentration on sound in her exercises for actors, indicates not only a special attention to the matter but also a special training to concentrate on sound, increase attention and create silence. (Spolin 267-73)

It is amazing the attention the Ancient Greek stage paid to the acoustic, sound and aural condition of theatre experience. For an audience living in a non-literate society where the written word was considered dangerous and public speaking was the crown of democratic activity, it is understandable why "the Greeks seem to have been self-taught in acoustics, working empirically and with no foundation of theoretical understanding". When Aristotle noticed "the voices of the chorus were made less distinct when straw was spread in the orchestra", this was part of a debate that later on Roman architect Vitruvius and others still carried on. The question was whether wood or stone was acoustically better for theatre construction? Most thought that wood was better. (Arnot 74-5) That explains why this conception enjoyed a tremendous reception in the theatre productions for centuries up to modernity. Romanian director Liviu Ciulei (1923-2011), for instance, had used wood in his settings for number of theatre productions knowing that wood will make a better acoustic context for the stage than iron-made set constructions. Spectators in Ancient Greece had felt the *need to listen* as spoken word was privileged in their everyday life that made little room to writing. Their theatre experience was fundamentally based on this and today is difficult to understand how the whole process was led unless one is not aware of the supremacy of listening. It is obvious, as Peter Arnot summarized, that:

Greek audiences were trained to listen to a play in a way that modern audiences are not. The plays, like the Homeric poems, are interwoven with intricate verbal patterns. A line at the end of a speech will pick up a thought at the beginning. A scene late in the play mirrors one from early on. Modern scholars trace these patterns by close application to the written text. An ancient audience was expected to attain the same results by hearing the play, and hearing it only once. (Arnot 79)

Most of the vocal techniques in theatre focus on the need to look for an improved performance of actor's voice on stage. Exercises are conceived from the body's perspective not from the spectator's aural context. Techniques to exercise the *listening* are not so many even if they are important. Their description shows that interactivity is at the level of actors' working groups rather than at the one of audience's being present as part of an aural context. A Romanian practitioner will look in his work for the connection between imagination, body and voice (Odangiu 155) in terms of a specific *stage behaviour* which should finally reach a way body and voice "function together" in the goal to be different aspects of the same message. The question is whether in this kind of behaviour one could be sure that the "difference" is given by the nature of the physical acts or by the audience's imagination.

### 3. Sign language and Theatre

It looks like hard to believe that sign language became a subject of academic studies, lab researches and many books since not too long. While pantomime has been practiced as a language of the body in itself, including patterns of physical actions, a repertoire of gestures and narrative sequences easy to be communicated to the audience, sign language began to raise an increasing interest as it performs a *special grammar in and through space*. As Olive Sacks states, the outstanding feature of sign language is "the linguistic use of the space." (Sacks 84) Pantomime is a performing act which substitutes word for movement while performing a sign language conversation requires the activation of a special grammar in space. Deaf people use space to communicate while theatre uses it to contextualize a performing act. Space "speaks" differently in these two cases. I think that there is a huge benefit for actors to be trained into the sign language. Some of them are but this is not the rule. One point is that sign language help developing a special *subjectivity* of the actor. An actor in text-based theatre productions relies to a significant level on his voice's performativity. The voice is trained to link sound, spoken text and interactivity with partners on stage, in specific space. As in sign language, gaze is a strong support of

communication. It also develops a “shared intentionality” that will command a shared attention from the audience’s side. Intention is more and more inferring with speaking and movement so as to lead the way to legion of changes. And that changes in meaning, that is from “movement toward a goal” to “intention” is evidence “that speakers in different cultures tend to infer intentions; similarly, changes from temporal sequence (as English since, originally meaning “after the time that”) to causation indicate that language users are prone to infer causation.” (Bybee in Tomasello, ed. 157) At the same time,

The voice is an important part of the means by which a collective perspective is established and maintained, but it is one among many. The interaction of voice and gaze may play a particularly strong role in allowing the protracted sustainment of conditions of joint attention, which appears as a possible foundation for the shared intentionality required to ground a human cultural world. (Tomasello et al., 2005)

Establishing the “collective perspective” is one of the goals in certain forms of performing arts. It points to

the importance of real time dynamic interaction among people in generating the subject-pole to which beliefs can sensibly be attributed. The neural signature of collective speaking is found when speaking with a live speaker, but not with a recording” (Jasmin et al., in preparation). Live conversational partners become entangled not only in ways that a linguistic description (lexical priming, syntactic biasing, phonological and phonetic imitation, Pickering & Garrod, 2004), but in a host of subtle ways that have hitherto been treated of as non-linguistic. These include gaze, posture, gestures, and blinks, but this set might conceivably be considerably extended as researchers turn their attention more and more to physiological markers of interaction (Campbell, 2007; Richardson et al., 2007; Shockley et al., 2009; Cummins, 2012; Wagner et al., 2014). (Cummins 760)

Many of the theatre exercises meant to develop a shared intentionality and a collective perspective of the audience could be inspired by the sign language techniques and procedures and by how the physiological markers sprang up from a real time dynamic interaction among people. Many of the most important theatre directors consider voice as an organic instrument and look for a constant adjustment of it to the whole body. Less are concerned with the physiological markers of the interaction. Even if all recommend that exercises be done at least in pairs or small groups (Grotowski, Barba, Zinder, Spolin), they do this to put the body in a state of interactivity, both internal and external, and in connection with a space. Voice and its performance on stage are seen as a means to stimulate imagination. They will give the necessary identity of the body in its *presence* on stage.

#### 4. *Hamlet again and More.*

One of the oldest ideas in text-based theatre performance is that the text should fit to the *speaking body*. It is no surprise that one of the most used quotations in theatre is from *Hamlet* (III.2. 1-36). It is amazing how the first two important things Hamlet shared to the players concern the way to *speak* and the way to *move* hands, like in sign language.

HAMLET: Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.

Hamlet as director gives the golden instructions to his players. They do not have to *utter* but to *speak*, what?, the *speech* and not the *text*. The value of the advice is well known in traditional text-based theatre where actors' training is heavily dependent on this match. One of the French literature and theatre historians of the '60s used an appropriate term to value this match. Text (Speech) and actor's play (Body) should look inseparable. If not, one may give the impression of being the "translation" of the other.

Mais le spectateur ne doit pas avoir l'impression d'une traduction; le texte et le jeu doivent paraître inséparables, le texte semblant conçu pour le jeu avant de l'avoir été sous la forme du langage. (Tieghem 20)

*Hamlet* is exemplary also for the change being in course during Shakespeare's time. The starting passage from an intense and well developed oral culture to that of a visual one. As Kristin Linklater reminds us, language in Shakespeare is several hundred years *younger* than today. Orality was still an intense *bodily* experience. What print and the whole text culture brought to us was a diminishing of the sensorium of speaking and feeling the voice. (Linklater 2009) Linklater model of freeing the voice is based essentially on four pillars, the "quartet" model of body, voice, emotion, and intellect. It is the engine that would make function today actor when working with voice on Shakespearean texts. Her model is challenged from the point of view of the status of the voice. Other practitioners (Pensalfini 2011) consider Voice as integrative of the other three and not only a component of the training paradigm:

The major difference between Kristin's actor's quartet and the model of integrated voice (...) is that integrated voice holds that voice is not one of a number of equal components in the expression of the self, but rather the ultimate means by which the components of the self, integrated (and given life) by breath, are expressed and

communicated. The breath is "inspired" by the imagination, the point of integration of the three Ps. (...) My version of this model is one that I call "integrated voice," and it holds that there are three basic components, which I call the three Ps: Passion, Precision, and Presence. These more or less equate to Kristin's Emotion, Intellect, and Body, respectively, with some differences to be noted.

Voice became particularly interesting as a subject of interpreting classic work in actors' training. Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Declan Donnellan, among others, paid a specific attention not only to the *intelligibility* of spoken text on stage but also to the integrative training model when matching speech and body. Hamlet is to be understood not from the point of view of the invented vocal experience of actors with the text's Shakespearean language but also from the perspective the speaking body of the actor cast a meaning for our aural experience today. This experience demands a qualitatively new experience of *listening* and of generating *attention* which can make bodies to speak significantly to audiences which look less and less experienced in absorbing the vocal meaning of a body on stage.

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## *On the Actor's Speech\**

FILIP ODANGIU\*\*

**Abstract:** This paper reemphasizes the importance of verbal communication on stage while it also defends, with arguments borrowed from science and from the field of contemporary theatrical practices, an integrating (holistic) approach of the issues of stage speech in the actor's training.

**Keywords:** art of the word, preparatory studies, embodied experience, narrative self, verbal-vocal mask, gibberish, documentary theatre, storytelling, stand-up comedy

### I.

Jean-Louis Barrault, in his memoirs (*Amintiri pentru mâine/ orig. ed. Souvenirs pour demain, 1972*), suggests that at each moment of our existence we are living on at least three planes: we are, we think we are, we want to seem. That which we are? We don't know. That which we think we are? We are delusional. That which we want to seem – we are mistaken. The French theatre man tends to see the human being as a society, an inner, noisy population amidst which each of us feels alone. Whether the number of the man's/actor's levels of existence is limited to three, as Barrault believed, or to some higher value is a matter approached differently by philosophy, psychology and other fields, depending on the system of ideas they suggest. What is definite, however, is that this "inner population" mentioned by the French scholar, communicates mostly through verbal behavior, through speech: "Word forms and creates man..." said Rudolf Steiner to his student (Steiner, and Steiner-Von Sivers 270), operating, since 1924, a link that the current studies of linguistics, philosophy and psychology altogether confirm, namely the enduring connection between word and body.

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Cognitive linguistics is one of the sciences that launched ideas able to generate new perspectives on the biunique relationship between body and logos. The book *Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (1999), by researchers George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, is one of the most provocative works. The two American scholars submit a number of surprising claims relating to the central role of the body to thought; the body is seen as root of the fundamental metaphors that shape our conscience. Theories of cognitive linguistics state that language is the result of the corporeal mark of experiences, i.e. "embodied experience". The studies of the linguist George Lakoff and of the philosopher Mark Johnson reveal the astonishing fact that the senses of our bodies and even the perception of our bodies' presence are the source of the thought's major metaphors, of the meanings we operate and of the values in which we believe and which create our identity. In a synopsis of the findings of neurosciences, psychology and linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson build their theories on three premises:

- 1) The mind is embodied (*embodied mind, mindful body.*)
- 2) Thought takes place, largely, at an unconscious level.
- 3) In general, the nature of abstract concepts is metaphorical.

The basic metaphors the human being operates are, in fact, references (adjustments) of abstract concepts to the human body. Thus, the fundamental metaphors relate to: time perception (phrases like "time is money" or "time flew by (me)", "time stopped", "time is pressing" etc.), space perception (phrases like "a distant man", "one's close friends" etc.), causality ("tread on eggshells"), identity ("I let myself go", "hold yourself in", "one is prone to something"), morality ("he is spineless"), emotion (love is "blind", "blinded by rage", "see red before my eyes" etc.). These are absorbed by regular thought and language and their operation is measured by the efficacy of communication.

In stage practice, the director's indications target the actor's "concrete and imaginative" organ (Marcus, and Neacșu 291-310) and make heavy use of such "efficient notions" (Eugenio Barba), to prompt the character's nature in the actor or a mere tone of interpretation.

A continuous chain of interactions and influences operates between language and embodied experiences; at some researchers, such as Rhonda Blair, this prompts the suggestion, in lieu of the already common term of "embodied mind", of the "mindful body" concept. In Rhonda Blair's opinion, the adoption of this notion could disseminate the actor's attention to his/her whole being, to the entire expressive instrument. (Blair 2009)

The focus of the actor's attention to his body involves the sense of Presence, contrary to what Drew Leder called *absent body* in the

homonymous paper (qtd. in Zarrilli 656), i.e. the relationship or rather the non-relationship the common man has with his own body. Leder describes a case where, for example, we read a book or ponder or are engaged in sports/physical effort/even stage acting: at such times, the condition of our body is far from being in our focus. Our senses are fully captivated by the experience provided by the world of ideas; thus, we ignore physical sensations or the position of the body. Sensory and motor organs become "transparent", they fade, when we use them.

The first cycle of the actor's training in school focuses on self-(re-)discovery, on the reassessment of the organic harmony between body and imagination, on the relisting of bodily parts and, most of all, on the study of body-mind (imagination) interactions. The learner is revealed that theatre means *communication*<sup>1</sup>, first with oneself, then with the outer worlds. Communication between stage and theatre hall can be seen as a blending of languages through which the actor leads the spectator to his own situation, to the understanding of the fact that he, the beholder, communicated, via *a story*, with *his/her* own story.

In his book, *Synaptic Self: How our Brains Become Who We Are*, neuro-researcher Joseph LeDoux suggests the concept of "narrative self", stating that, consciously, "who we are" relies largely on the linguistic reading of our experiences. (Le Doux 271-272)

"Who" we are relies largely on the linguistic interpretation of our experience, translated in the stories we tell ourselves about us and about our place in the world. These "stories" make the *narrative self* (or the *autobiographical self*, at Antonio Damasio). It includes the references, the mental constructs, the imaginary scenarios we create incessantly. In *Synaptic Self: How our Brains Become Who We Are*, Joseph LeDoux warns that stories which make the "narrative self" or the "autobiographical self") could improve or restrict the human being's creative ability. How can the "stories" people (characters) tell of themselves be inferred? By observing how they speak.

## II.

"The body and the voice are the actor's laboratory", said actress Sarah Jones, author of an exciting theatrical approach that makes exclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Patrice Pavis defines "theatrical communication" as the exchange of information between the hall and the stage. The French scholar also notes some researchers' opinion that "theatre is the art and the prototype of communication (...) theatre represented its object, human communication, by *human communication*" (Ivo Osolsobe, "Cours de théâtristique générale", in J. Savona, 1980: 427, qtd. in Pavis 73.)

use of the particularities of the character's verbal speech, based on which performances are later developed. A question was raised, at times, relating to the dynamics of reception: which is the first stimulus to reach the audience: the voice, the sound or the actor's image/movement? Experience shows that the audience's sensitivity is first reached at the phonic level. To what extent could the actor control the "feeling" his body, voice, words leave with their audience? To this end, there are no clear parameters of success. There is, however, recent research of a subtler aspect: the effect of one's movements and words on self-perception. This type of concern has been anticipated, in fact, by Vsevolod Meyerhold's studies, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While, according to Amy Cuddy (Harvard University scholar), "your body language shapes who you are"<sup>2</sup>, the reverse can be equally valid: how you express yourself verbally builds you.

Thus, how I relate to the world is shaped by how I perceive my corporeal morphology (what I (dis)like about me – physical complexes). Therefore, the *others'* relationship with my body is influenced by my own relationship with it, which is different each day. The same processes stay valid at verbal (see the *narrative self*) and vocal levels. As shown by Daniel Goleman, the acoustics ensured by our heads renders our voice as we can hear it, rather differently from how the others hear it. Voice tonality seems to have the most important role in the voice-generated feeling. (Goleman 81) The sound space I intend to occupy, what I believe about my voice or my vocabulary trigger my verbal actions in relation to the others.

According to British director Declan Donnellan, "the actor should not look into the character, but *through* the character. The actor's look should go *through* the character as if the latter were t r a n s p a r e n t . As if the character were a m a s k ." (Donnellan 55) In Declan Donnellan's opinion, the character does not exist, it is only a "lens through which the world is seen differently." (64) And the "color" of the lens, as seen above, is given by how the character relates to his voice, to his body. But most of the times people are not in agreement/harmony with the natural aptitude of their voice or body and seek to "adjust" it. They use, then, the so-called

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<sup>2</sup> While, in the current perception, body language accounted only for how the others perceive us, social psychologist Amy Cuddy shows how our corporeal behavior can also change how we see ourselves. The scholar shows how "power-related body positions" – stand in a way that suggests self-confidence, even when we aren't really confident – may influence the brain levels of testosterone and cortisol and may have an impact on our success rate. ([http://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are?language=ro](http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=ro))

“corporeal masks” or “verbal-vocal masks” – deliberate distortions of the body, of movement, of the voice (and of speech), in fact artefacts meant to ensure some sort of comfort and the illusion of complying with generally accepted standards. The famous film actress Anna Deveare Smith, creator of awarded documentary theatre performances where she acts as a number of characters characterized by speech alone, states that, in the interviews on which her performances rely, she seeks to remove the “masks” that conceal the real “music of voice”.

### III.

The meaning of a verbal speech can be obliterated by the very words that make it. One of the most efficient and recurrent techniques of stage practice of checking or emphasizing the intentional contents of some lines is, paradoxically, the emptying of their meanings, by replacing the text with invented words. Tagged “gibberish”, or in French-origin literary terms “galimatias”, the speech in nonsensical words is far from being a confusing language. The procedure, which involves vocal articulation through onomatopoeias, interdependently with the physical action, ensures the transmission of the subtext, of the intentions, thus clarifying the purpose of accurate communication. The meaning of a gibberish message can be received only by the organic integration of all the nonverbal means (position of the body, movement, gestures, vocal expression). A thought is rendered in an invented language spontaneously, by engaging the actor’s entire equipment and its imaginary as well as expressive elements. The removal of the dependence on words frees the physical expression. Gibberish uses language sounds, but excludes signs (words). Thus the issue of communication as pure experience is tackled.

The worth of *gibberish* to training and to rehearsals lies in the stimulation of spontaneity and genuineness, in the improvement of the imaginary-corporeal expression-vocal expression link via full corporeal reaction, in the increase of the ability to be in contact with the partner, in the “release” of actors who rely mostly on words, intellect and reason (reluctant types can express freely, protected by the vocal and corporeal mask) etc.

The significance and the efficacy of the *gibberish* technique have been proven by the conversion of these means of rehearsals in performance expression. One of the best known examples is “grammelot”, language invented by Dario Fo. The well-known playwright, in an attempt to further the tradition of the “giulari” (travelling folk storytellers) and of the *commedia*

*dell'arte*, created the renowned “grammelot”, a language that either joins several European languages under the North Italian specific syntax and pronunciation (mainly, the Bergamasque dialect) or agglutinates technical and scientific terms in social-political satirical speeches. In his book *Manuale minimo dell'attore*, transcription of a series of conferences, Dario Fo includes a chapter on the definition and description of “grammelot” species. (Fo, and Rame 81) According to the Italian scholar, it is obvious that the actor’s primary task is to generate and develop images in the spectator’s mind in order to be understood in an invented language.

Other famous uses of the “grammelot”/gibberish technique are Dario Fo’s *Mistero Buffo* and *La fame dello Zanni*, as well as scene of Adenoid Hynkel’s speech in Charlie Chaplin’s *Great Dictator*.

Another procedure, this time an “extreme” one, for the testing of verbal speech validity and necessity is the *Silent tension* exercise in Viola Spolin’s method, *Improvisation for the theatre*. Actors rehearse a scene or improvise but do not speak the text lines; instead, they build the relationship and the actions exclusively by the play of intentions, by the energy tension. These exercises may derive from C. S. Stanislavski’s similar practices described by Vasili Toporkov in *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*.

Regaining the meaning of words, the full commitment of corporeal and vocal energy to the word, hence the rehabilitation of the word as main and noble vehicle of theatrical communication occurs through a dramatic genre that seems to regain its former prestige: *storytelling*. The story(telling) is a long-established theatrical movement in the Occidental culture, with archaic roots in all cultures. This type of theatrical communication, rediscovered by contemporaneity, is validated by delineation. Thus, according to Ben Haggarty – British actor known worldwide for his *storytelling* performances – while in dramatic theatre action takes place on stage, before the spectators, the storyteller can have the “performance” “in” the audience’s “heads”, inside their minds, where the only helping tool is one’s imagination (perhaps richer than any technical stage machinery). The (spoken) word creates the performance. The storyteller does not “act” his/her characters, does not contort their voice or speech. His/her relationship with words unfolds at a subtler level. Most often, professional storytellers do not learn a text by heart beforehand. Instead, the ideas of the storyline are known in depth. Words are selected spontaneously and spoken in a way that translates as close as possible the images in the actor’s mind and which “projects” the performance on the listener’s “mental

screen". Thus, the storytellers retrieve an original function of theatrical communication, i.e. have the spectator as co-author of the images.

Another retrieval at the functionality of the actor's speech occurs, even if not at first sight, in stand-up comedy shows, but adding that I am considering the activity of an improv genius such as Robin Williams. In his case, the stand-up recital becomes a form of storytelling; its purpose exceeds the field of mere entertainment. The comic packaging does not exclude that, by making use of all the language resources, Robin Williams speaks about the fundamental themes of theatre.

Obviously, the importance of verbal language is emphasized in other contexts, too, such as *reading performances* (and the improved version of "lectures mises en espace" of French theatre), *poetry recitals*, *public readings* etc. While it does not aim to cover all the modalities that can "retrieve the power" of the spoken word, this paper provides students-actors and, perhaps, "stage speech teachers" with several premises for a shift of perspective on body-verbal communication.

#### IV.

In our theatre schools, speech is often considered a secondary, auxiliary discipline, which relies on the difficult transit of an infertile field. On the other hand, the professional environment complains about the increasing presence of severe deficiencies in young actors' speech; they "cannot be heard", they "lack diction", "do not know the literary Romanian language" etc. This situation is attributed to the lack of practice, to the teacher's low professional level and even to the favoring of "stage movement" training to the detriment of the vocal one. While the first claims could be valid or not, the last assertion (imbalance between focus on movement and focus on voice) should consider the viewpoint of those who make these claims. The curriculum of traditional theatre schools has always separated the training of the actor's voice and the training of the body. As stated by acting researchers and teacher Richard J. Kemp, Pittsburgh University, the training methods that focused on a psychological approach tended to neglect the mechanics of expression, with the exception of voice exercises. The belief was that increased attention to corporeal techniques would have led to anti-naturalist, atypical stage behavior. From this perspective, approaches of creators such as Jerzy Grotowski, Jaques Lecoq seemed "exotic", states Kemp. (31) In the American researcher's opinion, the current training of the actor cannot ignore the scientific findings of the last thirty years on the



operation of the brain and on its relationship with the body. According to the new paradigm, the body has a key role and its education during training is fundamental to the configuration of mind. Conventional dichotomies, for example cognition versus emotion, objective knowledge versus imagination, reason versus feeling are to be reconsidered. Remarkably, advanced sciences now confirm the insights of great theatre experts.

Speech is *action*, in no way less palpable or less efficient than any other physical action, said C. S. Stanislavski. Speech, meant to express/support intentions, is, according to Jerzy Grotowski, like a hand that comes out of one's mouth and performs actions. Therefore, a speech improvement exercise executed without intention will not reach its purpose; words will be mere strings of numb letters. At best, the underlying intention will be only to pronounce according to grammatical, phonetic rules etc.

The discipline that dealt with the "education of stage speech" in the traditional acting school was concerned with the concentration of the student's attention in two main directions: voice (resonators, registers, intensity) and diction (correction of articulation mechanisms, speed etc.). Now, the most recent and most educated theories in the field of the actor's vocal training (e.g. studies by Kristin Linklater, Cicely Berry, David Zinder and so on and so forth) approach the one-to-one relationship between voice and body, the way in which speech is generated in and through body. The aforementioned research by Mark Johnson and George Lakoff is an argument that supports this new type of approach.

On the other hand, words are the squarest expression of "life experience", of a person's "universe", of his/her level of civilization, of the existence (or absence) of some interests in the cultural field (books read, performances seen, music listened to, meetings etc.). When, as an acting teacher, you commit to "cleansing" the novice's speech, a fallow mind, a mind that lacks "cultural experiences" will always be an insurmountable obstacle, irrespective of the student's technical skill. Thus, stage speech experts are required to emphasize to beginners the necessity of a constant concern for the expansion of their cultural "universe". Although it is obvious that quality language (both at content and at form level) is conditioned by a matching level of knowledge, few seem ready to consider this fact. Therefore, unpleasant situations occur: student-actors speak words whose meanings they cannot grasp or at which they guess based on phonetic similarities with other words; even worse, they ascribe completely erroneous meanings to them. Performance should brighten the text rather than obscure it, would say director Andrei Șerban. Constantly pressured by limited time or

by the requirement to get in line with the exterior “*image*” of the character, student-actors sometimes get to a point where they accept the illusion that meaning should be discerned by spectators. Psychology studies, some of them very recent, confirm the existence of the so-called “mirror neurons”. It has been found that, in human interactions (hence, even more in theatre), a “mirroring” phenomenon occurs: the spectator executes, unconsciously, the same actions as the subject of his/her observation. Even reactions are mirrored. Therefore, an actor who ignore, who is passive in front of the challenge posed by the decoding of textual meanings, will transmit, unwillingly, the same attitude to and, sometimes, will annoy the spectator. Here, the audience’s position of partner, of co-author to the completion of theatrical image meaning is damaged.

To conclude, “speech” cannot be considered a secondary, auxiliary discipline. As an essential manner of self-modelling and main means of recognition/depiction of a character, speech alone can become a persuasive instrument in some social, cultural, political situations, as it happens with certain exceptional artists such as Anna Deveare Smith, Sarah Jones, Robin Williams and others.

Perhaps the arguments of this paper for a more integrating approach of stage speech have been selected from theatrical fields that may be considered peripheral: documentary theatre, storytelling, stand-up comedy etc. However, this type of performances can now validate the existence of theatre in a world where the performer’s art can no longer be justified as mere entertainment. Dario Fo, Meryl Streep, Robin Williams, Ben Haggarty, Sarah Jones, Anna Deveare Smith, highly concerned with the power of words, are only several examples of *intelligent* actors who possess the rare ability of making their spectators feel more intelligent and, perhaps, more human.

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*The Retrieval of Orality.\**  
*Actors' Experiences in Rehearsal*

ANCA HAȚIEGAN\*\*

**Abstract:** The present paper draws an analogy between oral thought and acting (stage) thought. As Walter J. Ong pointed out in his classic work *Orality and Literacy* (1982), orality shapes an empathic, relational, situational, operational, concrete, polemic and committed thought, which presents striking similarities with the mental processes of an actor while trying to convert a text into oral communication. Thus the stage becomes the privileged space where the terms of the reconciliation between the written word and speech are negotiated. Could this coexistence of written culture and of orality in theatre allow us to think the stage is the field on which "secondary orality" appeared first, a lot earlier than Ong believes? Doesn't theatre generate, with the actor's swing between the written part and the word spoken on stage, "a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print"? In order to sustain the said analogy, the second part of this paper consists of a short presentation and discussion of several testimonies by Romanian actors.

**Keywords:** rehearsal, secondary orality, acting, Walter Ong, Romanian theatre

*Motto: (...) with the advent of the print and after Luther, the printed book enacted the rule of interiorized reading. We, the theatre scholars and practitioners, seek to see the voice reemerge from the text. No wonder that dramatic texts are deemed illegible; theatre needs a voice.*

(Michel Deutsch, dramaturge, theorist and director.  
See Banu, ed. 101-102.)

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## I.

Traditionally, from its Greek origins, Western theatrical performance has relied on a pre-established text which the actors are to memorize accurately and perform on stage by vocal and extra-linguistic means. In his classic work *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Walter J. Ong claims that the very structure of the first plays preserved, of the Greek tragedies, is indicative of their literary nature, i.e. texts written and established in writing, before they were performed on stage. The closely knit and linear, concise plot, whose main events (exposition, rising action, climax and denouement) were described in Aristotle's *Poetics*, is a relatively late invention, says Ong (139-148), as it is the creation of a culture that was beginning to disengage from the mental universe shaped by orality, with its penchant for the much looser episodic narrative (see Homer's poems). The partially improvised scenarios of the Commedia dell'Arte or the modern and postmodern theatrical experiments, based on materials created by the performers themselves, the visual, gestural theatre performances, a fruit of the 20<sup>th</sup> century transition from the "logocentric" and "text-centric" theatre (which relied on the articulated word) to the theatre conceived as conspicuously physical language have not managed to shatter the foundation and to replace this tradition of the work on a pre-written text. The method continues to be successful in most of the theatre institutions, as well as in television or on the big screen, and an actor's talent is assessed to a great extent depending on the ability to enliven a foreign text, a text read or learnt by heart, and to make the spectator "forget" that a reply said on stage, on screen or from a microphone (for the radio drama) is seldom an act of the actor's spontaneity: "Olga Tudorache taught us how to treasure and how to contemplate the text, so that we should be able to improvise in unforeseen circumstances. She said *anyone can talk in their own words, few can convey feelings and be genuine by using the words of others!*" (our emphasis), Carmen Tănase, a former student, evokes the lesson taught by the great artist and teacher, a real legend of the Romanian theatre, recently retired, at the venerable age of 83 (in an interview taken for this paper by the author, A.H.).

*The Writing Technique and the Fading (of the) Voice*

Therefore, one of the actor's major objectives is the retrieval of orality, the delivery of the written words to their initial, voiced universe. The blank text, the "dead" letter require resuscitation and the actor's mission is to reclaim

the underlying “feeling tone”, because, as noted by neurologist Oliver Sacks in *The President’s Speech* (essay on the disorders associated to the perception of oral expression of language in his famous *The Man who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, 1985), “speech – natural speech – does not consist of words alone, or (as the English neurologist Hughlings Jackson thought) of ‘propositions’ alone. It consists of utterance – an uttering forth of one’s whole meaning with one’s whole being – the understanding of which involves infinitely more than mere word recognition” (104). This “feeling tone” (as defined by another neurologist, Henry Head<sup>1</sup>) withstood an unprecedented attack in the mechanical era, with the advent of the printing machine and of the people’s alphabetization, a phenomenon approached by Marshall McLuhan in his anthological work *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man* (1962). In the phonetic alphabet system, writing and reading take place by the dissociation of the senses, stimulating mostly the sight; sight separates, distinguishes things, introducing the distance between the subject and the object, unlike hearing that unifies, integrates the external stimuli in its field of action (the upper hand thus earned by sight over hearing is, according to McLuhan, Walter J. Ong and other authors, one of the main sources of modern individualism, contrary to the co-participative group psychology). Thus, during reading, a gap appears between the rhythm of picturing the graphic signs and the rhythm of their verbalization; this gap is augmented at the more educated individuals: in other words, an individual reads faster than they utter, even if they say the words only to themselves (silent reading), rather than loud. (In writing, things do not attain this range: we cannot write at a rate that could exceed the rate of our verbalization capacity. In fact, at most of the writers, silent, *sotto voce* or, on the contrary, extremely vocal verbalization is a privileged form of self-control.) Therefore, in the cultures based on a phonetic alphabet, claimed McLuhan, the separation of the written word from speech is required:

The new institutes for teaching speeded-up reading habits works on the separation of eye-movements from inner verbalization. (...) all the reading in the ancient and medieval worlds was reading aloud. With print the eye speeded up and the voice quieted down. But inner verbalization was taken for granted as inseparable from the horizontal following of the words on the page. Today we know that the divorce of reading and verbalizing can be made by vertical reading. This, of course, pushes the alphabetic technology of the separation of the senses to an extreme of inanity, but it is relevant to the understanding of how writing of any sort gets started. (201-202)

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<sup>1</sup> In the work cited, Sacks offers information on the origin and the place the syntagm occupies in Henry Head’s work– see Sacks 105.

While with living speech the words seem to be the sum of their linguistic (articulated sounds) and paralinguistic elements (quality, tone, intensity, inflection, intentionality etc.), that which is said being intimately linked to how it is said, in writing the paralinguistic traits are kept only at the level of suggestion, of underlying contents, allowing various interpretations. The reader is the one who reconstructs, reactivates or envisages them, according to the textual or graphic clues (see emoticons inserted in computer typed texts), in other words, the one who assigns a possible voice to the words. Quick vertical reading abandons, however, the entirety of this type of reconstruction/ assignment, losing the paralinguistic elements and keeping only the instructive aspect of the words. We might say that the greater the interest in the “chasing” of the sensitive tones during a live conversation, the more insensitive we are to them via the writing technology – and particularly printing.

Metaphorically, writing and reading put us in a state of “tonal agnosia”, while oral communication draws us closer to the position of the “tonal aphasia” subject in Oliver Sacks’ meaningful recount. Tonal aphasia is the alteration or loss of the ability to understand words, linked with an exacerbated sensitivity to “‘tone’ and ‘feeling’”, to the vocal-bodily expressiveness attached to the words in the act of speech. The individual who suffers from aphasia “cannot grasp your words, and so cannot be deceived by them; but what he grasps he grasps with infallible precision, namely the *expression* that goes with the words, that total, spontaneous, involuntary expressiveness which can never be simulated or faked, as words alone can, all too easily”. In particular, he has “an infallible ear for every vocal nuance, the tone, the rhythm, the cadences, the music, the subtlest modulations, inflections, intonations, which can give – or remove – verisimilitude to or from a man’s voice”.

On the contrary, the man who suffers from tonal agnosia can decipher words, but he is immune to the “color of tone” or the “evocative” tone (terms Sacks borrowed from Frege): “typically, the expressive qualities of voices disappear – their tone, their timbre, their feeling, their entire character – while words (and grammatical constructions) are perfectly understood.” The atonal claims accuracy of speech, while word connotations, meanings of poetical phrases, of suggestive speech evade him. Sacks talks about a patient suffering from tonal agnosia: “She could less and less follow loose speech or slang – speech of an allusive or emotional kind – and more and more required of her interlocutors that they speak prose – ‘proper words in

proper places'. Prose, she found, might compensate, in some degree, for lack of perceived tone or feeling." (104-107) Furthering our analogy, we could conclude that the technology of writing, mainly the printing press, with its penchant for "atony", encourages the use of denotative language – the accurate language of sciences rather than of fiction.

In fact, we have seen how the rapid eye of the "printing man", which races on the paper, scanning it vertically, is not likely to linger on a particular word, to feel its flavor: it requires the quick grasp of information. In the end, the main message received with this (quick, vertical) reading is speed – "*speed is the message*", would say philosopher Paul Virilio. However, if we had to name a sound equivalent, it would be, now, the news anchors' "white", prompter-guided voice, the robot voice that sacrifices intonation and even logical emphases, lending its own dynamism to the guiding mechanism.

Both types of reading – silent vertical reading, for information purposes, and loud reading like in newscast – are fueled by the myth of objectivity – another product of the writing technology; in writing, the voice seems to detach from the subject, to obtain autonomy, to become depersonalized, while in the act of speech it is always attached to the source. Inexpressiveness is promoted when the intent is that the voice sound more credible: an uninvolved, impersonal, submissive voice would seem the bearer of a disinterested message – the objectivity of a piece of news delivered in such a voice would never be questioned... However, the white, flat voice, *flatus voci*, often emerges intrusively, usually in front of a numerous audience: it is the *literal* voice that cannot detach from the written page and stays captive in its lines. How many times have we witnessed mechanical, monotonous loud readings or recitals? How many times, even on professional stages, could we hear dull, stiff voices, with the text passing *by* the actor instead through him?!

The retrieval of orality or the "pulling/squeezing" of words from the written page occurs somewhat despite the text, by assaulting it, by coercing its tongue, because the writing technology tends to dampen the voice and even to mute it. Oral expressiveness is not easy to obtain, not even when you read one of your own texts. Your own words, once put on paper, seem to resist your attempt to remove them from there. "I was sometimes dazed by some poets' inability to recite well their poetry (at times, not even the logical emphasis would be appropriate); they were unable to retrace their inspiration starting from the final form", said once actor Ion Caramitru (*see* Băleanu, and Dragnea 70), as a (probably unaware) echo of one of his



forerunners, Ioan Livescu, actor and professor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in the inter-war, who noted the following: “from all those I’ve come to know – and I’ve come to know many, with very rare exceptions – no one more than themselves (i.e. the poets, my note) effaces, in the meetings where they read them, the brightness of their own work and then they succeed, when they meet good actors, who restore the value of their poetry” (27). The strategies adopted most frequently intuitively by the actors for the organic memorization and expressive rendering of a text on stage suggest that the “retrace” is often a “leap” from a “scriptural” mind-set to one that has many affinities with the oral though, as described by Walter J. Ong.

### *Oral man vs. Print man*

And which is the *forma mentis* polished by the writing technology, different from the one of the oral tradition man? Walter J. Ong believes that writing and reading change fundamentally man’s mental structure, with a deep impact on his psychological and cognitive universe. With Jack Goody, Ian Watt or Marshall McLuhan, he is the promoter of a “rough” theory that claims there is an actual rift between the man shaped by the writing technology and the man of the oral tradition. Jean Duvignaud, author of a known book of *Sociologie du théâtre* (1965), says the great – and “final” – rupture between the two types of mentalities occurred only with the appearance of print, which marked the end of the “religion of the word” and the transition from myth to book, “two radically different ways of knowing and of being” (211-212). The French essay writer, however, considers the consequences of the writing technology at the level of the collective mental processes (an approach closer to McLuhan’s) rather than at the individual level (like Ong), given that “social practice and societies aware of their efforts could not be considered without the ultimate embedding of the world of the book” (214). According to all these authors, the writing technology enabled the development of reflexive, critical-analytical, conceptual thought, with a decisive contribution to the birth and progress of sciences and of philosophy<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, while in the oral tradition knowledge is transmitted by way of mouth and is stored in the memory, writing, as externalized memory that

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<sup>2</sup> To this end, Ong invokes a 1981 study of neurophysiology by Kerckhove, which shows that writing, and most of all writing in a phonetic alphabet system, intensifies the activity of the left brain hemisphere, in charge of abstract, analytical thinking (89). Sacks notes that tonal aphasia adds to disorders of this area, more exactly of the left temporal lobe, while tonal agnosia or atony associates with disorders of the right temporal lobe (106).

can be transmitted from one generation to the next ones in relatively unchangeable forms and available for thorough scrutiny, allows the mind's unloading of an immense burden and encourages the new connections, hence new mental processes. Knowledge itself is radically changed when they are no longer required to bear adaptations that could ease the memorizing efforts. Because, as shown by Walter J. Ong, the need to memorize "by ear" guides, in the oral cultures or cultures with strong oral residues (such as South East European cultures and those on the territory of the former Soviet Union!) the entire configuration of the body of human knowledge, in form and content. To simplify the memorizing process, fundamental knowledge is usually "packed" and delivered in versified or rhythmic form, concentrated in memorable – how else?! – phrases (e.g. sayings, proverbs, maxims). For the same reason, speakers use repetitions, alliterations, assonances, typical phrases, labeling epithets (Achilles is always "swift-footed"); they promote antithesis, strong contrasts; they use standard theme settings. The sentence syntax is incremental rather than subordinating (sequence of main clauses linked with "and...and" instead of sentences with main and dependent clauses).

Style also is aggregative rather than analytical (agglomeration of descriptive epithets, such as "the brave soldier", "the beautiful princess" or phrases such as "the Glorious October Revolution", ever-present in the wooden language of communist propaganda – are examples given by Ong, to which we could add infinite Caragialisms – see "the gruesome suicide on Fidelity street" -, or, for the nostalgic reflections on the Romanian press at the beginning of the 1990s, the haunting leitmotif "the odious dictator and his sinister wife"...). In oral communication, the information is often redundant, "copious", claims Ong, because only writing, owing to its slow run and the possibility to return to the text, allows concision, rationalizing, the organization of the material according to a close, linear logic (such as the "classic", Aristotelian plot mentioned before) or, on the contrary, the development of long, sophisticated demonstrations, complex but non-repetitive argumentation. Furthermore, the tonality of the reference (the transmission of information in the oral culture involves always direct address, with the adjacent possibility of being questioned by the audience) is often polemic, agonal: for example proverbs, riddles, says Ong, are real challenges for the interlocutors. In oral cultures, excessive slander or praise are common in oral cultures, and the world is divided in good and bad, villains and heroes, because only strong characters are impressive and

sticking upon your memory. Since communication is not mediated, always taking place live, *hic et nunc*, the speakers' style tends to be emphatic, participatory: Ong exemplifies with a bard who, caught in the public recount, went imperceptibly from a 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrative to a 1<sup>st</sup> person one, and identified with the hero of his story...

However, perhaps the most important feature of oral culture communication is that references are always to the familiar universe, with immediate, operational concreteness and relevance. Living memory does not get along with abstract terms, with impractical concepts disconnected from daily existence. It requires anchors in the reality: general, technical, cold descriptions, lists, statistics and so on, give it a hard time. For this reason, the genealogies of traditional communities, for example, will never resume to a mere inventory of proper names; they also include active verbs that itemize and soften the information (see the genealogies in the Old Testament). Therefore, because it has to work with entire series of "common places" and to restrict to data in the near, known world, in order to ease memorizing, oral thought, as noted by Walter J. Ong, is signally conservative, traditionalist, circumscribed: innovations are barely accepted and are quickly assimilated to the "already-known", as variations on known, approximatively the same themes. At the same time, oral thought is "homeostatic", in Ong's terms, because the information irrelevant in the present, which does not fit the current conditions, is removed from the memory: the present reinvents the past continuously, a lot more markedly in oral histories than in written ones. (36-56)

In a synopsis (procedure dictated by the written form of this presentation...), orality shapes an *empathic, relational, situational, operational, concrete, polemic, engaged* thought, while writing induces a *(self)reflexive, cerebral, critical-analytical* mind set *separated from routine*. In the 1960s, when McLuhan proclaimed the return to orality of the civilizations that had entered the era of electric power, a process he had called "retribalization", the Canadian author was also foretelling, with mixed feeling, the end of the written culture and the disappearance of the literate mind. The discrepancy between the two cultures, oral and written, was, in his opinion, so marked that he could not see any possibility of reconciliation. According to him, the homogenizing effect of the speed in the spread and expansion of information would soon lead to the "global village", and power-dependent technology, by generating the audiovisual environment and thus, ending the supremacy of the eye, would have man retrieved to the sum-total of his (re)integrated senses.

Indeed, with the invention of radio and of sound cinema, at the beginning of the last century, voice and hearing regained some of the prestige lost in the print-dominated era. More recent inventions, the remote control, the keyboard, the mouse, touchscreens require quite a lot our tactile sense, while the new interactive media facilitate nearly instant communication, reciprocity, evoking the oral exchange of replies. Analysts of the new technologies, admitting McLuhan's foresight, are not, however, equally hurried to proclaim the death of written culture, given the proliferation of writing on blogs, forums, chatrooms, social sites or news bars on screens etc. Although it went a long way both in the academic and in the non-academic environments, "retribalization" seems to be replaced now by Walter J. Ong's more flexible phrase "secondary orality" (he launched in 1971, in relation to the television environment, and then refined in the 1982 book), which leaves room to a new field of scrutiny relating to the forms of "crossing" generated by the interaction of the two said cultures. For the differences between them were too clear to Ong, just as they were too McLuhan; he admitted, however, as we've already seen, that written culture allows the identification of "oral residues": for example, the discipline of rhetoric, he says, deeply tributary to oral culture, extended the latter's life, in Western Europe, up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The author also wrote some studies on "oral residues" in Shakespeare's work and in the work of other English literature classics. It comes as no surprise that, in *Orality and Literacy* the essay writer included a subchapter "Tenaciousness of Orality" (112).

Thus, the last residual manifestations of "primary" oral culture in Western Europe coincide, in Ong's opinion, with the beginnings of the electric power era, which, he claims (following in McLuhan's steps), gave new "secondary" life to orality, in many ways very similar and in others very different from the primary: "with telephone, radio, television and various kinds of sound tape, electronic technology has brought us into the age of 'secondary orality'". This new orality is strikingly similar to the old one in terms of participatory mystique, of the communal feeling it generates, of the focus on the current moment and even of the choice of memorable phrases. But essentially, this is a more deliberate and a more self-conscious orality – it makes frequent use of writing and printing, since these are indispensable in the manufacture and use of electronic equipment.

Secondary orality is both remarkably like and remarkably unlike primary orality. Like primary orality, secondary orality has generated a strong group sense, for listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience, just as reading

written or printed texts turns individuals in on themselves. But secondary orality generates a sense for groups immeasurably larger than those of primary oral culture – McLuhan’s “global village”. (Ong 133)

Regarding the less developed countries in Eastern Europe, Romania included, with a high percent of rural population<sup>3</sup>, who live in conditions that evoke, at times, the Middle Ages, and where the rates of analphabetism are high<sup>4</sup>, they are not fully recovered from the influence of “primary orality” not even now, when here, too, we are witnessing the boom of “secondary orality” – this overlap gave birth to an extraordinary blend of adverse and contradictory attitudes on which there is no research yet. In fact, we must add that Walter J. Ong found very serious grounds for his comments on primary oral culture in a study by the Russian researcher A.R. Luria, suggested by Soviet psychologist Lev Vîgoțki, in the inter-war (!), more precisely in 1931-1932; the study was conducted on the analphabet population of Uzbekistan and Kirghizia. The corresponding paper, *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, was published only in 1976 (Ong 49).

Therefore, on the one hand, there’s a segregationist vision, according to which the coexistence of orality and literacy (as *forma mentis*) is impossible, and on the other hand, there’s a more toned vision, according to which coexistence is possible, which means feasibility of reciprocal adjustments, synopsis.

### *Gestural man vs. Rational man*

A wider digression is required here: it is likely that the radicalness of the first vision, which pleads, according to real, established phenomena (see Luria’s study), for the direct opposition between oral thought and thought *in-formed* by the writing technology, be however the fruit of the influence of an optical illusion created precisely by the said technology – McLuhan himself or, to a lesser extent, even Ong, may have been caught in its trap. The issue is the following: separated from the speaker, who has his voice and gestures to help convey subjective substance, words fixed on

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<sup>3</sup> According to historian Neagu Djuvara, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, peasants were still more than 80% of the Romanian population (194). In communism, rural population decreased abruptly, given the forced industrialization of the country, and until nowadays it remains at about 50% of the country’s population.

<sup>4</sup> The National Institute of Statistics (INS) reported, based on the 2011 Romanian population census, that there were 245,400 analphabet people in approximately 20 million inhabitants (the highest rate of analphabetism in the European Union). Other statistics show that 40% of the Romanians lack good reading skills or do not know how to read.

paper can easily seem – even if they aren't at all! – “blunt” abstractions, exclusive products of our rational minds: a mere list of graphical signs, lacking, at the core, in form, particularly in alphabetic writing (the most abstract), the strength of poetic suggestion (apparently, pictograms are an exception). In other words, in writing, poetry doesn't look too dissimilar from statistics. This *trompe l'oeil* effect, given by the possibility to contemplate words on paper as if they were foreign bodies, has deceived even some of the representatives of a subtle field such as psychology – words were associated exclusively with rationality, while feelings, sensations were linked strictly with the area of non-verbal expression: “Just as the mode of the rational mind is words, the mode of the emotions is nonverbal. Indeed, when a person's words disagree with what is conveyed via his tone of voice, gesture or other nonverbal channel, the emotional truth is in *how* he says something rather than in *what* he says” (Goleman 139). The previous Manichean dissociation ignores that the existence of the abstract, analytical, “diurnal” (see Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, 1960) word can be doubled, writing included, at the level of the contents, by the “nocturnal” conditions of synesthesia – see the poetic word, the evocative word, the “heavy” word of connotations (which the atonal person can barely understand). It also ignores the possibility of the *interaction* between word and gesture and, most of all, their potential *interdependence*.

Aren't the rather unfortunate awareness of the body-word duality and the divergent visions of one's alleged or expected superiority over the other owed to the illusion of our doubling in writing: gestural man versus *Homo sapiens loquans*?! To the same end, we should also look at the impression effected by the man engaged in reading (in silent reading, to be more exact) as compared to the speaker, for, unlike oral communication, which engages the speaker's whole being, gestures and face expressions included, to a wider extent than writing (which involves the movement of the hand and may trigger some nervous reactions), it seems to pin the reader in a purely cerebral, reflexive activity – hence the static, meditative image projected on the man of letters, on the “intellectual”. In paleo-anthropology, the dispute between the two different vision on the extent to which the gesture and the speech contributed to man's emancipation is articulated by whether speech owes something – and to what extent – to gesture, if, in the formation of *Homo sapiens*, speech developed early and gradually, from some gestures, as an extension of body language (*the gestural model*) or if it appeared later and downright replaced gestural language (*the nominalist model*)?

In *The Sound of Meaning: Theories of Voice in Twentieth-Century Thought and Performance*, Professor Andrew McComb Kimbrough paints an extremely crisp image of the said dispute, far from being unraveled (52-67). Literates tend to embrace the nominalist model that promotes the absolute superiority of speech over gesture, the writing technology creating the feeling the two can be detached – but I.L. Caragiale, the classic of Romanian dramaturgy, a great playwright and, at the same time, a great man of letters, thought that punctuation, which was one of his major and constant concerns (which is why he was called “Moș Virgulă” (Old Comma)), was “gestures” (!): “Too many (people) can’t see punctuation is mind’s gestures...”, he’d say to his good friend Octavian Goga, the poet (Cazimir, ed. 89). On the other hand, theatre professionals tend to choose the gestural model, in keeping with rhetoric, on which Ong said it originates in oral thought. Thus Kimbrough notes there is continuity in the “pairing of voice and gesture in rhetorical practice from Cicero and Quintilian to voice pedagogy used in theatre” (66).

