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## ***STUDIES AND ARTICLES***

### **RHETORIC OF EVERYDAY: CRISSCROSSING ETHNOGRAPHY: TEXTS/DATA/TEXTS**

**MARIE-LOUISE PAULESC<sup>1</sup>**

**ABSTRACT.** Recently, rhetorical scholars have issued a call for critics to go beyond formal texts and to attend to the everyday of discourse. This call is of course in the spirit of the grand project that aims expanding rhetoric as a discipline, but more importantly, it stimulates interesting and challenging questions related to the “object”/“text” of criticism. In addition, this call is accompanied by a methodological invitation to engage in ethnography; when rhetoric crisscrosses ethnography, their notions of texts and data get unsettled.

**Keywords:** rhetoric, ethnography, everyday, vernacular, text, rhetorical artifact, rhetorical ethnography.

Let's say you are a communication student and want to study the everyday and the vernacular. Let's add to this that you mainly identify yourself as a rhetorical scholar, but because it makes more sense to access the everyday via ethnographic methods, you are also something of a qualitative researcher. Your fellow rhetorical scholars will ask you impatiently: what is your text(s)? In their turn, your colleagues in qualitative research will ask you eagerly: what is your data?

The received story of the rhetorical discipline in the US tells us that in the beginnings rhetorical analysis was mostly if not exclusively concerned with speeches. Dead white men's speeches, as the formula goes. The speeches-as-texts are, in some critics' view, self-sufficient units that exist out there and, moreover, should be studied one at a time, as, for instance, Leff does (Condit 1990, 331). Others, however, have taken issue with this perspective and started to draw attention to the constructedness of the text chosen for criticism. Most famously, McGee (1990) contends, “our first job as professional consumers of discourse is inventing a suitable text for criticism” (288). But

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for Dow (2001), even McGee is guilty of seeing “the texts as existing outside critics” (341) and contends that texts and contexts are created. She affirms “the text” as “a purposeful creation of the critic, not a pre-existing entity.” (341)

An additional point could be made against the speeches-as-texts, especially as their rhetorical analysis as ordinarily practiced lost sight of one of the traditional canons. For a rather long time, speeches have been flattened out as texts. Neo-aristotelian criticism and close textual analysis almost totally disregarded the performative, bodily aspects of a speech and its context. One of the most important aspects of the Greek and Roman rhetorical theory, delivery, has been forgotten. The rhetorical scholar has entered the routine of taking the speech as printed rather than considering it with all its complicated and provoking performative aspects. Thus the idea that the rhetorician is an armchair scholar who pursues his or her research interests from the comfort of the home.

The received story of the discipline also narrates the permanent expansion of rhetoric. That is, rhetoric is striving, albeit slowly but nonetheless rather successfully, to add to the fold of its analytical attention more and more “texts” or objects of analysis. In an enthusiastic use of the scientific language or from the desire to make it intelligible to the scientific community some might even call them “data.” From the speech, critics moved to two speeches, so that they can assess a debate; from there, they moved further to a body of texts pertaining, for instance, to a social movement. But then rhetoric moved on, further and further, starting to pay attention to all sorts of “rhetorical instances” or “rhetorical artifacts.” “Artifact” thus moves one away from the implication that only writing and speech can be expressions of rhetoric. More importantly, the choice has become less about “the thing” and more about its rhetorical quality. If there is something “rhetorical” about it, then it’s worth exploring. One way or another, pretty much all human activity has something rhetorical about it. More conservative folks will stick however to well-defined “artifacts.” The speech is, of course, included, but other “items” have been included on the list: performances (not only as in “theatrical”), films, cartoons, photographs, documentaries, postcards, graffiti, websites, archives, books, TV series, commercials, museums, memorials, landscapes, coffee shops, cook books...

For people doing research in the field of cultural studies, the list above might sound commonsensical. There is nothing extraordinary about it. For rhetoric people however, claiming legitimacy on some of these territories has been a careful journey where every new item had to be accompanied by an entire and well-composed argument of justification. If semioticians, for instance, have thrown themselves at images since the early 80s, visual rhetoric is a much more recent trend in the discipline.

Wayne Booth has tried to draw attention to the rhetorical significance of the image since 1970, when he stated in the Wingspread Conference: “The rhetoric of the image, reinforcing or producing basic attitudes toward life that are frequently not consciously faced by the rhetor, constitutes an enormous part of our daily diet of

rhetoric.” However, only in the early 2004 were Hill and Helmers able to state “a few years ago, we noticed a major shift in the field of rhetoric, one in which an increasing amount of the discipline’s attention was becoming focused on visual objects and on the visual nature of the rhetorical process” (i). But five years later, DeLuca and Wilferth (2009) complained about the fact that “systematic rhetorical accounts of images” are scarce and that “they remain at the disciplinary periphery of English and communication studies” (2).

“The place” in rhetorical studies had a similar destiny and it is even a newer trend than visual rhetoric. Perhaps contaminated by such disciplines as cultural studies or cultural geography, the interest in the rhetoricity of place is rather recent. The place and the space have only recently gained traction in rhetorical studies, especially because of their significance in exploring public memory. The museum and the memorial are interesting as places “guilty” of rhetorical invention. For a rhetorical scholar, the places of memories – as “material locales” – “assume their cultural significance by means of their rhetoric, as marked capacities for meaningfulness, legibility, partisanship, consequentiality, and publicity” (Blair, Dickinson and Ott, 2010, p. 33).

These are just brief considerations that aim to foreground the ways in which the “text” of rhetoric not only has expanded over the years, but it also has changed shape and location. From the plane text on the page to the museum-as-place is a long tumultuous way that is marked, among others, by arguments that permanently challenge the tradition while attempting to recuperate it and by significant crisscrossings with other disciplines like sociology, psychology, anthropology, cultural studies, performance studies or cultural geography. In addition, if once upon a time one could assume that the critic does not have to move from his armchair to get to the object of his/her criticism, a more mobile type of critic is today compelled to move and to experience, for instance, the places s/he writes about.

In the last couple of years, the rhetorical field seeks to stretch its purview even more. It does so by asking that we shift the focus from rhetoric that is in some sense already produced and consumed to rhetoric-in-the-present – “rhetoric as it happens” (Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres 2011). Instead of focusing on “formal texts”, the critic is invited to pay attention to the daily exchanges (Hauser, 2011). More than a shift in focus and more than a change in orientation from the past toward the lived present, this is also a different critical program for rhetoric. In constructing “a practice of examining vernacular discourse” (Ono and Sloop, 1995), the rhetorical scholar ceases to heed the discourses that are already privileged by their high visibility and large circulation and that are, to a large extent, staring us in the face, and starts to engage discourses/artifacts/practices/places that have traditionally remained in the shadow of the disciplinary eye. One is thus prompted to look into marginal discourses and to discourses that pass as “ordinary” or vulgar. Largely neglected until now by the rhetorical criticism, they are nonetheless rhetorically salient; they also hold the promise of an interesting critical project.



For Ono and Sloop (1995) to afford attention to the vernacular is to change the focus from the discourse of the elites to the discourses of oppressed communities. More importantly, it would mean to engage “in talk about everyday speech, conversations in homes, restaurants, and ‘on the corner’” (20). For these authors, however, to pay attention to the vernacular is not only to turn away from the powerful and well-disseminated discourse. It is also, more importantly, to devote one’s scholarly attention to “historically oppressed communities,” to “communities that have been systematically ignored” (2). Hauser (1999) explores the vernacular as a more general set of discursive practices that share several key interlinked characteristics: (1) they are reciprocal engagements outside institutional framings, (2) they constitute publics by virtue of their rhetoric character, and (3) they enter into and form public spheres (pp. 35-36). Hauser’s most significant point is the idea that everyday exchanges have something significant to “tell us about our public life” (280). His vernacular is not “infused with an awareness of disparate social power” in the way Ono and Sloop’s definition is (Cloud 2001, 213). Nonetheless, Hauser’s vision of the vernacular steers the critic toward the street corner and the coffee shop, away from the well-thought well-rounded public addresses pronounced on special occasions, and toward the impromptu incomplete conversations occurring as people go about their regular business.

While getting excited by the theoretical possibilities offered by the everyday and the vernacular, one should also be aware of some of their risks. First, because the notion seems somewhat self-evident, there is something murky about the everyday. Second, in using everyday there is a risk of either celebrating its oppositional possibilities or intensifying its oppressive character. Third, explorations of the everyday offer occasions for such questions as “whose everyday?” (Highmore 2002, 14) or “whose vernacular?” (Cloud 2001, 213), thus drawing attention that specific choices related to where we choose to locate “the everyday” and “the vernacular” has specific consequences for the critical project undertaken.

The everyday is a term with “fuzzy, ambiguous meanings” (Felski 1999, 15), which entices us to assume that we can find it everywhere. In a similar way, the vernacular (more so according to Hauser’s definition) can also be located in potentially countless situations. The ambiguity of “everyday” feeds on not only its taken-for-granted, common sense meaning acquired by constant usage in ordinary language. It also feeds on the multiple and often times contradictory scholarly approaches of the concept. Under the umbrella of the everyday, scholars have paid attention to a variety of contexts, focusing on a variety of phenomena. Highmore (2002) identifies, in the study of everyday, poles or tendencies that privilege certain aspects of the everyday: the particular or the general, agency or structure, experiences/feelings or institutions/discourses, and resistance or power (5). To privilege one pair of these dualities over the other would mean to miss the complex interplay between the two. Highmore contends that both Lefebvre and de Certeau have found, albeit very different, solutions for interweaving these dualities. However, he challenges scholars to think of Lefebvre’s (1991) and de Certeau’s (1984) efforts not as if they have “achieved an adequate understanding of everyday life” but “as working projects that have yet to be completed” (14).

The everyday thus presents a serious issue for the rhetorical critic: it “continuously evades definition” (Sandywell, 172); it is, no matter how hard we try to grasp it, “an intractable object” (Highmore, 3). Where does one go to find it? What are its incarnations? Ono and Sloop (1995) have argued that the vernacular discourse “is neither accessible in its entirety, nor is it discoverable, except through texts” (20).

However, more recently, rhetorical scholars have argued that if we are to advance a critical project that pays attention to the lively vernacular/everyday rhetoric rather than to the already recorded and well-circulated discourses, we should seek better and more appropriate ways to access it. Consequently, they call for the adoption of ethnographic methods (Hauser 2012; Middleton et al. 2011). What does it mean for a rhetorical critic to work with/in ethnography? What does it mean to construct a rhetorical ethnography?

Let’s say you not only catch the call, but also you respond to it. Once you have passed the threshold of ethnography, one no longer talks about texts (although as a student that mostly identify as a rhetorician, you will permanently hear the voice of “what is your text” question breathing down your neck). One talks about “data.” Glaser’s (1978) famous statement “all is data” (8) tends to complicate things. Sticking with one speech might sound better.

In the “Four Seasons of ethnography,” González (2000) takes Glaser’s dictum to its ultimate consequences. Concordant with the postmodern valorization of all sources of knowledge and information, she posits: “all that exists and occurs in a culture is data” (263). For her, insight can come from virtually anything – “from any academic discipline, from fiction, popular culture and the media, or other non-traditional fonts of knowledge and insight.” This can translated in an attempt of the researcher/critic to expose her/himself to as many experiences and contexts as possible and to consider virtually everything that comes his/her way as “worthy” of being “collected” as data. “All is data” is an imperative for not discounting anything (given that to record everything is almost impossible). In addition, “all is data” conveys a more general “*doubt* that any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal and general claim to authoritative knowledge” (Richardson 1991, 173).

In very general ways, qualitative research is “about collecting descriptive data, people’s own words, and people’s behavior (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). The main objective in the field is to gather rich data so that one can provide a “thick description” (Geertz 1973) that lands itself to substantive analysis.

The field methods (observation, interviews) lead to the development of transcripts, field notes and memos. One can also literally “collect” other materials such as pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, posters, objects, letters, books and so on.

So one’s “data” are all the types of “texts” that one comes across, such as conversations, interviews, pamphlets, posters, flyers, graffiti, photographs, streets, buildings, bodies, sounds, conversations, movies, songs, and so on. Some of these texts, like pamphlets and flyers, are literally collected, i.e., picked up and stored in their physical materiality. Others are usually recorded with a tape recorder (interviews,

sounds). When the ethnographer takes photographs, the frame of the camera creates the “texts,” the same way one creates “texts” when writing down observation notes or transcribing interviews. Smells, bodies, streets, behaviors, silences and sounds, feelings and “atmosphere” can be “collected” only in the writing - which is more than a simple “recording.” It is more akin to a process of translation, which is also interpretation. Which is, eventually, the creation of an/other text.

But because of the nature of everyday life – fragmentary and contingent – the data are not finished texts, but rather fragments. McGee (1990) noted that “rhetors *make* discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence” and thus the critic should understand texts “to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent” (279). Like McGee’s rhetor, DeCerteau’s everyday persons (1984) are *bricoleurs*, they make use of the discourses and objects they find around them in a creative way (xiii). In a similar way, Ono and Sloop (1995) argue that “vernacular discourse is constantly engaged in the process of pastiche, in constructing a unique discursive form out of cultural fragments” (23). But not only that the “texts” of everyday can be seen as fragments or that they are made of fragments. *They are* fragments because the “everyday practice is dispersed, fragmented” (Lefebvre 1987, 57) and also, more importantly, because in the everyday “nothing is ever completely realized and nothing proceeds to its ultimate possibilities” (Blanchot 1987, 16).

*They are* fragments also because they are incomplete, always in motion, always as a response to something and in their turn expecting a response. The “genres” of the everyday are the episode, the undecided conversation, the interruption, the incomplete phrase, the trial-and-error, the transient gesture, the fleeting image, the background music...

In addition, both ethnographic and rhetorical practice creates fragments. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) notes that “objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers” (387). But the same can be said about any other “data,” including conversation or gesture. The ethnographer cannot “lift” the entire culture s/he is exploring. S/he cannot even lift one second of lived life. In observing (no matter how richly), transcribing notes (no matter how detailed), and analyzing them, the ethnographer detaches, carries away, and then exhibits only a portion of the culture in her writing. Thus, with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, we might speak of the “ethnographic fragment” (388).

Similar to the discussion about texts in rhetoric, there are different orientations toward data in qualitative research. In one version, data are out there, waiting for researcher to discover them. At the other end of the spectrum, data cannot ever be theory-free. Additionally, data are not “picked up” from the real world; they are already subjected to a “textualization” in the process of writing field notes. That is, there is no neutral language for writing down observations and thus my “data” are already to some extent my own textual creation. This is partly why, for instance, St. Pierre (2005) talks about writing as a method of both data collection and data analysis.

In my own research, I take “data/texts” as fragments, that is, I am interested in texts not as finished self-sufficient units that are completely subjugated to the author’s intentionality. I am interested (1) to attend to the ways in which people live in between texts, as discursive fragments are not experienced one by one, but rather simultaneously, and what is experienced is an encounter between subjectivities and the interplay of multiple discursivities; (2) to pay attention, question, and make apparent the ways in which I, as a researcher, write (construct) data/texts that will be taken up in analysis; and (3) to consider the ways in which “texts”/“data” present rhetorical qualities not as an intrinsic quality, but as an effect of their reading (Gaonkar 1993, 261) and/or of their use (Dow 2001, 341).

In this conceptualization of data/texts, I insert a rhetorical consciousness into the practice of qualitative research at multiple levels. Positioning the concept of data from qualitative research along with this specific conceptualization of texts from rhetorical theory (that is, “data/texts”) is meant to recognize the fact that “data” are already textualized, that is, they are on some level “invented” as part of the argumentative trajectory of the research project; it also means that my “data” will be instantiations of discourse, depending on and also part of the research context; it also means that “data” as “texts” are unfinished, because there are always more “data”/“texts” to be considered, but also because they will be entering in conversation with other discourses. Thus, “rhetorical reflexivity” is not only about deconstructing the rhetoric of qualitative writing as the final stage in the research process (Adler and Adler 2008), but also about re-constructing the rhetorical character implied in all the qualitative practices.

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## THE HUMAN TOUCH – ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE SOCIALLY ENGAGED THEATRE

MIRUNA RUNCAN<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The paper analyses the evolution of social and political theatre practiced by several independent companies these last years, in Romania. Based on the opposition between the independent theatrical movement and the dominant model of repertory theatres, the author opens a debate discussing an article published in the spring of 2012 after the Timișoara International Theatre Festival, an article that objected to the uniformity of textual structures in independent active theatre performances. By using examples of documentary or debate theatre performances, carried out by several independent theatre teams, the paper tries to outline several current strategies of textual construction, based on fragmentarism, associative dynamics, non-narrativity, the activation of the dialogue with the audience, efficiency and, most of all, the actor's involvement in the entire design and representation of the theatrical project.

**Keywords:** Drama, Political theatre, Theatre audiences.

To the best of my knowledge, the configuration of a thorough analysis of the presence/absence of the social and political dimension from the Romanian theatre during the last two decades is nearly absent, both in the narrow sphere of current cultural journal or magazine criticism and in the (even narrower but, theoretically, more pervious) sphere of academic periodicals. Occasionally, we get hints of this aspect in reviews, press accounts or summaries, or in several manifesto/status texts, undertaken by independent companies that perform various types of intervention theatre; and in several (I must say increasingly complex and bold) essay texts by (more or less) directional critics. However, since I do not have any intention to approach the topic *ex abrupto*, I am going to tackle it at two levels of personal experiences, the didactic level, on the one hand, and the spectator's one, on the other hand.

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A substantial chapter of a recent doctoral thesis on young theatre audiences<sup>2</sup> is based on the analysis and interpretation of the results provided by focus-groups centred on the reasons to go or not go to theatre performances, reasons provided by pupils (high-school level) and students in towns/cities. While the sociological relevance of this chapter is not irrefutable (instead, it is a careful elementary field survey application, which paves the way to more extensive research), it does provide interesting and fairly enlightening data. I think the leading conspicuous aspect is the quasi-unanimous interest in the living actor, in his/her stage presence, the fascination he/she wields, corporeally, emotionally and intellectually, on the young spectator's eye, irrespective of the latter's social category or amount of experience as a spectator. Puzzlingly, even group subjects who state they do not go frequently (or seldom go) to the theatre show high availability relating to the creation of opportunities to watch performances followed by free dialogue with the actors. Not by chance, one of the suggestions that substitute to a great extent the end conclusions of the study is the use of that particular fascination with the actor's living/live presence, turning it into a central operator in the retrieval, fixation and expansion of young theatre audiences.

Alternatively, young men's interest in the life of the city, even when present (hardly ever), seems to escape the interest in theatre, as if the two worlds, i.e. the world of social experience and the world of the performance-mediated experience, did not communicate at all. Or as if they communicated only in exceptional circumstances. The majority of the young spectators interviewed, as well as their older or much older parents and teachers, still see theatre as a patrimonial space rather than as a communicational action: a "place of symbolic – at most contemplative – scrutiny" rather than one where the here and now is debated.

On the other hand, last autumn, I attended a series of meetings – discussions included – generated by the release of a book very dear to me, which, in its turn, was the result of doctoral research: *Surplus de oameni sau surplus de idei [Too Many People or Too Many Ideas]* by theatre director Theodor Cristian Popescu (Cluj, Eikon, 2012). The book is dedicated to the recent history, with its "occurrences and recurrences", of the Romanian independent theatre, a development approached not only in our social, political and aesthetic context, but also placed for comparison in the European context. The author, director and professor, expressed constantly, at the above-mentioned book launches, the desire to start a discussion with the participants – theatre people, cultural managers, students; the discussion have been triggered by the question "To what extent is the socio-political aspect a constant feature of the productions created by independent companies?" Nevertheless, consistent with the

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<sup>2</sup> Pedestru, Mihai, *Generația digitală și condiția de spectator de teatru*, [The Digital Generation as Theatre Audience] [www.http://doctorat.ubbcluj.ro/sustinerea\\_publica/sustineri\\_teze/?let=P#autor](http://doctorat.ubbcluj.ro/sustinerea_publica/sustineri_teze/?let=P#autor)

results of the study in our first example, the response was rather timid, if not even reticent, and a rounded dialogue was proven inaccessible<sup>3</sup>.

The topic of the causes, various motivations and implications of Romanian theatrical discourses interested in the coherent statement and dissemination of their critical, social and political attitude is one I've discussed many times, from a number of perspectives, in these last fifteen years<sup>4</sup>. I want to try to cut the risk of reiterations, by joining the observations above in order to discuss – naturally – several performances. In reverse order, I want to reflect on Theodor Cristian Popescu's question: is the social-political aspect truly representative of the independent theatrical movement in the last decade?

On the one hand, it is; on the other one, it is not. In any event, the answers to this simple question must be varied rigorously, given that the independent Romanian "theatrical movement", as it is, has a complex map, not at all homogenous. State-subsidised theatre, in general, has retained its too little interest in texts and/or performances where the critical direction is blatant, and, in particular, has remained immune to any programmatic development of autochthonous dramaturgy. The very few exceptions prove the rule which established the preservation of the single, dramatizing-hermeneutic-metaphorical pattern I was describing more than a decade ago (Runcan, 2001). Thus, it is almost natural that independent theatrical expression takes shape in the area left free, outside the "artistic theatre" turned museum by the majority of the - startlingly! – public performing arts institutions; namely in the area of the debate *hic et nunc* of the unsettling facts, of the events of social, economic, community, political etc. unrest.

The explanations for the production of theatre in independent circumstances – even in the complete absence of supporting cultural policies – are a few and do not embrace automatically the overt marriage to a critical attitude, from a social-political viewpoint. At times, independent performance production groups are driven exclusively by the desire to put on stage that which they cannot perform in public institutions; some other times, they are driven by the desire to get out of the box of the repertory system. More often than not, young or adult actors want only to be seen, to engage in

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<sup>3</sup> However, a very pertinent review, wearing very much to the point polemic-creative emphases, was written by Iulia Popovici in no. 654, December 2012, of *Observatorul cultural*, see "Unde duce independența" [Where the Independence Takes You?], [http://www.observatorcultural.ro/\\*articleID\\_27998-articles\\_details.html](http://www.observatorcultural.ro/*articleID_27998-articles_details.html)

<sup>4</sup> Apart from the occasional articles and the reviews published in *Man.In.Fest*, *Observator cultural* or *ArtAct Magazine*, essays and chapters on the retrieving-therapeutic functions of theatre, or on its critical, intervention and/or shaping dimension are available in Runcan, Miruna *Modelul teatral românesc* [The Romanian Theatrical Pattern] (Unitext 2001), *Fotoliul scepticului spectator* [The Skeptic Spectator's Armchair] (Unitext 2007) and the more recent *Signore Misterioso. O anatomie a spectatorului* [Signore Misterioso. An Anatomy of Spectatorship] (Unitext 2011)



something, anything, given that they are employees in an institution that keeps them occupied sporadically or in minimum resistance conditions. This is why they stage on their own or with the help of some director friend productions in which they feel at ease, be they based on topical, present-day texts or on texts already established. Finally, every so often, what matters is the place, the atmosphere shaped throughout time in a pub, a coffee-shop, in an underground tavern where music and/or theatre is performed. Nevertheless, if there is anything that truly coalesces the independent Romanian theatre production, in the two decades of organization and rude awakenings, this is the inherent sentence to poverty and – with very few exceptions (Act, Green Hours, Teatrul 74...) – the lack of one’s own theatrical space<sup>5</sup>: which requires a management of precariousness, with the frequent practice of fortunate or wretched co-productions with subsidized theatres. Then again... ..

### ***A Shift in Perspective. From Text to Project and Back***

Nevertheless, what if we shifted the perspective, at least for the sake of a strategic reconfiguration of the problems? What if, for the time being, we deemed irrelevant the (otherwise steep) conflict/competition between the subsidised theatre and the independent theatre? Because, at least in principle, by coproduction or in self-standing performances, the theatrical discourse with social-political implications could be equally undertaken in – accidental or long-term – projects of the subsidised institutions (all of which, in Romania, are repertory theatres). The legitimate ensuing question concerns the extent to which the subsidised, repertory theatre institution, in its current form, in our country, is ready to face the controversies triggered, *volens volens*, by this type of programme. Because, in fact, loyal as well as accidental audiences of the repertory institutions are generally looking for entertainment thought “inheritable cultural act”; in other words, on the one hand, they want to see “masterpieces” or, on the other hand, they want to have fun, relax elegantly. Or both<sup>6</sup>.

In the case of co-productions, the state institution can be “only” a host, while the independent team is the message carrier and the coordinator of the dialogue with the community. Going back to the observations at the beginning of the article, it is

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<sup>5</sup> See here Iulia Popovici’s interview with director Radu Popescu, “«Independent» is the artists’ freedom” in *Observator cultural* Sept. 2012: [http://www.observatorcultural.ro/\\*articleID\\_27582-articles\\_details.html](http://www.observatorcultural.ro/*articleID_27582-articles_details.html), as well as the comment “The independent platform of the performing arts”, in the August issue of the same journal: [http://www.observatorcultural.ro/TEATRU.-Platforma-independenta-de-artele-spectacolului\\*articleID\\_27378-articles\\_details.html](http://www.observatorcultural.ro/TEATRU.-Platforma-independenta-de-artele-spectacolului*articleID_27378-articles_details.html)

<sup>6</sup> See, in this respect, *Barometrul de consum cultural 2010 [The Cultural Consumption Survey 2010]*, at [http://www.culturadata.ro/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=308%3Abarometrul-de-consum-cultural-2010adouaparte&catid=44%3Abarometrul-de-consum-cultural&Itemid=142](http://www.culturadata.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=308%3Abarometrul-de-consum-cultural-2010adouaparte&catid=44%3Abarometrul-de-consum-cultural&Itemid=142)

highly likely (applied studies lack) that loyal audiences of the repertory institution are reticent – even overtly suspicious of discussing “extra-aesthetic” topics, given the almost complete absence of audience events accompanied by debates. I was stating it elsewhere - the subsidised Romanian institution does not have, in fact, the tradition of its function of civic education<sup>7</sup>.

We call to mind the debate on Gianina Cărbunariu’s play *Roşia Montană pe linie fizică și politică*, [*Rosia Montana, on physical and political bases*] co-produced with the Hungarian State Theatre in Cluj: co-producer manager, director Tompa Gabor, explains the poor schedule of the performance and its gradual obliteration by the fact that... it has no audience. An audience, as a matter of fact, particularly loyal to the institution, but who, consequently, did not seem keen to interact with the topic, nor with the proposal of a type of theatrical discourse able to short-circuit their practices. I do not know the extent to which his explanation accounts for the whole truth (as long as approximately the same audience participates actively in proposals with a political charge in the *Interferențe* festival; with the difference that these proposals are made... from outside, they are externalized, distanced) – but the positive thing is that, in this situation, The Hungarian State Theatre was ill-equipped for such an experience. And this is only one of the most visible cases.

I may say, however, that the public repertory institutions – and, through them, entire generations of actual or potential audiences – are deeply intolerant of the strictly social-political discourse, because of a common confusion made, since the ‘60s, between the thematic discourse and the propaganda discourse. Overwhelmed by the propagandistic discourses of the plays and performances of the first decades of the communist era, both artists and audiences rejected the direct political themes or subjects from the stage's horizon, treating such material as unworthy for an aesthetical representation. In rewind, one of the perverse results of censorship and of the propaganda text, which had been installed starting with the ‘50s, is given, in Romania, paradoxically, by the lingering in the aesthetic and the overstatement of this element of the creation to the disadvantage of all the other potential functions of the theatrical performance (hence, of theatrical communication in general).

In Romania, even Brecht was received, at the time of the initial mises-en-scène, basically as *aesthetic discourse*, pertaining to the “Occidental theatre avant-garde”, rather than in relation to his political dimension. Since the subsidised institution does not accept, au fond, a series of active public policies (in the general, educational, social, civic etc. direction), but undertakes instead only the service to offer performances to the several levels of audiences it estimates, - perhaps even setting the scene for one or several competitive “festival” or “gala” premieres, in the

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<sup>7</sup> Miruna Runcan, *Signore Misterioso. O anatomie a spectatorului*, Bucharest, Editura UNITEXT, 2011, pp. 111-118

aesthetic canon of the '70s art theatre mainstream – the direct beneficiaries, these estimated audiences do not have other expectations either and do not see that THEATRE can also have functions different from those of strictly “enlightening”... entertainment.

What I see here is that, as long as nothing changes in the principles and ways of design and operation of the subsidised system, in other words as long as the public institution stays exclusively a repertory “service provider”, an increasingly consistent part of the independent theatrical movement, already coalesced on the critical contents of theatrical discourse, seems naturally “condemned” to freedom (in the words of the existentialists): by undertaking and developing their own strategies by which theatre stirs participation, response, actual reflexivity in relation to the world in which they were born and to which it returns.

### ***Text, Actor, Co-author, Project Team and the Human Touch***

I would like, however, to go back to the first observation in the introduction, the one relating to the young spectators’ preference for the interaction with the living actor. This comment can be easily linked, in this discussion, to a radical change of the actor’s position in the current militant/critical Romanian theatre. Since, most of the time, the production teams of the active art or cultural intervention performances are more or less constant (the best known examples are Gianina Cărbunariu’s, David Schwartz and Mihaela Michailov’s groups, and the multiple projects around Bogdan Georgescu), the actor, even when alone on the stage, is not (any longer) the performer of a pre-established text, but, to a certain extent, he is co-author, quasi-equal to the other authors of the project, the playwright and the director. I could even say that the actor becomes, to a certain extent, by his/her own will, an immediate part of the very text of the representation, as it is presented to its target audience.

A brief text-related detour is required here. Since in present-day Romania, even after 23 years of post-communism, there is no coherent approach to the development of dramaturgy (let alone that the system of dramatic text commissioning and the one of their development in the theatrical institution has not even been... invented, in our country), neither specialized criticism nor the audience manage yet to distinguish with clarity the play, in its classic sense, no matter how... “post-dramatically” it is structured, from the open, in progress text of the intervention performance. Even fine critics come to object (in a way, given that the theoretical base is absent, they are right to do so) to the dramaturgic reductionism of some of the independent productions with direct social involvement:

“ ... the design of most of these plays is as elaborate as a news report. A striking resemblance, the only difference is that they are performed by professional actors, hence considerably improved. In fact, the pattern (to avoid the use of the word ‘recipe’) on which most plays are created seems similar: succinct documentation followed by a text that begins with the removal of both the obsolete relationships and the obsolete conflict, even of the necessary debate, replacing “post-dramatically” all the means by which theatre, recently enough, would have eyes wide open spectators. Young authors opt for a cluster of scenes with no other connection than their relation to an extremely general topic.”<sup>8</sup>

Or, what I deem specific to interventionist performances (sometimes, rarely, to some of the dramaturgic-directing projects in repertory theatres, such as those where plays are written and directed by Alina Nelega, or by her young rivals) is the maximum contraction of the “interpretative” gap between the literary text and the text of the performance (in the strictly semiotic meaning defined by Anne Ubersfeld in the 1970s – where the latter is the freestanding visual-auditory layout we can perceive on the stage, more or less an interpretive update of the former). I’m not saying the literary text, seen as base for various interpretations, disappears; I’m saying it evolves into one of the steps of the collective creation, the goal of which – essentially – is not the text of the representation seen as prescribed, similar to a finished product; instead the goal is the stimulating, dialogic effect of the text of the performance in the relation with the spectator.

In other words, the aspect Cristina Rusiecki calls “elaborate as a news report” signals, in the last resort, the mutation from the semiology of a finite, contemplative reception, where the production of signification follows the reception and is more or less uninterested in the primacy of the “aesthetic effect”, to the pragmatics of triggering a response: the spectator is asked to work together with the team, and the production of signification is the preliminary stage for the mutual exchange of shared knowledge.

Since the reference, in the article published in *Cultura*, was made to *Rogvaiv*, the project coordinated by Bogdan Georgescu at Teatrul Spălătorie in Chişinău, we will reflect a brief while on this proposal. From the first jump, the team wants to merge in the text of the performance two complementary “topics”, covertly linked to the common topic: the (failed) change of the anti-discrimination legislation, concerning the articles that approach the issue of sexual orientation. The two interconnected topics are, on the one hand, the debates on television and the politicians’ pretend-irresponsible attitude, irrespective of their ideology, and, on the other hand, fragments from the anonymised interview with a young homosexual who recounts his becoming,

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<sup>8</sup> Cristina Rusiecki, “Ce și de ce în tînăra dramaturgie” [*What and Why in the Young Drama?*], *Cultura*, 25.05.2012

anxieties, daily difficulties in the relation with the family and friends, the story of a long-distance affair... The structure of the performance is trans-narrative, and the detachment in the presentation of the televised debate episodes is deliberate. The ENTIRE textual material (dramaturgic text tied to the performance text) is real, some talk-shows are available, in their initial version, on YouTube. Additionally, save the actor who performs on the interview fragments, the entire team is assigned the real “characters” making no reckoning of age (which would be impossible, since most of the actors are very young) or gender: girls can play men’s roles and the other way around, which doubles, both for them and for the audience, the general nature of the convention.

I believe the textual specificity of this proposal resides precisely in the strategy of conventional interferences, doubly negotiated by the spectator, who, thus, must reproduce mentally, in brief episodes, on the one hand the exact place and time of the plot, the political context, the concepts and legal texts debated etc., and, on the other hand, the identities, categories and “social role” gaffes, the reactions and inner motivations of those involved in the public debate, journalists, politicians, housewives or priests, in a structure whose dynamics is accelerated and which opposes deliberately the usual, immediate “verisimilitude” systems of drama and classic-realist theatre. Furthermore, the maximal contraction of the protective narrative grid that could link the episodes in a strictly linear causal chain charges the spectator with the task to merge these episodes by focusing on breakdown of media discourses, which shed light from various angles on the central topic of the “performed” debate.

The aspect that, I believe, in my micro-argument with the colleague at *Cultura*, truly defines the essence and appeal of this spectator experience is precisely the collage structure in which actors are involved at first hand, starting from the phase of investigation (a common aspect, even if each time solved differently... structurally, aesthetically and technically, of this proposal and of other similar projects, from Gianina Cărbunariu’s *20/20* or *Tigrul sibian* [*The Tiger from Sibiu*] to, let’s say, *Capete înfierbîntate* [*Hot Headed*] or *Sub pămînt* [*Under Earth*] of the Michailov-Schwartz team). In the end, the stake of the spectator’s involvement in the dialogue with the text of the performance resides in the substitution between the narrative web, which, as a rule, enables the reception, steering it from the particular to the general, and the mechanics of the public pseudo-debate, which leads step by step to the climax: pushing to the absolute risible the topic of social and political value of the debate. Hence the exceptional scene of the collective ripper of laughter (also authentic, which makes it the more difficult to replicate on stage).

I do not think that, in this project or in other projects that claim the same direction, the “succinct documentation” and the removal of conflict are part of a unique “recipe” of dramaturgic composition. First of all we do not have always documentary theatre projects. Then, to the best of my knowledge, most of the times, this documentation is not superficial: on the contrary, this is a long-term development, including interviews, historical documentation, gathering of life stories and personal experiences etc., which involve the entire team. The range of the situations as such, as well as of the project proposals or textual structures is wide. Here, in the upsetting *Rogvaiv*, there is conflict, but it does not reside in the dramatic situation (since there is no proper narrative base); instead, it resides between the two levels on which the topic is organized, i.e. the personal, human level and the level of the media representation, which goes haywire as the performance progresses.

To oppose a somewhat extreme example, *X mm din Y km* (2011) by Gianina Cărbunariu is a type of textual construction completely different from the older *20/20* (2010) and, despite the fact the same team is assigned here, structurally and strategically it is poles apart from the fictionalised selection of urban legends in *Tigrul sibian* (2012), where reality and oniric overlap and reference each other, according to a series of urban invariants of mythology in process of stratification.

In the first project, the few pages in Dorin Tudoran’s Securitate file operate exclusively as a source. The text of the performance is turned into a permanent spatial-situational negotiation, through the actors’ movement in various corners of the hall, among the spectators; the actors reinterpret, always in a different “key” (Goffman, 1974)<sup>9</sup>, the same scene in the office of the culture management at the level of the “Bucharest Municipality”. The major stake of the textual aesthetics resides again with the spectator, as long as each change of angle calls forth an acting modification: the actors do not keep, instead they reassign randomly their “role” positions, and the repetitive micro-narrative is performed again by each member of the audience. Thus, the audience becomes a direct participant, through the renegotiation of convention, to the construction of discourse, in an exasperated-empathic crescendo.

The textual structure is completely different in *20/20*, where diaries, interviews, video recorded statement, letters from the country and from abroad are organized as dialogic-complementary episodes of reflection on the tragic events that occurred in Târgu-Mureș: the traumatic time in the recent history, in the spring of 1990, when the Romanians and the Hungarians were pushed to the brink of an inter-ethnic war. Here,

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<sup>9</sup> "The term “key” used here is in the paradigmatic direction of the theatrical framework, concept introduced by Erving Goffman for framework analysis: “I refer here to the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something else. The process of transcription can be called keying”. (44)

the convention is based on spatiality, with the spectators surrounding the central circle that encompasses the actors. This basic convention is negotiated with the spectator in one of the first scenes, in which the children's ball game, called "the countries", works like a recreational curtain with direct reference to multiculturalism and communication – either immediate or mediated. The statement episodes, which rely on direct documentation, on site, are doubled and arranged paradigmatically around a central, fictional episode, where two families, neighbours in the same building, one of them Romanian, the other one Hungarian, pay visits to each other and attempt a polite-ceremonial communication, just as the events evoked by the performance unfold. This singularity *hic et nunc* of the fictional episode creates a particular, conflicting-reflexive tension at the spectator's level, between the non-fictional imaginary field and the fictional, historical and human one. On the other hand, the many tasks carried out by the Romanian and Hungarian actors, as well as the linguistic combination of the episodes, engage fully the spectators' skills of renegotiation of the convention, as well as of deconstruction-reconstruction of the significations.

In the case of *Capete înfierbîntate* (Michaela Michailov and David Schwartz), however, which uses interviews from various periods with direct participants or with commentators of the June 1990, Piața Universității events, the conflict nature emanates precisely from the successive re-account, from different perspectives, of the same events, from the clash of the subjectivities that are objectified (through the exceptional actor, Alexandru Potocean) in another perspective, the spectator's. Thus, the mechanisms of manipulation are demolished, by a permanent suspicious interrogation of each character's defence and self-defence reflexes; this time, the Goffmanian key is held by the actor who undergoes transformations from one episode to the next. In his turn, the spectator will "work" for the generation of signification, at least on three levels: from the position of the imaginary interviewer toward whom the characters' monologue answers are directed; from the remote-critical position created by the identification with the character, through the actor; and, finally, from the position of interpretant - according to Peirce's (1977) definition<sup>10</sup> - who reconstructs the historical episode of the street conflicts of June 13-15, 1990, in Piața Universității, according to their own existential and/or book-based experience.

In *Sub pămînt*, from the same core team, but with a larger group of actors-coauthors, the textual strategy changes, the social area of Valea Jiului being evoked by a conjugated series of monologues gathered on site and arranged apparently randomly, but which contain their own feel and crescendo. The episodes are interlinked by brief

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<sup>10</sup> "[The] Final Interpretant is [...] the effect the Sign would produce in any mind upon which the circumstances should permit it to work out its full effect. [...] [It] is the one Interpretative result to which every Interpreter is destined to come if the Sign is sufficiently considered. [...] The Final Interpretant is that toward which the actual tends." (111)

live musical moments, performed by the actors who use some of the simplest objects: chairs, cubes on the stage, a whistle, several bottles etc. Here, tension is obtained by the situational and narrative – historical and spatial – re-contextualization the spectator has to make by empathising with the actor-mediator, always the same and always another. The lives unfolding in the monologue interviews are neither object, nor subject, but, through them, the spectator obtains the object-topic, Valea Jiului, contemplated from the present day to the day before and the reverse. In this case (somewhat stricter than the *20/20* performance, where the space-time of the textual edifice included a subtle fusion of document and situational fictionalisation, which would unify the whole) I believe the opposition introduced by Jane Turner (2011) operates explicitly – an opposition inspired by Julia Kristeva’s theory (1997) on the “non-place” in late modernity theatre – between the mimetic theatrical communication and the diegetic one:

Diegetic theatre, I argue, offers the spectator a different experiential “place” that subverts the normative viewing experience by placing the spectator inside a narratorial world that is not coherent and thus requires the spectator to make choices and reflect on perceptual notions of time, space and reality. (Turner, 28)

In all the above-mentioned cases, the dramatic text, irrespective of structures, ceases, to a great extent, to be ONLY a support to the modernizing interpretation which is the text of the performance in the realist or baroque aestheticising play to which the loyal (if not even captive) Romanian audience is used. From its creation, the text of the play is seen by the production team as an open communicational strategy, with ample improvisational ellipses which leave room to the multiple interpretive-contextual challenges of the overall representation, as well as of the (individual and collective) audience the representation will face each time in a different way. The fact that the majority of these projects that hold an active, social-political stake want a dialogue with the audience at the end is neither accident, nor trend. Most of the times, the projects – even when they are not necessarily site specific – are meant to return to the communities on which their creation was based – and only later travel to other communities, where the sensitivity to the project topic justifies generalizations, as well as precise particularizations.

Thus, the circulation of this type of theatre becomes rather discomforting, in the context of festival events where the selection criterion is based on the current production of public institutions, still centred on the “masterpiece” holding universalist aesthetic claims. This is how we could also explain the negative, episodic or long-term reactions of this or that reviewer, whose expectations relating to the dramatic structure are, inescapably, challenged or short-circuited by the aesthetic – as well as strictly communicational – strategies of the critical theatrical act.



Nevertheless, I think the evolution and collective absorption of social and political theatre are based, to a critical extent, on the actor's textual participation, on his/her capacity to interact with the themes, topics and... subjects (where there is also a documentary dimension), as well as with the spectators seen as individuals and as potential groups. This way the actor becomes – and not to the detriment but to the benefit of writing and direction, both conceived as essentially collective and unified construction processes rather than as separate, time and space limited activities – co-author of his/her own textuality.

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## THEATER OF WAR, THEATER OF WITNESS - CAN ART MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

DOMNICA RĂDULESCU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The expressions “theater of war” and “theater of operations” have been used since the end of the nineteenth century to refer to episodes, spaces and moments in history where actual war is being fought, where humans are killing and are being killed. “Theater of War” refers to the “entire land, sea, and air area that is or may become involved directly in war operations,” while “theater of operations” refers to “the part of a theater of war in which active combat operations are conducted.”<sup>2</sup> Both terms were first used consistently to refer to World War I and then to World War II. It makes sense after all, for like in any war, just as in any theater, there is a protagonist and an antagonist who, depending on the angle one fights or watches the war from, change places and roles; there is a stage of course, the actual space where the war is being fought; there are actors who play different roles from the generals giving the orders to the soldiers actually engaged in combat, there are directors who create the larger vision of the show, namely the leaders and governments initiating and organizing it, and there are of course spectators: us the public, the great masses of people witnessing, watching and being shaken, those who are traumatized, or on the contrary rejoice or are indifferent at the sight of the war. Needless to say this kind of real theater of war is not a safe space and that would be a huge understatement. The theater of war that forms the subject of my study is on the contrary a safe space where actors and spectators choose to live or relive in a virtual, utopian or mediated way experiences, episodes, moments from actual wars, due to a desire to remember, to bear witness to actual wars and armed conflicts, to heal from traumas of war, but also really to be entertained.

**Keywords:** theatre, drama, memory, The DAH Theater, Motti Lerner, Erik Ehn.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Merriam Webster Dictionary* for explanations of the terms.

Whether in the course of human history, political theater and in the present case the theater of war and the theater of witness have made a difference or alleviated the suffering caused by wars, whether this kind of theater has made the world a better place as many of us would like to believe, or has had much bearing on the development of actual wars is highly debatable and truly hard to even prove. Those of us who are engaged in the creation, production, teaching or criticism of theatrical works meant to either bear witness to wars, to function as repositories of memory, or to raise consciousness about the devastation brought about by wars through artistic means would certainly like to believe so and we are motivated in our endeavors by the notion that art can make a difference and should be capable of making the world a better place, a more peaceful place if anything. But truly, that would be extremely hard to prove, nor is it my intention to do so in this essay. Atrocious wars and genocides have been going on and are still going on with what seems to be an unstoppable fury for decades, centuries, what am I saying – millennia and art doesn't seem to have stopped them. But this line of reasoning has always been unproductive and we would never know if the ravage of wars wouldn't have been significantly worse without the respite provided by art or whether art hasn't really made a difference, since like wars, art too has always been a reality of our world. Rather, I would like to argue that a certain kind of theater that has emerged during the last several decades in several areas of the world can function as a safe space from actual wars, that it can be a place of healing and of transformation, if anything, because it has the potential of making more savvy, questioning human beings out of the spectators that are watching and witnessing it. I would also like to argue that it is largely due to its particular aesthetics that the theater of war has the potential of creating safe spaces and spaces of resistance. I will explore here three particular instances of the creation of theater of war and theater of witness from three different parts of the world: 1. The DAH Theater based in Belgrade, Serbia; 2. The theater of the Israeli playwright Motti Lerner and in particular his play *The Murder of Isaac*; 3. The play cycle titled *Soulographie: Our Genocides* by the American playwright Erik Ehn. I will also place this theater in the larger context of political theater initiated by Bertolt Brecht and will attempt to define its particular role and aesthetic peculiarities in tandem with the artists' own credos about the necessity of such a theater for our times.

The aesthetics of the theater of war as I will often refer to in this study has the function of both illustrating the psychic breakages suffered by the author or in larger terms by say the community or group or nation that the author belongs to and of surviving and healing such psychic ruptures. The aesthetics of the theater of war described in this study also pertains to the larger field of post-

modern aesthetics and bears the marks of fragmented identities, and fractured cultural landscapes. The theater works discussed here have emerged directly and ferociously out of wars, violent political events and their aftermath and they not only testify to these experiences but, by the very virtue of their emergence and existence almost simultaneously or very shortly after these events, they stand as a wall of resistance, a space of peace, a place of solace, truth and re-belonging.

During the Holocaust the Jews who were in the audience of the terrifying theater of war directed by Hitler were also attempting and often managing to escape and become exiles to other stages of the world where Hitler was the antagonist and not the hero, all while their own people kept being loaded in wagons and carried to Auschwitz row after row from the terrified "audience." The suspension of disbelief was at work for too long among many of the spectators watching the horrifying show across the world. Elie Wiesel has noted in his book *Night* that for the longest time the Jews in his own town of Sighet in Northern Transylvania, which was then incorporated in Hungary, from where he and his family were deported and killed, were for a long time incredulous and did not realize what was happening, where their brothers and sisters were being taken when they were being loaded in the infamous trains and what was being done to them. They just watched in disbelief. The recent theater of the of war of the nineties in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Kosovo and the genocidal episodes initiated and carried out by Serbian generals, officers and soldiers against Muslim Bosnians, the brutal siege of Sarajevo and the rape camps all went on for three full years with the whole world watching in suspended disbelief and doing nothing. El Salvador, The Dominican Republic, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, the list goes on and on. It is in fact precisely the suspension of disbelief which keeps spectators/peoples/governments paralyzed in inaction until a Brechtian breaking of the fourth wall might take place such as the landing of the American and British troupes in Normandy in 1944, or the intervention of President Clinton in 1995 to stop the genocidal killings and rapes taking place in Bosnia. How ironic then that real war has taken its terminology from an artistic form that has existed for millennia in parallel and often in answer to it – live theater and the art of performance. One normally thinks of the relation between war and theater as one in which theater reflects or denounces or encapsulates in dramatic metaphors and images the conflicts, conundrums, ravages of real wars. Yet as in the Shakespearian famous line uttered by Hamlet that "the whole world's a stage," real war is being framed as theater, as a show to either take part in or watch.

War creates spaces of exile and leads thousands to take the fate of refugees or as in Edward Said's words it leads to exile "as a space of non-belonging," "where in the primitive times peoples were banished and where in the modern era

immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons" (177).<sup>3</sup> The theater created by artists out of a need to testify, survive and transcend historic wars is on the contrary metaphorical but it also creates real spaces of belonging. In 1991 a group of inspired and courageous Serbian women performers and directors gathered under the name of DAH Theater and created in Belgrade, just as their country was preparing to hold Sarajevo under siege and to wage war to their neighbors of centuries, the Muslim Bosnians, both a theatrical space and a theatrical project meant to bear witness to the raging war but mostly to create a peaceful space of belonging, a place where there was a real cease fire and where the body and the soul could rest and engage in the creation of art instead of war. The DAH Theater has functioned, grown and developed ever since, bearing witness to the violence of war, keeping and channeling artistically memories of victims and survivors, creating spaces and artistic structures of resistance. On the website of the DAH Theater one can find the following statement regarding the beginnings of the theater, its purpose and goals:

In 1991, when the war started in Yugoslavia, DAH Theatre immediately had to face these questions: "What is the role and meaning of theatre? What are the responsibilities and duties of artists in times of darkness, violence and human suffering?" The group decided to interrupt their work on the performance "Gifts of Our Ancestors" to begin work on a new piece that could provide them with the answers to these questions. DAH's first performance "This Babylonian Confusion" was based on the songs of Bertolt Brecht. An anti-war performance; it was presented outdoors in the centre of Belgrade at a time when it was forbidden to even mention the war. 'The forming of DAH Theatre and its cry of creation coincided with the fall of ex-Yugoslavia and the general destruction that followed. Theatre directors Jadranka Andjelic and Dijana Milosevic, together with the actress Maja Mitic, decided, perhaps subconsciously, to oppose the destruction with creation, to create, in the midst of a world falling apart, a microcosmos of theatre.'<sup>4</sup>

Later on, in parallel with the remarkable and courageous work of the women of DAH Theater a group of Serbian women opposing the war was formed and took the name of "Women in Black." They would gather in public places dressed in black and stand in silence as a sign of protest, remembrance of the victims of

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<sup>3</sup> See the article by Edward Said titled "Reflections on Exile" in which Said discusses both the tragic condition of the modern exile as well as exile as a fruitful metaphor for modern culture.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dahteatarcentar.com/aboutus.html>

war and resistance to its absurdity and horror. The group has grown over the years confronting many dangers, often suffering violence at the hands of regular citizens and supporters of the war yet it still engages in its silent anti-war performances in Belgrade, now protected by a cordon of police. Their gatherings have by now become an annual event commemorating the killing of eight thousand Muslim Bosnian men and boys during the summer of 1995. Recently the group gathered stories of Bosnian and Serbian women victims and survivors of the war, many survivors of the mass genocidal rapes waged against them by Serbian soldiers and published them in a book titled *Women in Black. The Women's Side of War*.<sup>5</sup> The DAH's theater most recent production titled *Crossing the Line* has emerged precisely from these stories as it stages many of them giving voice to women who have survived unimaginable acts of cruelty and yet still had the strength to tell their stories. The shows have been created from an interweaving of parts of or entire stories and are performed by three actresses of the DAH Theater in a stunning rollercoaster of passion, beauty, stage movement, singing and dancing. Movie images of Bosnian women and of the war are at times superimposed on the live performance. At other times, depending on whether the group is performing in their own theater space in Belgrade or are travelling, the actresses coordinate their stage actions and movements with a filmed version of the same show creating a dizzying and overpowering effect of mirroring images reverberating into infinity and offering a larger than life experience. The very processes by which the DAH Theater artists create their performances as much as the end result of their final theatrical products are a stunning illustration of the aesthetics of theater of war that I am trying to define, articulate and describe in this study. Reflective to a degree of the post-modern merging or mixing of the levels of the real and the imagined, of superimposing genres and aesthetic categories, boldly taking the harshest truths and realities and incorporating them in their shows, the director and performers of the group operate according to very high standards of artistic and theatrical professionalism as they stylize and transform raw stories into performance art of the highest caliber, of stunning visual and performative quality. The techniques used in the creation of their shows are largely those of devising as they mostly perform their own original work created in collaboration and through the merging of texts, ideas, stories and images that come from different sources such as the stories gathered in the *Women in Black* volume. It is the reason

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<sup>5</sup> The book consists of a large collection of first-hand narratives by actual survivors of the Bosnian War and of the rape camps, told in the first person and largely unedited. It circulates almost anonymously for fear of reprisal and it is hard to obtain. I personally was able to obtain the book with the help of Dijana Milosevic, the artistic director of DAH who put me in touch with one of the members of *Women in Black*.

for the freshness, rawness and also unexpected quality of their performances: they emerge organically out of experience yet are creatively transformed into art under the alchemic processes of bold imaginative processes and with the performance strategies borrowed from European theater innovators such as Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba.<sup>6</sup>

In the DAH Theater's performance the actor's body becomes on stage not only the vehicle for the telling of the story but the story itself, the page onto which physical pain, terror, survival and remembrance are inscribed uncompromisingly. At some point in the show one of the actresses actually slaps her own face while the others clap or beat their feet on the ground creating a maddening rhythm which is meant to tell the story of the violence and torture suffered by the women in the rape camps. Words and songs are superimposed over the rhythms and sounds of the beating and all culminate in a dance taken to paroxysm by one of the actresses. The dancing and singing actress is enacting the story of the Bosnian woman who was able to escape from one of the rape camps held by Serbian soldiers by acting madness and singing Serbian songs all day and all night long.<sup>7</sup> She was let go from the camp unharmed. As Dijana Milosevic, the Artistic Director of the DAH Theater was trying to explain in an interview about this story and its incorporation in the performance, even brutish soldiers are scared and "freaked out" by the sight of a "crazy" woman.<sup>8</sup>

Not at all. The paradox of the theatre is that while being the safe space where opposite sides can meet, etc. it is at the same time the space where the provocation is high, "Pandora's box" is opened and the audience has to meet the challenge, has to face sometimes the worst fears or denial, has to confront prejudices and to question their beliefs. This is why political theatre is not a safe space, but it offers the space where people could be together in their differences, could disagree and could confront each other, but not aggressively.

Obviously the paradox she is talking about is that the theater is a safe space to ask unsafe questions and to face unsafe fears, challenges and confrontations in peaceful ways. And when I asked her to point to any concrete positive effects of

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<sup>6</sup> See the techniques used by Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. Grotowski, like Barba developed a theater practice that made the actor and the actor's body the very center of the theater experience often subjecting actors to strenuous physical work and use of the body on stage.

<sup>7</sup> This story is told by the survivor herself in the *Women in Black* volume.

<sup>8</sup> She was explaining this during the question and answer session following the performance of *Crossing the Line* at Washington and Lee University in October 2012, as well as during a panel at LaMaMa theater's festival of the Soulographie cycle in November, 2012.

the DAH Theater on our society, community and historical time, this is what she answered:

First of all our work has positive influence on ourselves, artists in DAH Theatre. Speaking in my very name, our performances and need of the audience to see our performances and their feedback kept me in my country even during the darkest times. Our audiences and communities have been influenced by our performances in various ways- but it happened not only in our community, country or city but world- wide. People were often moved, they managed to open their hearts and to see some events or facts in a different light, very often the feedback we got from the audience was that it was important to them to hear certain things publicly , that it was like opening the window for fresh air to enter. On a more concrete level, after our performances, individuals from the audience would come to us to tell us their stories, sometimes for the first time ever and in that way our performances had a big impact on them, almost therapeutic. As we know that society consists of individuals, if individuals experience the change by seeing our performances, we have a chance to influence the community and society.

I also asked Dijana the following question: “Do you believe that experiences of war influence not only the content of your theater and the stories you choose but also the form and the aesthetic of your theater? If so, in what ways?” And this is what she answered:

Each story seeks the right form, the choice of forms of our performances is always connected with the topic we are exploring. In that sense, war and challenging political situation we live in our country, that we used as a topic in our performances, influenced our form. For example, in the performance “The Story of Tea,” where we dealt with difficult truths, denial and missing people, languages, civilizations, the audience was seating in a way that they were mirroring each other, and the performance was taking place in the space in between. It was because my concept was that we do need to face each other because my people were trying not to look at harsh truths for such a long time, it was important to create the shared place where the audience was seating as if for a vigil together with actors.

In our other performance “Crossing the Line” we used the proscenium stage, but the three actresses were on separate platforms, like three islands, or tables, but broken tables as the homes and lives of the women whose stories the actresses were telling had been (See Fig. 2. for *Story of Tea*)





**Fig. 1.** Crossing the line



**Fig. 2.** Story Of Tea

Interestingly enough the first production of the DAH theater at the onset of the Bosnian was built around the songs of Bertolt Brecht. Indeed, it all started with Brecht, as it always starts with Brecht: namely politically engaged theater that emerges in new and often surprising forms. An intermittent exile himself who escaped his Fascist motherland and its ravaging war to the United States only to be interrogated by the infamous House Committee on Un-American Activities, Brecht's theories and practice of theater are precisely the first to articulate and illustrate an aesthetic of rupture and fragmentation as the only viable one for modern theater. In order to develop a critical sense in his audiences, Brecht used montage, dance and song episodes, and combined them with dialogues and interspersed with story-telling moments in which the actors presented their characters at a distance aiming not towards the creation of empathy but of critical thinking. As the critic Douglas Kellner remarks:

The strategy was to produce an experience of curiosity, astonishment, and shock: raising such questions as: "Is that the way things are? What produced this? It's terrible! How can we change things?" Such a critical and questioning attitude was also fostered by a "montage of images" and series of typical social tableaux that Brecht called "gests" (*Brecht on Theater*: 42, 86-87, 104, 134, 139, 198-205). He wanted his spectators to work through these examples, to participate in an active process of critical thought that would provide insights into the workings of society, and to see the need for and to implement radical social change (4).

How beautifully ironic that as a revolutionary artist who exiled himself to escape from the war of all wars that his own country had waged against the whole world, Brecht initiated and created a theater aesthetics that promoted the techniques of montage, collage, distancing, breaking the aesthetic continuity of the theater experience and of the fourth walls, of mimetic mirrors and of the suspension of disbelief! How ironic that he was the first one to create an aesthetic of rupture, fragmentation and separation that was meant to be conducive to critical thinking and to revolutionary and social action! He promoted and created with great deliberation precisely the experience of an aesthetics of rupture and dislocation with the purpose of initiating his spectators to social action: "in his separation of the elements," where "each aesthetic component retains its autonomy and 'comments' on the others, often in contradiction, to provoke thought and insight." (Kellner). Furthermore, Kellner notes that:

Brecht intended that epic theater show emotions, ideas, and behavior as products of, or responses to, specific social situations and not as the unfolding of the human essence. The primary theatrical device of epic theater, the *Verfremdungseffekt*, was intended to "estrangle" or "distance" the spectator and thus prevent empathy and identification with the situation and characters and allow the adoption of a critical attitude toward the actions in the play. By preventing empathetic illusion or a mimesis of reality, epic theater would expose the workings of societal processes and human behavior, and would thus show the audience how and why people behaved a certain way in their society (4).

That it was an artist who experienced his own country's rise to Fascism, who fled the horror and devastation of that war and exiled himself in the United States, that it was an artist with this kind of personal history who revolutionized all of Western theater with an aesthetics meant to awaken critical thinking and inspire to social action is coordinate with the thesis of my study, namely that

theater emerging from or as a result of the trauma of war is marked by an aesthetics of discontinuity and “separation of the elements” not simply because a form of discontinuity and fragmentation seems the most appropriate to deal artistically with the fracturing and destructive reality of war itself, but because it is through such an aesthetic that theater may be conducive to critical thinking and social action. Thus, though it might seem paradoxical, it is precisely through the awakening of critical thinking and the raising of the spectators’ awareness to the threats and violence in their actual environment that theater may become a safe space, a space where actors and spectators engage collaboratively in testifying against, denouncing, resisting and remembering the reality of war with relentless questioning. It is precisely what the DAH Theater’s efforts over the past twenty years of intense artistic and anti-war activity has managed to create: a haven from the brutality of war, but also a place of questioning and resistance. And even the silent performances of the Women in Black group in public spaces where they have at times exposed themselves to the risk of violent acts from fervent Serbian nationalists, has in the end become a safe space of resistance to and remembrance of the violence perpetrated on thousands of Bosnian women, as the group has grown in size and notoriety and as it is now protected by the police as a form of peaceful demonstration and exercising of freedom of speech.

In an article titled “Playwriting in Wartime,” the Israeli playwright Motti Lerner actually offers a constructive and beautifully articulated program or manifesto with regards to the responsibilities and obligations of the theater artist in times of war and violence. He is particularly referring to the Israeli Palestinian war in his country, but his observations and reflections are of value and can apply to any country in conditions of war and to the role of the artist in society in general. As someone who grew up and has lived for his entire life in a country at war, Lerner is haunted by not only the question of the utility and function of art in conditions of historical and political violence but is consumed by a search for solutions. He says: “I am not suggesting that playwrights engage in political negotiations, but rather that playwrights engage in investigation of the psychological, ideological, mythical and political infrastructure of their society, in order to prove that these other possibilities indeed exist (1).”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore he notes that the playwright in times of war “must expose the lies disseminated amongst us on the nature of war. For countless centuries we have glorified war and described it as a stage on which man’s courage, his willingness for sacrifice and his stubborn will to win are revealed.” He calls the poetic glorifications of war “a tissue of lies” (3) and goes on to note that

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<sup>9</sup> English translation of the article “Playwriting in Wartime” has been provided by courtesy of the author himself.

[M]ost people who have participated in a war remember it as a terrible, ugly and humiliating experience. When they think about it they are filled with terror, horror and disgust, not pride and not satisfaction. They know that the pain they experienced will never abate. Hundreds of thousands of us are unable to live normal lives because of our war experiences, and our neighbors, too, have similar nightmares. The playwright must remind us all of this so that those who have not experienced war will not be so eager to participate in it (2).

In line with my thesis that a theater of war that aims towards the awakening of critical thinking in the audience in the ways promoted and illustrated first by Bertolt Brecht, Motti Lerner notes precisely that a theater of war that lucidly exposes the evils of war will act as a warning force for the audience, and therefore create, as I have contended so far, a safe space or at least the possibility of a safer space:

The heroes of our political plays, too, will fail in their endeavors to counteract the reasons for war. They, too, will fail to prevent the titanic clashes in whose shadow we live. But their failure is a warning signal for the audience. Their failure on stage strengthens the audience to contend with the reasons for war existing in their own political reality (4).

Precisely the function of theater as “warning signal” is in my belief that which has the potential of making out of the theater of war a safe space in the sense of enabling the spectators to develop strategies of resistance to war, strategies of denunciation of its injustice and futility and furthermore, strategies of self-preservation in conditions of war and violence. In an ironic manner, the artistic theater of war must to some degree, through its reenactments, through the rekindling of painful memories, the reliving of suffering and through the telling of wrenching stories, inflict a form of secondary psychological trauma on the audience in order to alert them and warn them of the primary trauma of war itself and thus turn them into thinking, resisting subjects.

Even when torn by doubts about the function of the playwright in society, Motti Lerner persists in believing against all odds in the necessity to create art that questions and stands up to the cruelty of war. He says:

Every day I awaken to new doubts, and every day I am compelled to go on fighting them in order to again believe that the playwright’s influence is not an illusion. Every day I reiterate to myself that while the playwright is, perhaps, unable to bring about immediate change, he can possibly do so in the long term. Perhaps he is creating a latent stream of consciousness that is gradually spreading, gradually reaching hidden corners, and in not too many years’ time we will all discover its influence (9).

It is the “latent stream of consciousness” reaching “hidden corners” that makes of political theater and of the theater of war in particular a safe space where audiences are being warned, awoken to and initiated into a rhythm of questioning, critical thinking, and lucid action that even if not capable of stopping wars, is at least capable of creating a cordon of resistance and memory. The street performances of *Women in Black* in silent remembrance of the victims of the Bosnian War of the nineties have by now become an annual occurrence in Belgrade. Motti Lerner’s play *The Murder of Isaac*, about the brutal assassination of the Israeli prime-minister Ytzhak Rabin is finally being produced in Tel Aviv during a time when violence and armed conflicts between the Palestinian and Israeli forces are as worrisome as they have ever been. Its message of peace articulated in a highly experimental theatrical form is allowed to air out at a time of extreme conservatism of the Israeli government.<sup>10</sup> When asked what was the motivation for the writing of his play *The Body of a Woman as a Battlefield in the Bosnian War* Matei Visniec gave the following answer:

This was the original motive for my play: to write as a way of trying to understand.

To try and understand how this mechanism transforms normal people into brutes, ordinary people into savages. To try and understand how, in the middle of Europe at the end of the 20th century, we are having to confront, yet again the murderous folly of a war with all the ingredients of a new world war. Is the nationalist fervor in the Balkans the price we must pay for the final departure of communism? If this is the case, then that Utopian concept, responsible for the deaths of 100 million people hasn't yet come to an end, and even after the announcement of its death, it continues to poison our lives<sup>11</sup> (1).

Visniec’s play raised consciousness internationally about genocidal rape and rape as a form of warfare. It certainly has not stopped world-wide instances of rape used in modern warfare from the Balkans to African nations to Latin America, but in its corner of the world it has had a small impact in establishing legislation about rape as a war crime, it has offered victims of war and of genocidal rape from the region a model of survival and the image of a strong heroine who raises above her traumatic past. Equally, the DAH Theater’s productions of *Crossing the Line* have contributed to

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<sup>10</sup> *The Murder of Isaac* is finally being produced in Israel and will open in May of this year in Tel Aviv. Lerner said that when he first wrote the play, very soon after the assassination of Rabin, no Israeli theaters wanted to produce it on account that the trauma was too fresh for audiences to be able to deal with that reality. The play was staged though at Center Stage Theater in Baltimore, in 2007.

<sup>11</sup> This quote is from Matei Visniec’s introductory note to the English Translation of *The Body of a Woman as Battlefield in the Bosnian War* by Alison Sinclair.

sensitizing more Serbians to the brutal history and nationalistic violence of their own government in the war of ethnic cleansing waged against the Muslim Bosnian population, and has given victims, in the words of one of the actresses in the group “a dignified place and respect.”

Dijana Milosevic noted that the performance *Crossing the Line* emerged from a need “to pull souls from the wreck and to remain with them in many spiritual and concrete ways.” She continues to say that:

[T]he challenge and the responsibility was not to stay in that place, but to return this time to the company of those souls walking in the dark. [...] The way to reenter light, in the company of others, is actually the power and law of theater – to transform darkness of the horrific picture into a clear physical and spiritual presence on stage, to shed light on darkness. The process would pose difficult questions about responsibility, the right to deal with hard experiences of others, to encounter my own fears, and to reject truth that hurts myself.<sup>12</sup>

Sanja Krsmanovic Tasic, one of the three main actresses of the performance notes the following:

I help the wars of the nineties be seen from a peephole of intimate, sometimes harsh truths, and not through the screens of one-sided TVs, or through the mouths of covetous politicians. Because only through these personal stories and immediate contacts can we encounter humanity in ourselves and realize the essence of the relation of ME and YOU, against the relationship of US and THEM.<sup>13</sup>

In the Preface to his collection of plays about world genocides of our times, titled *Soulographie*, Erik Ehn confesses that “Playwriting has always been an unsolvable problem for me; genocide is an irresolvable object. Sometimes it takes a broken shoe to fit a broken foot. Theater’s loose ends and available center are well matched to a subject that will not be fully located, or known, in a satisfying way, as content” (5). And he goes on to describe *Soulographie* as “a ruined body”, a series that is “pieced by the will of a network, and presented impossibly (a landscape that can’t be taken in, entirely, from any one point of view).” Ehn speaks in startling terms of a shattered, broken form, and of “inadequate language” as the only way to break the “immobility” of genocide and, as Visniec professed about his play as well, to try to understand, to refuse the notion of the inexplicable: “When we accept events to be inconceivable or inexplicable and leave it at that,

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<sup>12</sup> This statement is included in the program/brochure of the show *Crossing the Line* in bilingual format – Serbian and English.

<sup>13</sup> The statement is contained in the same program mentioned above.

we buy into a political lie and submit our heads to the truncheons of uselessness” (6). “To invade reality,” he also says, “we have to shatter a pane, to reach through and unlock the windows. We strip from language all that may be owned by art, so that the poverty and crisis in which our words find themselves are the apocalypse of the actual. [...] Engaging is stripped, fragmentary, splintered description – engaging – is resistance” (10). But most startlingly, Ehn points to the flagrant inadequacy of language when faced to the reality of war and genocidal violence and the need for a grotesque expression and for a language that transcends human language. He startles us by professing that: “Writing aspires to barking. While I am sentimental, my effort in the end is not to loveliness; dogs in a genocidal circumstance (the *Iliad*; see *Dogsbody*, the last play in the *Soulographie* series) are grotesque. Sometimes dog language – moaning, ripping – is the best match for the scene; language of witness martyred down to dog” (5).

All the testimonies of theater artists quoted above seem to be tied together by a fierce and relentless will to believe in the necessity of authentically political theater as a restorative force, as a vehicle for understanding and of resistance and as refusal to buy into political lies. Erik Ehn’s observation that the landscape of genocide is one that “can’t be taken in entirely from any one point of view” and his celebration of fractured forms and “splintered description,” is precisely in line with the core of my argument about the aesthetic of fragmentation and discontinuity as the only productive and viable aesthetic form to deal artistically, theatrically with realities such as genocide and modern day wars. In fact, Dijana Milosevic believes that

we do almost a violence when we try to use linear story- telling in theatre. We live in the reality where things are happening simultaneously, where past, future and present are entwined, where our perception creates the reality out of bits and fragments. It is very important to capture life, organic quality in the performances and when we work with fragments, parallel realities, different references that exist across time and space, we are closer to this genuine quality of life.<sup>14</sup>

Brecht knew it of course. The separation of elements, the techniques of collage and montage, the jolting of the audience out of their complacency and out of the delicious torpor of catharsis and suspension of disbelief through the process of distancing were created by Brecht not simply out of a desire for theater experimentation but from what he saw as the necessity of theater to create a cordon of resistance to “political lies” and through “splintered description” to create engagement. Even more so, in our post-modern reality of genocides mixed

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<sup>14</sup> This is part of the same larger interview I had with Dijana Milosevic about the workings and functioning of the DAH Theater, about the aesthetic and ethical parameters that define their art.



in with global culture, with virtual realities and the desensitizing that comes with the erasure of cultural identity by globalism and digital universes, the “splintered description,” the coexistence of a multiplicity of points of view is equally an aesthetic as well as an ethic necessity. The unseemly realities of war, respectively genocide demand the hybridity of perspectives, the postmodern resistance to definition, the carnivalesque irreverence towards fixity and authority of any kind, that of restrictive or mimetic theatrical form above all.

Motti Lerner’s play *The Murder of Isaac* takes place in the Israeli Ministry of Defense rehabilitation center for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) cases and is structured in multiple and disjointed layers of theatrical action as the patients are engaged in the production of an anti-war play that keeps getting sidetracked and distracted by the actors’ personal issues and their own diverging positions towards the war. The actor playing the character resembling Ytzhak Rabin is himself shot at the very end of the play in an oblique remembrance of the prime-minister himself and his tragic fate. The play’s language and structure are as in Erik Ehn’s observation “splintered” and composed of collages of songs, speeches, dialogues among the patients as patients and as the characters they are playing, movements in and out of the audience, all in a Brechtian rollercoaster of “separation of elements” and broken fourth walls. The patients go in and out of their parts offering comments on their own characters in the Brechtian technique of distancing and alienation. They break down and break the continuity of the play which they are expected to produce and layer upon layer they build a relentless denunciation of war as they are both living and playing war, as they are both remembering their own wounds and traumas and attempting to remove themselves from their memories through the parts they are playing and also not playing. In the scene quoted below, the Rabbis are the characters in the play that the patients are trying to produce and they are attempting to find a solution to the war. The scene breaks down when one of the actors points a gun at Binder, the character who plays the prime-minister. Lerner notes that “the play is constructed as a play within a play. The dialogues written and rehearsed by the patients are printed in this font, while those created as the play is staged due to the various snags and interruptions appear in this one.”

Rabbi B:	What do we do, Rabbi?
Rabbi C:	Everything. We do everything.
Rabbi A:	“Everything” meaning “everything”?
Rabbi C:	<b>(Forcefully)</b> Everything. Everything. Everything. Everything.
Rabbi B:	You mean really everything?
Shulamit:	He said everything.
Rabbi C:	<b>(In a rage)</b> Everything. Everything. Everything. Everything. Everything!

**At the height of Rabbi C's ecstatic outburst Yigal pulls out a gun and aims at Binder.**

Yigal: Everything! ("**Fires**" **three shots**) Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, who wreaks our vengeance.

Binder: (**In panic**) Ahhhhh... (**He shields his head with his arms**)

Natan: My ears are ringing, Lola.

Lola: (**To Yigal**) Sit down until it's your turn. And put that gun in your pocket. (**To Binder**) Calm down, Binder, he got confused, that's all.

Binder: Did you check everyone at the entrance? Their bags too?

Lola: Yes. (**To Avi**) Bring him some water.

Binder: Are the doors locked? Are the guards outside?

Lola: Yes. (**She wipes his nose**)

Binder: (**To the audience**) They're trying to kill me. By running me down. By poisoning me. By throwing me out of a window.

Lola: We can't continue without you, Binder.

Binder: (**To Lola**) They'll do anything so I won't remind them what war is all about. (**To the audience**) War is a sting on your shoulder. A burning sting! In the dark. Like a hornet's sting. What is it? What's this sting? I've been shot. Who dares? You shout and no one answers. You're all alone in the world. And there's another sting. On the cheek. God, what a terrible noise. And there's nowhere to run. Now there's a flash of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And you're covered in dust and smoke. And you choke and retch. You want to stand up but can't. You try again and fall down. And more lightning and more thunder. And suddenly you feel a dull pain. And the pain slowly spreads. You look to the side. It's hard to see in the darkness. There's something lying there, right next to you. Something weird. Suddenly you understand. (**Slaps his artificial leg**) It's your leg. Your leg that has been ripped from your body. And it's still wearing your boot...

Natan: (**To Talia**) Sing, Talia. Sing your song.

Talia: (**Looks for her mother in the audience**) Where's my mother?

Natan: She's right there.

**The orchestra plays, Talia sings.**

If I had said the cannon needs cooling

You would have said, "Hold off!"

If I had said the rifle was jamming

You would have said, "Cease fire!"

If I had said that we're low on ammo  
You would have ordered, "Halt!"  
If I had said the tank blew an engine  
Then you would have said, "Retreat!"

But I say our hearts are wrecked and defeated  
I say our blood's frozen cold in our veins  
I say our breath has grown short and weak  
And you say "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

I say our skin is scarred beyond healing  
I say that our bones have all crumbled to dust  
I say our souls have been torn to shreds  
And you say "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

I say that there's no more purpose in fighting  
I say that this makes no sense anymore  
I pray to you, won't you please let us live  
And you say "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Binder: **(To the audience)** I sometimes go out of here. They take me to see this country of ours. I walk through the streets. I look at the passersby and don't see any pain in their faces. I see people hurrying by. I see people working. Walking. Enjoying themselves. Loving. Quarrelling. But I know. That one's brother is dead. This one's father. That one's son was blown up. This one hides a scar running the length of his belly. That one hides his burn-scarred hand in his pocket. This one hasn't slept since a bomb landed next to him and ripped five people to shreds. **(Indicates Shulamit)** Her husband and two children were murdered. Pain is a danger signal. If we cover it up, we won't see the danger coming... (15-16).

Just as the patients' scars and amputations, and just as the blowing up, explosions, traumas suffered by the war victims, the play's discourses and continuity, and the play within the play are constantly splintered and blown up, broken and patched back together: an artificial leg, a broken up line, a song, an argument among the actors/patients/war veterans, a shredding of theatrical discourse and a shredding of bodies. Yet there is relentless and unforgiving will to create a safe space of questioning by refusing to "cover up" the pain, by refusing to pretend and act as if

“we won’t see the danger coming.” And let us not forget that, when the play is produced in Israel, the audience for this play is an audience that once leaving the premises of the theater house are rather close to if not precisely within the larger, ominous and real theater of war. But if there is any possibility for safety, that is paradoxically in the courage to ask the unsafe questions, in the boldness to see and point to the “danger signal[s].” Just as in the sample above, the entire play is constructed in a relentless race and shift between the actual lives of the characters/actors/patients – such as Binder, Shulamit, Talia, Yigel, who are all war victims – and the roles they are acting in the play which they are attempting to put together yet never manage to, as the rehearsal/production is continuously broken apart and shredded to pieces by the characters/actors/patients’ own emotions and personal histories. Binder, the one who throughout the play is trying to promote peace and is playing the role of someone promoting peace – very much like the assassinated Ytzak Rabin – is also the one trying to alert everyone to the monstrous brokenness and abnormality of war, in a country where war has become the norm. The fact that in the end he is the one who ends up being shot by one of the actors in the play is doubly ironic and something of a *mise-en-abîme* thanks to which the audience seems to be drawn closer and closer to the action of the play within the play as well as to the action of the real war itself yet still within the boundaries of the theatrical production of the larger play. Was it the PTSD patient Binder that was shot or the character in the play that the patients are trying to put together who was shot? Both of them of course. Crumbling, shredding, breaking are not simply metaphors, they are both the reality outside the theater house and they define the construction of the play within the play that never manages to come together and be presented before an audience. At the very end the patients/actors are desperately trying to keep the play running just as it is disintegrating towards the brutal ending. They urge the orchestra to “Play, play” and the audience to “Start singing” just before one of the patients/actors fires **“three real shots into Binder”** (70). When I asked Motti Lerner in an interview if the experience of war has influenced the form of his play, this is what he answered: “if the content has to do with the experience of war or exile – the form will grow from the same experience. In *The Murder of Isaac* the form certainly grew from the experience of war.” In its brokenness, Lerner’s play does its best to keep us whole, to keep its audiences safe by mercilessly waking them up from the mirage of war, from the illusion that we need war to keep peace, by the lie that there might be any heroism in war and by reminding them that the prime-minister had been killed by “real shots.”

Erik Ehn’s play cycle titled *Soulographie: Our Genocides* illustrates in wrenching and stunning ways his aesthetic/ethic of “invading reality” with theatrical forms that are “stripped, fragmentary, splintered description” precisely because they engage

with and resist through engagement to what others may consider un-approachable, unexplainable. Through the piecing together of the many splinters and shreds of testimony, histories, images of genocides he weaves a thread, a quilt of meanings and an enclosure of safe spaces. He affirms that “*Soulographie* is designed like a planet – it’s taking on giant themes, so wants to be shaped so you can’t see all of it at once; the horizon bends away from you. The too big structure is meant to suggest the unspeakability of genocide; [...] the method of construction (widespread, collaborative) advertises an ethic of community, in redress to genocide’s attempt to forbid history – to forbid the making of meaning by barring our real and imaginative abilities to gather history” (248). His plays indeed unfold like a constellation of horror made flesh, of darkness spoken in edgy strings of words, sentences, sounds, barks, and moans as meaning emerges equally in the piecing together and in the interstices between the pieces that are gathered from across the world from the genocides of Rwanda to El Salvador to the race riots and killings of Tulsa, Oklahoma, to the ethnic cleansing and genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The play cycle creates a constellation of communities, of broken selves that are emerging from the shards. The style of his plays is raw, evocative, abounding in nouns and adjectives that acquire the heaviness of stage actions and light and sound. Like this:

Solamente: In a small pond Peter wades and grows lotuses.  
 Mazout is a genocide singer.  
 The world is a small set of hills.  
 An Oklahoma, a Rwanda  
 An unwiped asshole.

[...]

### **Three – Puppet Show**

#### **a) Genocide Day**

*Child soldier is the chief puppeteer. Lellu drinks at a café; she falls in and out of sleep. This is the fighting she sees on her journeys. Friends are trained by MILITIA MAN.*

CHILD SOLDIER: Boys mass on the hills.  
 Boys mass on the hills  
 The rain speaks  
 Inside the rain.  
 Armed boys train. (*Drunk, Still Drinking*, 138).  
 Or like this:

ACT ONE

TRAUMA WARD

**Trauma 1. Arrows**

MOTHER: Scovia sets out four times. Athlete. Four arrows look for her. Abducted two months, six months, a year, four years. The arrows search for her, don't find her.

FATHER: Four stories, taken together, telescope as one.

MOTHER: Abducted two months.

FATHER: Cooks, holds ankles.

MOTHER: Six months, raped.

FATHER: One year, kills small boy.

MOTHER: Four years, kills/cuts up father, with help of younger brother.

SCOVIA: It has been months since I ...

MOTHER: Honey

Tree

Arrow

Bread

FATHER: Scholar

Athlete

Skein

*Scenes begin with their ending, then go back to the beginning. (Dogsbody, 218).*

One of the most painful moments in the play *Dogsbody* is the one where children soldiers play with a human skull made into a soccer ball. The language is stripped and visceral, a concise yet broken poem, a puzzling and puzzled haiku:

**Four – Man U Tee.**

*Storm is over.*

*A slow air played on bone oboes.*

*A dog eating something it shouldn't, pulling at it, trying to pull it from its place.*

*One boy, two boys, three boys, a dozen clearing the barracks.*

Belle-Rose: Years later they are still young, they are sixteen, they are a soccer team, with donated Man U tees. They play soccer with a human head (230).

During one of the post-show discussions during the festival of his plays at the La MaMa theater in New York in November of 2012, Ehn told his audience that he writes the stage directions and the dialogue as one continuum, undifferentiated, in one stream of story-telling and that he deliberately leaves out prepositions, articles

conjunctions from his sentences to capture more forcefully the essence of a situation, emotion, action, to be more truthful. To Erik Ehn, poetic expression, elliptical languages, overlapping and often contrasting aesthetics which also interweave poetic rhythms, songs, with dislocated chronologies and narrative lines, dialogues and monologues with polyphonic voices and perspectives are meant to express things, actions, emotions more clearly, to take us on an easier route directly to the core of human suffering, to the limits of suffering but also to the overcoming of suffering or at least the recording, the memory, the attempts at healing. As seen even in the brief quotes given here, the elliptical style leads truly to certain poetry of the stage, to a merging of action and word in more seamless and solid units of meaning and emotion. Indeed, what's the point of articles and prepositions when one tries to stage memories of genocides? The visceral brokenness of language and with it that of the stage action initiated is here too, the path to the creation of an enclosure of safety in which theater makers and spectators alike are called upon to ravel and unravel meaning, to become repositories of memory and to salvage history or rather, histories from the wreckage of wars and genocides and to recreate communities.

The aesthetics of the theater of war outlined in this study could be said to illustrate in various degrees a postmodern aesthetics as well as the incarnation of some aspects of post-modern theory. Despite the plurality of positions about what post-modernism really is, despite even conflicting views among its many theorists ranging from Jean-François Lyotard to Jean Baudrillard and Frederic Jameson, there is one strain of thought that conspicuously seem to link the two areas: the rejection of the assumptions of social coherence and the embracing of indeterminacy and of a decentered and fragmented subject. Could it be that the plurality of definitions of the postmodern, its refusal of representation and the impossibility of pinning down a coherent postmodern theory or aesthetics comes precisely from the fact that postmodernist theory emerged in a time when the realities of new wars and "our genocides" were added onto the false unification of cultures under the umbrella of global economies and cultural hegemonies, in particular that of the United States, and the destabilizing realities of post-colonialist societies? Could it be that the very plurality of definitions and the resistance to definitions of the postmodern is precisely what makes it postmodern and therefore that theater of war and theater of witness can only exist productively within a dizzying concatenation of decentered and decentering realities which despite their difference and diversity have one thing in common: a refusal of and resistance to the unifying and deadening shroud of essentialism and a celebration of the particular, the culturally specific, of location, space, geography as fertile loci for the creation of narratives. In her article "No Man's Land. The Intersection of Space and Identity", Ana-Marija Petrunic develops the cogent and provocative argument of the need for "Balkan hybriditiy as art" as a way of bursting the all too self-important bubble of cultural essentialism. She notes that:

[C]ultural essentialism is detrimental to understanding the development of individual and collective identity formation. In place of a Balkan identity, Balkan differences melt into sameness and essentialized identities pervade. Whether orientalizing the other (Said, 1979) or politicizing the mode of representation (Bjelić, 2002), cultural essentialism negates the idea that space becomes a place with meaning thereby creating a location in which identities are shaped and to which acts of identification are formed. This is to say that particular places create narratives to which entire communities and individuals are tied (5).

Instead, Petrunic proposes “hybridity” as a productive solution to essentialism, othering, orientalizing or politicizing: “The theory of cultural hybridity as an alternative framework to understanding postmodern identity suggests that postmodern identities are multicultural and thus may offer a space for resistance, protest, tolerance, and pluralism” (2). Her discussion focusses on art emerging, like that of the DAH theater group from the genocidal war of the nineties in the Balkans. Opposing multiculturalism to essentialism, narrating from the space of the culturally specific instead of an utopian claim to the universal are at the very core of the work of the DAH Theater, mark the theatrical testimonial of Motti Lerner, stretches across the entire arc of Erik Ehn’s *Soulographie* cycle. The latter one is particularly dazzling in the deliberate cultural specificity and flavor, the sense of space and historical time, of geography that stretches from the Balkans in the nineties and two thousands to African countries or Latin American countries in the eighties to the United States during the times of segregation and race riots of the thirties, to the present. In the production of the seventeen plays of the cycle at La Mama in the fall of 2012, each theatrical troupe created very specific locations and cultural or ethnic color through particular choices of sound, costume, accent, staging, video projections. At the end of the festival one felt as if one had engaged in what recently has been coined as “trauma tourism” around the world.

It is actually quite simple: the first time the term postmodernism was used to refer to an articulated theory for a historical movement was by Arnold Thornby in 1939 and he takes World War I as the starting point of this new era. The war to end all wars was only around the corner, and at the end of it, with the Auschwitz furnaces still warm from the burning of human flesh, the expression “never again” rose out from all corners of a world in shreds. But the decades and the century following that roar of indignation proved the exact contrary. More sophisticated patterns of evil, more elaborate forms of torture, genocidal events and wars spread and modeled themselves one after another and were made more ingenious by the new technologies and the digital world. Entire societies have been desensitized to war, and to the sight of atrocity by virtual universes and the appearance of what Baudrillard has coined as the “hyper-real,” a world of simulation and simulacra which is in constant confusion



about the “real” yet in desperate search for it. Most of “our genocides” have arisen from ethnic hatred and a will to erase the OTHER, a will to essentialize and to annihilate difference. As Erik Ehn has noted, genocides attempt to “forbid history – to forbid the making of meaning by barring our real and imaginative abilities to gather history.” The theater discussed here does the very opposite in its fierce attempts to recapture histories, to make meaning, to tell stories and to place the stories in their spatial, cultural, historic, geographical and personal specificities. It is largely the project of post-modern art, irrespective of its many dissenting definitions. This theater creates safe spaces of questioning and remembrance, of community and meaning making, it salvages histories. Matei Visniec has often articulated eloquent views denouncing the utopias behind dictatorships of the right and the left, wars and genocides. At the height of their carnivalesque incursion and parody of Balkan stereotypes about ethnic groups, his two characters from the play *The Body of a Woman as Battlefield in the Bosnian War*, Dorra, a victim of genocidal rapes by Serbian soldiers and her therapist Kate explode essentialisms and ethnic hatred with irreverent laughter and merciless irony. The most recent project of the DAH theater has been the creation of a film/bus tour titled “(In)Visible City” of the theater troupe moving across Balkan regions searching for and celebrating the great cultural and linguistic diversity of its peoples. The bus tour which has been in turn made into a stunning film has managed to transform the anxiety of difference into a hymn to the colorfulness of multiculturalism. Passengers on these buses suddenly see themselves confronted with free and explosively colorful performances by DAH Theater actors who are enacting diverse histories from the Balkans and its many regions and introducing the ideas of diversity and difference as a human and cultural enrichment and not as a threat or a loss.

The question still remains though: “can art make a difference?” Even after arduously arguing in the direction of a positive answer, looking at the state of the world and listening to daily news, I am still left with a nagging “I don’t know!” One thing is sure though: those of us working in, for and towards the creation and protection of that safe space of theater of witness are going to die trying to prove that yes, it does make a difference. I for one, am getting on that theater bus tour of the (In)Visible City. And another thing is sure too: that while we are on that bus tour or inside any theater space creating or spectating stories of survival and denunciation of war, stories of remembrance and healing from war, we are making art not war. And that is a difference.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Quotes from Motti Lerner’s play *The Murder of Isaac* and from the article “Playwriting in Wartime” have been used with the kind permission of the author. The photos of the DAH Theater are included with permission of Dijana Milosevic as are the quotes from their website and program. Permissions from both authors are gratefully acknowledged.