Before rhetoric could modify speech, as “‘exteriorization’ (expression) of all our senses” (McLuhan 201-202), in a vocal-corporeal, carefully formalized art, oral culture bards used gesture intuitively. Recitation, notes Ong, came with various movements: bending the body forward and backward, dances, raveling beaded threads (resembling rosary) on fingers, handling string instruments or playing drums. Hands were particularly tasked and trained in the (re)memorizing process. Stillness was unusual and appeared only at the times of suspense, as eloquent as meaningful silence. Ong believes this somatic component is extremely important for oral memory, but insignificant for textual memory. (65) In a 2002 article, Tony Noice and Helga Noice, while describing the (then) newest research on professional actors’ routines, invoke, among other things, an experiment that showed clearly that the actors’ movements on the stage have a significant input in the memorizing of the corresponding lines, even when they (the movements) do not agree with the meaning of the words (16). This is a good enough reason for the actor to want to mimic the former bards and choose the gestural model! But this preference and, in general, the “à rebours” operation of stage instinct or intelligence, contrariwise to the orientation of “textual” intelligence, had the actor suspected of “primitivism” and of some sort of “infantilism” (we do not forget that, until they learn to write letters, children live in a mainly oral world). This suspicion did not spare traditional, oral culture either (in fact, very sophisticated, as proven by Walter J. Ong), tagged “retrograde”, “wild” by representatives of written culture (the dogmatic-naïve

evolutionist perspective). To this end, Tudor Vianu's (literary critic and aesthetician) arguments are convincing; in a 1956 article published in *Revista Teatrul*, he tried to encourage Romanian actors to reduce and control their gestures:

A former recommendation of dramatic art schools provided the mandatory pairing of sound expression and gestural expression. Any saying must be acted. Any intelligible manifestation of voice must be paired with a gesture. *The truth, however, is that human kind's linguistic progress sees the significance of gestures gradually diminished. An individual's level of intellectual development and even the extent of his civilization can also be assessed by the decreasing need to use gesture, as manner of expression* (my emphasis). What's the worth of a gesture that shows an emotion or of one that reproduces an aspect of the outer world, signals a dimension, names a person or imitates an action, if the powers of verbal expression in description, narrative or dialogue are sufficient to communicate the entire content of ideas, representations and feelings of the speaker? (...) Thus, the actors' duty is to control their gestures, by avoiding the hectic movements of people drowning, by thinking that all the forms of anarchic excitement may appear in those of their audience. (4)

Beyond the common sense observations on tautological gestures, the nominalist *parti-pris* pierces through the entire article. (Among other aspects, the author pleaded for the unity of the language spoken on the stage; or, as shown by Ong, this even language – literary language – is an artificial creation polished by the writing technology. The oral expression of language is as diversified as possible – dialectical, sub-dialectical, regional, argotic etc.)

Even now, in the era of retribalization, of secondary orality (or of remote-literacy), the actor is often perceived as an “underdeveloped” in relation to vibrant eloquence: his ordinary speech is often rough, heavy and loaded with affective or motor “residues” the “rational” man, trained in the spirit of written culture, tries to shake off, pressured by the still very active nominalist preconception (at least in the Romanian literary environments, perhaps as a reflex to the complex of inferiority of a culture that was governed until late by primary orality). This is what the actor Florin Zamfirescu (he is not immune to this preconception either) writes on the native qualities that signal a possible theatrical calling:

All people say they express themselves, but they do it distinctly: first, those who argue verbally and with minimum gesture their point of view, second, those who use gestures, as if trying to make up for the lack of intellectual argumentation. There are those for whom ‘subtext’ is more important, because they do not have sufficient support in words; they use gestural additions instinctively. This behavior can be defined as some sort of *atavism* (my emphasis), but it is extremely important, because among gestural people... actors can be selected. (35)



What's interesting is that the urge to gesture does not leave the actor on the radio, in front of the microphone, nor in front of the written page. Thus, director Mihai Zirra, considered father of the Romanian radio drama, notes in his memoirs the moment he understood that: "actors act in front of the microphone and they do it with all the gestures and movements of the stage, but the microphone is the filter, to say so, through which an actor replies to his partner" (23). Another radio inside perspective is offered by actress Maia Morgenstern: "In radio drama, the voice and sometimes even the movement are important; we joke and sometimes we tell one another how the movement should look, there are such cues among us..." (Răboj et al., eds. 76).

Despite this gestural bias, we must emphasize, however, that the speaking actor is ill-at-ease when there's excessive stress on movements. Some do push to extremes the gestural model. Olga Tudorache recounted that the work at the *Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*, by Paul Zindel, directed by Cătălina Buzoianu (1977) had been very challenging as to the many physical actions that had to be done in a brief time interval on the stage. This mad bustle was jamming the actress's natural rhythm of speech linked to thought and feeling:

I thought the play with objects in the *Effect of Gamma...* was a huge hindrance. This innumerable actions were also the reason of some kind of misunderstanding between me and director Cătălina Buzoianu; I was asking, 'Alright, and when do I get to act? I'm used to an action in three sentences and you're asking me to do six actions in three words? I don't get to feel what I'm acting, because I'm whipped like a horse, I'm to get both on and under the ladder and under the table and spread those words, to make them feel thought and felt; to squeeze them like you do a harmonic, so that, while I speak them, I should also do so many things: put on a shawl, brush my teeth, take the shawl off – and all these in three words!. I need to digest a line, a situation, to catch it, swallow it, give it time to turn in me...'. Cătălina Buzoianu told me, however, that we had to mirror the American world and its hectic beat (which could not be obtained with 'Moldavian measures') and I did my best to accomplish everything she asked me to; in the end, I understood that, indeed, on the stage, there was a rhythm of life different from those to which we are used. It was a success, but the effort had been tremendous! (...) I had encountered a standpoint very different from mine, but I tried to do what was asked of me and it turned out alright; which means she was right. (Băleanu, and Dragnea 295-296)

Perhaps the actress would have found it more comfortable if her strong stage instinct hadn't told her that thought, action, word and feeling had to be linked organically. But success wouldn't have been the same either if, to ease her task, she'd have given up any of the elements. The word had to catch up with the gesture; this didn't mean it should be

abandoned to mechanical speech, as it does, unfortunately, rather often on the current Romanian stages. Or it is exactly the tension of the – not always harmonious – interaction between word and gesture that should have been kept and emphasized! One lesson a large number of young Romanian actors tend to ignore, which is why it seems that they are physically fit, para-linguistically impaired. Here, exacerbated dynamism short-circuits the path from text to speech. The era of speed and electricity and of the so-called “secondary orality” gave birth to the athlete actor, the acrobat actor (“the Browning actor, the engine actor”, “who terrorizes the immense stage by the dynamics of each muscle, by the circuit of each leap”, in the fervent opinion of Stephan Roll, recounted in the Romanian inter-war avant-garde magazine *Integral* (see *Actorul acrobat. Integral 2* (1925): 14, reproduced in Berlogea, and Muntean, eds. 154); this – lo and behold! – hinders, paradoxically, the retrieval of orality on the stage.

In so far as theatre takes it not to give up text, converting it to oral communication, it remains however the privileged space where the terms of the reconciliation between the written word and speech are negotiated. Could this coexistence – of course, not always a peaceful one – of written culture and of orality in theatre, which can be documented, as we’ve seen, since the ancient Greeks, allow us to think the stage is the field on which “secondary orality” appeared first, a lot earlier than Ong believes? Doesn’t theatre generate, with the actor’s swing between the written part and the word spoken on stage, “a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print”? This takes us back to the main thesis of this paper, namely the “tenaciousness of orality” (see Ong) and the strategies actors adopt for the said conversion of the text to oral communication.

### *“Oral thought”*

In very strict terms, of course, radio theatre is the most in-built in orality; Romanian director Liviu Ciulei compared it with the “sessions” of stores typical to the rural world: “I don’t know about a form of oral theatre before the appearance of radio theatre. Perhaps it is very slightly related to the so-called bee; most of the times, however, apart from ballads and lyrics, it made use of epic rather than dramatic formulae” (Răboj et al., eds. 35). Orality, in Ong’s opinion, is not the prevalence of sound elements; it also means a particular way of thinking. Director Peter Brook, states George Banu, would say: “to rehearse is to think loud”. In theatre, this “oral

thought", claims Banu, is geared from the first collective reading of the text, from its first loud reading. (Banu, ed. 113) Stage directions are also given in loud voice. In theatre, everybody talks, louder, soft or whispering, from actors and director to technicians or prompters. Surrounded by an ocean of orality, the text itself speaks when the performance is a success. Otherwise, the stage is governed by that mechanical, flat and colorless speech, which frustrates the spectators.

## II.

I will try in this second part of the paper to support the analogy between oral thought and acting (stage) thought outlined in the first part with a series of statements from Romanian actors. Most of them are excerpts from two volumes of interviews by Andrei Băleanu and Doina Dragnea at the beginning of the 1980s, with very explicit references to the actor's work and relation with the text during rehearsals; I have also used some opinions from acquaintances or friends who are actors.

As shown previously, orality shapes an *empathic, relational, situational, operational, concrete, polemic* and *committed* thought. Thus, the profound affinity of the actor's thought with oral thought is best described by how the *relationship* and the *situation* were, in Irina Petrescu's opinion, the main pillars of the dramatic structure:

I think the real acting work is in the building of a situation on the stage, the building of a relationship;

I believe truth on stage comes out only in the relationship. At Bulandra, I was lucky to act in the company of ideal partners: Clody Bertola, Petre Gheorghiu, Ileana Predescu, Gina Patrichi, Mariana Mihailescu... Actors who, not only during rehearsals, but also during the performances, enhance the relationship and keep it constantly alive. Like in ping pong, where each hit launched is received and returned. (Interview with Irina Petrescu – see Dragnea 160-161)

Both at Irina Petrescu and at Costel Constantin, *the polemic commitment* in relation to the stage partner looks like an antidote against the automation of the stage act:

We, those on the stage, carry out some sort of very beautiful fight, some sort of lurking, which also draws the spectator in. Somehow similar to what the film obtains by editing, by montage.

*What kind of lurking?*

A state of permanent wakefulness, trying to guess the partner's thoughts and intentions. (Interview with Costel Constantin – Dragnea 54).

However, perhaps the most eloquent argument in our demonstration is the preference, that most actors express, to learn the text during the rehearsals (rather than by themselves, at home), with their partners, when words can be linked with a fairly concrete context, with action (movement), objects (involved in the action), situation and relationship, setting layout, costumes etc.:

*Do you learn your part by heart before you begin the rehearsals or during?*

I learn it during the rehearsals. The part can be learnt in the situations the actor faces. That's my opinion.

*When you're in that situation, do lines come easy?*

Well, I do know the text in general, but when the real situation is created on the stage, lines attach definitely to memory. When the situation is not clear, it is researched, the text won't have the certainty of a well thought moment. I think that may be a quality symptom. When a stage is well designed and integrates each actor organically, the text is known and never forgotten.

*So a very accurate delivery of the text could be a test of the verity of the situation?*

Yes, I think it could; for me, it could! (Conversation with Ion Caramitru – see Băleanu, and Dragnea 75);

I never rehearse at home. I've been married for 22 years and my wife never heard be rehearsing a text. If I think about it, I can't say when I get to learn it. (Conversation with Amza Pellea – see Băleanu, and Dragnea 89);

*Do you work on your part at home or only during the rehearsals?*

I'm always working. Always! To work is to pay a thought to the character, don't you think? Sometimes they say we are lazy, that we do not learn the text at home. But it's not true. It's a denial, a fear that, by learning the part only at home, we could learn something fake, something that lacks authenticity. So you assimilate it with the movement, with the gesture. It is more complex, more organic, more character-wise... Louis Jouvet once said the actors think "physically". (Conversation with Valeria Seciu - see Băleanu 243-244);

I cannot learn the text unless we're rehearsing. I will reply to my partner one way and I will deliver the line in another one when I learn it at home. If I learn the words at home, I ascribe another tempo, another pace to them. Pace and tempo can be felt only depending on the situation created between the characters, which happens during table readings. (Conversation with Olga Tudorache – see Băleanu, and Dragnea 295);

I learn the text during table readings and during the rehearsals. (Victor Rebengiuc in a conversation with the author of this paper, A.H.);

I learn the text at table readings and during the rehearsals with movement. I connect the words to the partner and to the setting work, to the objects. I've never learnt a text at home. Because I need context! (Carmen Tănase in a conversation with the author, A.H.);

I don't like to learn the text at home. I like to discover it in relation to the stage partner(s), to the director. I don't even think I have this ability to learn by heart, mechanically. (Lăcrimioara Szlanko in a conversation with the author, A.H.)

And these examples could go on. To conclude, I will include here, given its complexity, the strategy for the assimilation of a part coming from the great actor George Constantin; a strategy that may well be one of the most bizarre and most efficient in Romanian theatre:

... I had to find means to learn quickly and easy the text I had to assimilate and then I invented various methods (or perhaps I'm not the only one who thought of them, perhaps there are others, too). First I typewrite the entire text...

*Do you type it yourself?*

I bought a typewriter and I've learnt to type. I don't type fast like a professional, but it does the job.

*Why? Does typing glue the text to memory?*

Not only do I learn it better, I think, but I also grasp some of its subtleties when I rewrite it; I think about it and get closer to it. And then I have it copied on a tape. When I'm on stage, I don't have time day after day after day to look at the text, but in the morning, before I go at the theatre, or in the evening, when there's some spare time, the cassette player is playing; I listen to it, even if I'm doing something else also; thus the text sinks in, whether I want it or not, you know? I think it's easier. (Conversation with George Constantin – see Băleanu, and Dragnea 88-89).

The typewriter and the cassette player, as extensions of the human body (would say McLuhan), were, for the actor, more than memory aid. They also influenced the mode of memorizing: through them, the text was assimilated via a larger number of senses, it was "absorbed", integrated organically – by sight, hearing, touch (fingers on the keyboard). Combined means had the paradoxical role of controlling the mechanical aspects, in a fight for precedence.

All these testimonies suggest, as I have previously stated, that between oral thought and acting (stage) thought there are strong affinities and this usually comes not as a hindrance while rehearsing a play but, on the contrary, it helps bringing the text to life, enriching the theatre experience for both the players and their audience.

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## *S. Beckett et Voix en jeu scénique*

CHRISTOFI CHRISTAKIS\*

**Abstract:** The original use of the voice in Beckett's dramatic work constitutes a reflection on the boundaries of dramatic art and theatre and proposes a dynamic relationship of the elements brought to the stage. It is connected to the play and stage, reinforcing the enigmatic presence of the character and questioning the limits of narrative and performance. It is carefully orchestrated to bring about new questions.

**Keywords:** Beckett, voices, stage, acting, movement, body

L'œuvre dramatique de S. Beckett constitue une réflexion critique sur les limites du langage dramatique et du théâtre et présente des rapports dynamiques des éléments mis en jeu. La voix se lie au jeu et à l'espace scéniques<sup>1</sup>. Dans cette étude, il s'agit d'interroger la voix en tant qu'élément scénique, qui renforce la présence énigmatique du personnage et comment Beckett met en cause les limites de la narration et de la représentation via l'emploi original de la voix. Nous examinons les problématiques principales liées à la narration et, plus précisément, au dialogue entre le personnage et la Voix<sup>2</sup>, et leur représentation, en focalisant principalement sur les *dramaticules*, pièces dans lesquelles ces enjeux apparaissent clairement en prouvant l'originalité de cette œuvre.

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<sup>1</sup> Cet article suis les recherches de trois autres travaux (1. Kimbrough, Andrew. *Dramatic Theories of Voice in the Twentieth Century*. Cambria Press, 2011 2. Richardson, Brian. "Voice and narration in postmodern drama." *New Literary History* 32.3 2001, p. 681-694 3. West, Sarah. *Say it: The Performative Voice in the Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*. Rodopi, 2008), en se focalisant sur le principe de la voix en-jeu scénique.

<sup>2</sup> Pour ce mot, l'emploi de la majuscule, adopté par Beckett, indique dans son œuvre dramatique la voix off.



Chez Beckett, les voix ou lorsque le personnage devient une polyphonie complexe des voix, dans l'écriture romanesque et dans l'écriture dramatique, sont un enjeu majeur des formes particulières. Souvenons-nous de Winnie, dans *Oh les beaux jours*, et comment elle (se) parle ou encore comment Willie lui répond derrière le mamelon. Dans l'évolution de l'écriture dramatique de Beckett, des œuvres à caractère réduit, la Voix dialogue avec le personnage, raconte une histoire (*Solo, Cette fois...*) ou commande (*Quoi où ...*). Ce qui renforce le caractère du personnage en tant que présence minimale qui s'entend parler, qui entend sa voix qui raconte son histoire, qui n'est plus. Cette sorte de distanciation est dramatiquement intéressante en tant que complexification de l'événement qui porte précisément sur le personnage : l'interrogation d'une absence en tant que présence du jeu<sup>3</sup>. Dans *Pas*, par exemple, on peut s'interroger si le but dramatique est « une tentative de May pour s'engendrer elle-même, ou donner vie à un moi »<sup>4</sup>. La Voix met en exergue la condition scénique du personnage et constitue un moyen critique du moi ou du soi<sup>5</sup>, de son sens. Elle participe en effet à ce démantèlement du personnage et, par conséquent, de son théâtre. Pour M. Engelberts, « la tension vers la spécificité du théâtre dans les pièces de Beckett prend dans son théâtre -récit la forme paradoxale d'un démantèlement de la forme dramatique courante par le recours à la narration ; elle mène ainsi à un mouvement vers une *frontière* générique pour trouver la *spécificité* générique »<sup>6</sup>. La scène admet alors des œuvres limites qui mettent en abîme des mécanismes de narration divers comme, par exemple, la diégèse et le monologue (*Solo*), mais « la présence ou simplement la voix humaine, telles qu'elles se manifestent sur une scène ou au micro, apportent aux personnages désincarnés de Beckett le minimum de matérialisation à défaut de laquelle nous ne pourrions plus les admettre »<sup>7</sup>. La voix se fait alors présence dans l'espace scénique<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Beckett affirme la possibilité « d'atteindre le moi comme essence et d'échapper à l'existence. Le personnage est né de cette double impossibilité de laquelle le théâtre se découle » : Simon, A. « Du théâtre de l'écriture » *Revue d'esthétique*, numéro spécial Beckett, hors-série, Toulouse, Editions Privat, 1986, p. 80. *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Gontarski, S. « Ressasser tout ça avec *Pas* », *Revue d'esthétique* 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> Engelberts, Matthijs, *Défis du récit scénique. Formes et enjeux du mode narratif dans le théâtre de Beckett et de Duras*, Genève, Droz, 2001, p. 293-294.

<sup>6</sup> Engelberts, M. *op. cit.*, p. 293-294.

<sup>7</sup> Mauriac Claude, *L'allitération contemporaine*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1969, p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Mauriac, C. *op. cit.*, p. 109.

De plus, l'espace scénique offre à Beckett la possibilité d'y *faire coexister voix/ mouvement/ silence*. Ce qui crée un mouvement organique des interactions qui se produisent sur scène. Pour Jean Michel Rabaté, chez Beckett, cet espace fait partie d'« une recherche qui s'identifie à l'acte d'écrire ou à la chorégraphie des « voix »<sup>9</sup>. En effet, la voix devient le moyen de montrer et de maintenir la tension entre parole/ silence, mouvement/immobilité, lumière/obscurité. Le personnage, sur la scène beckettienne, parle peu (*Berceuse, Cette fois ...*), et son silence est remplacé par sa propre voix enregistrée. Celui-ci ne fait que subir le balancement mécanique (berceuse, porte voix, magnétophone...), et il ne peut que compléter le rythme. C'est ce qui ramène toujours la tension à l'espace scénique. De même, dans *Va-et-vient*, les voix des trois femmes participent à ce jeu de la non distinction des personnages, qui sont *aussi semblables que possible*, car leur voix détimbrée est à la limite de l'audibilité<sup>10</sup>. Le spectateur a l'impression que c'est la même personne qui parle.

Le personnage de Beckett, pour combattre sa solitude, crée d'autres personnages (*Solo, Cette fois, Impromptu d'Ohio ...*). Plus qu'une question de présence physique, cette solution est alors un flot incessant de paroles (Lucky, Winnie, Bouche...). Le titre *Pas moi* montre cet enjeu : constitué de la particule de négation pas et du complément d'objet indirect de la première personne, moi, il indique clairement la relation du personnage, de cette femme qui se demande à quatre reprises « ... quoi ? ... qui ? ... non ! ... elle ! ... »<sup>11</sup>, avec l'histoire racontée à la troisième personne. Par conséquent, la voix ne peut être autre que la sienne. L'œuvre incarne alors une sorte d'impossibilité que son titre annonce déjà. Ce qui se joue complète constamment le sens. *En même temps que baisse l'éclairage de la salle, la voix s'élève, inintelligible, derrière le rideau. La salle éteinte la voix continue de même, dix secondes. Avec le lever du rideau, il y a une improvisation à partir des éléments donnés pour aboutir, une fois le rideau complètement levé et l'attention suffisante, au texte proprement dit*<sup>12</sup>. Là où le corps est censé remplir, donner sens à la scène, les rôles se renversent. Et les multiples interactions (voix/ corps/ mouvement/

<sup>9</sup> Rabaté, Jean Michel. « Beckett et la poésie de la zone (Dante...Apollinaire. Céline. Lévi) », *Poésies et autres proses, Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, Rodopi, 1999, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> Beckett, *Comédie et actes divers (Va-et-vient, Cascando, Paroles et Musique, Dis Joe, Actes sans paroles I et II, Film, Souffle)*, Minuit, p. 44. Ce titre est abrégé comme CA dans le texte.

<sup>11</sup> Beckett, *Oh les beaux jours* suivi de *Pas moi*, Minuit, p. 82, 86, 91, 93.

<sup>12</sup> Beckett, *Oh les beaux jours*, op.cit., p. 81.

lumière) constituent l'intérêt dramatique de cette œuvre. L'affirmation d'une présence va jusqu'à sa mise en question et jusqu'à l'affirmation du jeu<sup>13</sup>.

Chez Beckett, la voix exprime également la souffrance, la cruauté et le manque, prouve une présence absence, mais cette voix est la preuve d'une vie<sup>14</sup> et d'un jeu<sup>15</sup>. Ce qui motive cette voix reste alors inconnu, mais elle parle d'elle, elle coule (*Pas moi*), elle met en ordre (*Quoi où*). Or, le rapport de la voix au personnage est de l'ordre de ce qui se modifie constamment (*Pas*) dans son impossibilité d'être modifié. *Souffle* et autres *dramaticules* présentent l'amoindrissement et le passage au vide. Beckett «dispose sur scène un état limite pour un sujet qui occupe tout l'espace [...] avec le maximum d'efficacité formelle ces instants privilégiés d'une «brève conscience»<sup>16</sup>. La voix off, dans les cas où elle se présente, indique une certaine absence et singularise la présence du personnage.

La voix off chez Beckett participe à la singularisation du jeu scénique. Dans *Cette fois*, la scène s'ouvre dans l'obscurité ; le visage du Souvenant est à environ 3 mètres au-dessus du niveau de la scène<sup>17</sup>. Ce visage illuminé ne parle pas, ne fait qu'ouvrir ou fermer ses yeux et s'exprime à sa manière. La

<sup>13</sup> La voix est également source d'identité qui différencie le même personnage. Dans *Fin de partie*, par exemple, apparaissent également deux récits où la différenciation de la voix joue avec l'implication des personnages, des rôles différents, c'est pourquoi les trois voix doivent se différencier. C'est l'histoire du tailleur et le récit de Hamm vers la fin de la pièce. Beckett lui-même supervisant la mise en scène de cette pièce au Schiller explique que : «[c]hez Hamm alternent respectivement la voix du narrateur, sa propre voix et la voix du mendiant [...]. Cette concordance et cet écho doivent être clairs pour le public». La voix participe alors à la tension de ce qui est mis en scène. C'est ce qui se radicalise dans *Oh les beaux jours*, où la différenciation de la voix de Winnie se fait sentir dans le désert, et c'est la voix qui motive le jeu scénique. Haerdter, Michaël. «Samuel Beckett répète *Fin de Partie*», *Revue d'Esthétique* 1986, *op.cit.*, p. 313.

<sup>14</sup> «Une voix qui dit d'une façon impersonnelle ce qu'il en est pour elle de plus personnel. Une voix qui met à nu la souffrance et, avec la même sobriété, le rire. Une voix qui dit son incertitude sur le temps, le lieu, les personnages, les frontières de l'esprit et du corps, du passé et du présent, du jour et de la nuit, de l'animé et de l'inanimé». Anzieu, Didier. «Sur Beckett», *Créer/Détruire*, Paris, Dunon, coll. Psychismes, 1997, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> Marie-Claude Hubert affirme que «[l]a voix, lancinante, apparaît comme un stimulus extérieur qui s'impose au personnage, parfois douloureux et pénible à supporter» : Hubert, M.-Cl. *Le personnage dramatique chez Ionesco, Beckett et Adamov*, Thèse de doctorat d'état, Université de Provence, 1984, p. 401

<sup>16</sup> Bernard, Michel, *Samuel Beckett et son sujet: une apparition évanouissante*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1996, p. 157.

<sup>17</sup> Beckett, *Catastrophe et autres dramaticules (Cette fois, Solo, Berceuse, Impromptu d'Ohio, Quoi où)*, Minuit, p. 9. Ce titre est abrégé dans le texte comme CAT.

Voix, même si elle appartient au personnage qu'on voit sur scène, provient de trois sources différentes (selon la didascalie : *bribes d'une seule et même voix, la sienne, ABC lui arrivent des deux côtés et du haut respectivement. Elles s'enchaînent sans interruption CAT 9*). Le thème majeur est le souvenir, incarné par le visage éclairé du Souvenant et sa réaction minimale à sa voix. Chaque histoire racontée représente une autre temporalité et est différente. « L'histoire de B, affirme Beckett, porte sur le jeune homme, l'histoire de C est celle du vieillard, l'histoire de A celle de l'homme d'âge mûr »<sup>18</sup>. Pour l'histoire de A, c'est l'hiver, toujours la pluie (CAT 19), pour celle de B, le printemps ou l'été, et pour celle de C, l'hiver et la pluie, encore. Celle de A se déroule à la ruine où enfant il se cachait quand la journée était grise, avec le 11 jusqu'au bout de la ligne, les tramways abandonnés, des vieux rails (CAT 9-10)... celle de C, au musée des portraits (lieu de mort), bureau de poste, bibliothèque municipale... celle de B, au soleil sur la pierre à l'orée du petit bois et à perte de vue les blés blondissants (CAT 10). La notion de souvenir y régit tous les composants dramatiques : personnage (Souvenant), temps (trois périodes différentes de sa vie qui correspondent à des expériences différentes), lieux (trois pays différents) et actions. Le personnage a apparemment une fonction passive : il entend ses expériences de trois périodes différentes de sa vie. Ce qui dessine le portrait de ce personnage à travers sa voix et ses histoires propres. La scène, en effet, constitue le lieu d'une histoire, la seule qui peut ancrer l'histoire elle-même, parce que d'autres histoires et d'autres lieux sont évoqués. La fragmentation d'histoires rend leur localisation difficile. Les interférences des lieux, des histoires (d'une même histoire ? d'une même personne ?) accordent à cette pluralité étrange une dimension fragmentaire, ou mieux le fragmentaire engendre une pluralité étrange, provoque une interaction plurielle et renforce le jeu scénique. Sans le conflit du souvenir, le Souvenant ne peut exister. L'identification du personnage à la voix émise de trois sources différentes est claire, l'enjeu du souvenir et de la présence physique est indéniable. Voix et souvenir s'entremêlent.

Par ailleurs, dans *Pas*, une jeune femme, May, parcourt l'espace, ses *pas* sont audibles ; elle va et vient. Dans la première partie, May et sa mère maintiennent un dialogue. La mère est absente de la scène, mais on entend sa voix. Dans la deuxième partie, la voix de la mère raconte une histoire, et, dans la troisième partie, May rapporte probablement son histoire propre.

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<sup>18</sup> Knowlson, James, *Beckett*, tr. en français par Bonis, Oristelle, Actes Sud, 1999, p. 758.

Beckett résume cette pièce : elle «se compose de trois parties : d'abord la fille parle à sa mère malade, puis la mère parle à sa fille qui n'est pas vraiment là ; enfin la fille évoque le souvenir d'une autre mère et d'une autre fille. Elle ne parle que des souvenirs qu'elle a de cette mère et de cette fille »<sup>19</sup>. Le parti pris concerne l'espace scénique et la dis/jonction de la parole de/avec la scène. C'est un va-et-vient rythmé dans le noir où tout demeure confus : personnes mouvements voix.

La *voix de femme* y acquiert un statut particulier : il ne s'agit pas d'une présence scénique, mais elle est clairement identifiable : elle sort *du fond de la scène, dans le noir*<sup>20</sup>. D'après le texte, le personnage principal, May, se trouve dans un état de trouble. « Dans sa pauvre tête » (P 17) se passe quelque chose qu'elle ne peut contrôler. Elle marche sans cesse. Les rapports de May avec la Voix sont multiples et complexes. Dans les trois parties du texte, leurs relations sont confuses. Dans la première partie, la Voix dialogue avec May, dans la deuxième, la Voix entame son discours à la première personne du singulier : « [j]e rôde ici à présent », et la Voix poursuit, en utilisant la troisième personne du singulier, « elle s'imagine être seule » (P 11), ou la Voix raconte l'histoire confuse d'une personne, « May – nom de baptême de l'enfant » (P 12), qui n'a ni la notion de lieu (« [o]ù est – elle, peut- on se demander ? P 11), ni celle du temps (« quand commença ceci ? P 11). Ce personnage ne peut qu'errer. Dans la troisième partie du texte, c'est May qui prend la parole. Cependant, elle continue à raconter probablement la même histoire, c'est-à-dire l'histoire de May toujours à la troisième personne du singulier, « lorsqu'elle était tout à fait oubliée » (P 13). May poursuit son monologue en rapportant une autre histoire, celle d'une mère et de sa fille, Mme Winter et Amy (anagramme de May). May rapporte leur conversation lorsqu'elles se mettent à table après l'office, et pendant laquelle la mère interroge la fille si elle a « remarqué quelque chose... d'étrange aux vêpres ? » (P 15), mais Amy n'a rien remarqué, elle n'était, peut-être, pas là (P 16).

Dans *Pas*, ces « personnages » et leur statut se confondent constamment : la juxtaposition des fragments d'histoires interdit la construction d'un portrait clair, et elle ne permet pas au récepteur de se situer clairement. Dans la première partie du texte, le dialogue des deux « personnages » montrent deux émetteurs de paroles et d'actions distinctes : la Voix parle / May parle et

<sup>19</sup> Gontarski, S. *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>20</sup> *Pas*, suivi de *Quatre esquisses* (*Fragment de théâtre I, Fragment de théâtre II, Pochade radiophonique, Esquisse radiophonique*), Mûnuit, p. 7. Par la suite, le titre est abrégé dans le texte comme *P*.

marche. Dans la deuxième partie, la Voix se confond avec le « je/elle », et May continue à marcher. Dans la troisième partie, la Voix disparaît complètement, elle est peut être reliée à Madame Winter, mère de Amy, mais le seul acteur visible est May, dont l'histoire se confond avec celle d'Amy. En tout cas, pour May, une seule identification n'est pas possible. Dans cette dernière partie, May raconte l'histoire d'une autre, qui peut être la sienne, et elle continue à marcher sans parler. Le seul lien entre les différents personnages et May est la marche. Si le seul mode d'existence de May est le mouvement, en tant qu'extériorisation de son angoisse, certains éléments, comme la Voix, sont en liaison indirecte avec elle, ils sont *in absentia*, hors scène. Cette absence est pourtant assez forte, elle constitue un moteur essentiel pour cette pièce. La présence physique de May n'indique nullement où elle se trouve mentalement, elle n'indique pas ce qui se passe dans sa tête. Le jeu scénique est valorisé. Il y a une espèce d'intériorisation du mouvement qui renforce le jeu. L'éclairage et le bruit de la cloche marquent les trois grandes étapes clés de l'œuvre, concernant la présence scénique du personnage : premièrement, son apparition et son dialogue avec la Voix, deuxièmement, sa seule présence scénique et ses mouvements qui dialoguent avec la Voix, troisièmement, son soliloque et quatrièmement, sa disparition de l'espace scénique. Un va-et-vient domine ces quatre étapes. Tout y inter agit (parole silence ; lumière obscurité ; mouvement immobilité).

Chez Beckett, le corps du personnage sur scène est en rapport avec la voix off. Le corps est parfois représenté de manière minimale (*Pas moi/ bouche, Cette fois/tête*). En même temps, le corps fait sens par rapport à l'ensemble scénique. Dans *Cette fois*, le portrait dramatique du personnage s'établit à travers le souvenir. Faire un portrait est réussi dramatiquement par Beckett qui délègue la parole à une source extérieure, hors scène, même s'il s'agit de la voix du personnage, et ceci est possible grâce au souvenir, comme susdit. Le corps ne peut qu'avoir une implication indirecte avec ce stimulus extérieur. Cependant, il est toujours sous tensions. Il réagit *par rapport à*. Et parfois cette réaction semble illogique, inattendue. C'est une tête qui rit sans aucune raison apparente (CAT 25).

Dans *Cette fois*, le jeu entre la lumière, l'obscurité et les voix se structure selon les indications scéniques : 1) *Rideau. Scène dans t'obscurité. Montée de l'éclairage sur le visage du Souvenant à environ 3 mètres au-dessus du niveau de la scène et un peu décentré.// Vieux visage blême légèrement incliné en arrière, longs cheveux blancs dressés comme vos de haut étalés sur un oreiller. Bribes d'une seule et même voix, la sienne, ABC lui arrivent des deux côtés et du haut respectivement. Elles*

*s'enchaînent sans interruption sauf aux endroits indiqués. Silence 7 secondes. Yeux ouverts. Respiration audible, lente et régulière. 2) (les yeux se ferment, légère baisse de l'éclairage CAT 9) 3) Silence 3 secondes. Les yeux s'ouvrent. Légère montée de l'éclairage. Respiration audible. 7 secondes (CAT 14) 4) (les yeux se ferment, légère baisse de l'éclairage CAT 14) 5) Silence 3 secondes. Les yeux s'ouvrent. Légère montée de l'éclairage. Respiration audible. 7 secondes (CAT 19) 6) (les yeux se ferment, légère baisse de l'éclairage CAT 19) 7) (Silence 3 secondes. Les yeux s'ouvrent. Légère montée de l'éclairage. Respiration audible. Sourire, édenté de préférence. 7 secondes. L'éclairage s'éteint lentement. Rideau CAT 25). L'obscurité ouvre et clôt la pièce. Le jeu avec l'éclairage marque les trois parties de l'œuvre. La lumière suit et crée l'action, à la fois. Tout devient amalgame, c'est un ensemble sans début, sans milieu, sans fin, sans personnage, sans histoire, sans temporalité. Bref, c'est une action dépourvue de tout ce qu'il pourrait lui rendre une unité. Les différentes provenances d'une même voix amplifient la pauvreté scénique, constituée d'un seul visage éclairé, seul dans le noir. Ce qui suggère indéniablement une présence scénique, mais l'action est réduite au minimum, fragmentée par la multiplicité et la complexité des souvenirs du Souvenant. Les différentes provenances, A B C, de la même voix remplissent l'espace obscure de la scène. La tête, comme spectateur/témoin/acteur, entend et réagit peu. Pour le spectateur, aussi, il y a peu à voir, beaucoup à entendre.*

Les structures de ce texte sont particulières et pointent l'intérêt beckettien pour la composition musicale. Il faut néanmoins préciser que, par composition musicale, nous entendons toute composition valorisant la forme et le jeu dramatique. La composition musicale est l'hyperonyme, exemple matrice d'une recherche formelle. La même voix du Souvenant, différenciée par la source d'émission, relate, en trois parties, trois histoires différentes, concernant la même personne, de la manière suivante : PARTIE I : ACB, ACB, ACB, CAB PARTIE II CBA, CBA, CBA, BCA PARTIE III BAC, BAC, BAC. Beckett va jusqu'au bout de cette recherche formelle. Etant donné qu'une même Voix, provenant de localisations diverses (A/B/C), raconte trois histoires différentes de manière fragmentée, avec des reprises, des répétitions... et que la ponctuation est absente, le sens s'obscurcit, et le contenu se musicalise. Sur scène, le jeu avec l'image demeure. Les différentes permutations des voix matières créent le plaisir et posent indéniablement « des limites à l'égalité de la partie avec le tout »<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Beckett, *Watt*, Minuit, p. 259.

Par ailleurs, dans *Comédie*, ce sont des *visages impassibles des voix atones sauf aux endroits où une expression est indiquée*<sup>22</sup> (CA 10). Les personnages parlent seuls à leur tour ou ensemble comme un chœur. Ce qui contribue à la musicalité de la voix, puisqu'il n'est pas facile de distinguer des mots. Il s'agit des voix, qui ne peuvent être définies, ce qui constitue un mouvement confus. La structure de cette œuvre est aussi liée au sens (direction et signification). La structure ternaire, répétée deux fois, est indissociable du triangle amoureux. Le chœur (selon Beckett, moment où les personnages parlent en même temps) montre ce qui se passe dans ce type de situations, c'est-à-dire : la confusion. Et en fin de compte, la non communication entre les personnages se confirme par le désordre du discours.

Dans *Berceuse*, la forme du texte nous berce, la voix aussi. La femme en noir, assise dans un rocking-chair, se balance toujours au même rythme. Pourtant, elle reste immobile, et le rythme du balancement épouse celui du texte, celui de sa voix enregistrée. À certains intervalles, cette femme répète *avec* sa propre voix enregistrée : « temps qu'elle finisse », « autre âme vivante », « berce-la d'ici », suit un silence, un arrêt, et cela recommence jusqu'à la fin de la pièce où tout arrive à son terme : la Voix cesse, le balancement aussi, et la femme (F) incline la tête sur la poitrine. L'obscurité domine à nouveau. La Voix est *blanche, sourde, monotone*. Et lorsque, à quatre reprises Femme se joint à Voix, c'est *chaque fois un peu plus bas* et l'« encore » de F *chaque fois un peu plus bas*. Vers la fin, la Voix s'affaiblit progressivement (CAT 55). La Voix devient échos, parce que l'on ne sait pas d'où cette voix sort et la relation exacte entre le personnage et la voix. Et là où la Voix est captivante, elle disparaît. Cette femme est présente sur scène, agit et subit l'histoire ; cette histoire montre et la mort et le balancement. Le rapport du mouvement in/cessant à ce qui est censé représenter la fin de tout mouvement (la mort) rend la question de la séparation porteuse de plusieurs interrogations et irrésolutions. La mise en scène de ce balancement est valorisée, une berceuse.

Le mouvement des voix, des lumières et des matières acquiert alors un rôle essentiel dans cette œuvre. La montée de l'éclairage trouve la scène dans une parfaite immobilité. D'abord, c'est la Voix et balancement ensemble/écho, fin du balancement, légère baisse de l'éclairage (CAT 41-44), ensuite, Voix et balancement vont ensemble/écho, fin du balancement, légère baisse de l'éclairage (CAT 44-46), puis, même fait (CAT 46-49), enfin écho et

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<sup>22</sup> Beckett, *Comédie et actes divers (Va-et-vient, Cascando, Paroles et Musique, Dis Joe, Actes sans paroles I et II, Film, Souffle)*, Minuit, p. 10. Par la suite le titre est abrégé dans le texte comme CA.



fin du balancement, extinction de l'éclairage (CAT 52). Le balancement est faible, lent, réglé mécaniquement sans l'aide de la femme (CAT 54). A cette exemplarité du mouvement s'ajoute l'attitude figée du personnage jusqu'au lent affaissement de la tête à la seule lumière du spot (CAT 54). Il n'y a pas de cillement, et ses yeux sont tantôt fermés, tantôt grands ouverts : Moitié-moitié section 1. De plus en plus fermés sections 2 et 3. Fermés définitivement au milieu de la dernière section (CAT 54). En fait, l'ensemble est construit par l'écho de « berce-la d'ici », par la fin du balancement et par l'extinction de l'éclairage (CAT 53). Beckett coordonne la voix, la voix enregistrée, le balancement, l'éclairage : Montée de l'éclairage sur F, avant-scène de face, légèrement décentrée. Berceuse immobile. Un temps long (CAT 41) Ensemble: écho de « temps qu'elle finisse », fin du balancement, légère baisse de l'éclairage. Un temps long (CAT 44) Ensemble: écho de « âme vivante », fin du balancement, légère baisse de l'éclairage. Un temps long (CAT 46) Ensemble: écho de « temps qu'elle finisse », fin du balancement, légère baisse de l'éclairage. Un temps long (CAT 49) Ensemble: écho de « berce-la d'ici », fin du balancement, extinction de l'éclairage (CAT 52).

Dans *Quoi où*, le jeu de ces éléments se modifie. La pièce ouvre par le faible éclairage de l'endroit d'où sort la Voix de Bam, V (apparemment enregistrée, selon l'indication scénique : *V sous forme d'un petit porte-voix à hauteur d'homme* CAT 85). Ensuite *l'aire s'allume et s'éteint*, suite aux ordres de V, à plusieurs reprises, et à la fin de l'œuvre *l'aire s'éteint, V s'éteint* (CAT 86-98). L'espace scénique se divise en deux parties : l'aire du jeu des personnages, est un rectangle, entouré d'ombre, décalé à droite vu de la salle. L'espace scénique se motive également par l'emplacement de V (*petit porte-voix à hauteur d'homme*) à l'avant-scène à gauche (CAT 85). La voix alors devient personnage et régit les interrogations dans les dialogues entre les personnages. L'emplacement de V demeure faiblement éclairé (tout au long du déroulement de la pièce) ou totale (début et fin de la pièce) ne fait que renforcer les interrogations. Les quatre personnages (Bam, Bem, Bim, Bom) sont aussi semblables que possible. Ils portent tous une même longue robe grise. Ils ont tous les mêmes longs cheveux gris (CAT 85). Le cinquième protagoniste de la pièce, la Voix enregistrée de Bam, entame la pièce en mettant en cause leur statut, disant qu'ils ne sont plus que cinq (CAT 86, 87). La Voix reste seule et enfin Bom paraît (CAT 87). Ensuite, tous les quatre personnages paraissent sur scène de manière alternative. Or, on ne peut voir que trois personnages sur l'aire du jeu, au Nord, Est, Ouest. Le jeu se poursuit sur ce principe lorsque la Voix annonce le printemps, sa solitude et l'apparition de trois personnages. La Voix annonce l'été, l'apparition de trois personnages. La Voix annonce l'automne, deux personnages. La Voix annonce

l'hiver, l'apparition d'un personnage. Malgré le fait que la Voix de Bam s'identifie à Bam à la fin de la pièce (en disant qu'elle paraît, reparaît. Et *Bam entre par O CAT 97*), le statut du personnage se complique. Si la Voix est liée à Bam (par la didascalie initiale, par la voix et par sa présence scénique), si celui-ci n'arrive pas à découvrir par ses interrogations constantes sur Bom, Bim, Bem ni le *quoi* ni le *où*, et si le spectateur ne voit sur scène que trois personnages et à la fin de l'œuvre il en existe qu'un, pourrait-on dire qu'il s'agit d'une multiplication dramatique d'une, et même, seule présence ? La Voix l'affirme à la fin : « Je suis seul. Au présent comme si j'y étais » (*CAT 97*). Dans *Quoi où*, la Voix s'impose comme l'un des éléments principaux du jeu théâtral. Elle ouvre et clôture la pièce, elle *commande* l'apparition des personnages pour découvrir enfin qu'il est seul. L'ambiguïté s'impose, car la Voix est celle d'un personnage scénique, Bam. Comme susdit, elle se relie à ce personnage, et elle s'en distingue, d'où l'ambiguïté du jeu scénique : Voix personnage.

Thomas Hunkeler met en parallèle l'écriture beckettienne avec le mythe ovidien de l'Echo et Narcisse<sup>23</sup>. Ce mythe présente plusieurs mises en abîmes. C'est Narcisse qui contemple son image comme si c'était un autre ; Echo est une voix qui renvoie des paroles qui ne lui appartiennent pas. Les sources visuelles et sonores sont confuses. L'écho et le miroitement (le reflet) font surgir un double dont la source se perd. Ce qui reste c'est un effet sonore et visuel<sup>24</sup>. Dans le théâtre beckettien, les sonorités, les Voix obtiennent une réalité physique, les mots deviennent sons, matières, fragments d'images. Hunkeler pense que l'intérêt de la figure d'Echo est « le fait de répéter ou de doubler un discours présent par un autre discours qui n'est présent que pour mieux renvoyer à son absence »<sup>25</sup> : ce qui est dit n'est que l'écho de ce qui vient d'être dit. Autrement dit, il existe la dynamique de l'absence, les rapports entre les différents éléments scéniques sont formes des tensions irrésolues, qui valorisent ou qui font obstacle à la vision, à l'ouïe, à la compréhension, au jeu. Or, aucune source n'est identifiable. Aucune temporalité ne s'impose ... à part celle du jeu scénique. Ce jeu ouvre sur le jeu. Ce qui est alors écho ou reflet, ce n'est plus un simple renvoi, mais le moment de cette actualisation, de ce qui est en jeu : orchestration de ce peu à voir et à entendre.

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<sup>23</sup> Hunkeler, Thomas, *Échos de l'ego dans l'œuvre de Samuel Beckett*, Paris, Harmattan, 1997, p. 160-169.

<sup>24</sup> Ovide, *Les métamorphoses*, GF-Flammarion, Paris, 1966, p. 98-103.

<sup>25</sup> T. Hunkeler, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

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*Le corps, medium-miroir entre la graphie  
du poème et la chorégraphie?  
Les lignes corporelles de Wilfride Piollet,  
entre poésie et danse*

CÉLINE TORRENT\*

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper (*The body, medium-mirror between poetry's writing and choreography? Body's lines of Wilfride Piollet, between poetry and dance*) is to show how the body, reflecting poetry and dance in the French contemporary era, allows us to approach these two arts in a new way. Since their respective codes imploded at the end of the XIX's century, dance and poetry seem more and more involved with one another, but the link between them might not be very obvious. Therefore we will assume that poetry and choreography are two ways of writing that converse and redefine each other through the body, this one being the medium and the mirror of the two. We will demonstrate this hypothesis with the work of the French dance theorist and dancer, Wilfride Piollet. First we will see how dancing can be considered as Mallarmé's "écriture corporelle", through Wilfride Piollet's technique called "barres flexibles". Then we shall see how poetry can appear as a textual body, with the example of a choreographic adaptation, a "lecture corporelle", a corporeal reading of a poem by René Char. From there, and as a conclusion, we will try to define the concept of "corpoécité", combining body and poetry. At a time where dance and poetry can't be defined by very specific forms, we propose to use "corpoécité" as a tool to identify today's dance and poetry, yet not one the parallel of the other but one *through* the other, likewise dance through poetry and poetry through the body. The precise characteristics of this concept and its uses still have to be defined. For now, the paper's interest resides in considering the body as a new way to comprehend, further than the usual aesthetic categories they're confined in, what potential poetry and dance can have nowadays.

**Keywords:** French poetry, Stéphane Mallarmé, René Char, choreography, dance, Wilfride Piollet, body, corporeality, contemporaneity, writing.

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Suite à l'éclatement de leurs codes traditionnels respectifs lors de leur entrée dans l'ère moderne à la fin du XIXe siècle, la danse et la poésie semblent, en France, avoir eu tendance à reconnaître l'une dans l'autre un modèle de création. En effet, depuis Mallarmé, un certain nombre de poètes semblent s'intéresser à la danse, non plus comme un simple motif anecdotique, mais comme un véritable modèle pour leur écriture. De leur côté, les chorégraphes vont avoir tendance à aller vers la littérature, recherchant en elle de nouvelles sources d'inspiration. Notons à ce sujet que la possibilité pour les chorégraphes de se détacher de ce genre littéraire qu'est le livret de ballet, quasiment systématique avant la toute fin du XIXe siècle<sup>1</sup>, semble leur avoir ouvert la possibilité au cours des XXe et XXIe siècle de revenir d'eux-mêmes vers la littérature en général, sans pour autant perdre leurs propres ressources créatives.