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## SCÉNARIO DE PANTOMIME OU LE TEXTE COMME BOÎTE NOIRE : LES BALLETS DE R. CHAR ET DE B. LEŚMIAN/ THE PANTOMIME SCRIPTS OR THE TEXT AS A BLACK BOX: THE BALLETS OF R.CHARET AND B. LEŚMIAN

WITOLD WOŁOWSKI<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This article concerns a status of the text in scenarios of pantomime and ballet works. As an attempt to approach theoretical problems, the article proposes some basic distinctions, classifications and analytical paths. It also includes discussion about key events connected with the functioning of the natural language in a script and in a spectacle and it moves some problems of an intersemiotic translation. Main issues considered here are different shades of the presence of a spoken word in the pantomime, pragmatic changes in the status of utterances in a staging optics (didascalization), untranslatability of a language content on dance characters, communications difficulties on the axis sender – receiver. Considerations and conclusions are based on works from XIX and XX century (Deburau, Flaubert, Lorrain, Aragon, Beckett, Weingarten). Scenarios of two authors René Char (*La Conjuration, L'Abominable des neiges*) and Bolesław Leśmian (*Skrzypek opętaný*) are a deeper analyzed material.

**Keywords:** theater, pantomime, didascalia, intersemiotic translation, Char, Leśmian.

*Le texte initial de travail [...] théâtral subit des séries d'avatars, d'avortements, de déviations, et enfin de métamorphoses le menant d'un état larvaire au déploiement lumineux de la représentation*  
(J.-M. Thomasseau 1984 :100)

*La poésie dite (= écrite) y est remplacée par des gestes (danse) pris pour « Alphabet ». Mais l'auteur est poète : il va quand même, ou également, en même temps, dire ces gestes, et tout autant le fond physique et psychique sur lequel ils se déroulent, l'éclairage solaire et mental qui les fait visibles*  
(E. Mora 1968 :128)

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*La danse n'a pas besoin de mots... (B. Leśmian, Skrzypek Opętany, p. 234)*

Le scénario de (panto)mime, au sens strict du terme<sup>2</sup>, est un texte *pour* le théâtre où la part du dialogue / monologue a été réduite pratiquement à zéro, laissant une place prépondérante à une sorte de didascalies diégétiques décrivant les expressions faciales, les gestes et les mouvements des mimes/personnages. Pourtant, ce qui saute aux yeux à la lecture de certains livrets de pantomime, c'est que ces longues didascalies mimiques, gestuelles, kinésiques, proxémiques et chronotopiques sont enrichies çà et là de divers éléments que l'on dirait instinctivement parasites, mais que l'auteur a jugés nécessaires à la bonne compréhension de son œuvre, ainsi qu'à sa matérialisation efficace dans la réalité performative pluridimensionnelle.

Déjà à ce stade, on voit donc se profiler une distinction fondamentale qui ouvre une piste d'analyse importante :

a: d'un côté, le texte de scénario mimique comporte la description de la mimique, du geste, du mouvement, des paroles, des accessoires et de l'espace-temps où évoluent les sujets et les objets ;

b: d'autre part, le scénario charrie (ou peut charrier) d'autres éléments qui ne relèvent pas des catégories mentionnées (énoncés poétiques, remarques méta-théâtrales, réflexions d'ordre général ou philosophique, etc.).

Si l'on ajoute à cette dichotomie les difficultés pratiques de la traduction trans-sémiotique et les effets de stimulation et d'harmonisation intermédia (Wołowski 2012), on comprend à quel point le statut de scénario mimique est complexe et pourquoi ce type de texte jouit dernièrement d'un intérêt croissant<sup>3</sup>.

Face à ce phénomène, il est légitime, sinon urgent, d'esquisser une carte provisoire du terrain, ce dernier devenant de plus en plus attrayant, et ceci à plusieurs égards. Sans vouloir tenter ici une théorie globale de la pantomime, nous soulèverons juste quelques problèmes qui nous semblent importants du point de vue méthodologique : distinctions fondamentales, pistes d'analyse possibles, questions liées aux relations entre le texte mimique, la parole et la danse. Notre démarche, au fond textocentriste, ne saurait bien entendu faire économie de la transposition scénique du substrat verbal des œuvres pantomimiques. L'interprétation

<sup>2</sup> Nous écartons ici les scénarios des pantomimes dont les auteurs et les usagers ne font aucune distinction formelle entre *drame* (pièce de théâtre) et argument de ballet / mime / pantomime. En effet, une simple prospection effectuée dans l'Internet, à travers les sites en langues différentes révèle que l'on fait régulièrement confusion entre les spectacles où prévaut « le signe zéro de la parole » (Kowzan 1982) et les spectacles polyphoniques et plurivoaux faisant intervenir diverses formes de dialogue et de monologue, et même, ce qui est presque systématique, des voix narratives. Nous écartons aussi, pour les mêmes raisons, le *mime*, au sens médiéval du terme, qui est un genre monologal ou pseudo-dialogal. Voir ici même la note 5.

<sup>3</sup> Segre 1973 ; Kowzan 1982, 1988 ; Stone 1985 ; Pallacio 1990 ; Rykner 1996, 2007, 2008 ; Smużniak 2004 ; Lapalce-Clavierie 2005 ; Okupska 2006 ; Wołowski 2007a ; Komorowska 2011 ; Wojda 2011.

scénique, virtuelle ou réelle, reste toujours un point focal où tendent tous les ingrédients de l'univers de l'œuvre écrite pour le théâtre, qu'il s'agisse du texte lui-même ou d'éventuelles interventions para- péri- ou méta-textuelles produites par l'instance auctoriale ou d'autres sujets-émetteurs.

Commençons par une affirmation de base : le théâtre n'est pas seulement une image, le théâtre, c'est aussi une écriture, l'écriture du mouvement, de l'espace, de la parole (prononcée ou tue) qui génère des images et qui s'anéantit même parfois pour leur donner naissance et épanouissement, tel le grain de la parabole bien connue. La parole théâtrale, organisée en une *intrapolyphonie* (ou *rhapsodie*, Sarrazac *e.a.* 2005 :183) spécifique, toujours prête à projeter et à être projetée, est probablement le meilleur levain pour la fabrication des visions dynamiques, plus mobiles et plurielles que celles nées du discours magmatique, chaotique et homogène qui caractérise d'autres genres d'écriture. Associer à la parole le corps adéquat, la chose adéquate et l'image attendue – voici peut-être la plus brève définition de la *sémiosis* opérant dans la plupart des pratiques théâtrales contemporaines. Ceci dit, il faut observer que la communication ne se satisfait pas aujourd'hui de la parole seule. Celle-ci, isolée de sa situation, de l'histoire, de l'image, risque de paraître un peu mince, incertaine, insuffisamment amplifiée. Tout texte, et surtout le texte de théâtre, doit donc être toujours considéré dans une perspective double : comme porteur et déclencheur d'images et comme composante de la réalité audio-visuelle, subordonnée aux grands principes régissant la structuration du message multimédia, tel que l'équilibre des codes, entre autres (*cf.* Wołowski 2012). Dans ce sens, l'une des démarches capitales est aussi celle de relever avec précision tous les moments de synchronisation inter-code.

Le présent article aborde surtout ce premier aspect de la textualité théâtrale, même si, comme nous allons le voir tout à l'heure, il est impossible de le détacher complètement du second.

Avant de passer à l'examen des textes concrets et aux questions théoriques relatives, faisons encore quelques observations générales.

1 : Tout scénario mimique est un texte didascalique, mais tout texte didascalique n'est pas un scénario de pantomime. *Texte didascalique* est dans notre nomenclature un terme plus vaste, qui comprend les *scènes muettes* (présentes dans toutes les dramaturgies du monde), les drames quasi-didascaliques (intermèdes d'*Elsa* d'Aragon), voire les séquences muettes des pièces semi-pantomimiques (*Alice* de Weingarten). Tous ces types de texte donnent lieu à différentes stratégies de traduction en langage audio-visuel, en fonction de la présence plus ou moins marquée (ou du voisinage plus ou moins direct) de la parole articulée. Le scénario mimique, comme objet d'étude, devrait donc être traité à l'intérieur d'un champ de prospection convenablement large et sectorisé.

2 : Lorsque l'on parle de la présence de la parole dans le contexte des spectacles silencieux, on doit en outre tenir compte de deux autres paramètres : le degré et le temps de cette présence. Les différentes modalités de celle-ci sont en rapport avec le type de pantomime donné. En effet, la pantomime, comme l'affirme Rykner, n'est « ni pur théâtre silencieux, ni simple discours imagé » (2008 :161). Il apparaît alors absolument primordial de déterminer à quelle conception du mime nous avons affaire. Au fond, il y a deux conceptions essentielles :

a : la pantomime conçue comme résultat de la suppression, plus ou moins arbitraire, de la bande son dans une fiction représentée ; c'est le cas des œuvres mimiques de Debureau (pures nouvelles dialoguées destinées à la transmodalisation mimique), d'un *Pierrot au sérail* de Flaubert, ou de *Colombine sauvée* de Lorrain, mais aussi de certaines scènes des pièces comme *l'Intérieur* de Maeterlinck. La situation est ici en quelque sorte semblable à celle du film muet réaliste.

b : la pantomime abstraite où les corps et les mouvements sont davantage d'éloquentes métaphores que des sujets/objets dépourvus de voix. Dans ce genre de monde fictionnel, les personnages s'expriment essentiellement par le mouvement et la danse qui deviennent des moyens artistiques à part entière (les deux volets de *l'Acte sans paroles* de S. Beckett peuvent ici servir d'exemple).

Le problème de la présence de la parole dans la pantomime conduirait ainsi à distinguer trois types de textes que j'ai déjà évoqués dans mes travaux antérieurs (Wołowski 2007a, 2007b) :

a : textes didascaliques dans lesquels la parole ou la pensée articulées sont totalement absentes. Ce qui pose ici un certain problème théorique, c'est l'emploi de tableaux, écriteaux, inscriptions et d'autres dispositifs permettant d'introduire sur la scène la langue naturelle sous sa forme écrite (par ex. le mot EAU marqué sur la bouteille dans *l'Acte sans paroles* de Beckett). Il en est d'ailleurs de même avec la musique qui, à travers les airs faciles à reconnaître, suggère les paroles qui s'associent à eux.

b : textes didascaliques qui font appel à la parole non prononcée au niveau du spectacle (discours direct, indirect, narrativisé, récit de paroles, etc.).

c : textes didascaliques qui supposent une réelle présence sur la scène de la parole prononcée à haute voix (dotée ou non d'un sens précis).

Tout retour de la parole prononcée dans les pantomimes est corollaire du principe déjà mentionné d'équilibre des codes entrant dans la composition du message multimédia : le canal artificiellement désactivé finit toujours par réclamer ses droits. Ce que l'on chasse par la porte revient par la fenêtre.

3: En définissant la spécificité de la pantomime, il faudrait enfin distinguer deux types de *mimésis*: la *mimésis naturelle* où l'auteur du texte exploite le maximum des moyens d'expression et des canaux communicatifs possibles, et la *mimésis réductrice* où l'auteur s'astreint à utiliser seulement des moyens expressifs et des canaux de transmission sélectionnés. Il est clair que le second type de *mimésis* aura

pour effet un plus grand décalage entre le message émis et le message reçu. En opérant dans le champ de la *mimésis* réductrice, l'auteur d'un livret de pantomime étouffe consciemment le syncrétisme naturel des sens, des genres et de la communication ; dès lors, il doit envisager des problèmes d'interprétation / réalisation / réception / assez sérieux, surtout s'il tient à communiquer des contenus complexes et compliqués. En rédigeant son scénario, il doit en fait se rendre compte du gouffre qui sépare son produit de celui qui atteindra le public visé. L'auteur propose, la scène dispose. Cependant, comme dans le cas de tout autre type de texte théâtral, les auteurs des mimo-scénarios peuvent également nourrir l'espoir que leurs textes, restant enfouis lors du spectacle comme une boîte noire à l'intérieur d'un engin, pourront, grâce aux talents des interprètes, ou par un simple hasard, se teinter de nuances nouvelles et insoupçonnées. En effet, l'image scénique apporte toujours une plus-value et peut mettre en relief très avantageusement certains aspects du projet textuel peu saillants à la lecture.

Pour avancer, on verra de plus près des textes concrets choisis dans le répertoire de deux auteurs, René Char et Bolesław Leśmian, qui illustrent à merveille les principaux problèmes d'interprétation et de réception engendrés par l'« écriture gestuelle » (Mora 1968 :124), et surtout par une écriture gestuelle de très haut vol.

René Char, connu plutôt pour son œuvre poétique, tout comme Leśmian du reste, est l'auteur de deux ballets de facture très originale et intéressante : *La Conjuraton* (1946) et *L'Abominable des neiges* (1952).

Le premier mimo-scénario, *La Conjuraton*, comprend cinq « strophes », précédées d'un prologue et d'une brève apologie de la danse dont la charmante expressivité est vantée par l'auteur sur un mode lyrique juste avant l'entrée en scène des acteurs-danseurs. Au tout début, le texte de *La Conjuraton* se présente comme une partition pour danseurs à peu près classique, quoique...

[...] *Crépuscule peu avancé. Des fétus de paille s'élèvent sous les pas du danseur. / L'Homme à la peau de miroir paraît. [...] Il danse. Sa danse révèle une douleur rugueuse, incapable d'éclater, qu'une ivresse orageuse, versatile, interrompt soudain. Il s'efforce de donner l'assaut au paysage* (p. 1089).

Même s'il s'agit d'une instruction chorégraphique, on voit bien qu'il y a là quelque chose de plus, une littérature évidente, une émotivité labile, un on ne sait quoi d'obscur et d'inquiétant. Le transcodage exact, et surtout un transcodage immédiatement intelligible de ces didascalies en figures de danse frise l'impossible, cela est évident. Et inversement : si l'on voyait sur scène les mouvements réels du danseur correspondant aux indications que nous venons de lire, qui les (re)transcrirait avec les mots employés par l'auteur du scénario ? Repasser de l'image au texte produirait donc sans aucun doute un effet de téléphone arabe, ce qui démontre fort bien non seulement le caractère vacillant des signes dansés, mais aussi la fâcheuse conventionalité des didascalies pantomimiques.



Dans la première strophe du ballet, on repère un intrus : la description de la danse intègre une intervention verbale que la didascalie diégétique signale explicitement :

*Une jeune danseuse se tient à l'écart, qui ne ressemble à aucune autre. [...] Une voix, anonyme, insituable, énumérera des prénoms d'homme ; une deuxième voix dira des prénoms de femme\*. [...] Des mots susceptibles de suggestion, mots à la recherche de leur éden ou de leur sable, mots qui dépaysent ou recomposent, s'inséreront dans l'énumération, comme un arbre brille [...] dans le nombre de la forêt (p. 1089).*

L'astérisque placé en fin de la deuxième phrase renvoie le lecteur / metteur en scène à une note en bas de page, dans laquelle l'auteur indique les prénoms et les expressions à prononcer dans l'espace du jeu pendant les évolutions de *L'Homme à la peau de miroir* et de l'actrice nommée simplement *Elle*. Remarquons au passage une inversion des couches textuelles typique de la *mimésis* pantomimique : la didascalie occupe la position centrale, tandis que le « dialogue » est relégué dans une note marginale :

*\* Les prénoms et les mots : Hélène, Jean, Francis, Solange, – la sécheresse –, Irène, Claude, – la révolte –, Romain, Louise, – la patience, la moisson, – François, Thérèse, – la fumée –, Gilles, Michel, Henri, – les casseurs –, Marie, Jérôme, – la beauté –, Pierre, Catherine, – l'audace, – Jacques, Lucien, Yvonne, Blanche, – Assez creusé ! Assez creusé ! (p. 1089)*

L'architecture chorégraphique de *La Conjuración* laisse ainsi une fenêtre ouverte à des voix qui « trouvent ici ou là » le silence ou qui forment, selon une autre métaphore, des « excroissances » sur le tronc du spectacle constitué par le discours muet des mimes (Rykner 1996 :209). Les mots à vocaliser qui ponctuent cette scène, en plus de leur force évocatrice purement linguistique, peuvent accessoirement libérer un potentiel pictural, voire spatialisant, puisqu'ils conservent toujours le caractère de suggestion didascalique que le metteur en scène a le loisir d'exploiter en construisant la représentation. La fumée, la moisson, l'extraction des pierres dans la carrière, la révolte – autant d'éléments qui suggèrent des images « meubles », assez lisibles en somme, qui peuvent s'inscrire dans le tissu des phrases dansées par les acteurs. Cette libération de la didascalité interne des mots et l'utilisation créatrice de celle-ci sont les principales tâches du lecteur / metteur en scène.

En décrivant le phénomène pantomimique, Rykner a raison d'accentuer le terme d'*énergie*, présent déjà dans les commentaires de Diderot. En effet, l'écriture des séquences mimiques devrait se caractériser, selon le philosophe, par une richesse émotionnelle et picturale susceptible de stimuler l'imagination de l'acteur-mime et de lui servir sans cesse d'appui. Mais Rykner rappelle aussi le fait que le rôle de l'auteur de pantomime consiste en même temps à « proposer un texte suffisamment ouvert pour que l'acteur se nourrisse de [cette] énergie que font passer les mots » (1996 : 213). La qualité d'un scénario mimique dépendrait ainsi de deux facteurs apparemment

contradictoires, à savoir de son côté « béquille » et de son côté « carte blanche ». Aspects apparemment contradictoires, parce que la puissance inspiratrice du livret implique la plupart du temps une forte densité sémantique du texte, et la forte densité sémantique du texte, difficile à traduire en signes théâtraux, produit un effet paradoxal de liberté (ou, plus précisément, de fausse liberté).

On le voit bien d'ailleurs dans les strophes suivantes de *La Conjuración* qui font défiler des figures chorégraphiques contraignantes et laxistes à la fois. Ces figures, exécutées parfois par des animaux, sont souvent définies avec des expressions aussi récalcitrantes à la traduction intersémiotique que « l'ivresse versatile » de la première séquence. Selon le scénario, nous devrions ainsi voir sur la scène : « la danse des animateurs inséparables », « la danse-prélude », « la danse de l'exigence », « la danse de l'aimant qui se prive volontairement de son objet », « la danse close », « la danse dissidente », « la danse du secret gardé et de la source furieuse », « la danse de l'indépendance sublime », « la danse hermétique », « la danse de la dénudation du délire », « la danse des pouvoirs impossibles », « la danse du pouvoir élu de l'amour », « la danse de l'aimant sur le point d'appréhender son objet », « la danse des larmes » exécutée justement par un chat-chimère... Outre ces figures aussi ambitieuses que délicates à effectuer, la chorégraphie de *La Conjuración* suppose aussi la réalisation d'autres instructions compliquées, faciles à écrire pour le scénariste, mais difficiles, sinon impossibles à danser :

*Une place. Le matin. La ville s'éveille. L'Homme à la peau de miroir se hâte. Le danseur se signale au petit soleil de l'été. Il mime « Castor et Pollux qui croissent dans le ciel » (p. 1090).*

*La jeune fille poursuit sa danse hermétique. Elle danse « la geste des étoiles qui se montrent puis disparaissent, la nuit, dans l'interstice des nuages rapides » (p. 1091).*

*Quête du vertige. LE FRUIT NE PROVIENT PAS DE LA FLEUR. IL EST SON CONTRAIRE. Le fruit est le prolongement du soir. Il est le trait d'union entre le soir et le risque. (p. 1092)*

Souhaitons au metteur en scène et à son équipe des idées lumineuses et un énergique soutien de Terpsichore, muse de la danse, sans lequel les visions subtiles de Char auront toutes les chances pour essayer, sur la scène, un fiasco sémantique retentissant. En effet, les séquences du scénario citées ci-avant exigent du danseur l'expression des contenus linguistiques d'une finesse redoutable (allusion à un motif mythologique, extrait d'une œuvre littéraire, syntagmes poétiques à forte charge figurale). Que dire dans ces conditions du statut du texte-source, sinon qu'il est à la fois pure convention, sésame plein de bijoux ou une boîte noire dont on sait la présence, mais dont on ne connaîtra la teneur qu'après l'avoir ouverte (et lue) ? En face des ballets de Char, on comprend bien l'observation d'une de ses premières lectrices, Edith Mora, qui s'est exprimée au sujet de son « théâtre solaire » dans une très belle et éclairante étude de 1968 : « La virtuosité [...] du poète [écrivait-elle] qui

doit dire ce qu'ont à dire les gestes, exige qu'il réalise, pour sa part, une danse parallèle, au-dessus du vide (et peut-être pour le combler...) séparant le plan des gestes du plan des mots. » (1968 :128).

*L'Abominable des neiges*, le second grand texte didascalique de Char, est un ballet qui raconte l'histoire d'une expédition himalayenne : quatre alpinistes et cinq sherpas escaladent l'Everest où ils rencontrent... la planète Vénus et son Satellite. Dans le premier tableau l'équipe se prépare à attaquer le sommet, mais le récit didascalique ne se limite pas à présenter les actions entreprises par les protagonistes en vue de l'opération ; il pénètre dans leurs pensées, signale leurs conversations, pose des questions, se fait écho des réflexions méta-spectaculaires du poète-chorège :

*La plupart de ces derniers [des guides-porteurs] se montrent l'Everest avec appréhension, ils désireraient ne pas continuer... Ébauche de discussion. Les explorateurs sont fascinés par la proximité illuminative du but à atteindre (p. 1099).*

*Les hommes fatiguent et peinent pour ne conquérir que peu de terrain. / Ils se désaccordent (figures de danse ayant la corde pour motif – qu'est-ce qu'une corde ?) et le docteur Hermez part de l'avant. (p. 1100).*

Ce qui est singulièrement intéressant dans cet extrait, c'est la remarque auctoriale sur « les figures ayant la corde pour motif » terminée par une question oratoire qui – attention ! – appartient pleinement à l'ordre didascalique, puisqu'elle suggère aux acteurs que le jeu doit représenter une interrogation dansée, une recherche dansante de la « cordicité », si l'on peut dire ainsi. L'énoncé interrogatif change ainsi de statut modal / pragmatique, devenant une injonction par laquelle l'auteur précise que le mouvement des danseurs doit prendre la forme des improvisations performatives sur un canevas imposé : la corde. Ce *changement de valeur pragmatique des énoncés*, à côté d'une certaine *diminution de la valeur communicative* du texte, est l'un des phénomènes clefs de l'interprétation (dans tous les sens du terme) du scénario mimique.

René Char, nous l'avons déjà vu, se distingue par un sens très aigu de la théâtralité ainsi que par un instinct chorégraphique exceptionnel. Il perçoit mieux que beaucoup d'autres la plasticité dynamique des actions humaines et des motifs culturels. D'où la fréquence de son écriture didascalique et de motifs dansés qu'il introduit aussi dans ses pièces dialoguées (*L'homme qui marchait dans un rayon de soleil, Claire*).

En revenant encore un instant à *L'Abominable des neiges*, soulignons encore un fait aussi banal qu'important : pour la pantomime, tous les sujets ne sont pas également bons. En ce sens, *L'Abominable des neiges* est une idée chorégraphique doublement réussie. Le texte lui-même, nous l'avons vu, est d'une qualité poétique remarquable. Mais ce ballet semble en plus particulièrement convaincant par le thème sur lequel il est axé. En fait, qu'est-ce qui se prête mieux à un spectacle silencieux qu'une lente escalade en haute montagne ? On dirait un sujet idéal : la neige amortit le bruit des pas, l'effort

des protagonistes réduit au strict minimum les échanges verbaux, l'action se déroule au milieu d'un silence majestueux que seules les bouffées de vent peuvent venir perturber... La question du choix du sujet paraît ainsi un autre paramètre qu'il importe de prendre en compte lorsqu'on étudie (ou qu'on évalue) un scénario mimique.

Mais nous n'en sommes pas encore au bout de l'aventure. Ayant dansé ce qui précède, les mimes de *L'Abominable...* devront encore danser ce qui suit :

*Le docteur Hermez est évanoui [...]. « L'Abominable des neiges » s'arrête près du corps. Il se penche et avec douceur le retourne. Aisance extrême du couple dans le chaos aérien et minéral. Méfiance et hostilité du second personnage envers Hermez. Rejetant sa fourrure, le premier apparaît sous les traits d'une jeune femme en maillot brillant. C'est Vénus... [...] et son Satellite céleste qui a échappé jusqu'ici au regard des astronomes.*

*Le Satellite exprime appréhension et blâme. Vénus se gausse de lui. [...] / Saint Augustin rapporte, d'après Varron, que Castor le Rhodie a laissé le récit d'un prodige : Vénus, planète, aurait changé de couleur, de figure et de trajectoire. Le fait se serait produit du temps du roi Ogygès.*

*En réalité, Vénus solitaire vit en exil à la fois dans le ciel et sur la terre. Le jour la trouve aux abords du sommet de la plus haute montagne terrestre. La nuit, elle reprend sa course à l'écart dans la voûte des étoiles. Des humains, elle hante la chaîne des mémoires, vestiges de sa présence jadis au milieu d'eux ; Vénus victrix, Vénus d'Homère, Vénus himalayenne...*

*« Nature, écrit Anacréon, a donné sabots au cheval, pieds rapides au lièvre, au lion la mâchoire béante, au poisson la nage, à l'oiseau le vol, à l'homme la pensée, à la femme ? Il n'y a plus rien pour elle. Que lui donner maintenant ? La Beauté. » La beauté et la neige en qui s'opposent et s'unissent la limpidité et le double sens, ces conventionnels inséparables (p. 1101).*

Si tout ce que nous venons de lire doit faire objet d'une transposition chorégraphique, nous devons admettre d'office un certain degré d'insatisfaction chez le spectateur qui connaît le texte (ou même chez celui qui ne le connaît pas). Il y a pire : nous devons nous rendre compte qu'entre le scénario du ballet et sa représentation scénique s'étend un abîme, voire un abîme double : celui de la *différence* et celui de la *liberté*. En effet, exiger qu'un essai philosophico-historico-littéraire fasse figure de scénario de ballet est une attitude assez arbitraire qui, en définitive, ne saurait produire qu'une frustration (provoquée par l'énorme *différence* entre le texte-source et la performance-cible). Mais, d'autre part, essayer de mettre en scène le texte de *L'Abominable...* doit quand même procurer une agréable sensation de manque de contraintes à peu près total. Allusions érudites, flashes mythologiques, citations de grands auteurs du passé, figures de style et simples connecteurs logiques organisant le discours – tout cela prend soudainement une coloration surprenante : au lieu d'être ce qu'ils sont, ces éléments hétéroclites se transforment en une métonymie du vaste univers de la culture, avec tout ce qu'il comporte comme images. Il est clair qu'il est difficile de rendre au moyen de la danse l'expression : « *St. Augustin rapporte...* », mais

ce syntagme, dès qu'il devient une didascalie (c'est-à-dire une directive pratique) doit être lu comme un panneau indicateur : peut-être le chorégraphe doit-il à cette étape étudier un peu l'art de l'époque du grand évêque pour y chercher des inspirations visuelles. *Idem* pour Anacréon et tout le reste. Le texte de Char, indiquant juste quelques points d'appui et des suggestions vagues, ouvre ainsi devant ses éventuels interprètes tout un faisceau de perspectives. Ils ont, tout compte fait, mains libres, carte blanche, feu vert...

Dans le contexte des réflexions qui se situent à la jonction du texte, du mime et du théâtre, on discute beaucoup ces derniers temps à propos d'un des plus importants scénarios mimiques européens, à savoir de *Skrzypek opętany* (*Le Violoniste obsédé*) du poète polonais Bolesław Leśmian. Découverte tardive (texte publié seulement en 1985), *Le Violoniste...* a probablement été écrit en France vers 1912. Pour savoir à quel genre de texte nous avons affaire, précisons qu'il s'agit là d'un scénario de presque 60 pages divisé en 3 actes (trois « Hallucinations ») où l'on voit évoluer plus de 40 personnages, dont la moitié appartiennent au monde féerique (fantômes, ombres, reflets, Ondine). Etant donné que *Le Violoniste...* était initialement intitulé *Pierrot et Colombine* (tout court), on peut dire que nous voilà devant l'un des plus grands *Pierrot* de l'histoire théâtrale. Si l'on considère en outre les atouts artistiques du livret, on peut légitimement soupçonner qu'il y a en Europe peu de textes mimiques de cette envergure<sup>4</sup>.

*Le Violoniste obsédé* de Leśmian, malgré ses affiliations superficielles avec la *commedia dell'arte* et les *Pierrot* français, n'a rien d'une arlequinade vaudevillesque conçue pour amuser les badauds. La spécificité de ce beau ballet de Leśmian, rangé par Wojda (2011 :83) dans la catégorie des *scénarios fantasmatiques*, tient à son caractère à la fois féerique et philosophique, à sa suspension dans un espace mystérieux entre la fiction dansante et la décevante réalité de l'existence. Les didascalies préliminaires nous informent en effet que « *La chose se déroule dans ces intermèdes de l'existence où les paroles manquent, alors que tous se comprennent mutuellement.* » (s. 174). La fin de l'œuvre ménage une nouvelle surprise. Voici les derniers mots du texte :

Le rideau s'abaisse lentement, et après sa descente – dans l'obscurité – on entend encore les trois coups d'horloge qui marquent minuit. Ensuite, les quinquets peuvent s'allumer.

Fin de la fable – début de l'incroyance. (p. 231; traduction W.W.)

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<sup>4</sup> Les brèves analyses qui vont suivre constituent probablement la premier (ou l'un des premiers) commentaire sur *Skrzypek...* publié en dehors de la Pologne. Je tiens ici à remercier mon collègue et ami, Jarosław Cymerman, qui m'a signalé ce texte rare et exceptionnel méritant d'être montré à un plus large public ; je me promets d'y contribuer autant que possible dans mes travaux ultérieurs. Extrêmement originale et profonde, l'œuvre théâtrale de Leśmian connaît d'ailleurs en ce moment un vif regain d'intérêt grâce à la découverte de nouveaux manuscrits qui sont actuellement en examen.

Répétons : la fable mimique de Leśmian se joue « dans les intermèdes de l'existence » et elle débouche sur la déprimante contrée de « l'incroyance » qui s'étend, on le voit bien, au-delà du monde fictionnel. Ainsi encadré, le texte se trouve projeté à l'extérieur de la fiction pour s'installer dans un *no man's land* situé entre la féerie et le monde empirique. Le lecteur l'apprend tout de suite, en ouvrant le livre ; le spectateur, lui, ne le saura qu'à condition qu'on l'en informe explicitement lors de la représentation, et l'unique moyen de le faire serait de verbaliser sur scène les deux didascalies encadrantes.

*Le Violoniste obsédé* est l'histoire d'un artiste (Alaryel-Pierrot) frappé d'impuissance de créer, douloureusement tiraillé entre deux mondes, celui de la plate réalité symbolisé par sa femme Chryse, et celui de la féerie, représenté par l'Ondine, sa muse et son amante. Poussée par la jalousie, Chryse fait appel aux puissances ténébreuses (Sorcière, Nains, Fantômes) pour tuer l'Ondine, dont la musique obsède Alaryel. Accablé, hagard et rongé par le désir, celui-ci se sépare définitivement de son épouse devant la tombe de l'Ondine. À la vue des souffrances d'Alaryel, Chryse lui rend son violon d'or volé. L'Ondine ressuscite alors momentanément, de sorte qu'Alaryel réussit à jouer la belle mélodie dont il avait toujours rêvé, et dont les notes apparaissent sur la robe magique de l'Ondine. C'est peut-être ce jeu qui attire vers lui le Serpent Doré libéré par la Sorcière à l'aide de la clef d'or jadis en possession de la nymphe. Mordu mortellement, Alaryel expire (satisfait?) et la féerie se dissipe. Cette histoire n'est cependant qu'un squelette de l'œuvre. Ce qui est artistiquement le plus important s'accomplit dans les espaces entre les éléments porteurs de la construction.

Tout d'abord, il faut relever le caractère flou du monde représenté, et sa géométrie variable. Comme dans certaines pièces de Pirandello (*Sogno o forse no*), la description de la réalité représentée dans *Le Violoniste...* relativise les formes et les impressions, en autorisant les doutes et une réception subjective :

Une vaste pièce dans la cabane d'Alaryel – une pièce vide et inoccupée, habitée seulement pour la durée de la Féerie éphémère ; équipement rudimentaire, apparemment inutile et accidentel, mais, au fond, indispensable pour les événements et les pratiques féériques. La somptuosité involontaire d'un palais se mêle à un dénuement résolu et prémédité d'une cabane forestière. Cette somptuosité et ce dénuement dépendent du point de vue (ou bévüe). (s. 175, traduction W.W.).

Une pièce à la fois habitée et inhabitée, des objets utiles et en même temps inutiles, une somptuosité et un dénuement dépendant du point de vue (ou bévüe) que l'on adopte... – autant d'éléments qui s'articulent en un monde illusoire et inquiétant, extrêmement délicat à figurer avec les structures visibles et stables de la scénographie. L'univers du *Violoniste...* ne cesse de changer ; il rétrécit, s'élargit, s'étire, s'éloigne, retrouve ses dimensions pour se retransformer encore subrepticement comme les visions toujours mobiles d'*Ulysse* de Joyce :

CHRYSE [...] La pièce s'allonge et tend, dirait-on, vers l'infini, vers les sombres recoins de la forêt.

CHRYSE continue à suivre la trace de l'Ondine impossible à atteindre.

L'ONDINE – lointaine et inaccessible, elle s'éloigne toujours davantage vers le même infini, où toute la pièce semble se précipiter [...]. (p. 185 traduction W.W.).

Si pour le bon déroulement de certaines séquences du *Violoniste...* il faudrait embaucher Marthe Graham et Mikhaïl Baryshnikov, la réalisation adéquate du décor scénique demanderait le recours aux techniques d'animation sophistiquées employées dans les films de Disney les plus récents (Komorowska, qui analyse dans son étude une représentation concrète du *Violoniste...*, remarque que l'auteur de la musique, en cherchant l'équivalent musical adéquat, a eu ici recours à l'*aléatorisme* : 2011 : 5). À tout cela s'ajoute une orchestration raffinée de différents stimuli médiatiques :

[...] À gauche, un trône pourpre avec un dossier étroit qui monte presque au plafond et un marchepied large sur lequel est posé un coussin noir. Sur le plancher, près du trône, un calice d'or et une cruche rouille claire (cadmium orange + vermillon) avec une anse énorme et un goulot étroit. [...]

#### SCENE I

Alaryel et Chryse

ALARYEL assis sur son trône pourpre, pensif, vêtu d'un manteau écru à l'apparence fantastique. Il tient sur ses genoux le violon doré et l'archet.

CHRYSE debout devant son chevalet, avec un pinceau et une palette noire à la main ; au rythme d'une musique, elle peint le portrait d'Alaryel. Elle porte une robe orange et une couronne de roses vermeilles. Elle a aussi un collier fait des mêmes roses, qui entoure mollement son cou, et une ceinture de roses qui serre sa taille d'une étreinte florale. (En exécutant le portrait, tantôt elle cligne des yeux pour observer Alaryel, tantôt elle mesure les proportions à l'aide du pinceau, tantôt encore elle jette sur la toile les taches et les lignes saisies à l'improviste). La musique met en relief et marque chacun de ses mouvements avec un son, un accord ou une gamme appropriés. Elle peint en dansant. Mais c'est là une danse dissimulée et imperceptible. Une danse-frisson qui inquiète le corps d'un frémissement féérique affectant d'abord les pieds, ensuite montant vers les mains, pour onduler vers les bras et couler enfin sur la poitrine... Une danse intérieure, rythmiquement tendue, pleine de déferlements soudains, d'actions et de réactions, mais en même temps de figements, d'arrêts contemplatifs et d'embuscades... (p. 175-176 ; traduction W.W.)

Ce qui frappe dans cet extrait, c'est la richesse de la gamme chromatique, la diversité des sons et les nuances kinésiques. La musique, les couleurs et la danse s'entremêlent dans un faisceau harmonieux des signes. Et il en est de même tout au long du texte qui n'arrête pas de faire miroiter des lumières artificielles et les reflets dansant du feu des torches. Toutes ces lumières accompagnent des effets sonores

programmés avec une extrême précision et les milliers de menus mouvements des danseurs créant une véritable *synchorie* (c'est-à-dire symphonie chorégraphique, selon le mot de Roman Maciejewski cité par Komorowska, 2011 :6). Quant à la musique, les performances définies dans le scénario exigent de sérieux moyens techniques, une inventivité et une qualité d'exécution considérables. Pour ce qui est de la bande sonore, ajoutons encore que dans *Le Violoniste...* toutes les chutes d'objets s'effectuent sans aucun bruit, le poète le rappelant de manière explicite à chaque occurrence (cela pose quand même un problème concret au niveau de la mise en scène) :

Les objets jetés tombent sans bruit. (p. 177).

La musique [...] se fait entendre à nouveau, en pleurant avec le premier accord la chute du violon doré... (p. 182).

La musique se fait entendre au loin – dans un espace inconnu. Il est difficile de définir son éloignement... Il est difficile de deviner son mystère... (p. 183 ; traduction W.W.).

À l'intérieur de cette féerie, tout est donc inconnu, lointain, vague, mystérieux, mais ce tout doit pourtant être figuré, représenté et concrétisé dans l'espace scénique. Comment faire ? Là encore, c'est une inconnue. Comme l'écrivait Rykner, la pantomime « joue l'espace contre le mot, le corps contre le langage » (2008 : 163). Sous la plume du chercheur, c'était juste une affirmation générale, mais elle comporte aussi un conseil : il faut jouer *contre*... Mais il faut aussi se souvenir des principes fondamentaux de la communication artistique et non seulement artistique, clairement énoncés dans ces remarques de Kowzan : « Il est évident que les signes théâtraux sont autre chose que les signaux de la route : on ne peut ni exiger ni souhaiter qu'ils soient univoques. [...] Georges Noizet nous rappelle : "Toute situation de communication suppose un état initial, ce que l'émetteur veut dire, et un état final, ce que le récepteur comprend. Naturellement l'état initial et l'état final peuvent différer" [...]. » (Kowzan 1992 : 103).

Que le texte dramatique et tous les textes écrits pour le théâtre soient des objets fragiles, changeants et systématiquement trahis, nous le savons depuis longtemps. J. M. Thomasseau l'a très bien montré déjà en 1984, en indiquant les neuf états du texte dramatique. À ces neuf états, on peut ajouter un dixième : le scénario de pantomime – texte mort-né ou qui s'annule totalement dans sa textualité pour s'épanouir en images vivantes de la scène. Cette métamorphose vitale et fatale provoque tantôt la joie, tantôt une mauvaise surprise chez l'auteur-émetteur<sup>5</sup>. Tant pis ou tant mieux...

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<sup>5</sup> Au sujet des conflits et « confluences » entre les auteurs et les metteurs en scène, cf. p. ex. Vigeant 2008 et Hubert 2012.



Ce qui est certain en tout cas, c'est que les scénarios de pantomime appartiennent à la catégorie des textes écrits pour le théâtre qui montrent le mieux le hiatus entre *page* et *stage*, entre la surface du texte et la pluri-dimensionnalité de l'action scénique. En constituant de sérieux défis pour les metteurs en scène, ces scénarios poétiques peuvent rejoindre la famille des livrets du XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles (Champsaur, Rebell, Silvestre, Richepin) que Laplace-Claverie qualifiait de *pseudo-scénarios*, « délibérément voués à ne pas être représentés », qui « se donnaient à lire comme un spectacle se donne à regarder » (2005 : 121). En partant d'un autre point de vue, mais en restant toujours dans le domaine où se rencontrent l'écriture, la parole et le spectacle, on voit récemment dans la pantomime un « dispositif » complexe (Rykner 2008) où les rapports entre la langue naturelle et l'image se décomposent pour se recomposer différemment en formant des relations nouvelles, plus conflictuelles, plus difficiles à saisir, mais stimulantes et fascinantes. « Tout œuvre de ballet musical ouvre une infinité d'interprétations chorégraphiques », écrit Komorowska (2011: 1), et l'on peut sans crainte étendre cette affirmation sur l'œuvre mimique écrite.

En ce qui concerne son fonctionnement sémantique, le scénario de pantomime opère d'intéressantes transformations dans le domaine des rapports entre différents modes de discours qu'il intègre et la composante clef du livret, à savoir la didascalie diégétique : en vertu de ces processus, certains éléments verbaux ou discursifs perdent en quelque sorte leurs fonctions naturelles pour devenir des indications de mise en scène. Pragmatiquement, on pourrait parler là d'une *didascalisation* du discours.

En regardant les livrets de pantomime dans une perspective diachronique, on est enfin tenté de dire que le texte mimographique, par sa position en retrait (vis-à-vis du spectacle), subit une sorte d'intériorisation ou de dissimulation qu'il est possible de mettre en rapport avec le phénomène des *théâtres intimes* décrit par J.-P. Sarrazac (1989), bien qu'il s'agisse ici, certainement, d'une extrapolation de ce concept sur les phénomènes de l'émission / réception du message écrit. En effet, le renouveau de la pantomime, genre théâtral qui « avale » le texte pour le transformer, coïncide historiquement<sup>6</sup> avec l'émergence énergique des diverses formes de *theatrum mentis*, où la réalité extérieure est « avalée » et transformée de manière analogue. Vu son irradiation (sémantique inhérente) et sa résistance (au niveau du transcodage), le texte de scénario mimique pourrait ainsi être comparé à une « boîte noire encore fermée » (Debray 2000 : 107) qui ne s'ouvre entièrement que lors de la lecture, mais qui, en contrepoint, constitue aussi une matrice (réduite) d'une spectacularité (elle) illimitée.

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<sup>6</sup> « Aujourd'hui le mime désigne un genre théâtral qui repose entièrement sur le langage du corps humain, et désigne également l'interprète spécialisé dans ce genre. Le mime s'est perpétué tout au long de l'histoire du théâtre, avec des temps forts (le Pierrot de Jean-Gaspard Deburau au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle), et un important renouvellement dans le dernier quart du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle), sous l'influence des techniques cinématographiques et de la danse moderne. » (F. Fix *e.a.* 2005 : 526).

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## DOCUMENTARY AS OBLIVION AND A LITTLE BIT OF MEMORY - NATURE THEATRE OF OKLAHOMA AND THE UNCREATIVE WRITING

ANDREA TOMPA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The present article deals with the performance of the American avangard theater Nature Theater of Oklahoma, looking at the texts created with a documentary technique, documenting a special function of memory, or rather oblivion. Cultural oblivion is a key for interpreting the texts of this group.

**Keywords:** documentary theater, verbatim, cultural memory, American theater, Nature Theater of Oklahoma, Romeo and Juliet, Life and Times, Hungarian theater.

'It's an old theatre, but they keep developing it'.  
'I'm surprized – said Karl – that there aren't many  
more people who want to join them.'

Franz Kafka: *Amerika*

Nature Theater of Oklahoma is a theatre company based in the United States, but it does not have anything specific to do neither with nature nor with Oklahoma. The independent company from New York borrows its name from the last chapter of Kafka's novel *Amerika*, in which the protagonist spots the poster of the Nature Theater of Oklahoma and is later admitted to join the company. Everybody is welcome here, says Kafka's poster. Everybody can be our protagonist, claim this contemporary theatre group, founded by the Slovakian origin Pavol Liska and his partner, Kelly Cooper. Both directors are people with peculiar looks: Pavol Liska is bald, wearing a fair-sized antique handlebar moustache, while Kelly Cooper wears a different elaborate hair installation each day. Nowadays they often perform in Europe, at the Burgtheater in Vienna, in Avignon.

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Their performances open up new ways of documentary theatre and of cultural oblivion, elaborating on a new way of thinking about theatre and text, which lays quite far from the European traditions, even being subversive to it, while it is also constantly reflecting on it.

America is a country without a past, a cliché which we often like to think and say, with pity and feeling of superiority, since their 'white' history is lot shorter than the European. Yet, looked at from Asia, China, Persia or even Egypt, our European history is also short and superficial. Nonetheless, America's young history is often a relief to our Europeanness constantly overwhelmed with the past.