Poésie et danse semblent donc amenées à converger. Pourtant, le lien entre d'un côté l'art du langage et de la trace écrite des mots et, de l'autre, celui du silence et de l'évanescence des gestes, ne semble *a priori* pas évident. Aussi, nous émettons l'hypothèse selon laquelle c'est le corps qui constitue le médium, l'intermédiaire entre danse et poésie à partir de la fin du XIXe siècle. Nous nous appuyons ici sur l'idée de Laurence Louppe selon qui :

(...) les deux arts [la poésie et la danse] ne connaissent leur « révolution » respective qu'en s'adossant plus fortement au corps.<sup>2</sup>

Cette hypothèse pourrait sembler aussi incongrue concernant la poésie que de l'ordre de la lapalissade en ce qui concerne la danse. Et pourtant, si nous y regardons de plus près, nous observons que d'un côté la poésie, « dé-vers-tébrée » suite à la crise qu'a connu le vers à la fin du XIXe siècle<sup>3</sup>, va avoir tendance à chercher à se reconstruire comme un corps. Pour reprendre les termes d'Hugues Marchal, « l'écrit ne doit plus offrir

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<sup>1</sup> « (...) la danse moderne a banni l'argument, cette scène verbale virtuelle, ce texte "extérieur" (...) qui "gère" le déroulement mimétique d'une dramaturgie gestuelle, telle qu'elle perdurait depuis le "ballet en action" théorisé par Noverre [au XVIIIe siècle] », Laurence Louppe, « Écriture littéraire, écriture chorégraphique au XXe siècle : une double révolution », *Littérature* n°112, « La littérature et la danse », Paris, décembre 1998, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> A la fin du XIXe siècle, la poésie française connaît ce que Mallarmé nomme en 1886 une « crise de vers ». Le vers, forme qui pendant des siècles s'est confondue avec le genre poétique, est soudain remis en question. Les expérimentations menées sur ce dernier suite à la fin de son âge d'or romantique ont brouillé ses limites avec la prose (vers libre, poème en prose...). Dès lors, il apparaît que la poésie peut exister hors du cadre formel strict du vers, ce qui remet en cause la définition même du genre poétique.

une manière d'être en relation avec les corps [mais] doit être le corps »<sup>4</sup>. De l'autre côté, la danse prend peu à peu conscience de la possibilité de s'écrire non plus seulement *sur* le corps, mais à *partir* du corps, à travers son propre langage qui, se basant sur le corps, soudain n'est plus nécessairement tributaire des autres arts auxquels elle a pu être pendant longtemps inféodée, qu'il s'agisse de la musique ou de la littérature à travers le livret de ballet.

Ainsi souhaitons-nous envisager le corps comme un « medium-miroir » entre la chorégraphie et la graphie poétique qu'est le poème. Le corps serait en effet à la fois un miroir à travers lequel danse et poésie pourraient se reconnaître l'une dans le reflet de l'autre, et un medium, qui pourrait assurer le passage de l'une à l'autre et de l'une *dans* l'autre, passage dont elles ressortiraient mutuellement redéfinies. Car à une époque où il est difficile de savoir précisément ce que l'on entend par danse « contemporaine » et poésie « contemporaine », poésie et danse pourraient retrouver une identité, non pas l'une parallèlement à l'autre mais bien l'une à travers l'autre, à travers le corps comme medium-miroir.

Nous prendrons appui sur l'exemple de la danseuse et théoricienne de la danse Wilfride Piollet, et de son travail autour des textes de Stéphane Mallarmé et René Char. Dans un premier temps, nous verrons d'une part que la danse peut être conçue, selon l'expression de Mallarmé, comme une « écriture corporelle »<sup>5</sup>, à travers l'exemple de la technique des « barres flexibles » de Wilfride Piollet. Dans un second temps, nous verrons que ; réciproquement, la poésie peut se révéler comme corps dansant, en nous appuyant sur l'adaptation chorégraphique du poème de René Char, « Lettera amorosa », par Wilfride Piollet. Ceci nous amènera à esquisser en conclusion la notion de « corpoéticité », comme intermédiaire à la fois corporel et poétique entre les deux arts à l'heure contemporaine.

### ***1. La danse comme « écriture corporelle » : les « barres flexibles » de Wilfride Piollet***

L'expression « écriture corporelle » pour parler de la danse est lancée de façon très significative par un poète, à savoir Mallarmé, qui dans ses critiques de ballets dans les années 1890 qualifie ainsi la danseuse :

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<sup>4</sup> Hugues Marchal, *Corpoèmes : L'inscription textuelle du corps dans la poésie en France au XXe siècle*, thèse dirigée par Michel Collot, soutenue à l'université Paris 3 le 18 décembre 2002, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Mallarmé, « Ballets », *Œuvres complètes I et II*, éd. présentée et annotée par Bertrand Marchal, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de La Pléiade, 1998, p. 171.

...suggérant, par le prodige de raccourcis ou d'élangs, avec une **écriture corporelle** ce qu'il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer, dans la réaction : poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe.<sup>6</sup>

Voyant la danseuse à travers son regard de poète, Mallarmé reconnaît en elle une écriture, et plus précisément une « écriture corporelle ». Cette façon de considérer la danse nous paraît d'autant plus visionnaire que nous y trouvons un écho très percutant dans la démarche d'une danseuse d'aujourd'hui, pratiquement deux siècles après la publication des textes de Mallarmé. La technique des « barres flexibles » de Wilfride Piollet semble en effet parfaitement valider cette intuition de la danse comme « écriture corporelle ».

### *Présentation de Wilfride Piollet et des « barres flexibles »*

Alors qu'elle est encore danseuse étoile à l'Opéra de Paris, Wilfride Piollet décide dans les années 1970 de, selon sa propre expression, « lâcher la barre », cette barre horizontale à laquelle les danseurs classiques s'appuient pour faire leurs exercices d'échauffement :



*Danseuses faisant des mouvements à la barre, Edgar Degas, vers 1877, Metropolitan Museum of art.*

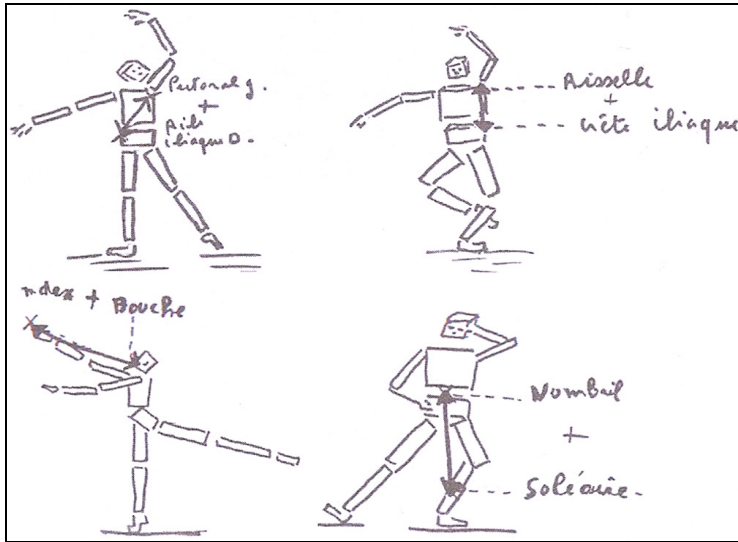
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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Wilfride Piollet va alors élaborer, des années 70 à aujourd'hui, une technique dont le point de départ fut la substitution de cette barre rigide par ce qu'elle nomme des « barres flexibles ». Il s'agit pour le danseur de remplacer l'appui matériel et extérieur de la barre de danse classique par des appuis imaginaires à l'intérieur de son propre corps. Ainsi, pour reprendre la définition exacte de Wilfride Piollet :

Les « barres flexibles » sont le résultat de l'observation dans le corps de deux points qui ont « à voir ensemble », à un moment donné du mouvement ».<sup>7</sup>

Le danseur doit visualiser une « barre flexible » entre deux points différents de son corps, par exemple, entre le nombril et le fémur, entre le manubrium (étymologiquement « poignée » osseuse reliant les clavicules) et l'omoplate, etc. :



Schémas de Wilfride Piollet, in *Barres Flexibles, exercices*, Sens & Tonka, 2008, p. 20.

Ces images, mentales, vont permettre au corps d'aller mobiliser des muscles, nécessaires au mouvement, qu'une pensée rationnelle ne pourrait atteindre. Il ne s'agit d'ailleurs pas tant d'actionner à proprement parler des muscles que de mettre le corps dans un état apte à impulser le mouvement, transformer par le symbole un « état d'esprit » en état de corps.

<sup>7</sup> Wilfride Piollet, *Les barres flexibles, exercices*, Paris, éd. L'une et l'autre, 2008, p. 18.



*De l'action des mots sur le corps à une « écriture corporelle »  
« sans lettre »*

Tout un panel d'images métaphoriques existe pour permettre la mise en action des diverses « barres flexibles » par l'imaginaire du danseur. Par exemple, la « barre flexible » qui met en relation le manubrium et l'omoplate se nomme l'épée. Une multitude d'autres symboles viennent ainsi nommer les nombreuses « barres flexibles » imaginables dans le corps : le « fil à plomb », le « rayon de la lune », la « flèche », etc. Ainsi le danseur se fait-il le poète de son propre corps via la mobilisation de son imaginaire. Et de la même façon que le poète, à proprement parler, a ce pouvoir de mettre en écriture une image intérieure, une métaphore, le danseur la met en corps. Nous pourrions même dire que, faisant de la métaphore un levier pour enclencher le mouvement, le danseur renvoie au sens étymologique du mot « métaphore », qui implique l'idée de mouvement, puisque comme le rappelle Michèle Aquien, ce mot « vient du grec *metaphorein*, "transporter" »<sup>8</sup>.

Par ce processus, le danseur se met dans ce que Wilfride Piollet nomme un « état poétique physique »<sup>9</sup>. Ainsi le rôle des mots, et de l'imaginaire qu'ils déploient directement dans le corps, est au cœur de la technique des « barres flexibles ». De façon très révélatrice, c'est notamment chez un poète, Mallarmé, que Wilfride Piollet a trouvé des symboles particulièrement opérants dans la mise en état poético-physique du danseur. Pour Mallarmé en effet, la danseuse, qui n'est « pas une femme » mais « une métaphore », se décline en trois symboles majeurs : « glaive, coupe, fleur »<sup>10</sup>. Or ces trois symboles ont rencontré un écho très fort chez Wilfride Piollet, au point de synthétiser à eux seuls la multitude de ses « barres flexibles ». Ils mettent en effet en image les trois grands « temps du corps » desquels naît la danse pour Wilfride Piollet. Pour le dire de façon très simplifiée, le glaive, imaginé à la verticale pointe vers le bas, représente la suspension ou la perception de la gravité en soi, dans le

<sup>8</sup> Michèle Aquien, *Dictionnaire de poétique*, Librairie générale française, coll. « Le livre de poche », 1993, 5<sup>ème</sup> édition, 2001, p. 177.

<sup>9</sup> Wilfride Piollet, entretien du 26 avril 2013, Poissy.

<sup>10</sup> « A savoir que la danseuse n'est pas une femme qui danse, pour ces motifs juxtaposés qu'elle n'est pas une femme, mais une métaphore résumant un des aspects élémentaires de notre forme, **glaive, coupe, fleur**, etc. ; et qu'elle ne danse pas, suggérant, par le prodige de raccourcis ou d'élans, avec une écriture corporelle ce qu'il faudrait des paragraphes en prose dialoguée autant que descriptive, pour exprimer dans la rédaction : poème dégagé de tout appareil du scribe. », Mallarmé, *op. cit.*, p. 171

monde intérieur du danseur. La coupe elle, est assimilable au bassin dans le corps du danseur. Elle est ce qui reçoit le poids. Déséquilibrée sur son unique pied et versant son contenu, elle symbolise la chute qui est une sortie hors du monde intérieur du danseur, un laisser-aller vers l'ailleurs. Enfin, la tige de la fleur, mobile entre la tête de la fleur et le pot dans lequel elle est plantée, représente la transformation, les métamorphoses qui ont lieu au centre de soi autour de l'axe de la colonne vertébrale, « la liberté du mouvement de la colonne vertébrale dans son propre espace »<sup>11</sup>. Dans ces différents états-symboles se diffractent tout le réseau imaginaire des « barres flexibles ». Ces trois symboles sont pour Wilfride Piollet « les emblèmes de nos différentes façons d'être »<sup>12</sup>. Ils sont en quelque sorte la synthèse imaginaire de la multitude des « barres flexibles » de Wilfride Piollet, de celles déjà répertoriées aussi bien que de celles encore à inventer.

Ainsi, ce que nous retiendrons de ce très rapide aperçu de l'usage piollettien des symboles mallarméens, c'est la mise en évidence d'une correspondance possible, idéale entre les mots d'un poète et la poétique d'une danseuse. Les « barres flexibles » semblent parfaitement pouvoir être assimilées à des lignes corporelles, mobiles, plastiques. Que les mots d'un poète viennent ainsi animer ces lignes d'écriture sans lettre est extrêmement révélateur quant à la mise en évidence de la poéticité de la danse. Mallarmé qualifie dans l'un de ses textes de critique de danse la ballerine d'« illettrée »<sup>13</sup>, ce qui a pu lui être reproché. Or, en réalité, sans doute ne faut-il pas comprendre « illettré » dans son sens usuel, à savoir « ne sachant pas lire », mais bel et bien précisément au sens *littéral*, à savoir « sans lettre ». A travers ce qualificatif, Mallarmé ne fait que redire à nouveau que la ballerine *écrit* sans avoir recours à l'« appareil du scribe », sans avoir recours au langage lettré. La danse est une écriture silencieuse, comme le revendique Wilfride Piollet : « la danse est muette. Résolument muette. Ce n'est pas sa nature mais son ambition suprême. »<sup>14</sup>

Wilfride Piollet, à travers la technique des « barres flexibles », semble bien illustrer pleinement cette écriture « sans lettre », cette « écriture corporelle » qui imprime le corps d'imaginaire et exprime l'imaginaire par le corps.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Wilfride Piollet, entretien du 13 mars 2014, à Poissy.

<sup>13</sup> « la ballerine illettrée se livrant aux jeux de sa profession. », Mallarmé, *op. cit.*, p. 174

<sup>14</sup> Wilfride Piollet, *Rendez-vous sur tes barres flexibles*, Entretiens avec Gérard-Georges Lemaire, Paris, éd. Sens & Tonka, 2005, p. 21.

Impulsée par ces catalyseurs d'imaginaire que sont les mots, les symboles de Mallarmé par exemple, la danse est une poésie écrite par l'intermédiaire silencieux du corps, dans l'éphémère du mouvement.

## 2. La poésie comme corps dansant : la « *Lettera amorosa* » de René Char incarné par Wilfride Piollet

### *D'un corps poétique en creux à sa mise en volume « corporégraphique »*

A présent que nous avons vu que la danse peut être conçue, pensée mais aussi véritablement « engendrée », comme une poésie, une « écriture corporelle », nous allons voir en quoi réciproquement la poésie peut se révéler comme corps textuel, à travers l'adaptation chorégraphique que fait Wilfride Piollet du poème « *Lettera amorosa* » de René Char.

Rappelons tout d'abord que Wilfride Piollet est également une grande lectrice de René Char. Elle le connaissait d'ailleurs personnellement, au point qu'il lui a adressé en 1986 un poème d'où elle a extrait le nom même de sa technique des « barres flexibles ».

Donne-moi ta main de jonc avançante. Rendez-vous sur **tes barres flexibles**, devant la source qui nous a séparés. Ah ! **Wilfride**, voici les Hôtes, et voici le miroir aux ailes déployées.<sup>15</sup>

Lorsqu'à la même époque, René Char a offert à Wilfride Piollet un coffret contenant le livre de son texte « *Lettera amorosa* » et la cassette audio sur laquelle le poète lui-même lit le texte à voix haute, cette dernière a souhaité « lire » ce texte à sa manière de danseuse, autrement dit à travers les lignes que sont les « barres flexibles » de son corps. Or, l'interprétation qu'entreprend Wilfride Piollet de ce texte semble opérer comme la révélation de la corporéité latente de ce texte. Tout se passe en quelque sorte comme si ce texte contenait en lui-même un appel à être mis en corps par la danse.

Notons tout d'abord que ce long poème en prose<sup>16</sup> est une adresse à l'absente, à l'amoureuse absente. Il s'agit, comme l'indique le titre, d'une lettre d'amour, adressée à celle qui « est partie »<sup>17</sup>. Or ce texte, non versifié,

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<sup>15</sup> René Char, lettre adressée à Wilfride Piollet et Jean Guizerix, le 27 octobre 1986, reprise dans le poème « Nous étions dans l'Août d'un clair matin peu sûr », dans *Eloge d'une soupçonnée*, Paris, Gallimard, vol.1, 1988, p. 190.

<sup>16</sup> René Char, *Lettera amorosa* (première édition par Edwin Engelberts, Genève, 1963), illustrations de Georges Braque, Gallimard, coll. Poésie, Paris, 2007, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14

qui donc cherche à creuser sa propre forme dans la prose en même temps qu'il cherche la figure absente de l'amoureuse, ne pourrait-il pas être considéré comme la mise en abyme de la quête de la poésie elle-même par le poète ? Ce poème écrit en 1963 par René Char semble pleinement s'inscrire dans la quête qui est celle de la poésie contemporaine « dé-vers-tébrée », une poésie qui ayant fait éclater la forme clairement définie du vers fait de son écriture-même la quête de sa propre forme. Aussi, dans la prose de la « *lettera amorosa* », l'amoureuse absente à laquelle s'adresse le texte de la lettre pourrait être considérée comme étant la poésie que le poète cherche dans les lettres du texte. Le texte de Char pourrait alors être compris comme un poème en quête de son propre corps, de sa propre forme, de sa propre plastique sur la page. Tandis que l'amant cherche le corps absent de l'amoureuse, le poète cherche le corps du poème, ou plutôt tisse son poème autour de ce corps encore absent. Les paragraphes du texte se déploient en effet sur une cinquantaine de pages, entre lesquelles s'intercalent, outre les illustrations de Georges Braque, de larges espaces blancs. Ces derniers semblent figurer la brèche, la faille entre le poète et l'amoureuse, entre les mots du poète et la poésie qui échappe aux mots. Ils creusent dans le texte un espace pour l'indicible, pour ce qui ne peut être dit par les mots du poète – ce que Mallarmé nomme l'« appareil du scribe » – mais qui en revanche pourrait peut-être être exprimé par les lignes sans lettre du corps dansant, de la ballerine « illettrée ». Tout se passe en quelque sorte comme si, par son interprétation chorégraphique, Wilfride Piollet mettait en volume la corporité présente en creux dans le texte, le corps absent de l'amoureuse, symbole du corps encore absent du poème en quête de lui-même. La mise en évidence de la corporité du texte par la chorégraphie se fait ainsi mise en volume « corporégraphique ».

### *Le corps dansant comme moyen de lecture corporelle*

Notons tout d'abord que la « *Lettera amorosa* » de René Char prend sa source dans l'œuvre éponyme du musicien Claudio Monteverdi, comme en témoigne l'exergue ouvrant le texte du poète :

Non é gia part'in voi che con forz'invincible d'amore tutt' a se non mi tragga.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Claudio Monteverdi, « *Lettera amorosa* », cité par René Char dans sa « *Lettera amorosa* », *ibid.*, p. 9 (traduction : « Il n'est pas une partie de vous qui ne m'entraîne vers elle avec la force invincible de l'amour ».)

Or, si la version finale du solo de Wilfride Piollet est dansée sur le madrigal *Lettera amorosa*, de Claudio Monteverdi, composé au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, il faut noter que c'est bien le texte de René Char, lu à voix haute par le poète lui-même, qui a été le matériau premier dans la création de cette danse. C'est en se repassant en boucle la cassette audio sur laquelle René Char lit ce texte que Wilfride Piollet, selon son témoignage, a commencé la création du solo, en improvisant sur la voix du poète, sur son rythme, sur ses intonations, dans un processus, dixit, « non intellectualisé »<sup>19</sup>. Wilfride Piollet met ainsi en œuvre, dans le processus de création de ce solo, une « lecture chorégraphique » telle que la définit idéalement Michel Bernard, à savoir effectuée « par la sensorialité et la motilité subtile d'une corporéité dansante et non par la vision contemplative, passive et distanciée de l'œil d'un lecteur, dont le corps n'a d'autre expérience que celle des pratiques utilitaires quotidiennes », autrement dit à travers « la complexité et la finesse de la création ou de l'engagement concret de l'activité artistique »<sup>20</sup>. C'est en utilisant sa sensibilité propre, corporelle plus qu'intellectuelle, que le danseur sera à même de faire émerger ce qui se joue *entre* les mots du texte. Alors que nous avons vu que la danse était assimilable à la poésie en tant qu'« écriture corporelle », nous voyons qu'elle peut également faire de la poésie une « lecture corporelle » par la chorégraphie, une lecture « corporéographique ». Les textes de Mallarmé sur la danse, même s'ils ne faisaient alors en rien allusion au travail d'adaptation chorégraphique d'un texte littéraire, semblent pourtant parfaitement pouvoir s'appliquer à ce phénomène :

(...) celle-là (...) pourvu que tu déposes à ses pieds d'inconsciente révélatrice (...) la Fleur d'abord de ton poétique instinct, (...) écrira ta vision à la façon d'un Signe, qu'elle est.<sup>21</sup>

Ainsi, de même que Mallarmé parle d'« instinct » pour expliquer ce que la danseuse révèle au poète de son propre travail créatif, Wilfride Piollet qualifie le processus d'adaptation chorégraphique du texte de René Char de « non intellectualisé ». Dans les deux cas, l'« instinct », aussi bien du poète que de la danseuse, prime sur l'intellect. En somme, lorsque Wilfride Piollet ré« écri(t) (la) vision » de Char à travers son solo, c'est bien dans une entente tacite entre son « instinct » et celui du poète, une intuition qui révèle *sans*

<sup>19</sup> Wilfride Piollet, entretien du 13 mars 2014 à Poissy.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Bernard, *De la création chorégraphique*, Paris, Centre National de la Danse, coll. « Recherches », 2002, p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Mallarmé, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

les mots ce qui se cache *sous* les mots du poète. Le rôle du silence, auquel renvoient les blancs laissés entre les paragraphes du texte de René Char, est à ce titre très intéressant. Le poète semble presque lancer un appel à la danseuse, à la danse, lorsqu'au cœur de la « *Lettera amorosa* », il clame :

Qui n'a pas rêvé, en flânant sur le boulevard des villes, d'un monde qui, au lieu de commencer par la parole, débiterait avec les intentions ?<sup>22</sup>

Ne pourrait-on pas lire dans cette phrase comme l'espoir du poète de créer un monde poétique sans avoir recours au mallarméen « appareil du scribe » ? N'est-ce pas la danseuse, dont l'ambition est d'être « muette », qui serait en ce sens la plus à même de parachever cette volonté ? Le mot « intentions » employé par René Char mérite d'ailleurs que nous nous y attardions. Il désigne une tension mentale vers une action, étymologiquement le fait de « tendre vers quelque chose ». Or précisément, les « barres flexibles » de Wilfride Piollet, l'interprète du texte, sont ces lignes de tension corporelles que l'imaginaire anime. Elles sont des lignes de tension mues par des intentions, par une pensée tacite, plus rapide que la parole :

La danse, c'est la vitesse de la pensée incarnée, une pensée de l'infinitésimal qui est aussi une pensée de la fulgurance, au-delà de toute logique.<sup>23</sup>

En somme, c'est donc bien comme ballerine « illettrée » au sens que lui donne selon nous Mallarmé, que Wilfride Piollet lit chorégraphiquement ce texte de René Char. Elle réécrit le poème dans les lignes sans lettre de son corps, et donne corps non pas tant à la lettre – autrement dit au sens littéral du texte – qu'au non-dit situé *entre* les lettres : « (...) ce que je voulais, c'était réveiller quelque chose, rentrer dans l'imaginaire des mots de Char »<sup>24</sup>.

### *La danseuse, lettre blanche ?*

Pour l'interprétation de son solo, Wilfride Piollet a fait le choix du costume le plus épuré qui soit, à savoir le justaucorps académique blanc, recouvrant tout le corps de la danseuse, en même temps qu'il en souligne les contours. Elle semble symboliser ainsi sur scène à la fois la page blanche qui précède l'écriture et la plasticité d'une écriture labile, s'effaçant au fur et à mesure qu'elle se dessine sur la page-corps de la danseuse. A travers

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<sup>22</sup> René Char, *Lettera amorosa*, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> Wilfride Piollet, *Rendez-vous sur tes barres flexibles*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Wilfride Piollet, entretien du 25 juillet 2013 à Poissy.

ce costume, Wilfride Piollet se fait donc à la fois présence et absence de l'écriture, « écriture corporelle » s'évanouissant au fur et à mesure qu'elle s'écrit, un pur tracé sans traces. Notons que là encore, la danseuse donne corps à cet entre-deux entre présence et absence mis en évidence par René Char dès le début de son texte, lorsqu'il s'adresse à la femme aimée : « Tu es partie mais tu demeures dans l'inflexion des circonstances... »<sup>25</sup>

L'opposition entre le « tu es partie » et sa négation immédiate, « mais tu demeures », est extrêmement significative. Le départ de la femme aimée au passé composé est immédiatement contrebalancé par le présent du verbe « demeurer ». Et en même temps, le verbe d'état « demeurer » est contrebalancé à son tour par la contingence des « circonstances ». Rien que dans cette phrase, nous avons l'impression de voir tour à tour apparaître et disparaître la femme aimée, dans une sorte de clignotement syntaxique ponctué par les prépositions « mais » et « dans », qui à chaque fois viennent nuancer le sens catégorique du verbe précédent. Il en va de même pour la poésie que recherche le poète, absente du texte en prose mais accomplissant par instants des trouées de présence, se cherchant dans ces trouées, représentées comme nous l'avons vu plastiquement par les blancs du texte. La danseuse se fait « lettera » blanche, présence d'écriture sans cesse évanescence, elle-même ne « demeur(ant) » que dans les « inflexions des circonstances », dans le temps éphémère du mouvement.

Dans le silence de la danse, Wilfride Piollet lit et réécrit donc la vision de Char, sa vision de la figure absente « à la façon d'un signe qu'elle est »<sup>26</sup> pour reprendre l'expression de Mallarmé. Si comme nous l'avons vu, elle est « illettrée » au sens où elle n'utilise pas les lettres comme moyen d'expression, peut-être peut-elle être considérée en revanche comme étant elle-même, dans son mouvement, l'incarnation physique de La lettre, « à la façon d'un Signe qu'elle est ». Elle serait la « lettera » (au sens calligraphique) de la « lettera » (au sens épistolaire). Elle serait une lettre blanche dans laquelle se dissoudraient toutes les lettres noires du texte, un alphabet plastique se formant et se déformant sans cesse dans le flux du mouvement éphémère.

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<sup>25</sup> René Char, *Lettera amorosa*, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Mallarmé, op. cit., p. 174.

« *Iris, ma fleur de gravité* » : la mise en corps d'un entre-deux poétique

« Merci d'être, sans jamais te casser, iris, ma fleur de gravité ».<sup>27</sup> Cette phrase, ouvrant l'ultime paragraphe du poème de René Char, suffirait peut-être à résumer, à condenser toute la force du lien entre le texte de René Char et la danse de Wilfride Piollet, c'est pourquoi nous y prêterons une attention toute particulière. Nous verrons que si ce poème ne parle à aucun moment *de* danse, il en appelle néanmoins à la compréhension d'un danseur, notamment à travers cet entre-deux (méta)physique qu'ouvre l'image de la fleur entre pesanteur et élévation.

L'image de l'iris revient à plusieurs reprises dans le poème de René Char. Dans le passage intitulé « Chant d'insomnie », René Char fait en effet une première allusion à une orchidée, décrite comme une « miniature semblable à l'iris »<sup>28</sup>. Plus loin, il évoque « deux iris jaunes dans l'eau verte de la Sorgue »<sup>29</sup>. Cette variété aquatique de l'iris n'est d'ailleurs pas sans éclairer le sens que nous pouvons accorder à l'expression « mi-liquide, mi-fleur »<sup>30</sup>, employée quelques pages auparavant. Après l'emploi final de l'expression « iris, ma fleur de gravité » au début du dernier paragraphe du poème à proprement parler, René Char ajoute encore une sorte de notice à son texte, qu'il nomme « Franc-bord », dans lequel il énumère à la façon du dictionnaire les différents sens du mot « iris », du nom de la divinité grecque à la fleur, en passant par le terme qualifiant ce qui entoure la pupille de l'œil, le prénom féminin ou le nom d'un papillon. Et de conclure sur « l'iris plural, iris d'Eros, iris de Lettera amorosa »<sup>31</sup>. L'image de l'iris est donc au centre de l'imaginaire de ce poète, et c'est autour de cet imaginaire que Wilfride Piollet semble en partie avoir tissé sa danse. De façon significative, l'iris est cousu dans le costume de la danseuse, redessinant de ses contours le dos du justaucorps, tandis que les extrémités des collants s'« irisent » de bleu. L'écharpe que porte la danseuse sur la tête n'est quant à elle pas sans évoquer « la messagère des dieux » éponyme, qui, selon les termes de René Char dans le « Franc-bord », « déployant son écharpe, (...) produisait l'arc-en-ciel »<sup>32</sup>. De façon extrêmement subtile, la danseuse donne à voir dans l'épure même de son costume immaculé, le spectre « plural » de sens du mot « iris ».

<sup>27</sup> René Char, *Lettera amorosa*, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

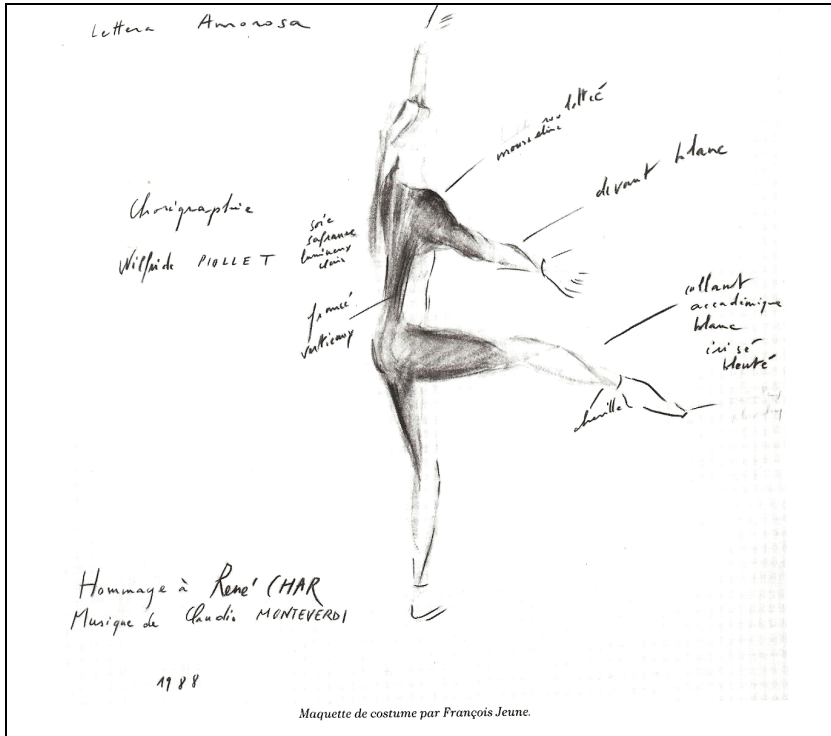
<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*





Maquette du costume de Wilfride Piollet par François Jeune, in *La conjuration René Char*, Programme de l'Opéra National de Paris, Avril 1988, création salle Favart, p. 12.

Pour autant, si Wilfride Piollet incarne dans sa danse l'iris, elle ne le « figure » pas. Elle ne « mime » pas la fleur d'iris, comme pouvait le faire par exemple Loïe Fuller, agitant ses voiles de telle sorte qu'ils donnent forme à une fleur de lys. Wilfride Piollet, elle, donne corps à ce que représente l'image de l'iris dans le texte de René Char, et plus précisément au paradoxe que Char donne à cette image de l'iris lorsqu'il la nomme « fleur de gravité ». L'expression peut en effet sembler antithétique. *A priori*, l'image de la fleur renvoie plutôt à l'idée de légèreté tandis que la « gravité », au sens étymologique, renvoie à celle de pesanteur. Or, en réalité, Wilfride Piollet dans son interprétation, donne tout son sens à cette expression, par ses partis pris chorégraphiques qui n'ont rien d'anecdotique. En effet, pour ce

solo, Wilfride Piollet s'est assez rapidement détachée de ses premières improvisations, notamment au sol, sur la voix de René Char pour en venir à la rigueur technique de la danse Renaissance. Il serait certes aisé de rattacher la raison de ce choix chorégraphique uniquement à celui de la musique de Monteverdi. Sa création « Lettera amorosa » appartient en effet au genre du madrigal, une forme ancienne de musique vocale qui s'est développée au cours de la Renaissance et au début de la période baroque (XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle - début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle). La coïncidence n'est pas fortuite en effet, mais sans doute pouvons-nous aller plus loin, et rattacher ce choix également à la « Lettera amorosa » contemporaine, celle de René Char. Car Wilfride Piollet ne se contente pas de reproduire strictement les pas Renaissance tels qu'ils existaient à l'époque de leur élaboration. Elle ajoute à l'esthétique baroque toute une gestuelle de bras ainsi que les pointes classiques, deux anachronismes qui pourraient passer pour de la subversion, mais qui en réalité semblent bien être une juste adaptation de ces pas Renaissance à la contemporanéité du texte de René Char. Tout se passe comme si Wilfride Piollet était allée puiser dans cette technique de danse ce qui précisément a peut-être séduit René Char dans la musique de Monteverdi, à savoir un rapport bien particulier à ce couple antithétique que sont la pesanteur et l'a-pesanteur, « la fleur de gravité ». En effet, Wilfride Piollet rappelle que la danse Renaissance, tout du moins dans sa tendance « noble », se caractérise par cette recherche particulière de l'« élévation », recherchée à travers une « danse avec les jambes plutôt tendues mais les pieds ne quittant pas le sol »<sup>33</sup>. Autrement dit, ce n'est pas tant par les élans et les sauts qu'est mise en œuvre l'élévation, que par un appui ferme pris sur le sol pour d'autant mieux s'ériger vers le ciel. Or, tout dans la chorégraphie de Wilfride Piollet semble illustrer ce phénomène. A l'image de « l'iris, fleur de gravité », la danseuse pousse le plus loin possible depuis le sol pour aller le plus haut possible vers le ciel.

L'antithèse apparente de l'expression de Char, « fleur de gravité », semble se résoudre parfaitement dans le choix chorégraphique de Wilfride Piollet. Toute sa chorégraphie reste fidèle à ce principe, qui est le maintien coûte que coûte des appuis au sol, non pas pour se laisser attirer vers lui mais précisément pour s'élever à partir de lui. Ainsi la danseuse affirme-t-elle :

Je ne voulais pas du tout tricher avec les appuis. Tout devait partir des appuis au sol, comme dans les pas Renaissance, c'était ça mon diktat.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Wilfride Piollet, *Rendez-vous sur tes barres flexibles*, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>34</sup> Wilfride Piollet, entretien du 25 juillet 2013, Poissy.



Wilfride Piollet, vidéo de la répétition pré-générale du 25 avril 1988, Opéra-Comique, Salle Favart.

Notons que le refus des grandes robes Renaissance illustre parfaitement la volonté de la danseuse d'extraire cette technique de son contexte historique, pour en sublimer l'essence. La très grande simplicité du costume va dans ce sens, il ne donne à voir que le corps, que le texte du corps, et non le contexte d'une esthétique. Comme cousu à même le corps de la danseuse, le justaucorps souligne les lignes verticales que trace la danseuse, donne à voir toute la tension du mouvement entre sol et ciel. L'ajout des pointes est sans doute à interpréter également dans ce sens. Il s'agit de tirer parti de méthodes plus modernes de la danse pour exacerber l'ambition de l'esthétique Renaissance, celle de l'élévation à partir de la gravité, ainsi qu'un cisèlement du poids, de la pesanteur corporelle dans une extrême précision de mouvement. « J'ai voulu travailler au plus pointu »<sup>35</sup>, affirme ainsi Wilfride Piollet.

La pointe est précisément l'outil qui, tout en obligeant la danseuse à rester en contact avec le sol (dressée sur ses pointes, jambes tendues, la danseuse ne saute pas), lui permet de s'en éloigner le plus possible. Ainsi, mis à part un grand jeté qui vient strier horizontalement ce solo, pris sans presque aucun élan, la danseuse maintient un contact aussi ténu que quasi permanent avec le sol. Elle est à proprement parler une « fleur de gravité »,

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, *loc. cit.*

à la fois légère et ancrée dans le sol, ou plutôt légère *parce qu'*ancrée dans le sol. Ce que dit Wilfride Piollet de l'ambition du danseur classique se retrouve ainsi pleinement dans cette chorégraphie atypique :

Le danseur classique est mû par le désir pressant de la hauteur, par le vertige de l'altitude. Il veut intensément vivre la tête dans les nuages. A mon sens, plus on veut s'élever dans le ciel, plus on doit avoir de relation avec le sol.<sup>36</sup>

La danseuse s'épanouit ainsi, au sens floral du terme, à l'image de l'iris de René Char, entre pesanteur et élévation.



Wilfride Piollet, répétition pré-générale du 25 avril 1988, Opéra-Comique, Salle Favart.

Pour conclure sur la « Lettera amorosa » de Wilfride Piollet, nous remarquerons que de la pointe de la plume du poète à celles de la danseuse, le corps se fait ici l'écran blanc sur lequel se projette la corporéité latente du texte de René Char. Il incarne au sens fort du terme cet entre-deux dans lequel le texte en prose cherche son corps de poème, symbolisé

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<sup>36</sup> Wilfride Piollet, *Rendez-vous sur tes barres flexibles*, op. cit., p. 105.

par la quête de la femme aimée absente. Cette lettre blanche dessine ainsi l'indicible entre présence et absence, pesanteur et gravité. Ce corps-lettre est ainsi bien *medium-miroir*, révélant ce que nous nommerons la « *corpoéticité* » du texte de René Char.

*Conclusion : Contemporanéité de la danse et de la poésie à travers une « corpoéticité » intermédiaire ?*

Si d'une part le corps dansant peut s'appréhender comme une graphie poétique, une « écriture corporelle », et si d'autre part la graphie poétique peut recéler entre ses lettres un appel à une lecture corporelle via la chorégraphie, une lecture « corporégraphique », peut-être pourrions-nous avancer l'hypothèse de l'existence d'une « *corpoéticité* » commune, miroir intermédiaire à travers lequel pourrait se reconnaître et se redéfinir l'un et l'autre des deux arts à l'heure contemporaine. Le choix du mot-valise « *corpoéticité* » résulte de l'union des termes « corps » et « poésie », les deux facettes d'un miroir commun entre danse et poésie. Tandis que la danse mirerait sa poéticité dans la poésie, la poésie mirerait sa corporéité dans le corps dansant.

Si la danse peut être considérée comme une « écriture corporelle », alors un langage commun, et même une fusion entre le poème et le corps devient possible via la danse. La danse n'est alors plus seulement un motif neutre, pour le poème. Elle est le reflet possible de son processus de création, via l'intermédiaire du corps. Elle se révèle alors elle-même comme écriture poétique à part entière. Et de son côté, la poésie, lue par ce *medium* qu'est le corps dansant, se révèle par-delà les mots comme un véhicule d'indicible. Il ne s'agit pas pour le poème de parler *de* danse, ou *de* corps dansant. Il s'agit de se faire corps dansant, ou plutôt peut-être d'être soutenu par cette ambition de se faire corps dansant. En ce sens, la lecture « corporégraphique » d'un poème par un danseur ne viendrait que parachever cette ambition du poème à se tisser comme un corps dansant.

Entre la danse et la poésie, un corps poétique, une « *corpoéticité* » se fait donc *medium-miroir*. Et peut-être est-ce cette « *corpoéticité* » qui à l'époque contemporaine peut encore nous permettre de reconnaître ce qui est danse et ce qui est poésie. La poésie se définirait par son aspiration à se faire corps dansant tandis que la danse pourrait se reconnaître comme telle à travers l'impulsion poétique qui la sous-tendrait. Si l'on ne peut plus aujourd'hui reconnaître un texte comme poétique par sa forme versifiée, nous pourrions peut-être faire appel à sa teneur « *corpoétique* », à ce qui

dans le texte en appellerait à une mise en corps dansante. Quant à la danse, la notion de «corpoéticité» nous permettrait peut-être de sortir des ambiguïtés relatives à ce que l'on nomme «danse contemporaine». Cette notion semble prise entre deux paradoxes aujourd'hui : d'une part, seules certaines esthétiques de danse semblent reconnues comme étant «de notre temps», «contemporaines», excluant la danse classique par exemple, quand bien même des danseurs la pratiquent bel et bien à notre époque, avec les moyens de notre époque. D'autre part, si le «contemporain» en danse rejette certains types de danse, il admet en revanche aisément l'absence de danse, comme en témoigne un courant extrême qui se revendique clairement comme étant de la «non-danse». Au point que certains critiques de ballet en soient venus à créer le concept de «danse-danse», en opposition à celui de «non-danse». Autrement dit, la notion de «danse contemporaine» pose la question de ce qu'est finalement encore la danse à l'heure contemporaine. Aussi, le concept de «corpoéticité» pourrait nous fournir également un outil pour identifier ce qu'est la danse à l'heure actuelle.

Le concept de «corpoéticité» pourrait ainsi être utilisé de façon double : d'une part pour identifier ce qui dans un texte fait encore poésie aujourd'hui, d'autre part pour identifier ce qui dans un corps fait encore danse. A la croisée du poétique et de la danse, la démarche de Wilfride Piollet nous intéresse d'autant plus qu'elle s'est en premier lieu insérée dans l'esthétique classique, permettant au danseur classique de se faire résolument contemporain, en tant que créateur de son propre corps. Car même sans être chorégraphe, même sans créer de nouvelles figures, de nouvelles formes, le danseur en tant qu'interprète, à travers une prise de conscience de son corps via des théories modernes comme celles des «barres flexibles», peut écrire son propre corps en poème en imprimant dans les lignes invisibles qui le constituent son propre imaginaire. Et c'est bien cet imaginaire qui sera apte à faire vivre la forme du mouvement, que celle-ci soit classique, moderne, ou dite «contemporaine». Là est la liberté créatrice du danseur, dans ce pouvoir qui lui est conféré de se faire le créateur de formes qu'il n'invente pas mais impulse en y réinventant son propre corps, devenu poème éphémère, devenu création en même temps qu'outil de création.

*Entre* danse et poésie, à l'heure contemporaine, il nous reste donc à donner les contours précis à cette notion de «corps intermédiaire», ce corps d'écriture «illettrée», sans lettre, que nous avons choisi de nommer «corpoéticité», entre la «graphie poétique» et la chorégraphie.

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## *Psychodrama and the utopian playing*

SORIN CRIȘAN\*

**Abstract:** The research assumes that utopia finds an ingenuous form of manifestation in Psychodrama. Thus, having roots in the meeting place of sacred and imaginary events, utopia tends to undermine the authenticity of the reality in which we live. Likewise, utopia is the space where the psychodramatic play, passing beyond the limits of everyday reality, acquires the simulacrum vitality. The protagonist (and along with him, auxiliaries) are looking for an ideal space, hidden or affected for a while by a “wreck” or an “error” of Being, all “over the earth” or in the “water”. Therefore, often in the role play, we think we are witnessing a journey, real and imaginary at the same time, presented by the protagonist’s dream or reverie. This shorting of the reality from the psychodramatic play can be classified as utopia manifestation for the unachievable desires. Through the protagonist’s role play, utopia gives an actual answer to society, to the imaginary, to the visible, to the logic and the suffocating day-to-day rationality.

**Keywords:** psychodrama, utopia, role play, protagonist

Numerous papers dedicated to psychodrama have nowadays come to the point of identifying, with surgical accuracy, the most insignificant details referring to therapy or to means of self-knowledge. Thus, it is easy to pinpoint the thematic takeovers of several theories once promoted by Jacob Moreno, as well as the upstream continuation of researches and applications in the above mentioned area of interest.

This study intends to transfer the “productions” of psychodrama into the field of conceptualisation, as well as to focus on a few of the elements that, on one side, describe its specificity (and highlight its oftentimes paradoxical way of manifesting itself), and, on the other side, place it next to the overall human condition and a possible utopia-related discourse.

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*Utopia or How to Dream of “a place of no existence”*

If, in the beginnings of the philosophical thinking of the Antiquity, *Utopia* directed us towards a non-place, to a “nowhere” or to a “place of no existence”, it subsequently gained the aura of that ideal land that only Paradise might compete with. It is good to know that, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Utopia referred to works of fiction and philosophy which imagined and promoted a world that was beneficial to everybody, as written in Thomas More’ famous work, *Utopia* (1516, 1992), where 54 cities, built according to ideal longings, might make the dream of universal welfare come true. Then, as well as now, the clearest image of a utopian world was the island, the strictly limited realm of a “state” which translates into the theme of the yearning for happiness of its inhabitants.

One of the most accurate definitions of utopia belongs to André Lalande. Already in his famous “Vocabulary”, he writes that utopia is “a process consisting of the representation of a fictitious state of facts as concrete fulfilment method, either with the purpose of understanding its consequences, or, most of the times, to show how one might take advantage of these consequences” (Lalande, 1991, 1180). But could utopia also work as a protection tool against reality’s “tempests”? Or against “un-reality” and all those self-destructive constructions that man embraces only to conceal his suffering? And if the first answer that comes to mind is a negative one, to the extent that the embodiment of such a thought would simultaneously claim man’s hope and protesting will, should we then ask ourselves whether utopia could at least represent the *dream* of change or of augmenting our day-to-day life? Until finding an answer that should satisfy us all, the ideal place imagined in the works of utopia writers – thoroughly highlighted in the discourse of the Rationalists – functions alternatively as a chimeric and as a remote place, towards which we turn our eyes, but about which we have serious difficulties in saying when and if it can ever be reached.

It is believed that nothing could be more to the disadvantage of comprehending what utopia is all about, both in the realm of psychodrama or else, than a “strictly objective” analysis, mostly adopted by the ones looking for logical answers, even when they are delivered from a *constructive* perspective, meant to be part of the labour of “imagining” that which could be shaped as the *ideal place*. The attempts to conceptualize utopia led to the unveiling of an ambiguous, multi-shaped and fully malleable “field”, rather inclined to intellective and inferential speculation. Thus, in a utopian world, language appears to be radically altered (see *infra*), thus compelling

the ones looking for its image to return to the resources of fiction, phantasy and the imaginary. Nowadays, after a few centuries of questions and debatable answers, the inversion of roles, the reshaping of moral and social priorities, the paradox generated by the relationship between order and carnivalesque, de-theatralization (in its deepest psychoanalytical significance or, quite the contrary, in its rather discouraging manifestation of losing contact with reality), the reflected image (sometimes of an anamorphic nature) and the image of theatre-within-theatre consolidate features of this world so much inclined to psychodramatic representation.

While, by means of the theatre, fiction is restored as an artistic, speculation inclined form, by means of therapeutic theatre or psychodrama, the participants plunge into a universe of immediate necessity-related fiction, a utopian universe, able to offer protection – even if for a short period of time – from the “asperities” of the real world. The psychodramatic stage aims to be – as shown elsewhere – “a protective place, a *spiritualis uterus* (Thomas D’Aquino), thus allowing access to a private world” (Crişan, 2007, 141). In theatre, the reason for utopia resides in the capacity of its creators to imagine another “slice of life”, in fact another world, *ex-novo*, situated outside the narrow borders of the real. The reason of utopia resides also in the necessity to show the perspectives of a recovered “republic”, a construction which is good for all. In this particular case, we shall not rely on the interpretation of the relationship between utopia and psychodrama based on the frail hope into the social good or for psychological comfort, but on the in-depth judgements of the being and on the activation of conscience acts (cf. Cioranescu, 1972, 12). Nevertheless, this does not exclude the connection to the contingent and also to an actually lived *material reality*. It only signals the incongruence between its exegetical form and the evolutionary form of manifestation, to the extent that “there is a *previous staging*, which *situates* and *focuses the action*. Psychodrama does not happen in a *vacuum*, but in a *place* that can be described, a *time* that can be defined and it takes place between *full-bodied* beings, which have their ways of living together” (Schützenberger, 2003, 80).

### ***Psychodramatic Play or Waiting for the Being***

We assume that traditional utopians missed what Nicias told his soldiers before the battle of Syracuse: a citadel is made of people, not of walls and empty ships (cf. Thucydides, 1998). Starting from this statement, an over-mundane space of utopia can be created as a virtual place (which exists only as

possibility), hard to identify with/ or estranged from the real world, a world which is oftentimes so very dramatic. And then, which is the meaning of such an undertaking which derives from the effort of revery, rather than from concrete application? The redirectioning of an undignified past and of a shapeless future towards a manifest present (the one related to scenical time and space, as shaped before the beginning of the psychodramatic play) warns us about those “interstitia” of existence, which satisfy the human dream of touching the ideal horizons. As a rule, the critical comment of the utopian (be it theatrical or otherwise), refers to the world of *here* and *now*. And if, at the moment of their first manifestations (i.e. in the past), affects find words or representations useless, they are being carried to the present that invokes them, thus making them the utopian manifestation of emotional discharge. A radical alternative is also brought into discussion, and the possible solutions take their distance from both the actual state of the protagonist and the social “order” that one has to consider. By means of the utopia of the staging itself, the participants in the psychodramatic play relate to events of being, which makes them prone to subjectivity, and therefore dreaming about a world that needs to be born again. Nevertheless, that which makes theatrical (scenical) action differ from psychodramatic play (or *simulation play*, which is basically defined as therapeutical attempt), beyond all aesthetic, artistic, ideological and directorial issues, is that, in the first case, the ontic truth is stated clearly – in other words, it is given concrete shape, describing a precisely designated space, while, in the other case, the subject is free of any constraints and drives and allowed to manifest itself through complete “flight”.

Remember that theatre is the *manifestation* of the human being *while waiting* – a paradox of this art, which has its roots in the relationship between man and the transcendental. Therefore why (and how) does that which-does-not-exist yet, exist?! – this is, in fact, the question that the individual who is bereft of his own peace of mind is asking himself, while living the anxiety of the narrowing of perspectives, alongside with the great dilemma that utopia is faced with in the theatre, and which is taken over by psychodrama. The starting point of the individual who has already reached the state of crisis is marked by the moment when, as observed by Sorin Antohi, he “fights any type of becoming, denying the present, as well as the change by transfer projections, replacing real time with the obsessive image of several past experiences, to which neither remembrance, nor conscience keep him connected. To him, real time is only the background for several subjective scenarios, thus losing any trace of ontological consistency” (Antohi, 2005, 149).

According to Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, utopia “is that particular quest for the possible which accompanies the history of our Western culture, always subject to innovation, shift of forms and of values. Utopia is the relationship between historical imagination and that particular elsewhere, which is never anywhere, and which always takes us towards the new” (Wunenburger, 1979, 7). Actually, imagination exists within the boundaries of a psychodramatic “as if”, nonetheless always remote, which makes Wunenburger discuss the topic of a kind of utopia which is close to the history of “our Western culture”, of the “tragedy of history”, of “historical imagination”, of “the end of history”, of the “final happiness of history” or, to end this chain of syntagms, of “historical stereotypical and monochrome images” (*ibidem*, 7-9). Man’s need to turn to a reevaluation of utopia during the moments of crisis (be it of a psychological, social or cultural nature, be it with or without the human spirit), when the contact with manifest reality is lost, but also the distancing from the “reality” beyond, the transcendental one, is thus reflected. This is why, nowadays more than ever, utopia finds its way among the paradoxes of thinking, thus strengthening our revolt, as well as our yearning for a possible world (which covers the ideal one). Nevertheless, as this is not “a permanent feast”, but an exception, can utopia still be enough for itself? Being, once again, skeptical about all those theories that strive to draw its boundaries, we may ask ourselves whether utopia is not hiding behind “phantasms” or “reveries” invoked in the absence of some real conceptual fundamentals? And finally, does the utopian space of psychodrama entirely resist the temptations of the real and of evolution?

The chances of full psychodramatic utopian completion are altered by the continuous transfiguration of shapes and of the values defining them, by the coming together of rules and exceptions and by the fact that the perfect citadel is “an interval, limited on one side by the corruptible world of history and, on the other side, by ideality” (Antohti, 1999, 14). Now, utopia becomes outlawed and steps out of the “unrestlessness of creativity” (Constantin Noica) and ends by submitting itself to (self)criticism (i.e. distancing) and, consequently, by missing its completeness. In fact, any utopia germinates its failure from the very moment of its development. Does this create an unavoidable censorship between the “un-world” to which it refers and our real existence? The discussion regarding the one being prefigured around the other seems to suggest dissimulated, unseen bridges, which are useful to all those reciprocal “visits” from the protagonist to the role that he/she identifies with during psycho-dramatic

action, as well as that particular something that allows the spectator to recognize him/herself in the others (Lemoine, 1969-1970, 899-902). The result, though, seems to be an “autoimmune” reaction, due to the attempt to impose a *status-quo* of utopia, in other words, following the ideologizing of the new “republic” – which is nevertheless challenged by utopia itself, as one may read in one of Paul Ricœur’s studies: „If ideology keeps and preserves reality, utopia interrogates it in an essential manner. Thus, utopia is the expression of all potentialities of a group, which are repressed by the current order” (Ricœur, 1986, 388).

### *Psychodrama and the virtues of the utopian imaginary*

Paul Ricœur has reached utopia through his studies about the imaginary and in opposition to those related to ideology. If the former is not the result of its constitutive data, but of its “function, which is always that of proposing an alternative society”, the latter produces an “inverted image of reality” (*ibidem*, 388), a confirmation and integration of the *praxis* (*ibidem*, 381). *In extremis*, the idealization that the utopist loves so much makes reality twist, lying to itself and radicalizing the means involved in the dynamics of the game (as it can be seen in the method of *the double*, where the auxiliary ego gives expression to the supposed feelings of the protagonist), which brings to the forefront the danger of turning away from a reality that is blocked at the surface of the personal unconscious; from here, it is merely a step until “future tyrannies, which may turn out to be even worse than the ones it seeks to demolish” (*ibidem*, 390). One should not, after all, take the path of disappointment and observe that, by the very utopian elements that they make use of, all forms of “psychodrama” (be it classical, Balint, psychoanalytical, triadic etc) have one element in common, which ensures their therapeutic function: “the presentation of personal truth in the protected world of make-believe as a way to master and cope vicariously with stressful life events in a creative and adaptive manner” (Kellermann, 1992, 12).

Finding its place in the space dedicated to “the passage” – and, consequently, to miscibility – utopia takes the form of yearning towards something that is never adjudicated. This is why, all descriptions of it are permanently covered by the thin veil of nostalgia or even melancholy, for which it seeks a cure. Once acknowledged, according to Jean Starobinski, melancholy works just like a panacea, re-establishing the order inside of a dream which has lost its landmarks: the utopian is innocent by its very melancholy: being very well aware of the fact that his imaginary world is,

at the same time, possible and unachievable, he regretfully resigns himself, but then he also multiplies his perfect features, at the same time (cf. Starobinski, 1984). Melancholy appears as an effect of the wearing of „masks“ (social roles, as we might call them, i.e. the ones censoring and moulding personal identities).

In a similar manner, in psychodrama, the stage expands the space between the two poles, the one of iterated happening (or the protagonist's own history, its ideality included) and the one of the play itself (the object of psychic analysis or dramatic expression), aiming at the dissolution of anxieties. The space of the “play” is the “in-between” or “nowhere”, where a cure or, in its extreme form, the infinity is the target. (When it displays a social ideal, the utopia of the psycho-therapeutical stage is attracted towards *eutopia*, which is a space of generalized happiness). By means of the psychodramatic play, it is not the carrying into effect, but the tribulations of utopia (being recognized in numerous forms) that draw the attention of auxiliaries.

If, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Europe defined utopia as being a desirable dream, the number of critical positions against this opinion increased during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the translucent lenses of ideology affected the nuances of interpretation: The time of prophets has made way for the time of judges – Wunenburger concludes. The promise of a bright future is understood as dishonest advertising and abuse of trust. The great reflux of Utopia crusaders is shaping itself in the realms of history (cf. Wunenburger, 1979, 7). Despite all excesses and against all pure ideas about supreme happiness, the imaginary, the fragmentary universe of fiction, finds its place again around utopia, so as to make possible the enchantment of all senses and the presuppositions of the irrational. Here, Dionysos, with all his excesses and nuances, makes his presence felt. When imagination rules, all suffocating powers will be merely imaginary. During all this Sabbath of repression, the man of will celebrates the childhood of the world, the Adamic innocence, the playful passion (*ibidem*, 8).

Therefore we can only ask ourselves if it is not the imagination of protagonists and auxiliaries, with all it includes, just like a sailship from the beginning of time, the one that makes the germs of utopia visible to us, as projections of an autonomous space, marked by the illusion of freedom? The adepts of psychodrama, just like the utopians of any kind, live their present by looking into the future, remembering, with or without realizing it, the very beginning of time, an eternal, Adamic place. They make use of the technique of dis-location, as inherited from the establishers of the first “dreams” which contained the germs of social ideals: „There is a dimension

of time which no one has conquered or which, when conquered, cannot be consummated. This dimension is the future. Because the future is the time which acts as a place“ for everything” (Liceanu, 1992, 98).

The imaginary dynamisation of the of the psychodramatic play may lead to a privileged position granted to the “spectator’s” eye, as well as to further images built upon the skeleton of the same dream (of the same utopia!), wishing to break free from the captivity of the past it substitutes. The stake of attracting utopia on the side of psychodrama (and of its pragmatical prospects) lies, before all, in its reaffirmation as an “anthropological structure of the imaginary” – in the capacity of the participants to integrate the play in the multitude of structures and forms of action and of the protagonist’s yearnings – and less in its defining as a way of “transforming reality into logical categories”, as Karl Marx supposed when evaluating the “utopian sects” (Marx, 1953, 225), as well as Socialism, which was, at that moment, just being born. Marx accuses the promoters of utopia of the intention to build imaginary, chimerical, reactionary systems, estranged from the ones proposed by authentic revolutionary movements (cf. Bouchard, 1983, 273-274). What actually unites psychodrama and utopia is the wish to change, from the very foundation, the interior world of the individual, according to the principles of “goodness”, but also the attempt to free all the impulses rejected by society and suppressed within the “shadow” of the unconscious, this negative side of personality. For Jung, the shadow carrying an archetypal value represents what the conscious refuses to the individual, „the other person” or the *forbidden* spiritual feature. Sometimes, this can take the appearance of the *alter ego*, but without identifying itself with the *persona*. At the same time, it gives the measure of our subjectivity, as it is impossible for us to chase it away from our lives. One may also remark that, following the Jungian analysis path, the *inversion* of the psychodramatic play, especially in the particular case when an “antagonist” is involved, may unveil to us the “shadow” of another person: “This shadow is the part of one’s that contains the feelings, images and thoughts that are undesired or denied – aspects of self that a person does not want to recognize and which are unconsciously projected on the other people” (Gasseau & Scategni, 2010, 262).

If divine intervention is invoked in religious practices, one remains in the realm of the humane through the attempts of psychodrama, thus granting man the full power of building an exemplary *polis*, thanks to the creative force of the unconscious. By its utopian undertaking, psychodrama intends to be an “accomplished eschatology” (Ricœur, 1986, 389), nevertheless, an eschatology which is deprived of its sacred dimension. It is only in the case of philosophy

(or of a *civitas imaginalis*, with Sorin Antohi) that “an invasion of the sacred on the realm of thinking” actually happens (cf. Liiceanu, 1992, 102), which places the un-knowledge in proximity, in opposition with knowledge by distancing, transcending the real and „the discovery of a sense of ascension at the level of spiritual experience” (*ibidem*, 104). The distance between *here* and *there* allows the utopian to “dislocate” and imagine *another* world, “a world of images” (*ibidem*, 99). Through the “good life” that the protagonists of psychodrama are dreaming about, they offer themselves to the others, thus renouncing their private life, which leads us to the idea of identifying its origins in the principles of equality belonging to the ancient *polis*. In this context, making an in-depth analysis of the Greek *polis*, Hannah Arendt wrote: “Equality, therefore, far from being connected with justice, as in modern times, was the very essence of freedom: to be free meant to be free from the inequality present in rulership and to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed” (Arendt, 1958, 32-33).

Not paying attention, though, to the manner in which classical Greece imagined the freedom of the individual, the first creators of utopias conceived, in addition to all this, an order and a hierarchy that should maintain the state of “goodness” of the citizens, once again turning the “shadow” into the privileged storage space for all unallowed manifestations, thus enlarging the life-absorbing darkness.

### *Utopia and Ideology*

Regional utopias, including the ones belonging to theatre and to psychodrama, end with an appeal to existence as a whole, but also to the factors that give birth to expectations of any kind. In psychodrama, to give up utopia would mean entirely giving up the noble concern for an augmented world. What is left to the psychodramatist or to the play master, as well as to the group as a whole, is to free the stage of all symbol-related canons and to overcome the phase of premature distancing of the real from the imaginary, but also to take away the special remnants of the latter (in fact, to ensure the strategies and qualities of distancing itself, in the Kantian meaning of the term). The advantage of the psychodramatic play lies in its total freedom from the real that exists beyond the stage, but also from the inadvertences identified by comparison with the everyday life of the participants in the play. On the other side, truth be told, the rigours of “translating the past onto the stage” impose a certain self-censorship as concerning to that which is being shown; in other words, it



limits the field of fantasy and of the speculative discourse; and this happens as the psychodramatic utopia, just like any other utopia, is not sufficiently separated from the real, is not surreal enough, so as to be able to express the powers of the imaginary (cf. Wunenburger, 1979, 11). Taking care of itself, before all, so as to see “how the future rises from the past it detests” (Cioranescu, 1972, 14), it shows its meta-expressive function, explaining and justifying itself, using its self-defence strategies and, thus, bringing to front the real society and all the barriers built in front of the person. Transformed into therapeutical strategy, via the utopia it claims, psychodrama turns all social habits into *tabula rasa*, throwing away, into the waste bin of history, all rules, necessities, rigours of everyday life; it develops as a trans-historical reality, if we were to use one of the conclusions of Karl Mannheim’s work, “Ideology and Utopia” (1929).

The majority of those who turned towards utopia observed its feature as a “propelling engine” of life. This is how Herbert Marcuse put it in one of his works (a round table) in 1968, thus signaling the possibility of utopia to leave the fields of illusion and to turn into a way of denying the existing order and to be reborn right at the core of a new *anthropology* (Marcuse, 1968, 10). Even Cioran, the skeptical by definition, has observed the capacity of utopia to dynamise action and to wake everybody up to “reality”, despite the fact that it is oftentimes associated with the “fascination of the impossible”. In psychodrama, the “reality” which concerns us is a special one, related to the psyche and, for that reason, a screen is built in the playing space, where the subject projects all that is forbidden by consciousness and thinking (cf. Villa, 2009, 53). Moreover, beyond the disturbance that sometimes utopian movements may create, one can learn a lot, even if this means surrounding ourselves with ideas about things and not with the things themselves. Let us return to Cioran and observe that, as far as he is concerned, a society which is “not able to create a utopia and to be dedicated to it, is threatened by sclerosis and ruin. Wisdom, which cannot be fascinated by anything, recommends the existing, *present* happiness; man rejects it, and this makes him a historic animal, which is in fact a creator of *imagined* happiness” (Cioran, 1960, 104).

Nevertheless, the same Cioran quickly reconsiders his opinions, observing that there are utopias and then there are degenerated versions of them, misrepresenting the reason for being and limiting the chances of “modern illusion”. As an exhibition of powerlessness, this would breach the principles of becoming and of vitality, while being no more than the

fruit of man's *naivety* or *madness*: "Against abnormality, deformity, asymmetry, it aims towards the consolidation of the homogenous, of the type, of repetition and of dogmatism. But life means disruption, heresy and breaking of the laws of matter" (*ibidem*, 110). "The impossible" of utopia, Cioran concludes, originates in the variability of existence, as well as in the difficulty of getting out from the "comfortable state" of neurosis.

The forms of utopian representations, either theatrical or psychodramatic, avoid providing an explanation or a justification for the formal undertaking and the *falling into the world*, as well as for the bringing to life of the "child inside", referred to, in equal proportion, by psychodramatists and followers of Jungian psychoanalysis. In his workshop, *Breaking the Silence: Assuming Responsibility in Relationships*, held as part of the National Conference of Psycho-Drama (October 25 – 27, 2013, Bucharest), Yaacov Naor underlined the significance of creating the proper conditions for allowing this "child inside" to speak out, play, explore, express his feelings, in other words to be "alive", which makes us ask ourselves permanently what kind of parents we are to this child. These forms of representation would rather show that hidden something of existence, even if, as Leibnitz believed as well, in his *Theodicy Essays* of 1710, the authenticity of the reality in which we live is constantly limited or undermined. Using the terms of semiotics, we may say that, by aiming at the "inverted world" of the person, the psychodramatic play invokes the iconicity of the representation space, thus making useless any attempt at turning the scenical message abstract. Intending to differentiate itself from other projects, – the Golden Age, Millenarism, Arcadia etc. – utopia fully becomes a human construct, while the positioning of its followers in an immediate relationship with the transcendental is made more difficult to the extent that, as Plato (the creator of that social and political utopia that the named "the Republic") stated: „we must acknowledge that there is one kind of being which is always the same, uncreated and indestructible, never receiving anything outside itself, nor itself going out to any other, but invisible and imperceptible by any sense, and of which the contemplation is granted to intelligence only" (Plato, 1931, 362). But if theatre – as regarded by Artaud, Grotowski, Barba, Pasolini – incorporates a utopia of the purity of the human body (a body which is innocently caught in the meanders of a systematically demolished environment) and of life, psychodrama takes a step forward, absorbing all suppressed manifestations from the realm of the "shadow".

The wish to leave personal history behind to meet a horizon that is illuminated by truth and justice seems obvious to us. In fact, what the psychodramatic play endeavours (and, once again, we see here one of theater's most profound wishes) is to adopt a utopian method, rather than the utopia itself, or, otherwise said, to bring onto stage a fictitious action which might emanate the absolute truth of the represented past and, to the same extent, (re)lived by the protagonist, by the auxiliaries or by the spectators, together with their play master (to whom we can also add all those named and included as part of the represented fable by the "performance" itself). The image of that *mundus imaginalis* described by H. Corbin (1964, 23), translated onto the stage, goes beyond the state of a diurnal phantasm, which serves the demonstration of its power to surpass its own utopia and to give a chance to fulfillment. In fact, this is what Moreno actually meant, when analysing the "simplified world of psychodramatic play: „A lifetime is condensed into an hour or two, and the fragmentary quality of existence outside the theatre is reduced to proportions in which we are able to express the essential experiences of our existence. Thus the psychodramatic stage is able to give one's own life a unity and completeness which a great dramatist presents to his public on a symbolic level only (Moreno, 1987, 53).

We may indulge, at this point, in a short digression related to the philosophical interpretation of Gabriel Liiceanu, the one that identifies a double distinction between traditional utopias (the ones configured by Morus, Campanella etc.) and the traditional utopian discourse, on one side, and between the "utopia of the intellect" (Morus, for instance) and the "utopia of philosophy" (Plato), on the other side. Sorin Antohi remarked, in his turn, that the first type of utopia is germinated by Plato's Republic, but also by the classical writings and visions of Paradise. Thus, according to him, utopia appears to be "an interval, a flagrant discontinuity within the fluxus of temporal and/or spatial continuity, an invasion of the non-place and non-time over place and time [...]" (Antohi, 1999, 13). A second type of utopia, according to Antohi, claims the position of history, which it tries to substitute in time and space. As a consequence, in the light of philosophy, utopia becomes either a way of developing a model, or the instrument or expression of "derealized thinking." Nevertheless, irrespective of his direction, the utopia follower is forced to make use of the tools of reason (and, starting from that, the tools of logic), in order to be able to explain the single and exclusive image of the place he inaugurates. On the other hand, by reason, as Paul Cornea draws the attention, one does not only understand "to think in a coherent

and logical manner”, but also to “acknowledge the fact that the world we live in does not allow us to ignore subjectivity, chance, chaos, contradiction, ambiguity [...]” (Cornea, 2006, 565). It is necessary to make this correction for the realm of utopia as well (including theatrical or psychodramatic utopia, by means of spontaneity as a connection element for all the parts of this game and even with the risk that utopia itself may be affected by dissolution), so as not to “suffocate” the chances of representation or the ones of ideatic affirmation of “action patterns”, i.e. “patterns” which are taken over during the whole process, starting with the interview phase and ending with the post-drama analysis.

One may observe the same level of refinement in theatre, as well. Shakespeare (see “The Tempest”) and Cervantes (see “Don Quijote”) discuss utopia as a manifest form of human aspirations and not as a social levelling out target. As a rule, with these authors, but also with many more others, the recovery of the utopian space is conditioned by a shipwreck or by their wandering on land or on water. Quite often, the spectator witnesses an *imaginary* journey, a dream or a reverie of the characters, which leads to transformations of the thus created image, in relation with the world that we live in, by means of an aestheticizing *control* of the stage directions (see *L’an 2440* by Louis-Sebastien Mercier). We may say that theatre fully reflects what Tudor Vianu called “the eternity and ephemerality of art”. The handiest tool of the heroes of this kind of theatre (and subsequently of the “characters” and “spectators” of psychodrama) is to short-circuit reality, the present loaded with anxiety, which may, in its turn, lead, just as in the works of the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to a description of utopia as a means of manifestation of unattainable anxieties. This approach has, to a certain extent, been explained by Mannheim. In his writings, utopia avoids the present, connecting the past (i.e. history, of any kind) to a future where reality is excavated from. Later on, Raymond Boudon and François Bourricaud would amend Mannheim’s description, stating that utopia is the connector between the present world and *the world as it should be* – i.e. the world as we want it to be (Boudon&Bourricaud, 2000, 661). In conclusion, we favour the idea that, in psychodrama, by means of the play it builds, utopia is the answer given by the participants to the real world, to its gallery of images, to the logic and reason of the everyday world. It cannot escape the psychodramatic stage, with all it includes, the careful “(re)reading” of the dramatic past and an oftentimes fundamental change in the *composition* of the image that it represents. If, in theatre, “the stage is

a re-inventing of the semantic content of the staged text, it re-imagines the content" (Rivier, 2006, 74); in psychodrama the stage bestows upon the protagonist „a miniature society – in which living is different and much easier. At times it is simpler and at other it is much richer than the society from which the patient has come, but to him it is just as real as – sometimes more real than – the world outside. On the stage he continues to live his own life, but it is more compact because it has been reduced to its essentials" (Moreno, 1987, 52). It is in this very essentiality that we discover the fundamentals of psychodramatic utopia and of its existential undertaking.

### *Psychodrama: from Literary Utopias to Utopian Theatre*

According to Alexandru Cioranescu, utopia has been stereotyped over the years, thus draining the identity of the heroes (1972, *passim*). Therefore, utopia's great loss would lie in the impossible development of things, despite the fact that the change of what it used to foresee as just and perfect at inauguration was the consequence of correctional wishes, on the one side, and integratory ones, on the other side. This is why, it can be said that, even though, from an ideatic perspective, it could exist, it turns out to be the exception from the rule, transforming itself into an ignoble, inversed reality, right at the moment when it takes the form that everyone dreams about. Actually, by transgressing the limits of fulfillment, it changes into a place of *utopism*, of unfulfillment of the self. According to J. Servier, the analysis (i.e. the history) of utopia has a psychoanalytical background. It is true that, by establishing an immediate relationship between the labour of dreaming and the utopian phantasm, J. Servier initiated a series of unlimiting speculations, the reader being compelled to follow a chain of syllogisms. In this case, utopia might cover spaces which are difficult to identify and which psychodrama (in the absence of utopia) might otherwise have to avoid, both for reasons concerning the economy of time, space etc., and for reasons related to the legitimacy of the psychotherapeutic undertaking, as well as staging-related rigours. As opposed to the theatrical space, where the actions are mainly metaphorical, the psychodramatic space uses the spontaneity and the capacity for improvisation of the players, thus adding value to a place which is situated outside of the everyday life. This consolidates all phases of interpretation and integration of the effects of the psychodramatic play. As in therapeutical theatre, with which it shares a lot of features, in psychodrama "space should not be regarded as a physical entity, independent of the

subject, but as a constitutive element of the language itself [which it uses for its own purposes – m.n.]. By changing language, one also changes the way in which the environment is perceived and we know very well that theatre language, with its spectacular corporeality, always acts as a space of provocation and transgression” (Orioli, 2010, 112; cf. Minet, 2006, 95-96).

In the image created by R. Ruyer, the follower of utopian ideas would actually develop a schizoid manner of thinking (in the psycho-pathological meaning of the word) in real life, leaving behind coherent, rational, tolerant thinking, naturally shaped by social life. Valetudinarian by definition, the utopist would be cross with the society he comes from, taking into possession this “non-place” where social norms are suspended, only to be later confirmed. This realm points towards a “world which is built according to principles which are different from the ones that apply in the real world” (Ruyer, 1950, 3), favouring knowledge, the conquering of virgin realms, the confirmation of predictions, there evaluation of moral “heresies”. The French writer also describes the connections between myth and utopia, thus observing the theoretical effort (fully speculative and self-referential) of those who dream of an augmented, perfect world, an effort which he translates as “a mental exercise over possible sideways” (*ibidem*, 9). Born as a consequence of theoretical discourses, psychodramatic utopia takes over the structural data of literary narration (and fiction), on the one side, and those of the dramatic, on the other side, thus imagining an “incomplete” (cf. Pavel, 1986, 110-112), differentiated world and satisfying all necessities of therapy and self-knowledge. Nevertheless, as opposed to the two above-mentioned methods – i.e. the literary and the theatrical ones – which open a limitless range of possibilities, without needing to bring proof of any subsequent confirmations in the urban space or in the space of experimental demonstration, the psychodramatic method grants *visibility* to the compensatory “sides” of utopia and to the “leap” outside the time (duration) during which all the anxieties accumulated. It addresses all forms of human existence and their unseen shadows. Psychodrama, like art therapy, “includes expression within the process that makes the created form develop” (Klein, 1997, 9).

It is not our intention to suggest the acknowledgement of the psycho-therapeutical method practised by the psychodramatic play as an existential paradigm, but to draw the attention upon a *reality* represented by it which, in its turn, highlights other possible ways of existence of the Being. In a radical manner, Gabriel Liiceanu speaks about the “non-being” of Utopia. Here, we take over, in a scarce manner, the author’s conclusion (Liiceanu,

1992, 97). Therefore, let us not forget that theatre remains the loyal partner of psychodrama, with its input of creative spontaneity (in other words, with its share of fiction), despite all restrictive rationalizations imposed by any type of representation. The world imagined by the protagonist and by his partners is described without any claim of immediate recovery outside the playing/acting space. And, even if the utopian statement, according to Gabriel Liiceanu, “does not claim anything, but only describes a world which, in principle, does not exist” (*ibidem*, 97), the world of psychodrama opens several ways favourable to self-transformation. By re-presenting, the psychodramatic play does not pretend to have the function of traditional utopian discourses, as, for instance, the one “related to the expansion of the ideal into the real” (*ibidem*, 97); dramatic action, staging, acting make up for the impossible embodiment into something real, thus living the dream of “being” within the boundaries of the stage chronotope and in the context of the crisis of that person’s status. Being and remaining only a dream (or revery), they do not aim at the virtues of the “complete being” (*ibidem*, 98), but rather at the ones of self-knowledge. Thus, by means of the utopia, psychodrama will choose to represent the *image thesaurus* of this world, and not the narrow and objectified *real* that we all inhabit.

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## *The Psychological Mechanism of Trauma and Its Effects On Sarah Kane's Experiential Theater*

OZANA BUDĂU TUNYAGI\*

**Abstract:** This study presents a Psychological approach of Sarah Kane's theatre, whose esthetic intention is, as suggested by the author, to express the truth about the human condition by means of trauma-related mechanisms. This paper, then, argues that while Sarah Kane's traumatic theatre is an expression of her emotional inner Self through which the artist communicates her personal view of the human condition, the esthetic truth that comes to life in her plays, does not limitate or alters the Other's perception and point of view, but, nonetheless, it amplifies it and creates the vital space for the Other's truth to be felt, heard, seen, and experienced totally and viscerally.

**Keywords:** Sarah Kane, trauma mechanisms, truth, the Other, visceral-emotional experience

I consider Sarah Kane to be a strategic writer. She intentionally stages her inner emotional world in order to reopen, in the public's consciousness, the issue of what a "dramatic word" could and must be: a potent, frightening, sincere, intransigent, liberating tool that can induce emotional and cognitive changes to the people that witness it.

I propose, therefore, a dual, interdisciplinary reading of the author's work, both psychological and theatrical by which I will approach Kane's theatre not only as an expression of her inner world and lucid perception of the Other, but as an instrument through which the author intentionally tries to change the internal cognitive mechanisms of the Other (viewer, spectator, witness) by trauma-related mechanism.

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*Trauma, inner truth and the Other's truth*

I believe Kane conceives her dramatic writing based on the intention to tell the truth about the human nature, to expose the public to the horrifying cruel dimension of a destructive and self-destructive humanity; her theatre is an outcome of her authentic commitment to what she feels and wants to communicate. "As a writer, I don't believe I have a responsibility to the audience. My responsibility is to the truth, however difficult that truth happens to be" (Sierz 2001: 23), says Kane in one of her interviews in the 1990 and by that she makes a statement about the radicalism of her work. Kane shows forms of outer and inner human violence, without turning them into pathetic representations of 5'o clock soap-operas or objective, contextual news reading. Her dramaturgical violence is contextual unframed and becomes a perfect expression, both in content and form, of how she emotionally, viscerally and cognitively perceives the world. More so, her dramatic objectives go beyond mere entertainment and intellectual delight as she does not choose shock related content and shocking methods to cross the public's boundaries and invade their personal space in order to put them into awkward situations and make them feel extreme emotions, just for the fun of it. Kane detaches herself from the *in yer face* trend and their experiential theatre <sup>1</sup> and focuses on *the process* of changing people when exposed to powerful, intense emotional experiences.

Aleks Sierz has declared in the introductory chapter of the book *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* that a defining feature of the new dramatists of the '90s is their experimental nature. The term experimental theatre is widely circumscribed by the critic as a form of creation that determines the public, through violent ways of expression, to feel rather than think.

Sarah Kane's theatre, nonetheless, bears away from their artistic objectives as well as she bears away from the realism-social tradition of the mainstream British theatre. Experiential - and not experimental - is the term that Sarah Kanes uses in order to describe the theatre she wants to create.

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<sup>1</sup> In-yer-face theatre is the kind of theatre which grabs the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. In-yer-face theatre shocks audiences by the extremism of its language and images; unsettles them by its emotional frankness and disturbs them by its acute questioning of moral norms. It not only sums up the *Zeitgeist*, but criticises it as well. Most in-yer-face plays are not interested in showing events in a detached way and allowing audiences to speculate about them; instead, they are experiential - they want audiences to feel the extreme emotions that are being shown on stage. In-yer-face theatre is experiential theatre. (in <http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/what.html>)

“I hate the idea of theatre just being an evening pastime. It should be emotionally and intellectually demanding.” (Kane in Saunders 15). “If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched.” (Kane in Saunders 22).

Kane pinpoints here a form of experiential theatre, immersive, fresh, emotionally uncomfortable and capable of stimulating cognitive and attitudinal change of the public exposed to it. To attain that, I believe the writer engages and commits totally and radically to the “truth” she wants to present, until the end of her career in theater, at the expense of her own life<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, I believe we must ask ourselves: what is the author’s truth, what does it express, how is this truth communicated and what is the mechanism by which this truth turns deadly?

Each of Sarah Kane’s plays assiduously explores the same thematic content: the human being’s difficulty to adequately respond and react to radical, total experiences, such as: love, violence, suffering, fear – and, also, the challenge to authentically become aware, express and stand for his/her needs and desires without aggressing the Other’s desires and needs. Her dramatic texts tend to be “obsessive reactions” to a world where ethics and morals are arbitrary, compromised or inexistent. Her theatre plays, thus, when performed, become sheer mechanisms, shrewd decoys by which the spectators are *forced* to lose their witness demeanor in order to confront and reflect upon the moral dilemmas and paradoxes in their mundane lives.

The author has stated in several interviews that she has the intention to write performance texts, (as in texts to be performed) instead of writing dramatic plays (texts to be published and read) and that this intention is based on her desire to immerse the spectators into the depthness of a direct experience.

*Mad* was a very unusual piece of theatre because it was totally experiential as opposed to speculative. As an audience member I was taken to a place of extreme mental discomfort and distress and then popped out at the other end. It was a bit like being given a vaccine. I was mildly ill for a few days afterwards but the jab of sickness protected me from a far more serious illness later in life. *Mad* took me to hell and the night I saw it I made a decision about the kind of theatre I wanted to make – experiential. (Sarah Kane in Saunders 47)

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Kane has committed suicide after finishing her last theater play: 4.48 Psychosis. The play approaches the themes of existential crisis, despair, depression, suicide, the presence of the Divine, the tantrums of romantic relationships, love and death. Even if the mainstream critics have precociously avoided to consider the play a suicidal note, there is a statement made by the author herself to her literary agent, Mel Kenyon, in which she says that writing the play had a direct influence towards her decision to take her life: Do with it whatever you like. Just know that writing it killed me. (Sarah Kane in <http://www.danrebellato.co.uk/sarah-kane-documentary/>)

She also problematises the issue of the adequate distance between the personal, safe space of the spectator and the fictional, theatrical space of the fictional worlds and characters, presenting her theatre as a place of meeting and confrontation of both actors and spectators with trauma, psychological discomfort and overwhelming emotion.

The scene ends with her kicking, punching and dragging him naked around the stage; and during that scene people in the audience actually cried out: Stop this! And that was Sarah Kane's main interest in that people would want to stop something happening on stage because it was too real. (Jeremy Weller in Saunders 123)

Therefore, Kane's dramatic texts result into an effect of what Michel Foucault used to call *active history*: it breaks apart our emotions, it dramatizes our instincts, it multiplies our being and turns our multiple beings violently and cruelly against ourselves (Foucault in Saunders 78).

In other words, the imagery of truth that Kane creates in his dramatic pieces is constructed so that the public witnesses and participates to something unique, surprisingly new and, therefore, dangerous: radical learning experiences in the wake of which essential memories are inscribed in the brain; thoughts change, behaviours change, personalities change.

To explain the mechanism by which these dramatic effects are achieved, I will turn to the psychological models of trauma and fear. I believe that most of the Sarah Kane's theatre experience can be compared to a traumatic experience. Trauma can be an overwhelming, emotional experience; it is, in general, described as something shocking, disturbing, something that can not be processed, understood, assimilated in one's life-story. When we are involved directly or witness an event that we perceive to be traumatizing for us or the others, we feel intense emotions and we react physiologically in a radical way. We feel terror, fear, disgust, helplessness in front of danger. Sometimes, due to the emotional shock, the cognitive processing system stops working and needs to be "rebooted".

Fear, anxiety, anger are natural, normal emotions. They represent the modality by which our body and mind face day to day dangers. At a medium level, these emotions become motivational triggers that influence our behaviours and decisions to take action and escape that perceived danger. This does not hold true in the case of facing extreme dangers (situations that threaten our physical integrity, our lives, the lives of our loved ones, but also our moral integrity and our core values about ourselves and the world, by being exposed to verbal or physical violence) when our body reacts physiologically and emotionally very intense. In these specific situations, the emotions turn from motivational triggers to

inhibitory mechanisms which overwhelm and eventually “shutdown” our mind. More so, our cognitive system evaluates that what we perceive or happens to us is horrifying, unacceptable, therefore our mind tends to dissociate from what is happening. In the case we can't escape physically from a stressful situation (leaving, avoiding, and fleeing the situation) our mind finds a way to escape from that danger, by triggering mental reactions such as: unacceptance, denial, suppression. This is a delicate, unique moment in one's life experience, as it can be seen as an opportunity to change, enhance and improve one's life experience. Perceived trauma can be overwhelming and uncomfortable, but it can also direct to post-traumatic growth and resetting of one's cognitive, attitudinal and value system.

Events which are categorized as traumatizing factors can be: direct experiences such as war, natural disasters, car accidents, sexual or physical assaults, acts of torture and violent abuse, or violent indirect events that you find out about from different sources.

Our brain is wired to react with intense feelings either the danger is real or imaginary. The fear/horror response implies both primitive neurophysiological structures, such as the amigdala (which processes information fast and superficially) and more recent neurophysiological structures, such as the cortical regions (the cortex) which process information slower but at a more complex level. In a case of a trauma, the amigdala suddenly reacts, signaling danger, while the people living or witnessing the trauma experience physical symptoms, such as: nausea, trembling, increased heart-rate, short breath, lump in one's throat, sweat, shaky feet and strong, intense, overwhelming emotions, such as: fear, terror, disgust. The hyperactivity of amigdala is soon to be corrected by the more complex but slow processing cortex. The message it sends to the amigdala can resemble this one: the danger you perceive is not a real danger, it is only a fictional created danger, you don't have real reason to be afraid. Nonetheless, the emotions were there, people experienced them as they were real and they still have a recollection of them in their affective memory.

The general reaction to the violences in *Blasted* (in *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed* afterwards) were disgust, nausea, powerful negative emotions that were felt for a long time in the affective memory of the spectator, as recorded by the critics (Saunders 46). Moreso, Kane's first theatre performances were catalogued, in the beginning, as visceral plays that have nothing to do with reason and ideas.

In a real trauma experience, in the real world, some people might develop an anxiety disorder called post-traumatic stress disorder, as the

intense negative emotional experience becomes a learning experience which teaches them that the world is a very dangerous, aggressive, place where one is totally vulnerable and helpless and can't do anything about it. Other people might develop a post-traumatic growth, as the intense negative emotional experiences become a learning experience that teaches them that the time one has in this world is rather short, that anything can happen anytime and that one must make the best of it while he/she is still alive. Emotion overwhelms the mind, yet emotion is the most powerful tool we have to learn fast and efficiently new things.

The main important aspect of a trauma (either it is directly or indirectly experienced) is that it might **change the belief system of a person**. Intense negative emotions might trigger five reactions and change the way we think.

This is Sarah Kane's one of her clearly stated dramatic intents: "If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched." (Kane in Saunders 22).

In other words, she uses *the total emotional truth* (Innes, AvantGarde, in Wallace 2004: 43) to traumatise the witness of the horrifying event in order to alter his/her identity, his/her way of looking at things, his/her perspective of the world, his/her comfort zones.

Kane's dramatic texts are designed to be life-changing experiences involving truth and trauma, that create heightened emotional and psychological intensities by focusing on individuals overwhelmed by crisis, by deliberately creating and using violent imagery, violent language, temporal desorientation, ambivalent perception, contradictory and multiple identities and a *denouement* based on emotional and a dreamy-like state logic.

In any traumatic event there is a power relationship and dynamics between the perpetrator who inflicts and creates the dangerous situation and his/her victim.<sup>i</sup> In the fictional on-stage world, the roles of the victim and perpetrator are played by the actors impersonating characters, while the spectator plays the role of the witness, more or less a participant or immersed/involved in the performance, more or less identified with the fictional character on stage. In a traditional, mainstream British realist play of the 90's, the spectator is the perfect witness and, generally, does not live his/her comfort zone while the conventional esthetic distance is not destroyed.

Things are, nonetheless, different in the new theatre of Sarah Kane. As she blasts away the conventions and the representational frame of the

theatrical event, the theatre as a conventional event disappears and turns into an authentic community event, where the spectators lose their comfort zone and experience the feeling that they are put in danger.

I believe that one of main reasons why Kane intentionally destroys the classical social-realistic frame and conventions of the traditional English play is to create the necessary conditions to change the status of the public.

“I don’t think *Blasteds* is a moral play – I think it’s amoral and I think that is one of the reasons people got terribly upset because there isn’t a very defined moral framework within which to place yourself and assess your morality and therefore distance yourself from the material.” (Kane in Saunders 26) “Kane says chaos is dangerous for us but we have to go into chaos to find ourselves.” (Bond in Saunders 25).

A change in the belief system may be possible only if that belief system is threatened.

The Sarah Kane theatre performances deny the spectator the safety of an esthetic distance in relation to what is happening on stage. The traumatising strategies used by Kane blocks the public to develop an esthetic attitude – that is to understand the esthetic object and to position itself outside the esthetic object. Instead, the traumatising imagery and rhetorics “suck” the spectator inside the fictional world and force him/her to position himself/herself as a victim or a perpetrator within the power relationship mentioned above.

The spectator, here, turns from mere witness to victim or perpetrator, to a person whose comfort zone is obliterated and whose belief system might be radically changed.

In short, the trauma mechanism and its influence on the role of the spectator includes the following steps:

1. The representational framework and the esthetic distance is destroyed
2. The spectator finds himself/herself outside the conventional comfort zone and feels his identity and belief system to be threatened
3. The spectator experiences intense physiological and negative emotional reactions
4. A psychological distance might appear as the spectator finds unacceptable what he experiences, he denies the disruptive moment, he leaves the experience.
5. A psychological absorption might appear as the spectator immerses himself/herself in the performance while the performance becomes a *shared community event*. The person loses his/her identity as a spectator and becomes a participative agent in the event.



6. The esthetic distance might reappear after the event: the event is cognitively processed, then denied or accepted.
7. A change in the belief system of the spectator might occur.

The Sarah Kane's traumatic truth theatre needs the presence of the public in order to exist. It depends upon the public and it forces the public to constantly position themselves differently, to consider and identify with multiple points of view within the power relationship of a traumatic event. I believe its main purpose is not to make the public have a reaction, but to open the limits of perception, to change perspectives, minds and personalities.

### *Expressions of the trauma mechanism. The Plays*

Let's consider now how the trauma mechanism communicated through dramatic form and content.

All the author's five plays explore consistently the same major themes: love, violence, suffering, the way someone's wishes affect someone else's integrity and freedom. In order to do so, she uses strategies to alienate the public from the illusion of mimetism and realistic representation of the play and to give to the public the feeling and the rush of a direct, authentic experience. Kane does not write the plays, she *becomes* the plays (Bond 34), she banishes the boundary between life and fiction and merges them into one dimension where one is cause and effect to the other.

Sarah Kane had to confront the implacable. If she thought that perhaps the confrontation could not take place in our theatre, because it is losing the understanding and means – she could not risk waiting. Instead she staged it elsewhere. Her means to confront the implacable are death, a lavatory and shoelaces. They are her comments on the meaningless of our theatre and our lives (...). (Bond in Saunders 25)

Kane does not ponder upon a single dramatic form; the structure and form of her plays evolve and change constantly as if they were laboratories where the creator experimented with forms, tested and invented new structures, new images, new ways of saying. The author's dramatic quest is guided by the author's will to find the perfect form, the performative text, capable to authentically express the essential truth and to induce epiphanies and changes into the person who sees it and hears it perform. Kane gives to the text an important role in the context of theater, yet she doesn't choose to do so due to her belief that the writer of the text is the only true creator of the performance; she does it as she thinks that the text embodies the essence of the performance, the text SHOWS the FORM of the

PERFORMANCE and INDICATES the RHYTHM of the PERFORMANCE. Thus, according to the author's wish, the director of the play is free to be more creative in relation to the imagery of the performance and less creative in relation to the text and form of the performance.

As opposed to the last two plays, the first three plays, *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed* seem to hold on to the typical traits of the traditional social-realist theatre play, such as: realistic representational framework, characters, dialogues. In this case, the destruction of the conventional theatrical codes happens more subtle, from within and takes the form of hyperboles and exaggerated rhetorics, of extravagant stage directions.

It's evident that the first British critics' reactions were not related strictly to the violence of the play but to the fact that a violent world suddenly blasts away also taking apart the predictable, safe, easily categorized and easily referenced dramatic structure of the traditional play.

The traumatic violence in Sarah Kane's dramatic world creates high emotional outbursts as it appears abruptly and unforeseeable, seemingly in an irrational manner. A concept created by Lehmann that could best suit the dramatic form of *Blasted* is *an emotional theatre of risk* (Lehmann 234), a theatre lacking of any rules and opposing to any conventions.

In *Blasted*, Kane uses figures of speech such as hyperboles to literally attack and abuse the human body, in order to disrupt the natural order of things. The stage directions of the first play indicate an excessive use of physical and sexual violence, assaults and cannibalism acts which contrast strongly and violently with the more tender moments in the play.

The attention that Kane gives to the body in the first three plays is similar to the interest shown by the post-dramatic artists for the human body. In *Phaedra's Love*, the author mentions oral sex, sexual rape, genital mutilation. In *Cleansed*, different forms of torture and amputations, impaling and flesh eating rats, also, appear. All these forms of violence and assaults towards the human body are used as potential tools to conceal the meaning of the play and the actions of the characters, to undermine the functions of the realistic character, the form of the traditional play and the traditional realistic staging approaches of the directors.

*Cleansed* explores the interchanging relation of love and cruelty, while the physical body becomes the place where trauma follows its course. The fear of self loss and the terror of losing the other's love are marked and drawn on the couples' bodies (Rod and Carl/ Grace and Graham) just like on a map. While Carl tries to express his love to Rod, he loses his tongue,

his arms and legs and finally his genitals and Grace loses herself while physically transforms into Graham.

*Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* continue to virulently attack the validity and the legitimacy of the organic, coherent character that has to live and adapt to a world of fragmented, dissolute, multiple selves as they present to the public abstract, unidentified characters, worn down by personal, psychological crises whose voices express, nonetheless, radical states of mind and extreme emotions.

Therefore, one could see that the first three plays are more incompatible with the traditional theatrical conventions than the last two plays, which, due to a beckettian-like framework, language and esthetics, were more easily integrated within the theatre tradition and history.

The last and the most radical form of violence and trauma appears in *4.48 Psychosis* and takes the form of self-destruction. Despite the obvious connection between her last text and her last actions in her real life, the author's suicide have always been perceived strictly as a personal gesture, justified and triggered by the presence and the manifestation of a psychiatric disturbance, and not as an artistic gesture of an artist or a public statement of self-transfiguration triggered by the exposure to the traumatic truth.

Someone said to me this thing (...) because I was going on about how important is to tell the truth and how depressing life is because nobody really does and you can't have honest relationships. And they said, but that's because you've got your values wrong. You take honesty as an absolute. And it isn't. Life is an absolute. And within that you accept that there is dishonesty. And if you can accept that you'd be fine. And I thought that's true. If I can accept that not being completely honest doesn't matter, then I'd feel better. But somehow I couldn't and so Hyppolytus can't. And that's what kills him in the end. (Kane in Saunders 80)

An act of public suicide would represent, as Lehmann said, a modality to induce radical changes into the identity of a performance artist and, also, a way to totally deny the conventions of theatre representation and theatricality.

The official Sarah Kane's theatre critics (Aleks Sierz, Graham Saunders) position Kane's theatre to a referral zone that still maintains the esthetic distance between the author and the author's work, as opposed to the avant-garde zone, where life and artistic practices interlace.

However, by committing a public act of self-destruction, Kane has succeeded (deliberately or not) to place her dramatic work into a zone where it can be analysed and discussed freely of any virulent, subjective attacks. For sure, the shadow of Kane's death, as mentioned by David Creig in his introduction to the book *Sarah Kane. Complete Plays* has changed the way we

read and witness *4.48 Psychosis* (Creig in Saunders 6) and has certainly changed the way the critics and the public perceive her performances (Saunders 22).

However, could her last work be considered a radical form of body art, an artistic act created by a performer who succeeds in turning CONTENT-FORM and AUTHOR into ONE?

Aleks Sierz comments that this kind of interpretation of *4.48 Psychosis* is rather restrictive, as her artistic inheritance is encapsulated within the limits of her suicide act. (Tyser 24) The artist, he also explains, would be found to be a more authentic creator, while the symbolism of the play would be blurred away.

I believe this line of thought is also limiting. To exclude the autobiographical dimension of *4.48 Psychosis* is to take away the truthness of the play. Yes, *4.48 Psychosis* is a text about a person struggling in the middle of a crisis to make peace with the world, with God, with herself and, who, at the end, loses the fight or wins the fight. Yes, this is a play about the trauma of not being in the world, in the right time or in the right body, it is a play about love and suffering, about identity loss and radical lucidity, but it is also a play based on real facts. The realness and the truthness of the struggle, is, in my opinion, the foundation and the essence which give intensity to the play.