European theatre culture can also be described by the dynamics of remembering and oblivion. Just like the absence of remembering, which means, forgetting, is a sinful burden on the shoulders of one or another Greek hero, who forgets about his own fate, and thus theatre will show us the act of remembering itself; in the same way the heroes from Hamlet do not observe the mourning, meaning that they forget it, and try to cover up the murder, while the Ghost's role is precisely to remind the living of their punishment. Ibsen's plays also carry the obligate memory of the past deeds. Or the theatre (not exclusively Hungarian) born out of the Romantic tradition, which keeps reminding its spectator of history, language and national identity. And finally, the documentary theatre forms born in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century make one face the challenges of remembering. Each of these theatre forms tries to problematize the *dangerous nature of oblivion*. If there is no memory – first and foremost memory of the self, like at the Greek heroes, or collective memory, that is, historical and national remembering –, both the individual and the community will be in serious peril.

Whereas the initial era of documentarism focused on the immediate necessity of remembering – for instance a play like *The Investigation* by Peter Weiss, in which the minutes of the Auschwitz trials were reproduced word for word –, the newer forms of documentary theatre, from the second half of the nineties, started to analyze how collective and personal memory works, what (how little and how heterogenous) content is preserved in it. One such performance in the Hungarian and Romanian theatre context was the show titled *20/20*, which dissembled the hierarchy between the separate elements, as if everything preserved in the personal historical memory was of the same importance.

In the mainstream Hungarian theatre the question of remembering or oblivion is also today a very strong focus. Twenty years after the change of the regime historical memory and Coming to Terms With the Past have come to new crossroads. Just to list a few from this season: *We live only once...*, a play by János Mohácsi or the plays inspired by the Ten Commandments at the National Theatre are serving the process of remembering even by their themes – you have to

remind yourself of the Commandments. On a personal level the performance titled *Nehéz (Hard)* or *The Misanthrope* could also be described as the drama of self remembering.

Historical, cultural memory or the lack of it can also be spotted in the theatre debates at the Hungarian Parliament, which emerged in relation with the performance of *János Vitéz (John the Valiant)* at the National Theatre. Even today, the easiest way of becoming utterly ridiculous is to *remember incorrectly* the name of a well-known theatre character, as it happened to one of the MP's. *Cultural oblivion is unforgivable.*

The American theatre group chooses to show up instead of chasing away of the memories, or be intoxicated by it, or morally condemn oblivion. Their 'project' titled *Romeo and Juliet* (which is a two-person show) displays the presentation of cultural oblivion in a theatrical frame.<sup>2</sup> The procedure seems simple: the company had recorded interviews to be used as the text of the show, with the so-called average people, asking random folk in the streets to give an informal account of the story, using their own words. Just imagine the same attempt in Hungarian context, when the researcher wants to find out how the 'average Hungarian' remembers the plotline of *Bánk bán, Csongor and Tünde* or the *John the Valiant*. (This is actually what *We live only once...* sets its focus on at the National Theatre, where the characters *fail to remember* the original epic poem by Sándor Petőfi, only recalling its popular operetta version.) Even if there is a difference between the various cultural contexts – e.g. the position of *Romeo and Juliet* in the English speaking cultural background, or *John the Valiant* in the Hungarian, or we can also mention here Europe's most prominent "remembering nation", the German, with *Faust* –, the final picture would barely show any difference. In the next phase of the theatrical work the interviews are transcribed word for word, resulting in texts in which the speakers, in their stammering and broken sentences, face up against an almost total cultural oblivion. They only recall bits and parts of Shakespeare's play, they also find it hard to remember what the names of the two families were and where the plot is set. However, the fact that the play is about two lovers and that there is some kind of family conflict involved which will lead into a double tragedy, is remembered by each and one of them. This is almost all what popular culture has also preserved, for instance the *West Side Story*, since they are clearly more inspired by that, and the effect of films or musicals with a similar title can also not be disregarded.

The 'speeches' recorded in a verbatim manner will then become short monologues.

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<sup>2</sup> Published in: Theater - Yale School of Drama 40/2 (2010).

This is how the play starts:

Uhhh...  
Romeo and Juliet?  
The Capulets –  
And the – ?  
(And I can't remember the other guys.)  
Came from two families  
That didn't –  
That were warring?  
Against each other?  
Aaannnd...  
The two young people fell in love –  
(Even though they were WAY too YOUNG  
to do ANYTHING!)  
Aaannnd...  
Because they couldn't be together –  
They –  
DIED.  
....  
There were fights.  
The –  
But then –  
I know Romeo killed –  
The best –  
The brother I think of Juliet or something.  
I can't remember...  
And uhhhh...  
It was basically about keeping the two young  
People apart.  
And if I remember right –  
He gets injured in a fight – she thinks he's  
Dead – she kills herself – he wakes up – and  
Then he kills himself.  
Right?!?  
I know.  
That's all I know.

Finally, a story starts to frame up from the many small monologues, but it is simultaneously getting more and more uncertain. The narrative mode, however, deprives it of all its literariness, fiction-like character. If there is such a concept as creative writing, there must also be an uncreative writing, too. The way that the text is printed, however, imitates poetry, as if saying: you can write poems in this

way, too. The speakers are also constantly referring to their memory, or rather to its lack. The text wishes to grasp the pure form in which a determining building element of culture is present in the memory, which has, however, almost turned to dust.

After one small monologue the floor is given to another 'recaller', and this is how the text rolls by in its endless monotonous variability, as newer and newer details come to the surface – at a certain point someone remembers the Nurse, the Friar, the exile – or submerge in the sea of oblivion; accompanied by comments or self-comments, contemporary language, slang and turns of the informal language, contemporary cultural contexts. For example the idea that the characters are too young to 'do something'. Strange debris comes to the surface – the 'renowned balcony scene' for instance, from which at least two people could quote word for word. But the circumstances of the double suicide have many different versions. There are also quite a few fake quotations, as the speaker takes up Romeo's or some other character's role and makes up a few lines in our contemporary language. Here the focus is clearly shifted from the content of the narrative to the manner of speech.

The final result shows that if let's say an alien were reading the text, who has never before encountered a text by Shakespeare, it could actually seed out some kind of story from it, even if not a very clear one.

Each monologue is endlessly funny and playful, in its own manner. The attitude which gave birth to this text is entirely American: on the one hand 'culture is accessible to everyone', culture belongs to everyone, there's a Romeo and Juliet hiding in each of us, and everyone is entitled to tell his/her own version – these thoughts reflect an utterly democratic approach to culture. On the other hand, however – since this is what the text demonstrates – this 'culture' situated in the heads barely has any content, it is endlessly scattered, dustified, without any trace of coherence and depth, and it is most likely only nurtured by popular culture. If you like, a play called *Romeo and Juliet* is scarcely remembered by anybody: Game Over, all's gone. It is also part of the authors' viewpoint that the show tries to 'only' acknowledge and show this fact – to document it. And it is the task of the spectators to reflect on that. Our Europeaness would probably go in deep mourning when seeing such an experience.

The two-person show shows a perfect means of estrangement for the text: all is performed in real, and of course consecutively fake, so called Shakespearean theatricality. Small painted set, the stage lit from under, Shakespearean cliché costumes and real English Shakespeare declamation with the gestures which normally belong to it. This is where the verse form gains meaning: the two actors, Romeo and Juliet perform the debris speech, this formless chatter in a heightened



tone, like they truly were ‘the’ *Romeo and Juliet* from the play. They actually are, since this is all that has been left of them by today. The declamation gives a certain tension to the sentences and all which in the spoken form is said to the side, is self-comment, hesitation, lack of subject or predicate, becomes here a conscious choice, part of the artistic intention. As if the form – the theatrical form – had been preserved but the content would have disappeared forever. On the other hand, the performance draws up a fictional frame for the documentarist reality, the sociologically accurate observation. High (form) and base (content) are interwoven like in a post-modernist parable.

This is, however, a maniac minimalism, since everything which is happening in the first five minutes can last for a good hour. This clear, sometimes even shallow, conceptual form, philosophical essay – which is kept alive all along by the work of two very precise and attentive actors – gives possibility for a real contemplation: we immerse gradually deeper and deeper into this narrow yet very illuminating phenomenon of cultural oblivion which – contrary to *Odyssey’s* sinful and therefore destructive forgetting – is no more than an unquestionable and sometimes very ludicrous element of contemporary reality.

Their newer show, titled *Life and Times*, is promising something epic even by its title. And as we submerge in it – down under, since a gigantic work is being born – as if we were watching a distorted version of the epic timeflow in Proust's *A la recherche*. Or maybe the work is a reflection of the Heideggerian concept of existence and time. The first two parts were already presented, while the third and fourth will be staged next year at the Burgtheater. The piece consists of one monumental monologue: an average, middle-class, “typical” American woman tells the story of her life. The way how the text is written shows very strong ties with the *Romeo*: the woman delivers a text which is also not constructed in a literary way, it is not a closed and rounded-up narrative, but instead it is built up of fragmented, hazy, elliptic sentences, aside remarks and self-reflective elements. The small details gradually come to the surface of memory, details which might feel unimportant, if it weren't for a palpable core, a centre or a turning point, they could always connect to. The viewer can believe only for a very short time that some kind of turn will come about in this life story, that we are heading for a sort of culmination or at least experiencing a development of character, as any European can hope who had been brought up with the good old *Bildungsroman*, the education novel. Nothing of the sort actually happens. The concepts of building and character are consciously destructed. While in Proust's memory-voyages a personality is gradually built up, in this story there is absolutely no construction of such an individual. It's better to say that a sort of collective character is being formed – a hypothesis built also on the fact that there are several actors in the show. The

memory is not a sort of Proustian underground stream, which washes out and uncovers details, any act of uncovering seems impossible in this case. Instead we get generalities, thousand insignificant, nice but meaningless details of everydayness: the father is reading a newspaper in the afternoon while the little girl is horse riding on his lap; the children are playing theatre, with a puppy as the protagonist; in the kindergarten someone has a red ribbon in her hair, and 'I was a nice little girl, I remember.' Pretty happy, pretty common, pretty immemorable American childhood.

It is again the mode of narration which becomes emphatic, the way, how an actor is trying to unveil and convey a part of her childhood:

This is how the play begins:

*(breath)*

Um... So...

Shall I start?

Okay.

Um...

*(pause)*

So... let's see. Okay.

Well –

As far as I know, I was born –

*(pause)*

In Providence? Rhode Island?

And – my mother?

*(breath)*

At the time – I was the – THIRD child for her.

And –

They –

*(pause)*

Didn't expect me. They – planned both my

brother and sister before me, and –

So... my mother says that she was – VERY HAPPY

That I was a girl, and she was like:

"you were SO BEAUTIFUL!"

And – I didn't cry a lot.<sup>3</sup>

The company uses the same procedure as in *Romeo*: the form is there as a counterpoint to the content. The content is being rewritten in opera form, like Béla Pintér's *Peasant Opera*. Each word, sentence fragment, hesitation, pause is of great importance. The (American) 'um', 'so', 'okay' etc. receive a specific stress, they

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<sup>3</sup> The full text of the show was published in the booklet of the show.

are no more just clipped hesitations but very important building blocks – almost the essence itself. The first-class musicians are accompanied by a live orchestra. The tempo is slow, tense, endlessly leisurely, just like it were some kind of an Odyssey. In the multi-character performance the actors, duets, trios consecutively pass the torch of storytelling to one another. And the sports metaphor is not a coincidence: the choreography uses the simple gesture system of the Spartakiads (which the director of Slovakian origins could be familiar with from his childhood). This system of signification portrays a standardized society, which on the other hand has a very strong American spirit. (Peter Sellars was using something very similar to Händel's oratory, *Theodora*.) The form is again estranging the content. Whether there is in this story a material for three and a half hours or not we can only judge if we perceive the stage events as a dense, saturated play and we keep reflecting on it, and are able to accept this conceptual form as the only possible one. But as all sort of conceptualism, this one also requires a meditative effort from the viewer.

And choreography is precisely the field the group is experimenting with at present.

Documentary is also used in a dance show. The show titled *Choreography* (*Chorégraphie*) is a curious dance-speech experiment. The title was borrowed from one of the oldest Baroque dance methods, in which Robert Feuillet defines the notion of choreography. As a source of the text three of their actors are asked to describe with their own words an eight-minute-long dance sequence from an earlier show of the company, titled *No Dice*, on the phone, (thus excluding gestural metacommunication). This text is used later in the performance – what an absurd and productive idea. As the three actors have received no dance training, the three descriptions of the same dance scene are quite different. This introductory part is followed by three distinct scenes. In the first one Kelly Cooper, one of the directors of the show, relates the score of the eighth-minute sequence in words, while nothing is happening on the stage, therefore the viewers have to imagine the events. (This seems quite boring). In the next sequence professional dancers come to the stage who think that they are at an audition and could be taken or not in the production in the light of their performance of the sequence repeatedly related by Kelly, and the audience can assess and compare their performance, side by side with the score told by the director. (She had first met the dancers only one hour before the show). The dancers gradually drop out, and finally only two of them remain. In the third sequence Kelly repeats the dance score again then leaves the stage. The music starts while the two dancers simultaneously present their choreography (they can listen to the instructions again through headphones), but the audience only sees the dance without the text this time.

Um – you’re making a –  
Vague –  
(Well, not *vague*...nothing’s *vague*.)  
Uhhmm.  
A kinda –  
A – T-shape with your feet –  
The – the right foot  
Is coming in – the right heel is coming in for this one.  
So, that leg is a little bit more bent –  
Than the left – foot.  
Uhm...  
You’re mostly jumping on your left foot.  
And while you’re doing the jumps –  
Your – arms are going crazy, so...the –  
Left arm – is in – a loose fist...  
With – uh, the thumb – extended.  
And that’s –  
Bending at the elbow.  
So your arm is sticking –  
OUT of your body –  
And bending at the elbow...  
And the first move the – the hand comes up.  
So when you jump the – left hand comes up,  
The – right arm – is –  
You’ve got the index finger pointing –  
And that’s going up, too, so

The text describing the choreography<sup>4</sup> is *Romeo and Life and Times* in every bit. Naturally, the explanation of the eight-minute dance sequence is much longer than the dance itself, running up to the length of about a theatre play.

It seems that life is a lot shorter than the speech about it, since when the protagonist of *Life and Times*, after three and a half (stage) hours is still going to primary school – while we also know that the speaker is well in her seventies –, we suddenly realize that theatre is the most suitable means for stopping time, instead of compression and densification, it can stretch and slow the flow of time to infinity, and by this, it can overwrite the voluble and cursive nature of being. And then, in this stage time made still, the struggle with language starts, since oblivion – both cultural and linguistic, as the two are the same – is there to cover up everything.

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<sup>4</sup> Published online at: [http://www.cipa.ulg.ac.be/intervalles4/57\\_nature\\_theater\\_of\\_oklahoma.pdf](http://www.cipa.ulg.ac.be/intervalles4/57_nature_theater_of_oklahoma.pdf)

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## TRUTH THROUGH THE MEANING GLASS: TANACU IN LITERATURE, THEATRE AND FILM

DANIEL IFTENE<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** Art trying to find or to offer inner meaning to reality: this is the seemingly plain remark that encompasses the sum of literary, dramatic or cinematographic texts that attempt to conquer the intimate significations of one of the recent traumatic events of nowadays Romania: the so-called Tanacu exorcism. In the past years, journalists, writers, stage and film directors became interested in a novice nun's death after a religious ritual meant to cast out the daemons. Therefore, few people thought that the very recent attempt to bring this subject to the screen by Cristian Mungiu would end up vexing, once again, the community interested in the subject. Nevertheless, part of the audience was moved by this new and very realistic interpretation of the events, up to almost the same level as those controversial actions substantiating the fact the "wounds" had not been burned. Where do the sparks of this emotional response lie? The following article tries to answer this question after analysing the interpretation of the real events contained by the most prominent texts that deal with the case, by means of literature, theatre and film, in the complex game of subjective readings.

**Keywords:** non-fiction journalism, documentary theatre, adaptation, audience response, reality and cinema, exorcism, art and religion.

*"Every portrait that is painted with feeling  
is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter."*

Oscar Wilde

June 15, 2005. The day that polarised the media consuming Romanian audience on a subject that was going to circle the world: a young nun's death after a religious ritual at the Tanacu Monastery, a ceremonial supposed to cast out the Devil

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or other evil spirits. These are the plain facts that led to a direct or mediated quarrel between the various interpreters of the sensationalist journalists, ranging from the anti-clerical or atheist groups to the Christian fundamentalists. Each community fashioned specific meanings to the events, according to their own subjective religious, moral, political or cultural beliefs, reshaping the facts in distinct utterance. To the former, the so-called Tanacu exorcism was just another sign that the Church had become a serious impediment in a country that was facing the upcoming EU integration, and the irrationality of faith must not be financially and politically aided by the state. In their constructed reality, the priest was a “murderer” who had killed a young disordered girl, after “crucifying” and keeping her in “medieval” conditions. To the religious people, the storm was even darker, as they had to either place the blame on the Church, thus having to reconsider their attachment to the institutional and moral values and practices of the Orthodox Church, on the priest and nuns that performed Saint Basils Prayers of Exorcism, a well-known practice in the Christian ritual; or to violently dismiss the facts under the pretence that the Church, the priest and the nuns had all been victims of an attack on faith controlled by obscure forces (from heathen journalists and politicians to the Illuminati or masons). Obviously, the majority approached these last two attitudes in order to justify their personal reading of the events, blaming either the “Satan in soutane”, as some called the priest, or the state which had gone under “the demonic possession of the West” (Calciu, “Părintele Gheorghe Calciu despre Biserica și călugarii de la Tanacu”). For a more accurate image of the tensions these choices carry, one may note that the opinion polls conducted at the rise of the third millennium showed that Romanians had faith in the power of prayers (88%), the Last Judgment (63%), the existence of Heaven (65%) and the afterlife (54%) (Metro Media Transilvania 39); in the opinion of 80.5% of the inhabitants of a village similar to Tanacu the clergy are “authentic role models”, just 10% less than the saints, while to more than two thirds of them disobeying the Church’s rules and commandments inflicts evil doings on them (Siritian 20-24).

This is just an outline of the contextual location of text and of audience, a guiding path for the intricate sense-making process (Bhaskar 391) switched on by the fictional and non-fictional artistic texts that are based on the Tanacu events.

One first such appropriation of the story has been delivered by the former senior editor of the Bucharest Romanian Bureau of the BBC WS, Tatiana Niculescu Bran, who wrote, one year after the events, the “journalistic novel” *Spovedanie la Tanacu (Deadly Confession)*, followed in 2008 by *Cartea Judecătorilor (Judges’ Book)*, an account of the trial of father Daniel Corogeanu and the four nuns who attended the religious ritual. From her first attempt, the journalist states the subjective grounds of her non-fictional approach: *Spovedanie la Tanacu* is “just a translation of the facts, the one that seemed the closest to the truth” (Niculescu Bran 2008b 7), one that, in various accounts, she opposes to the general description of the facts in the media.

All the documents and testimonies became, in the following year, the backbone for another search for the true meanings of the Tanacu case, during the Andrei Șerban Traveling Academy, the result of this experience being *Deadly Confessions / Spovedanie la Tanacu*, performed on the famous stage of LaMama Theatre (New York) and Odeon Theatre (Bucharest): a venture “to enhance the understanding of human actions through theatre”, as Șerban describes it in the aftermath of his journey along the Tanacu path (206).

After major Romanian film directors were tempted to bring Tanacu to the screen, the final step in the quest for truth through artistic expression was taken last year, when Cristian Mungiu’s latest film, *Beyond the hills*, premiered at the Cannes film festival, was awarded for best screenplay and acting. As Mungiu recounts, the idea was based on the media accounts of this sensational story, Tatiana Niculescu’s Bran meetings and books, Andrei Șerban’s show, which he saw in New York, and “the terrible polarization amid the audience”; therefore his fictional work becomes “mainly a story about the freedom of choice” (Mungiu “I strongly wish the spectators wouldn’t remain passive watching the movie”).

## I.

The search of meaning in the events unfolded in the months the novice Irina Maricica Cornici spent in the monastery becomes, at Tatiana Niculescu Bran, more than a customary journalistic investigation. Relying on scores of interviews with those involved in the events or with people who knew the victim, on documents and observations, the author takes on a crusade under the commands of the narrative journalistic practice, that of accuracy and neutrality of the account, often dramatized for literary purpose, aiming at a complex work that would take after the famous non-fictional novel of Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (1966).

Exactly four decades earlier, the American author was trying to bring to the public “a serious new art form” which would challenge both the audience, and mostly the writers who were asked to get beyond the self-imposed limits of their imagination, rooted in their subjectivity, and their personal daemons, which sarcastically Capote called “a view that ends with their own toes”. By the means of narrative journalism and non-fictional literature, backed by thorough research, Capote thought that the writer would “empathize with personalities outside his usual imaginative range, mentalities unlike his own, kinds of people he would never have written about had he not been forced to by encountering them inside the journalistic situation” (Plimpton, “The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel”).



In the rough cut, Niculescu Bran seems faithful to the rules described by Capote, which nowadays are current practices in this area of reporting, at least in the professional American media. The form of her expression tries to disrupt by opposition the current practice of many Romanian journalists who were investigating and interpreting the real facts for their audiences. Nevertheless, one cannot overlook a methodological option the author makes, that goes beyond the Capotian rules. The Romanian writer expands the fact-based narrative with a symbolic one, based on various assumptions and inferences.

“Irina Cornici’s thoughts, wishes and dreams, as depicted in the book, belong to logical, psychological and situational inferences, which I outlined, in my mind, from photographs, letters, gestures, personal belongings or places she had been” (Niculescu Bran 2008b, 7)

By blurring the line that should lie between the hard facts and the aforementioned assumptions, the author signals a capital displacement in the outcome of her artistic display of the reality, due to this intentional or involuntary act. Reshaping reality at the very core of the design David Bordwell envisages for his bull’s eye text schemata: the place where all the traits, actions and relationships of the characters reside (Bordwell 171) leads to a major shift in the interpretation of events. The main character’s thoughts, wishes and dreams become vessels for the deep meanings of her actions, favouring a *certain* interpretation of the narrative inside the meaning-making process. What do all these inferences add to the fact that a young orphan girl died in a monastery after being part of a religious ritual?

Deliberately or not, these methodological options manage to bring to the circle that encompass the character’s traits and actions a parallel hyperphysical world, which becomes part of the diegetic one. A world that conveys a very intimate meaning through text, an extremely important one since the author noticed its absence in Cristian Mungiu’s recent cinematographic approach (Sauciu, “Cristian Mungiu, inspirat de romanul *Spovedanie la Tanacu*”). In its climactic progression, this parallel world bears all the sexual, morbid or religious phantasms, and gives proof of demonic possession: at first, the sounds of the semantron seem to disquiet the novice; then, she is tormented by guilt in the aftermath of apocalyptic visions, and experiences symbolic self-defeminisation intent, to eventually drift towards sadism and homosexuality. The dire statement delivered around Irina’s crises, “the fool has fornicated with the devil,” becomes the climactic sentence that authorises a profoundly religious reading. The world of the text that revolves around Irina becomes a territory where God and the Devil fight their never-ending war and the army of devils lead to black damnation, while archangels come in the aftermath of exorcisms to soothe the collateral victims of this battle.

“Everyone she had ever met in all the places she had been blended inside her head at stunning speed. (...) And those she was seeing there had claws, horns, tails, like those in the icons. What if they shamed her? (...) She felt her joint soothed, like a blissful touch, right there where her skin had been rubbed off by the towels. Father Daniel had just touched her with the chrism” (Niculescu Bran 2008b 155-6)

“At once, everything went dark, and she felt like gasping for breath. It was as if hordes of short black demons crawled up her body like flesh-devouring ants (...) instead of cells, she had only small, microscopic devils, bound with more and more complex bonds” (158)

“Suddenly, a bright blaze blinded her, resembling an archangel’s armour. Had she entered the Kingdom of God? The thought amazed her” (165)

The parallel narrative Niculescu Bran builds up from these so-called inferences becomes a major disruption in the non-fictional design of this first book. On the one hand, the author alters the whole pretence of the faithful portrayal of events, and on the other one, she gets to build a very specific “ideological bridge”, in Bakhtian terms (qtd. in Bhaskar 390), which favours the interpretations given by certain members of the audience, especially the pro-religion ones.

No wonder Niculescu Bran’s side of the truth never seemed to challenge the profoundly religious audience, as it portrays the main character as a usual case of possession, thus delivering all the immaterial arguments for the so-called exorcism. In her interpretation of the event, this audience is able to find all the necessary proof in order to back up their own interpretation, and thus empower a seemingly dominant ideology. Therefore, the text manages to provide a more detailed and closer to the truth account of the Tanacu events than most of the local media, but fails to offer one which would put through a test the distinct communities circling this traumatic sequence in recent Romanian history.

## II.

“Theatre joins life and in this manner discovers a new kind of performance, that of documentary theatre (...) We staged parts of Tatiana’s books, in order to continue the exploration of this subject, and try to practically understand something that was concealed from our analytical mind” (Niculescu Bran 2008a 6). This is the way the famous stage director Andrei Șerban defines his practical experience in building *Deadly Confessions / Spovedanie la Tanacu*, the performance that followed the aforementioned journalistic novel and which bestirred the interest of both professional and non-professional audience in discussing the inner meaning of the theatrical text and performance, the aesthetic form of expression and the way it relates to the ongoing real life events.

While Romanian judicial institutions, media and audience attempted a public trial of the priest, the nuns, the doctors or the social security system, all the participants in the 2007 Andrei Serban Traveling Academy tried to understand, through subjective analysis and practical experience, the things that led to the tragic conclusion in the Tanacu story. Secluded in a small village in the Apuseni mountains, the director, actors and journalist Tatiana Niculescu Bran, who also dramatized the non-fictional text, watched the documentary footage showing the main “actors” of the real life at Tanacu, read the journalistic novels, trying to improvise various segments of them, and interpreting the particular impulses of every character and the way they conjugate to lead to Irina Cornici’s death. As a result of this intricate and difficult path to the essence of reality, Niculescu Bran reshaped the literary structures she used in her novels in dramatic ones. “Their [the actors’] emotions are the raw material of my future play. I think none of us, including the actors, the director and myself, knows very well where we are heading. This play is writing itself in the process of being performed”, she recounts in *The Confession of Andrei Serban* (Bran 2010).

As the adaptation formula chosen by Andrei Şerban tries to use the actor in order to read the real life events, a series of hindrances had to be overcome in the process of interpretation. Each participant had to fight his/her acquired understanding of the ongoing events, each one being a more or less active member of the community and holding various data about the way the local community works. Consequently, the participants in the Academy were the first to attempt a form of apprehension that would later be required from the living audience. This process of stripping off any kind of preconception by acknowledging the effect all other contextual texts and experiences had on your understanding of events and then looking the characters directly in the eyes became the prototype process required from the audience; the stage characters were just the bridge to comprehending the real actors of the Tanacu tragedy, whom the spectator, during the performance, is also forced to look in the eye and establish an arch-connection through the actors’ performance.

“We imagine we are living something for real, and yet, at the end, we hear applause. The actors stand up for their applause, and thank their audience for watching the play. That it is, just a play. The thing that moved so many during the applause is that the actors gather in a circle around the audience. I suggested my actors to get eye contact with their public, thus telling them: We hope you understood what we wanted to tell you, and we hope we also got to take something back from you, a sort of energy that we shared. What is extraordinary in theatre is that in the end we feel the vibe of the community. We are not alone”. (Bran 2010)

Thus, the stage performance becomes, just like Dorian Gray's famous portrait, a way to reveal a true nature of reality, to claim a rational and emotional response from an audience briefly cut off from the mainstream interpretation of facts, a response that would alter, more or less, its statements about the ongoing events.

Andrei Șerban's way to tell the Tanacu story seems to follow the few commandments Carol Martin laid down for the documentary theatre, starting from its very functions. For Martin, this kind of theatre should attempt:

"1. 'To reopen trials in order to critique justice'; '2. To create additional historical accounts'; '3. To reconstruct an event'; '4. To intermingle autobiography with history'; '5. To critique the operations of both documentary and fiction'; '6. To elaborate the oral culture of theatre" (qtd. in Reinelt 11).

There were critics who found in Șerban's play some of the defining features of the documentary theatre, "if the documentary theatre means a multifaceted performance, consisting of multiple perspectives on reality, distinct points of view, different situations and various outlooks on the case" (Rusiecki, "Magie și vinovăție"), but most of them wrote that the text of the play did not fully meet the documentary formula, on account of the way "symbolic parts interfere with the investigation process" (Mihailov, "Comunitatea crimei"). In many cases, the symbolic elements are just remnants of the afore-discussed parallel story line created by Niculescu Bran in her non-fictional novel. To others, the major fault seems to be the absence of neutrality, read in the "subtle manipulation detectable in the performance, which whispers Satan definitely lives in the European Union or the globalized world". "It may be so, but this does not mean that this piece of news should be put as absolute; not by the means of documentary theatre, anyhow, since it is defined as objective and detached" (Georgescu, "Începătorul"); "Is Deadly Confessions the dramatization of a novel about a real case, a sample of docu-theatre? I think not. At no time does the judgement of the facts belong to the audience, because what they are offered is a directional and denunciative discourse about the exorcism at Tanacu" (Popovici, "Confesiuni funeste, exorcizări teatrale").

Therefore, various spectators' accounts show they did not respond mainly to the primary meaning contemplated by the creators of the show - "the profound tragedy of a girl who desperately sought love in a society that holds no place for her", as Șerban puts it; instead, they responded to the social and moral claims made against a Romania at that time, understood as ignorant, corrupt, stuck in dark ages practices and as a great delay from contemporary western cultures. The insertion in the dramatic text of new characters to illustrate these collective strands becomes a meaning-directing mirror that inflicts on the reader/spectator conclusions that sometimes challenge, but in other cases renew contemporary cuts on reality.

## III.

Seven years passed and nobody talks about Tanacu anymore. At the time Romanian film director Cristian Mungiu starts writing the screenplay for *Beyond the Hills*, the events became just some obscure tragedy that happened in a monastery, where the ones found guilty - the priest and the nuns - had been charged with Irina Cornici's confinement resulting in her death. Even the author of the nonfictional novels *Spovedanie la Tanacu* and *Cartea judecătorilor* did not think that the adaptation for the screen would intensify the debate about what happened years ago, but it did. The first weekend after the premiere brought more than 12,000 spectators in cinema theatres across the country, and the professional and non-professional reactions prompted in the media, on the social networks or forums.

Local film critics described the film as "a new hit" that surpasses both the sensationalist and the antireligious approaches (Gorzo, "Noua lovitură a lui Mungiu – *După dealuri*"), "elaborate, tedious and thought-provoking" (Fulger "Pragmatism și opacitate"), "innovative and unique" (Mareș, "Ne va trebui ceva timp ca să evaluăm *După dealuri* în întreaga sa dimensiune inovatoare"). Moreover, Tatiana Niculescu Bran wrote that, at the official screening in Iasi, one member of the Orthodox Church said that the movie will be "a disgrace (...) and it will make a bad image of the Romanian people and our Church. Tanacu was an unfortunate case" (Niculescu Bran, "*După dealuri* și publicul creștin"). And while criticizing this point of view she also targets Mungiu's very realistic perspective; he had explained that *Beyond the hills* was the story of two girls who loved each other, a story about freedom and choice. It was not the first time the author of the novels that were the adaptation source of the film held the film director responsible for the absence of some mystical "beyond" that had not been abandoned by Andrei Șerban in his work.

The words hint to one of the most important decisions Mungiu made when writing the screenplay, namely to elude the symbolic religious world that Niculescu Bran had re-constructed without a substantial base, but on assumptions and illations. Devils and angels were kept outside the film diegesis, they appear just in short whispers and silences; homosexuality and sin are just in the eye of the beholder. The film director minimizes any fact that could be sensational and goes back to the simplest phrase: a novice died in a monastery after a religious ritual meant to cast off the devil and evil spirits. After that, he recreates the characters and their seemingly simple world sticking to one ground rule: the calming balance. The movie offers to interpretation a text where one cannot distinguish the victims and the butchers, where the characters are given freedom of choice, and there lies their doom. Alina Ringhis (character based on Irina Cornici) is a troubled girl who wants to have her old friend (Voichița / Paraschiva)

just for herself, even though Chița is happy with staying at the monastery where she found - in the first place - homelike protection. The nuns and the priest try on various occasions to suggest that maybe Alina's place is not in the monastery, but her own will and attachment to Voichița bring her back. The former devil from Tatiana Niculescu's work seems nothing more than sheer jealousy, and the exorcism is just the result of everyone's good intentions. There's no silver lining in the interpretation of events that Mungiu offered to the audience. Not even the main character - which, in this case seems to be Voichița - can save her friend, even if she is given the opportunity. The sense of tragedy is thus complete. One image stands upon the small defining gestures the film director gives to his characters: the angel-like feminine figure that is symbolically both Voichița and Alina and who seizes the spectator with her Dreyer-inspired gaze forcibly leading everyone to the truth, and thus explaining Mungiu's attitude to the adaptation of this particular subject:

"It was not my intention to make a report of the subject, I did not want just a main storyline; I wanted to talk about everyone behind these people, why they made those decisions, what their biography was, how they came to that point. I don't think that my personal interpretation of the case, of religion generally, should pollute the movie more than that." (Goțiu, "Cristian Mungiu: 'Dacă nu ne place ce vedem în filmele românești, hai să schimbăm conținutul, nu imaginea'").

This absence of a very precise meaning on the Tanacu incident caused seemingly surprising reactions amid an audience long released from the tragic case of exorcism. The Christian communities were often disturbed by the interpretation Mungiu gives to the events, posting numerous often violent messages on forums and other online discussion groups. The battle between the anti-religious community and the Christians replaced, on many occasions, the discussions over the artistic aspects of the movie. Some of the viewers read an "anti-Romanian and anti-Christian" message that "went far from the purpose of Tatiana Niculescu Bran's novels" produced by an author with a controversial history (Mungiu's sister, Alina Mungiu Pippidi, was accused of blasphemy by the Romanian Patriarch after her play *Evangelistii* was staged). Others admit that the movie has its qualities, but it remains "extremely harmful" while they see it either commissioned by obscure anti-religious forces or sensationalist approaches that serve only to the author's fame and wealth. "The ones who would appreciate the movie will be harshly punished by God!", cries one user on the Romanian platform Cinemagia.ro. Such comments, part of the "religious" crusade, represent nearly half of all audience responses on this kind of platforms, showing that the film got to the core communities that should have been confronted with this case.

## IV.

One event, three artistic expressions that try to convey its meanings. In the process of reading, all three authors aim at finding *a* truth, an audience-oriented interpretation. In the material reality, all these approaches become documents that give account of a very recent traumatic event, trying to challenge all the other texts and messages about the same reality. The journalistic novels battle the mediated hysteria and one-sided interpretations of the facts; the play tries to find truth in the humanity of the actor's experiences and reactions, and transgresses the plain illustration of facts, adding new dimensions to the initial text; the film selects only some details of other accounts, making severe cuts and trying to furnish a world that resembles the real one but its inner meaning is completely changed.

Nevertheless, like with any interpretation process, meaning is "never found, but made" as Bordwell states, by our "perceptual, cognitive and affective processes" (Bordwell 257). Just like authors attach meaning to the hard facts of reality or the pre-existent texts they adapt to other languages, the audience engages in the same process of reading based on their acknowledgement of previous expressions of the same or similar events and personal experience. Thus, the reading and the response become a much subjectified experience, anchored in the close encounter between all these features and the literary, dramatic or cinematographic text. All the data of the character, diegetic world or narrative structure can cause different feedback from the audience, even if the stated purpose or facts stay the same. And Tanacu is just a very recent example of the mutations that occur in the audience response on account of these changes, operated deliberately or not.

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## RADU NICA. A LEAP FROM THE TEXT TO THE AUDIENCE

IVONA VÎSTRAȘ<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This study proposes an analysis of the connection between the text of the performance and its reception at the level of the theatre plays put on stage by Radu Alexandru Nica. The discussion encompasses the theoretical concepts on which the director's poetics relies, such as de-theatricalization, intertextuality and the technique of filmic narration, as well as their applicability to the director's artistic undertaking.

**Keywords:** Radu Alexandru Nica, detheatricalization, intertextuality, illusion, anti-illusion, re-adaptation for the screen, screenplay, text of the stage play, spectator, audience.

Under the umbrella of the elusive concept of detheatricalization, described in his MA dissertation<sup>2</sup>, Radu Alexandru Nica, graduate in directing, draws his own phatic coordinates relating to the "contemporary Romanian theatre". Obviously, the manifesto, orbiting the *J'accuse* system, boasts the fiery mark of young directors weary of an obsolete theatrical routine and a national cultural standstill. Beyond the imperative slips of the study, reading it provides, however, the safest way to understand the director's choices, as well as delivers a reliable theoretical base to his artistic creation.

### ***1. The premises of a personal revolt: detheatricalization and the audiences' new reality***

The antithesis between the Romanian theatre "golden generation" – blamed with excess of aestheticism and tributary of the 1960s retheatricalization – and "my generation" (Nica, 8) is the basis of the detheatricalization advanced by Nica. The generational conflict, in the manner described by the director, is chiefly defined by the post-December 1989 expansion of the mass-media. Young audiences are educated by

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<sup>2</sup> Partially published in Runcan, Miruna (ed.). *Studii de teatru și film. Studii teatrale*, Cluj, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2006

the cinema, the television, the sensationalism in the written media – and more – rather than by the communist period media censorship and the dissidence of closed doors. The audiences' transformation occasions also a revision of the artistic performances which, from then on, are required to render the "world as it is", even if that meant the lending to or contamination of the artistic product with elements recognizable from the audience's close sphere.

What we need today is a new type of realism! What could it mean? Formally – a filmic, fast and masterly mode, adapted to the contemporary reception trained by television and cinema to this end – and, from the point of view of the content – a set of social contemporary issues... (Nica, 6)

Undoubtedly, the connection of the artistic products to the audience's requirements can only emphasise the ludicrousness of the situation that threatens the Romanian theatre performance in the twenty-first century, ignoring the law of marketability and profitability (Lehmann, 5) and expedites a potential process under which theatre becomes museum.

Once the director's working principles are established, he expands his theoretical approach by the introduction of an actual instruction book on the renewal of the Romanian theatrical performance. At least until now, the director has been loyal to the programmatic account listed in his dissertation, given that the performances directed by him have applied systematically and constantly the ideas he noted down here.

## **2. An armistice**

A listing of Radu Alexandu Nica's stage shows is enough to illustrate his preference for the construction of the theatrical performance as adaptation of film and, obviously, of screenplay. Here, we note *I hired a contract killer* (his staging for the BA exam) and *La vie de bohème*, adaptations of Aki Kaurismäki's films, *Balul* adaptation of Ettore Scola's film, *Breaking the Waves*, adaptation of Lars von Trier's film.

In a 2011 interview with the author<sup>3</sup>, when asked about his choice of screenplays, Nica explains it by an attack against contemporary dramaturgy; according to him, screenplays are better than 99.99% of the contemporary theatre texts. Concise replies, used in screenplays, are considerably more favourable to theatre than the post-dramatic monologue. Although at first sight the dismissal of the post-dramatic seems to challenge his theory of detheatricalization, in fact, it does not. The reconsideration of the dramatic text is a basic aspect of his theory. Unlike the post-dramatic, Nica envisages, first of all, a "retrieval" of the dramatic conflict, which must

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<sup>3</sup> Published in Runcan, Miruna and Măniuțiu, Mihai (ed). *Studii de Teatru și Film. Regizori, Dramaturgi, Compozitori*, Cluj, Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană.

be the foundation of the tensions in the future of the dramatic performance. Tension build-up is the mark, if we may say so, of Nica's stage plays.

Formally, the filmic story technique will be held in high regard. Editing and ellipsis must be started in theatre, too, by a dramaturgy of absolutely sudden changes of situation, with stage entrances and exits carried out briskly, with characters who do not turn explicit, who, between this never-ending idea and the other, do not interpose those "fathomless" pauses. Full action followed by a moment of respite, where a realist story can become an undeniably magic one. I'm talking about the magic of the tangible that overwhelms the power of perception rather than about the magic of modernist nostalgias (Nica, 10)

Nica opts for a rupture in the classic structure and suggests a release of as much stage action as possible upon the spectator; such action – preferably – should escape the frequent, disproportionate psychologizing of the Romanian performances. The connection with the contemporary reality will occur via the rhythm of the performance dependent on the "rate of the century", the popular cliché that defines the twenty-first century. Nica does not suggest, nor is he intent to enter the sphere of the social-political theatre, but, similar to a large part of the post-dramatic individuals, he relates to a potential illusionist magic left unrecovered from the hands of the modernists. We think this may be a retrieval of illusion, however, not in the naturalist meaning of the word; this illusion stems from intertextuality and cannot otherwise than from the receiver's (spectator's) interpretation; the receiver triggers automatically an entire personal cognitive system and, thus, contributes to the creation of their own illusion. Obviously, we are on the field of hypernaturalism invoked by Lehmann and we reach even Baudrillard's hyperrealism. It is fairly easy to "expose" the theoretical approach launched by Nica in his thesis; however, this is not our intent.

Nevertheless, before we come to the applied analyses, we must discuss two more essential aspects of Nica's poetics. One such aspect would be the director's almost urgent appeal to the return of the "exiled" playwright in the Romanian theatres. According to Nica, the playwright should be the indisputable tie between the everyday life and the dramatic performance, the living link between the audience and the reality of the latter. I insist on this aspect because it is crucial to the director and his work. To become aware of and undertake teamwork is more than a scarce practice in Romania; at the same time, it is a potentially pathological syndrome of "national culture". Thus, we can state that the text of the performance or the linguistic text inhabits an extremely important position in Nica's staging. The second aspect is the collage and editing technique. The collage is a secondary rank creation (Nica, 20) which involves clipping, juxtaposition and prior detachment from the original meanings in view of composing new meanings in new circumstances. The collage requires a specific reading key, which can favour or not the spectator. This happens because the impact on the spectator relates directly to his/her capacity to identify and translate the collage

proposed by the director/playwright. Of course, the collage means a fairly heightened facetious dimension and, at least in the performances directed by Nica, it relies on the speculation of the means of film editing. This means more than the above-mentioned dynamic chain of stage actions; it is also a paradigm of the theatre and of paralinguistic element game.

The theatre game and the exploitation of dramatic specificities are emphasised best in *Breaking the Waves*<sup>4</sup>. Although the dramatic staging follows the narrative logic of the film directed by Lars von Trier, it is deeply different by its very construction. We can guess an active detachment between the two, the dramatic performance being strongly driven by the means of dramatic representation. There's a lot of music, dancing, motion. In order to retrieve a "handicap" of theatre as compared to the film, i.e. the former's pace, and the possibility to condense information and image, a functional, dynamic, playful stage design, a kinetic installation is required. Throughout the performance, everything will turn into something completely different. In the end, the performance means more than the epic denouement of the story; it arrives to an actual depletion of the stage design and of the technical solutions used. Another particularity of the staging is text compression. Most of the times, entire paragraphs or thick dialogue scenes in the film are trimmed to the core, cut to only one line, to a gesture or a projected video image. The above-mentioned collage becomes here a juxtaposition stimulated by communication media. By playing, almost ironically, theatre as total art, Nica applies all the channels of communication, which leads to the almost exhausting use, in one scene, of music, video projection, actors in relation to objects and setting, the setting itself, the text etc. All the elements build well stratified and dosed tension, concluding, as said before, with their total depletion.

Our approach continues with a reconsideration of Nica's older staging experiences, i.e. *Vremea Dragostei*, *Vremea Morții*<sup>5</sup> and *Balu*<sup>6</sup>. While the former is based on Fritz Kater's text and on the film *Times Stand Still* by Pèter Gothár, the latter is an adaptation of Ettore Scola's film based on an idea of Théâtre du Compagnol. Although on the surface the stage plays seem substantially different, they are not. First of all, they are both built on regular people, on anti-heroes that are always

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<sup>4</sup> Premiere date September 18, 2009 at the Sibiu Radu Stanca National Theatre, Stage Design and Light Design: Dragos Buhagiar, Music and Sound Design: Vlaicu Golce, Video: Daniel Gontz, Starring: Ofelia Popii, Diana Fufezan, Dana Talos, Marius Turdeanu, Ciprian Scurtea, Liviu Vlad, Adrian Maticoc, Gelu Potzulli, Dan Glasu, Cristian Stanca.

<sup>5</sup> The performance premiered on January 27, 2006 at the *Radu Stanca* National Theatre, Sibiu. Translation: Alexandru Mihaescu, Adaptation: Radu-Alexandru Nica, Stage design, projection and multimedia concept: Andu Dumitrescu, Choreography: Florin Fieroiu. Cast: Ofelia Popii, Catalin Patru, Diana Fufezan, Cristina Flutur, Florin Cosulet, Bogdan Saratean, Alexandru Malaicu.

<sup>6</sup> The performance premiered on January 19, 2007 at the *Radu Stanca* National Theatre, Sibiu. Dramatization by Radu Alexandru Nica and Mihaela Michailov, Play: Radu Alexandru Nica, Mihaela Michailov, Setting: Helmut Stürmer, Costumes: Maria Miu, Choreography: Carmen Cotofana, Music Vasile Sirli.

tested; however, they do not create their fate deliberately, on their own. The stories are the lives of the people in the theatre hall, who, initially, are not aware that they are witnessing their own story told by someone else. In *Balul*, the collective memory is set in motion by dance steps, music, the actors' improvisation and gesticulation. Mihaela Michailov's work – acting here as dramaturge – is the more difficult that the linguistic text is absent. Of course, the stake is the construction of credible stage situations. Each decade illustrates another face of the history of the twentieth century Romania and, in the economy of the performance, installs each time another strain in relation to the previous one. In fact, the construction of tension is, if we may say so, the foundation of the "text" of the performance. In *Balul*, similar to *Vremea dragostei*, *vremea morții* an essential element, which, in fact, supports both constructions, must be discussed. From the beginning, Nica establishes a target audience. Though, we think, this can pass unnoticed, it changes profoundly the very essence of the performances. Considering Lehmann's concept of common text, which results from joining the significations communicated from the stage and the meeting with the spectator's own customized version of the things seen, we argue that the key in the analysis of Nica's stage plays is in this area, because the value of the "text" in the author's performances resides precisely in the capacity to stimulate an authentic response. We awake easily to the fact that the highest impact of *Vremea dragostei*, *Vremea morții* is on the generation currently aged 30-35 years, i.e. people who were children in the communist period. For the other performance, the target audience is somewhat wider – the average age ranging in 30-60 years. Apart from the classification of the audience on age categories, in *Balul* the target audience must be fairly highly available emotionally and, why not, must possess some degree of self-deprecating humour. For the above-mentioned performances, their intrinsic value derives precisely from the sustained fusion of the two aspects.

Theatre is a production of reality pursuant to the rules of art. That which, in politics, leads to totalitarianism, is what we need on the stage. The theatre of the future is not theatre, it is configured reality. (Nica, 43)

Extra-textual elements are plentiful in Nica's performances. Stage artifice is used – relating to the sphere of *plagiarism*<sup>7</sup> – precisely in view of the steadiness of the relationship between the performance and the spectator's emotional baggage. For instance, the video collage at the beginning of the performance *Vremea dragostei*... made by Dumitrescu is an arrangement of prototype images from the communist era – Mihaela cartoons, the pioneers' festivities, the communist leaders, the labels on sugar, rice and jam products, the school uniforms, the classic classroom photos, the factories. Another example, this time in *Balul*, is the use of key-objects, bursting with

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<sup>7</sup> Nica defines plagiarism as part of intertextuality and as assumption of not referencing an original, and he deems it essential means to construct the "detheatricalized performance".

emotional signification for the spectators. Crepe paper garlands in classrooms, one-litre milk bottles, the instant coffee mug, and many other, similar to the images in the video projection, establish a deep emotional connection with the spectator. By the use of such devices, the text of the performance becomes a text subjectified and modified by the spectator. It is precisely by the affluence of information, by the filmic account technique that Nica requires the spectator's response – particularly if the latter is part of the above-mentioned target audience.

### **3. Prospective reconciliation?**

Following the osmotic (we may say) process between the text of the performances and its reading, both the spectator and the performance as such are left profoundly modified. The audience, neutralized, can turn upon the performance by reproving the artifices by which it has configured the text. Nevertheless, the performance will have to bear the condition of story trigger, unless this was its very purpose.

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## SARAH KANE. THE CORROSIVE DRAMA OF AGGRESSION, TRAUMA AND DEPRESSION

OZANA BUDĂU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** In Sarah Kane's theatre, aggression, violence and traumas are invasive and all consuming. Their powerful imagery cannot and will not be contained by conventional dramatic structures. Starting with *Blasted* and finishing with *4.48 Psychosis*, the involution of the plays from a social-realistic staging, character and plot to a poetical, fragmented, no character, incoherent monologue, show the corrosion of a violence-corrupted world and the disintegration of the traumatized psyche of the individual.

This study focuses on Sarah Kane's theatre as a modality to explore human aggression and its subjective perception as excruciating trauma and self-destroying depression. It also discusses the author's choices concerning the dramatic structures she uses to express stories of aggression and depression. Based on the fundamentals of traumatic psychological theories, I suggest the author suggests that Kane is using her theatre to stage and create the conditions of a traumatic event, to "traumatize" the spectators and ultimately force them to reorganize their beliefs, change their values and way of thinking. In other words, she presents to the public a excruciating, yet amazing path to post-traumatic growth.

**Keywords:** Sarah Kane, aggression, trauma, depression, emotional experience, dramatic structures.

*I believe that violence is the most urgent problem we have as  
species, and the most urgent thing we need to confront.*  
(Kane in Saunders, 2009, p.102)

Aggression, defined as a violent, destructive behavior directed towards other persons, objects or the inner self has proved to be one of the most relevant traits of our society, playing a major role in the survival and the perpetuation of the human species. Whereas at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, aggression is considered

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by Sigmund Freud a natural outcome derived of the need to satisfy one's death drive (Freud, 1920), at the end of the century, the concept of aggression and violence has been thoroughly reconsidered and explained within the trauma theoretical models not so much as a natural trait of the human beings, but as a learned ability, one that can be exploited and manipulated from a social and cultural point of view.

Trauma, seen both as a subjective, personal experience of outwards-directed-aggression and of inwards-directed-aggression, has turned to be one of the major concepts which define the development of one's identity and personality at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In his book, *The Culture of Trauma* (2008), Luckhurst shows that trauma, as a real life experience, has become an important element in the structure of the Self in western societies. Daily exposed to direct or indirect (mediatised) forms of aggression, the contemporary individual has integrated the violent events as a normal dimension of his/her existence.

This study focuses on Sarah Kane's theatre as a modality to explore human aggression and its subjective perception as tantalizing trauma and self-destroying depression. It also discusses the author's choices concerning the dramatic structures used to express stories of aggression and depression.

The narratives of trauma, says Cathy Caruth in her book *On Trauma* (Caruth, 1995 ) do not only express the violence of the traumatic event, but also its lack of comprehensibility, as they become a story more about survival in the aftermath of the event than about the event itself. Sarah Kane's plays rely on trauma psychological mechanism to alter and influence the spectators' perception of what they have witnessed on the stage. The shock creating dramatic strategies that she applies in the development of her first play, *Blasted*, such as violent language and imagery, annihilation of dramatic conventions (thoroughly described by the British critics in their reviews of the premiere at Royal Court House Theatre in London, 1996) have been described as capable of generating powerful, intense emotions (such as fright, disgust, terror) that pull the spectator out of his comfort zone. Moreso, I suggest that Kane is intentionally using her theatre as a trauma inducing mechanism in order to address aggression as a most urgent problem that people have to consider, confront and resolve:

I believe that violence is the most urgent problem we have as species, and the most urgent thing we need to confront. (Kane in Saunders, 2009, p.102)

An event is potentially traumatic if it generates intense negative emotions, a feeling of uncertainty, helplessness and lack of control.

The emotional overload interferes with the rational, cognitive processing of the event whereas the experience of the event is not fully lived and integrated in one's personal life experience. This would lead, in the aftermath of the event, to

intrusive and repetitive flashbacks and ongoing cognitive processing of the “missed” event in order to make it comprehensible. Coping with a traumatic event requires giving that event meaning, making sense of it, and this could only be done if someone reconsiders his/her values, principles, opinions, beliefs about him/herself and the world. Based on the fundamentals of traumatic psychological theories, I suggest that Kane is using her theatre to stage and create the conditions of a traumatic event, to “traumatize” the spectators and ultimately force them to reorganize their beliefs, change their values and way of thinking. In other words, she presents to the public a excruciating, yet amazing path to post-traumatic growth.<sup>2</sup>

I’ve chosen to represent it because sometimes we have to descend into hell imaginatively in order to avoid getting there in reality. If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our heart through suffering, whereas speculations leave us untouched. It’s crucial to commit to memory events never experienced – in order to avoid them happening. I’d rather risk an overdose in the theatre than life. And I’d rather risk defensive screams than passively become part of a civilization that has committed suicide.

(Kane in Saunders, 2009, p.85)

One of the main strategies that the author uses to achieve this effect is to reorganize *the familiar* to be perceived as *unfamiliar*, new, and different. *Explicit violence or metaphorical violence wouldn’t have generated such alarming outcomes, as Kane’s forms of violence*, says Chute in his essay *Victim, Perpetrator, Bystander. Critical Distance in Sarah Kane’s Theatre of Cruelty*. This becomes possible as the author presents a form of aggression which originates neither in domestic violence nor in historic, general violence, allowing the spectator the freedom to find his/her own personal violence.

Another strategy that Kane is using is to shift the public’s position from a mere spectator of a fictionalised world to a conscious yet passive witness of a real world full of aggressors and victims. *Each one of us*, says Pinter (in Chute, 2010, p.161) *is aware, at a certain level, of the cruelty and aggression capacity of the human species. Nonetheless, we succeed in making peace with these forms of violence, to label them and put them away and not think about them for the most of the day.* Kane’s uncompromised perspective on violence averts the viewers from finding a

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<sup>2</sup> Post-traumatic growth is a concept that implies not only a simple recovery or healing, but also a fundamental change in the core of one’s being. For a post-traumatic growth to have place, the experienced event must threaten one’s beliefs about oneself and the world whereas the affected persons must have the ability and faith to accept new ideas, new perspectives, new beliefs. (Levine 1997).

proper name and category for it, whereas she insists that the spectator would be denied any form of protection or safe esthetic distance from the violent realities of the fictional/real worlds.

People say: we know that these things happen, why do we need to see them? And I believe the answer is that we need to see them presented in a different way and so we will understand them better.

(Kane in Saunders, 2009, p.103)

What is interesting about Kane's plays is that they ponder not only on the anonymous morals of the society, but also on the morals of her public, forcing them to have a personal reaction, without giving them any hint about what their reactions should be. James MacDonlad, the director of her first play, *Blasted*, comments that Kane's theatre *presents material without instruction guidelines and then asks the public to form their own reaction to it* (MacDonald in Chute, 2010, p.161) The play confronts the spectator with some of his/her greatest fears and presents him/her with an opportunity to react by facing those fears instead of escaping them. After acceptance, the next step would be taking responsibility and taking action. *It was not the violence that offended so much*, commented Kane regarding the media scandal related to the *Blasted* London premiere, *but the lack of responsibility for creating, maintaining or allowing that violence to exist*. It is my opinion that the initial hostile reactions to *Blasted* were the direct outcome of the public realising the paradox of their lives: the most civilised part of the world was as violent and responsible for the world's violence as much as the less civilised people usually considered the guilty part.

The Western contemporary world can also be a place where ethics, morals and goodness are arbitrary, give-and-take or absent concepts. Kane's artistic representation of this civilised violence was a truth that was difficult to accept and which has succeeded in insulting the civilised world more than the real violence of the real world could have ever done it.

I think *Blasted* is 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 own morality – distance yourself from the material. I suppose it's not only about social breakdown – it's about the breakdown of human nature itself. (Kane in Saunders, 2009, p.61)

This truth is, indeed, hard to take, as the author behaves gently to her fictional characters, either victims or aggressors, while pointing an accusatory finger towards the witness-spectator who, in Kane's opinion, positions himself/herself arrogantly outside the aggression structures.

Her characters are limited to their own destinies, they can not behave better or know more than they are supposed to know. As opposed to them, the witness-spectators, as observants of the fictional world, have more opportunities to act based on more informed decisions.

Hence, Kane approaches the concept of esthetic distance between the private, safe space of the spectator and the dramatic space of the fictional world, by creating her theatre as a meeting and confrontational place where both fictional and real people have to face traumatic experiences, overwhelming emotions and psychological stress. Her final objective is to force the public out of his passive status as a spectator towards an active participant to extreme learning experiences, in the light of which important memories are encrypted in his/her mind, while his/her beliefs and behaviour suffer relevant transformations.

If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our heart through suffering, whereas speculations leave us untouched. It's crucial to commit to memory events never experienced – in order to avoid them happening. (...) I'd rather risk defensive screams than passively become part of a civilization that has committed suicide. (Kane in Saunders, 2009, p.85)

In Kane's theatre, aggression, violence, traumas are invasive and all consuming. Their powerful imagery cannot and will not be contained by conventional dramatic structures. According to trauma theories, the traumatic experience can not be told or communicated as a coherent story until its memory is properly understood and integrated into one's life story. Trauma shows resistance towards conventional narrative structures and may find a way to communicate itself within postdramatic and postmodern narrative structures. While sociologists and psychologists describe trauma using terms such as dissociation, inaccessibility, unrepresentability, the postmodern artists have discovered new ways to express it that have nothing to do with conventional narratives. As Jeanette Malking states in *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama*, the narrative structures of memory are integrative, they reestablish coherence and give to the reader a feeling of closure and relief. The experience of aggression is, nonetheless, immune to this rational order of things. Trauma, violence, aggression cannot express their truth through conventional narrative or dramatic structures.

Kane uses form and language to address the emotional destruction related to perceived and lived aggression. Her plays, one by one, undergo a process of corrosion and disintegration of their dramatic structures in proportion to the growth and development of aggression and violent-related moments. Starting with *Blasted* and finishing with *4.48 Psychosis*, the involution of the plays from a social-realistic staging,

character and plot to a poetical, fragmented, no character, incoherent plot, show the corrosion of the violence-corrupted world and the disintegration of the traumatized psyche of the individual.

*I'd rather risk an overdose in the theatre than life* states Kane, as she tries to express in her last play, *4.48 Psychosis*, the ordeal of the individual who has become victim and aggressor at the same time. *4.48 Psychosis* can be read as a confession of a depressed mind but also as a representation of the passing towards one of the most terrifying traumatic experiences of the contemporary world: that of the aggression turned inwards and the self-annihilation of the individual. In her last play, Kane *risks a suicide in the theatre* and FAILS OR SUCCEEDS to find a liberating closure for her suffering.

Aleks Siertz and Graham Saunders position Kane's theatre criticism outside any biographical perspective, as they consider that a biographical reading of her plays would diminish their semantic complexity and that her artistic legacy would be limited to the meaning of her real suicidal act. Authenticity will destroy meaning. In my opinion, this line of thought is also limitative and it goes against one of Kane's major artistic intents: to create powerful emotional experiences fueled by authenticity.

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, 2002, p.1)

*Her last act is a theatrical act*, says Edward Bond in *Lexi/texts 3*, 1999. Suicidal depression and aggression of others are both forms which satisfy the Freudian death instinct. The complete union of self-aggression and outward aggression takes place in her last play, where the dramatic self plays both the parts of the aggressor and the victim, undergoing total annihilation. Freud states in his essay, „Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920) *that one person's destiny is ruled by two fundamental biological instincts: the life drive and the death drive, continually struggling for power*. The self-destructive drive expresses itself at its best in the suicidal act, whereas suicidal depression becomes the mental condition that best describes the turmoil, the fight and the negotiation of the two drives. *4.48 Psychosis* is the confession of a person who finds herself simultaneously in the shoes of the victim, the aggressor and the lucid by-stander. The text of the play is an atemporal and aspatial monologue constructed to express the ambiguity of the three voices, whose structure is based on the variation of their emotions and states of mind. The turmoil of Kane is evident, as she dives within herself, lucidly and thoroughly, to explore and to bring to the surface the darkest moments of her depressive experiences, in order to describe *the most perfect expression of the hell I felt* (Kane in Saunders, 2002, p.1). The feelings she portrays are frightening in their categorical and absolute nature. The voices demand

absolute love, absolute truth, absolute honesty, whereas the suffering and the turmoil they are experiencing are the outcome of their rigid, pure perspective of approaching the world and the Other

*But the pursuance of honesty was something that kept coming back to me when I was writing Phaedra's Love. And someone said to me, because I was going on and on about how important is to tell the truth, and how depressing life is because nobody really does (...) and he said: that's because you've got your values wrong. You take honesty as an absolute and it isn't. (...) And I thought, if I can accept that if not being completely honest doesn't matter, then I'd feel much better. But, somehow I couldn't, and so Hippolytus can't. And that what's kills him in the end. (Kane in Saunders, 2009, p.70)*

Given these rigid principles, a happy ending seems impossible. Hence, love turns to be the deadly instrument through which the *4.48 Psychosis* voices traumatise themselves and choose death as escape, the perfect and the only absolute that can bring them peace of mind. In Freud's opinion in „Beyond The Pleasure Principle“ (1920), the living degrades in time and dies. The life drive keeps us going, but the final goal of any activity is to attain one's equilibrium and peace, a state of mind where all the needs have been satisfied, and that is death.

The psychiatrist Doina Cosman states that, *after having read 4.48 Psychosis she had the feeling that Sarah Kane had received the mark of death very early in her life. The author loves intensely, but what she loves most is death*

(Cosman in *Enigma Sarah Kane*, 2009, p. 74).

Based on these ideas, I suggest that Kane uses her experience with depression, at least at the beginning, as a tool that will help her create a text where form, content and emotion become one. The depressive mind, seen as an uncensored, lucid mind, becomes the main mechanism through which the author decides what is valuable and what is not, what truly matters and what is irrelevant. The final goal of *4.48 Psychosis*, I believe, is not to show the dramatic battle of the depressive mind with the norms of the contemporary society, but to communicate, as before, a powerful, changing emotional experience. In this final life and death dance, the author is generous to give to readers, actors, stage directors and spectators large empty semantic spaces where they can project their inner suffering, as they become contributors to the transformation of one of the most authentic intimate self-aggression experience into an universal monologue of suffering. At the end of the play, it is the public that is invited, again, to play the part of the witness. Unlike the horrified public of her first play, the spectators of *4.48 Psychosis* may be older and wiser, they may have accepted the experience of hell, absolute love, total truth and liberating death, and may have already played the part of the aggressor and the victim. Yet, a new challenge is upon

them. The last line of the play, *Please open the curtain*, is, I believe, Kane's way of challenging her viewers: It's your turn now, It's up to you. The scene is yours, the responsibility is yours.

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## TUNING OUT THE TEXT. THREE SHORT POSSIBLE READINGS

MIHAI PEDESTRU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This essay attempts to explore a subtle distancing between the dramatic text and its young audiences. Based on a series of group interviews conducted with theatregoing and former theatregoing members of the digital generation, I try to offer three possible readings of their seemingly detached and uninvolved mode of spectating. Without striving to be extremely comprehensive or generally representative, these readings aim to draw attention to some as yet unexplored troubles Romanian mainstream theatre is facing in relation with the ever-changing wave of virtual worlds, fictions and technologies.

**Keywords:** spectatorship, digital generation, alienated audiences.

One of the most intriguing aspects repeatedly emerging from a series of focus groups<sup>2</sup> that I have recently conducted, concerning the theatrical consumption behaviours of the so-called “Digital Generation”, is an apparent disregard for the literary layer of the theatrical performance, countered by a sort of histriocentric focusing on the performance as work.

Albeit concealed behind a carefully worded reverence towards what they perceive as “high culture”, this shift of interest always beacons from within the subjects’ answers, from the small mistakes and the fleeting moments of impassioned

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<sup>2</sup> Part of my doctoral research, the three focus groups conducted in 2012 tried, by interviewing young (17-25 years old) theatregoers and former theatregoers, to investigate the ways in which the digitalization process has influenced the cultural consumption patterns of those subjected to it from an early age. The results, as well as the full transcription of the interviews are being prepared for publication in book format in 2013.



speech. One subject, a regular theatregoer, claims to have witnessed a performance of “Carmen Electra” instead of the classical “Electra”. Others shorten or paraphrase play titles, calling David Greig’s “The cosmonaut’s last message to the woman he once loved in the former Soviet Union” “the one with the cosmonaut” or Tchaikovsky’s “The nutcracker”, performed by the Sankt Petersburg Ballet on Ice, “the thing with Sankt Petersburg”.

On the other hand, the main attraction seems to always be the actor. The names on the billboards seem to determine from beforehand whether or not the subjects will attend the performance. When asked how exactly they choose what to attend or not, one subject answers, and all the others agree: “According to the actors. The girl, I’m sorry, i don’t remember her name, she acted in the Cosmonaut thing, and... Do you know her? I love her! The lass, twenty-something years, thirty maximum...” The topic of the actor’s primacy reoccurs constantly, the objects of spectatorial affection being either unnamed, but highly appreciated actors, or famous television personalities who have also embraced a theatrical career.

While placing the performer as the focal point of the performance is in no way unexpected or out of place, what I find intriguing is the manner in which the subjects seem to “tune out” the many concurrent theatrical texts, such as the literary text *per se*, or the text of the performed character, in favour of that of the actor’s work, in its most mechanical meaning. “If I look at an actor”, says one subject, “and he doesn’t convince me, and he seems to me to be acting badly, the props and stage design, however good they are, don’t matter. If he plays his part as I could play it, I feel nothing, no matter how good the play is or how great his words are”. Another subject furthers this train of thought: “I think what matters most are the actors; what voice they have, what looks... If you like the voice, you might want to listen to what he says”.

The misnamed play titles are not the only hint that the literary narrative is losing ground. Whenever they refer to a specific moment in a performance, the subjects describe either what they were doing or experiencing at that moment “then, when they moved us all on the stage”, or to the actors’ actions: “then, when one pulls out a cigarette and the phone rings onstage”, eschewing both the traditional segmentation into acts or scenes and referring to the character or the proposed fictional world.

From a semiotic perspective, a theatrical performance encompasses many texts, bundled together in a concurrent stream of signals. There is the play proper, then the director’s reading of the play, the actors’ reading of the director’s reading, the accompanying diegetic and non-diegetic sounds and lights, the text of the stage design and many others. All these texts, together, form a stream of meaningful stimuli,

which reaches the spectator, allowing him a final, unique, and syncretic reading. This is how theatre and the other performing arts work and it is what fundamentally sets them aside from literature or the other forms of representing the world<sup>3</sup>.

In the case of our subjects, however, the attention seems to focus on two distinct texts to the detriment of the others: the text of “theatre as added social value”<sup>4</sup>, wherein attending a theatrical performance is regarded as conferring a sort of ineffable status increase to the attendee, and a “text of the performance as work”, wherein the spectator’s object shifts from the character and his narrative, towards the actor and the narrative of his unmediated and dedicated effort.

While I do not presume to extend these findings beyond the scope of my group of interviewees, as representative (or not) as they might be for the young generation of Romanian spectators, I believe they warrant a closer look, if only to add a new set of hypotheses to the debate about the on-going audience haemorrhage, towards both cinema and television and video games, experienced by the mainstream Romanian theatrical institutions, as evidenced by the recent Cultural Consumption Barometers.

Why does the play seem to be “tuned out”, the narrative set aside and why does the stage appear in these young spectators’ discourse as something akin to a zoological diorama? I will attempt to answer these questions in the pages that follow, from different vantage points, positing different readings, so that some light might be shed on this quite difficult to grasp phenomenon.

### ***The gamer’s gaze***

The digital generation is a generation of gamers. From simple, repetitive, casual games, to hugely detailed role playing games, children as young as eight years old play an average of eight hours per week (Warburton & Braunstein 56). While no cogent studies have been done in the Romanian space as of yet, it has been found that 99% of the boys and 94% of the girls in the United States of America are constant players (Lenhart et al. 2008). Even accounting for all the differences in the rate of technological penetration and the relatively short history of Romanian Internet connectivity, we can easily presume that the figures are quite elevated.

How does gaming matter? From a gamer’s perspective, what I see myself doing, through my in-game avatar, is what reality is. Regardless of the narrative constraints of the game, it is always the avatar’s action (or inaction) that determines the outcome. As Miruna Runcan puts it,

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<sup>3</sup> see Elam, Keir. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London; New York: Routledge, 1988. Pages 20-59.

<sup>4</sup> Which I have discussed in detail in a previous paper (Pedestru 2012)

By nullifying any exterior determination, or “fate”, the RPG player’s condition is that of being there, doing. The gamer neither can assume/perform the tragic, nor does he want to: the pressure that gaming puts on spectatorship forces us to redefine - and not only in ethical or aesthetic terms - our entire mythology of catharsis. (Runcan 93)

I would go a little further from this, departing from the narrative itself and focusing for a short while on the underlying mechanics of reading. While reading a classical narrative, be it a performance, a book, or even a painting, the reader follows a linear path, from a beginning to an end, constantly making meaning (and thus reconfiguring the fictional world) based on the stream of stimuli fed to him by the text in question. The gamer’s experience, however, is quite different: the fictional world produces meaning about itself based on the player’s actions.

At the beginning, the gamer is in not much different a state than the spectator. They both stand before an open world, gazing upon the vast array of possibilities put before them by an “other”. As soon as the gamer presses the first button, however, things start to change. While the spectator’s world changes and evolves independently, the gamer’s awaits an input and, when it receives it, it adapts. In both cases, identification occurs, but while the spectator’s object of identification floats away into a sea of unavoidable circumstances, the gamer’s avatar “fights back”, retrying over and over again to overcome the obstacle, until one of two things happen: success or abandonment. Not only is the tragic unassumable, or unperformable; it is to be abjected, its rejection being the main goal of playing.

While a dramatic character is built to fail, and thus to conform more or less to the classical sine-wave of crescendos and decrescendos leading up to a climax, an RPG character is built to succeed. The avatars are always hypertrophied humans, able to withstand bullets, to destroy harder and harder “boss-level” opponents and to shape reality according to will. His evolution is always both a goal and goal-oriented, each action gaining skills, gaining experience.

In his seminal “Postdramatic Theatre”, Hans-Thies Lehmann observes the changes that the then new technologies have brought:

With the end of the “Gutenberg galaxy” and the advent of new technologies the written text and the book are being called into question. The mode of perception is shifting: a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving is replacing the linear-successive. (Lehmann 16)

In further developing his theory of the postdramatic, Lehmann posits the autonomy of theatre from its literary prison, as well as the “magical” exchange of energies that happens during a performance:

In postdramatic theatre, breath, rhythm and the present actuality of the body's visceral presence take precedence over the logos. An opening and dispersal of the logos develop in such a way that it is no longer necessarily the case that a meaning is communicated from A (stage) to B (spectator) but instead a specifically theatrical, "magical" transmission and connection happen by means of language. (Lehmann 145)

For our subjects, however, the experience appears to be somewhat of a hybrid. While they perceive the actors' presence as the main reason for attending, the focus falls on a traditional, linear reading of the „visceral presence" and stops there. Has their constant engagement in avatarial spectating stunted their ability to identify with a living, autonomous being? Has it made it harder for their gaze to affix to anything other than the skill tree? Or does the "me in the story" preclude the "me like the other in the story"?

### ***The literary diener***

In the Romanian environment, a young person's first theatrical experience is often strictly linked to school and, just as often, it may be the last one. As one subject, from the group of those who no longer attend performances, says: "Only once did I ever go to the theatre, taken by a teacher. And I never again wanted to go there." When asked why, he answers: "I was bored. It was something with... A Lost Letter<sup>5</sup>... whatever, I find theatre boring. I mean it's not fun enough for me to go. I'd rather watch a movie and... entertainment". Another subject follows suit: "Me too, when I still was in high school and the teacher took us. We had to go, if we didn't read the books, we'd better go and watch. But... we were just as bored".

This idea of theatre as a shortcut towards curricular literary content comes from the established practice of group "field trips", encouraged by both schools and theatrical institutions alike. In my opinion, this damages severely the "magical connection" Lehmann has talked about, while at the same time contaminates the theatrical experience with the burden/boredom of school-taught literature. As one subject affirms, "It was ok... You didn't have to read a book, you could find out the characters".

In this reception framework, the stakes are no longer aesthetic, the goal is no longer the production of pleasure, but a sterile mind game, the solving of an irrelevant puzzle. This causes a split between, in their own words, "theatre that I like" and "theatre that must be". The former is historiocentric, framed by the

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<sup>5</sup> I.L. Caragiale's *A Lost Letter*

contemplation of the actors' effort. The latter is value-centric, framed by the contemplation of one's own spectatorial effort. Neither requires truly understanding the message that the performance emits, and they are irreconcilably torn apart.

For the "theatre that I like", the keyword is feeling: "I want to see the actor perform", "I want to feel that he's there". On the other hand, for the "theatre that must be", the discourse shifts towards rationalization and taxonomy: "If a critic goes and writes about the play, he takes a lot more details into consideration. When you go, you watch... you try not to get bored" / "A critic evaluates differently than I do. He has a certain education, a certain culture..."

From our subjects' point of view, it seems that *aisthesis* is broken, shattered; feeling and understanding having different objects altogether. This compels us to not only set the strictly mimetic model of theatrical effectiveness aside, as so many have done in recent times, from Artaud and Brecht onwards, but to question whether theatre, as a medium, still has any effectiveness at all, that is whether its message, be it a social, political, religious or simply an aesthetic one gets across.

As long as the unsanitary link between literature as an object of study, akin to physics or biology, and compulsory theatrical attendance remains in place, reception of both will suffer. When upstairs, in the balcony, where seats are cheaper and no one minds their talking, giggling and mobile gaming, the young spectators are not involved in an autoscopia through art, but in an autopsy of art. They are, at best, dieners; looking at the corpse and taking notes, memorizing the names of the characters and the sequence of actions so that they may reproduce them when asked. When the strange creature on stage does something out of the ordinary, something bizarre or exaggerated, they burst into laughter and applause. Understanding is substituted by knowing, feeling is substituted by reacting.

### ***The octopus and the elf***

When asked what exactly they would like to see in a performance, content-wise, one subject, who claims to be a fan of the manga culture, praises the originality of the Japanese cartoons' stock of characters: "Those people try, my friend... They have octopuses... they even have octopuses. ... I would like new ideas. I would like it to be creative... I'm sick of the same old dramas with incest and 'I've killed my girlfriend...'. Seriously, I don't like the stories." Another subject seems to concur: "They use and reuse and reuse the same creatures. Elves, or whatever... Can't you invent anything new? Even in the movies, like The Lord of the Rings, same creatures. ... I'd like something... another creature... something. We're not standing still. The world evolves. I think... I hope".

The statements above bring forward the matter of adequacy. In a world filled to the brim with innovation, the fantastic and the extraordinary, theatre seems to fail to adapt. For a generation raised to be constantly amazed by its ever-changing and ever-evolving virtual milieu, theatre fails to be amazing. Neither its stage design, nor its narratives seem to be able to fulfil the need to impress. Its fictional world has different objects of desire, different rules, different structures, making it uninhabitable, foreign, irrelevant.

They want to see classical texts, however, and they say so. One subject claims he would want more “historical plays, presenting the lives of kings and such information...”. Aesthetics aside, this goes to prove the diener hypothesis above. Theatre is a form of school, a shortcut for gaining the information one is expected to gain. Put off by the inappropriate aesthetic, the young spectator seeks “the theatre that must be”, seeks the scholarly knowledge that his teachers taught him to seek. The theatrical “text as meaning” is tuned out, replaced by a sort of “theatrical text as an encyclopaedia”.

The distancing from the literary layer of the performance is not a violent one. The text is not abjected as an “other”, it just fades into irrelevancy as a “nothing”. Countered by a strong desire for status and cultural belonging, this distancing is not very evident. It seeps slowly through the ranks of the young generation of spectators, however, undermining, I think, the whole fabric of the theatre-audience relationship. As Lehmann has noticed, “theatre is no longer a mass medium” (Lehmann 16). While I cannot say whether it should or should not be one, what I can say is that it certainly could become one again, if it would be willing to undergo a radical change of both its aesthetics and its mechanisms of audience attraction. A shift from a captive spectator to a captivated one is undeniably desirable and, in the long run, I believe will affect theatre’s survival and relevance as a cultural phenomenon.

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## CRITICAL DETACHMENT AND POST-BRECHTIANISM: GIANINA CĂRBUNARIU AND THE TEXT OF THE PERFORMANCE

CRISTINA IANCU<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This study approaches Gianina Cărbunariu's creation- as an example of political theatre in Romania. By critical exercise, the author intends to look into the post-communist Romanian reality. Her working technique includes thorough research of current topics of social interest. By documentary theatre methods, her texts are written directly for the stage, with the help of the team of actors she trains starting from their student years. She takes note of her audience, by trying to maintain constant contact with them, by stimulating them in the direction of actual dialogue on the topics she proposes for the stage. Since the beginning of her career she has been in the eye of the audience and critics abroad, while her performances, based on original plays, participate to important European festivals. Her plays have been translated and staged in Germany, France, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Italy.

**Keywords:** director-playwright, dialogue, cultural identity, critical detachment, post-Brechtianism, documentation, extra-aesthetic perspective.

A great part of the post-communist Romanian dramatic art approaches matters that relate, in particular, to the Romanian space recently freed from the ideological influence of totalitarianism, in its Ceaușist form. From politicised rewriting (from a postmodern perspective) of canonical works, by using pastiche, intertextuality, plays of the post-Beckettian absurd wave, to texts written directly for the stage, based on the immediate reality, inhabited by characters who dwell on the margins of society, we can see a path along which the Romanian playwright, irrespective of his/her aesthetic preferences, is concerned with the pursuit of the cultural identity he/she claims, with a definition of the collective Romanian mentality which had been "parasitized" by communism for decades. In the texts written after December 1989, we can read various types of approaches and investigations of the Romanian identity,

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as well as a persistent facet: undertaking a project for the “cleansing” of the collective mind-set from the ideological ballast by socio-critical exercise (Pavel 2012, 10). After the 2000s, we have been witnessing a propagation of the Romanian dramatic art toward a “here” and “now” – tributary to a totalitarian system that devised its own history, its own national myths, attitudes and behaviours. We believe an analysis that goes beyond the sphere of the aesthetic is required by the Romanian dramatic art, because the need of a self-redefinition in terms of language, structure, geometry formulae stems from its own stake. This is why the Romanian texts need a reading particularly from an extra-aesthetic perspective.

We are going to focus on the texts of performance written by a playwright of the generation 2000, Gianina Cărbunariu<sup>2</sup> the author of this study considers the most resonant voice of the new Romanian dramatic art; this opinion is sustained by the powerful impact of her plays both in the country and, especially, abroad. We will analyse some of her plays/performance texts<sup>3</sup> with an eye on the topics approached and, at the same time, we will try to outline a direction of the working methods used.

Gianina Cărbunariu is an author who, by critical exercise, wants to look into the close reality, while preventing the risk of didacticism. Her working method means thorough research of current topics of social interest. She keeps a keen eye on her audience, by trying to maintain constant contact with them, by stimulating them in the direction of an actual dialogue on the subjects approached on the stage.

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<sup>2</sup> Gianina Carbuariu (n.1977) graduated the Faculty of Letters at the Bucharest University, and Directing at the Bucharest National University of Theatrical and Filmmaking Art (UNATC). She had obtained an MA in Dramatic Writing (UNATC, 2006). She is one of the founders of the dramAcum group (2002), together with Andreea Vălean, Radu Apostol, Alexandru Berceanu. She was granted fellowships and residences of dramatic art in Wiesbaden, London, Valence, New York. Grand Prize winner in the National Contest of Dramatic Art of the Ministry of Culture, for *Irealități din Estul salbatic imediat* (2000)- a play that remains unstaged. Her plays *Stop the Tempo* (2003) and *mady-baby.edu/Kebab* (2004) – staged by her at the LUNI Theatre at Green Hours and Teatrul Foarte Mic – *Țipii ăștia seamană cu părinții noștri* (2005) have been translated, published and put on stage in Germany, France, Ireland, Poland, the United Kingdom, and Italy. Gianina Carbuariu’s plays participated in important festivals throughout Europe – Wiesbaden, Torun, Moscow. Concerned with the research of immediate reality and with the analysis of Romania’s recent history, she puts on stage performances based on original texts, such as *Poimăine, alaltăieri* (Teatrul Mic, Bucharest, 2009), *20/20 (Teatrul Yorick, Târgu Mureș, 2009)*, *Sold Out* (Münchener Kammerspiele, 2010), *Roșia Montană-pe linie fizică și politică*- performance in collaboration with her colleagues at dramAcum (Cluj-Napoca Magyar Theatre, 2010), *X mm din Y km* (Fabrica de Pensule, Cluj-Napoca, 2011), *Tigrul sibian* (Teatrul de Comedie, Bucharest, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Her texts are written directly for the stage, most of the times by close work with the actors. To this end, she states in her unpublished doctoral thesis, *Autorul de spectacol. Regizorul-dramaturg*, “Each time I saw the two texts in the books or magazines where they were published, I stuck only to looking at the cover. In my opinion, the publication of the text is to the detriment of the performance we created with the actors; it is some sort of shadow of what the process and the outcome of the rehearsals truly mean. In a way, this is precisely what the published text is, because, as I was writing it, I was seeing the performance or I was creating it with the actors; this way I saw no necessity in giving text clarifications or stage directions.” (Cărbunariu 131)

No surprise is attached to the fact we are witnessing a shift in paradigms in Romania, given the technological, informational boom, the thriving rule of the image and of man's reification under the impact of the changes occurred in the political systems, in the market economy and in consumerism. The transition from communism to capitalism continues to produce effects in the collective mind-set, because the assimilation of what is "new" has occurred only superficially. Echoes of communism continue to be present in the collective attitude: from the practice of politics, to education, public administration, cultural policies and interpersonal relationships. In her plays, Gianina Cărbunariu approaches the impact of these changes at a particular level and investigates persistently the individual's condition in a continually transitional system, whose memory and analytical sense follow a trend toward annihilation.

The text *Stop the Tempo*<sup>4</sup> illustrates the young men's confusion and lack of perspectives, their hovering in non-action and the absence of an attitude. The characters, young men and women aged twenty – twenty-five years, reject the conformity with the trends others require, deny connection to a fast pace that does not represent them, reprove a system that sets measures to their freedom by a series of rules that configure a so-called contemporary "human ideal":

We were sensing that our generation lacked a direct, actual attitude, meaning that everyone complained and was discontent, but no one did anything. We wanted to carry out a project which should talk about young men and women, from a general perspective. The play is about three young men whose life is apparently "ok", I mean they have money and a job (essential qualities of the capitalist-wild society: have money, be "cool", be "trendy"...), but at a point in time become aware something is no longer ok and they take a minute to think about it... The pressure society puts on them is very high. (...) They are not terrorists; they are only people who try to ask very important questions. Their achievement is a "warning signal", which is the most important thing. (Cărbunariu, "Teatrul mi-a oferit șansa de a lupta pentru libertate")

Considering the situation proposed, *Stop the Tempo* is a radical text. Three young men meet in a club and decide to break the fuses there in order to see that crowd of *cool* people required to return to humanity, to their origins. The three young men are products of their living system: Maria has three jobs in order to keep up with a society in which disproportionate consumerism is the foremost requirement of existence, at least in the others' opinion; Rolando wants to be a DJ in order to pick up girls and to build the perfect social mask – to be *cool* is another requirement of existence, while Paula is a copywriter, recently left by her lover.

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<sup>4</sup> A reverse reading of the title *Push the Tempo* by FatBoy Slim, popular in electronic music clubs at the beginning of the 2000s

When they meet by accident in a club, they discover one another's disgruntlement with a world foreign to them. This is why they decide to cut the power supply in clubs, cinema theatres, theatres, pubs etc.

These young men's weariness is obvious in any of their actions, from the relationships with people around them, in which they no longer involve because of lack of courage and determination, to the distrust and fear of a future that doesn't come. The way in which they take hold of their own bodies and in which they grasp the meaning of sexuality becomes embodiment of organically embedded inertia and ennui. Although their entire being demands and longs for a tinge of care, the characters in *Stop the Tempo* do not have the tools required by emotional fulfilment. They feel foreign to the world to which they belong, although they only sink deeper and deeper in it, stricken by the generation's supreme fear: boredom. The fear of boredom parallels the fear of not feeling (in their "own skin and bones"), because monotony is associated with the direct or indirect failure of fulfilment of some pleasures that relate to corporeality. The antonym of boredom, in its current meaning, is the concept of "entertainment", based mainly on activities of *clubbing*, social networking, alcohol and hallucinogen consumption, sex, computer games etc. Thus, the *Stop the Tempo* characters' meeting in a club is not at all random, because this space acquires the qualities of a topos-antidote to boredom – a source of potential sex partners, of alcohol, hallucinogens.

Sexual intercourse also becomes commonplace because of its repeatability and of a lack of emotional involvement; it is another way to chase tedium away and, at the same time, a mechanical act, now devoid of intimacy, in its original meaning. The three young men in the play, bored to tears even by sex, seen as an act of isolation in two, yearn constantly for thrills which could help them escape everyday life inertia. Thus, the scene where the three meet in the club, finished with an attempt of *ménage à trois* in Maria's car, is highly relevant.

Their disconnection from all the accessories of the technologized world holds moving touches of radicalism, owing to the fact that the three characters' efforts are driven to the same end. Their actions make the audience think, ask themselves fundamental questions: Are we products of the system in which we live? What is beyond this illusion of reality created by the society? What is left of us once we are stripped of our history, of all the rules, value systems taught and required by the society? What makes our identity?

Rolando: We're approaching ground zero,  
We're approaching the ice embryos  
Thrown in space.

Paula: Life has changed and is expiring.

Maria: With each day we're getting closer  
To nothing and no one.

And it's only natural. (64)

With *Stop the Tempo*, Gianina Cărbunariu catches the Romanian audience's eye by the ethical, nearly utopian stake undertaken: to caution her generation. It is an attempt to understand the spirit of the 1990s generation, by plunging in the team's own frustrations, dreams, ideals; here, we note that the play is written with her actor-colleagues, who belong to the same generation; a type of restorative writing, a poem of rebellion, which provides a new perspective on the psychological identity of the young men about and for whom it has been written/performed.

The dramatic art fellowships at Royal Court or New York acquaint Gianina Cărbunariu with the method of the verbatim or documentary theatre, particularly preferred by the English, whose theatrical tradition places the text at the core – the text is inspired by the actual context of its production; the author borrows these directions and customizes them. The eye kept on the spectator, the permanent dialogue with the audience, the critical attitude, the contemporary society investigated – these are reverberations of political theatre theories, as described by Piscator and Brecht. Both of them believed that theatre, without prejudice to its art status, can be used in the society's development, by active involvement in the life of the community for which it is produced. This is possible only by the investigation of the social-historical background of the artist's activity. In *The Political Theatre*, Piscator criticises his era's theatre because it neglected the spectator by providing him with fictions that had no impact on account of the space and time gap; at the same time he proclaims the necessity of a spectator-centred political-sociological dramatic art: "the theatre existed on the fiction that there were not spectators in the house" (158)

The main source of inspiration for the play *Mady-baby.edu* is an interview with a 15-year old Romanian emigrant forced by her boyfriend to prostitute in Ireland. The text is fictional, but it is based on an ample documentation of the emigration phenomenon, particularly that of the Romanians. Gianina Cărbunariu keeps an eye on the context that favours the emergence of this "wave" and on the consequences of the decision to leave the country. *Mady-baby.edu* discusses the status and identity of those who leave abroad, because they stand at the junction of two cultures and, in fact, they don't belong to any of them:

I've also found a shop called "Alimentara" which sold Romanian products. The appearance and the majority of the products in the shop would stir some sort of nostalgia for Romania: seed, canned tripe soup, pickles, all of these guarded by a large tricolour flag at the entrance. All the clients were Romanians. The two spaces, the shop and the church, left me the feeling of a Romanian community unable to adapt to a new world (because they lacked either education or chance), who try to nourish a nostalgia for a space which they decided radically to leave and to which they would never return. A community in-between worlds, which does not belong, in fact, to any of them. (Cărbunariu 133)

*Mady-baby* re-approaches, at a weightier level, the two great mythologies (as proposed by Lucian Boia) which marked the Romanian mind-set: the national ideology and the communist one. Acting as centrifugal forces in the collective subconscious, they are manifest in all the sector of the Romanian society. The political topic is very present in the Romanian media and cultural sphere and perhaps too little put on stage at the time the text and the play *Mady-baby.edu* appear (in 2004), which explain the success it had. At the same time, it builds the foundations of a political theatre, post-Brechtian, on the Romanian stages.