"I've only written to escape from hell – and it's never worked – but at the other end of it when you sit there and watch something and think that's the most perfect expression of the hell I felt then maybe it was worth it." (Kane in Saunders 1)

*The final act is a theatrical act*, says Edward Bond (23). While she plunges within her own self, she discovers the face and the mind of the world; as she describes intimate, personal, intense experiences, the author is describing the way of the world: the failure of the moral, social man in front of his selfish driving instincts.

Aleks Sierz' fear that people will not get passed the melodrama of Sarah Kane's suicide note and that, due to that, they will be incapable to go deeper inside the play to indentify and to understand more important issues, such as loss and trauma, undermines, in my opinion, the emotional intelligence of the public and the amazing potential of the play.

Kane writes *4.48 Psychosis* with *The Suicide Mind* of Edwin Shneidman on her night table, while diving in and exploring her own mind for more specific, authentic details of depression and of how it feels like to lose one's interest to live. She uses her own trauma and suffering to give life to a text as powerful and alive as the real life experience, emphasizing the emotional involvement of the public.

This is what Claude Regy describes in *L'état d'incertitude* (16) as **kanian lucidity**: to write about herself and the others, to be herself and the others, to not know where she ends and the others begin.

"She has gone deeper into her own psyche and I think she knew she was delving deeper, and she did have a very strong reaction to the play. (...) I think there was a kind of love hate relationship with this play and she knew that she was exhausting a certain reserve in herself while she wrote it." (Kenyon in Saunders 110).

Thus, the unique experience of the play *4.48 Psychosis* is not just a play about Sarah Kane's trauma and depression, but an artistic masterpiece that collapses the boundaries between life and art, between fiction and reality and which transfigures the personal trauma into general, universal experiences.

Starting with *Crave*, Kane reinvents herself (she signs her texts as Marie Kelvedon) and moves from violent plays to linguistic plays; the character's identity deteriorates and the character's body is populated by voices who simultaneously talk to the voices inhabiting the other characters. She also manifests a beckettian-like approach to the language and construction of characters. The abstract voices and fragmented identities in *Crave* are quite similar to the disembodied, time and language-free characters in Beckett's plays and suggest the traumatizing dissolution of one's identity.

The concept of character has been blasted away, his lines were separated from his body and his language has become autonomous. In *4.48 Psychosis*, the language is autonomous; it is not owned by a character and is free of stage directions in relation to HOW and WHEN should be uttered. However, the elliptical, abiguous language in *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* does not fail of logic and meaning; much more so, it adds multiple layers of meaning to the play.

Kane, as opposed to Beckett, does not discredit the language: the silence that appears on the page in the form of a sparsely text does not represent the silence beyond language or the silence that kills the words; it is the concrete representation of silence, it is silence itself. The page of the text is not a beckettian empty space, waiting for a word to be uttered, but a full space imbued with silence.

In other words, Kane gives the language the power to represent its deconstruction and failure. The words fail us because the character, smoothly and suddenly, slips away.

The language has become the space where trauma itself takes place.

The author, nonetheless, does not drop out totally the notion of character. Tinker, Ian and Cate reduce themselves to the abstract A, B, C, D, who, at their turn, reduce themselves to the voices in *4.48 Psychosis*. Yet, they still have traces of recognizable identities. The kavian voices can live in a body and be disembodied at the same time.

Kane systematically destroys the time-space-character referrals in relation to which the traditional spectators of the traditional theatre play take on a position and formulate an opinion that helps them place themselves outside the esthetic object. Using different forms of trauma as dramatic mechanisms, the author forces the public to be open and vulnerable to the changing experience.

Powerful emotions create the necessary conditions for change. The main objective of the kavian traumatizing mechanism is not to shock but to expose the public to deadly truths about the human condition, such as the pathological, yet natural fascination for violence, the indifference towards its consequences, the guilt of not taking any responsibility.

I believe it is impossible to create powerful artistic experiences without taking on them personally. Kane's theatre takes on to tell the truth in order to transfigure. As she explores deep within her inner crises, towards the most authentic emotions and experiences, her dramatic world and discourse transgress the sphere of personal crises and takes on a universal meaning. Responsible to her own truth, the author shows, at the end, the performance of a decaying psychic and offers to the public one of the most intimate experiences, death as a performance.

Trauma, exposure to radical truth and emotional involvement imply and aim at a resetting of the moral values of the spectator. While in ancient theatre, the spectators, cleansed of extreme emotions, returned to their town to live a much more rational life, in kavian theatre, the spectators, exposed to deadly truths of the human condition, experience extreme emotions and return to their town to recreate it.

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## *Mind and Body in Performance: Real or Fake Dualism? Performing arts in the last century correlated to the main philosophies of mind*

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**Abstract:** Both perspectives on the mind-body connection, dualistic one and the one suggesting unity, have deep roots in the universal culture. Each era, with its major trends in philosophy, science and religion, has brought to attention different elements sustaining one view or the other.

This paper presents a correlation between various performing methods of the last century and the corresponding philosophies of mind that best fit their views. This puts performing and training methods into a wider perspective which is much needed today. What we find out is that any creative activity has very much to do with self-development and spiritual-growth and therefore has to be carefully chosen to both suit and complete the disposition of the person practicing it.

**Keywords:** performance, dualism, monism, philosophy of mind.

Contemporary Western culture is mainly a dualistic culture. The dominant religion, the general beliefs, the traditional approaches towards science and the occult all shape a collectivity's view on the mind-body relationship. And the dualistic view is at the moment the most popular theory of mind of the general population – mainly non-philosophers. The domain of art usually holds particular and more diverse opinions in all aspects. On this subject, Western performing arts, however, also tend towards the dualistic approach – or so we may believe. The general arguments when intuitively thinking this come from the fact that performers are always masters of their bodies, in that they train them and are aware of their importance, while training mentally in parallel: learning lines and choreographies, building

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characters, managing expressed and felt emotions and so on. In the following article I will try to take this particular subject in hand and see how often this dualism has actually proved to be the general view of performers throughout different moments in history, focusing on the last century.

*Beginnings of the mind-body issue – anthropological perspective*

To trace back the whole mind-body problem to Descartes, Aristotle or Plato is already a reflex for those who are trying to discover historical truths about theories that have been already brought to light. From a more anthropological point of view, however, these names are less important. For this research, at this point, it might be of use to start with a psychological perspective, an intuitive view of what we feel, as human beings, about this subject, regardless of what we were told by parents, teachers, religion.

Recent studies (like the one performed by Bruce Hood at Bristol and Yale Universities) prove that we develop a sense of disparity between "outer" and "inner" traits of the living beings around us at quite an early age. Psychology also argues that we are aware of this "duality" in our own selves at an early stage, about the time that, as babies, we realize where our own bodies end and where the outer world begins, more precisely, where the body of our nurturing mother begins. The starting point of man's awareness of this potential tension between mind and body might as well be his very first conscious moves. Trying to learn how to walk or make several different more complicated moves, like grabbing a fragile object or making a jump, could be moments when a person realizes that what he visualizes and strives for in his mind is quite different from what his body will manage to do when first trying it. Of course, to actually be aware that there is a difference between the imagined action and the physical result one must have a conscious approach to that act. Therefore, not every fumble discordant movement will trigger mind-body discrepancy awareness and so we have to carefully state that infancy is the first contact with this issue, since consciousness and self-consciousness are elements not necessarily related to action and reaction (also, their installation is considered to be gradual and not sudden).

The age when we try out more complex games and test the limits of what our body can do is a good time to find out and evaluate what mind can do in the physical world and what the body can do to our inner self. Depending on the information we have been exposed to, we might have already heard of dreams, supernatural, afterlife, magic; we will try to use mind power to make things come true and try out the force that imagination

and thoughts hold when it comes to influencing the physical world. From here on it's a matter of getting in touch with the proper information or the curiosity and intellect each has to get to the level of philosophical analysis.

As for the equivalent of this moment in human history and evolution, we can safely say that "practice" came before theory, in a sense that believing came before analyzing. Before naming and theorizing the connection between body and mind (rather body and *soul* at that time), people tested the powers of both elements and also the influences they had on each other. Healing rituals, martial arts, war dances are all testimonies of the strong beliefs people had in the power of mind-body connection. We can conclude that, at that point or later on, ideas about whether the two elements were actually different or more like two sides of the same coin started to emerge.

When imagining the way that the mind-body problem was presented millenniums ago, one more general view leads me to picture man trying to limit and define the "outer" world from his own "inner" world, in terms of the "seen" and the "unseen" universe. This is a purely intuitive and most probably an inexact perspective of the birth of the mind-body issue, but it proved of much help to me in connecting both religious and non-religious views concerning the subject and its development. Back in the early times of mankind, the "unseen" might have been considered the sum of all things that were either unreachable through any of the five senses, or unexplained by that era's knowledge. Part of this unseen world was surely considered to be the inner psychological self of each individual. With the passing of the ages and the progress of mankind in all fields of knowledge, what was once obscure started being "logical" and the amplexness of the "unseen" started reducing itself. The knowledge brought by biology reshaped the "inner" universe by demystifying so many of the once un-understood behaviors of the body and of man in general. I imagine that *soul* became the word describing everything about man that wasn't understood or couldn't be explained by any other means than metaphor. People would intuitively see the soul as the part of a living being that could not be controlled and reproduced by man. The mystical part of man started getting narrower and narrower as anatomy, medicine, psychology, sociology, neurosciences, explained more about human life. Yet, the mystery never stopped existing.

### *Trace through history*

Most ancient philosophies touch the subject of mind-body relationship and they all propose different approaches. Western civilization had Greek

philosophy to start with, followed by Roman philosophy, Western Medieval philosophy, Early Modern and Modern philosophy. Eastern Civilization had even wider philosophical perspectives through its Indian, Chinese, Iranian, Japanese, Korean, Babylonian and Islamic philosophies (these included the widespread and still present Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikh, Jainism and others).

Dualism is usually traced back to Plato, although some dualistic ideas were revealed in doctrines of Parmenides and Empedocles. Some go further and trace the source of Greek dualistic views to Iranian tradition (Volf, 2004). On the Eastern side, dualistic views can be found earliest in Hindu philosophy. Monism dates back to the pre-Socratic philosophers, mainly Parmenides in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, although the actual term was first used only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by German philosopher Christian Wolff.

A short description of the two most common groups of theories regarding the mind-body problem defines dualism as the separate nature of soul/mind and body, while monism states that the two are not distinct. There are several forms of dualism and monism, all quite different from each other, having been developed in time alongside the cultural and informational shifts undergone in the world. Since going through the complete history of mind-body theories is beside the point here, I will only add a short list of different theories (see Table 1) and a few relevant notes regarding some of them, to help approach the way that these theories affected or were affected by peoples' changing lives in the social and political context.

**Table 1.**

The different categories of the main mind-theories – based on the description made by William Jaworski (2011).

MIND	DUALISM	Dual-Attribute Theory	Organismic	Emergentism		
				Epiphenomenalism		
		Non-organismic				
		Substance Dualism				
	MONISM	Idealism				
		Neutral Monism				
		Physicalism	Eliminative			
			Reductive	Behaviorism		
				Identity Theory		
	Nonreductive					

When talking about dualism in the philosophical context, Plato and Aristotle are usually mentioned as initiators, though the general form of their theories dates back to other religious philosophies. Their great merit was bringing the issue in an academic context and formulating it in manners that allowed better reasoning.

In his work, *Phaedo*, Plato underlined the difference between Form and Matter, the first one being the eternal, true, non-physical substance, the soul, the perfect element of which bodies (the Matter) are only an imperfect copy of. He sees soul as being trapped inside the body and striving to get free. Also, it “performs the role of universals”, not only making the world possible, but also intelligible (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2003). Being grounds of intelligibility, they are in connection with the intellect, it being immaterial as well. Basically, mind (either equivalent of soul or quality of it by means of intellect) is a prisoner of the body, the two of them being substances with very different properties and no actual connection other than their necessary “cohabitation” on earth. This view is close to Buddhism and other religious philosophies that imagine soul as being a traveler in the world of matter through bodies, which are mere “containers”.

What Plato's theory left uncovered was the causality of the particular union between a certain soul and a certain body. Aristotle's theory then came with not only an explanation for that but with a completely different perspective. His hylomorphic doctrine stated that soul is actually the form of the body, its sum of properties and nature.

Aristotle's theory has been considered monistic by some, because of the apparent equivalency relation between soul and body, and dualistic by others, since he considered that intellect is immaterial.

The name that is most closely related to dualism is René Descartes'. He is considered to be the first to formulate the mind-body problem in the form in which it exists today. His theory emphasizes the existence of two distinct substances, matter and mind, the first being defined by its main property, that of spatial extension, and the latter having the property of being able to think. He was, thus, considered a *substance dualist*. The problem his theory raised was the need of an explanation for the way in which these two very different substances interacted, which undoubtedly they did.

The following age of scientific discoveries and industrialization helped dualistic theories flourish, each one answering the question raised by the former, but creating its own paradoxes, to be solved by the next one.

Monism also had a starting point in religious philosophy and gathered a number of different theories when scientific discoveries in sociobiology, computer science, evolutionary psychology and neurosciences started to gain momentum. Before entering the more extended Occidental scene, monism was mainly an element of Oriental culture, since its origins in the belief of the united nature of reality were rather part of Eastern ancient philosophies (Chinese and Indian for example). The forms of monism also changed and multiplied with time. Monism in general is frequently associated with Baruch Spinoza, a 17<sup>th</sup> century rationalist. While the central element, the belief in a unique substance as nature of mind and body, was kept intact, differences appeared in respect to the nature of this substance. Three of the main monistic theories are classified by the nature of this substance, it being seen as mental, physical or neutral.

The two extremes are the physicalist approach and the theory of idealism. The first one asserts that the only existing substance is physical, while the latter believes in the sole existence of a nonmaterial, mental substance. The most common monisms in the last two centuries are considered to be some of the variations of physicalism, like behaviorism and functionalism (Albucher, 2014). The birth and then the development of psychology in the direction of cognitive sciences have also supported a more physicalist perspective (although it has never stated that mind is material). In the last centuries, Western culture seems to have easily embraced all explanations about the "unseen" of human life having to do with concrete logic, numbers, palpable objects, quantifiable events. It might be an inner inclination towards scientifically based truth, or just the result of Psychology struggling to be accepted as a valid and scientifically based subject, thus having to make a lot of compromises, one being rationalization. Eastern culture, on the other hand, is more easily associated with the theories that supported either supremacy of the "unseen" or the fact that matter is as transparent, changeable and light as the immaterial. Eastern culture might be experiencing this effect due to its tendency of holding to traditions more than the West. And most traditions incorporate beliefs that ask for complete faith rather than any proof. This is not to say that all people from the Orient are men of faith while Occidentals are men of science.

### *Mind-body issue in daily life*

The way in which the mind-body question has been set forth and the attention it has received from academics and, earlier, from highest intellectuals, might make us think that this question is related to

philosophy and religion rather than to other categories of activity and knowledge. The truth is that this issue is ever present all around, even if under very different names, and has a strong influence in shaping people's lives, their beliefs, their approaches toward a lot of subjects and activities. Even if one never takes the actual time to question his own opinion on the matter, one surely has already adhered to one theory or another and has guided his personal and professional life according to it. It's also important to know that we do not have the same "affiliation" throughout our entire lifetime. Most of our choices depend on the influences of the people and institutions that are an authority for us. Also our own age and experience act as a filter for what is being told to us, directly or not.

The mind-body issue has always been a part of man's life, since his early interactions with peers or reactive elements of nature. When considering it, we shouldn't fall in the trap that might make us believe that this apparently all philosophical issue lacks any daily life interest and has too little to do with our everyday actions and choices. Actually, it is more a part of quotidian than a part of the world of abstractions simply because small everyday activities and choices, like believing the words spoken by the person in front of us, or choosing to blow off steam by kicking the trash can, are moments when we choose to believe in a certain connection between thought and action, between mind and body.

We are probably unaware of how intensely the mind-body issue builds up and constantly (re)organizes our lives. We might not always recognize these short moments, but we still face them, either with the will and need to change a way of action or with the usual response we have for that certain kind of situation. Part of our decisions to act in a particular way when confronted with a circumstance that leads up to posing the old mind-body question are guided by what we have been told and thought, with or without being aware of it. Simply stating that we *have* a body, in these words, rather than we *are* a body leads to a dualistic way of thinking we might not even realize we have.

### *The influence of the mind-body issue on expression*

Whether we believe in mind supremacy, substance dualism, or pure physicality, whether this belief is the effect of a long process of analysis and meditation, or simply something that we have been taught, we owe this belief a large part of who we are. Aside from the inborn aspects of self, we "knit" our own personalities based on everything we see and learn. The

relation between mind and body (or between thought and physical action) is a fundamental aspect in the way we perceive the world and interact with it. For example, we will either neglect or give a lot of attention to the way we look (to the way our body is seen, presuming others around us see the same that we do) depending on how society judges us (our inner selves, meaning our aptitudes, beliefs, personality etc.) based on our physical appearance. We will either attentively take care of our bodies' health and wellbeing or neglect its needs depending on how much we believe that the body's state influences mental performance, our aptitudes or social abilities. We might choose to work on personal growth and becoming a more positive and radiant person if we strongly feel that perceived physical beauty is more a reflection of our personality than the appreciation of a given physical attribute (idea popularly stated in the saying "beauty comes from within") etc.

The areas of life in which this question has most impact on are those of spiritual beliefs, social interaction, self-development, self-image, creative expression, communication in general and personal health. The main area I wish to further focus on is that of creative expression (concentrating on the performing art of theatre). It is important to mention from the start that, since the mind-body question connects different parts of one's self and all the different aspects of life are already intermingled, it is almost impossible to thoroughly select the elements of a single field being influenced.

Through creative expression humans communicate, self-regulate emotions, personalize abstractions, affect attitudes at an emotional and intellectual level, introspect, learn. It is only natural that such a complex issue upon which social, mental, emotional and physical health and well-being of a person hang on will quite often appear as an element in a creative process. It can be source of a creative act, motivation, subject of a work as well as a barrier.

### *Performing arts, the mind and the body*

The well-known metaphor of life as a stage, aside from lyrically pointing out the human condition, gives a very visual and simple example of theatre's utility as a concept in understanding life. Since ancient times the concept of Theatre has been a go-to reference when exploring human existence, with all its potential and limitations. In this context, theatre might be seen as being to life as a puppet or a dummy is to man. It is a simulated, man-made micro cosmos, also a laboratory for testing paradigms, beliefs. Many philosophers use the Theatre metaphor to explain their own

theories, others use the actual “power” of Theatre and generate new ones, guided by their role as spectators or actors being enlightened through catharsis. Despite its highly variable status – ranging from privileged form of communicating with gods in a ritual-like process to a disregarded activity in the Middle Ages – theatre has always been a useful tool in the examination of mankind and in the education of the public. Therefore, we expect theatre to enable an insight into mankind's greatest dilemmas, both from the point of view of subject and the theatre-making process. Since Theatre has been the “rebel sibling” of science, philosophy and most fields of knowledge, and, for a long time, the renegade of Religion, it has allowed itself its own rules. And when not accepted by censorship of any kind, it has taken the underground path. That is why we can find, throughout history, examples of theatre productions that “try out” all sorts of principles, ideas, beliefs (through political and social theatre, experimental theatre, acrobatic performances etc.).

There is more than one possible approach in making a correlation between philosophical paradigms and performance methods. We have the analysis of the philosophical motivation behind different performance styles and acting techniques; the chronological approach and the investigation of performance methods, their contemporaneous philosophical theories and possible influences between them; the geographical approach related to both performance and philosophy, making a distinction between Western and Eastern culture; there are also the two more performance-focused and philosophy-focused approaches, creating a two pole “scale” view of either performing techniques or theories on the mind-body issue and then finding the equivalent in the philosophy/art area. Some require more research and space than proposed here. In particular, a philosophy-focused view would require an addition of specific information, terms and definitions that might suppress a wider and more useful view on performance forms. Therefore, I will use a less strict performance-focused approach, both in format and content, using examples of some canonical acting methods, as well as a few examples of perhaps less known methods that help make a point.

Performing arts were born out of rituals and so they are in many ways correlated to religious beliefs. After the Middle Ages, Western tradition separated performance arts, like dance and theatre, from religious practices. Asian cultures on the other hand kept them closer together and still have various religions that include complex and esthetically appreciated performances, viewed both as ceremonies and art forms (Miettien, 2010).



All arts started with a liminal status of act/work placed in between human and supernatural, animal-like and human-like, mortal and eternal, material and immaterial. This transformed them into the perfect "playground" for anything in a man's life that is too difficult to integrate in any other area, that can't be explained, that is paradoxical, difficult to understand or cope with. Monaghan, in his article on Theatre and Philosophy, cites Lepage in a metaphorical but very relevant statement about Theatre's liminal status and almost supermundane character that reminds us of its religious roots:

I think theatre has a lot to do with putting the audience in contact with the gods ... Theatre is very close to the Olympics ... [which are] about mankind trying to surpass the human body, human endurance, gravity ... It's all about this transfiguration of the man into a god (Lepage, in Delgado, and Heritage 1996:143-4, qtd. in Monaghan 2007)

Performance art is one step closer to "real" life (everyday life, easily accessible to mind and senses) than other arts because it makes use of the same elements as life does: time, space, matter and energy. And so performing art duplicates life in a certain degree, by borrowing its tools, and fills it in with different content.

All this brings us to a first element correlating mind-body paradigms with theatre (including dance-theatre, or related forms of dance that are based on dramatic effect).

### *Grotowski*

By trying to reproduce and reconstruct the world, theatre started as and continues to be an example of man's attempt to overcome his condition of mortal, material and instinctive being, by acceding to the superior form of a world-controlling deity. This is especially true for ritualistic theatre, some traditional forms of performing arts and for some more modern types of performing arts, which sought personal spiritual growth before aesthetical value (like the Japanese Butoh performances, Grotowski's theatre as a vehicle towards transformation, or Mary Wigman's dance philosophy). Clearly, these performing arts have been guided by the belief in what philosophy calls dualism (in these cases property and substance dualisms). With no actual temporal connection, only the sharing of a belief in the spiritual power of performance, people have used theatre (in its many forms) to (self) develop in a spiritual and deep way, both in ancient and modern times. It is not by coincidence that all modern or contemporary initiators of performing art forms focusing on this type of self-growth make a case out of studying old traditional practices. Grotowski mentions kathakali

theatre methods in his works and adopts elements of exercise from Indian theatre in his routines. Mary Wigman and Isadora Duncan have included in the philosophy and practice of their art ideas and elements derived right from ancient Greek customs and beliefs. This element of "historical" inspiration might be seen as a "primitive effect", an awakening of senses in a manner that is more persistent precisely because of its ancient source. But in order to perform this kind of theatre and understand it, one needs to believe in a power that is unseen. One needs to accept that an action that might basically be viewed as saying lines on a stage and moving the body in an expressive manner while being watched has more to it than what is seen. Not only that, but one also has to believe that man can reach a higher point, and that there is an ideal soul to aspire to, both unreachable and unearthly. By this description a person that enjoys the kind of performance I mentioned before might be considered religious, but that is definitely not a necessary condition. Believing in the distinct material nature of mind/soul and body, does not equal believing in a god. However, it does imply believing in something unseen. And in this case, it also implies that this "unseen" is also unexplained by material scientific rules (like in the case of epiphenomenalism). We might say, with the appropriate reluctance, that this kind of performing art is one made by and for "spiritual" individuals.

If we went further with the correlation, we would have to assess whether this artistic approach is consistent with either interactionism, occasionalism, double aspectism, inverted epiphenomenalism or psychophysical parallelism, which are all different kinds of dualism. This art did not profit in any way from having figured out the details, concepts and notions behind it. Therefore, I believe none of the artists involved ever used up precious energy and time to establish some of the small and precise details about their work needed for a proper classification under the abovementioned philosophical theories. We can only approximate and guess an interactionist view, this implying the belief that both mind and body, being different substances, have a reciprocal influence. These artists train their body for a mental and spiritual growth. But we might as well consider that they also believe that an actor who is "above" others in this particular aspect will perform better than the rest, thus having changed his body's expressivity.

### *Stanislavski*

No discussion about performing methodology is ever complete without mentioning Stanislavski. It is already a known fact that he had an interest in the field of psychology and had read the works of Théodule

Ribot, William James, and Carl Lange. His theories on acting practice hold various suggestions extracted from the works of these researchers. This is a perfect example on how the field of performing art is influenced by scientific discoveries, philosophical theories and cultural beliefs. Stanislavski used the findings of cognitive psychologists to help actors embody characters in a more naturalistic way. When saying that he used psychology in his practice we should not assume a psychoanalytical perspective. Although he does mention consciousness and other related elements in his later work, his theories began from a perspective much closer to behaviorist method. What he underlined was that the feelings that an actor wishes to enact should be thought of and reached by the means of his actions. Rhonda Blair mentions this shift of focus as an act that can “simplistically be called an ‘outside-in’, as opposed to ‘inside out’, technique early in his thinking” (Blair 2008: 31). This means that the focus was on action, on gesture, ultimately on *body* in action. This body would justify and also generate the emotions depicted. We can therefore argue that, although there is a clear belief in the existence of two elements, material body and mental/emotional side, the emphasis is on the power of the material to influence the less palpable. This makes the Stanislavskian method a property dualistic approach. Of course, depending on the interpretation of his words, his exact work (early or later one) and the approach and execution of the actor, we may find different kinds of dualism, and also monism, in his views. The purpose is not to label a certain performing method, but to see the different reflections that philosophical theories have shed onto them. So it is only fair to say that a complex and varied method such as Stanislavski's has more than one philosophical equivalent for the mind-body issue.

Dualisms of various kinds are taught as a basic premise in various Stanislavsky-influenced acting classes (“get out of your head”, “don’t think, do”), even though Stanislavsky himself was an early twentieth-century version of a monist who would likely have agreed more with Spinoza than Descartes, at least in terms of the premise that mind and feeling can’t be separated from body. (Blair 2008: 26)

We can conclude that the accent of this performing method falls on the *interaction* between body and mind/emotion, not on depicting the nature of these elements. Also, mind and emotion seemed to be understood as not only connected to the body but dependent on it and, at some point, generated by it. This is the monistic aspect mentioned earlier. Joseph Roach goes further and correlates the Stanislavskian view to behaviorist approach of Pavlov:

To both Pavlov and Stanislavski [sic], behavior consists of chains of physical adaptations, continuous transitions in the direction of the stream of consciousness caused by physical stimuli. This is the life that the actor attempts to emulate by "living the role." (Roach 1993: 206–207, qtd. in Blair 2008: 34)

Considering Stanislavski's cognitive psychology "affiliation", this might seem far-fetched. Then again, broken into smaller pieces, his method stands for different philosophical views. As an ensemble, I would choose property dualism as best fit, with strong Epiphenomenalist elements.

### *Meyerhold*

To remain in the same area of interest and see an even more emphasized scientifically based approach in performance, we can discuss Meyerhold's Biomechanics. Biomechanics is a technique, a cumulus of exercises and theories based mainly on behaviorist psychology, aiming at maximum responsiveness and efficiency for the actor on stage.

Whatever Stanislavski included in his methods from James-Lange's theories and from the rising mechanization procedures in the industry, Meyerhold pushed much further. Studies on labor efficiency were in bloom at that time and the published works of F.W. Taylor, bringing forward the concept and method of the assembly line, added to the influences that shaped Meyerhold performance and training methods. He strived for efficiency of the actor's task and brought forward the question of physical preparation. Not only did he insist on physical training, he believed that done correctly, this kind of training was all that was needed from an actor. His connections with Behaviorism were much deeper than in the case of Stanislavski. Meyerhold even stated that "all psychological states are determined by specific physiological processes" (Meyerhold 1969: 199). What better proof of monism is there? He was uninterested in the inner emotional aspect of acting and also believed that any emphasis on emotions in an actor is too much. The theories of Pavlov and conditional reflexes were all that Meyerhold considered was needed to create the technique which assured an adequate performance fit to express and reach its audience.

Various detailed aspects of Meyerhold's theory might also bring out elements of dualism into the light, just as Pavlov himself had moments inclining away from monism. It may well be that Meyerhold didn't reject the importance and force of mental and emotional states, but he strongly believed that theatre should not be built on them. He saw physical aspects as being more reliable and clear.

His views were also consistent with the Communist paradigm of the time. His materialist perspective may be attributed to this social, cultural and political context. He might not have denied the existence of the soul, but he "hid" this spiritual aspect in the depth of the complex nature of the body.

### *Barba*

To comment on the theories of Eugenio Barba is quite a challenge. They incorporate a great deal of information and knowledge about a kind of performance that leads back to the East, therefore to a ground of philosophy and religion very different from what we are used to, incorporating much more variety, historical facts and a mixture of something barely understandable to Occidentals: a perfectly balanced combination of historical, social, political, cultural and spiritual. With no claim to capture more than just fragments of the philosophy behind the performances he makes, I will mention a few relevant elements of his practical and theoretical work, in an attempt to illustrate the mind-body approach used in this case.

First of all, no matter what physical technique is adopted in a performance of Barba, it is important to know that the purpose of the act lies not in educating (like in the Ancient Greek theatre), criticizing (like in the epic theatre of Brecht), nor in amazing the viewer (like in all forms of dances and shows that thrive on virtuosity alone), but in giving the performer and spectator a chance to find a meaning. "To make theatre means practicing an activity in search of meaning. [...] We can adopt the values of the spirit of the times and of the culture in which we live. Or we can search for *our own* values" (Barba 1995: 36). There is a similarity here with the first method of performing we mentioned, the one used as a vehicle for self-growth. *Meaning* and *values* stand for moral, for ethics, for an inner truth. Put into the context of Oriental tradition, they exceed civic mind and enter the field of spirituality. There is no need to mention *soul* here. It is already included in the essence of the act.

A very important element in Barba's work is that of the pre-expressive level. It is the basic "biological" element of a performance that transcends cultural barriers, determines scenic presence, creates "the body in-life able to make perceptible that which is invisible: the intention" (Barba 1995: 7). The pre-expressive level focuses on that which has not reached the form of a statement but is still a message.

The pre-expressive principles of the performer's life are not cold concepts concerned only with the body's physiology and mechanics. They also are based on a network of fictions and 'magic ifs' which deal with the physical forces that move the body. What the performer is looking for, in this case, is a *fictive body*, not a fictive person. (Barba 1995: 34)

We are already faced with a dualism at this point, and it seems as if it is a "body-body" kind of dualism. If we also add the mind to this question, we reach a very complex construct that resembles nothing Western culture has dealt with before. The performer and his actions reveal layers and layers of different kinds of energy, different bodies, different effects. But before concluding that we hit upon a *pluralist* perspective, we have to look more closely at the way that these layers, energies, substances supposedly interact. The mind and body, as seen by Barba, have a working relationship in which the "shape" of the body is determined by its non-material inside. He uses the words of Etienne Decroux to describe this relationship: "Our thought pushes our gestures in the same way that the thumb of the sculptor pushes forms, and our body, sculpted from the inside stretches" (Decroux, qtd. in Barba 1995: 49).

Interactionsim? Or, might we dare imply, in a game of "less is more", that the emphasis on training the body, the mind, training energetically, physically, mentally, "dissecting" the performer and re-sowing him into a perfectly balanced *dancer-actor* is a form of spiritual monism? The whole basis of researching the pre-expressive level has a universal air to it. I would incline to believe the later correlation. Although imprecise, it comes naturally, just as the pre-expressive intention is meant to be transmitted.

### *ALBA Emoting*

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Diderot's *The Paradox of Acting* brought forth a problem that had long been kept silent in Western theatre, that of the risks and disadvantages of experiencing *real emotions* on stage. What Diderot argued was that, for actors, feeling the actual emotions they wanted to evoke on stage makes them hysterical and not necessarily expressive. He noted that the most important element and also most influential for the spectators, is the actor's objective expression of an emotion.

A modern acting technique that offers a middle way between the "emotionally immersed" method of acting and the above mentioned idea of a "cold-hearted" performance is the ALBA Emoting technique. It is a tool elaborated by Susan Bloch and her team of researchers in order to help actors create and control emotions at will on stage. It is based on psychophysiological data obtained in laboratory conditions. "It mediates the famous actor's paradox by providing actors with precise technical control of the expressive components of emotion while, at the same time, allowing them to experience as much of the feeling component as they desire." (Bloch 1993: 123)

The research started from observing the interdependency of the three levels of emotions: physiological, expressive, and subjective. The researchers found that specific emotional feelings were correlated with specific patterns of breathing, facial and postural expressive attitudes and degrees of muscular tension. This group of elements, together with the associated subjective experience, was called *emotional effector pattern* and represents the core element of the ALBA technique. It is a sort of physiological map of an emotion; by following the steps the right emotion appears. This is a substitute for mental images and the using of personal memories to bring out certain emotions. The advantage that Susan Bloch points out in using ALBA Emoting points is the control factor: one can choose the intensity and duration of the emotion induced, since this technique not only shows one how to generate a feeling but also how to level it once it has been brought out and also put a stop to it. As Bloch herself states, "ALBA is to emotions what physical training is to body control or vocal exercises to the mastering of voice and speech" (1993: 129).

What do these elements make out of ALBA Emoting? A practical use of a monist view, for sure. But when using the term of monism here we also have to underline that this is not an example of pure physical monism, but rather a more integrated approach towards body and emotion. If the creators of the ALBA technique would believe that the emotional effector pattern is all that is needed for creating a complete and authentic feeling, they would not mention that "a degree of maturity and inner wisdom are requisites to work harmoniously with ALBA." They state that "reproducing the emotional patterns mechanically may turn the user into a sort of 'robot' if mindlessly and purposely practiced" (Bloch 1993: 130). Mind has an important role in the process. It not having been considered with all its aspects in this research might be its weak spot. This is not to say that this technique is inefficient, just that it is only a fragment of the larger puzzle that is the complex structure – be it perfectly unitary or fragmented – of body and mind (and/or emotions).

### *Is Idealism possible on stage?*

Theatre and dance have always been considered "physical" forms of art, this having brought them denigration in the Middle Ages – everything that was *of flesh* was considered tainted and sinful. While all arts required man's presence to be created, only the performing arts actually incorporated man's body in it. It wasn't just a facilitator as for music or painting. It used the very matter of the body to picture a second world.

Throughout its history, theatre has had its share of attempts of separating itself from the performer's body. Puppet Theatre and Shadow Theatre are ancient forms of performing. Yet, they always keep man close. In more recent times, the form of live<sup>1</sup> radio theatre distanced the performer's body from its audience even more. But only through the experimental Object Theatre did the performer actually manage to distance his body from the actual stage. With these variations of performance the audience is placed in front of an increasingly difficult question: what is a performance and what are its limits? We may call a "performance" any live presentation that has an artistic attribute (either an esthetic aspect or a statement at its core that justifies its artistic nature), but we will find it difficult to name it theatre or dance in the absence of the actor and dancer. We were used for too many centuries with the idea that the actor/dancer is what makes a performance and in an intuitive and "naturalistic" way this is actual truth.

Performers know the importance of their bodies. They are aware of how something as quotidian and natural as their everyday bodies becomes an element of art in the moment of performance. Depending on the chosen theory, we can state that the body on stage and the body on the street are the same object, different objects, or elements that share substance but not all properties. However, no actor or dancer will ever will think that he can both perform on stage and not use his body. The quotidian body cannot be physically left backstage while the performing body steps into the limelight.

Whether they consider their performance an example of a dualistic or monist "act", it is very unlikely any performer will leave out the materiality of their body when analyzing it. It is in the nature of a performer's job to deal with his bodies limitations. Even the most aerial ballerina, experiencing a trance-like moment in the peak of a majestic execution of a movement, is still beautifully shaped matter as long as a wrong step and a sudden muscle cramp can break the magic. Time may feel like standing still, weight like disappearing, space like infinitely expanding; we may all decide to agree that a certain moment is pure magic; but as long as it is ephemeral and uncontrollable, we cannot talk about it as being "ours", "us", "real", "present". Not yet. The rules we made for ourselves – through laws of science, philosophy, public behavior – are the ones stopping us.

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<sup>1</sup> I specified the characteristic of *live* theatre here to avoid leaving the performative area of these arts. Although a recorded radio theatre play broadcasted to an audience is not less of a theatre show for its listeners than a live one, it does send it into a different category of performance that needs different approaches when analyzed and pushes us away from the subject treated here.



Therefore, at this point, we can only see examples of dualism and physical monism on stage. Is there any room left, any backdoor or faulty rule that would allow Idealist monism to find a place on stage? Would it be called Imaginary Theatre, Invisible Performance? I will take the example of a germ of paradox, rebellion and effusion in the middle of theatre history, a source of lyricism in the midst of the dramatical, a 20<sup>th</sup> century imagine of actual magic inside art: the *Impossible Theatre*, the work of Artaud.

### *Artaud*

The Impossible Theatre is not the name assigned by Artaud himself to his theoretical form of theatre, but a version coined by its successors. The form of performance Artaud spent his time to imagine, describe, promote and materialize is the Theatre of Cruelty. His manifesto requested a form of theatre that contained the necessity, effectiveness and power of a ritual, of a sacred and magical form of art. He believed in theatre's ability to influence and convert anything it reaches. Every word he spoke and wrote about this art form supported the idea that it is just as powerful as life itself, that it should be considered a magical and therapeutic tool, a force as strong as both life and death. His opinion on the theatre of his days – much like today's theatre – was that it lacked any intensity, any strength; he saw it as a lamentable piece of art in a dusty museum, an inanimate object with no potency.

Many beautiful words have been said about theatre and many poets have wrote lines on what theatre once was and it should be, but only Artaud believed in his lyrical definitions so strongly that actually thought they would be possible to materialize. He searched for a way to take theatre out of the intellect and forcefully project it into the sub-consciousness.

The uniqueness of his theory was the joining of the carnal with the magical. In his view, Theatre was the ground where the absolute physical, the flesh, the blood, could have the supernatural, magical impact of spirit. His ideas talked about infinity and transcendence in terms of possibility and reality. We can state that his view united body with the burning spirit – a monist statement, an Idealist view. By this, he “reject[ed] man’s usual limitations and powers and infinitely extend[ed] the frontiers of what we call reality” (Artaud 1994: 7).

As a truly idealistic form of art – although Artaud himself would have probably disagreed with this statement – the Theatre of Cruelty remains a theory. Peter Brook saw Artaud as a prophet and stated that “the power of his vision is that it is the carrot in front of our noses, never to be reached” (Brook 1997: p79).

### *Today's way*

The few examples mentioned so far give us an idea on how different eras influenced general beliefs, specific philosophical approaches and methods of creating art, or, rather, how these aspects are correlated. A view of today's trend is a little bit more difficult to give since a complete overview is much harder to attain given the unfolding of numerous processes. And it is true that we can only be objective about facts if we step outside them.

What I would like to point out here is simply a personal observation and some conclusions that it generated. It is, therefore, a view that encounters the issues of subjectivity, cultural and temporal bias and should be regarded as such.

With the technological boom of the last two decades, most of us have been projected into a world with a lot more information than we were used to handle. Having so many different and distant sources of information can be both benefic and overwhelming. We eventually manage to adapt to this flow of information (by learning to control and filter it), but in first instance we appeal to some sort of adaptive behaviors. Some of these behaviors refer to being skeptical towards anything that comes from outside the range of our controllable field (for example our field of expertise, or maybe information from our own country or written in our own language, it being easier to verify). Some refer to being very unstable in our own opinions, basing our every idea on what has been stated most recently, which, nowadays, is virtually every minute. Some might refer to – and this is the aspect I would like to underline – a tendency to include every piece of information that appeals to us and create a very chequered and multivalent perspective. This is both an admirable and risky action. It is useful because it allows more than one perspective on one issue and allows comparison and a more general view, usually considered closer to actual facts. On the other hand, distant sources are difficult to check – and so we run the risk of being misinformed – and are themselves culturally biased at times, or taken out of their cultural context and thus presenting a deformed notion.

Any activity today has a more universal approach than it had a century ago, be it the effect of global communication, globalization, the interest for everything foreign etc. Also, there seems to be an intense tendency to mix influences: old and new, occidental and oriental, classic and contemporary. It may be the effect of reaching a saturation that requires a look back to the “classical”, or the fascination with the exotic that is now reachable. Alternative

medicine, Eastern philosophies and spiritual practices are all becoming elements that modern Occidental culture is integrating quickly. Art is also strongly experiencing this influence. This receptivity and flexibility in Western art may be a sign of less rigid traditions. Jukka O. Miettinen makes an observation regarding this issue on the subject of theatre. He states that Europe has only very few still living ancient performing traditions, theatrical tradition being based more on the written text in Western culture, whereas Asia has many more, most having specific techniques and stories related to them, in spite the thousands of years that have passed by.

This may be due to the deep interrelationship with religion and rituals. Religious art tends to be conservative in nature and changes of style are mainly avoided. [...] Most of these traditions preserve not only a literary heritage, but also an acting technique, costuming, masks, a make-up system etc. that have retained much of their original qualities throughout the centuries. (Miettinen 2010)

The Eastern views brought into Western art and culture have also created a connection between a more Occidental scientifically based perspective on mind and body and a spiritual and traditional Oriental view. I think the mind-body issue is at one of its highest instability moments. Western culture has psychology and neuroscience on one side and spiritual approaches on the other, gaining more ground each day. Practices brought into the Occidental daily life like meditation, yoga or martial arts focus on a more unified approach towards mind and body.

All these elements bear an influence on performing arts. "It is impossible to separate views of the actor's process from the dominant scientific views of any given historical period. How we understand acting is contingent, even if only implicitly, on how we understand basic human functioning" (Blair 2010: 23). What method is then best suited for a creating a performance today, for training actors and dancers for today's audience, expectations, knowledge? Lecoq, Yoshi Oida, or better ALBA Emoting? The already classical Method Acting or experimental improvisations? Is it better to go through all of them when training or to adhere to one from the start and master it? It is not so much a question of "which chapter of my acting manual should I use?". It is more of "which general perspective on life, body, mind, art should I take as my own truth?". When performing, we learn. Once we've learned we become a certain person. It is not the same thing to practice Butoh for years or street dancing. Their different ideals, their philosophies become your own and they end up shaping your personality. It is not an easy choice and all performers should be aware of this fact.

I consider that each individual performer's personal inclination towards a certain lifestyle and ideology should be an important factor in choosing his training technique and performing method. Molding in the natural direction is not only easier than working in opposition to it but also more productive. It is common sense for us today to think that a person can be born with a body suited for classical ballet. Mental and emotional predispositions should be equally taken into consideration. Of course, recognizing these predispositions and offering each future performer the right training raise organizational and method issues which need to be solved.

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## *Playing Genius and Performing Gender: How the Old Good Gertrude Stein Became the New Bad Gertrude Stein*

IULIU RAȚIU\*

**Abstract:** This paper analyzes Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* both as a celebratory reenactment of the author's life with her partner and as a declarative performance of gender roles. Once Toklas takes the formal role of wife in their couple and entertains the wives of famous "geniuses" like Picasso, Matisse or Hemingway, Stein immediately assumes the husband role. By adopting the status of a genius on equal footing with her male counterparts, Stein subverts the social codes of family and portrays herself and Toklas as a couple with distinct "conventional" roles of husband and wife. Blamed for using Toklas's voice to perform her life story as a ventriloquist would use a puppet, Stein is in fact bending the rules of autobiographical writing by transgressing not only literary codes but also gender roles.

**Keywords:** autobiographical writing, gender roles, passing, performance, ventriloquism

In the critical reception of her work, the dialectic *good / bad* functions as the framework through which Stein's writing backfires on its author's public image and cultural relevance. The person overshadowed the work to such an extent that Stein's work (whose complexity had been read as laxity) lost the aesthetic value and suffered the imposition of a moral predicament. Both Stein and her work became either *good* or *bad*, *tertium non-datum*. Too obedient to the moral convention, Stein did not want to shock her contemporaries by publicly confessing her lesbianism, which made her *good* and liked as an extravagant person during her lifetime. Because of this *goodness*, people accepted her work, even though they referred to it as *bad*. In the hindsight, her work became *good* (it challenged the literary codes of that time), while the author got *bad* (she did

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not come out in public). *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the book that made Stein famous, is also the book that started the *good / bad* controversy. As Catherine Stimpson considers in *Gertrude Stein and the Lesbian Lie*, Stein did *lie*, for the sake of fame and recognition, but, at the same time, she told the truth because, even though it does not spell it right out, the book celebrates her relationship with Alice B. Toklas and it does it in a way which is both appealing to the public and it gives the author freedom for literary experiment. In this way, Stein is the author of a transgression of both literary and sexual codes. Regarding the literary codes and models of the time, her writing professed change, innovation, and linguistic performance to such an extent that only a few proved capable of acknowledging her work beyond the customary echoes like *interesting, cubist, different*. As far as the sexual codes, in a time and a society that did not offer women anything else but marriage, Stein's sexual orientation and life style let her no choice but to move to France and live with her brother for some years, even after Alice B. Toklas had entered her life. For the modern audience, these subtle forms of *passing* divided Stein into the *Good Stein* whom the public liked, and the *Bad Stein* whom the public hated and ridiculed. For the postmodern audience, influenced by the second wave of feminism, the situation is reversed. Stimpson argues that "The Old Good Stein is the New Bad Stein: she is too obedient to convention. The Old Bad Stein is the New Good Stein: her transgressions are exemplary deeds." (152) Consequently, Stein succeeded in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* to put together both obedience to and subversion of literary and sexual codes in a way that broke the dialectic *good / bad*.

For Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* represents the much-needed public recognition. Even though critics, prompted by her, consider the book as part of her *audience writing*, the other works that might encompass a PR type of writing, such as *Everybody's Autobiography* or *Paris, France*, are entirely different from what Stein presumably advocated in her 1933 book. As a capricious writer, with an exact sense of her value, talent, and capabilities, Stein played along her success without really giving in to the public's expectations as far as her difficult style was concerned. Once she made it clear for everybody, but most importantly, for herself, that she can really have an appeal to her readership, she returned to her old style. In this respect, *The Autobiography* represents the much-needed compromise to have the public's attention turned toward the remaining of her writing. Unlike other women writers, whose biographies play a minor role in their reception, Stein become well known exactly because of her hoax biography. Almost over night, the literary ideas, the cultural and social activism that Stein professed for the last

three decades get the necessary recognition and assure her a prominent role in both the propagation and the reception of modernism. The fact that Stein's public recognition took such a painful and long birth can only reiterate the singularity this strange book plays in Stein's work.<sup>1</sup> Because of that, the extent of obedience to literary and social conventions and the amount of subversion of linguistic and sexual codes, as they are both *written* and *read* in *The Autobiography* become the framework of Stein's recognition.

Moreover, this hoax autobiography also set the standard for a moral evaluation of Stein's work. In fact, the moral judgment predicated by Stimpson's essay tends to impose itself as *the* real analysis of Stein's work, by mixing together both ethics and aesthetics, even though *the* analysis falls short in unprovoked and harsh criticism and critique of a *too* conventional and *too* subversive way of writing that undermines the function, position and understanding of literature itself. If the conventionalism, easily dubbed *cubism*, secures the author the prominence she openly claims in a fervent époque of imaginative experimentalism and endless configurative performance of the interplay between form and content, the subversion Stein obsessively pursues during her prodigious career questions the famous woman's literary value and cultural insight. *Grandmother of modernism* and *aunt of feminism*, Stein divides her critics between those (herself included) who praise her work for *originating* a new epistemological cultural cycle (Stein gave birth to the 20<sup>th</sup> century's literature) and those who pay tribute to her for being a *seminal* force of feminism. While the modernists encourage the convention, the feminists promote the subversion. *The Autobiography* satisfies, as well as undermines, both of these claims.

An outline of the époque would prove the convention that there are no conventions as long as any work bears the fruit of a genius' mind. The *maler* the mind, the better the work. Joyce, Hemingway, Picasso and others easily fall in this category and help Stein develop for herself the status of a genius. The interplay *good / bad*, with reference to her peers, this time, mirrors the fundamental dialectic that underscored her work. For her, those famous male writers and artists could only play the role that Leo had played when the two got along. Either good brothers or bad brothers, Joyce, Hemingway,

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<sup>1</sup> It can be argued that *Everybody's Autobiography*, the lecture tours, and other autobiographical writings like *Paris, France* are part of the *audience writing* strategy, but it is not necessarily true, since in these later works Stein returned to her style, experimenting again with the metanarratives of writing or portraiture, without actually exposing herself and her private life, the way she did, no matter how veiled, in *The Autobiography*.