The first scene is relevant to the extent where it emphasises the characters' expectations, their refusal to return home; the author mocks the series of legitimising myths of the overseas and of democracy: the myth of the equality of rights, the myth of meritocracy etc.:

Mădălina : Aha...But you do want to stay there, don't you?

Bogdan: That's the bottom line.

Mădălina: I don't even think about returning to Romania. Not a thought of it.

Bogdan: Yes, of course.

Mădălina: If you are a good hard-working man, everybody appreciates you. That's what Voicu, my boyfriend, told me, apparently they are different from us.

Bogdan: Well yes, well not really.(...)

Mădălina: You are right. The name won't be a big problem. What matters is to be good at what you do, to work hard and earn a lot of money!

(*Mady-baby.edu* 24)

The characters are constructs of the post-1989 Romanian reality. In her book *Un teatru la marginea drumului*, Iulia Popovici states that they carry the burden of an "infamous Romania you want to but cannot shake off, because it's inked – even in careless Ireland – in your DNA" (107). The only lesson learnt at home is that of survival by any means, even if with the violation of the fundamental human rights. The play becomes a realistic and harsh comment on a society split by ghosts of nationalism and of communism, by a perverted history that continues to nestle in the collective Romanian imaginary.

Gianina Cărbunariu's latest stage plays illustrate the author's heightened interest in Romania's recent history and outline in an improved manner her artistic direction in the last years: to discuss, by using theatrical instruments, moments of the recent Romanian history in which very few men of the theatre in our country are interested. She clarifies her option by saying that there are few cogent debates in Romania relating to the Department of State Security files, the Târgu Mureș *Black March* or to the selling of the Transylvanian Saxons and Swabians by Ceaușescu's regime. She want to pave the Romanian audience's way to a dialogue on these events that are still reverberating in the Romanians' mentality and actions.

The stake is transparent dialogue which stays away from parallel, guilt-finding discourses that abound in preconception and tagging, such as those in the Romanian media sphere. An important element in political plays is represented by history and its consequences on the construction of ethics. It becomes a question-generating topic when past events still reverberate in a country's social-political life.

The text *Sold Out*, put on stage at the Münchner Kammerspiele theatre, approaches the selling of Transylvanian Saxons and Swabians by the Romanian authorities to the authorities of the German Federal Republic between the '50s and 1989. Throughout this time interval, more than 225,000 ethnic Germans were sold by the communist regime to the German state; according to statistics by Germany, the entire transaction amounted to approximately 1,127,737,770 Deutsche marks (Irina Wolf "Gianina Cărbunariu: Sold Out la Münchner Kammerspiele!"). Gianina Cărbunariu starts from these data and makes a series of interviews with ethnic Saxons who emigrated or with German authorities, but it is not her intent to make documentary theatre, or to shed light on an exclusive truth; her purpose is to understand what happened to those people, to see the personal stories left behind, the mechanism of human memory, its techniques of clipping and selecting moments that are worth describing. This is why the performance text is fictionalised, pursuing the path of a family throughout three generations; the narrative perspective is that of a doll manufactured during the Second World War. In the text of the performance, toward the end, there is a stage direction that indicates the actors to talk to the audience by small monologues borrowed from the testimonials by the victims of this trade. The actors deliver fragments from the interviews and create an intensely real scene which, at the junction with fiction, generates powerful tension and a sense of uncanny. Thus, the spectator focuses on the topic, analyses it rationally, by becoming hyper-aware.

In *20/20* the author and the entire team of (Romanian and Magyar) actors approach the Târgu Mureş March 1990 clash between the Romanians and the Magyars. This is a taboo-event for the inhabitants of Târgu Mureş, because no one wants to retrieve the past out of fear of repeating such conflicts. This is why the *docu-fiction* performance wants to favour a meeting of the two ethnic groups in the dramatic space, twenty years later, for an actual, relaxed dialogue on the topic.

Gianina Cărbunariu emphasises the importance of documentation on site for certain topics in which she is interested when creating a play. She has faith in this type of work because she believes that, this way, the creator becomes more open to the audience and manages to establish a strong connection with the latter. This is the underlying principle of *DramAcum*: the playwright and the team make interviews with people from certain communities, in order to obtain concrete data which should provide the basis for the text of a performance. The result of the field survey can be shown or not in the performance, or it can be only a source for an original text.

Documentation allows the director and the playwright concerned with the socio-cultural context of their life to extract the necessary information. Deep knowledge of the context approached in a play and permanent contact with the stage are essential requirements at Gianina Cărbunariu, because, in her opinion, they provide a wider openness toward the current spectator. Apart from the increased attention paid to the audience, she admits this type of work is the greatest source of inspiration, the stories researched being the most fecund material of creation:

I like to talk about things I know. At the same time, reality is fascinating; people, their stories, their lives are. Contact with reality inspires me. I cannot create at home, a sheet of paper before my eyes; I cannot write or wall myself behind the doors of the hall of rehearsals. I wish theatre were more open to its audience. (Cărbunariu, "Cu ruscsacul de prejudecăți în spate, interview by Andreea Tompa)

On the subject of the plays that examine Romania's recent history, documentation is required in order to understand the present better, in order to question it and to know the path and long-term consequences of phenomena, mentalities, events rather than in order to retrieve faithfully the truth of a past event. Furthermore, memory becomes a fundamental source of artistic exploration, because the author identifies her creative choice in the characteristics of this feature of the human brain. Human memory does more than record data; it places them in a context, it operates emotional connections, it interprets. It is never objective. In itself, this refresher process can be compared with a first phase of fictionalisation, and this fine borderline between reality and fiction becomes a catalytic force of the creation. Gianina Cărbunariu speculates this process in her plays; this is why the memory theme is approached many times. To this end, she states, on the subject of *20/20* (valid also for *Sold Out*):

It's not a question of reflecting a "reality", nor one of more "realities"; it's a question of the way in which memory selects some details, (re)interprets some recollection, diminishes the importance of some of it or intensifies it for some other parts. This is the difference between artistic creation and journalistic investigation or legal inquiry. It's not just all the witnesses have been credited (or have not been credited equally), but that it is the memory effort that is included in the play rather than the ambition to tell the "truth". (Cărbunariu 152)

Gianina Cărbunariu's efforts of documenting a play include more steps. In a first phase, she investigates the already existing sources (specialised books, official documents, archives, blogs and websites) in order to establish the context of the phenomenon or of the event she wants to know. After this step, she goes to direct investigation, based on non-participant and participant observation. This way, she makes interviews with people on whom a certain phenomenon (the selling of the

Transylvanian Saxons during communism, in *Sold Out*) or event (the “Black March” interethnic conflict, at Târgu Mureş, in *20/20*) has an impact, or she looks into a system’s practices (the Department of State Security files, case Dorin Tudoran, in *X mm din Y km*). Apart from unearthing personal stories that overlap history, Gianina Cărbunariu is also interested in the distance between the verbal discourse and the corporeal one. The gesture, the mimic, the pace of the account, the subjects’ involvement in a specific topic of discussion are relevant to the construction of the characters and of the subsequent story; we are not talking about imitation; we are talking about behaviours that generate reference-questions for the concept of the play.

Once documenting is completed, the author and the team of actors choose a number of situations that can be staged and are relevant to the topic of their interest. The important aspect in this working process is that before or even during the documentation of the topic the author engages the team of actors in a deep dialogue on the theme proposed. This way she wants to familiarise with the experiences or preconceptions of each participant to the artistic act, to see them faced against hers; she believes that this form of sincerity and confrontation of the team’s preconceptions can generate a living performance that does not claim to elucidate any enigma or to convey a unique, moralist, didactic message. It’s a working process which is fundamental in the author’s opinion, because, one way or another, Gianina Cărbunariu intends that, through her plays, the audience should be able to go along the same path of comprehension and analysis of phenomena and to reach the questions reached by her and the actors. One such example relates to the events of the Târgu Mureş “Black March”, the topic of the play *20/20*:

Each participant in the project chose three or four “moments” (it is difficult to describe them as “realities” for the above-mentioned reasons) or topics, or stories, or a character that inspired them. From the more than 30 proposals (some coincided) we chose 10 initially; we all found them interesting. Nevertheless, the basic working rule was that, even if the topic was interesting but did not work in improvisation, we should try to approach stories or topics which, at first sight, did not seem equally inciting or spectacular. Furthermore, in improvisation, we agreed to mix some topics, stories, characters, even if they were not directly interconnected or particularly when they were not directly interconnected. At the same time with the improvisation on these materials, we continued to discuss, within the group, on topics touching on the central topic. (Cărbunariu 153)

Furthermore, in this phase of the performing play creation, the actors’ personal stories can be of great help. They contribute to the story by describing their own experiences relating to a specific event. The games and improvisations proposed by Cărbunariu to the actors are working tools the author uses in each performance she produces. She is the author of the performance, meaning that



she has the initiative to launch a project, she manages the documentation, but she writes and directs with her team; and this is not a question of enforced democratisation; it's simply the desire to have something living and authentic come to life on the stage (rejecting the naturalist veridical). To illustrate this, relating to *20/20* we will render several fragments from the log of rehearsals, included in her doctoral thesis:

Memories about how we saw the world back then or the somewhat older generations (in their twenties or perhaps thirties back then), our parents' generation and how they lived in that period. All these talks we had, which helped us revise these memories (some sort of interviews with ourselves) were also useful when we chose a situation in order to improvise based on it. Indeed, the material gathered gave us access to very interesting stories and to this entire process of recollection, but the personal baggage each of us carried mattered a lot (the characters we remembered, the family, school events etc.). The fact that everyone present had more or less direct access to that time turned the improvisation and performance creation process into a reconsideration of a childhood period rather than into a meeting with a historical era. (154)

When a play is created for the stage, the working mechanism is complex; it involves the entire team and, although it is protracted and at times challenging, Gianina Cărbunariu believes that such an approach is essential. The process is considerably more important than the outcome. It is the only type of work she believes in because it offers freedom to all the artists in the project, which stimulates their creativity and emotional involvement, which then produces the foundation of a living and dynamic dramatic experience.

The performance of *X mm din Y km* is based on a *ready-made* play: the stenograph of a confrontation that took place at the Bucharest Municipality Committee of the Romanian communist party on March 25, 1985; the "protagonist" of the episode was writer Dorin Tudoran. The author's interest in the Department of State Security files is generated by her attempt to understand the mechanism by which these documents were drawn, because, many times, text interventions, comments that relate to gestures, actions of the characters that participate to the discussion remind of a play:

We haven't looked for the sensational; nor have we looked for the "truth" in the files to which I had access and managed to examine in the three months dedicated to the gathering of material. I was interested in the mechanism these files were drawn. I've read hundreds of pages that reprise the same piece of information (the biographies of each "objective" are copied, updated, corrected etc.), pages thick with trite remarks, as well as touching, revolting or unwillingly madly hilarious pages. The authors of this massive novel, informers and officers of the Department of State Security alike, become, in their turn, more often than not, characters seen by other participants to this national endeavour. (Cărbunariu, "X mm din Y km. Despre o posibilă arhivă performativă")

The purpose of the play *X mm din Y km* goes beyond the search for a historical truth or for the records made by the authors of the files; instead, it focuses on launching a coherent public dialogue on this practice of the Department of State Security, a practice that can still be discussed in current terms, if we consider the *Big Brother Law*, under which telephone calls, e-mail or any online form of communication are recorded and archived for a six-month period. Of course, at present, the justification of this law is national security, with the authorities stating that these records will be consulted only when there are suspicions of law –breaking by a citizen:

Since the very first ideas, the purpose of the project has not been a “reconstruction”; instead, it has been an examination, by theatrical means, of the possibility theatre (and, in the end, society) has to “reconstruct” those moments. What’s always been important to us is the exercise as such – to understand the real meaning of opening a public discussion on this topic, beyond verdicts and beyond the media clamor. (Cărbunariu, “X mm din Y km. Despre o posibilă arhivă performativă)

Cărbunariu and her team ask themselves questions that are essential to the construction of the performance: from the things they found in the archives, they are questioning the objectivity and accuracy of the events recorded by the Department of State Security. This idea leads us to conclude provisionally that these documents can help us understand the past if we manage to discern the mechanism of their writing, without fully crediting their notes. At the same time, the play is meant to look into the audience’s position relating to the topicality of the subject, in order to see the extent to which this phenomenon reverberates in the present:

The first questions during the gathering of the material were: are the State Security files documents that could help us understand the past? In the end, is this “brushed up” archive a sample which could reveal the mechanism that merged reality and fiction? How do we relate today to this heritage? Just how present is this recent past? (Cărbunariu, „X mm din Y km. Despre o posibilă arhivă performativă)

In a permanent game of convention and types of theatricality, the four actors who play the stenograph characters interchange frequently their roles. From the beginning, the roles are drawn and it does not matter if an actress plays a male character. It’s the context that which is played here rather than the character, in the direction of psychological realism. This permanent game of “Stop. Resume”, this change of game or of the actor does not result from a Pirandellian display of the mechanisms of theatre. On the contrary, we think the meta-theatrical discourse is the least important; it is a working instrument rather than a purpose in itself. This modality of performance is justified by the impossibility of objective relation to an event, because

it would be completely useless if theatre provided a verdict on certain historical facts. At the same time, the decision to use this game of conventions stems from where, at a closer look at the stenograph, the creators of the play discover it was written like a play drawn by the authorities for the meeting with Dorin Tudoran, while the persons, characters here, learnt by heart their replies to the writer, irrespective of his answers:

Nevertheless, apart from this game of convention, this text is separated by a classical play by things much more important than those that draw them near. First, those are not the names of “characters”, they are actual people’s names, our contemporaries (all the 3 participants in the 1985 discussion are alive. (...) The comical turn is that the stage “partners” do not “perform” together: DR Popescu and Croitoru reply many times to Tudoran as if they hadn’t heard or understood what he said. This happens because (as suggested by the file), the two had already learnt the “play” with which they had been sent on stage and they were not at all ready to “improvise”, to simply react to the real circumstances. (Cărbunariu, “X mm din Y km. Despre o posibilă arhivă performativă)

Thus, the creators decide on highlighting the “stage directions”, the upturns, the emphases, the rewriting operated by the “playwrights” of the Committee stage, by a permanent game of theatricality. Even the parts that lack actual dialogue are performed, which is obvious because of the absence of connections between the replies of those attending the confrontation. Theatricality breaks forth both from the permanent exchange of roles among the actors or the attitude change in the “Stop. Resume” signal, and from the increase of the secondary text significations.

Once again, on the subject of the creators’ approach of the topic, Gianina Cărbunariu acknowledges (and this is obvious in the performance, as indicated above, in the game of conventions) that she did not want to express a firm position from where she speaks to the spectators; it would be damaging both for aesthetic and, particularly, for moral reasons. This is why she chooses to configure a playground where the audience can contribute to the decoding of the stenograph and try to understand together what happened (by dialogue, in the second part of the play – when the discussions with the spectators take place, which is frequent in Gianina Cărbunariu’s plays). Thus, upon entering the playground, each spectator is invited to take a chair and seat wherever they want to, while the actors perform depending on the space left unoccupied. This option should be analysed particularly from an extra-aesthetic perspective, because it questions the history recorded by “pawns” of Ceaușescu’s regime. In the neo-Marxist line of the cultural studies, the play, through structure and composition (interactivity, the audience’s free arrangement, the meta-theatrical game) is an exercise of deconstruction of ideologically permeated “annals”:

Very early in the rehearsals, questions were raised on the way we were to relate to the topic, to the material, to the “characters” in the stenograph (real people, our contemporaries) and to the audience. These questions do not relate only to the performance aesthetics; they relate equally to ethics. We understood we didn’t have any verdict we could communicate by a frontal setting of the stage action toward the audience. We wanted the audience to participate with us in the attempt to “read” these “traces” of reality, to participate in the confusion experienced during documentation in front of a file, of a kilometres-long archive. (Cărbunariu, “X mm din Y km. Despre o posibilă arhivă performativă”)

At the end of the performance, the actors begin to write on the walls “I confess and I am sorry I was an informer”; this way, the audience is asked to stand up and also write it down, if they feel like doing it. In this manner, the team invites those who have collaborated with the Department of State Security (Securitate) to acknowledge their guilt – an act otherwise necessary and absent from the Romanian public sphere.

Gianina Cărbunariu’s dramatic and performing art is reconfigured with each production made. We can see how, throughout time, several working principles essential to her creation are crystallised, while her dramaturgic-directing project of readjusting the Romanian socio-cultural identity gains increasing consistency, with important characteristics, particularly extra-aesthetic ones.

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## IN SEARCH OF A DIDACTIC METHOD FOR THE STUDY OF THE ACTOR'S ART BY TEENAGERS

IULIA URSA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** This article looks at a survey carried out in the summer of 2012, on a group of adolescents who studied various artistic fields and who tried to put together a collective play performance. This material is a succinct anamnesis of a good practice model in the study of the actor's art in the artistic vocational high school system. The study examines the mechanism of configuration and development of the creative camp that was the object of our research. We approach the core issues of our research, the solutions we suggested and the final conclusions that completed our endeavours.

**Keywords:** didactics, education, collective play, teenagers

This present article is the result of a research process upon a suitable teaching method for acting dedicated to teenagers, the present research being conducted from a teaching perspective. Our education system lacks practical approach in subjects such as esthetics education and artistic education<sup>2</sup>, making this study very current and of great interest.

Traditionally, in Romania, the framework-plans that guide the development of the didactic procedures provide only classes of plastic and music education in the field of artistic learning. Of course, here a differentiation between the general education and the artistic vocational education is required; the latter, by definition, involves specialised training in a specific artistic field (schools of music, of plastic arts or of choreography).

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Worldwide, in countries where the development and adjustment of the educational system to the contemporary social-economic rhythm are established, artistic education has undergone a type of evolution that required the enhancement of the areas approached; one of the natural development guidelines that were considered was the introduction in schools of the study of the performing arts.

The general psycho-pedagogical prospects associated with the study of the performing arts are obvious. We can list here the development of one's personality, of interpersonal communication skills, of public communication skills, the development of musicality, rhythmicity, affective, aural and tactile memory, development of facial expressions, development of corporeal plasticity, development of aesthetic value judgment skills etc. We can add to this list a series of specific psycho-pedagogical possibilities such as: the development of cultural act analysis and criticism skills, the development of stage improvisation skill, the development of the ability to use in a responsive and controlled manner the vocal projection mechanism etc.

On the subject of these possibilities, it is easy to guess their fields of application: mass-media, audio-visual, public relations, management, marketing, psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy, psychopedagogy, public presentations, training sessions, workshops etc. To conclude, this type of educational activity is a necessary improvement of the individual's psycho-pedagogical development in the general institutionalised educational structure.

On the other hand, perhaps the most important quality of artistic education is to form free personalities or, more fittingly, free spirits who can have and express a coherent political-social attitude.<sup>3</sup>

The founding of artistic vocational education, actor's art speciality, is an important phase approached by the Romanian public education system. This policy is completed by the evolution and development of fields of study that established theatre as institution, namely the role-play, as specific working method, used particularly in the study of foreign language, as well as in the children's teaching-learning approach in pre-school and primary education.

These recent years have aided research activities that ascertain the existence of a keen interest in the practice of the pedagogical prospects of the dramatic art in the general or vocational education. These were encouraged by the lack of specific documents in view of the organisation and regulation of the status and methods in this field of education.

I want to mention here the programme *Competențe în comunicare, performanță în educație* (*Communication competence, educational performance*)<sup>4</sup> launched by the Bucharest National University of Dramatic and Filmmaking Art (UNATC) partnered

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<sup>3</sup> Martin, Anna Marie. "Why Theater Should be Integrated into the Curriculum." Reports - Evaluative. 1998.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.competenteincomunicare.ro/>

with several universities throughout the country and co-funded POSDRU. The project focuses on the application of the pedagogical possibilities theatre has in the didactic process, namely the improvement of the pupil-teacher communication. One of the main training sessions is the acting course, which allows the attendants' (teachers) access to specific dramatic methods and means that can improve the educational practice.

The programme *Practica artistică-tranziția tânărului artist spre piața muncii (Artistic practice – the young artist's transition to the labour market)*<sup>5</sup>, POSDRU co-funded, initiated by the ArtAct Association and by the Cluj-Napoca *Gheorghe Dima* Music Academy, is another example of research and search for a strategy of improvement of the artistic education. The novelty of this programme resides in its target, namely pupils and students; it is an attempt to enable their artistic formation in a professional framework. To this end, the main activity proposed by the initiators of this project is to organise practical training stages in professional cultural institutions and to create the premises of the collaboration among pupils, students and professionals (actors, directors, stage designers etc.).

At a theoretical level, in the month of May 2012, on Associate Professor PhD Nicolae Manda's initiative, dean of the Faculty of Theatre, the UNATC Bucharest launched a series of conferences on *Theatre in social communication*<sup>6</sup>. The series was planned in three sections:

- *Theatre for education*
- *Community and participatory theatre*
- *Theatre and open society*

The participants to this conference (Sylvia Rotten- Children's Viennese Theatre, Chrissie Tiller-Goldsmiths University London, Lynne Gagliano-Royal Court Theatre London, JonathanPeterbridge-London Bubble Theatre Company etc.) managed to provide an ample illustration of the performing art phenomenon from a pedagogical perspective. And this illustration showed that the current tendency is to draw the pupil to the theatre by using his imaginative universe rather than a foreign, barely penetrable and barely comprehensible one. Thus, an interesting model was the one provided by Chrissie Tiller from Goldsmiths University London; it emphasised the efficiency of a novel method of introduction to classical texts, by relocating them geographically and temporarily in the proximity of those to whom we speak.

On the anamnesis the Romanian education system, the didactic activity carried out during the actor's art speciality classes in the artistic vocational high school is regulated by the Analytical Programme for the Actor's Art (differentiated curriculum), a document published in *Appendix 1 to the order to the minister of education and*

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.practicaartistica.com/tabara-de-creatie-baluba-boccie/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.edutheatre.eu/>



*research no. 5006/14.10.2004.* Although artistic vocational education actor's art speciality is carried out during both cycles of the high school education (the mandatory and the higher one), the above-mentioned document concerns strictly the educational process in the lower high school cycle (classes IX and X).

This document came into force in the school year 2005-2006, and since then no additional mention has been made, which could clarify the contents of the teaching-learning process in the higher cycle of the high school education or which could improve the contents of the didactic process in the lower cycle of high school. Thus, for classes XI and XII, there is no effective analytical programme which could establish the activity framework.

These circumstances enabled the launching of research in view of identifying a solution to teach the actor's art in a manner adjusted to the specificity of the artistic vocational high school education and in line with its subjects' psycho-pedagogical qualities.

This study is an actual research effort whose objective is the identification of a model of good practice, which could be used in the specific didactic activities in view of the practical study of the actor's art in artistic vocational high schools.

The activity of the actor's art teacher in school has raised practical issues we tried to formulate in a series of questions; in their turn, these questions guided our subsequent actions.

One of the main topics that require discussion is that of the concrete object of the activity carried out in the actor's art classes. Is the pupil's exposure in a performance in front of an audience necessary and appropriate?

The programme in force does not provide explicitly the organisation of performances, but all the other ministry actions require it. Thus, we can mention the Olympiads and competitions organised by the Ministry of Education, Research and Sports, as well as the methodology of professional certification at the completion of the high school studies. Moreover, we need to note the inappropriate organisation of the speciality Olympiad and its two sections – individual and group. The Olympiad regulation involves, in both sections, problems that do not exist in the programme. In the individual section, competitors are required to describe a repertory similar to the one required at the faculty admission, different poems, fable, two monologues.

These obscurities are enhanced by additional disturbing factors: the necessity to stage a performance in view of the national speciality Olympiad (an order expressed clearly by the school direction), but mostly the pupils' half-hearted attendance to classes.

From my point of view, the direst issue is the pupils' apathy. Is it important to understand why a teenager who chose this high school (often against the will of his family) grows suddenly completely uninvolved and disgruntled with what he/she

does? Following our research, the answer is simple: the absence of the purpose of the activity; we train, but we need to go in the field; otherwise training becomes dull, boring, frustrating and gratuitous.

For a deeper look into these issues, for the better understanding of their nature and characteristic, we initiated two parallel projects with two different groups of pupils, to whom we asked to propose a topic for a future performance.

The first group proposed more classical texts, most of which were written by Molière. I understood quickly that their choice had been influenced by what they were studying at that time at the classes of History of Theatre. At the same time, this choice generated yet another series of questions on the curriculum of the theoretical speciality classes. However, they initiate another discussion I will not approach in this article.

The second group had an apparently original suggestion: *let's make a play about us, about how we are...* I found the idea extremely appealing, yet difficult to implement. Then we went through hours and hours of talks about what they were, about what they wanted to communicate to the others. And the effervescence of the pupils' participation to class made me understand the importance of the adequacy of the methods used to the immediate didactic circumstances.

The two projects exposed several issues that require dialogue and analysis:

- It is important to define clearly and measurably an objective of the entire educational process; pupils need to know his/her direction, and when the speciality is the actor's art, a specific objective, materialized in a performance, is required.
- The classical text is inadequate in view of staging with teenagers: the language is unfamiliar; the situations described are determined by a historical background rather difficult to understand; it has characters with ages different from the pupils' and requires character composition;
- The need to revise the analytical programmes of the corresponding study matters, so that they should train more useful skills, such as writing one's own stage plays;
- Teenagers have a voice that strives to be heard; they have real and important experiences that can render an eloquent image of our society, and they are willing to share with us this projection;<sup>7</sup>
- We must guide their pursuits in order to prevent the situations in which age-specific exhibitionism is mistaken for the real calling to the theatrical phenomenon.

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<sup>7</sup> Jessie Randle. *Theatre for the Interactive Age: Participatory*. London: The International journal of the arts in society, 2011.

This first experience paved the way to the task to explore in the company of specialists a system of performance play creation which should allow the settlement of all these issues. To this end, in August 13-19, 2012, we organised a creative camp for teenager artists enrolled in the artistic vocational high school system. This activity was part of the project the *Artistic practice, the young artist's transition to the labour market*, which had objectives in line with ours. The objective of this activity, as an integral part of the above-mentioned project, was a performance that would involve the best participants to the previous practice stages. Furthermore, this creative camp was meant as an occasion for the young artists to work under the coordination of professionals; to the specialists, it was also an occasion for the specialists to put together good practice guidelines in view of the artistic activities at this level.

The camp was organised in a neutral context, separate from school or art institutions, separate even from the community, in a tourism resort that made available an adequate material basis including conference rooms, halls of rehearsals etc.

I was an artistic coordinator in the organisation and development of this activity. Thus, I suggested an artistic concept which would allow me to study practically an adequate method of work with teenagers, based on the model from the London Royal Court Theatre, UK, coordinated by Lynne Gagliano; this meant that throughout one week the teenagers benefit from assistance in the writing and staging of a play.

The team of tutors we chose included actor and director Horea Suru, choreographer Melinda Jakob and musician Răzvan Krivach. The participants were selected from among the students at the *Ostroia* High School of Choreography and Dramatic Art, at the *Sigismund Toduță* Music School and at the *Gheorghe Dima* Music Academy. Overall, there were ten instrumentalists, four pupils of the Dramatic Art Section and three Choreography students.

We add briefly that this team of tutors was not chosen randomly; director Horea Suru is one of the most active promoters of theatre with and for teenagers. He is the initiator of a theatre festival in English in Brăila. In partnership with Theatre Maria Filoti in Brăila, Horia Suru, as director, managed to stage a play with teenagers and for teenagers: *To Our Teacher with Love*<sup>8</sup> as part of the project *Theatre and School*. This project rose from the need to open theatre to a well-defined category of audience, i.e. the high school students. Like all those involved in this type of projects with high school students, Horea Suru, too, noted it was difficult to stage a play with teenagers because of the lack of appealing plays to this end.

The general concept of the camp was to create actual play rehearsal conditions for the participants. Thus, we relied on the efficiency of an experience by which the three specialisations, dramatic art, choreography and music, would build together a complex and coherent artistic product.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.tmf.ro/index.php?q=ro/node/437>

In order to ensure the factors adequate to the creative process and in order to secure a considerable study support our suggestion was that the entire performance should be an original work. The play should be one written then and there by the participants coordinated by director Horea Suru, music should be composed for the play by the instrumentalists coordinated by Răzvan Krivach, and the original choreography conceived by Melinda Jakob should complete the end product.

The subject proposed for this camp was vast and appealing at the same time: *First-person narratives*. One of the selection criteria was the writing of an autobiographical story with a character that should be well-defined dramatically. We noted that most of the participants sent dramatic, even tragic stories. The topics approached were varied: reminiscences of a childhood accident, a recent trauma (sexual abuse), interpersonal relations, love, the artist's relation with the artistic act etc.

Throughout a week of trials, attempts and rehearsals, these stories, written more or less coherently and engagingly, were transformed under the tutors' coordination in a complex performance.

Starting from the participants' stories, a collective play was created; it was illustrated musically by original compositions, it was acted by improvisations<sup>9</sup> and choreographic episodes. One week was enough to create a unified performance that blended harmoniously choreographic, acting and musical elements. The transformation of these texts by adaptive techniques was interesting; it was equally interesting to look at how, starting from the first person we got to a scene with two characters, or how a story turned into music or in a choreographic piece. Here's an actual example:

**A Tale**

One day, I plucked up courage and decided to follow the girl I liked. I was shy, so when I got near her, I hid right away. She, however, had seen me and thought I wanted to harm her; she came toward me and threw two handfuls of sand in my face. I ran after her to catch her, to talk to her, but she did not want to. Then we stopped and I gave her a flower to calm her down. We sat next to each other and started talking. She let me understand she liked me a lot and kept asking me to tell her I loved her. At that point I tried, in a way, to leave, but I didn't want to upset her. She grew sad and I said I couldn't do it, so I returned to her; we left together, holding hands.

Christian Har (16 years old)

Christian Har's tale was dramatized and turned into a scene with two characters:

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<sup>9</sup> Johnstone, Keith. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Dialogue:

Christian: Your eyes, lips, mouth...

Alexandra: And that's all?!

Christian: Ah...I'll catch you!

Christian: Would you please come here?

Alexandra: Can I tell you a secret?

Christian: Yes!

Alexandra: I've never had toenails on my pinkie toes.

Christian: What do you mean?

Alexandra: Well, I've never had!

Christian: I'm sorry, but I can't say I LOVE YOU after one week.

Alexandra: Give me your hand!

Christian: I'm ok. You know, I kept wondering.....

Christian: You know that saying, "Tomorrow is another day!"?

Alexandra: Yes, but what about, "Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today!"

Christian: What do you think, could we build a campfire?

Alexandra: Only if we sang together.

Christian: I don't feel like it...

What remains from the story is in the undertone embedded in the actors' performance. The dramatization method used by Horea Suru is original. He walked along the wood side with Christian and Alexandra and proposed a game: to try to recreate the feeling of the story, to commit to that situation and reconstruct it. Thus, the dramatization resulted in a living manner, beyond pen and paper, by action, movement and game. Practically, the creative values of stage improvisation went beyond, in the writing, dramatization process.<sup>10</sup>

Those days proved that text can come to life and become a living, almost palpable form when it is born in a factual here and now, distinctive of the performing art. Now I am building, now I am writing, now I am improvising, now I am rewriting, now I am rehearsing, now...

An example for the training and improvement of specific skills was provided by the actual experience of the other art. When the musicians pulled together with the actors, they were able to understand the stage circumstances and their importance in the construction of the dramatic episodes; this allowed them to adjust their scores. The fact that they were on the stage, in sight, instead of being in the pit, made them

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<sup>10</sup> Alina, Nelega. *Structurile și Formulele de compoziție ale textului dramatic*. Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2010.

commit to their stage actions and to the development of the performance, and compelled them to be present rather than just provide automatically and technically the musical illustration.

To the students at choreography, this was a good opportunity to understand by actual example that dancing is an art in full progress and that its forms can be metamorphosed. The impact of this event on the students at choreography was positive, as they actually acknowledged: *"From my point of view, this thing with the written play was the most interesting part; I've never had such a chance before; I hadn't even though I was able to write. (I froze for a moment... you know, when you have no idea and you don't even think you can contribute to something constructive, because it gets you out of the mental comfort and it keeps you at it, it keeps you searching...).*

*To conclude... I believe this collective performance of co-creating a play is a more appealing working method. But it is important that the working method with an already existing play is explored through the collective play approach. This way you deal with a series of information that helps increase the flow of ideas for the collective play.* (Andrada Lazăr, 22 years old, student at the Gheorghe Dima Music Academy, Faculty of Performance, Section Musical Performing Arts)

This was a complete, enlightening and healing experience for the students at the acting section: *"The fact that the origins of the performance are events in our lives, each of our lives, made rehearsals a lot simpler. I am also happy I had the chance to work in a manner different from school and I understood there's a great amount of effort put in a performance. This encouraged me to work more for my development (...). I really want to perform again this wonderful play."* (Christian Har, 16 years old, student at the Octavian Stroia Choreography and Dramatic Art High School, specialisation Dramatic Art): *"Our stories describe us. Our life experience connects us to these stories. Feelings, emotions, memories tie us and I believe that such a story should be performed by an acting student in a considerably better way than a classical text."* (Raluca Baciu, 16 years old, student at the Octavian Stroia Choreography and Dramatic Art High School, specialisation Dramatic Art)

The conclusion of this experience is that, in order to be efficient, the didactic act must be adequate for the subjects, both in method and content. At present, we deem efficient and adequate a method that could blend dramaturgy and dramatic text writing elements with exercises of acting and choreographic improvisation that could lead to credible and assumed stage situations. To build on the teenager's actual experience is a lot more helpful than to require the undertaking of situations that are "foreign" to him in terms of historical time, language, psychology, and so on.

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## **ANTIGONE, OU LE TRIOMPHE DU TEXTE À L'ÉPREUVE DE SCÈNE/ ANTIGONE OR THE TRIUMPH OF TEXT IN THE CHALLENGE OF THE STAGE**

**ȘTEFANA POP-CURSEU, IOAN POP-CURSEU<sup>1</sup>**

**ABSTRACT.** The present article, *Antigone or the triumph of the text confronted to the stage*, takes as a starting point Sophocles' tragedy and follows its adaptations and transformations in the modern and post-modern theatrical creations. What happens when a literary figure keeps fascinating the world of theatre? How does tragedy turn into drama and what is still available from its dramatic substance on a stage where the borders between reality and fiction, characters and actors are voluntary blurred? Can we still talk about a post-dramatic theatre, when the dramatic intensity of life overflows the literary text and vice versa? Some answers are proposed through the close analysis of a few examples such as Jean Anouilh and Jean Cocteau's plays or the contemporary Motus Team's *Syrma Antigones* performance.

**Keywords:** *Antigone*, Sophocles, Cocteau, Anouilh, *Syrma Antigones*, text, rewriting, interpretation, history of theatre, post-dramatic.

Le grand nombre d'*Antigone* mises en scène au cours de l'histoire rend compte de la fascination que la figure féminine imaginée par Sophocle a pu exercer. La fille d'Œdipe hante le théâtre et tout un chacun se laisse fasciner par sa pureté, son courage, sa décision inébranlable d'enterrer le proscrit Polynice, révolté contre Thèbes. La tragédie politique et la tragédie de l'amour, subtilement interpénétrées, n'ont eu de cesse de donner lieu à des réécritures, des réinterprétations, et même à des interrogations complexes sur le statut et la nécessité du texte de théâtre. Ce qui nous intéresse dans le présent article, c'est d'étudier quelques transformations significatives

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que le texte de Sophocle a subies, afin de mieux s'adapter aux réalités d'époques bien éloignées de celle de sa création et de répondre aux goûts de publics très différents de l'homogène *polis* de l'Antiquité.

Il est à remarquer, dès le début, que toutes les tentatives de recyclage du texte de Sophocle s'en sont tenues au schéma de la tragédie représentée autour de 441 av. J.-C. à Athènes. Étéocle et Polynice, les deux fils d'Œdipe, sont morts au combat, le premier en défendant Thèbes, le second en attaquant la cité, dans les armées des Argiens, où il tenait une bonne place suite à son mariage avec la fille d'Adraste, roi d'Argos. Créon, le frère de Jocaste et nouveau roi de Thèbes, ordonne que le traître reste sans sépulture, qu'il pourrisse et qu'il soit mangé par les bêtes. Antigone, la fille préférée d'Œdipe, après avoir voulu entraîner sa sœur Ismène à faire son devoir malgré l'interdit du « chef » de la cité, accomplit les rites funéraires, ce qui provoque sa condamnation à mort. Créon la destine à être murée vive en dehors de la cité, pour ne pas se souiller de son sang, malgré les insistances de son fils Hémon, fiancé d'Antigone, qui essaie d'attirer son attention sur le mécontentement du peuple : « j'entends Thèbes gémir sur le sort de cette fille »<sup>2</sup>. Le roi s'entête et ce sont seulement les prophéties du devin Tirésias qui arrivent à faire vaciller sa volonté : il court ensevelir Polynice mais, malheureusement, il n'arrive plus à sauver Antigone. Elle s'est pendue avec un « lacet fait de son linon épais », tandis qu'Hémon « collé contre elle » se lamente « sur la perte d'une épouse désormais aux enfers, sur les forfaits paternels, sur ses noces douloureuses »<sup>3</sup>. Fou de rage, le jeune homme dégaine son épée pour tuer son père mais, puisque celui-ci s'échappe, Hémon se suicide et va rejoindre Antigone dans l'au-delà. Entre-temps, Eurydice, la femme du tyran, en apprenant la mort de son fils, s'est suicidée elle-aussi, laissant Créon en proie au remords et en face d'un vide impossible à combler : « je ne suis rien de plus qu'un néant désormais »<sup>4</sup>.

On retrouve donc ce schéma, à quelques variations près, chez Luigi Alamanni en 1533, chez Jean de Rotrou en 1638, chez Vittorio Alfieri en 1783, chez Jean Cocteau en 1922 et chez Jean Anouilh en 1942, ou bien dans le projet *Syrma Antigones* de la compagnie italienne Motus (2009-2010). Les œuvres musicales, qui semblent vouloir prolonger les nombreuses parties chantées de la tragédie de Sophocle ne semblent pas faire exception, qu'il s'agisse de l'*Antigone* de Johann Adolph Hasse (1723), de celle de Tommaso Traetta (1772), de celle de Nicola Antonio Zingarelli (1790) ou bien de celle de Peter von Winter (1791). S'y ajoutent deux grandes réussites musicales du

<sup>2</sup> Sophocle, *Antigone*, in *Tragédies. Théâtre complet*, Préface de Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Traduction de Paul Mazon, Notes de René Langumier, Paris, Gallimard, « Folio Classique », 1995, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle : Félix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy et Camille Saint-Saëns (1893)<sup>5</sup>. Ce qui varie d'une *Antigone* à l'autre, ce sont les accents et les interprétations personnelles, empreintes de subjectivité ou portant la marque du milieu social, du moment historique, etc. Tel auteur se concentre sur la figure de la jeune femme, tel autre sur celle de Créon, qu'il humanise. Certains mettent l'accent sur la dimension politique de l'histoire d'Antigone, surtout en période de révolution, de guerre ou de troubles sociaux (tel fut le cas à la fin du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, ou aujourd'hui). Il ne faut pas oublier que la fille d'Œdipe a été une icône pour les partisans du théâtre politique en général : Brecht en a fait, en 1948, un emblème de la lutte contre l'autorité injuste, en mettant un signe d'équivalence entre Créon et Hitler. D'autres hommes de théâtre font plus attention aux ravages et aux difficultés de l'amour, qu'il soit fraternel ou érotique. Nous reviendrons sur tous ces aspects, en nuancant les interprétations les plus frappantes, les plus saillantes.

Une première ligne directrice des réécritures du texte de Sophocle reste la fidélité à l'esprit et à la lettre de l'original. C'est ce qu'on peut observer dans l'*Antigone* de Luigi Alamanni, publiée en langue italienne à Lyon, en 1533, qui se contente d'italianiser un peu, surtout dans un sens linguistique, la tragédie grecque. Rotrou, de son côté, en 1638, suit fidèlement Sophocle à partir du troisième acte, les deux premiers actes de son texte étant consacrés à une présentation détaillée des deux frères ennemis engagés dans le conflit armé. Sa source principale reste la tragédie d'Eschyle, *Sept contre Thèbes* (467 av. J.-C.), à laquelle il emprunte le portrait d'Étéocle, héros assoiffé de sang, qui défend avec acharnement sa ville natale. Rotrou accorde, cependant, une plus grande importance à Polynice, dépeint comme un tyran impitoyable, à l'instar du Créon de Sophocle. Robert Garnier, dans son *Antigone, ou la pitié* (1580), relâche un peu le principe de fidélité, car il enrichit une action qui ne se soumet pas encore aux règles contraignantes de la tragédie classique.

Le cas de Jean Cocteau est tout spécial. Obsédé par la destinée tragique des Labdacides, il s'est efforcé, tout au long de sa carrière d'auteur dramatique, scénographe et metteur en scène, d'en reprendre et d'en réinterpréter l'essentiel<sup>6</sup>. Ainsi, il a publié un *Œdipe Roi*, d'après Sophocle, en 1928, employé comme prétexte pour un oratorio de Stravinski (*Œdipus Rex*, Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, 1930), illustré de sept tableaux vivants par Cocteau lors de la reprise de 1952. En 1937, la pièce a été jouée au

<sup>5</sup> Pour la diversité des *Antigone* écrites et mises en scène au cours de l'histoire, si nombreuses qu'il est difficile d'en dresser un simple répertoire complet, voir George Steiner, *Antigones*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984 [trad. fr. *Les Antigones*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004], et Simone Fraisse, *Le Mythe d'Antigone*, Paris, Armand Colin, coll. « U – Prisme », 1974.

<sup>6</sup> Voir Irène Einat-Confino, *On the Uses of the Fantastic in Modern Theatre. Cocteau, Oedipus, and the Monster*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Théâtre Antoine, dans la mise en scène de Cocteau lui-même. En 1934, Cocteau a donnée, dans *La Machine infernale*, une réinterprétation courageuse de l'histoire d'Œdipe, victime d'une « machination » des dieux, bien avant sa naissance. Jouée à la Comédie des Champs-Élysées, dans une mise en scène de Louis Jouvet, avec des décors de Christian Bérard, la pièce a été un des succès les plus durables de l'auteur. Reprise en 1954 dans plusieurs théâtre français, adaptée pour la télé et la radio, *La Machine infernale* a conquis les faveurs du public international, dans une mise en scène de Jean Cocteau, réalisée au Théâtre des Célestins, à Lyon, et partie en tournée : Genève, Bruxelles, l'Allemagne, le Maroc, etc.

Quant à *Antigone*, Cocteau semble lui avoir accordé la même importance qu'à *Œdipe roi*. En 1922, il en a donné une remarquable contraction du texte de Sophocle<sup>7</sup>. Tout y est : l'action, les personnages, les situations dramatiques, les répliques, les idées, mais en concentré. Aucune fioriture, aucun ornement rhétorique ne nuisent à une tension habilement ménagée, réduite à l'essentiel, d'une simplicité à même de toucher directement le cœur des spectateurs modernes. Cocteau a renoncé à toute « figuration », laissant les personnages les uns en face des autres, pris dans une action d'une « extrême vitesse »<sup>8</sup>. Le projet esthétique et l'attitude par rapport au texte source sont d'ailleurs clairement définis dans une note auctoriale qui accompagne le texte en 1922 :

C'est tentant de photographier la Grèce en aéroplane. On lui découvre un aspect tout neuf.

Ainsi j'ai voulu traduire *Antigone*. À vol d'oiseau, de grandes beautés disparaissent, d'autres surgissent ; il se forme des rapprochements, des blocs, des ombres, des angles, des reliefs inattendus.

Peut-être mon expérience est-elle un moyen de faire vivre les vieux chefs-d'œuvre. À force d'y habiter, nous les contemplons distraitement, mais parce que je survole un texte célèbre, chacun croit l'entendre pour la première fois.<sup>9</sup>

Cocteau décrit son « expérience » comme une manière de faire « vivre » les textes classiques du patrimoine théâtral européen, victimes de la « distraction » qui dérive d'une trop grande habitude. Les « photographier » de haut rend ces textes vivants à nouveau, car ils ont de grandes beautés à transmettre, en dehors de celles qu'ils y perdent. Si Cocteau reste fidèle, avec la distanciation qu'on a soulignée, au texte de Sophocle, son effort de modernisation et d'actualisation se concentre au

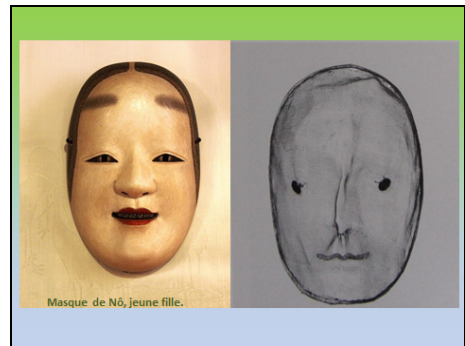
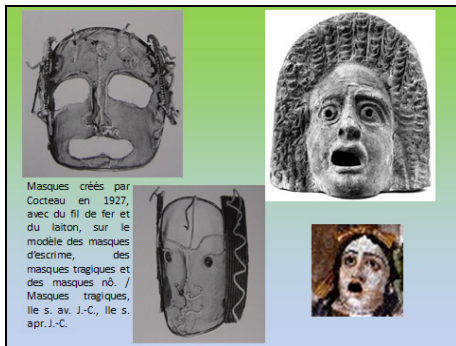
<sup>7</sup> Jean Cocteau, *Antigone. Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, Paris, Gallimard, « Folio », 1976.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

niveau de la mise en scène et du jeu. En 1922, au Théâtre de l'Atelier, patronné par Charles Dullin (qui jouait le rôle de Créon), *l'Antigone* coctalienne a bénéficié d'un décor de Picasso, d'une musique d'Arthur Honegger, et de costumes de Chanel. Antigone était jouée par Génica Atanasiou (Jenica Atanasiu), Tirésias par Antonin Artaud, et le Chœur par Jean Cocteau lui-même. Le chœur, même s'il présente des analogies avec celui de Sophocle, est pensé en termes résolument modernes : « Le chœur et le coryphée se résument en une voix qui parle très haut et très vite comme si elle lisait un article de journal. Cette voix sort d'un trou, au centre du décor. »<sup>10</sup> En 1927, Cocteau a imaginé un programme esthétique différent, qui visait aussi la modernisation du texte à travers des éléments de mise en scène :

Pour la reprise, en 1927, cinq têtes monumentales de jeunes hommes, en plâtre, encadraient le chœur. Les tragédiens portaient des masques transparents du genre des masques d'escrime, sous lesquels on devinait leurs figures et sur lesquels, faits de laiton blanc, des visages aériens étaient cousus. Les costumes se mettaient sur des maillots noirs dont les bras et les jambes étaient recouverts. L'ensemble évoquait un carnaval sordide et royal, une famille d'insectes.<sup>11</sup>



C'est donc à travers une compression du texte et des innovations de mise en scène que Cocteau fait revivre d'une vie nouvelle *l'Antigone* de Sophocle. En effet, les images ci-dessus montrent que, avec une grande liberté, l'auteur s'inspire, pour la création de ses masques, à la fois des masques d'escrime, d'anciens masques tragiques, ainsi que des masques du théâtre japonais. Le même désir de modernisation s'est fait jour aussi dans un spectacle réalisé en 1943 avec *l'Antigone* d'Arthur Honegger. Jean

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

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

Cocteau, auteur de la mise en scène et de la scénographie, a imaginé – dans un souci quasi-archéologique – une ville de Thèbes aux murs blancs, traversée cependant par des véhicules et des figures modernes.

Si l'on s'arrête maintenant à l'*Antigone* de Jean Anouilh (1942), incluse dans le cycle des « pièces noires », on peut découvrir l'effort de modernisation non seulement dans la mise en scène mais déjà dans le texte, qui brode avec une grande liberté et une grâce incontestable sur le canevas hérité de Sophocle. Nous laissons de côté les interprétations déviantes, comme celle de Katie Fleming, qui voit dans le texte du dramaturge en premier lieu le collaborationnisme avec les Allemands et les marques du « fascisme »<sup>12</sup>, pour nous concentrer sur la manière intelligente dont Anouilh a transformé Sophocle, en humanisant et en ridiculisant quelque peu les personnages tragiques.

Antigone est une adolescente tenace et pure, qui se refuse à « comprendre »<sup>13</sup> le monde de manière rationnelle et veut aller jusqu'au bout dans tout ce qu'elle entreprend, en refusant le « bonheur » facile, fait de petites lâchetés et d'aménagements<sup>14</sup>. Créon qui, avant la prise de pouvoir, était passionné seulement par les livres et les belles reliures, n'est pas un tyran. C'est un « métier » qu'il exerce : il se soumet à la raison d'État sans plaisir et essaie de toutes ses forces de sauver Antigone, qui refuse toujours les voies de sortie que son oncle lui propose (il voudrait même faire disparaître les trois gardes qui ont surpris la jeune fille !). Étéocle et Polynice sont dépeints comme des voyous, des ivrognes, des fêtards imbéciles pleins de dettes de jeu, fumant des cigarettes et ne songeant qu'à aller plus vite que d'autres jeunes avec leurs voitures. Rien ne les différencie : la trahison de Polynice, Étéocle la préméditait aussi, sauf qu'il est moins rapide que son frère... Anouilh supprime un personnage essentiel chez Sophocle, le devin Tirésias, en éliminant du même coup toute idée de surnaturel, de présage, de présence des dieux. Par contre, Antigone est – sur le modèle d'autres personnages de tragédie – accompagnée par une nourrice qui n'apparaît pas chez Sophocle, et qui entoure la jeune fille de toute la

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<sup>12</sup> Katie Fleming, « Fascism on Stage: Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* », in Vanda Zajko & Miriam Leonard (éd.), *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 163-188. Fleming, dans un esprit féministe un peu étroit (mais qui se dit « progressiste »), s'intéresse surtout aux éléments qui, chez Anouilh, sont « complicit with fascism » (p. 169), par exemple le portrait de l'héroïne en tant que « the model fascist-youthful, vigorous, and rebelliously uncompromising », et celui de Créon en tant que chef « autoritaire » (p. 182). Bien peu, en effet, à verser au compte du fascisme, alors que l'intérêt esthétique de la tragédie d'Anouilh se trouve ailleurs, comme nous essaierons de le montrer brièvement.

<sup>13</sup> Jean Anouilh, *Antigone*, in *Théâtre complet*, Tome I, Préface de Pol Vandromme, Lausanne, La Guilde du livre, 1963, p. 648.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 676-677.

chaleur maternelle dont l'a privée la mort de Jocaste. À l'humanisation et à la ridiculisation des personnages royaux vient s'ajouter une foule d'éléments modernes parsemés dans le texte d'Anouilh : les cartes postales, le café, les voitures, les fusils, les affiches, les bars, etc.

Anouilh innove aussi au niveau des enjeux (politiques) de la pièce. Dans la première confrontation entre les deux sœurs, Ismène affirme que Créon est à craindre parce que tous pensent comme lui dans la ville. Les paroles d'Ismène s'avèreront lourdes de sens vers la fin, quand Hémon demande à son père de sauver Antigone, donc de penser autrement que ceux qu'il gouverne. Le refus de Créon, qui avait d'ailleurs essayé de camoufler l'incartade d'Antigone, se fonde surtout sur la peur du peuple : « La foule sait déjà, elle hurle autour du palais. », dit-il, en expliquant à son fils qu'il ne peut pas être le « maître »<sup>15</sup>. Le tyran désireux de marquer son pouvoir absolu, qu'on peut déjà trouver chez Sophocle, s'est ici transformé en un homme politique habile, ne transgressant pas les codes établis et ne se mettant pas en travers d'une foule déchaînée. L'accent a changé sensiblement par rapport à Sophocle : là, la foule gronde parce qu'Antigone va être condamnée à mort, ici, les gens s'insurgent parce qu'ils supposent que Créon pourrait songer à sauver la fiancée de son fils.

Ce qu'il y a de vraiment novateur et de séduisant chez Anouilh, c'est la conscience du théâtre et du jeu. À l'ouverture de la pièce, tous les personnages sont en scène et accomplissent de petites actions insignifiantes. De leur groupe se détache le « Prologue », qui s'avance et fait une présentation de chacun et de chacune, en concluant vers la fin de son discours : « Et maintenant que vous les connaissez tous, ils vont pouvoir jouer leur histoire. »<sup>16</sup> Et ce n'est pas tout. Chaque personnage, et surtout Antigone, a la conscience nette de jouer un « rôle » qui lui a été imparti sans possibilité d'en sortir, comme une sorte de fatalité. Pour la fille d'Œdipe, il est clair que son rôle, c'est de mourir, tandis que celui de Créon, c'est de la condamner. Les stratégies méta-textuelles abondent donc chez Anouilh, et même le chœur fait partie de cette logique du clin d'œil vers le spectateur. Dans sa première intervention, au lieu de s'apitoyer sur le sort misérable des personnages, le chœur entreprend une comparaison entre tragédie et drame :

C'est propre, la tragédie. C'est reposant, c'est sûr... Dans le drame, avec ces traîtres, avec ces méchants acharnés, cette innocence persécutée, ces vengeurs, ces terre-neuve, ces lueurs d'espoir, cela devient épouvantable de mourir, comme un accident. On aurait peut-être pu se sauver, le bon jeune homme aurait peut-être pu arriver à temps avec les gendarmes. Dans la tragédie on est tranquille. D'abord, on est

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 680.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 643.

entre soi. On est tous innocents, en somme ! Ce n'est pas parce qu'il y en a un qui tue et l'autre qui est tué. C'est une question de distribution. Et puis, surtout, c'est reposant, la tragédie, parce qu'on sait qu'il n'y a plus d'espoir, le sale espoir ; qu'on est pris, qu'on est enfin pris comme un rat, avec tout le ciel sur son dos, et qu'on n'a plus à crier – pas à gémir, non, pas à se plaindre – à gueuler à pleine voix ce qu'on avait à dire, qu'on n'avait jamais dit et qu'on ne savait peut-être même pas encore. Et pour rien : pour se le dire à soi. Dans le drame, on se débat parce qu'on espère en sortir. C'est ignoble, c'est utilitaire. Là, c'est gratuit. C'est pour les rois.<sup>17</sup>

Et c'est justement cette comparaison entre la tragédie et le drame qui semble ouvrir la voie à l'exploration contemporaine du rôle d'Antigone, des multiples facettes dramatique de ce personnage tragique. Un dernier exemple sur lequel nous nous arrêterons sera donc la tétralogie récente, *Syrma Antigones*, proposée par la troupe italienne Motus avec ses quatre spectacles, réalisés entre 2009 et 2010, et souvent repris depuis : *Let the Sunshine in*, *Too Late*, *Iovadovia* et *Alexis, a Greek Tragedy*.

C'est à la recherche de la compréhension de la tragédie à travers son actualité dramatique ou, de manière tout aussi valable, de la compréhension de l'actualité à travers la tragédie d'Antigone, que partent la formidable actrice Silvia Calderoni et ses partenaires de jeu. La tragédie ne change pas vraiment de territoire, puisque l'action n'ira pas loin de la Grèce, mais elle se *déterritorialise*, dans le sens que donne Jean-Pierre Sarrazac à ce terme, par rapport à l'évolution et aux mutations du drame dans la contemporanéité, puisqu'elle passe dans le champ justement spécifique du drame « post-tragique ». C'est une « reprise »<sup>18</sup>, l'éternelle reprise post-moderne. Le méta-texte présent chez Anouilh devient ici méta-spectacle et l'expérience tragique du personnage de Sophocle se transforme en expérience performative qui explore la *catharsis* en essayant d'entraîner les spectateurs dans une quête identitaire : Qui est Antigone ? Qui est-elle, ici et maintenant ?

Dans le premier spectacle de la tétralogie, *Let the Sunshine in*, pendant l'entrée du public on n'entend que des murmures, des enchaînements de mots incompréhensibles : le texte ne fait surface qu'après l'échauffement physique, il respire dans les micros en même temps que les acteurs :

« Sei pronto ? – Pronto a che ? – Ad andare. » Suit la reconnaissance : « Polynice! – Sorella ! », et les personnages apparaissent en laissant aussi les acteurs faire surface de temps à autre, afin de s'interroger sur les raisons d'être là, sur scène, sur les raisons qu'ils ont d'incarner ces personnages, sur la manière de les « rencontrer »,

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 660.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Pierre Sarrazac, « La reprise (réponse au post-dramatique) », in *Études théâtrales*, n° 38-39, *La réinvention du drame (sous l'influence de la scène)*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2007.

de les doubler. Comment cerner le pourquoi de la rébellion de Polynice ? D'où part cette révolte et donc son comportement violent, retourné contre sa propre ville, Thèbes ? Qu'est-ce qu'il aurait dit, lui, le frère rebelle, si la parole lui avait été donnée ? Son amour pour Antigone ? La révolte qui bouillonne à l'intérieur avant de jaillir, « l'indignation qui se transforme en action », comme dit l'acteur, en citant un Allemand des années '70<sup>19</sup> : tout cela « parce qu'on ne peut pas oublier » ... Le texte du poète tragique hante, on ne peut pas l'oublier, de la même manière que les personnages ne peuvent oublier leur passé, leur famille, leur condition, leur malédiction. Faut-il rappeler la phrase qui clôt la première réplique d'Antigone adressée à Ismène, tout en ouvrant le conflit de la pièce : « Ignores-tu que le malheur est en marche et que ceux qui nous haïssent visent ceux que nous aimons ? »<sup>20</sup>

Le malheur est en marche, le drame est amorcé : ici, dans sa la forme « rhapsodique »<sup>21</sup>, le drame de la rébellion commence par un amour partagé entre deux frères qui s'entretuent, un amour exaspéré pour celui qui est abandonné sans sépulture par Créon qui, devenu « tête » de la cité, emploie la force, domine, fait la loi. La cité devient alors Athènes, le temps de la guerre est le temps de la crise, la rébellion des manifestants qui crient aux « criminels » répond à la rébellion de la forme dramatique qui superpose, entrelace, renverse actions, paroles, images et gestes – correspondant à plusieurs niveaux de réalité et fiction –, puis revient à la légende tragique, s'en éloigne et y revient encore. La double mort de Polynice surgit comme une interrogation sans réponse : est-ce son frère ou son oncle qui l'a véritablement tué ? Quelle variante de l'histoire faut-il raconter ?

Dans le texte de Sophocle, la révolte (et l'orgueil) d'Antigone transparaissent déjà dans la première présentation des faits :

Pour Étéocle, me dit-on, il juge bon de le traiter suivant l'équité et le rite, et il l'a fait ensevelir d'une manière qui lui vaille le respect des ombres sur terre. Mais pour l'autre, Polynice, **le pauvre mort**, défense est faite, paraît-il, aux citoyens de donner à son cadavre ni tombeau ni lamentation : on le laissera là, sans larmes ni sépulture, proie magnifique aux oiseaux affamés en quête d'un gibier ! Et voilà, m'assure-t-on, ce que le noble Créon nous aurait ainsi défendu, à toi comme à moi – à moi !<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Souvenons-nous de la réplique d'Antigone adressée à Ismène : « Vois si tu veux **lutter** et **agir** avec moi ! », Sophocle, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Pierre Sarrazac entend par forme « rhapsodique » « la forme la plus libre [du drame], mais pas l'absence de forme », *L'Avenir du drame*, Belval, Circé/Poche, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Sophocle, *op. cit.*, p. 86.



Dans les spectacles de Motus, la révolte prend le visage de la rue, de ceux dont Antigone – à la suite de Polynice – se fait le porte-parole, des « rebelles » dont Créon a peur et dont Hémon lui parle en l’avertissant de prendre garde à ses actes : « voilà la rumeur obscure qui sans bruit monte contre toi »<sup>23</sup>. L’obstination dans l’indignation et la révolte constituent un motif récurrent de la tétralogie de *Syrma Antigones* et le personnage féminin en est l’effigie active. D’ailleurs, le jeu des acteurs est une performance physique extraordinaire. À l’épreuve de la scène contemporaine, Antigone non seulement ne tient pas en place, en parcourant l’espace de long en large, loin d’une vision statuaire de la tragédie antique, mais même lorsqu’elle se trouve assise, ou debout, sa voix ses gestes prennent forme comme sous le fouet de la réplique antique : « Ah ! crie-le très haut au contraire ! Je te détesterai bien plus si tu te tais et ne le clames pas partout ! »<sup>24</sup>

L’Antigone de Sophocle, comme celle d’Anouilh ou d’autres auteurs dramatiques parle beaucoup du pouvoir, de la « force » qui ne doit pas lui manquer, dont il faut faire preuve. C’est pour cela que l’actrice italienne à apparence androgyne construit son personnage sur le fond d’une force qui bouillonne, qui se contient à peine, qui jaillit en poussées de révolte, en actes anarchiques, pétards fumants lancés par-dessus les spectateurs pris entre les deux actants rebelles, en regards et paroles cyniques, comme en gestes désespérés, troublants par les images qu’il génèrent : « Silvia, as-tu jamais tiré sur quelqu’un ? », « Non. Non, jamais. » Cette question incommode hantera les acteurs-personnages de la tétralogie, en revenant sous la forme de « as-tu jamais lancé une pierre contre quelqu’un ? », dans *Alexis, une tragédie grecque*. Alors comment ne pas enterrer ses morts ? Comment oublier ceux qu’on aime, qui nous sont chers et à qui on est chers ? « Créon n’a pas à m’écarter des miens ! », crie Antigone devant la faiblesse de sa sœur qui « cède à la force », qui « entend obéir aux pouvoirs établis » et pour qui « les gestes vains sont des sottises »<sup>25</sup>.

Dans *Let the Sunshine in*, l’ensevelissement de Polynice reste le moment culminant, d’une splendide intensité cathartique : les spectateurs n’ont plus d’intermédiaire, plus de messenger ou de soldat qui puisse raconter la manière dont Antigone couvrit de poussière, les mains vides, le corps inanimé de son frère. Dans cette halle vide et peu accueillante, ils se voient dérober les chaises par l’Silvia-

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108. Le mot « rebelle » est utilisé plusieurs fois au cours de la pièce, par Créon lorsqu’il somme le chœur des vieillards de Thèbes de ne pas « se joindre aux rebelles », p. 92 ; par le chœur, quand ses membres voient s’approcher Antigone et les gardes. Créon dit lui-même : « il y a dans cette ville des hommes qui s’impatiente et qui murmurent contre moi », après il traite Antigone d’« insolente », ou « en délit de rébellion ouverte ».

<sup>24</sup> Sophocle, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

Antigone, désespérée, qui n'a rien d'autre pour accomplir son devoir. Chaises qui s'entassent, tombeau improvisé, pendant que le public, debout, participant volens-nolens aux funérailles de Polynice<sup>26</sup>, écoute les explications données par Antigone à Créon, que Silvia murmure sur le ton de l'indignation montante :

- Tu me tiens dans tes mains. Veux-tu plus que ma mort ?
- Nullement : avec elle, j'ai tout ce que je veux.
- Alors, pourquoi tarder ?

Les répliques suivantes qui n'existent pas telles quelles dans la tragédie de Sophocle deviendront le fil rouge des représentations à suivre :

- Pourquoi est-tu si obstinée ?
- Parce que je veux donner un exemple.

Ainsi, le deuxième spectacle, *Too late*, enchaîne sur le double face-à-face Antigone-Créon et Hémon-Créon, puis le troisième, *Iovadovia*, continue à investiguer la complexité dramatique de l'histoire d'Antigone à travers la position de Tirésias, le devin aveugle, exilé aux marges de la cité. La marginalisation, thème cher à la littérature et aux mouvements théâtraux contemporains depuis plus d'une dizaine d'années, fait amplement sentir sa présence ici aussi, surtout à travers le renvoi direct, explicite, aux problèmes sociaux auxquels se confronte la Grèce à cause de la crise économique la touchant depuis quelques années. Antigone et son exil entre la vie et la mort, dans « le lieu délaissé par les pas des hommes », se fait aussi l'écho des voix de ceux qui – excentrés – ne sont plus écoutés.

Dans la dernière partie de cette tétralogie, *Alexis, a Greek Tragedy*, les valences sociopolitiques se précisent encore plus, l'action se focalisant sur le cas du garçon de quinze ans tué par un policier dans un des quartiers à émeutes d'Athènes. Les événements, devenus histoire, se superposent en palimpseste à la tragédie antique et la question qui surgit est celle de comprendre comment un tel drame fut possible, comment de telles choses sont encore possibles de nos jours, dans une société qui se veut démocratique, anti-tyrannique par définition. Pourtant, bien que la dimension politique soit indubitablement de première importance dans le texte source de ce

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<sup>26</sup> À la fin, Benno Steinegger-Polynice, sort de son tombeau, complètement nu, en rappelant aux spectateurs la terrible nudité des victimes de l'Holocauste et en demandant une aide qui ne vient pas avant de sortir de scène.

pot-pourri admirablement conduit qu'est l'exploit scénique de Motus dans *Syrma Antigones*, pour qu'il y ait tragédie, il faut écouter les deux camps, « on est tous innocents » – comme le disait Anouilh – et tous perdus par orgueil, par cette *hybris* si importante pour Aristote. Or, à la fin de cette « reprise » contemporaine de l'éternelle Antigone, le spectateur n'a plus qu'une version des faits : celle de révoltés, des rebelles, et plus rien de la justification si importante pour le jeu de l'équilibre tragique chez Sophocle. N'oublions pas qu'Antigone elle-même attirait l'attention de Créon sur le fait que le changement du point de vue change aussi la réalité des choses perçues : « Qu'on en appelle au mort. Il dira autrement. »<sup>27</sup>

De même, un autre aspect se révèle symptomatique pour ce passage de la tragédie antique au drame contemporain : la principale motivation des décisions et des actes d'Antigone chez Sophocle est la loi divine, la volonté des dieux, qui fait pâlir tout acte de volonté humaine : « Ne dois-je pas plus longtemps plaire à ceux d'en bas [*id est* aux dieux infernaux] qu'à ceux d'ici, puisque aussi bien c'est là-bas qu'à jamais et reposeraï ? » Ainsi, pour elle, les défenses établies par un mortel ne valent rien à côté des « lois non-écrites, inébranlables des dieux »<sup>28</sup> ! Pourtant, chez Anouilh, et dans la majorité des reprises modernes et contemporaines du texte antique, les dieux, le transcendant, n'existent plus et ne jouent donc plus aucun rôle dans l'évolution du personnage féminin qui se révolte contre l'ordre établi.

Une fois cette dimension perdue, le risque est de s'enfermer dans un enclos idéologique qui fera donc d'Antigone une effigie, une représentante, un « exemple » à suivre. Que ce soit pour le féminisme, pour l'anarchisme ou pour la révolution de toutes les couleurs, Antigone changera de visage en fonctions des besoins socio-idéologiques ponctuels d'une génération ou d'un courant de pensée<sup>29</sup>. Mais ce que le spectateur conquis par la performance scénique des Antigone ne doit pas oublier, c'est le fait que la validité atemporelle de ce personnage est donnée par la complexité fascinante du texte antique dont les niveaux de lecture restent toujours une source vive d'interprétations possibles de l'être humain vivant parmi ses semblables, vivant dans une société avec ses lois écrites et non-écrites. Enlever ainsi la dimension transcendante revient à renoncer définitivement à la tragédie, comme le remarquait

<sup>27</sup> Sophocle, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>28</sup> *Éd. cit.*, p. 87 et p. 100 ; « ainsi je suis bien certaine de plaire à ceux à qui je dois plaire avant tout » p. 88 répliques adressées à Ismène.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Stéphanie Urdician, « Antigone. Du personnage tragique à la figure mythique », in *Figures mythiques. Fabrique et métamorphoses*, Études réunies et présentées par Véronique Léonard-Roques, Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2008, p. 83 : « Au cours du processus d'humanisation, les auteurs doublent l'intrigue mythique d'une intrigue historique contemporaine de l'écriture. La figure mythique subit alors une décontextualisation et/ou recontextualisation à des fins souvent idéologiques. »

Anouilh, pour entrer en plein dans le champ du drame, du drame de l'homme moderne et post-moderne, prisonnier de son propre monde, assoiffé d'une évasion qui ne semblerait plus possible – nous laissent entendre les acteurs de Motus, héritiers d'une longue tradition du théâtre politique et d'agit-prop – que par l'engagement dans la lutte sociale, dans l'action qui déborde la scène, en passant l'éponge sur les frontières entre art et vie.

Mais la question qui en résulte et sur laquelle nous voudrions finir ce parcours intertextuel est la suivante : Comment continuer à parler du « post-dramatique » alors que l'effervescence dramatique nous appelle à l'action, même au-delà de la rampe ? Hans-Thies Lehmann affirme, dans un ouvrage qui n'est que trop cité par la critique actuelle, en rejetant – sous l'influence d'Adorno – non seulement la forme dramatique, mais aussi le dramatique lui-même :

Si le drame moderne se fonde sur un homme se constituant dans ses rapports interpersonnels, le théâtre post-dramatique au contraire suppose un homme pour qui, même les conflits les plus graves, semble-t-il, ne prennent plus la forme du drame [...]. Certes, on peut à un moment ou à un autre reconnaître encore une « tournure dramatique » dans tel combats de dirigeants, mais on s'aperçoit assez tôt à nouveau qu'au fond tout conflit se décide ailleurs – dans les blocs de pouvoir.<sup>30</sup>

Or, justement, que veut dire récupérer la tragédie d'Antigone aujourd'hui et la rendre vivante, actuelle, la comprendre en l'assumant en tant qu'être humain du XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle ? En un premier temps, partir à la recherche des conflits si présents, si clairs dans la tragédie de Sophocle : 1. le conflit avec celui qui représente le pouvoir légal mais considéré « injuste » et, par conséquent, avec la société qui l'agrée ; 2. le conflit avec tous ceux qui ne pensent pas comme l'héroïne et refusent son action, par conséquent avec sa propre famille (sa sœur) ; 3. le conflit avec soi-même : faire le choix entre la vie et la mort ; 4. le conflit avec les dieux qui est refusé dès le point de départ et qui devient par conséquent le générateur de tous les autres conflits<sup>31</sup>.

À tous ces conflits majeurs, la tétralogie de Motus trouve un équivalent, en les faisant germer dans le terrain du monde contemporain, dans sa violence et sa cruauté. Il n'y a que le dernier conflit qui ne trouve pas sa place. Les dieux n'existent plus pour cette nouvelle Antigone, ces dieux qui étaient, eux, le véritable « bloc de pouvoir » dirigeant, au nom duquel Antigone sacrifie tout ce que la vie lui offre. Or

<sup>30</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Le Théâtre post-dramatique*, Paris, L'Arche, 2002 (édition allemande de 1999).

<sup>31</sup> « Dans notre conception, le dramatique, même diffus, est premier ; il renvoie à cet événement spécifique, primordial : *la rencontre catastrophique avec l'autre – fût-ce l'autre en soi-même.* », Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, *art. cit.*, p. 8.

ceci vient justement contredire le post-dramatique même, tel que le voit Hans-Thies Lehmann. Ce n'est pas que dans le post-dramatique que « tout conflit se décide ailleurs – dans les blocs de pouvoir », mais dans le tragique, et dans le dramatique aussi. La différence est que *l'ailleurs* est beaucoup moins éloigné mais paradoxalement aussi beaucoup moins familier dans le « dramatique » contemporain.

Aussi, nous ne pouvons qu'être entièrement d'accord, à l'instar de Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, avec Thomas Ostermeier, qui affirme que « la théorie du post-dramatique est aujourd'hui dépassée car les conflits dans les sociétés contemporaines deviennent à nouveau si forts que le drame revient en force dans la vie, et le théâtre doit bien s'en faire l'écho »<sup>32</sup>. Parler dans ce sens d'un« *découplage* du théâtre et du drame » ? Non, le découplage est à notre avis entre le théâtre et la transposition scénique d'un texte dramatique tout fait. Mais le drame n'en finit pas de grandir et de se transformer.

En guise de conclusion, on doit absolument souligner la fascination du texte, dont on ne peut pas se séparer complètement, même dans les mises en scène contemporaines, représentatives de ce que certains critiques continuent à désigner – malencontreusement – comme du théâtre « post-dramatique ». Le texte de théâtre, bien écrit et audacieusement adapté aux exigences de la scène, dégage une force, une énergie sauvage, et les mots touchent fortement les spectateurs, mieux que ne le feraient les gestes seuls et les mimiques des acteurs, aussi expressives soient-elles. Le texte fait sens, il est prétexte à innovations mythologiques, à jeux linguistiques, à changements de significations. L'exemple des *Antigone* montre à quel point le texte (littéraire) se définit comme élément fondamental du théâtre, aussi résistant et vivant que l'acteur. Cette fois-ci le théâtre vient ressusciter le dramatique et confirmer sa présence, ô combien vivante, dans le monde du XXIème siècle, qui n'aura, heureusement, pas fini de nous surprendre.

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Ostermeier, Introduction et entretien par Sylvie Chalaye, Arles, Actes Sud-Papiers, 2006, coll. « Mettre en scène ».

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## RECREER BECKETT, REJOUER *OH LES BEAUX JOURS* – TROIS WINNIE EN SCENE/ RECREATING BECKETT, REPLAYING *OH THE BEAUTIFUL DAY* – THREE WINNIE ON THE STAGE

CATARINA FIRMO<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** The main question that underlies my paper is the bridge between the written word and the theatre stage in Samuel Beckett's dramatic texts. I propose to study the dramaturgical itineraries of *Happy Days*, by analyzing a set of recent stagings of this play. I will try to understand the continuity of Beckett's theatre today, through sets of thematic approaches which seem fundamental in the stage recreation of this text. Confronting three different creations of *Happy Days* with important directors like Giorgio Strehler, Frederick Wiseman and Bob Wilson, I propose to demonstrate the importance of recreating Beckett dramaturgy.

**Keywords:** Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days*, Giorgio Strehler, Frederick Wiseman, Bob Wilson, staging strategies.

Le sens étymologique du mot théâtre rapporté au verbe voir (en grec ancien *théa* [θήα] signifiait la vision) est couramment remarqué. Pourtant, il est aussi curieux de penser à la liaison entre représenter et regarder. Le verbe «regarder» reporte à une répétition de l'action de garder (souvenons-nous du verbe italien «guardare»). Or la représentation théâtrale nous motive justement à l'action de garder à nouveau, c'est-à-dire de capter autrement le texte écrit et de replacer ce que nous avons lu face à l'ensemble d'éléments dynamiques qui constituent le spectacle vivant.

Si les pièces de Samuel Beckett sont représentées d'une façon incessante depuis les années 50, nous observons toutefois un blocage de la liberté scénique motivé par les consignes légales et la critique qui promeuvent le besoin de protéger ses didascalies et ses intentions dramaturgiques. Il faut cependant se souvenir que les didascalies présentes dans les textes ont souffert des changements proposés par l'auteur lui-même, qui a accompagné et dirigé la mise en scène de ses pièces. En

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effet, la richesse des didascalies de Beckett réside justement dans l'ensemble de possibilités d'interprétation et de lectures scéniques que les textes nous permettent de déceler. La subjectivité et la pluralité de significations de ces indications scéniques ont été confirmées par le dramaturge dans le passage des textes à la scène. Dans les cahiers de mise en scène de Samuel Beckett, mis en ordre par James Knowlson, nous remarquons l'ensemble des changements que Beckett a établis dans ses textes lors des représentations qu'il a dirigées. Dans ce sens, James Knowlson souligne que nous avons dans ces manuscrits la preuve qui confirme que la volonté de l'auteur a changé au cours du temps et en fonction des conditions de chaque spectacle : «Il faut souligner que ce carnet révèle une approche flexible et totalement ouverte, que l'on considère souvent comme étrangère à la façon dont Beckett travaille au théâtre. Nous n'avons pas affaire, avec cette pièce, à une entité abstraite, ni à une chose immuable et statique mais à un organisme vivant qui doit inévitablement évoluer selon les circonstances et les intentions.» (Knowlson, 1994 : 82).

En France, la première mise en scène de *Oh les beaux jours* par Roger Blin, en 1963, a fondé un style de représentation et, pendant longtemps, la pièce semblait inabordable après sa création avec Madeleine Renaud. Plus qu'une fidélité au dramaturge, il s'est institué le besoin de rester fidèle à un modèle de représentation. Petit à petit d'autres manières de mettre Beckett en scène sont créées, avec Pierre Chabert, Peter Brook et Giorgio Strehler. En 2006, à l'occasion du centenaire de Beckett à Paris, deux mises en scène étrangères ont osé reprendre cette pièce, en brisant la tradition : celle de l'italien Giorgio Strehler reprise par Carlo Battistoni au Théâtre de l'Athénée et celle de l'américain Frederick Wiseman au Vieux Colombier de la Comédie Française. En 2010, le tour a été joué par le metteur en scène Bob Wilson, qui a présenté une version innovatrice de *Oh les beaux jours*.

Ces spectacles, avec leurs différentes approches, se situent au croisement de lignes esthétiques, avec des constructions scéniques qui font référence à notre contemporanéité. Dans cet essai, je me propose de relever l'importance des nouveaux regards et de nouvelles propositions scéniques pour recréer Beckett aujourd'hui.

### Noyée dans la glace



Le spectacle *Giorni Felici* a été créé pour la première fois en 1983 par Giorgio Strehler au Piccolo Teatro di Milano. Carlo Battistoni s'est engagé dans la tâche de donner suite à la création après la mort de Giorgio Strehler. En 2006, l'œuvre a été en scène à Paris au Théâtre de l'Athénée, dans un cycle intitulé «Un peu d'Italie à l'Athénée». Cette création, qui est devenue déjà un classique, demeure pourtant profondément innovatrice pour les salles de spectacle parisiennes. Le décor volcanique de Blin et les dunes montagneuses qu'on reconnaît dans la plupart des représentations sont renouvelés. Le paysage devient une extension plane et blanche de sable glacial. On reconnaît des traits de source dantesque, dans cette représentation de l'espace apocalyptique où Winnie est enterrée. Au dernier anneau de l'Enfer, Dante a aussi rencontré des âmes noyées dans la glace. Strehler a cherché un sens pour l'espace scénique, conjuguant des éléments différents, avec le souci de créer un scénario capable de correspondre à la dimension poétique du personnage et à sa relation avec les objets. De ce long chemin il est arrivé enfin au scénario glacial qui contraste avec le fond noir, en allant à la rencontre de l'antithèse représentée dans le texte, l'optimisme humain devant la fatalité.

La lecture du metteur en scène italien renvoie ainsi à l'optimisme de Leibniz et Voltaire, dans la demande «du meilleur des mondes». Il lit dans ses *Giorni Felici*, un texte qui cite les ruines de la bombe atomique et l'Homme qui se débat en train d'évoquer encore l'espoir et la possible survivance. Dans ses notes de mise en scène, Strehler raconte que c'est à partir de Beckett qu'il s'est senti prêt à mettre en scène le conflit de l'Homme avec la Vie, le Fatum, le Divin : «Je suis surtout frappé par cette affirmation de vie qu'il contient à travers une répétition de gestes, de paroles, d'actions dans un monde arrivé presque à son terme, mais pas encore détruit même s'il est réduit à ses ultimes et presque dérisoires formes de survivance. [...] La grandeur et l'humanité de Beckett ne sont pas dans la négation de la vie et de l'homme mais dans la persistance d'un appel à ne pas se laisser détruire. [...] Beckett n'est pas une voix qui résonne dans le désert. Il cherche des échos dans tous les coins du monde où existent une capacité et une volonté de vivre.» (Strehler, 1989 : 213-215).

Carlo Battistoni clarifie cette lecture, en expliquant que Strehler ne pouvait pas accepter ce que chez Beckett lui semblait relever d'un négativisme absolu et qui d'une certaine manière lui était étranger. Winnie métaphorise dans cette création une forme d'espérance, le courage de résister, le sens du verbe «espérer» latin que Beckett a trouvé si frappant, parce qu'il signifie à la fois «attendre» et «avoir de l'espoir». Nous identifions ce refus dans la mise en scène, indiqué par divers éléments fondateurs de l'optimisme du personnage enterré, tels que les effets de lumière dans le fond noir qui représentent des étoiles. L'épisode qui est à l'origine de ce détail du décor fait encore écho à l'enthousiasme de Strehler, en préservant le côté onirique de l'œuvre et en cherchant de la vitalité pour l'espace désertique de Beckett.

Les étoiles dans le fond noir sont créées pendant une répétition, où le metteur en scène a essayé de transformer le désespoir en courage. Devant l'insécurité que Giulia Lazarinni manifestait dans une première phase du travail, Strehler a décidé de créer cet effet de lumière, destiné à accentuer le côté héroïque du personnage et en même temps à encourager l'actrice. Carlo Battistoni raconte cet épisode légendaire : «Je me souviens qu'une fois, lors d'une répétition [...] j'ai vu Giorgio s'interrompre pour marcher vers elle et lui susurrer quelque chose à l'oreille. Il lui avait dit, Giulia me le confia par la suite, que derrière ses épaules brillaient les étoiles qu'il avait inventées pour elle, pour illuminer le ciel sombre de la nuit de Winnie : une note d'espoir.» (Battistoni, 2006 : 6).

Cet optimisme nous révèle une Winnie énergique, avec un rythme accéléré, parlant sans cesse pour vaincre le silence. Cela nous amène de nouveau à Dante, qui est sorti de l'Enfer gelé et aphonique<sup>2</sup>. C'est aussi dans les profondeurs de l'Enfer que nous avons l'épuisement des mots qui pétrifie les âmes glacées. Au huitième anneau, Dante rencontre des âmes qui ont parlé fausement, étranglées par la glace<sup>3</sup>. L'idée des mots qui pétrifient est d'ailleurs un lieu commun dans la littérature et la mythologie. Par exemple, dans *Les Métamorphoses* d'Ovide on décrit le mythe de Niobe, cette femme qui est devenue un rocher, parce qu'elle a trop parlé, gênant la divinité.

Selon Giorgio Strehler, ce qui rend le texte absurde et hallucinant, c'est précisément l'absence de logique que l'interprète ne doit pas chercher. C'est ainsi que les mots et les actions peuvent fluctuer sans causes et sans raisons. Devant ce monde en ruines, Samuel Beckett a mis à nu l'impuissance de l'humanité à communiquer dans l'épuisement du langage (Deleuze, 1992).

Beckett était très conscient de la signification de la douleur comme besoin artistique. À l'instar de Schopenhauer, le dramaturge a souligné comme avertissement que les hommes, au contraire des animaux, sont privés du sentiment de bonheur à cause de leur rationalité. L'incontinence verbale, cette parlotte incessante où Winnie est plongée, se rapporte aussi à l'incapacité de sentir la douleur. C'est là un état d'anesthésie si connu par notre monde moderne et postmoderne. Cette Winnie strehlerienne représente le désir obstiné de continuité, où la vitesse des gestes et des mots va de pair avec la peur d'un point final. C'est peut-être là que réside l'actualité de Beckett, dans le besoin de représenter un portrait de l'humanité, qui se refuse encore et de plus en plus à une rencontre cathartique avec la douleur et qui cherche son réconfort dans la vie qui se répète constamment, assurant son intangible permanence.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Enfer* XXXIV, 21-24.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Enfer* XXXII, 108-139.

### Engloutie par une pyramide



*Oh les beaux jours* a été mise en scène par Frederick Wiseman, au Théâtre du Vieux Colombier – Comédie Française, pendant le Festival Paris Beckett en 2006. Si Beckett a mis à nu l'impuissance de l'humanité condamnée au scénario de l'absurde, dans le *Cinéma vérité* conçu par Wiseman, nous avons un écho des mêmes préoccupations : «Je n'ai jamais trouvé une explication idéologique qui rende compte adéquatement de l'étrangeté du monde et du fait d'être conscient.»<sup>4</sup> Wiseman partage avec Samuel Beckett une perplexité lucide dans son regard sur le monde. De cette inévitable rencontre est née une nouvelle création d'*Oh les beaux jours*.

La mise en scène propose, entre autres changements scéniques, un décor qui transforme le mamelon de sable en pyramide. Les couleurs volcaniques sont aussi abandonnées et renouvelées par des dunes de sable clair. L'herbe qui surgit dans les dunes n'est plus de l'herbe brûlée, en donnant lieu à des extensions de vert, dans un chantier vertical construit à un mètre du sol, au quatrième mur. Dès le début du

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<sup>4</sup> Wiseman, Frederick in AA.VV., programme du spectacle *Oh les beaux jours*, mise en scène de Frederick Wiseman, interprétation de Catherine Samie et de Frederick Wiseman, Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier de la Comédie Française, Paris, du 26 octobre au 4 novembre 2006.

premier acte, nous sommes frappés par un bruit électronique, à la place du son du vieux réveil auquel nous sommes habitués. Maintenant, un son strident marque l'heure du réveil et du coucher. Dans un entretien, Frederick Wiseman a clarifié son interprétation et ses choix scéniques : «J'ai gardé que le bleu du décor dans les indications de Beckett. L'idée de montagne tue la métaphore : Winnie – Air ; Willie – Terre.»<sup>5</sup> En ce qui concerne le bruit électronique du réveil, Wiseman raconte qu'il cherchait un signal d'appel d'attention, d'agression, quand il s'est rendu compte qu'il fallait recourir à la radio américaine pour demander l'enregistrement du signal qui annonçait le largage de la bombe atomique.

Dans le premier acte, la pyramide rhomboïde donne l'image d'une jupe en tulle, où Winnie est enterrée jusqu'à la ceinture. Encore une fois pour aller à la rencontre de la métaphore : Winnie – Air ; Willie – Terre. Selon le metteur en scène, l'idée de la jupe pyramide, sur le modèle des costumes du XVIIIe siècle, et le décor sont conçus en rapport à cette relation. On a de nouveau la source dantesque puisque Wiseman nous explique que la pyramide est faite «de cercles concentriques pour rappeler les cercles de *l'Enfer* de Dante»<sup>6</sup>. Les étages augmentent au deuxième acte. Le public, qui s'attendait à baisser le regard pendant que Winnie se voit disparaître de plus en plus dans son mamelon (trait commun à la plupart des mises en scène), est surpris par cette Winnie qui incarne l'Air et qui nous regarde du haut de sa pyramide et de plus en plus haut d'ailleurs, jusqu'à être engloutie par le sable.

Selon Chevalier et Gheerbrant, «la pyramide est un symbole ascensionnel, tant par sa forme extérieure, particulièrement quand ses degrés s'appellent l'escalier ou l'échelle, que par ses couloirs intérieurs généralement très inclinés. [...] Convergence ascensionnelle, conscience de synthèse la pyramide est aussi lieu de rencontre entre deux mondes : un monde magique, lié aux rites funéraires de retenue indéfinie de la vie ou passage à une vie supra-temporelle.» (Chevalier et Gheerbrant, 2005 : 791). Si la pyramide peut être vue en tant que parcours d'ascension, Winnie s'inscrit dans un chemin de remémoration. Elle sait qu'elle est en train d'arriver à la rencontre tragique avec la mort, mais elle ne peut pas s'empêcher de convoquer encore les souvenirs et les beaux jours qu'elle a vécus. Il y a quelque chose de très vrai dans la métaphore de Wiseman et finalement en accord avec la vision de Beckett, malgré les différences des choix scéniques : «Dans sa propre mise en scène Beckett a insisté sur le fait que Winnie est un être interrompu, une femme-enfant qui saute d'un sujet à un autre. Elle est comme un oiseau, dit-il, avec du pétrole sur les plumes.»<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Entretien avec Frederick Wiseman, à Paris, le 29 de novembre 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Frederick Wiseman, [http://passouline.blog.lemonde.fr/2005/11/30/2005\\_11\\_beckett\\_a\\_encor](http://passouline.blog.lemonde.fr/2005/11/30/2005_11_beckett_a_encor) (blogue du journal *Le Monde* organisé par Pierre Assouline).

<sup>7</sup> Programme Festival Paris-Beckett 2006-2007, p. 14.