Picasso, and a few others help Stein assess the advantages that were traditionally assigned exclusively to men. At this level, the gender role the author assumed proves to work as long as writing does not come between the two geniuses. Even though they respected each other to such an extent that they publicly ignored each other, Stein and Joyce play, at least from Stein's perspective, the roles of bad-brothers. Picasso, in contrast to Joyce, plays the role of the good-brother, until they have their differences once Picasso starts writing poetry and Stein considers that an affront to her status. Hemingway, on the other hand, functions either as the son or as the brother, both good and bad, until their unsentimental breakup. But this opposition *good / bad* loses interest once Alice B. Toklas gives Stein the opportunity to actually assume the role and status of a male figure. In fact, and this is camouflaged in the text of *The Autobiography*, once the two women find the benefits of a conventional marriage together, Stein is suddenly free to consider herself a genius, because now she can reflect herself, as the husband, in Toklas, the wife, who is permitted to talk only to the wives of geniuses, thus making Stein Picasso's equal. The fact that feminists blame her for *passing* as a man fades once that is clear that Stein assumes that position in order to be considered a genius (traditionally a male prerogative) and thus legitimize her work.

In the second chapter of *Women of the Left Bank*, entitled *Settlements* with a good reason, Shari Benstock dedicates a section to Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas and their life together in Rue de Fleurus, where the critic points out the importance that Toklas played in Stein's creative enterprise. Benstock's argument is that Toklas, through her presence, support, and love finally gave Stein the much needed intellectual space and motivation to pursue her literary goals. Once their relationship had been *settled*, Stein found in the dedication of her significant other the necessary energy to undertake, from a secure and invulnerable position, the major task of innovating and, at the same time, subverting the literary and sexual codes of that time. Becoming the man, that is a genius, of their couple, Stein started the most fruitful period of her life. With respect to *The Autobiography*, and to the conventions of biography and autobiography, Stein's persona emerges as a central character whose ideas, deeds, ironies and capricious moods are plainly presented, in a manner not different from the traditional biographies that concentrate mostly on the importance of a famous character. It also can be argued, like Estelle C. Jelinek does in *The Traditions of Women's Autobiography*, that Stein herself, through omission of mainstream political commentary, camouflage, diverting anecdotes and fragmented narrative, contributed to the affirmation of women's biographies, but her main concern had been to break, from the inside

if possible, the constraints of a men's world. And this happened by using Toklas as the woman telling the story of her famous man. As Jelinek notes, "Toklas's presence as the narrator legitimized Stein in a world that expected some information stereotypically associated with women, just as the geniuses Stein gathered around her legitimized her as a professional, if yet unrecognized, writer." (144) It is true that Toklas did not make Stein famous, quite the contrary, but she helped Stein acquire a position that in the end allowed her to be famous.

*The Autobiography* validates the roles Stein and Toklas assumed inside their couple almost at a formal level: in its pretence, in its *lie*, the book is Toklas's account of Stein's character, personality, and genius. To sustain this subterfuge, and to further subvert the genre, Stein employs two more crucial elements for any biographical report: chronology and development. By not following a strict time order, which, as Jelinek argues, "her consciousness of the chaos of her time" and "her discontent as an unrecognized writer" (136) and by not addressing directly a linear development of character, even by not considering the influence that history might have played on the lives of her characters, Stein deliberately denies the differences between fiction and non-fiction. In fact, what she presents as a life narrative fits very well the canons of modernist fiction. First of all, time chronicles the events only when those events assess something important for the narrative. A simple overview of the seven parts of *The Autobiography* exposes the pattern Stein deploys in her writing. Thus, the need of the biographer to cut in half the story, by interposing as the fourth chapter, *Gertrude Stein Before She Came to Paris*, between the chronological development from chapter three, *Gertrude Stein in Paris – 1903-1907*, to chapter five, *1907-1914*, signifies the importance the encounter of the two women played in their lives and their common decision to rehash their past as a final commitment for their would be union. Another formal element supports this idea. If the first four, out of seven, chapters of the book describe the two women's lives before their meeting, even though in a perfect Steinian prose time is rather fluid and follows the whims of narrative memory, the last three seal up an alliance that makes up for the wasted time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the formal arrangement of the seven chapters and their titles invites to a contextualization of Stein's self-awareness about writing and the incorporating, almost suffocating, power of the narrative. In this respect, *The Autobiography* starts as an innocent personal story of a woman (Alice B. Toklas) only to slowly become the story of another woman (Gertrude Stein), then a story of a couple (Stein – Toklas), then a story of a cultural movement (Stein's salon), and in the end, these stories become history (War World I). This encompassing nature of writing is well expressed in the remarks Stein makes in Toklas's voice about her most ambitious work, *The Making of the Americans* "it was to be the history of a family. It was a history of a family but by the time I came to Paris it was getting to be a history of all human beings, all who ever were or are or could be living." (69)

The subjectivity / objectivity aspect contributes to this formal structure in a very important manner. Until the final *coup de grace* when Stein de-conspires the real identity of the narrator, Toklas is the one recounting the events. In fact, the first chapter, *Before I Came to Paris*, signals from the title the subject of the autobiography only to have it objectified in the title of the second chapter, *My Arrival to Paris*. This objectification of Alice B. Toklas, dubbed by critics as *ventriloquism*, plays along Stein's mastery of providing, in detectivistic manner, closure to the story. *The Autobiography* is a hoax, consequently, the biographer shows interest not in particular persons, but rather in their interaction with each other and with the history, thus seizing a pattern commonly employed by the modernist writers when they have their characters wander the world in search of their identity.

The quest, the identity quest, means more than a simple journey, so that the characters themselves provide the background for the quest. The consequences then allow life to take over a character as common as possible, and the quest itself represents the actual validation of the hero. In other words, Stein's insistence on her life, as well as on Toklas's, as fictional as they might be, before their meeting in Paris, represents an assertion of their future life together in a union which could not have been exactly spelled out then and there. The two women's personal histories (constantly moving and wandering through Europe and the United States ever since early childhood) are drawn as symbolic initiations that strengthen their would-be encounter, so that the past trials validate and seal a future that was meant to be. Their separate lives in the United States and their common life in France are divided, like the past is split from the future, by a constant present that allows them to assess their gender identity in a relationship that otherwise would not have been accepted. This conscious choice gives Stein a chance to theorize, with a new inference, the existence of two countries. In *Paris France* she writes, "After all everybody, that is, everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really. The second one is romantic, it is separate from themselves, it is not real but it is really there." (2) This is the author's way of veiling and unveiling her own identity. She belongs to the traditional category of *Jewish American Woman*, but, on the inside, she is a Lesbian writer. The separation she mentions in this quote does not deny her lesbianism, rather it reflects the impossibility for the women of that time to assess a different posture than that of a wife. Her lesbianism was "not real" for the society of that time, but for her, in a different country and with a faithful partner, it was "really there".

The appearance of *Buildungsroman*, that any biography or autobiography need to have, minimizes the actual attributes of Stein's work, because the reader hardly ever realizes how Stein, or Toklas for the same matter, could develop and have developed throughout the book. Apart from a photographic standpoint, where a photograph of Stein in Vienna in early childhood is constantly counterparted with few other photos showing Stein, Toklas and other as adults, there is no development. And yet, the convention is in place, because Stein, deliberately once more, presents a development in this book, that is the development of a relationship and, more importantly, of a status that is already attained by the time the work is written. Otherwise, the character (Stein) everybody wants to see is wearing a mask that is identical to the mask-like portrait Picasso painted of Stein in 1906.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, remembering her posing career for Picasso and Valloton, Stein also remembers the long hours followed by long walks that permitted her to meditate on her writing and she uses the occasion to relate her sentences to Bach's music, as a French critic does in *The Autobiography*, "She had come to like posing, the long still hours followed by a long dark walk intensified the concentration with which she was creating her sentences. The sentences of which Marcel Brion, the French has written, by exactitude, austerity, absence of variety in light and shade, by refusal of the use of the subconscious Gertrude Stein achieves a symmetry which has a close analogy to the symmetry of the musical fugue of Bach." (62) It might be argued that this is a perfect definition of Stein's cubist manner of writing, but what is striking from this unusual association of painting, writing, and music is the combination of movement and static elements, which in the end promote and arrest development at the same time: posing vs. walking, absence of variety vs. fugue.

The third element that would legitimize a biography or an autobiography, the history, which makes a character worthwhile, runs through Stein's work like a noun empty of any significance. The war is nothing more than a timeframe. It is used to give the titles of the last two chapters of the book (*The War* and *After the War – 1919-1932*) and it gives

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Autobiography* Picasso is recorded to have said about his painting "everybody says that she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will" (14). The same holds true for *The Autobiography*, the power of art and Pound's adage that life imitates art. Also, the biblical power of the word has its share in Stein's endeavor, since literature is a matter of will. The final sentence of the book enforces the image of Stein as "Deus ex machina". Once she takes the decision to write, the work is already conceived "And she has [written it] and this is it" (310).

Stein the chance to meditate on the valences of the language the American soldiers fighting in France utilize. Even the charitable works that shows Stein's and Toklas's involvement, valuable because of the war and caused by the war, fades in momentary notes that describe an activity like any other.<sup>4</sup> Yet, Stein obeys the modern convention because by avoiding the direct treatment of such an important event, she accentuates the moral and existential void of an event that does nothing more than circumscribing the modern world and its loss of meaning. In the same manner, outstanding cultural figures of modernism, who all intersected in Stein's salon, even if they take the center stage and engage in innumerable important conversations, do not play crucial roles in the book. Like the famous paintings covering the walls in the residence in rue de Fleurus 27, they are *exhibited* in the book.

Chronology, character development and history hinder Stein's effort to write the conventional autobiography, even though she tries deliberately to have them in place. These three elements, along with others, assumed by the audience to be in her text led to the public success of *The Autobiography*, and, as seen before, they are in the text. In fact, Stein's mastery in dealing with history and famous men emphasizes at the same time both the obedience to and the subversion of convention, which proved in the end the winning card. The question, then, still unanswered, that raised the

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<sup>4</sup> The way Stein portrays the war (or as some critics might object, the way she does not portray it) defines her writing. In *Narration*, the book that collects the four lectures she delivered at the University of Chicago in 1934, Stein makes a distinction between poetry and prose depending on whether a noun is used or not and comes to the conclusion that "poetry was a calling an intensive calling upon the name of anything and that prose was not the using the name of anything as a thing in itself but the creating of sentences that were self-sufficient and following one after the other made of anything a continuous thing which is paragraphing and so a narrative that is a narrative of anything" (25-6). Thus, writing about war means writing about it without naming it. Even if she affirms its importance, considering the war as the limit for the nineteenth century (1), Stein spends no time describing it. For her, the *paragraphing* of narrative bears more fruit than the actual account of the great event. In *The Autobiography*, Stein's and Toklas's decision "to get into war" is facilitated not by the crude development of the hostilities, but by their chance encounter with an ambulance of the American Fund for French Wounded. The war is not named, but invoked by the name of the charity and the ambulance (207). Similarly, the battle of the Marne is not properly described, but rather invoked by both Nellie Jacot and Alf Maurer. The first complains about the difficulty of finding a taxi during the curfew, while the other remembers the "pale absinthe" of the sky and the soldiers guarding the treasury which "was going away just like that before the battle of the Marne" (184-5). Narrative, like history, detective stories, and even biography, as subgenera of prose, describe events, situations, and characters, in a way in which denotation loses ground to connotation.

moral judgment of *good / bad* can be altered to a more precise one: is subversion enough to downplay the compromise Stein made when she wrote for the public? Like in the detective stories Stein praised so much, the answer lies within the text. Did she really lie, as Stimpson argues, or did she really tell the truth in her writing by transgressing literary and sexual codes? A closer look to her relationship with Alice B. Toklas, as presented in this book, will nevertheless shed some light on this critical issue.

The crucial questioning of *The Autobiography* from the hindsight draws on Stein's inability to openly claim her lesbianism. Without a doubt the fact must have troubled Stein a lot since in *QED*<sup>5</sup>, as well as in other of her writings, the author tries to find both the right time and the right language to express lesbian relationships. The answer, at least as far as *The Autobiography* is concerned, is given by the change Toklas brought into Stein's life. The reason stands in the fact that Stein had been more interested in gender than in sex, and Alice B. Toklas has provided the perfect way out: by playing wife inside their couple, Toklas gave Stein the chance of assuming the role she has probably wanted, that of a man. The role turns out to be more important than that since it eventually legitimized for Stein the status of a genius, that is, now having a wife entertaining the wives of geniuses, she could fully enjoy the conversations with the latter from an equal standpoint. By influence and allusion, Stein subverted the social codes of family, portraying herself and Toklas as a couple, with distinct "conventional" roles as husband and wife.

Another vexing point for critics questions the author's choice of exploiting Toklas, as a ventriloquist would use a puppet, to tell her story. Even if the voice is Stein's, the fact that she manipulates Toklas along with other characters and situations throughout the book made critics blame her for not coming out in full. Apart from useless and mean accusations of egotism and self-centeredness, the question is fairly justified. The answer again lies within the text and undermines all suspicions. Without being obvious, the deed is exemplary for its candor, resolution and loyalty. Stein's intention to take Toklas's identity represents a valuable declaration of their relationship. Seen in this way, *The Autobiography* is the gift Stein gives her lover for their 25 years together. Their union is sealed: they are

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<sup>5</sup> The novel, written before the two women met, was only published posthumously. The titles, because there have been two, are in themselves rather transparent allusions to Stein's lesbianism: *Things As They Are* (the first edition published by Alice B. Toklas in 1950) and *QED* (probably the initial title, 1971).

one.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the book is a celebration of the romantic period in their life, in the sense Stein discussed the importance of the second country, the one in which writers live, even if they do not belong there. Moreover, the book represents the fruit of the long awaited encounter of the two women and their future relationship because once Toklas arrives in *Steinland* the author finally acquires the status of a figurative man of genius. The first issue of *The Autobiography* features a famous photograph by Man Ray, "Alice B. Toklas at the door", in which Toklas enters the chamber where Stein writes at her desk. Engulfed in her writing, Stein does not seem to realize that Toklas is about to enter the room, but the opening door clearly brings new light inside, that is new opportunities and new ways of expression, making the viewer and the reader imagine that Stein is actually writing Toklas's entrance into the room. The fact that this photo mirrors the title page means that Stein is the author of the hoax autobiography and that this writing is not going to be about Toklas or Stein, but about their life together. In this respect, *The Autobiography* narrates events happening in that second symbolic country that permits the two women to set their own rules and transgress the conventions of the time, when women were not at all free to live the way they wanted and did not get the deserved recognition in the absence of a man that legitimized their work to his benefit. In contrast, the two women legitimized one another by being equally important and equally sharing the consequences of their symbolic actions. Here lies a paradox that still puzzles and confuses the reader, because Stein would not have written a book that assumed for its author, until the end, a different identity, if it were not for the fact that the other person's identity helped the author assume her real identity; similarly, Toklas would not have accepted to play along Stein's game, had she not realized the importance she had in Stein's creative and real life.

If the metaphor of the ventriloquist<sup>7</sup> is not specifically spelled out in the text, there are other examples that Stein alludes to when she refers to

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<sup>6</sup> In *Narration*, when glossing on history and the way it might be written, Stein ponders on the epistemological supposition that all entities can be eventually reduced to one, which in turn can encompass the other/s. To prove her point, she argues that in mysticism, inside the Trinity, three can be one, while in marriage, two can be one. Then, she concludes that "one is not one because one is always two that is one is always coming to a recognition of what the one who is one is writing that is telling" (57). This conclusion functions as an oblique reference to her "marriage" and also to the narrative strategy of *The Autobiography* in which the one who is telling (Toklas) and the one who is writing (Stein) are the same.

<sup>7</sup> Considering that Toklas had been Stein's secretary, typist and publisher, *communicating* thus the latter's work, the metaphor might have some positive relevance.

her work. Two of them draw on similar cases, mixing the fiction with nonfiction. The first one, Boswell's Johnson, as Stein calls it in *Narration*, is an interesting one because "Boswell conceived himself as an audience an audience achieving recognition at one and the same time that Johnson achieved recognition" (60), implying that Toklas, as Stein's first audience or because of that, becomes famous once the author herself does. The second example refers to Defoe and Robinson Crusoe. The enigmatic sentence at the end of *The Autobiography*, "I am going to write it [the autobiography] as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe" (310) is decoded in *Narration*, "Think of Defoe, he tried to write Robinson Crusoe as if it were exactly what did happen and yet after all he is Robinson Crusoe and Robinson Crusoe is Defoe and therefore after all it is not what is happening it is what is happening to him to Robinson Crusoe that makes what is exciting every one." (45) In other words, like Defoe writing the life of Robinson Crusoe wrote about himself, Stein writing the autobiography of Toklas wrote about herself. By conceding Toklas the prerogatives of authorship for more than 300 hundred pages, just to take them back in the end, Stein outplays the audience: she gives the public an affordable, yet problematic work; she makes clear to put in as much as she lets out; and, most importantly, inside her couple with Toklas clarifies who the writer is, because Stein's "love with a b" (as she calls Toklas in *Narration*) is a "pretty good" everything except a "pretty good author." Moreover, Stein's declaration, "I love my love with a b because she is peculiar" (39), opens up to different interpretations. First of all, in a pure example of Steinian verse, the author encrypts what she has never made public, her love for Alice B. Toklas, but has suggested this in several of her poems and, probably, most explicitly in *The Autobiography*. Then, by naming her lover only with reference to the middle initial, Stein plays along the first letters of the alphabet, where *a* might stand for herself, the man in the couple, while *b* is reserved for Toklas, in a symbolism that hints to the priorities inside their couple, but also to the author's literary efforts to assign to letters, and consequently, to words new meanings. Finally, their union and identification with one another is once more asserted at a subtle syntactic level that almost escapes analysis. Downplaying the ambiguity of a transitive verb (love) with an internal direct object (my love), Stein references, almost unconsciously, even though her egotism is well known, the love for herself. This self-reference can be validated by considering the fact that Toklas used to call Stein *Lovey*, meaning that when the author assesses the love for her lover actually professes love for herself thus implying that Toklas and herself are one.



Another element that supports this identification comes from an interesting scene that took place during the war when Stein and Toklas were doing charitable work for the American Fund for French Wounded. The roles the two women played helps understand the complex relationship they had. As the rules asked that every ambulance had an official person and a driver, Stein chose to be the driver, because she showed interest in cars and really enjoyed driving, "Gertrude Stein was perfectly ready to drive the car anywhere, to crank the car as often as there was nobody else to do it, to repair the car." Thus, the official position remained to be held by Toklas, "I was officially the delegate." Since all the official papers were on her name, Stein was supposed to deal with the civil, medical and military authorities in various situations when in need for fuel, direction, or protection. Because she did not do that, it remained up to Toklas to take the delegate's role, thus taking, when talking with the authorities, Stein's identity. When a French major wanted to invite Mademoiselle Stein to dinner, Toklas was forced to admit her real identity "Mademoiselle Stein is the driver and I am the delegate and Mademoiselle Stein has no patience, she will not go into offices and wait and interview people and explain, so I do it for her, so I do it for her while she sits in the automobile." (218-9) The same identity exchange happened at the American and French embassies in Madrid, where Stein did not want to go through all the trouble of waiting for a pass in front of the offices, so Toklas had to be the delegate. But, in this latter case, because the official workers found out about Stein's literary profile, they were able to give the two women the passes as soon as possible, without keeping them wait in line. Like in Man Ray's photograph, because she does not want to "wait and interview people and explain", Stein stays at her desk and writes, or waits in the car and meditates, letting Toklas open doors and do the explanations. The same happens with *The Autobiography*, where Stein literally does the writing and Toklas figuratively does the explanations.

The final subversion when Stein assumes her authorship, in the last sentences of the book, constitutes, by default, the answer to the moral question asked by feminists. Stein is a "pretty good writer" and remains a good writer because in *The Autobiography* she transgressed both the linguistic and sexual codes. The fact that the modernists failed to relate to her literature, but lionized her through the reading of one book, while the feminists considered the same book as being too conventional and purposely hiding the author's identity gives the real value of the book. On the one hand, Stein seems to follow the convention by not tackling critical

issues like lesbianism and women's role in society, on the other she encodes them in a language that is no different from the language she dedicated her life to conceive. The harsh moral judgments concerning her work proved invalid. When discussing and analyzing her writing the moral balance *good / bad* is highly flawed. Stein wrote for the public, therefore she lied, seems to be the moral verdict that feminists came with just to deny the real value of *The Autobiography*. Because Stein had in mind the audience when she wrote about herself and Alice B. Toklas and because she did not *fess up* her lesbianism, she deserves no consideration as far as this unparalleled work is concerned. A closer look at some formal aspects of the book as well as at the formal aspects of (auto)biographical writing showed that Stein did indeed come out in this book. First of all, the book is a celebration of her life with Toklas. Even though, the chronology starts before the two women met, the actual interest and development draws on their relationship. In fact, Toklas provided Stein with a chance to take a gender role, that of a man, that both appealed to her and to the society of the time that cherished everything that was made by a genius. Once Toklas took the formal role of a wife in their couple and entertained the wives of famous geniuses like Picasso or Hemingway, Stein immediately adopted the status of a genius herself by engaging in sophisticated and endless conversations with her peers. Second, *The Autobiography* uses a refined narrative and point of view that legitimize in the end the assertion that Stein and Toklas identified with each other to such an extent that the identity of the author becomes secondary. The accusation that Stein used Toklas as a ventriloquist would use a puppet is in itself useless, since the author certainly did not intend to do that, but rather she intended to have Toklas narrate events that changed their lives because undoubtedly they shared the same opinion. Finally, by undermining the conventional structure of any biography, when dealing with the chronology, the development or the characters, Stein only stresses out the importance Toklas's arrival in her life had on her literary creativity. In *The Autobiography*, these three elements merge in order to transgress the margins of literary, as well as sexual codes, and realize a hoax autobiography that presents, with the appearance of subversion, much more than it was expected. It was Stein's way of imposing herself both as a modernist writer and as a feminist precursor, struggling with the problems of language and tradition.

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***Between Dismemberment and (Dis)embodiment:  
Defining (Hyper)text in Shelley Jackson's  
Patchwork Girl***

**ELIZA DEAC\***

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to explore the shift in the understanding of textuality brought about by the advent of the computer and by its use for the generation of what is generally termed "electronic literature". The starting point of this analysis is Shelley Jackson's hypertext fiction *Patchwork Girl*, which resuscitates and gives a new twist to the old metaphor of bibliographical terminology – the body of text. Written in *Storyspace*, this hypertext makes deliberate use both of the possibilities and of the limitations of the programme by representing itself as a human body, more specifically as the feminine counterpart of Victor Frankenstein's monster, whose severed body parts – corresponding to the hypertext's lexias – are stitched together by the hypertext links. Such works both confirm and challenge the post-structuralist perspective on the text as illustrated most conspicuously in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, in which he proclaims "The end of the book and the beginning of writing". The hypertextual forms of writing exemplify a breach with the established view of the book as a symbolic form of organic totality; however, their surface of inscription cannot be stripped of materiality as Derrida, despite his insistence on the corporeality of writing, suggests. Therefore, this paper will compare and contrast the book and the hypertext as two mechanisms that have developed specific means of employing their physical characteristics in the production of meaning with the aim of finding the middle ground between the two pitfalls of the discourse on the new media: the technological determinism of media essentialism (Espen Aarseth) and medial ideology (Matthew Kirschenbaum), which regards the electronic text (or any kind of text) as disembodied.

**Keywords:** body/text metaphor, hypertext, *Patchwork Girl*, (non)linearity, (im)materiality

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A close look at the technical language of various professionals involved in text processing activities would reveal that their terminology is fraught with body metaphors, which have at least three distinct referents: the book as a physical object (for the art of bookbinding), the page (in typography and web design) and the linguistic content (for the art of rhetoric and for poetry). The bookbinder's description of the codex is modelled on human anatomy from top to bottom: the top page edges are called *the head*, the bottom page edges represent *the foot*, while the pages themselves form *the body* of the book, held upright by its *backbone* or *spine* – the bound edge where the pages are fastened together. If one were to take this metaphor one step further, (s)he could say that, as far as the physical actions are concerned, reading a book is like embracing another human(like) being: the reader and the book stay face to *face* (the human visage facing the edge of book pages opposite the spine), while the reader's hands encircle *the back* of this unusual creature so (dis)similar to herself/ himself. The fragile body of the book needs protection just like the human body, so the bookbinders cover it with all sorts of garments which have both a functional and a decorative role: *headcaps*, *headbands*, *dust jackets* or *bellybands*<sup>1</sup>. Typographers and web designers, in turn, use the same analogy when describing the structure of the (web) page. Thus, the typographic grid, which serves as a matrix for each individual page, divides the text into three distinct information zones: running header, body text and running footer<sup>2</sup>. A simplified HTML document displays the same basic metaphor:

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<sup>1</sup> One may wonder if this metaphoric system is as consistent in other languages as in English. A list of the equivalent terms in French may answer the question: the head – *la tranche de tête*; the body of the book – *le corps d'ouvrage*; the foot – *la tranche de queue* (in this particular case, the French terminology borrows its metaphor from the field of animal biology; the same metaphor is also present in English, in the alternative term *tail edge*); the face – *la tranche de gouttière* (in French, the metaphor invokes a manufactured object – the gutter); the back/ backbone/ spine – *le dos/ l'épine* (in Québec); headband – *tranchefile/ comète*; headcap – *coiffe*; dust jacket – *chemise/ jaquette*. Although the French terminology is not as consistent as the English one in its choice of metaphors, it is still easy to notice that its main term of comparison remains the human body.

(A comprehensive list of bookbinding terms both in English and in French can be found at the following web-address: <http://www.cbbag.ca/ResourceListsWeb/TranslationOfTerms.html#BB>.)

<sup>2</sup> One can also notice the parallel use of the same metaphors both for the containing area and for its content: the header contains headlines, while the footer may include footnotes. The French terminology does not depart from this metaphorical pattern, except that its referents differ: the body text is placed inside the text area called *le rectangle d'empagement* for which the typographer must choose the size of the letters – *le corps*. This textual space is delimited at the top and at the bottom by two blank margins: *le blanc de tête* and *le blanc de pied*.

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<html>
  <head>
    [...]
  </head>

  <body>
    [...]
  </body>
</html>

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### ***1. The text's body: history of a metaphor***

If men create books in their image and if the human body is the measure of all books and, on a smaller scale, of all pages, this happens because the physical appearance of human beings is regarded as the supreme model of proportion, harmony and beauty. However, when the rhetoricians first employed this trope in connection with their art, they gave it a negative twist by projecting the analogy on the distinction inside-outside or content-form in order to signal rhetoric's entrance into a stage of decadence which would extend from Cicero to Fontanier and, in a different manner, even beyond (Todorov 61-83). Viewed from this perspective, the ideas represent the soul of the orator's speech, the language – its body, and the rhetorical figures – its clothes and ornaments. This system of equivalence implicitly establishes a hierarchy in value: the rhetorical figures form only the external and twice-removed sheltering layer of thoughts, which are (at) the heart of the rhetorical discourse. The rhetoricians' critique of their own profession is summed up in the following fragment from Quintilian's treatise on *The Orator's Education*:

I must go on the offensive, and block the way right at the outset to those who would like to use this confession of mine for their ends: I mean the people who take no trouble with their subject matter (which is the backbone of all causes) and grow old in a futile pursuit of words. They do this in the name of beauty, which in my view is indeed the finest thing in oratory, but only when it comes naturally, not when it is deliberately sought. Healthy bodies, with sound blood and strengthened by exercise, acquire good looks by the same means as they acquire strength; they are tanned, slim, and muscular. On the other hand, if one feminizes them by plucking the hair and using cosmetics, the very striving for beauty makes them disgusting. Again, decent and impressive apparel lends men authority, as

the Greek verse bears witness, but a womanish and luxurious dress, instead of adorning the body, exposes the mind within. In the same way, the translucent and many-coloured style of some speakers emasculates subjects which are clothed in this kind of verbal dress. What I want is *care* for words, but *deep concern* (emphasis in the original) for the subject. Most commonly, the best words are bound up with the subject, and are discovered by their own light; and yet we go on searching for them as though they were always hiding and taking themselves out of the way! We never think they are to be found where the subject of our speech is to be found, but prefer to seek them elsewhere and do violence to the results of our Invention. Eloquence should be approached in a higher spirit; if her whole body is healthy, she will not think that polishing her nails or styling her hair has anything to do with her well-being (317-319).

The target of his attack is the pursuit of discursive beauty for its own sake, to the detriment of the topic of the discourse – the backbone of any speech. The critical view of the figural language is expressed through its association with the artificial and shallow effects created by means of cosmetics or luxurious clothing, as opposed to the natural beauty of the plain speech, which resembles the healthy muscular body dressed in simple and appropriate clothes. In its second phase, rhetoric obviously and somewhat contradictorily favours the plain speech over the figural one in the name of a certain ideal of social morality and efficacy (Todorov 78-79). When this mindset is brought to a close in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, allowing the individual to pursue the idea of beauty irrespective of any ethical and commonly shared regulations, the romantics reverse this hierarchy and equate their art – poetry – with the production of figural discourse, which they continue to describe in terms of bodily metaphors, as Paul de Man's investigation of *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* brings into relief: "The language of tropes (...) is indeed like the body, which is like its garments, the veil of the soul as the garment is the sheltering veil of the body" (80). Nevertheless, the analogy still carries a negative connotation. This time, the figural language is not condemned from a moral perspective, but because of its incapacity to embody ideas completely. The use of figures implies the perpetual displacement or postponement of literal meaning: "To the extent that language is figure (...) it is indeed not the thing itself but the representation, the picture of the thing and, as such, it is silent, mute as pictures are mute" (80). This critique of the limits of representation and of the actual muteness of the discourse – which cannot name except indirectly – recalls Plato's main reproach to writing. And soon enough, de Man's analysis reveals explicitly that it is the representative power of the vehicular means that the romantic poets bring into question: "To the extent that, in writing, we are dependent on this language we all are (...) deaf and mute – not silent, which implies the

possible manifestation of sound at our own will, but silent as a picture, that is to say eternally deprived of voice and condemned to muteness" (80). Such criticism signals a new turn in the evolution of the metaphor: from speech to writing, from the figurative language to its medium. Thus, although Wordsworth's famous 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads* presents the poet as "a man speaking to men" (255), what he realizes is the fact that the poet of his times no longer speaks, but actually writes:

The paradox of the human soul and its body as the metaphor for that on which it is modeled, the relation of the immortal intellect to nature, is made more problematical by the introduction, at first surreptitiously, of a second metaphor, that of the book. If nature is the bodily image of a deathless spirit, the things man has wrought for commerce of his nature with itself are not vocal or bodily expressions, but books. The articulation of the deathless spirit behind nature into the signs on the speaking face of earth is like the articulation of man's spirit in the words stamped on the printed page. The book replaces the human body as the incarnation of the otherwise undifferentiated power of the human spirit. Body and book are the same, and vocal and written speech are seen as performing a similar differentiating function. (...) The traditional metaphor describing the body as the garment of the soul (...) is here transferred to the books men write (Miller 86)<sup>3</sup>.

In this context, the metaphor reaches the deepest level of negative implications for, in written form, the textual bodies seem not only voiceless, but in fact lifeless: "Any printed poem (...) is the corpse of its meaning, the spirit turned letter, mute marks on paper. The poem on the page is a dead body" (105). This negative interpretation of the medium's role in relation to the content it carries is a reflection of the powerful influence exercised on European thinking by the Christian doctrine, whose statement that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 *Corinthians* 3:6) encouraged the adoption of a view which privileged thought over words and gave precedence to ideas over text (Todorov 77), that is, the text's graphical incarnation or its codex format.

Regarding the field of literature, the most consequential result of this way of thinking was visible in the definition of the literary text as an immaterial product of an autonomous author's mind, independent of historical circumstances and of the medium which makes its circulation possible. In Wordsworth's words:

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<sup>3</sup> Both Miller and de Man's comments are inspired by those texts of Wordsworth's which overtly show his preoccupation with various forms of written language: epitaphs, monuments, memorial plaques or other forms of inscription, proving that even the most idealist of the romantic poets were not oblivious to the role of different material means in the embodiment of their visions.



poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquility gradually disappears, and *an emotion*, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is *gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind* (266, emphasis added).

In privileging the specific moment of interiorisation, when the creator allows its mind to become the stage on which the recollection of a previously felt emotion takes place, while concomitantly passing over the necessary phase of its externalisation on account of the imperfect renditions that the communicative means give of such visions, the romantic poets also express their view of the poetic product as the result of inspiration rather than composition: “when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet” (Shelley 656). However, the romantics’ effort to equate the mode of existence of the poetic work with a state of the mind was subtly brought into question in the contemporary work of Hegel, which formed “the philosophical counterpart of what occur[red] with greater delicacy in the figural inventions of the poets” (de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* 100). According to de Man,

The question remains, however, whether the external manifestation of the idea, when it occurs in the sequential development of Hegel’s thought, indeed occurs in the mode of recollection, as a dialectic of inside and outside susceptible of being understood and articulated. Where is it, in the Hegelian system, that it can be said that the intellect, the mind, or the idea leaves a material trace upon the world, and how does this sensory appearance take place? (101).

The critic believes that the answer is to be found in the Hegelian distinction between recollection (*Erinnerung*) and memorization (*Gedächtnis*). No matter what the romantic poets choose to believe,

the idea makes its appearance on the mental stage of human intelligence at the precise moment when our consciousness of the world, which faculties such as perception or imagination have interiorized by way of recollection (*Erinnerung*), is no longer experienced but remains accessible only to memorization (*Gedächtnis*). At that moment, and at no other, can it be said that the idea leaves a material trace, accessible to the senses, upon the world (108).

To put it another way, it is only when the poetic work attempts to expand its existence beyond the solitary world of the poet’s imagination by means of the concrete act of inscription that it acquires an objective existence which makes it perceptible to the public, both contemporaneous and posthumous: “Memory (...) cannot be separated from the notation, the

inscription, or the writing down of these names. In order to remember, one is forced to write down what one is likely to forget. The idea, in other words, makes its sensory appearance, in Hegel, as the material inscription of names" (102). It is in the same way that the poetic idea makes its appearance in literary works, despite the fact that the theoretical accounts of the romantic authors attempt to make abstraction of the actual process of recording. Nevertheless, the meditations on the role of the medium in carrying over the products of their imagination resurface at key points that J. Hillis Miller calls linguistic moments: "What I am calling the linguistic moment is the moment when a poem, or indeed any text, turns back on itself and puts its own medium in question, so that there is a momentum in the poem toward interrogating signs as such" (339). It is also at such moments that the metaphor of the body is invoked once again, this time as a carrier of positive meanings: "incarnate flesh and clothing have at least one property in common, in opposition to the thoughts they both represent, namely their visibility, their accessibility to the senses" (de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* 79) and the material manifestation of the text shares in these qualities. Its function is to grant visibility to the invisible in the poet's mind and thus to render it accessible to the readers. Such conclusions are drawn from the poems of a most ardent advocate of the fundamentally immaterial nature of poetry. Despite his aspiration towards the world of pure abstractions, "Wordsworth always found it difficult and frightening to imagine any state of disembodiment, even that of heavenly beatitude" (Miller 86). His preoccupation with the poetry of inscriptions reveals his realization of the fact that "In heaven we shall need neither book nor body, those garments of the soul, but as long as we are children of the earth we cannot go naked" (87), which is why "Man (...) must be divided into immortal being and those strange garments woven of geometrical or poetic texts" (87); in other words, "Man's naked spirit must clothe itself in the leaves of a book" (87). Although the book may be regarded at first as a corpse or a tombstone, it still maintains one redemptive quality since it also represents the only means of preserving the poetic vision: "the book (...) also protects man from death by giving him a way to stamp his image on matter. All poems are in one way or another epitaphs" (106).

Even if the romantics acknowledged more or less overtly the fundamental role of the medium in poetry, they continued to discuss the process of embodying ideas in terms of corruption and contamination. Their perspective diffused through the conceptual constructions of editorial theory and literary criticism and took root deeply in these fields:

In textual criticism, this attitude is implicit in the very strategy that distinguishes a text from the manuscripts in which it is imperfectly embodied; in contemporary literary criticism, it is expressed by the privileging of interpretation, that act that discovers in the poem a meaning that transcends both the words in which it is expressed and the historical context of its enunciation. It is an attitude that at least in part undergirds the entire literary enterprise and that has been an element of literary culture since the time of Plato (e.g. the *Ion* and *Phaedrus*). But it is also quintessentially Romantic, and certainly it is as enunciated by Wordsworth and especially Coleridge that it has entered into contemporary Anglo-American thinking in the form of New Criticism (McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* 76).

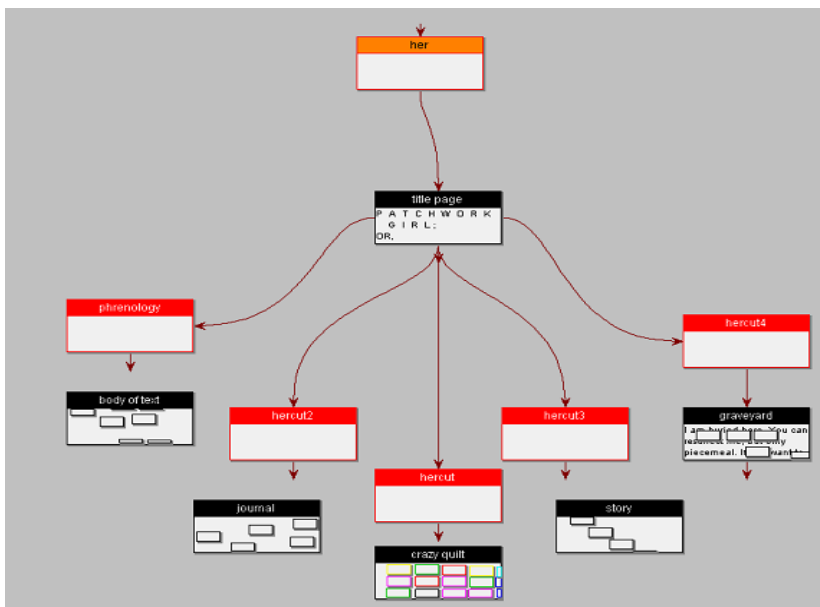
It is this limited perspective that forms the object of attack in recent studies on the textual condition informed by materially-oriented disciplines such as paleography, bibliography, sociology of texts, history of the book and others. First and foremost, they advocate a change of perspective according to which “these mediations are regarded as conditions of being rather than otherwise; limits, if you will, but limits only as the body is a ‘limit’ of humaneness” (103). McGann contrasts what he considers the communicative approach to textual materiality, which treats the bibliographical elements as redundancy or noise, with the poetic approach of artists like William Morris, for whom art owes its existence to the resistance in the materials: “But the redundancy, excess, and thickness of the textual condition are positive features in the perspective I am taking. They draw our attention to that quality of self-embodiment that is so central to the nature of texts” (*The Textual Condition* 14). He argues that the literary work should be conceived of as a physical object in the first place, whose various components “come first to the attention of our eyes and then of our minds” (*A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* 91). This change of perspective results in a more comprehensive definition of texts, which includes not only the linguistic but also the physical features: “all texts, like all other things human, are embodied phenomena, and the body of the text is not exclusively linguistic. By studying texts through a distinction drawn between linguistic and bibliographical codes, we gain at once a more global and a more uniform view of texts and the processes of textual production. Body is not bruised to pleasure the soul” (*The Textual Condition* 13-14). These debates concerning the (im)material nature of textuality take a new form in the discussions that accompany the development of the literary hypertext.

## 2. Patchwork Girl's body – hypertext as a hideous progeny

Written in *Storyspace*, one of the first and most complex hypertext writing systems, in 1995, *Patchwork Girl; or, a Modern Monster* by Shelley Jackson (or, as the title page indicates, by Mary / Shelley, & Herself) belongs to the first-generation of hypertext works, whose links with the textual space of

(print) literature become more visible in retrospect. Such early experimental enterprises, which have hardly any similar precedents to which they could relate, are bound to generate a considerable amount of self-reflection in an attempt to arrive at a self-understanding that would provide them with a clearly defined conceptual background. In the particular case of this hypertext, the meditation on its own nature is realised by means of the same age-old metaphor of the body that traverses the field of literature and of the neighbouring domains. Thus, the story of the reassembled and resurrected feminine counterpart of Victor Frankenstein's monster is also the story of this hypertext, which represents itself as a complement to Mary Shelley's book – a patchwork of discarded potential plots or excised fragments. The monster's arrival at self-knowledge mirrors the hypertext's progression towards self-conceptualisation.

*Patchwork Girl* is divided into five sections: *a graveyard, a journal, a quilt, a story & broken accents*. As the map of the links shows (see figure 1), one can identify a meaningful order behind the random way in which the five components can be accessed. These sections are preceded by images displaying different recombinations of the severed members of the monster's body. Each image (marked in red) – *phrenology, hercut2, hercut, hercut3, hercut4* – corresponds to a particular conglomerate of textual fragments (marked in black) – *body of text, journal, crazy quilt, story, graveyard*.



**Figure 1.** *Patchwork Girl*. Screenshot of the title page map.

The first pair – *phrenology/ body of text* – reveals the analogy that informs the system of links connecting the main units of this work: the hypertext is modelled on the physical structure of the human figure – each image is (at) the head of the specific body of text it introduces. It is the section entitled *body of text* that constitutes what Miller would call the linguistic moment of *Patchwork Girl* as most of the fragments of which it is composed have a self-reflective quality. The first lexia to which the reader gains access by clicking on the image of the brain map bears a self-referencing name – “this writing”:

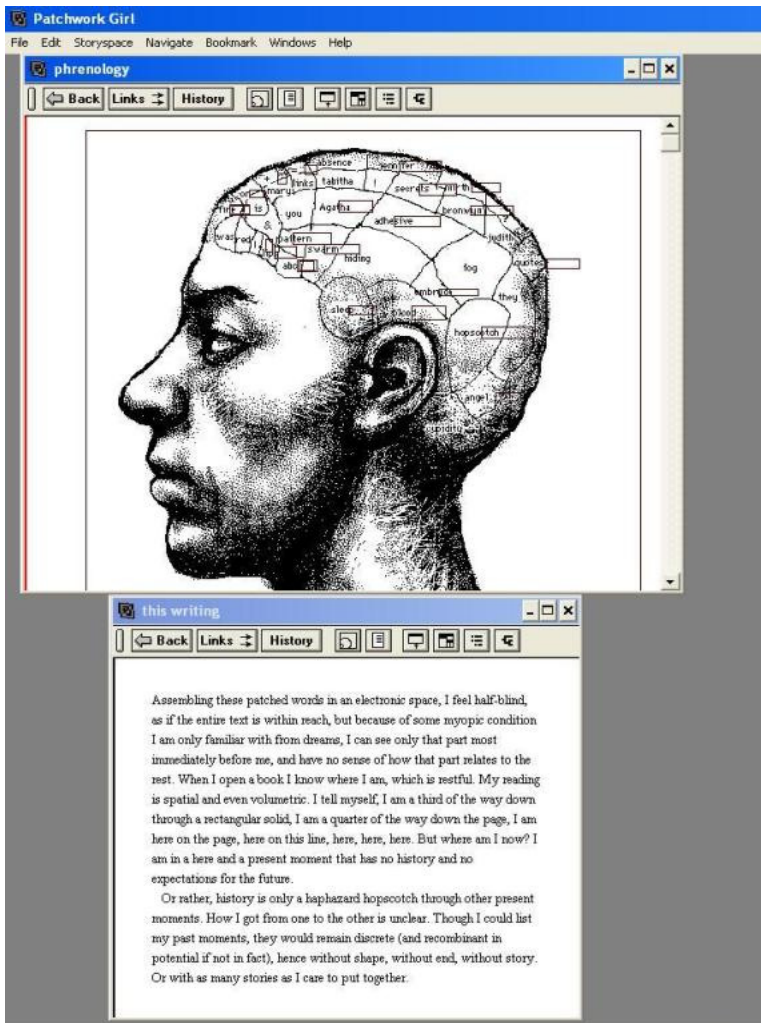


Fig. 2. *Patchwork Girl*. Screenshot of “phrenology” and “this writing”.

Assembling these patched words in an electronic space, I feel half-blind, as if the entire text is within reach, but because of some myopic condition I am only familiar with from dreams, I can see only that part most immediately before me, and have no sense of how that part relates to the rest. When I open a book I know where I am, which is restful. My reading is spatial and even volumetric. I tell myself, I am a third of the way down through a rectangular solid, I am a quarter of the way down the page, I am here on the page, here on this line, here, here, here. But where am I now? I am in a here and a present moment that has no history and no expectations for the future.

Or rather, history is only a haphazard hopscotch through other present moments. How I got from one to the other is unclear. Though I could list my past moments, they would remain discrete (and recombinant in potential if not in fact), hence without shape, without end, without story. Or with as many stories as I care to put together. (*this writing*)

This introductory fragment offers an accurate description of the sensations experienced by the readers whose text-processing habits were formed solely through interaction with print literature when first confronted with the unfamiliar medium of hypertexts. The description highlights the two immediate effects of the electronic mode of the texts' existence on such readers: the feeling of having lost the totalising vision but of having acquired in exchange a higher degree of liberty in the treatment of texts and the sense of moving in an immaterial environment, which also represent two key points frequently invoked by the theoreticians of electronic textuality when attempting to underline the specificity of the new medium. The necessity of defining this new system of text-organisation – the hypertext – finds in the contrast with its prestigious predecessor – the book – the simplest means to provide it with a distinct identity. This comparison results in a series of oppositions to which the incipit of *Patchwork Girl* already alludes and which will be further explored and expanded throughout its *body of text*: the pair book-hypertext subsumes, for a start, such distinctions as unity-fragmentation and materiality-immateriality, whose metaphorical counterparts are to be found, firstly, in the discussions about the organic unity of literary texts that for a long time preoccupied poets and critics alike, as opposed to the dismemberment that this hypertext claims for itself, and secondly, in the age-old debate over the issue of the embodied or disembodied nature of literary texts, in which printed texts and hypertexts seem to take different sides: the first aim for an angelic condition in accordance with a mindset which gives precedence to the soul over the body, while the second, which appear to have arrived at a state of immateriality, argue that they are not entirely independent of their material foundation. It is this system of oppositions and the complementary contrasts they engender that will form the object of the present analysis.

## 2.1. *Organic unity vs dismemberment*

When the ancient art of rhetoric chose the human body as a term of comparison for its own body of words, this relation was established in the name of a specific ideal of wholeness, perfect coordination of parts and beauty, which explicitly excluded everything that was incomplete, disproportionate, out of place, in one word, monstrous<sup>4</sup>:

The comparison between a literary composition and the fitting together of the human body from various members stemmed from ancient rhetoric. *Membrum* or “limb” also signified “clause.” The re-establishment of the connection between painting and writing in Neoclassical pedagogy focused again on Quintilian’s dictum that the artist must put together an integrated corpus from detachable elements, smoothly flowing from one section to another. Dandre-Bardon taught that “thoughts are the limbs of a composition and must be distributed over the canvas with a just economy.” This basically phraseological skill – gliding from corporeal syllables to sentences – averted the creation of tortuous somatic monsters whose parts did not belong. (...) The limbs of syntax were distorted and set in foreign places where they did not rightfully occur. (*typographical*)

*Patchwork Girl* is aware of this long-standing tradition and chooses to take a place within it by reversing its values and assuming the monstrous condition:

I am like you in most ways. My introductory paragraph comes at the beginning and I have a good head on my shoulders. I have muscle, fat, and a skeleton that keeps me from collapsing into suet. But my real skeleton is made of scars: a web that traverses me in three-dimensions. What holds me together is what marks my dispersal. (*dispersed*)

In fact, a retrospective look at the way in which the old principles were put into practice would expose their illusory character. For instance, when Percy B. Shelley lamented the fact that the poet cannot rely entirely on inspiration but also needs to resort to composition, he concomitantly revealed that the aspiration of the (romantic) poem towards the coherence and unity of autonomous organisms represented an ideal rather than an

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<sup>4</sup> This point is clearly made in a supplementary specification that Quintilian adds after his elaborate comparison between human and discursive appearance: “So let us give as much attention to Elocution as possible, so long as we understand that nevertheless nothing should be done *for the sake of* (emphasis in the original) words, because words were invented for the sake of things, and those words are most acceptable which best express our thoughts and lead to the effect we want in the minds of judges. *They must of course produce speech which arouses admiration and delight, but an admiration very different from that which we bestow on monsters* (emphasis added), and a delight derived not from unseemly pleasure but from pleasure combined with honour and dignity” (323-325).

achieved aim since, on closer inspection, the poem revealed itself to be a patchwork of authentically inspired fragments intermixed with passages whose main purpose was to link the former together: "The toil and the delay recommended by critics can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connection of the spaces between their suggestions, by the intertexture of conventional expressions" (656). While the romantic poets and their successors strove to attenuate the differences and to give their texts the appearance of an organic whole or of a well-wrought urn, the hypertext defines its specificity precisely in terms of discontinuity through the words of its spokesperson – the female monster: "I told her to abort me, raze me from her book (...). I laughed when my parts lay scattered on the floor, scattered as the bodies from which I had sprung, discontinuous as I myself rejoice to be. I danced in front of the disassembly" (*she*). The hypertext recovers these remains of flesh and prose – "unused lengths of venous plumbing, fatty trimmings, deleted passages, a page that blew off a table" or parts that "Percy himself excised [because] he found [them] blemished" (*basket*) – and incorporates them into its own structure without attempting to hide the scars. Its core element does not consist in the order it mimics outwardly, but in the system of links that is at its basis, which holds in store the possibility of a freer – and implicitly less unitary – way of exploring its lexias.

A second difference, closely connected with the first, resides in the way in which the book and the hypertext relate to notions of legibility and error. The poets' efforts to create self-sufficient texts, which are equalled, and probably surpassed, by the literary critics' strife to provide perfectly coherent interpretations that leave nothing out, reflect a basic human need for giving or for making sense, for bringing the surrounding world under the control of meaning. Consequently, the mechanisms that serve as textual carriers are expected to provide unimpeded access to the message and by the same token to make themselves invisible. Having been the dominant mechanism of this type for many centuries, the codex has perfected a variety of means to facilitate the accessibility of its content. In fact, as recent investigations into the history of the book demonstrate, the structure at which it finally arrived originated in the totalising approach characteristic of the scholastic thinking in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries: it was at that time that the text started to be separated into chapters according to a general plan, which were further divided into smaller units – *partes*, *membra*, *quaestiones* or *distinctiones* and *articuli* – meant to register the gradual progress of a line of argument



(Melot 57). At the other end, the hypertext abandons this bird's-eye view, together with the restricting limits it necessarily sets, and encourages its readers to engage in a circuitous progress through trial and error. Once again, the hypertext takes the side of the monster: "our infinitely various forms are composed from a limited number of similar elements, a kind of alphabet, and we have guidelines as to which arrangements are acceptable, are valid words, legible sentences, and which are typographical or grammatical errors: 'monsters'" (*bodies too*). To put it differently, Derrida's distinction between book and text (18) may be reformulated in this context as the distinction between book and *hyper*-text. What this hypertextual arrangement reveals is something that poets like Shelley already intuited, namely that there is no essential totality which precedes the text and to which it can be returned once it becomes subject to dismemberment. Instead, its sectioning allows potential links to become visible. The web-like structure of the hypertext is actually the embodiment of this conceptual realisation:

When I take something apart that once seemed whole I make an unnerving discovery. You might think I am left with a kind of kit over which the dream of the whole hovers as reassuringly as the picture on the front of the box, whispering that the whole already exists, that I am not making something new and subject to accident but returning scrambled elements to an order they already yearn towards because it is their essence. That I am painting by number, I am pouring wax into a mold; I am filling up an abstract vessel with matter so the vessel may be visible to all. Instead, I find that the picture on the box has changed too. I see only a slew of colored bits.

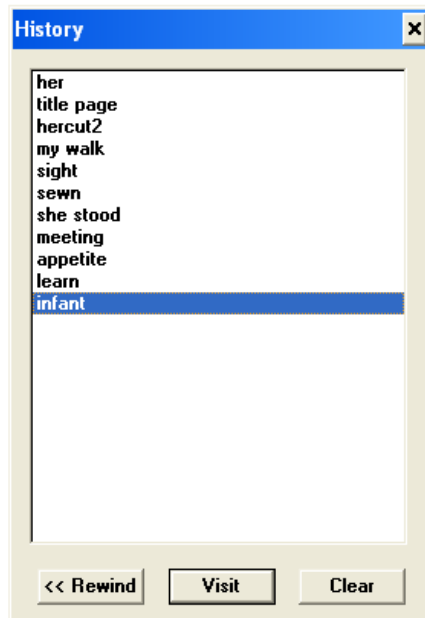
I prise the parts apart at the cleavage zones and discover no resistance; when I press the cut ends together they don't recognize each other. Chasms gape between paragraphs and between ideas, chasms I stepped across without looking down. I didn't know they were there. *Now when I want to join them again – not to restore their original wholeness, but to establish a relationship – I can't easily justify the link. That a head attaches to a neck and not a wrist seems less obvious when the pieces lie in a jumble on the laboratory floor, and there is no skeleton hanging in the corner to sneak a look at* (emphasis added). Even joined I feel the fragments swimming farther apart. The links hold, stretching with me, and I can still reel them in, but when I let them go again they begin immediately to drift. (*cuts*)

The third distinction that the hypertext invokes in order to dissociate itself from the book is the opposition between the chain and the web, between the linearity of traditional narration and its own manner of unfolding, which is unpredictable and selective, allowing the reader to skip, very often unawares, text links which may remain forever unvisited. Such practices can easily strike the ones accustomed to the established ways of literature as erroneous and may be relegated to unnatural experiments which must be exiled from its field: "We live in the expectation of traditional narrative progression; (...) a kind of vertigo besets us when we witness plot

developments that had no foreshadowing in the previous chapters; we protest bad writing" (*lives*). The structural characteristics of the hypertext, by contrast, favour repetitive regressive movements and actually oblige its readers sometimes to retrace their steps and start anew in the hope of finding a better itinerary or simply to see where certain paths lead: "but here where the spindly bamboo bridges of the links criss-cross the void (...), I run faster and faster over the quivering spans, dizzied by the echoes of my footsteps that rebound from far below me and from above until I doubt up and down and scuttle through a universe of sideways" (*flow*). However, this contrast is not to be understood in an absolute manner: when the hypertext proclaims its non-linearity, it does not argue for a radical and complete pulverisation of order and signification but rather for a relativisation of what seems an outdated way of interpreting the notion of wholeness, that is, as a unique, objective and all-encompassing vision of the textual meaning, which would represent the crowning result of the continuous and unwavering advance through a block of print from start to finish. The hypertext presents itself as occupying the middle ground between linear and chance progress: "I am not predictable, but neither am I random" (*think me*); "I am not the agent of absolute multiplicity any more than I am some redoubtable whole. I am a double agent, messing up both territories. I am muscular and convincing because I am whole; I am devious and an escape artist because I am broken" (*double agent*). Its wholeness has an unstable character, which makes it permanently prone to mutations: "Keep in mind though, that on the microscopic level, you are all clouds. There is no shrink-wrap to preserve you from contamination" (*hazy whole*).

The complexity of this anticipatory response to any queries the public may have about the nature of hypertexts leaves however one more question to be answered, more precisely, how accurate this self-portrait is. The oppositions on which it is based represent recurrent topics in the literature on hypertext. Their potential for ambiguity has very often turned them into bones of contention during the debates between media theorists and literary critics and theoreticians, who tend to mix their metaphorical and literal meanings (see, for example, Aarseth 2-5). Or, from a different point of view, is it possible that during the hypertext's search for a distinct identity, its discourse has inadvertently adopted the rhetoric of technological determinism (Aarseth 19), which circulates a fallacious paper-electronic dichotomy? The answer to these inquires may be found in the comparison between what the hypertext says about itself and what it really does.

Concerning its discussion of unity and dispersion, one may wonder if it is not simply the unfamiliarity with the hypertextual working system that prevents the readers from achieving a sense of totality. In the case of *Patchwork Girl* (at least), once they overcome the initial sensation of confusion, they can pretty easily learn to find their way through its web by repeated experiments and will notice in the end that the liberty of moving around is not absolute but, on the contrary, quite restricted. Moreover, the programme provides certain instruments that save inexperienced readers considerable time they would otherwise spend groping around and enable them to acquire a sense of perspective. Firstly, it keeps a record of the accessed links during a particular reading session.



**Fig. 3.** *Patchwork Girl*. Screenshot of the history of one reading session.

Secondly, it includes maps of each story section which display all the lexias that compose it and indicates the way they are connected.

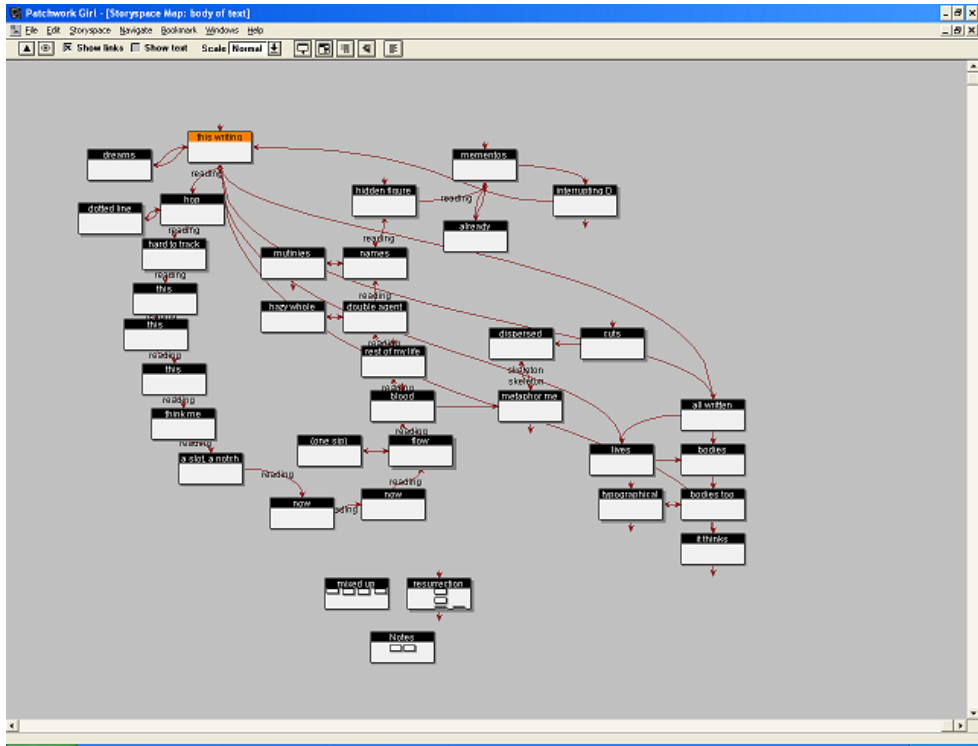


Fig. 4. *Patchwork Girl*. Screenshot of the *Storyspace* map of the section entitled “body of text”.

Using these hypertext maps is not very different from scanning through a table of contents in a book.

The second issue that the hypertext readers may raise regards the manner in which they should interpret the claim to nonlinearity, which can be seriously brought into question once they get accustomed to its mechanisms. For instance, even if sometimes the number of links that the readers may choose from can be as many as twenty-four, it is very often that on clicking on a fragment of text they are given only one option to follow. In fact, as Aarseth shows, such limitations are not necessarily attributable to the work itself, but are inherent in the design of the software used for their creation:

When Ted Nelson first coined the word *hypertext* in 1965, he was thinking of a new way of organising text so that it could be read in a sequence chosen by the reader, rather than followed only in the sequence laid down by the writer. However, since codex texts can also be read in sequences determined by the reader, what he in fact suggested was a system in which the writer could specify which sequences of reading would be available

to the reader. Later, implementations of such systems, for example, *Storyspace*, embodied this suggestion so fully that readers could follow *only* (emphasis in the original) the sequences laid down by the writer. Hyperfictions written in *Storyspace*, like *Afternoon* [or *Patchwork Girl*], do not allow its readers free browsing, unlike any codex fiction in existence. The reader's freedom from linear sequence, which is often held up as the political and cognitive strength of hypertext, is a promise easily retracted and wholly dependent on the hypertext system in question (77).

Consequently, the initial question must be reiterated: do such facts amount to the conclusion that this hypertext projects an illusory image of itself? On close inspection, *Patchwork Girl's* symbiotic relation with Mary Shelley's book as well as with other print sources enables it to bring out some of the contradictions that the theoretical discourse on literature has disguised behind its metaphors and at the same time to avoid the mistake of instituting absolute oppositions between the two media. The main outcome of its definitional enterprise consists in adding the required degree of relativism to notions such as organic unity or clear-cut progression from a definite beginning to and established end, which literary critics are inclined to treat as absolute due to their consecration through lengthy use, by means of a creative exploitation of the new media resources that mirrors the work of the contemporaneous deconstructive approach to literature. But it does not pretend to dispense with them completely; after all, *Patchwork Girl* is the story of a quest for identity which starts with an act of reassemblage: the scattered body parts collected from different corpses are stitched together to form a whole that would resemble a human being that could live a life of her own while concomitantly refusing to disguise her scars and trying to incorporate this hybridity into her notion of the self. On a functional level, far from claiming complete novelty, *Patchwork Girl* is aware that some of its characteristics emulate possibilities also existent in the codex. What it does next is to take these possibilities even further and to make use of the particularities of the new medium to give a literal appearance to features with which the texts in the typographical medium were endowed only in a metaphorical sense.

## 2.2. (Dis)embodiment or (im)materiality

The hypertext's identification with erroneous or superfluous bits – of body or literature, which, in an organic view, must be discarded, relegates it to an age-old yet marginalised literary tradition – the texts which enhanced their visuality by graphical means – for which the dominant theoretical discourse, instituted with the romantics, found no place in the literary system since they put on display what the romantic poetics, as it

was previously shown, tried to conceal – their dependence on the medium, with all the consequences that follow:

This basically phraseological skill – gliding from corporeal syllables to sentences – averted the creation of tortuous somatic monsters whose parts did not belong. Analogously, Joseph Addison (1672-1719) disparaged as the creations of false wit the use of obsolete words or barbarisms, rusticities, absurd spellings, complicated dialects, and the outlandish construction of poems made up of concrete objects. The essay on “True and False Wit” took to task “tricks in writing” and decadent signs of “Monkish” taste. These were evinced in the visual turning of one set of terms into another and resembled “the Anagram of a Man.” (*typographical*)

The hypertext seems to assume such consequences, most notably the inevitably distorting effect that the means of expression exercise upon the work as it first appears to the mind’s eye, as an intrinsic flaw of its condition:

The body could be said to be the writing of the soul. [It’s] expression, but also and inevitably [it’s] *misstatement, precisely because it is an expression, and must make use of material signs in all their imperfection, allowing them to garble the pure idea (emphasis added)* and go home on days off to their own unknowable lives in the kitchen of things (*bodies*).

But then it dissociates itself from this consecrated view: “This if you adhere to the traditional separation of body and soul, form and content” (*bodies*). In the perspective it adopts, the relation between form and content is one of mutual engendering. The meaning can be produced by moving both ways: from content to form or from form to content. As Hayles has shown (152), *Patchwork Girl* is one of the most illustrative examples of the latter case: it was the effort to understand how the constraints of the *Storyspace* medium (consisting of linked and nested rectangular boxes) worked that inspired the key metaphors of this hypertext – the graveyard, the quilt and, ultimately, the patched body. The fact that the reader accesses the text through various images of this body indicates an inversion of “the usual hierarchy that puts mind first” (Hayles 150) and points to one of the key conceptual changes resulting from the interaction with the new media – an integrative perspective on the means of communication and the departure from a strictly informational view postulating that these are simply channels through which the information passes unhindered. In sum, the linguistic moment of *Patchwork Girl* reflects *in nuce* the evolution of the critical thinking on literature as illustrated by the particular history of the body/text metaphor:

We are inevitably annexed to other bodies: human bodies, and bodies of knowledge. We are coupled to constructions of meaning, we are legible, partially; we are cooperative with meanings, but irreducible to any one. *The form is not absolutely malleable to the intentions of the author; what may be thought is contingent on the means of expression (emphasis added).*” (*bodies too*)

### 2.3. Conclusions

At the end of this excursion following the meanderings of a rhetorical figure, the question arises how this metaphor contributes to a better understanding of the conceptual issues raised with the advent of hypertext and how this knowledge compares with the theoretical investigations. In the first place, it provided a link with similar debates in the literary domain and served as a starting point for a comparative approach which brought the commonalities and differences into focus in a more objective manner. Secondly, it developed an awareness of the physical peculiarities of its environment which helped avoiding the pitfall of what Matthew Kirschenbaum calls medial ideology, namely the claim that digital texts exist in a purely immaterial world (39). Also, as a corollary to the extensive exploration of the metaphor of the body in *Patchwork Girl*, the hypertext reaches the conclusion that, ultimately, it is not the analogy with the human body that constitutes the best metaphor for approximating its own nature, but the metaphor in itself:

I am a mixed metaphor. *Metaphor*, meaning something like 'bearing across', is itself a fine metaphor for my condition. Every part of me is linked to other territories alien to it but equally mine. Shin bone connected to the thigh bone, thigh bone connected to the hip bone: borrowed parts, annexed territories. I cannot be reduced, my metaphors are not tautologies, yet I am equally present in both poles of a pair, each end of the wire is tethered to one of my limbs. The metaphorical principle is my true skeleton. (*metaphor me*)

Thus, on a metaphorical level, the hypertext inverts the place that the figures occupied in the ancient system of rhetoric and moves them from the marginal position of ornaments to the central position of structural principles.

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**CREATION, INTERVIEWS, MISCELLANEA**



## *Neutralité de la diction dans la performance Une année sans une autre de Virginie Balabaud*

LAETITIA CHAZOTTES\*

**Abstract:** The performance *Une année sans une autre* (*A year without another one*) acted by Virginie Balabaud addresses the intimate connection between History, Object and Absence. The reading of a World War II psychiatric patient's draft letters, a combination of silence and words, leads the artist to question the voice adjustability. From a neutral angle, Virginie Balabaud explores the relation between diction and dramaturgy: Does neutrality and minimalism reinforce the dramatic intensity? Virginie Balabaud conceptualizes the joint of vocal harmonies as time goes on. In this project, the tone is a vehicle of temporality, implying the perception of past, present and future. The artist intends to report obstacles lining her artistic path through a sophisticated scenery and using her voice as a tool.



**Keywords:** voice, silence, reading, performance, psychiatric hospital's archives, minimalism, time, absence

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Virginie Balabaud, alias Globuline, expose ses travaux depuis 1999 en France et à l'étranger. Son œuvre se situe à la frange du documentaire et de l'art vidéo. Son médium préféré reste la photographie qu'elle insère d'ailleurs dans ses films. De nombreuses performances, expositions, et installations jalonnent son parcours.

**Laetitia Chazottes:** *Comment est venue l'idée de votre performance Une année sans une autre ?*

**Virginie Balabaud :** J'ai effectué un travail photographique dans le grenier d'un hôpital psychiatrique en 2000, il s'agissait de photographier des objets intimes ayant appartenu à des patients hospitalisés entre la fin du 19ème siècle et les années 1975, date importante avec la construction de lieux de soins plus proches des habitations des patients. Ces services de consultations ont permis que les patients soient moins abandonnés dans des hôpitaux, loin de leur famille.

Parmi ces objets, j'ai retrouvé un paquet de brouillons de lettres qu'une jeune femme adressait à ses proches et parfois également à des médecins. J'ai présenté à de nombreuses reprises ces photographies d'objets, dont trois de ces lettres, dans des lieux d'Art en France et à l'étranger, sous la forme de diaporama ou en accrochage classique. En 2010, j'ai repris ces brouillons de lettres, j'en ai fait une retranscription, les ai remis dans le bon ordre chronologique, c'était un véritable travail d'enquête pour comprendre sa place dans la famille, ce que représentaient pour elles les autres personnes à qui elle adressait des lettres, j'ai réellement été percutée par sa tragédie et j'ai donc décidé de la partager en la présentant sous forme de performance par leur lecture en public.

**L. C. :** *Pourquoi avoir choisi de les lire ?*

**V. B. :** Ces brouillons apportent une lumière importante sur ce milieu psychiatrique totalement clos de l'époque. C'est aussi l'Histoire de la seconde guerre mondiale dont cette patiente témoigne à travers sa propre histoire, elle perçoit les murmures de l'extérieur par les récits de sorties des autres patients, par la réception de rares lettres ou visites, la jeune femme nous amène ainsi par touches le contexte du monde qui l'entoure.

Présenter ses brouillons sous forme photographique est certes intéressant comme restitution de trace, mais rendait la lecture très ardue car la jeune femme, par manque de papier, écrivait de manière particulière

en remplissant chaque centimètre de la feuille, une fois la page remplie, elle écrivait dans la marge de cette même feuille, il fallait donc tourner la feuille et se repérer parfois parmi plusieurs brouillons pour trouver la bonne suite. La lecture en diaporama ou en accrochage au mur était donc très fastidieuse et ne pouvait rendre compte du réel récit de vie de cette femme.

**L. C. :** *Comment avez-vous traité la voix ?*

**V. B. :** Le titre de la performance « Une année sans une autre » se rapporte directement à la temporalité et à la mort. La description de son passé, de son présent et de son futur forme le corpus de ses lettres :

- La jeune femme décrit son passé de manière très idéalisée où le soi-disant « bonheur d'avant » se serait brutalement brisé par la maladie.

- L'hospitalisation marque une rupture nette, un temps d'arrêt dans la progression de sa vie, il s'agit dès lors d'un présent enfermé dans une spirale morbide où une institution décide pour elle de son quotidien.

- Le futur est imaginé de deux manières, soit comme une libération avec un retour à l'identique dans sa vie passée; mais cette liberté ne peut être obtenue qu'avec le consentement familial qui permettrait de lever l'internement. Soit comme un vide abyssal, où son abandon à l'asile signe l'échec des liens affectifs la reliant au monde.

Le protocole de ma performance est simple et la mise en scène minimale car c'est une interprétation d'un texte qui n'a pas été écrit pour être incarné dans une parole vivante, ni pour être traduit visuellement. En tournant les pages, lettre après lettre et en déclinant chaque date de courrier, j'ai travaillé sur le passage du temps, je l'ai traité comme le constat d'un temps linéaire, froid, rigide, mécanique, répétitif, le spectateur se met dans la même position que la jeune femme et entre dans cet enfer de la succession en ne sachant pas, tout comme cette femme, quelle peut être l'issue des requêtes adressées à l'Autre. C'est le silence qui parle, le silence entre les mots.

J'enlève toute émotion dans ma lecture mais respecte les ponctuations, ce qui permet de reprendre du souffle et ainsi de mieux capter l'attention. Le texte est lu de manière non appuyée, avec peu de nuances. C'est une voix posée et très calme dont toute musicalité est ôtée, une diction aride, sans emphase. Ma voix, presque blanche ne l'est pas tout à fait, car je souligne systématiquement de manière légèrement plus tonique la dernière formule de tendresse ou de politesse adressée à l'Autre en fin de lettre.

Je tente dans cette performance que le timbre de ma voix, seulement, restitue la description rattachée à une date, ainsi cette tonalité neutre et

sans éclat ne met pas en avant un événement plutôt qu'un autre. Cet aspect un peu monotone n'atténue pas la portée, au contraire, car paradoxalement l'émotion du spectateur monte en puissance par le contenu de ce qu'il entend, y compris le silence entre chaque brouillon de lettre. Épurer au maximum matérialise le propos et amplifie l'impact.

**L. C. :** *Y a-t-il eu un travail de réécriture des lettres ?*

**V. B. :** La réécriture des lettres a été indispensable car il s'agit de brouillons, la jeune femme sautait parfois des mots, ne marquait pas forcément la ponctuation et surtout se répétait beaucoup de lettres en lettres pour signifier son quotidien aux différentes personnes auxquelles elle écrivait. Pour que le texte soit fluide, intéressant à être entendu sur scène, je devais à la fois retrouver et respecter la chronologie, souligner l'aspect répétitif et ennuyeux de la vie quotidienne en psychiatrie, et enfin faire comprendre qui étaient les différents protagonistes auxquels elle s'adressait.

Les lettres ayant été envoyées, seuls les brouillons ont été retrouvés, d'autre part il n'existait malheureusement plus les lettres de réponses mais je comprenais qu'elle en avait reçues à de très rares occasions, je pouvais en déduire la teneur au vu des nouveaux brouillons qui leur succédaient. Cette lecture devait offrir une compréhension de son histoire tout en respectant son style, celui-ci s'est d'ailleurs amélioré au fil du temps. Ses textes, bien entendu, n'ont pas été écrits pour être lus à voix haute ni représentés sur scène, je me suis accaparé quelque chose de sa sphère intime, d'autant plus qu'il s'agit de brouillons et non de lettres finalisées. Ses courriers étaient adressés à des interlocuteurs précis qui la connaissaient déjà, alors que sur scène, on la découvre au fur et à mesure de la performance.

**L. C. :** *Quel a été le dispositif ?*

**V. B. :** J'ai effectué cette performance dans trois lieux différents, il m'a ainsi fallu adapter le dispositif physique pour que ma voix soit mise en valeur. Les salles de taille moyenne du musée Fujak pour le festival d'Avignon et celle du Musée de l'Histoire de la folie et de la psychiatrie permettaient d'entendre la lecture sans ajout de technologie sonore, la proximité avec le public amplifiait l'aspect intime dégagé par la lecture. Pour la performance au théâtre du Gymnase à Paris, étant beaucoup plus éloignée des spectateurs, j'ai eu besoin d'un micro. Il existe une spécificité du travail de la voix en position assise, la respiration profonde est plus

difficile à obtenir et à équilibrer sur une longue durée et ce texte ne permet pas du tout de forcer la voix. Je délivre sur scène des manuscrits, c'est un passage obligé de l'écrit vers l'oral et je souhaite susciter l'attention du public sur l'histoire d'une inconnue.

Le contenu est très fort, ses lettres sont dramatiques par elles-mêmes alors j'ai choisi d'épurer au maximum la scénographie ; le dispositif est minimal tant sur le choix du costume, de la lumière, des accessoires, de ma gestuelle et bien sûr de ma diction.

Le costume se limite à une robe sombre très neutre, celle-ci se confond avec l'arrière-plan du décor, simple fond noir, ainsi lorsque j'allume une lampe de chevet posée sur une petite table, ne ressortent du noir que mon visage, mes mains, une paire de lunettes dont je m'empare posément et la lecture commence.

**L. C. :** *Etes-vous juste une voix ou y-a-t-il une implication en tant qu'artiste ? Où se situe-t-elle ?*

**V. B. :** J'ai travaillé cette performance artistique pour représenter un système spatio-temporel particulier, celui construit par une écriture née de l'enfermement. La voix de cette jeune femme était prisonnière, sa seule manière de la faire sortir d'une institution psychiatrique passait par l'écriture. Dans son désir d'écrire il y avait avant tout celui d'être lue, comprise, reconnue dans sa souffrance, et délivrée de cette hospitalisation forcée mais aussi certainement de manière plus obscure et moins consciente, celui de mettre du sens à ce qu'elle vivait dans cet état d'isolement du monde. Ses mots sont adressés à un autre mais cet autre reste le plus souvent trop silencieux. Ces brouillons sont rédigés dans la rage, la passion et avec l'espoir d'entendre l'autre en retour, le panel de ses émotions est large, elle passe par la souffrance, la plainte, l'incrédulité, parfois le chantage pour tenter de faire plier cet autre muet. Elle use de la prière parfois de la menace et se refuse d'être une condamnée. La traduction visuelle et auditive du calvaire de cette jeune femme est une mise en scène portée par une voix qui sort du noir et qui y repart.

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## *“My Mother, Irén Lengyel”*

DELIA ENYEDI\*

**Abstract:** Despite the fact that Irén Lengyel (1900-1980) was the greatest prima donna of inter-war Transylvania, public biographical details are scarce and often inaccurate. The present interview with her eldest son Gabriel Ilieș (b. 1936) provides an intimate account of her career, ended abruptly on charges of irredentism, as well as of her private life, enjoying the privileges of marrying into an aristocrat family and bearing the later persecutions of the Romanian Communist regime.

**Keywords:** Irén Lengyel, biography, prima donna, Transylvania.



Young Irén Lengyel, at the beginning of her career.  
(Source: Private collection of the Ilieș family)

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**Delia Enyedi:** *For someone who has not yet heard the name, what would you respond to the question of who was Irén Lengyel?*

**Gabriel Ilies:** To me and to my brother, she was first and foremost our mother. For everybody else, my mother, Irén Lengyel, was a woman of ravishing beauty... who could have had an even greater career if she had not uttered that ill-fated word... for she mastered singing, acting and dancing.

**D. E.:** *By "that ill-fated word" you refer to the famous moment of her saying the name of her country of birth on stage. Why was that such a risk?*

**G. I.:** You see, she truly was an extremely courageous young woman. In 1931, she was a prima donna of Hungarian origin beloved by the public, employee of the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj (the name of the city was changed in 1974 into Cluj-Napoca - A/N). She was performing in *The Bride from Hamburg* (*A hamburgi menyasszony*), an operetta with music composed by Zsigmond Vincze and lyrics by Ernő Kulinyi. Circumstances surrounding it had already been delicate, because of one particular verse that went "Hungary, you are beautiful and splendid" ("Szép vagy, gyönyörű vagy, Magyarország" - A/N). Now, you must understand that both Vincze and Kulinyi were Jewish. In the general state of anti-Semitism that accompanied the Hungarian radical political regimes following World War I, censorship immediately intervened and in order for the operetta to be staged the word "Magyarország" was substituted with "Meseország". So instead of the reference to Hungary, the verse suddenly referred to a fairytale land, a cloudland, thanks to the similar spelling of the two words. However, in the case of the Transylvanian Hungarian speaking theatres, the province shifting under Romanian authority after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, keeping this replacement of terms carried an additional stake, as it was forbidden for Hungarian artists to openly encourage the nationalism of their public. After all, only a decade had passed since they had suddenly found themselves as a minority living outside the borders of their native country. Despite all these circumstances, during her performance my mother chose to respect the original verse and praised the beauty and splendor of Hungary in front of the hall packed with audience.

**D. E.:** *So there is no doubt that her gesture was premeditated, but out of these two possible potential motivations behind such a dangerous decision what was her own?*

**G. I.:** Indeed, it was definitely a premeditated choice. As far her motivation is concerned, I can only speculate. She never discussed this episode of her career, at least not in front of us children. I don't know, I guess it could be both. She had been married before she met my father. I don't know much about that man, but I do know he was a Jew. Probably, it was also her desire to express devotion to her country of origin, but she was not a fervent nationalist. After all, at the time of this performance she was already happily married to my father, a Romanian. Maybe precisely due to all these facts, she must have been irritated by the absurd reasons of censorship altering the text of this operetta.

**D. E.:** *What were the consequences of her assumed act of freedom of speech?*

**G. I.:** The consequences of her bravery were immediate and extremely serious. Jenő Janovics, the director of the theatre, was forced to revoke her contract. At that moment, Irén Lengyel's career came to an end. But I don't think she had time to give it much thought, because she was charged and trialed on charges of irredentism. Just imagine, a thirty one year old prima donna becoming an enemy of the Romanian state.

**D. E.:** *How did she escape conviction?*

**G. I.:** It was the same Jenő Janovics who, while he was not able to save her career, testified in her defense and saved her. He was an incredibly educated man and, it seems, of great influence. My mother remained grateful to him up to the end of her life.

**D. E.:** *Would it be fair to consider Irén Lengyel's 1931 performance in The Bride from Hamburg the pivotal point of her biography?*

**G. I.:** Without any doubt! The two parts of her life revolve around that moment. Up to that day, she was a successful prima donna, starting with the day after she was a loving wife and mother, leaving the stage forever behind.

**D. E.:** *If we were to follow her becoming up to that day, how did Irén Lengyel built her prima donna career?*

**G. I.:** She was born on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 1900, in Rákospalota, a neighborhood of Budapest, as Lengyel Irén Karolina (in Hungarian, the last name precedes the first names - A/N), single daughter of a humble family. I think this aspect is very important to be known. Her father István was a railroad system employee and her mother Mária was a housewife. So there was no artistic tradition going in the family. They must have discovered her talent and agreed that she would pursue her dream of professional acting. After two years of study, in 1921 she graduated from the National Actors' Society's School of Dramatic Art.

**D. E.:** *Where did she make her debut and in what theatres did she play before coming to Cluj?*

**G. I.:** Since this part of her life ended before my brother and I were born, I don't have much information to complement the facts that she made her debut in Ungvár, nowadays a city in Ukraine, and performed in Hungarian theatres from Timișoara and Arad. For our family, what reenacts that period of her life are less the actual details, but the dozens of photos she left behind, displaying her graceful beauty costumed for different parts, whether alone or with her stage partners, or seated backstage receiving the appraisal of her public. That is how her children and nephews came to know Irén Lengyel, the prima donna. She herself did not used to speak much about those days.

**D. E.:** *In what ways did her life change after leaving the theatrical scene?*

**G. I.:** She had married my father, Victor Ilieș, before the end of her career, on 9 July 1929. He was the single heir to the wealthy fortune of an aristocrat family. At the time, the Ilieș family owned two mansions in Cluj counting a total of about fifty apartments, a summer residence in the village of Recea-Cristur (located forty five kilometers north of Cluj-Napoca - A/N), as well as extended pieces of land in the region. The main business they ran was located in that village and consisted of an industrial alcohol factory and a mill. So at least from a financial point of view, she had no worries.

**D. E.:** *It sounds like a charmed, careless existence.*

**G. I.:** Truth be told, for short periods of time it actually was. But the first tragedy that struck the family came early. In 1935, my mother gave birth to a child, whom my parents named Victor, after his father. Tragically, he died from diphtheria at the age of five, a disease with no cure at that time. The following year I was born, and in 1941 my brother followed, also named Victor.

**D. E.:** *How did your mother use to spend her days, what were her interests?*

**G. I.:** Her personality was quite different than that of my father. Without being harsh, his manner was rather reserved. Mother on the other hand was, as she had publicly proved, very outspoken, energetic and, of course, creative. She would go to great efforts to perfect the decoration of the houses the family owned. For example, in the mansion from Recea-Cristur she chose distinct colors for each of the eleven rooms. The reception room was red, the dining room was decked in mahogany and the children's rooms were all white. It was a place she deeply loved. During the summers spent there, she would wake up in the early hours of the morning and go horseback riding, inspecting the domain. Of course, that was a personal pleasure of hers, for there were two hired landholders. I still vividly remember them, Glück and Moskowitz, because it was them who warned my father of the gloom future that stood ahead of us.

**D. E.:** *How did the Communist regime intervene in the life of your family?*

**G. I.:** Ever since the Communists had subdued the political power in Romania, in 1945, their ideology casted a threatening shadow upon the lives of the wealthy upper class. Many chose the exile, as it was the case of Glück and Moskowitz who sold everything they owned and moved to Switzerland. We never heard of them again. But my father, an educated man, owning a Ph.D. degree in Law, could not conceive that any vicious measures could alter his social and financial status.

**D. E.:** *When did the Communist measures aimed at the wealthy citizens actually struck?*

**G. I.:** It was the infamous Decree 92 that was put into effect in 1950 by which the state nationalized private houses and lands. Overnight, everything we owned was taken away from us. We found ourselves being escorted in a horse drawn wagon to the nearby city of Turda, with just a suitcase of personal belongings. Once arrived, we were ordered to take up forced residence in the city of Aiud where we ended up living for years, in one small room, with our presence there being verified on a weekly basis.

**D. E.:** *Did your family suffer additional persecution, as it was the case of many illustrious personalities wrongfully imprisoned?*

**G. I.:** Oh, yes. I remember many sleepless nights haunted by the fear that the agents of the Securitate (the Romanian Communist secret police - A/N) would barge in and take my father to another session of questioning. But he was never imprisoned. He was lucky to have one huge advantage. He never ever got involved into politics. In the end, they could not charge him of anything and dropped his case. It's interesting they never speculated on mother's so-called irredentist act. They probably did not know who she was, being identified as Iren Ilieș. But that doesn't mean we did not suffer. My father, the former aristocrat, was forced to earn our austere living by tending cattle and swine. I often wonder what mental strength had prevented him from going mad, you know, being robbed of everything and humiliated in that manner...

**D. E.:** *What happened to your family's estates during the Communist period?*

**G. I.:** Well, the current state of the Recea-Cristur mansion is an eloquent example. Today, when one stands in front of it and looks down onto the village, little has changed. Peasant houses are still lined up on both sides of the main road. But if the person stands in the middle of that road and looks up to the small hill, the former majestic building that stood on top of it carries the derelict traces of being used for decades by the Communists as a stable. It almost seems like the Dodge automobiles, one red and one blue, and the Citroën pick-up truck that used to be parked in front of it, the exotic botanical garden, the swimming pool or the tennis court never existed.

**D. E.:** *Did your family benefit from the coming to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu, in 1974, and his first phase relatively moderate rule?*

**GI:** Not really. I mean, my brother and I were able to leave Aiud in 1966 and moved to the small city of Luduș, but this was possible due to being forced to undertake specific jobs according to the field of study we graduated, as it was the habit in those days. Obviously, this was not quite a privilege and had nothing to do with getting our confiscated assets back. Despite having to bear those difficult years of our life, both our parents encouraged us to look beyond the immediate future and get an education. Even as a housewife, my mother exuded a cultivated distinction and gave a lot of attention to learning to speak correctly Romanian and German.

**D. E.:** *Unfortunately, she did not live long enough to see all the estates being returned back to the family, after the fall of the Communism.*

**G. I.:** No, she didn't. She died on 16 January 1980, in Aiud. It was incredible how fast the sad news reached a significant number of people that attended to her funeral. They were not only relatives and friends, but also her admirers who had not forgotten her years spent on stage. My mother was buried in Cluj, in the Hajongard Cemetery, alongside her eldest son, where she rests under her married name, as Ilieș Iren Carolina.

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Irén Lengyel "seated backstage receiving the appraisal of her public".  
(Source: Private collection of the Ilieș family)

“MY MOTHER, IRÉN LENGYEL”



The burial place of the Ilieș family in the Hajongard Cemetery of Cluj-Napoca, where Irén Lengyel was laid to rest under her married name, as Ilieș Iren Carolina. (Photo Credit: Delia Enyedi)



## *Voice Rehabilitation and Voice Hygiene from a Phoniatrics Specialist's Point of View*

IULIA URSA\*

**Abstract:** This series of interviews with Doctor Rodica Pavel and Doctor Rodica Mureșan, both specialized in phoniatrics and active in hospitals from Cluj-Napoca, Romania, sheds some light on the nature of this medical field, as well as on how it relates to our daily life and on how associated diseases can be prevented and diagnoses and treatments can be reached.

**Keywords:** otorhinolaryngology, phoniatrics, acoustic analyses, voice, voice diseases, voice hygiene, voice rehabilitation, teenagers

**Iulia Ursa:** *What is phoniatrics?*

**Rodica Pavel<sup>1</sup>:** Phoniatrics is a supra-specialization of ENT (otorhinolaryngology) which investigates the voice from a medical point of view, by using regular consultation tools for this specialty and going farther with phonatory parameters.

**I. U.:** *What made you choose this supra-specialization?*

**R. P.:** In the beginning, in 1992, this supra-specialization something new in Romania. My mentor was Bogdan Constantin from the Bucharest University of Medicine; he was the founder of phoniatrics in Romania; later, I continued my studies in Scotland, Germany and England.

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**I. U.:** *How are the phoniatics schools abroad?*

**R. P.:** Given their economic options, they are way, way more developed, especially in research. Since phoniatics can also include patients with pharyngeal neoplasms, who, after surgery, lose their ability to speak, these patients have the chance at recovery and at social inclusion.

**I. U.:** *What should the connection between a phoniatics specialist and a performing artist be? Where should they meet and how should they cooperate?*

**R. P.:** First of all, we should be talking about team work, because phoniatics specialists can't do everything on their own. A team is needed, a team that should include a psychologist, a phoniatics specialist, a dramatic arts teacher, a vocal coach and a physical education teacher recommended for teaching the proper physical exercise. So you see, we're talking about a multidisciplinary approach. It's a specialty that requires successful multidisciplinary interaction.

**I. U.:** *Do you think that a performing artist can have a career without working with a phoniatics specialist?*

**R. P.:** Sure he can have a career (as it happened until now, in our country) because artistic qualities are not set by a phoniatics specialist; but performance improves when the artist works with a phoniatics specialist.

**I. U.:** *Tell us about the investigation you used in your thesis!*

**R. P.:** I focused on the study of vocal aerodynamics. It was something new in Romania, and some things have changed for the better now. I saw remarkable changes in phoniatics parameters from an aerodynamic point of view, but I could not find equipment good enough to advance my investigations.

**I. U.:** *What else is there in Cluj today, in terms of phoniatics?*

**R. P.:** There are two ENT physicians who also work in this field of supra-specialization, the only doctors apart from those in Bucharest, but they only have videostroboscopy equipment, and that's about it.

**I. U.:** *And what happened with the partnership with the Academy of Music...and the phoniatic center you were trying to start?*

**R. P.:** The partnership worked, the students benefited from curricular and technical study, but the project was left unfinished, because of the absence of funds.

**I. U.:** *What do you think is needed in the process of phonatory education for highschool students?*

**R. P.:** Team work and prophylaxis, because it is more difficult to establish performance and you cannot work with students that much; they are going through puberty and that is when the voice changes a lot.

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**I. U.:** *What is phoniatics?*

**Rodica Mureșan<sup>2</sup>:** Phoniatics is everything that refers to communication, voice, speech, hearing, verbal communication. It also works with children suffering from hypoacusis who need to be retrained to speak again with the help of logopedics.

**I. U.:** *What are the diagnoses and what treatment do you use?*

**R. M.:** In diagnosis, first we need to study the larynx with the help of a stroboscope. This is how we can see the vocal chords while the patient talks, the movement of the chords in regular light as well as in stroboscopic light, how they vibrate and the curling of the mucous membrane of the chords. This investigation allows us to see some subtle things that go unseen without the right equipment. Then we evaluate the voice. It is a perceptive evaluation that focuses on several criteria: sound intensity, fundamental frequency of the sound, and pitch. The voice is evaluated based on the patient and on his/her pathology.

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**I. U.:** *Who are the voice professionals?*

**R. M.:** There are more categories of vocal professionals. At the top we find singers and actors. Then comes the category of professions where a slight variation of voice has a big impact. This includes lawyers, teachers and clerics. Right after that, there is the category of professionals who are not affected by minor vocal problems, like physicians, and finally, the professions that have nothing to do with the voice.

**I. U.:** *What follows this first evaluation of the voice?*

**R. M.:** Well, there's the possibility of acoustic measurement. Some programs show the changes that I notice perceptively in the voice. Acoustic analyses are made on voice emission. We now have advanced technology and a program can make all the analyses. Such a program measures and records fundamental frequency, harmonics, fundamental frequency variations, intensity variations, the ratio between harmonics and noise. A phonetogram can determine the ambitus in piano and forte, which means it determines not only the ambitus as frequency, but also the dynamics of voice intensity. There are a few more analyses now, such as the sonogram and the spectrogram.

**I. U.:** *Looking at all of these analyses a specialist can do, what do you think the connection between a phoniatics specialist and a performing artist, an actor or a lyricist should be?*

**R. M.:** This should be a strong link. For example, I work with the "Gheorghe Dima" Music Academy, where I teach vocal hygiene to the students. I resumed this partnership this year, after a rather long break. During these lessons, I teach concepts of anatomy, physiology, and how to produce a voice. It is important that you know the rules of vocal hygiene, what you have to do to maintain your voice healthy, the techniques of vocal therapy, not necessarily for fixing vocal problems, but for improving the qualities and the resistance of the voice (flexibility, expressivity). And unlike the techniques the actor learns in stage speech classes, phoniatic techniques of voice therapy follow the function of the larynx, rather than the articulation. We don't focus on articulation, we focus on the correct placement of the voice, the proper use of vibration, of the larynx and of the resonators. We see vocal exercises from a different point of view.

**I. U.:** *Do you think a phoniatics specialist should use his profession to impose on the future of performing artists?*

**R. M.:** That would be too much. Before the admission exam, the candidates for the vocal pedagogy section are bound to take a phoniatics exam, but I've never seen a situation where there is a slight contraindication. There are other contraindications referring to congenital changes or acquired diseases that are incompatible with the activity of vocal performance. However, if we do encounter an intercurrent problem, we don't recommend giving up the artistic career. The candidate may suffer from functional dysphonia caused precisely by the effort to prepare for the admission exam.

**I. U.:** *How did you decide to study this specialty?*

**R. M.:** I think it was an accident, I vacillated between the phoniatics and audiology; and I got a suggestion, 'How about....?'. So I went to Bucharest, took a course, realized that I liked it...and I kept liking it more and more.

**I. U.:** *Did you have a guide?*

**R. M.:** Yes, absolutely. He was Dr. Constantin Bogdan; there was also my mentor, professor Emil Tomescu, who showed me the way into this field.

**I. U.:** *Could you speak of a tradition of the phoniatics school in Cluj?*

**R. M.:** This specialization was established only a little time ago as a separate specialization, as it used to be in the ENT's. Some physicians had concerns in the field. My colleague and I, I think, were the first ones who took an exam for this specialty, and the only approved phoniatics center is in Bucharest.

**I. U.:** *Reading your thesis I found references to a phoniatics center that works in partnership with the "Gheorghe Dima" Music Academy. Does it still exist?*

**R. M.:** It no longer exists as a center, but we striving for development, sand I think we've grown a lot lately, because I managed to expand our collaborations. We now collaborate with those specialized in logopedics. My Master's degree is in Psychology and Special Education. Speech therapists have dealt so far with voice problems and now they are becoming more



interested in handling voice problems, as vocal therapy should not be done by a phoniatrics specialist. Voice therapy should be done by a speech therapist or voice therapist. They are more specialized in the problems of articulation, in the education of children with hearing problems.

**I. U.:** *I've heard that there is a phoniatrics association in France, is there such an association in Romania?*

**R. M.:** There is no phoniatrics society in Romania; we are independent members of international associations. I'm affiliated with the Society of Laryngology. I didn't affiliate with the Society of Phoniatrics because they focus more on speech therapy, while the phoniatrics part is neglected. There is a group, "Pan European Voice Conference", which I really liked and I found myself in that group, because they have conferences with vocal pedagogy teachers, acting teachers, phoniatrics specialists and speech therapists. This was where I could really see myself; it focuses more on the study of the professional voice. These conferences are attended by researchers in the field of voice that try to understand, explain and objectify singing techniques.

**I. U.:** *Are you doing research work now?*

**R. M.:** We have a project for which we do not know whether we will receive funding: voice rehabilitation in laryngectomized patients. We conducted questionnaires to successfully validate "The Voice Handicap Index" in Romania. I was involved in the organization of the "International Day of the Voice"; I organized conferences addressing voice professionals for teachers. In other countries, it is considered absolutely mandatory to introduce the teachers to vocal training, because teachers are involvement in the same amount of work as an actor, and they do not benefit from any training. The impact on the teachers' voice is quite high, and it goes unnoticed. This year I was in Alba Iulia, where we organized such a conference, dedicated to teachers. 50 teachers attended; they were very interested and asked a lot of interesting and relevant questions after the presentation.

**I. U.:** *Is there a possibility of developing a phoniatric center in cooperation with the educational institutions which train performing professionals?*

**R. M.:** We are on track. We tied up our collaboration with the "Gheorghe Dima" Music Academy. I've had a consultation with the

participants at the admission examination, held a voice hygiene course, evaluated their voices in the beginning and decided to reevaluate them at the end so that we could track vocal performance progress. I organized my course so that it would have a highly practical applicability. I am interested in understanding how much knowing which muscle we use for respiration helps with phonation, or what kind of respiration helps with phonation. I organized my course so that it would have high impact from a practical perspective. You have to know at least that the vocal cords are oriented from front to back, and not vertically as I heard from other vocal pedagogy teachers. You have to know what happens when you rise to acute or descend to severe because you have to be able to use the muscles that make the transition from chest voice to head voice freely. You have to know that there are muscles that need training just like any other muscle of your body.

**I. U.:** *What should performing art teachers who work with teenagers emphasize, considering the fact that they also have to take care of their voice?*

**R. M.:** They have to consider the fact that their voice is changing; here, things get delicate. It is likely that they also study singing, since an actor at that point has to have developed skills in a number of fields. Because the voice is changing, the larynx is more fragile and therefore their voice power and stamina are reduced. Moreover, because of those changes, the voice fluctuates, especially in boys. Girls do suffer from a voice mutation as well, even if it is not obvious. It decreases by a few tones (for boys it can decrease by a whole octave). It is really important for them not to burden themselves. Excessive vocal effort affects the voice, regardless of age. I have many teenager patients, not only from the music school, who have artistic potential and willpower. It is a delicate period, more delicate than when they are in college (because they start to be mature and serious). It is important for them not to show off. This is actually the most important thing during this period, because showing off can lead to serious health issues such as laryngitis and nodules. Slowly and gently, while trying not to yell or talk very loud. Boys get nodules not because of crying, but because of shouting too loud when they are 5-6 years old. In time, because the vocal cords ligament only develops during puberty, those with small nodules may see them disappear without complications. Unfortunately, those with bigger nodules need surgery, which will eventually leave a scar. The method of recovery is relevant, yet the surgery methods are not. The idea is that if a scar appears, due to the vibrations of the vocal cords, that person may not be able to go on with their musical career; or at least they could

require a year off. Also they should not smoke. Anyone who wants a career in this area should give up smoking, and also understand that smoking and this career are incompatible. The reason is that smoking irritates the larynx.

**I. U.:** *Is the book<sup>3</sup> that you published in 2010 to be user's manual for voice professionals?*

**R. M.:** I think it is a guiding book, a book of recommendations. It includes medical information, as well as information for the vocal professionals who don't have medical knowledge. From my point of view, one needs to know the organ with which they are working, just like a pianist studies for a year the pieces that make up a piano. I am an adept of prophylaxis. I intend to write a second book, a more applied one. We've evolved, nobody teaches you based on intuition or on how they feel anymore; well, at least not in the West. There are scientific studies that show the optimum way to open your mouth, how to place your voice and have maximum amplitude. Such details really matter.

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<sup>3</sup> Mureşan, Rodica. *Reabilitarea și igiena vocii*. [Voice Rehabilitation and Hygiene] Cluj-Napoca: Alma Mater, 2010.

## *Reflections on Body and Voice as Elements of Intercultural Dialogue in The King's Speech*

OANA POCAN\*

**Abstract:** This paper proposes an approach of *The King's Speech*, a famous 2010 movie by director Tom Hooper. The main focus is the question of the voice and of the theatrical therapies able to cure speaking disorders. The power of the spoken word is also emphasized here through the analysis of the discourse delivered in front of the nation by Prince Albert. The perspective is comprehensive, because voice is regarded as a main part of the body: it cannot be "brought to light" unless the body is brought to life, with its muscles and bones, in its most delicate movements.

**Keywords:** voice, body, acting, speaking disorders, therapy.

"In the past, the king needn't have but look respectably in the uniform and not fall off the horse. Now we must invade people's houses and ingratiate them. This family has been reduced to the lowest and most primary of the creatures. We have become actors". George V (played by Michael Gambon) states the above in the film *The King's Speech*; a statement also applicable to the impact that the culture development of media technology (radio, television) has had even on the most conservative institutions, like the one of British royalty. Thanks to the appearance of sound film and to radio practice, a new world of sounds and noises becomes available. Acoustic means stand for a viable form of reception, giving the spoken text an unmistakable shape through rhythm, escalations of tempo, tones, accents, while also revealing the performer. Because "vocal performance is also, in its way, an interpretation" (Olaru, and Năstase).

*The King's Speech* captures a moment in the history of British royalty when, just because of the need to adapt and assimilate media culture to royal conservatism, prince Albert (Colin Firth), the future king George VI

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of England, deals with a major problem of image because of stuttering<sup>1</sup>. The problem is that, "we are not a family, we are a company". Because of media technology, the king cannot remain a formal image anymore, he must also become a voice. This is the Prince Albert's main difficulty. Although he has all the skills of a leader and of a worthy royal representative, stuttering incapacitates him and lessens the degree of authority in front of his people. Although many attempts are made to cure his stuttering by classical approaches, no viable outcome is reached. Prince Albert's impasse and the despair of not meeting the criteria attached to the image of royal authority make him accept another try: Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush), specialist in "speaking disorders", "unorthodox and controversial" methods. Logue is an Australian amateur actor, who has found his calling in life by helping persons with speaking disorders by methods and techniques of actor training experimented with good results on "those poor young people [who] had blocked their scream from fear. Nobody listened to them. My job was to give their faith again in their own voice (...). Everything I know, I know from experience".

The film captures the relation created between the prince – as royal representative - and Logue – as middle class representative –, as well as the approach to the treatment of Prince Albert's disorder, in a historical context that requires a strong and incorruptible image of the Royal House (the beginning of the Second World War and the country's imminent involvement in the war). Hitler's and Stalin's oratorical art influenced and manipulated entire nations, which meant that Prince Albert ought to get over the sole disorder that flawed his image and the possibility to reach the souls and minds of subjects 'from the country and across the ocean', whom he must ask to face the sacrifices of waging war in the name of justice.

We can say that *The King's Speech* is a film about **voice** and about **the power of the spoken word**. The spoken word has an unusual power. It triggers emotions, sensations, ideas, and thoughts in the listener; these, in turn, lead to action. The way we speak says a lot about us. It tells of our identity, personality, character. To speak in public, to give a speech means control and self-assurance which can be obtained only by exercise (practice) and technique.

The two men meet in Logue's office. Fine psychologist and expert in human anguish, Logue will help the Prince understand his disorder, the result of some childhood trauma, and the possibility to overcome it. But in

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<sup>1</sup> Stuttering = disruption of elocution characterized by hesitation, jerky repetition, awkward pauses and even complete obstruction of the faculty of articulation.

order to do this, first, an atmosphere of confidence must be created, one where social barriers, class differences are to disappear; Logue's 'castle', these rules are essential: "I can cure your husband. But in order for my methods to be efficient I need trust and absolute equality. Here, in the privacy of my office. No exceptions". "The mechanical difficulties" the prince has when he must give a speech or talk in public can be solved by "physical exercise and tricks", but they will "solve only the surface problem" as long as the trauma/psychological blockages that started them aren't solved, as they will alter the energy transmitted.

There Are words between the voice and the body that tries to convey meaning (...) to find a way to fill the words with energy-meaning. Energy. Yes, it is a problem of energy. This energy full of meaning, which in its turn, fills the words, is the sound vibration which is born (...) to transmit the meaning; there must be the energy to fill the words, the energy-word, energy-voice, energy-body-voice, energy-body-voice-word must be applied. (Brook 70-71)

When he guesses that Prince Albert suffers from some emotional blockage that hinders his verbal skills, Logue asks him, at the first appointment, to recite Hamlet's famous monologue while listening to music in the headphones. While reciting, Logue records him on disc (with the help of "the latest invention in America" - the Silverstone phonograph) aware that "A prince's mind knows for sure what his mouth does", but also that the human body reacts to music. In all nations, cultures, rituals, music has a purifying role, reestablishing the inner peace. The body feels, hears, and answers to musical stimuli. Music orders and mobilizes, it works together with the human body, becoming an expression of our soul, impressing the senses. Music acts as activator. Rhythm has the power to train and to control movements. The action of listening to music is not only auditive and emotional, it is also motor action: as Nietzsche would write "we listen to music with our muscles", and "Michel Foucault suggested that the therapy value of music lies in the transformations it produces in the body. They are divided in particular specific movements, induced by music and pleasure sensations. These produce a state of peace of pressures by regular vibrations. By the specific unity between body and soul, man engages in a journey of harmonization" (Avram 151-152).

Albert's skepticism regarding Logue's method of treatment will be defeated when he listens to the disc and realizes that he can speak freely, without stammering.

By associating exercises specific to the actor's body and vocal training with psychological and speech therapy (overcoming speaking disorders by song or by chanted talk, which gives independence and fluency to speech etc.), Logue will manage to reset the balance between Albert's inner world (thinking and feeling) and the outer world (body and voice- vocal emission).

**Voice** is part of the body and it cannot be "brought to light" unless the body is brought to life. In order to give life to the body<sup>2</sup> it is necessary "to develop his agility, to master his muscles, to tame his body. It is necessary that personal impulses grant the real rhythm". "To create your own dance, to release your own score, this is the purpose of training where technique targets the development of live impulses of a body which is not only a plastic instrument, but a living body". Jacques Leqoc said in the volume *The Poetic Body*: "(...) it would be absurd to pretend to separate the voice from the body. Each gesture has a vibration, a voice (...). To speak is to make a gesture: (...) I launch my voice in space, I try to reach a goal, I talk to reach somebody from a certain distance (...) the gesture, the breathing and the voice are accomplished together". (81) Prince Albert's entire treatment targets all the blockages and the elimination of fear. "Push-pull, climb-fall- [are] actions which draw in the sensitive body certain physical circuits where emotions, feelings, conditions and passions can be found" (Ibid.), "repeated movements result in stimulating the inner energy, making you more sensitive and conscious as a person" (Oida, and Marshall 64).

We are actors on the stage of life; we play our parts. There are parts we play in our life, but we play them in other people's lives, too. Parts that we choose or that we end up playing according to the choices that we make. The past chases us to a certain extent and it defines us, but at the same time it can create obsessions, difficulties to being who we are. To leave the past behind, in order to be in the present and become in the future, is a choice; it is not always a simple choice, but it is a possible one. In this regard, the scene from the park is relevant, when Logue tells Albert that he can be a king, "the poisonous words" triggering his outrage in the prince as, "The identity or feeling of individuality shapes better by what you reject or by contrast with what you refuse to identify with (...)". (Goglează 412)

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<sup>2</sup> In her study "Grotowski și Barba: pe calea teatrului-dans. Între teatru și dans: antrenamentul actorului grotowskian" (*Grotowsky and Barba: On the Path of Dance-Theatre. Between Theatre and Dance: the Training of Grotowski's Actor*), the author, Monique Borie, analyzes the training technique of Grotowski's actor. (See Borie 95-100.)

Grotowski's ideas regarding the actor and the director and the relationship between them can also be applied to the film *The King's Speech*, because Logue appears as a director who shapes and coordinates the actor (Prince Albert) and, thus, prepares him for the role of his life. By following the aforementioned comparison, we can say that Prince Albert – as an actor – “reveals himself by sacrificing his most private part – the one which is not made for the eyes of the world” (Grotowski 21). He must be able to eliminate all “the disturbing elements in order to surpass all imaginable limits” (Ibid.). At Logue – just like at a director – “Being warm is essential – an understanding of the human contradictions, as man is a creature who suffers and who is not to be despised” (30). Logue's “warm opening” (so necessary when work with an actor is involved) allows Albert to show himself in all his privacy, “to make the most extreme efforts without being afraid that he is mocked or humiliated”. In the end, Albert – from a man “governed by fear”, inhibited by his own speaking disorder, will become “a mature and self-possessed man” and “will be a really good king”, as stated by a satisfied Logue.

The recovery of his voice and the fact that he is aware of it (the scene from Westminster Cathedral) obviously contribute to the (re)construction of Prince Albert's own identity, as well as the social and political one. “The consciousness of a symptom, which has been persisting for years or since childhood, raises besides strictly pathological problems also a problem regarding the changes made by the consciousness in the personality structure which has integrated this ‘adaptive answer’. Thus, the symptom tends to become a component of the feeling of identity.” (Goglează 416) In fact, Logue's role is to bring to light a nation's leader who must rule a quarter of the world's population. Logue will show Albert who he is in fact, by teaching him self-confidence, by showing him how to control his emotions, how to come out a winner from the battle with his own fears.

Theatrical practices that are used and assimilated as treatment techniques in the pathology of communication, by borrowing and integrating the technologies specific to the media as well as to royal traditionalism, a subject's acceptance and ascent to the rank of personal adviser and friend of the royal family, and the voice of royal authority that speaks to a multicultural empire are important intercultural elements we can identify in the film.



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## **PERFORMANCE AND BOOK REVIEWS**



## *Secret Lives in The Valley of Astonishment*

**Performance review: *The Valley of Astonishment*, written and directed by Peter Brook and Marie-Hélène Estienne, a 2014 production of Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris, UK Premiere: Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, June 11-14, 2014  
With: Kathryn Hunter, Marcello Magni, Jared McNeill  
Musicians: Raphaël Chambouvet and Toshi Tsuchitori**

The most recent Peter Brook, Marie-Hélène Estienne and Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord production, *The Valley of Astonishment* (premiered in April, 2014) began its UK tour in Coventry, at the Warwick Arts Centre, where it was present from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, before setting up camp, until the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, at London's Young Vic Theater.

The performance takes as a starting point the 12<sup>th</sup> century Persian poem, *The Conference of the Birds* by Farud ud-Din Attar (Attar of Nishapur), in which the reader is invited to accompany the birds of the world in their journey of initiation across seven valleys – from the “Valley of Quest” to the “Valley of Poverty and Annihilation” - in search of a king. The poem, which Peter Brook successfully adapted for the stage in 1979, is symbolically present here, as the directors suggestively give the production the title of the sixth valley which the birds have to go through in their quest, and they do so in order to portray a different type of initiation journey, a journey into the fascinating realm of the human mind. This is not Peter Brook's first such “journey”, but rather a continuation of his 1993 *The man who...*, an adaptation of Oliver Sacks' 1985 bestseller *The man who mistook his wife for a hat*. The current production brings to stage characters that see the world through *synesthesia*, a neurological phenomenon which determines patients to perceive words and letters as colors, and as a consequence, as one character puts it, “when you enter the Valley of Astonishment you are bewildered and stupefied”.



**Photo 1.** Kathryn Hunter (Left), Jared McNeill (Center), Marcello Magni (Right)  
in *The Valley of Astonishment*  
© Warwick Arts Center, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

In a minimalist setting consisting of a few chairs, tables and a light-colored square stage carpet in the middle, the kind of “empty space” which Peter Brook audiences have grown accustomed to, with two live musicians (Raphaël Chambouvet and Toshi Tsuchitori) on one side and three very good actors moving effortlessly from one character to the other, the performance is an interesting incursion into the lives of individuals struggling to come to terms with their unique way of perceiving the reality around them. The play centers on Sammy Costas, grippingly portrayed by Kathryn Hunter, a former journalist for whom her incredible memory proves to be both a gift and a burden. How does one stop the mind from storing every piece of information that life throws his or her way? How do you prevent the mind from constructing a parallel, and at the same time,

powerful, palpable reality of connections, sounds, colors and images, which tends to become more real than reality itself? The performance does not desire to offer solutions, rather focusing on the questions and the quest. We witness the characters as they try to come to terms with their affliction, we accompany the doctors and scientists, helpless, yet appearing very confident, as they are able to set a diagnostic, but incapable to offer medical treatment or any other kind of solutions. At one point even, the doctors (played by Marcelo Magni and Jared McNeill) who document these manifestations of the mind begin to have doubts whether they are indeed helping their patients. As useful as their scientific work is, it seems unable to provide immediate solutions to the condition of their patients. “You are a phenomenon”, one doctor tells Sammy Costas, and this statement proves to be more of a verdict than anything else. Losing her job as a reporter, the character, the “phenomenon”, finds refuge, albeit for brief period, in the world of entertainment, only to find out that the repercussions are irreversible. Every piece of information she is asked to memorize as a performer on stage is forever stuck and materialized in her mind, thus adding to her personal drama.



**Photo 2.** Kathryn Hunter as Sammy Costas in Peter Brook’s and Marie-Hélène Estienne’s *The Valley of Astonishment*

© Warwick Arts Center, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

Sammy Costas is not the only such story presented on stage, although it is the central and most poignant one. Two other stories of personal struggles with similar illnesses are briefly presented. Effortlessly switching between several roles, both Marcelo Magni and Jared McNeill portray individuals which had to find ways of understanding, accepting and living with their medical conditions. Marcelo Magni's character tells his doctors (in this case played by Kathryn Hunter and Jared McNeill) about his inability to sense his own body, a disease known as proprioception, while the character played by Jared McNeill associates the letters of the alphabet with colors. They are stories of personal struggles, of learning how to live with such illnesses, without being completely subjugated by them.

*The Valley of Astonishment* does not desire to offer any answers, does not present solutions, but rather it aims to be an incursion into the infinite realm of the human mind, bringing together a series of stories that emphasize, through extreme situations, the limitlessness of, in Peter Brook's words, "the mountains and the valleys of the brain". And it is the search that is central to this production, a search which is both personal – each character's drama –, scientific – the doctors who record both the manifestations of the illness and their patients' individual struggle – and, at the same time and equally important, public – thus involving, observing and relying on the audience's active or passive reactions. This last aspect is even more intriguing as it tests the immediate reactions of the spectators of the performance, thus managing to offer a general pattern of the audience's reactions when faced with such strange "phenomena". In this respect, the scene towards the end of the performance in which Marcello Magni plays a one-handed magician engaging the audience in his card tricks is essential in understanding, and experiencing first hand, how, in the case of Sammy Costas' mnemonic stage act the audiences might have responded. Is her drama relevant to the spectators, or are they more concerned with the peculiarity, the strangeness of a character that is there solely to entertain them? *Mutatis mutandis*, do we stand to wonder why the magician in front of us only has only one hand, are we interested in his personal drama, or is this "detail" lost, irrelevant, in the wider context of the entertainment act? This is of course, for every spectator to discover.



**Photo 3.** Marcello Magni as the magician in *The Valley of Astonishment*  
© Warwick Arts Center, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

One thing is certain: *The Valley of Astonishment*, well-constructed and remarkably performed, remains in your mind long after you leave the theatre hall. It makes you wonder, opens your eyes to the infinity possibility of the mind and, at the same time, determines you to question your own relation to the world around you. It is, in Peter Brook's own words from his *Statement of intent*, a journey "into new and unknown territories through people whose secret lives are so intense, so drenched in music, color, taste, images and memories that they can pass any instant from paradise to hell and back again. (...) As we go forward with our feet firmly on the ground, each step takes us further into the unknown".

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## *Snap & XMM from YKM – Images of Reality*

**Performance review: SNAP. A Create.Act.Enjoy production, 2013. After Eric Bogosian. Directed by: Cristian Pascariu. With: Diana Buluga, Mihail Onaca.**

**XMM from YKM. A ColectivA production, 2011. After Dorin Tudoran's *Eu fiul lor. Dosar de securitate*. Directed by: Gianina Cărbunariu. With: Paula Gherghe, Mădălina Ghițescu, Rolando Matsangos, Toma Dănilă. Visuals: Ciprian Mureșan.**

By paraphrasing Andy Warhol, we agree that America is a utopian material and the substance of the American Dream can be found within "Coca-Cola" - an affordable product for everyone which has the same taste for the nation's president, for Elizabeth Taylor and for the ordinary people. America - an area of simulation and simulacrum, terms understood in a *baudrillardian* manner, whose suburbs are dominated by supermarkets, is the picture of the perfect life and the universe of consumerism.

As an anticipation-driven model, the hypermarket (especially in the U.S.) precedes congestion and it facilitates it, whereas the traditional market was in the heart of the city, a place at the intersection of the village and the town. The hypermarket is the expression of an entire way of life that has led to extinction not only the village, but also the city to make room for *agglomeration*. But its role goes beyond *consumption* and the objects in it do not have a specific reality: what prevails is their serial, circular, spectacular articulation, which is the future model of social relations. (Baudrillard 58)

American culture is as fragmented as it is consistent and paradoxical. In today's America there is no longer room for interculturality, but rather for defining the concept of "globalization"; globalization has today a wide range of meanings: from the image of a compressed world, to that of a heterogeneous world, that has a common set of values which form an ideology or a capitalist equalization, because of the dominance of international brands and corporations which define us in terms of identity.

America means, above all, a utopia we all dream about at some point in our lives; a fragmented society of “the future” filled with naturalized individuals and whose past is based on the histories of each immigrant.

How can freedom of speech still be perceived when we are continuously monitored by statistics and messages, designed to draw our attention to a standardized way of life, in which the social networks and media create a parallel universe where hypermarkets represent the image of a capitalist existence? As far as culture is concerned, mass media represents a primary source for defining the images of our social reality and the most impactful representation of common identity. More correctly, it establishes a dominant order of rules, discourses, ideologies and capitalist values.

I would gladly defend your freedom of expression if I thought it were in danger. I would defend your freedom of speech if you told racist, frustrated, political or homophobic jokes just because they made you feel good! But no, you do this because that is what the audience requires. I do not think you can go lower. We are the *OMG-Generation* for which an acid remark has a higher value than the truth. No one has respect for anything and we celebrate that. People film themselves tormenting animals and post the videos on YouTube just for the views. Politicians today are anxious for a tragedy to happen so that they can exploit it for electoral purposes. I mean, why do we have a civilization if we are not civilized?

But what matters most is *Who we are*. We have become a cruel and vicious country. We reward superficiality, stupidity, wickedness and depravity. We have no common sense or decency. We do not have a sense of shame. We do not distinguish between right and wrong. The worst of qualities are admired and displayed on television. It's okay to lie and to inspire fear - as long as you make money from doing it. We have become a country of slogans, hatred – we are the country where stupidity is praised every four years. We have lost our kindness. We have lost our soul. What has become of us? We take the weakest men and put them under a spotlight and we mock them for our sole amusement. Nobody speaks anything. They just repeat what they see on TV, hear on the radio or read online.

When was the last time you had a real conversation with someone without them scrolling on Facebook or endlessly rubbing a touchscreen?

That's the problem of our generation. We do not enjoy anything anymore and we have quit living truly. We are too busy recording everything.

The final monologue of *Snap* comes as a conclusion for our society. A monologue that breaks convention, it puts the actors at the intersection between fiction and reality. We are no longer in the fictional universe of the performance, but in the “in-between zone”. A woman points a gun to a man's head, speaking to him about freedom and speech. The man with a gun pointed at his head can be anyone, the situation “concerns us all”. We come from a society in which censorship exists at all the levels of our lives,

and has now acquired the name of “political correctness”. We ask ourselves: is our life much different than that of our parents? Indeed, we have more resources, but the way we use them can either oppress or set us free. We have a freedom of choice that we are not entirely aware of.

*Snap* is conceived as a television show, oscillating between a *live* and *recorded* register, the studio being the link between all the sketches presented to the public: Pastor Phil and his “Inner Baby” theory, the nostalgic Junior, Mary Kelly, TV ads, The Psychologist’s Corner (couple problems), casting for a beer advertisement in Alaska, an actor and a fan and a life insurance agent.

An important moment for the show and the message it conveys is the “Ad Break”, repeated twice *live* in perfect detail. Brands do not just sell a product. They sell a possible dream come true for buyers. “Change your life” is the repetitive line of the ads. In *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, the artist recalls: “Some company recently was interested in buying my ‘aura’. They didn’t want my product. They kept saying ‘We want your aura’. I never figured out what they wanted. But they were willing to pay a lot for it.” (77)

“Aura” is the equivalent of the term “brand”, meaning a quality and a slogan that potential customers would like to be associated with. The casting director for the beer advertisement in Alaska says the following representative line: “We sell virility”.

Why are all these relevant for today’s Romanian society? Because after 1989, Romania joined the capitalist ideology, trying to forget its past, and became a hybrid community – we adopted a new form, on an unchanged background. This relationship between essence and appearance is specific for the contemporary Romanian society and this concept is also present in *Snap*.

As a means of representation, Cristian Pascariu, Diana Buluga and Mihail Onaca opted for a fully assumed, apparently simple, yet thoroughly difficult, minimalist method.

Based on texts written by Eric Bogosian, the two actors have made their own script driven by the belief that a playwright cannot provide a fully objective view on the suggested topics. Therefore, the entire team was involved in conceiving the script of the performance, a work strategy similar to that deployed during the rehearsals for *A toast with the Devil/ Un toast cu Diavolul*. “A playwright will never think the same way as his thousands of readers. The *ideal* reader is a reverie of the writer, on which he secretly relies, but in reality, he is the sum of thousands of reading identities.” (Popescu 170)

The methods of work used for achieving this kind of performances are to some extent based on devising theatre. Testing, recording, writing/

rewriting pieces of text, footage, choreography, combining multimedia elements with traditional means and then returning to them with a critical eye, all these are means for conceiving this type of performance.

The actors swap from one character to another, using only small pieces of costume and props: a hat, a scarf, shoes, shirts, glasses etc. The big challenge has been the ability to internalize a character, removing emotion and using external elements and little details which serve the character. Basically, the work was done from the outside to the inside, without relying on caricature.

There have been a wide range of analyses focusing on the modalities of obtaining comedy of situation and enlarging the public's empathy with the presented cases. "In terms of communication, theatre is a two-way process: from the scene to the audience and vice versa. It's an exchange place where the simple communication scheme – transmitter-receiver – is not designed as a one-way ticket: the message is transmitted, but it is also immediately replied to." (Popescu 166) In the case of alternative-theatre performances, communication is directly due to the proximity between the spectator and the actor. Even more, the setting is less formal (as compared to regular theatre halls), and thus the audience is more relaxed. The audience's receptivity and proximity may be a double-edged sword: they can influence the performance, either negatively or positively, and the repercussions can be seen with the naked eye.

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In 2011, Fabrica de Pensule, Cluj-Napoca, hosted the production *XMM from YKM* directed by Ms. Gianina Cărbunariu. The performance, which premiered at the Temps D'Images International Festival, discusses an innovative topic: the staging of a secret official document without the means of typical dramatization. I chose to present this performance, in the making of which I participated as assistant director, since it equally concerns the themes of renegotiating conventions, the "change" of character and taking of a clear position in relation to society, as it was the case with the production *Snap*, produced by Create.Act.Enjoy.

The intellectual from the East is a very harsh judge of everything that comes from the West. He was often disappointed and scorned cheap joys, which later gave him greater grief. The war made him more clear-sighted in terms of revealing appearances. He rejected many books which he had loved before the war, guidance in painting and music, because they all failed the test. For the work of human thought must withstand the test of brutal and immediate reality. If it fails, it's worthless. (Milosz 60)

What did freedom of speech mean in an era of dialectical materialism? What did leading a life within the normal limits mean when the authority considered it “bourgeois and Western”? How do we establish trust with people around us in a period in which the State impelled distrust in the individual next to you?

*XMM from YKM* is at the boundary between traditional theatre and *performance art*, where this becomes a fortunate combination. From the very title, a coding of hidden essences is established: XMM means a citizen faced with miles of NCSSA files, a history badly transcribed on tons of waste sheets.

The theatre space changes from one representation to the other, depending on the voluntary arrangement of the audience in the studio. In this situation, the actors must establish new relationships with the audience permanently.

From the very first step in the studio we reach a realm of conventions. The first one is that the spectators sit, at the suggestion of the actors, “wherever they want”. This creates the impression that the actors and the audience are on an equal footing. They even make presentations: “I’m Toma and these are my colleagues: Paula, Rolando and Mădălina”. Using their real names, the actors create an apparently civilian convention inside the performance. And, therefore, there is a certain distancing effect of the artistic act about to happen. “We have a director, a visual artist, but we do not have a playwright. However we do have a script. A particular scenario in the sense that it was not written to be staged, on the contrary, it was transcribed after it had been staged”, is a line said by one of the actors before actually assuming their parts. We find these breaking and interleaving conventions throughout the entire performance. We are confronted with a form of meta-theatre, a *mise-en-abyme* in which a scene is built up and deconstructed under the eyes of the spectator. The character itself (named either Dorin Tudoran, Nicolae Croitoru, D. R. Popescu or the Stenographer) arises before the public, under a so-called “hazard”. Roles are chosen by lot, because “no matter how much we tried to make up the ideal distribution, we failed”. Another convention used is that the sex of the characters is not important. Anyone can be any character and actors switch roles between them during the performance, so that by the end they all will have played all the parts in the play. So there are two key moments that become recurring themes of the performance: renegotiating agreements (which are announced by a simple signal within the text: “resume” or “change”) and role reversal (announced by the repeating line: “This was my best... next”). Regarding the construction of the characters and their

redistribution, they have a clear structure which is generally-valid for all who will interpret. To do this, visual signs defining each character are used, which aid the interpretation and are then passed on to another actor: a fur cap and a checked scarf for the character Nicolae Croitoru, a gray and red scarf agenda for D. R. Popescu and a video camera for the Stenographer. This last sign has a triple function. First, it is a defining sign for the Stenographer; the camera is the *eye* of the Secret Police, capable of seeing everything, but which chooses to see only what it wants, by skipping what is not in accordance with the "Party and State factors". In addition, it has a practical function: it transmits on the two panels the live scenes that take place, thus creating a hybrid between theatre and film (an overlay of conventions). This helps visibility (considering the fact that actors change their place around the room throughout the performance) and increases the dramatic effect of some moments, capturing details which would otherwise be invisible without the zoom effect of the camera. The sign is, somehow, linked to the presence of a microphone caught under the table. Its significance is very strong, driven by the fact that it captures certain phrases that are important to the System. The video camera and microphone are two powerful signs in the performance, suggesting a lack of intimacy, control and censorship, three of the causes that generated an ill System. The management sees and hears everything and influences the decisions and behaviour of the comrades.

Let us return to the moment where the audience sits as desired. This generates a new convention, different from one performance to the other: it becomes part of the scene taking place. In this case, language is reduced to its phatic function and the individual chosen from the audience comes out from his anonymous state for a few moments. Again, we are witnessing a new negotiation of conventions: the performers are at the boundary between actor-character-role, leaving ambiguity in this regard. There is also a moment of free improvisation, which leads us more into the sphere of performance art.

The most powerful of all these signs is the one that also has a great visual impact on the spectator as he enters the studio. The floor is full of messages written in chalk. Different types of handwriting expose different situations that refer to a corrupt society, bearing the title of a condemned nation. The audience steps on the phrases and the performance begins with the actors writing more messages, trying to fill the empty spaces. We can read a profound line: "We all bear the seal; half of Romania should apologize to the other half." These notes represent a cause, which is explained at the end of the performance. A quote from *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Camus summarizes the

structure of the performance: “the feeling of absurdity can strike any man in the face at any street corner. (...) The absurd is one man’s divorce from his life ...”. This is what Dorin Tudoran, the character of the play, is trying to do, driven by a lucidity which surpasses fear.

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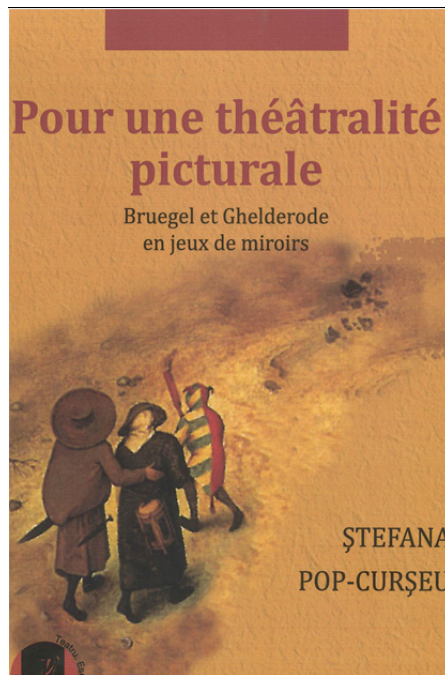
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## *Les mystères de la peinture et de la scène*

**Book review :** Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, *Pour une théâtralité picturale. Bruegel et Ghelderode en jeux de miroirs* de Cluj-Napoca, Éd. Casa Cărții de Știință coll. *Théâtre*, 2012



À la rencontre d'un théâtre de la cruauté que Michel Ghelderode développe dans la continuité des idées théorisées par Antonin Artaud, Ștefana Pop-Curșeu propose des pistes et des questions pour comprendre les sources dont s'abreuve l'inspiration du dramaturge belge. L'approche de l'auteure, qui croise des références à la peinture flamande, à des épisodes et des images bibliques, à des représentations théâtrales du Moyen Âge, avec un

sens aigu de l'imaginaire dramatique et religieux, aboutit à un livre passionnant sur quelques aspects de la visualité au théâtre.

Avant de commencer le voyage du regard à travers un labyrinthe miroitant fait de toiles, d'esprit et de chair, Ștefana Pop-Curșeu ouvre une porte à part sur l'œuvre du peintre Pieter Bruegel l'Ancien, figure majeure de la Renaissance nordique. En plaçant *Le Combat de Carnaval et Carême* (1559) en tête de ses premières références à la peinture du grand maître flamand, l'auteure entreprend un travail avec le paradoxe, qui est censé devenir une profonde méthode d'analyse. De la même manière, l'évocation du texte de l'Évangile sur les possédés sauvés par Jésus-Christ, qui a permis aux démons d'entrer dans les corps des porcs, rappelle l'heure baroque du diable qui, à côté de l'exubérante fascination pour le divin spécifique à la Renaissance, crée le cadre contrasté nécessaire à la compréhension du théâtre de Michel de Ghelderode. Le dramaturge belge, un familier des représentations flamandes et des fêtes moyenâgeuses, non seulement pour des raisons qui tiennent de la géographie, mais surtout à cause de motifs imaginaires intimes, est confronté de cette façon avec ses maîtres et avec les images qui l'ont poussé à la création de son univers qui, dans l'histoire du théâtre, reste encore bien particulier.

D'ailleurs, le dernier niveau de ce livre ne se clôt pas avec une simple analyse de la participation de la peinture à la genèse de l'écriture dramatique ghelderodienne, mais on nous propose de plonger dans les matérialités qui s'associent dans les œuvres de Bruegel et de Ghelderode. Cette démarche nous paraît inédite vis-à-vis d'une histoire tout autant burlesque que tragique de l'humanité, racontée en images par les deux artistes.

Dans le premier chapitre, en s'appuyant sur les considérations de Georges Banu, Mikhaïl Bakhtine ou Jelle Koopmans, Ștefana Pop-Curșeu nous rappelle que les cieux peuvent signifier non seulement la profondeur infinie de la grâce divine, mais aussi un dur plafond par lequel l'Homme semble avoir assez souvent été gêné. Le miroir orienté vers les deux grands territoires de l'éthique chrétienne, le Bien et le Mal, dévoile la gourmandise qui caractérise les représentations de l'Enfer, si chères à Ghelderode. Ce côté grotesque prononcé nous conduit vers la consommation et le macabre,

qui font l'objet de la séquence suivante, intitulée *Le triomphe de la mort*. La sombre apparence du tableau de Bruegel, qui a inspiré le nom de cette section, est reprise dans les couches internes des textes ghelderodiens, notamment dans les didascalies des pièces comme *La Ballade du Grand Macabre*. Dans cette partie du livre, Ștefana Pop-Curșeu réussit à faire le portrait du grand personnage de la mort et de l'univers qui l'entoure, plein d'angoisse mais aussi de fascination pour le riche spectacle funèbre. Les connexions entre les tableaux de Bruegel qui envisagent ces aspects et le théâtre de Ghelderode apparaissent évidentes là où l'imaginaire du grand maître flamand fait usage de l'esprit théâtral émané par la présence visuelle de la mort et, de l'autre côté, là où le dramaturge belge songe au trompe-l'œil du monde physique, à l'éphémère humanité et aux profondeurs terribles des textes de l'Apocalypse.

Après avoir décelé les particularités qui réunissent les éléments d'un théâtre de la mort chez les deux artistes, l'auteure passe à l'étude du calvaire qu'un tableau comme *Le portement de Croix* (1564) de Bruegel fait surgir dans la dramaturgie de Ghelderode. Les sources d'inspiration du dramaturge, attentivement poursuivies dans les pièces et dans les précieux *Entretiens d'Ostende*, souvent cités dans ce livre, dévoilent le processus de développement d'une esthétique des gestes tendus et des attitudes dramatiques dans les images scéniques de Michel de Ghelderode, aussi bien que leurs retentissements dans la logique de ses pièces.

Le deuxième grand chapitre s'intitule *Le « théâtre muet » de la peinture*. Il s'agit ici d'une fine démonstration de l'existence d'une véritable mise-en-scène, avec ses procédés spécifiques, dans la peinture de Bruegel. L'auteure pointe vers des repères, des signes, qui, dans plusieurs tableaux du vieux maître flamand, rendent compte de la théâtralisation appliquée aux scènes et à l'image elle-même. La compréhension de la configuration de l'espace pictural passe, dans l'approche de Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, de la problématique du cadre et de l'encadrement à celle de la mise en personnage et de l'utilisation du signe théâtral dont Bruegel s'avère être un maître.

Une fois démontrée l'existence d'un langage théâtral complexe dans les peintures analysées, l'auteure ouvre un troisième grand chapitre où la question qui se pose est celle des didascalies, de leur nature dans la continuité

du spectacle visuel bruegélien. L'intertexte des citations et références bibliques, théâtrales par excellence, auquel renvoient les tableaux de l'artiste flamand, rencontre de nombreuses couches de dramatisation offertes par la réalisation de l'image. Le procédé de *ré-actualisation* par la *re-présentation* des personnages, des scènes, des situations, des gestes et des discours s'avère être soumis à la multiplication à tous les niveaux de la visualité de Pieter Bruegel le Vieux. Ștefana Pop-Curșeu montre que l'exubérance déjà baroque de l'œuvre de Bruegel cache du vrai langage, possible à saisir derrière des voix présentes qui expriment des paroles en attente. À ce point, le théâtre muet des peintures devient encore plus évident. La frise gestuelle qui raconte des textes, proche de la récitation dramatique, aboutit à la récupération de l'acte d'énonciation pour celui qui regarde les images. Ștefana Pop-Curșeu insiste sur la qualité de spectateur de celui qui appuie par sa vue active ces représentations fondées sur un ample fond culturel, étendu dans le temps et dans l'espace, dont les éléments se parlent et se répondent dans la logique d'une perpétuelle réanimation, parfois touchant au vacarme.

Fort présents dans la dramaturgie de Michel de Ghelderode, les procédés mentionnés sont analysés aussi après leur amplification par des méthodes spécifiques à sa création. Afin de mieux faire comprendre cet entrelacement, l'auteure nous offre, à la fin de son livre, trois riches annexes : *Lecture des « Sept péchés capitaux » de Jérôme Bosch à travers le théâtre ghelderodien*, *La sorcellerie et la sorcière dans le théâtre de Michel de Ghelderode* et *Éléments farcesques dans « L'École des bouffons » de Michel de Ghelderode*. Elles traitent – par des études de cas attentivement choisis dans la création dramatique de Ghelderode – de la manifestation d'une théâtralité picturale, mise en vedette auparavant. En guise de conclusion, ces *Annexes* constituent des mises au point nécessaires, qui vont de pair avec la structure de cet ensemble interprétatif, appartenant aux territoires entremêlés de la peinture et de la scène.

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## *A Leporello on Singing and Speech*

**Book review: Georges Banu, *From speech to singing*, Cluj-Napoca, Koinónia, 2012 / Georges Banu, *De la parole aux chants*, Cluj-Napoca, Koinónia, 2012**



The 2012 edition of the Interferences Festival from Cluj was centred around the theme „voices in dialogue”, namely the relationship between theatre and music. The shows participating led the viewer to theatrical territories where sounds such as human speech and singing, musical instruments or even something as trivial as unsnapping a cork from a bottle became relevant parts of the performance. It was then fitting to have the

volume *From speech to singing* (edited by Georges Banu) launched in the festival's off-programme. Very similarly to the event's theme, this book studies the different states of speech and singing through the analysis of a series of representative shows, moreover, it captures the thoughts of several professionals from the realms of theatre and music, artists that have also participated in several works showcased at the festival.

The book was first published in French in 1995 and contained comments of participants of a research workshop held in 1994, a programme that discussed the relationship between speech and singing. The original edition also had an interview with Andrei Şerban which was completed in the Hungarian and Romanian translations with interviews with Ada Milea and Vasile Şirli, bringing the topic closer both geographically and theatrically to the readers.

A book of reverse interviews, *From speech to singing* has a set topic with varying commenters. The editor, Banu is the author of the preface with the same title as the volume itself, a text that attempts to sum up the whole volume, and co-writes a study that examines the works of Brecht and Grotowski. He is also the interviewer, hence a constant presence throughout the book.

On 119 pages, 32 directors, composers, singers, actors and theoretical professionals express their opinions through 22 comments. After Banu's opening text comes a series of studies analysing the history of speech and singing in theatre. It starts off with greek tragedy (*Tragedy and singing* by Jean Bollack who died just a couple of days before the book launch), Elizabethan theatre (*Songs and music on the Elizabethan stage* by Pierre Iselin), tragédie lyrique (*Tragédie lyrique: speech, recitation, singing* by Jean-Marie Villégier et Jacques Drillon), the genres of leçons de ténèbres and recitar cantando (*The recitarcantando* by Alain Zaepffel és Marcel Bozonett) and ends with a study on how music and singing worked in the shows of Brecht and Grotowski (*Two pioneers: Brecht and Grotowski* by Georges Banu and Ludwig Flaszen). Brecht and Grotowski made sound and singing an organic part of their art, offsetting the common practices of the beginning of the 20th century that preferred songs to be outside of theatre. Similarly to the study on Brecht's

and Grotowski's work, the book itself also showcases different artists who share their artistic visions and personal experiences on this extremely contemporary subject.

The next chapter is entitled *Beyond speech and singing* and discusses one of the main themes of the volume, namely the relationship between the sound uttered and the text brought to life. For this the commenters (Helene Delavault, Veronique Dietschy, Susan Manhoff, Vincent Leterme) share their experiences and thoughts regarding operas directed by Peter Brook.

Alain Zaepffel in his aforementioned text finds that one of the joys of singing consists in the possibility of being able to escape the constraint of making sense. Contrarily, the commenters on Brook's work see words and speech, respectively the restraint of the body and voice when singing as a possible take-off for a layered and organic meaning.

Similarly to the tension in theatrical acting, music also comes from the differences that define the succession of states and sounds. Banu says that music is „the existential lack of words“, whereas words stand for „the intellectual lack of singing“. His phrasing goes back to the desire formulated in the first sentence of the book: the wish to achieve a primordial state where tensions between speech and singing can be reconciled over and over again. In this state of origo speech, singing and the theatrical performance represent perpendicular spindles that form the basis of a frame of reference where all the other commenters sit. This is the same space where the lands of the Interferences Festival reveal themselves. The book's 22 comments become 22 spots that may be insufficient to cover this infinite area but that nonetheless hold relevant information about some of its landscapes.

For example, Ariane Mnouchkine talks about a cave (*A sound on the shore of songs* by Ariane Mnouchkine and Jean-Jacques Lemêtre) from which we can dig out a raw diamond that looks like a pebble stone and whose value we can only appreciate if burnished. In Mnouchkine's work music helps both the surfacing and the shaping of a given mood. Another example would be Jean-Louis Hourdin who says that „[...] the actor is a bag full of tears and if shaken, tears start falling [...]“ (*An actor shedding songs* by



Jean-Louis Hourdin) or Véronique Dietschy who, following Brook's instructions, starts swimming through the rehearsal room when singing.

The images and the comments of the book are both too much and too little. Too much because the quick fluctuation of the different perspectives made by the 32 commenters create a feeling of crowdedness; too little because those that have similar opinions repeat rather than strengthen each other. In turn, the contradicting opinions just talk over one another, lacking the arguments needed to unfold a real discussion.

Despite all of this, the volume stops various gaps. It was translated to Romanian and Hungarian (both published by the Cluj-Napoca based publishing house called Koinónia) and was launched at an international theatre festival, creating a common starting point at a place and time where Romanian and Hungarian theatre works side by side but mostly without any connection.

*From speech to singing* is not more, nor less than what Georges Banu and Michelle Kokosowski promise it would be in a half-page long introduction: the publication of a set of comments on a given topic. A polyphone but not a collective contemplation on „the shifts from speech to singing”.

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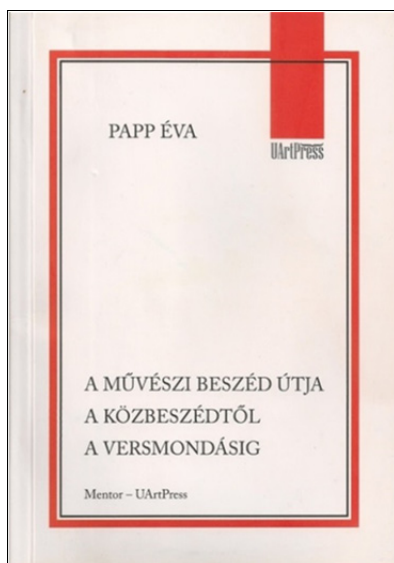
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## *The Art of Speech*

**Book review:** Papp Éva, *A művészi beszéd útja a közbeszédtől a versmondásig* (*Artistic Speech: from Ordinary Language to Recitation*). Târgu-Mureș: Editura Universității de Arte (UAT Press), 2011.



"Poetry is human language that relates to music, ancient music. Poetry is the most undiluted statement of man, ethereal flight, intense assertion of life. It is the fairest game. A dance around the ineffable, a summoning, a rare ritual, an artistic prayer." In her book, *A művészi beszéd útja a közbeszédtől a versmondásig* (*Artistic Speech: from Ordinary Language to Recitation*), Papp Éva cites Latinovits Zoltán, reknown for the creation of the modern, passionate school of recitation, who described in a few words all the things that are harsh and beautiful in recitation. The nearly 130 pages of the book explain why this harsh and beautiful things are worth the trouble.

The book has three main parts. The first one, "*Language and speech*", offers a short background introduction to the evolution of language from

gestures to contemporary communication; it makes then the transition to the description of speech. When we think, we do it by using language and we interpret what we hear by using language again. Nevertheless, inevitably, our speech distorts things. It varies based on one of two reasons: either we are not able to express ourselves properly or the audience understands/infers something else. Correct emphasis plays an important role in the decrease of distortion, because we can express different things by a mere shift of emphasis (stress), even if the word order is kept the same.

However, for accurate expression, the technique of speech has to be learnt. Contemporary theatre deals often with cases where the main focus is not on the text. More precisely, the emphasis is shifted to other elements of the performance, for example action, movement, music even though, as long as there is speech in the play, the spoken text remains a key aspect of theatre. The second chapter "*On the labyrinth of speech techniques and artistic speech*" describes thoroughly the instruments of interpretative speech. Additionally, it presents the way of speech from understanding to interpretation. The author refers to the music of speech, to instruments that reinforce acoustics, such as tone, tempo, and pitch, as well as aspects like intonation, word order, stress. Thus, we are able to deliver varying messages. In fact, these are aspects of which we make daily use. For the purpose of understanding, speech has to be articulated, specific thoughts and words should be emphasized. However, while in our everyday life we can rethink and alter what we say or ask for repetition when we do not understand some things, we do not have the same opportunity when on stage. This is why it is extremely important to have all stresses and pauses in the right place. My personal and teaching experience has shown me that an emotional approach of a poem is most convenient to a performer who is likely to subordinate technique and interpretation to emotions. Of course, the emotional connection with the text is important and is the ground of authenticity.

However, Papp Éva states very clearly that authenticity alone is not enough for someone to be able to love a text. In a first place, the actor has sometimes to play a role that does not match his personality; secondly, the emotional factor is neither still nor reproducible. Constant speech practice and breathing exercises, the intention to speak clearly and nicely are not pleasing to the audience alone; they also provide confidence to performers and they are as important as the proper familiarization with the text. The author emphasizes this is crucial particularly in the case of students, entrants, because some of them are still anxious and intense strain may be harmful to the spoken text if their training is not satisfactory. Additionally,

we must note that the purpose of artistic speech is different from the function of ordinary speech. The former does more than merely inform; it represents characters; through it, we may be given the performer's role in society and mentality. To achieve this, in some cases while using 'informal language' such as slang or dialect, the performer should be perfectly aware of language and speech techniques.

As a poem reader, I particularly enjoyed this book, because it emphasizes from the very beginning – from the title –, the importance of reciting poetry. I had to pause after I read the third chapter which discusses the relationship between an actor and a poem. The title suggested to me that more emphasis would be put on recitation and I thought non-actor performers like reciters would be approached. This book is mainly for future actors but, as Papp Éva states, it is not for actors alone. She believes recitation is a theatrical instrument, but she also gives examples of performers who are not actors, such as Tessitori Nóra, György Dénes or Brassai Viktor. At the same time, recitation undoubtedly has or can have an important role in the actor's training. The following excerpt has become (almost) an idiom among reciters: "a playwright writes pieces of art, a poet writes full ones". A poem may include tragedies and great joy; to express those, the wide scale of figures of speech is needed. As Papp Éva states:

Therefore, poetry can help unconditionally the actor's training. Empathy, emotional education, the ability to express feelings and to understand texts are prerequisites to recitation, and, of course, they are vital when applied in the theatrical environment. When he approaches a poem, the actor is prompted to make a proper analysis of the text, to carefully create a related interpretation, to establish tempo, rhythm, and dynamics, and uncover intertextual meaning. When this method becomes routine practice, it prevents the risk of mechanized performance. (91)

Basically, *Artistic Speech: from Ordinary Language to Recitation* is a guidebook. In the introduction, the author approaches the issue from a practical point of view and theorizes only when necessary. Papp Éva, assistant lecturer at the Târgu-Mureş University of Arts dedicated her book to acting students, but the offer stays valid also for anybody interested in the performing arts, who recites poems or hosts events, and, moreover, who goes on stage to perform by high standards.

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