Dans cette version, nous trouvons d'autres changements intéressants. En ce qui concerne les costumes et les accessoires, on ne voit plus les couleurs rose pâle auxquelles Madeleine Renaud nous a familiarisés. Renonçant clairement au *vieux style*, le chapeau est une couronne métallique et la robe est rouge et blanche, avec des motifs abstraits. Dans cette ambiance postmoderne et urbaine, Wiseman a abandonné la rupture entre le gag du premier acte et le ton tragique du deuxième acte. Le tragique est toujours présent et même quand le gag stimule le rire, nous n'arrivons pas à avoir plus qu'un sourire embarrassé, en devinant que les étages de la pyramide vont augmenter. Le ton, le geste et le rythme de Catherine Samie nous empêchent d'oublier la prévision de ce corps enterré, enfoui dans le sable.

Ce personnage suspendu dans l'air, qui se réveille et se couche au son de la bombe atomique, fait bien le portrait de l'absurde philosophique beckettien, décrit par Adorno à propos de *Fin de partie* : «Après la Seconde Guerre mondiale tout est détruit [...]. On escompte la fin du monde comme si elle allait de soi. Toute pièce de théâtre qui prétendrait traiter de l'ère atomique serait sa propre dérision. [...] [Beckett] prolonge la ligne de fuite de la liquidation du sujet, [...] la perte de toute qualité, pousse littéralement *ad absurdum* l'abstraction ontologique.» (Adorno, 1999 : 205-207).

La dramaturgie de l'après-guerre est dans le droit fil des théories d'Artaud. Elle s'inscrit dans un moment de rupture, qui a motivé le besoin de repenser les catégories esthétiques et performatives et de trouver des nouvelles modalités de représentation. Cette génération s'est débattue devant l'impossibilité de créer après Auschwitz et Hiroshima. Elle a cherché à reconstituer ce sens fragmenté par de nouveaux moyens artistiques. Devant ce blocage, les auteurs ont assumé la responsabilité de renouveler le langage, dans les limites de l'incohérence et du non-sens. C'est toujours Adorno qui affirme, dans les années 50, qu'écrire un poème après Auschwitz constitue un acte de barbarie. Benjamin avait déjà été étonné par le spectacle de la barbarie, lors du premier conflit mondial. C'est pourquoi il voyait l'histoire modelée comme par un processus de déclin inéluctable où «les allégories seraient au domaine de la pensée ce que les ruines étaient au domaine des choses» (Benjamin, 2002 : 191). Dans sa *Théorie Esthétique*, Adorno a articulé l'idée philosophique de l'Absurde avec la notion de Nouveau. Comme le tableau *Angelus Novus* de Paul Klee, qui a tellement inspiré Benjamin, l'homme moderne marche avec la tête en arrière, en regardant son passé en ruines.

L'immobilité de Winnie est la métaphore d'un personnage qui se fond dans l'incohérence du monde, manifestant le désordre à travers l'action et les mots. Elle représente le drame de l'homme moderne devant l'impossibilité de communiquer. Cette représentation du corps immobile qui exhibe la douleur, la fragilité et la décomposition a amené Wiseman à lui attribuer le sens de radiographie : «*Oh les beaux jours* est une radiographie de notre manière de vivre,

de penser, de sentir. Comme toutes les radiographies, cette pièce triste, drôle et tragique à la fois, ne prescrit pas de remède, mais décrit, sans illusions, ce qui est, pour ceux qui veulent savoir.»<sup>8</sup>

L'image du désert apocalyptique, vu aussi comme un *no man's land*, contient la métaphore de la pièce : l'être humain étranglé par le sable essaie de survivre aux vestiges irradiés du monde. Le sable, un des éléments du monde minéral beckettien, se trouve surtout dans la poésie écrite en Irlande. La poésie de la terre mère est ainsi transposée sur la scène : le sable où Winnie s'enfonce, la pierre d'Estragon, les pierres de *Dis-Joe*. Dans *Oh les beaux jours*, le sable est aussi le minéral à la mutation rapide, le symbole de la matière instable, la mise en poussière de la matière, la métamorphose du désert qui engloutit chaque chose. Ce signe de l'Air, prisonnier de la terre, affirme une volonté de bonheur malgré son corps qui s'abîme dans le désert.

### Ancrée dans l'asphalte



Quatre ans après la présentation de *Giorni Felici* pendant le centenaire de Beckett, avec la mise en scène de Giorgio Strehler, le Théâtre de l'Athénée a ouvert la saison 2010-2011 avec la recréation de *Oh les beaux jours* par Bob Wilson. Le metteur en scène américain explique dans un entretien publié dans journal *Les Échos* que jusqu'à ce moment-là il n'avait pas mis en scène Beckett car il sentait sa dramaturgie trop proche de son travail : «Parce qu'il est, par certains côtés, trop proche de mon travail, *explique-t-il*. Mais aujourd'hui, trente-cinq ans après, j'ai décidé de relever le défi et de me lancer.»<sup>9</sup> En effet, la complicité entre le texte de Beckett et les options scéniques de Wilson est frappante, comme le remarque Philippe Chevilly dans le même entretien : «Ce qui frappe d'emblée, c'est l'évidence du projet : Bob Wilson n'a

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<sup>8</sup> Wiseman, Frederick in AA.VV., programme du spectacle *Oh les beaux jours*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Chevilly, Philippe, «Bob rencontre Samuel» in *Les Échos*, 27 septembre, 2010.

pas besoin de varier son style, de réévaluer ses codes – on dirait qu’il les a inventés pour le théâtre de Beckett.»<sup>10</sup>

Au début du spectacle, un drap blanc couvre le quatrième mur soufflé par le vent. Il finit par tomber avec des bruits fantasmagoriques et stridents, pendant que le rideau se lève. Winnie est interprétée par Adriana Asti, l’actrice italienne emblématique qui a travaillé avec Visconti, Strehler et Ronconi. Bob Wilson a créé une Winnie clownesque avec des effets sonores qui amplifient le caractère comique du personnage : «Bob Wilson a conçu un véritable oratorio contemporain – entre la voix de Winnie, les borborygmes de Willie, les objets qui tombent, les grognements, chuintements, chuchotements... Il oblige le public à dépasser le sens du texte pour se concentrer sur la musique des mots, la répétition des gestes, des rites – brosses à dents, miroir, revolver, sortis du sac jour après jour...»<sup>11</sup>

Dans cette version, le metteur en scène a conçu un scénario apocalyptique, à partir de l’image d’une autoroute après un tremblement de terre. Winnie surgit ainsi noyée dans l’asphalte en éruption. Philippe Chevilley souligne l’intensité de l’image apocalyptique articulée avec les effets sonores : «Le vélum savamment éclairé de soleil et de lune, de jour aveuglant et de nuit bleue, compose un ciel immense et métaphysique, qui résume toutes les joies et les peurs de l’homme. La montagne d’asphalte noire dans laquelle Winnie et son mari Willie (Giovanni Battista Storti) sont ensevelis a des airs de volcan éteint, de gratte-ciel effondré, de tombeau d’apocalypse. Les voix sonorisées créent un décalage constant qui rend la logorrhée faussement enthousiaste de Winnie encore plus dérisoire et dérangeante.»<sup>12</sup>

Cependant, la Winnie interprétée par Adriana Asti assume l’ennui devant les gestes identiques caricaturés et articulés avec les bruits amplifiés. Dans cette version, le personnage abandonne l’attitude innocente et naïve à laquelle on s’est habitué dans d’autres mises en scène. Ses gestes et son ton discursif manifestent la conscience d’une défaite. Par-delà l’affirmation de la possibilité d’un beau jour, cette Winnie dirigée par Bob Wilson ne nous laisse pas oublier que ce sera son dernier jour. Ce changement de la dimension psychologique est manifesté par le ton ironique.

Dans une rencontre avec l’équipe artistique à la fin du spectacle au Théâtre de l’Athénée, Adriana Asti a souligné que «nous sommes toutes des Winnies et des Willies. C’est l’histoire de tous les couples. C’est la vérité.»<sup>13</sup> L’actrice a aussi expliqué que le choix de l’utilisation du microphone pour amplifier le son a été une option de Bob Wilson pour éviter le ton déclamatif. Adriana Asti a remarqué que cette option scénique l’a aidé à entrer dans l’univers créé par le metteur en scène : «L’utilisation

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Rencontre avec l’équipe artistique le 28 septembre, 2010.



du micro aide à ne pas déclamer, à être dans son monde. Il a créé un monde magique avec ses lumières, ses coups de foudre.»<sup>14</sup>

Philippe Chevilley décrit la situation dramatique de cette œuvre en tant que l'histoire du dernier couple de l'humanité. Dans ce sens, le scénario et la mise en scène de Bob Wilson mettent l'accent sur la beauté de ce dernier instant éphémère : «Winnie et Willie forment un couple de fin du monde héroïque et pathétique, dopé à l'ivresse des mots d'un passé rêvé. Bob Wilson s'autorise quelques images magnifiques. Comme l'apparition de ce paysage bucolique, jardin d'Éden naïf et poignant, dans la première partie du spectacle, et le déclenchement d'un saisissant orage de néons dans la seconde partie. Ce qu'il reste de la beauté des jours est résumé en deux flashes sur la scène du théâtre.»<sup>15</sup>

Dans un entretien avec Armelle Heliot, Bob Wilson explique les raisons qui l'ont amené à choisir la version française : «J'ai choisi cette version à cause de la musicalité du langage. Beckett avait d'abord écrit *Happy Days* en anglais, mais, comme il le fit souvent, il traduit son texte. Et il est un écrivain qui a su trouver la musicalité du français.»<sup>16</sup> L'accent italien d'Adriana Asti accentue le comique du spectacle et contribue en outre à illustrer d'idée de la déconstruction du langage si chère au dramaturge. Le parler incessant illustre l'inefficacité de la communication et la vacuité des mots en contrepoint avec la situation d'immobilité et d'impuissance devant la mort qui s'approche. Dans cette création de Wilson, Winnie surgit encore plus immobilisée puisque le mamelon de sable, dans lequel elle était enterrée jusqu'à la ceinture pendant le premier acte, est remplacé par des escarpes d'asphalte qui lui laissent libres seulement les bras et la tête. Le personnage concentre ainsi tous les gestes dans les bras et dans les mains avec un rythme mécanique et une expression du visage très plastique et clownesque.

La mise en scène de Bob Wilson inscrit l'ambiguïté dans l'œuvre de Beckett. Le scénario apocalyptique avec l'image d'une explosion d'asphalte nous conduit à de nouvelles interprétations pour l'avenir du personnage. Dans le programme du spectacle, il est suggéré qu'une autre explosion de la terre puisse libérer Winnie : «La terre va-t-elle enterrer Winnie ou exploser pour la laisser sortir?»<sup>17</sup>

Il s'agit d'une mise en scène qui concrétise la rencontre de deux chemins d'importante complicité esthétique. En effet, les principes scéniques de Wilson, loin de contrarier la dramaturgie de Beckett, manifestent une proximité avec l'univers du dramaturge. Pourtant, la notion de fidélité est déclinée par des choix scéniques innovateurs. Plutôt que suivre le dramaturge, le metteur en scène a su créer un dialogue avec le texte dans la transposition du texte sur la scène.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Chevilley, Philippe, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Heliot, Armelle, «Robert Wilson dans les pas de Beckett», in *Le Figaro*, 21 septembre, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. AA.VV, Programme du spectacle *Oh les beaux jours*, mise en scène de Bob Wilson, interprétation d'Adriana Asti et de Giovanni Battista Storti, Théâtre de l'Athénée, Paris, du 23 septembre au 9 Octobre 2010.

## Conclusions

Les trois versions étudiées de *Oh les beaux jours* confirment que la pluralité de chemins scéniques contribue à de nouvelles pistes d'interprétation et de réflexion qui valorisent la complexité des œuvres textuelles. Ce corpus de mises en scène et les futures transpositions scéniques de l'œuvre de Beckett peuvent lancer le débat sur l'importance d'une récréation qui nous oblige à repenser et à revitaliser la signification du texte au cours du temps.

Dans la version de Strehler, on a une lecture scénique qui renforce l'optimisme du personnage, à travers un décor de sable glacial et un ciel rempli d'étoiles, valorisant l'onirisme de la pièce. Strehler a cherché un sens pour l'espace scénique, conjuguant des éléments différents, avec le souci de créer un scénario capable de correspondre à la dimension poétique du personnage et à sa relation avec les objets. Par ce long chemin, il est arrivé enfin au scénario glacial qui contraste avec le fond noir, en allant à la rencontre de l'antithèse représentée dans le texte, l'optimisme humain devant la fatalité.

La mise en scène de Frederick Wiseman propose, parmi d'autres changements scéniques, un décor qui transforme le mamelon de sable en pyramide. Les couleurs volcaniques sont aussi abandonnées et renouvelées par des dunes de sable clair. L'herbe qui surgit dans les dunes n'est plus de l'herbe brûlée, en donnant lieu à des extensions de vert, dans un chantier vertical construit à un mètre du sol, au quatrième mur. Winnie est placée dans une pyramide, qui accentue, par son symbolisme, le tragique du personnage.

À son tour, Bob Wilson s'est inspiré de l'idée de l'asphalte en éruption après un tremblement de terre. Il nous a présenté une Winnie plus clownesque et plastique, où la dimension du personnage est renouvelée par un côté ironique, qui rompt avec le pathétique et la naïveté d'autres mises en scène.

Pendant longtemps, le sable faisait partie d'un univers volcanique. Les dunes d'où Madeleine Renaud vingt ans durant a surgi enterrée, nous ont laissés attachés à une image de montagne stérile, la rencontre ultime entre la terre et le feu. Pourtant, depuis la première création française par Roger Blin en 1963, d'autres lectures et options de représentation ont été perçues. Aujourd'hui le scénario des ruines s'est vu transformé. Il est devenu glace, pyramide et tremblement de terre. Il s'est éloigné du feu pour se rapprocher de l'eau et de l'air et il a brisé la terre. Puisque le monde n'est plus le même, il ne peut pas finir de la même façon que celui d'avant.

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## **CREATION, INTERVIEWS, MISCELLANEA**

### **OLEG AND VLADIMIR PRESNYAKOV – THE PLAYWRIGHTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

**RALUCA SAS-MARINESCU<sup>1</sup>**

**ABSTRACT.** This paper is a review of Oleg and Vladimir Presnyakov's contemporary writing based on an interview that took place during a workshop that the brothers conducted with the students of theatre studies, Romanian and Hungarian class, at Cluj Napoca and points out the importance of surrounding awareness, the attention a writer needs and brings front their belief that the text should be in strong relationship with the spectator's needs.

**Keywords:** playwright, Presnyakov, everyday life drama, contemporary theatre.

Coming from the Ural, the brothers Vladimir and Oleg Presnyakov (born in 1969, respectively in 1974) studied philology at the Yekaterinburg Maxim Gorki University. They attended the courses of the same faculty: Oleg studied the theory of literature and philology, while Vladimir studied the theory of literature and psychology. They teamed up and founded "Cristina Orbakaite", the university youth theatre, an organisation committed to the production of experimental performances.

Playwrights, novelists, dramatic directors and, recently, screenwriters and filmmakers, the Presnyakov brothers rose to world prominence in 2003, when their play *Terrorism* was premiered at the London Royal Court Theatre. Their plays were staged in New York, Washington, London, Vienna, Lisbon, Sydney, São Paulo, Torino, Berlin, Hamburg, Köln, etc. Currently, Oleg and Vladimir are the most frequently performed Russian playwrights in the world, just behind A. P. Chekhov. They've also written the plays *Captured Spirits* and *Resurrection. Super*, both performed for the first time in Moscow, in 2004. *Playing the Victim* was written for the 2003 Edinburgh Festival, and later staged by Kiril Serebrenikov at the 2005 Golden Mask Festival.

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The Presnyakov brothers' uniqueness, owed to their sources of inspiration and from their style of writing, is represented by topics and characters sought for in our contemporary world: *Playing the victim* is the story of a man whose job was to play the victim in murder reconstructions of the police, *The Head* recounts the selling of the head of the main character, Salman, inspired by author Salman Rashdie, and *Terrorism* deals with a series of apparently common scenes, which are in fact mentally terrifying for the contemporary human being.

The brothers' manner of writing and of working may seem interesting to those who are not used to the concept of everyday life drama: absolutely all the situations encountered are analysed and considered dramatic prospects.

The text *The Head* includes, apart from the direct reference to Salman Rashdie, a chain of circumstances described, based on the same method: the butcher who sells books is the result of layoffs which, at social level, caused professional changes that created absurd situations. The almost obsessive interest in airports arises from the observation of the space that provides the most diverse range of characters. For example, the Young Man's character says: "I took a picture with this face and posted it on Facebook. Hundreds of comments to it."<sup>2</sup> And we can provide numerous other examples, but we find that pertinent to this case, apart from the authors' non-participative observation of the surrounding world, is the way in which human psychology is applied on the type of characters created and the manner in which the Presnyakov brothers' texts emphasise how we are able to see things day after day after day and to ignore the effect they have on the development of humanity.

There's muscle in the Presnyakov brothers' texts and it is produced by the approach of the common event... This is what they were declaring in 2007, in an interview by Iulia Popovici, on the text *Terrorism*:

We wrote the play in 2000, we already had a feeling back then. We were guessing a change, primarily in man's nature. This is what *Terrorism's* about. The text does not discuss the terrorist attacks in Russia or elsewhere; instead, it discusses the things that happen in men's souls, on what the man feels in his bones. From our point of view, all these attacks we see on TV are the outcome of what happens inside the man. We felt some sort of inner revolt in men, when something in them was suddenly stirred. The structure of the play is powerful, but also symbolic; this is why it is staged in different places and countries. And the more time passes by, the more interesting its interpretations will become.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Presniakov, Oleg & Vladimir, *The Head - Căpățâna*, play translated in 2011, unpublished

<sup>3</sup> Popovici, Iulia, *Conștiința morții a otrăvit-o pe cea a frumuseții vieții*, (The consciousness of death poisoned the consciousness of life's beauty) interviu cu frații Presniakov realizat în 2007, [www.liternet.ro](http://www.liternet.ro).

In her book, *Structures and compositions formula of the dramatic text* Alina Nelega analyses succinctly the writing style used by the Presnyakov brothers, indicating that

Their plays simulate a structure, for they simulate a type of story, but there is never an actual plot, because their plays are not linear. The episodes are “staged” in such a way that the spectator will understand the story of the text only at the end, just like it happens with *Terrorism*.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, we could pin a lack of a storyline to the texts written by the Presnyakov brothers in their earlier years, but this is an appearance resulting from the structure of monologues that remain unconnected by a dramatic thread to the end. It is only the last scene that clarifies the structure of the story. Nevertheless, this type of aesthetics changes in texts such as *The Head* or *Playing the Victim*, in which the narrative universe is delineated in the first scene, even if throughout the plot the narrative convention is renegotiated several times.

In *Playing the Victim* we witness the story of a man hired by the police to help reconstruct murders, playing each time the victim. His experiences related to the victims he has to play run in parallel with the drama of his family relationships.

The Presnyakov brothers’ texts use humour as a main form of expression, the authors laugh heartily at the daily situations, stirring also the audience’s reaction; most of the times, however, the ending knocks down the initial configuration and everything turns into drama.

Translations into Romanian are very scarce, namely *Terrorism*, *Playing the Victim*, *Bad Bed Stories* and *The Head*. At the time this article is written there is no volume to include these texts, *The Head* is still unpublished and the instances of Romanian staging are very few, although that, at a worldwide level, the Presnyakov brothers are some of the most popular playwrights and have written more than seventeen plays.

The following interview was made in May 2011, in Cluj, with help from Andreea Tompa, as translator from Russian to Romanian. The Presnyakov brothers came to Cluj on the occasion of a workshop organised by the Cluj-Napoca Faculty of Theatre and Television, for the sections of Romanian and Hungarian theatre studies. At the course of *Performance text processing*, the students translated, supervised by Andreea Tompa and by the author of this article, the text *The Head* by Oleg and Vladimir Presnyakov, and later, in one-week workshops, they checked with the authors the accuracy of the two translations, in Romanian, respectively in Hungarian.

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<sup>4</sup> Nelega, Alina, *Structuri și formule de compoziție ale textului dramatic (Structures and compositions formula of the dramatic text)*, Cluj Napoca, editura Eikon, 2010, pg. 165.

On this occasion, Oleg and Vladimir agreed to an interview we made in one of the sweet shops of Cluj and began as a relaxed discussion about contemporary theatre, without questions asked and answers provided by the book. It was a mutual exchange of ideas.

**Vladimir:** There's been one idea haunting me since my childhood. I did not know to skate and at the physical education classes skating was mandatory. Then, there was a skating competition, and I finished second. At the finish line, the teacher literally took me in his arms, because I couldn't take any other step. Later, I thought about this episode, about how I achieved this feat. While I was skating I imagined I was playing in a movie. Maybe that's why I finished second. I had the feeling the camera was shooting and I even repeated some moves just to be sure they had been recorded. And from that time on I've been having the constant feeling I'm an actor in a movie.

**R.S-M:** Role Playing Game... I wonder why you believe it is important to write theatre, not to stop writing plays?

**Oleg:** Truly interesting... Why is it important to write theatre plays?

**Vladimir:** Well, many people believe that it's not ok to have children. Because bringing a child to this anti-human world is against this child. The world is so cruel that the child will be ignored. But if people no longer have kids, the world dies. And perhaps from among these billion children, one will take upon himself all the crimes of the human kind and this will save the world. And if we stopped writing plays, this hope of a better thing could vanish.

**Oleg:** Theatre is a formula that did not appear by accident in human kind's history. Art is not just a thing to make our life beautiful, it's not a flower. We see art like a form that holds very important substance for the human nature. Perhaps, to some extent, art helps the man to build inside those contents he could not renew without art. In its turn, theatre, as a form of art, needs renewal because it cannot renew by itself.

**R.S-M:** You're talking about forms... which are the forms to be filled and which are the contents to fill such forms?

**Oleg:** I'll answer with a metaphor. All the time we think about the fact that man is divided in a number of directions, he's pulled to different directions. There are many things we can do and which occupy all our time, or there are other people who concern and occupy us. In fact, the form is an instrument that helps man focus. To the Christian man, the form of the cross is the form of concentration, the form that gathers the highest amount of substance, from my point of view. We are very often sorry we didn't focus enough on one thing or that we got distracted to other directions.

We can make efforts to focus on one thing, to concentrate on one point. To this man who is assaulted by many things at a time and lacks sufficient concentration, theatre is the form through which he can focus on himself. And I believe that the contemporary play, written in a contemporary language, carries on a tradition, that man is mortal, he has boundaries. Man was born at a specific time, but this doesn't mean he is able to understand himself. He must make efforts to understand himself and to focus on this self. To carry on a tradition does not mean to write like Chekhov. Chekhov or Shakespeare is renewed in another writer, a contemporary one, who gets to the same issue, of the man who needs to be born again, for the second time, in order to access self-knowledge, through the effort of understanding and thinking.

**R.S-M:** In other words, it would be preferable that people of our time write about issues of our time. The natural question then is why do the people of our time not watch the performances of our time?

**Oleg:** A Russian director once told that people don't like to watch contemporary play performances because the distance between the time of the text and their time was too small, so about fifty-sixty years must pass so that they are able to be an audience of such issues.

**R.S-M:** This rejection of rebirth, of renewal, could it be a negative answer, a fear coming from the spectator?

**Oleg:** As we see it, the world may seem simple from a certain point of view, and frequently the contemporary play illustrates this world in a coarse manner, debasing it. And this aspect is not appealing.

**Vladimir:** Perhaps the spectator needs points of reference to explain what he sees. At the supermarket, we buy the products we know. We go to the movies about which we know something, about which we read or whose trailers we see. And then there's criticism, which should provide points of reference to the spectator, to explain briefly the form of conscience the play is. Even German Romanticism discovered very lately Shakespeare and his *Hamlet*.

**Oleg:** Men of theatre, critics should contribute to this type of enlightenment of the spectators. We can see very frequently that even actors don't understand contemporary dramaturgy. They are lost in these texts.

**R.S-M:** Could an audience who dares to look in the mirror determine more or less the removal of the director's dictatorship in theatre; meaning that the director and the theatre manager no longer decide what they stage, with a repertory no longer including exclusively classical plays just because they are already known by and tested with the audience?



**Oleg:** There's need of constant and sustained communication with the people. We must make them understand what the contemporary play is. We've seen many ways in which theatres communicate with the audience. Given that schools and faculties teach only classical texts, we all know, since our childhood, how to approach them. It is perhaps from this point of view that the directors, critics and even playwrights must find some forms of communication with the audience; these forms should explain what they can see on stage or why the language used is the way it is. This is how we see our role. To this end, young theatres, which do not depend on a space, on a specific building, which can perform anywhere, are very important.

**R.S-M:** ...Because, in the end, this communication helps organise a conscience of the audience. And then, what is – practically speaking – the importance of the playwright's presence in the hall, when his own play is staged?

**Vladimir:** It is very important from the point of view of the human contact. Many times, even in Russia, the image people had of us was that of some illiberal guys who didn't know anything, who didn't even know how to read etc., because they didn't like culture. The fact that these people met us was very important; to see that we are people too, to get to talk with us; and we could explain what we write. At settings, many times, we felt an antagonistic attitude toward us and we started simply telling them how we built this or that text, explaining how an actor should feel in that text. This happened also because, very often, the director could not find the arguments appropriate to the actor in relation to the text.

In theatre, there's a primitive attitude toward human psychology, to the psychology that relates traditionally to the psychological theatre. But contemporary theatre is a type of psychological theatre. It's not as clear as some may think it is; psychology resides in ideas and meanings rather than in pretence. The hero of the contemporary text also buries very deeply, many times, who he really is. He has an I that does not want to be seen; it would rather stay concealed. The contemporary hero is not the one to say, "I want you to understand me"; instead, he wants to say or even says it bitterly: "I don't want you to understand me". We are these people. We are hidden from one another. We don't live in a harmonious world, we hide in ourselves and we do not want to show ourselves and help one another. Theatre is self-evidently communication. Perhaps, a long time before, all these things worked. Perhaps they are useful to people who, let's say, have a classical psychology or a classical soul. Ours is some kind of postmodern and broken soul.

**R.S-M:** Fragmented.

**Vladimir:** Yes, fragmented. We see theatre as a place that should help people.

**R.S-M:** You write in a different way, you take a look around you, you find a topic, an idea and then write. How would you feel about a comparison between you and... let's say Sarah Kane?

**Vladimir:** We've been branded in many ways: English criticism called us Dostoyevsky's children. This reminds me of a very cynical telephone conversation of Sarah Kane's agents, after her death; they were saying, "now the price of her texts will go up".

**Oleg:** Her main topic was pain. She touched excellently this nerve, the nerve of contemporary existence. In fact, it is with pain that life starts, as if it were some sort of unconscious guilt. It is very important that you feel this pain, though I don't know its origins. It is important you feel, when you start to exist in an aware manner, you are guilty. You can be completely free only when you are completely guilty. This paradox is very frequent in contemporary texts and it is very important that these things should be discussed. The contemporary world encompasses contradictory societies. And there are people who think everything's in (very good) order in the world. They have everything; the world is well configured. And if you tell them they have their share of the guilt too, they wouldn't understand it.

**R.S-M:** You mean... their sins?

**Oleg:** Yes, their sins.

**R.S-M:** The Romanian theatre does not have a tradition of contemporary play staging. Everything began with the independent companies that are fighting a complicated battle for existence, given the absence of the law of sponsorship. If you want to gather funds, there's no legal framework to provide to the sponsor something in exchange: for example, some form of tax exemption. But I believe we can make the audience get out of the classical theatre and join us on the street, in clubs, in industrial zones. On the other hand, the only way to do it seems to speak to the audience about them rather than stage *Hamlet* in a factory; because they will not believe you. It's a harsh fact and I think the remains of the communist mentality prevent us from having the courage to face ourselves. This means that in our social life we are wearing a mask, we are playing a role which, in time, can grow stronger than the original self. This thing can be the essence of theatricality. What do you think theatricality is?

**Oleg:** Well, what if aliens came out of the blue, took a seat at our table and started talking with us? They are not biased, they don't know anything. What would theatre and what would life mean to them? We have all sorts of types of a priori knowledge, we are universal people; we are people of a universal culture. Since we

believe this thing, we know we are at the theatre when the light comes on, we see the settings etc. I am the greatest performance. It is with me that theatricality starts; from here, our hero is theatre that walks, theatre that moves. When the man performs a play by himself, from nothing. For example, when we went back home from the faculty, by car, with some friends...

**Vladimir:** If we got a flat tyre, I liked to react, to fall as if I had been shot and then sit along the road like a dead man, until the problem was solved.

**R.S-M:** A reaction to the sound of the tyre's blow-out.

**Vladimir:** There are very many people who can act like this. We like this theatre in theatre. Natural theatre. Spontaneous theatre. Many Russian theorists, for example Evreinov, saw in theatre an element of the miraculous, which occurs when we really believe that there's rain falling on the stage although we don't see any drop of rain. Some people understand theatricality, at present, as if it were a mirror of what happens in the society. We think, however, that theatre is not a mirror. Theatre is given by these miraculous turns inside when you don't know what is happening.

**R.S-M:** Do you mean surprise element in relation to the situation or do you mean a lucky turn?

**Vladimir:** I mean the element of surprise. As if you knew there's a mirror that reflects your hand, and yet the image gives back someone else's hand.

**Oleg:** In other words, everything relates to how we understand and evoke the being. The man who is free for himself and to whom nothing dictates any future behaviour.

**R.S-M:** Without any sort of rule or constraint.

**Oleg:** There are many things we carry: our childhood, our memories...

**R.S-M:** Our knowledge belongings, our referential belongings...

**Oleg:** And, however, we cannot say how we will act next. There's nothing to guarantee that I will still exist in the near future. And it is not ok to think the things that surround us and that we are able to perceive are a guarantee of our existence. Politics, friends, young men around us, nothing helps us continue this existence. You must work with yourself. And if I am able to do it, if I can work, then I am also able to carry on. This dialogue with me makes everything pre-established. It is here that the theatre that interests us begins; I mean the theatricality we find interesting; the theatricality that lets me be unpredictable. I must find a mask for this let's call him character, through which I can communicate. But I am not this mask, because I am not a thing that can be defined. But the so-called traditional spectators want something definable, something determined. It's very difficult to play Valya from *Playing the victim*. He is not a murderer, he is not a drug addict...

**Vladimir:** But every now and then he behaves... like a drug addict murderer.

**Oleg:** He is not a philosopher, but he theorises. This is the experience of unpredictability. By this, you talk about the spirit about which you are not allowed to talk in theatre. Thus, the contemporary text carries on some traditions, because from our point of view Shakespeare did the same thing. He tried to define indefinable things. This is why he is still interesting. And to us he is the most contemporaneous author. Indefinable. Many times, when you manage to do it, you enter a space where you find Shakespeare or Chekhov, this space of the indefinable. These personalities are truly living in their works. When we understand these authors, we review their conscience.

**R.S-M:** Is this why you cut Salman's head?<sup>5</sup>

**Oleg:** Who needs a head? Who wants a head?

**R.S-M:** That is the question...

**Vladimir:** It's easier to survive without a head. I know many people who live without their head and who are very happy. It's very important to gather young playwrights. They must have a meeting place. Of course, art means some people's effort, but at least once a year they should meet, hear one another, read their plays, there should be a meeting place.

**R.S-M:** This can be rather complicated, particularly here, where the tradition of the Romanian school tells you that you need to be dead to have your play read.

**Vladimir:** This happens in many countries. The best author is the dead one.

**A.T.:** Let's get serious: theatre is not a formula; we are the ones who have to discover this darkness it represents.

**Oleg:** We have been asked many times why we do not write tragedies: how to write a tragedy by design? Deliberately? I will not reply to such an absurd challenge, like the one with the dead author.

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<sup>5</sup> *Salman* is the main character in the play *The Head* by the Presnyakov. The action of the play focuses on the sale of his head and the family's attempts of persuading Salman to allow the cutting of his own head.

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## DE LA REVERIE POETIQUE AU CAUCHEMAR VECU : LA POESIE DANS L'ECRITURE DRAMATIQUE DE STAMATIS POLENAKIS/ FROM POETIC DREAMINESS TO LIVED NIGHTMARE: THE POETRY IN STAMATIS POLENAKIS DRAMATIC WRITING

ATHENA-HELENE STOURNA<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** Stamatis Polenakis est poète contemporain grec et écrit en même temps des pièces pour le théâtre. Nous proposons de toucher à la question de la place de la poésie dans la dramaturgie grecque contemporaine en parcourant son œuvre théâtrale. Son écriture dramatique, caractérisée par un langage poétique, se réfère à des périodes historiques précises, telles qu'elles ont été vécues par des personnalités du monde littéraire. Plus précisément, nous proposons une présentation de sa pièce *Berlin*, qui se concentre sur le personnage de Dora Diamant, la dernière compagne de Franz Kafka, avec qui il a partagé les derniers mois de sa vie dans la capitale allemande, en 1924. A côté de cette présentation, nous touchons au sujet de la dramaturgie grecque contemporaine et la place d'une écriture poétique au théâtre, dans une conversation avec le poète.

**Keywords:** écriture dramatique, théâtre contemporain, poésie, Grèce, Franz Kafka, Dora Diamant, Stamatis Polenakis.

Stamatis Polenakis est poète contemporain grec et écrit en même temps des pièces pour le théâtre. Dans son œuvre théâtrale, il se réfère à des périodes historiques précises, où la mémoire surgit à travers des images qui oscillent entre rêve et cauchemar. Le rêve revient souvent pour contrebalancer la réalité. Selon lui, il est possible de sortir du cauchemar de l'histoire au moyen du rêve poétique. Une partie de son œuvre théâtrale se compose de drames autour de la vie de personnalités du monde littéraire international, d'où il tire le matériel pour donner à ses œuvres de la substance qui touche à la fois la réalité et l'imaginaire.

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Voici une brève présentation des pièces qui appartiennent à cette catégorie. Tout d'abord, *Le Dernier rêve d'Emily Dickinson*<sup>2</sup> est un monologue de poésie pure où la poétesse parle de sa vie énigmatique et le monde imaginaire qu'elle a créé pendant son enfermement volontaire dans sa maison à Amherst. La vie d'une autre personnalité littéraire tout aussi énigmatique, à savoir Franz Kafka, se présente dans *Berlin*<sup>3</sup>, où Polenakis fait référence aux derniers mois de l'auteur, tels qu'il les a vécus dans la capitale allemande de la période de l'entre-deux-guerres. La mort dramatique d'Heinrich Von Kleist et de son amante Henriette Vogel est mentionnée dans *Berlin* et se trouve aussi au centre de sa nouvelle pièce *Voyage d'hiver*. Cet incident est superposé avec des faits historiques provenant de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale.

La voix poétique de Stamatis Polenakis qui émerge dans son écriture pour le théâtre, reste très distincte dans la dramaturgie grecque contemporaine, grâce à la double vocation de l'auteur. Poésie et drame s'alimentent pour créer un théâtre politique, au sens large du terme. Cette spécificité dans le langage théâtral chez Stamatis Polenakis, ainsi que les thèmes que transpercent ses pièces font de lui un auteur dramatique remarquable, qui commence à se faire connaître en dehors de la Grèce.

Nous proposons une brève connaissance avec l'écriture dramatique de Stamatis Polenakis, en nous concentrant sur sa pièce *Berlin*. Afin d'introduire les lecteurs à son langage théâtral si particulier nous ajouterons au fur et à mesure quelques extraits. De plus, à travers une conversation avec l'auteur, nous allons partager ses opinions personnelles au sujet de l'écriture dramatique actuelle en Grèce.

### ***Berlin*, les derniers mois de Franz Kafka dans la ville tourmentée**

*Berlin* se concentre sur le personnage de Dora Diamant, la dernière compagne de Franz Kafka, avec qui il a partagé les derniers mois de sa vie, en 1924. Déjà sérieusement malade, Kafka est présent/absent dans son appartement berlinois, ce lieu clos dont l'atmosphère lugubre rappelle constamment la mort de l'auteur qui approche. Dora Diamant, cette jeune femme courageuse qui a pris soin de lui durant sa maladie et qui a sauvé ses manuscrits après sa mort, reçoit la visite d'un personnage

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<sup>2</sup> *Le Dernier rêve d'Emily Dickinson* a été traduit en roumain par Cezarina Udrescu et présenté dans une interprétation de Valeria Seciu comme pièce radiophonique au Radio România Cultural, en décembre 2010. Cette version a été choisie pour représenter la Roumanie dans la compétition pour les programmes radiophoniques du Prix Italia 2011. De plus, la pièce a paru dans la revue *Fario* (No 11, printemps-été 2012) dans une traduction en français de Myrto Gonticas et a été également traduite en anglais par Richard Pierce.

<sup>3</sup> *Berlin* a été traduit en français par Jacqueline Razgonnikoff et en anglais par Richard Pierce.

qui n'a pas réellement existé, le Docteur Léopold Mayer. Les trois personnages vivent à l'intérieur de cette cruauté absurde et font constamment l'effort de maintenir leur tendresse et leur vue poétique sur la vie, intactes.

La qualité poétique de la dramaturgie provient soit d'images réalistes violentes et cruelles, soit d'une rêverie lyrique. Elle s'intensifie par la musicalité d'une écriture elliptique, offrant des moments d'une magie théâtrale à la fois tendre et brute. Le rêve revient souvent pour contrebalancer la réalité.

Franz Kafka se veut absent de la scène, toutefois il reste omniprésent à travers son écriture. En effet, Polenakis utilise assez souvent des fragments de lettres et de textes littéraires, ainsi que des poèmes, afin d'offrir une discontinuité dans la parole et pour briser l'effet réaliste dans le dialogue. Dans l'extrait qui va suivre, Kafka fait état de la gravité de sa santé dans une lettre adressée au Docteur Mayer. Polenakis fait allusion aux lettres que Kafka avait adressées à son père et termine la lettre avec un texte provenant des *Aphorismes*<sup>4</sup> dans lequel l'auteur parle de la mort :

23 décembre 1923

Neige dans la Grünewaldstrasse. Hier j'ai à nouveau vu mon père. Il est venu du monde des rêves pour me rendre visite. J'étais allongé dans mon lit, les yeux fermés, sans dormir, et alors j'ai entendu ces pas Au début, c'est à peine si je les entendais, puis ils ont commencé à se rapprocher de plus en plus. La porte s'est ouverte avec un bruit horrible et quelqu'un est entré dans la chambre. Je n'ai pas osé ouvrir les yeux et regarder ce qui se passait, mais je savais bien, j'étais absolument certain que cet inconnu était mon père. Je voulais le regarder dans les yeux, je voulais lui demander ce qu'il cherchait, mais c'était impossible. Je ne pouvais pas trouver les mots et l'épouvante me possédait de plus en plus.

Il continuait à s'approcher, ses mouvements étaient lents comme ceux d'un reptile un peu avant qu'il ne s'empare de sa proie. Maintenant il se trouvait près de moi et son visage touchait le mien, je pouvais sentir son souffle. C'était mon père, il n'y avait aucun doute. Je ne pouvais pas ouvrir les yeux, j'étais sûr que si je les ouvrais, je me trouverais face à face avec quelque chose de monstrueux, avec un horrible masque, avec un visage que je n'avais jamais vu de ma vie, et pourtant c'était bien celui de mon père. Tout mon être était paralysé de terreur.

Tout à coup, il s'est éloigné, il est sorti de la chambre et a commencé à descendre les escaliers, alors j'ai entendu des voix fortes au loin, comme si un grand nombre de gens criaient tous en même temps. Je ne pouvais rien comprendre à ce qu'ils disaient, mais je distinguais clairement la voix de mon père ; au milieu de cette cacophonie, j'entendis ma sœur Ottilia, sa voix était douce et

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<sup>4</sup> Il s'agit de l'aphorisme numéro 13.



calme. Jamais je n'avais ressenti autant d'amour, autant de gratitude pour ma sœur qu'à cet instant-là. J'ai pensé que peut-être elle essayait d'expliquer quelque chose mais mon père criait, en colère.

Sans savoir pourquoi, j'étais certain que, à cet instant, mon avenir se déterminait, ma vie elle-même et peut-être aussi quelque chose de plus important encore que cela. Et pourtant je ne comprenais rien, pas même un mot, de toute cette conversation.

L'inquiétude et la terreur continuaient à croître, tout à coup je me suis mis à étouffer, j'étouffais vraiment, je sentais un terrible manque d'oxygène, c'était comme si soudain quelqu'un avait vidé d'un coup tout l'air de la chambre. Puis j'ai entendu la porte s'ouvrir. Alors j'ai compris que j'étais mort. Je me suis demandé comment il était possible que je sois mort et que je conserve encore mes sensations et alors j'ai murmuré : est-ce donc cela la mort ?

J'ai senti une main me caresser le visage, c'était Dora. C'est alors seulement que j'ai pu ouvrir les yeux sans crainte, j'étais mort et j'étais revenu à la vie.

Mais je ne veux plus de cette vie, cher Léopold Mayer. Je sais qu'un jour viendra où les souffrances deviendront intolérables. Vous pouvez me comprendre. *« Cette vie-ci paraît insupportable, une autre irréalisable. Il n'y a pas de honte à ce que quelqu'un qui veut mourir supplie qu'on le transfère de la vieille cellule qu'il hait dans une autre qu'il apprendra à haïr. Un reste de foi l'assiste dans cette dernière, au cours du transfert le Seigneur passera par hasard au milieu de la route, il verra le prisonnier et dira : 'Celui-là, il ne faut pas l'emprisonner à nouveau. Il viendra avec moi<sup>5</sup>'. »*

De son côté, la ville de Berlin joue un rôle important dans la pièce, étant présente/absente, tout comme l'auteur malade. Les conditions de la vie quotidienne, comme la faim et la pauvreté, constituent l'environnement obscur qui pénètre dans l'appartement. De plus, l'écho d'une violence sous-jacente, faisant référence à la montée imminente du nazisme, s'intensifie progressivement pour se manifester en une menace réelle à la fin de la pièce.

Stamatis Polenakis m'a confié sa pièce en décembre 2008. Par pure coïncidence, ces jours-là des émeutes se sont produites à Athènes à la suite de l'assassinat d'un garçon de quinze ans par deux policiers, au centre d'Athènes. Toute la ville était en flammes et la situation se dégradait de plus en plus et se mettaient hors contrôle. Enfermée dans mon appartement athénien et ne pouvant pas sortir puisque les rues voisines étaient mises en feu par les foules enragées, j'ai commencé à lire *Berlin*, pour découvrir une ressemblance inattendue entre les deux pays et les deux époques. Voici la fin de la pièce, où le parallèle entre les deux époques et les deux pays est remarquable :

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<sup>5</sup> Touts les fragments de *Berlin* en français proviennent de la traduction de Jacqueline Razgonnikoff.

**Mayer** : Je ne sais plus quoi dire de plus, je crois qu'il fait déjà jour.

*(Il prend son chapeau et son manteau)* Maintenant voilà, je sens que la fin est vraiment arrivée.

**Dora** : Attends ! Je veux savoir combien de temps il lui reste.

**Mayer** : Pas plus de deux à trois mois.

*(On entend un grand bruit dehors. Bruits de sirènes, des coups, des voix)* Je ne pense pas que nous sortions vivants d'ici, Dora. Berlin est en feu.

**Dora** : *(elle court vers la valise, l'ouvre, y prend les manuscrits de Frantz. Elle les tient un moment, comme perdue, sans savoir quoi faire. Finalement, elle les donne à Mayer)* S'il nous arrive quelque chose, pense à faire passer les manuscrits dans les mains de Max Brod. *(Elle entre dans la chambre. Mayer reste tout seul. Il retourne vers la porte. Il demeure sur le seuil, les manuscrits à la main, hésitant.)*

*Berlin* a été finalement monté par notre compagnie de théâtre, la Compagnie Okypus, en avril 2010, quelques jours avant que la Grèce ait demandé l'assistance du Fonds Monétaire International<sup>6</sup>. C'était alors le début d'une nouvelle ère pour le pays, celle de la crise économique, mais qui n'était à l'époque une idée vague, car les gens ne pouvaient pas se rendre compte des changements qui allaient s'effectuer les années suivantes. Au-delà du parallèle économique entre les deux périodes, nous devrions également noter les effets effrayants de la montée de l'extrême droite dans les deux cas. Dans *Berlin*, Polenakis fait allusion à l'ascension du nazisme, puisque le séjour de Kafka à Berlin coïncide avec le putsch raté d'Hitler et son enfermement en prison, où il a rédigé *Mein Kampf*. Nous ne pouvons pas, bien-sûr, négliger ce parallèle avec la Grèce actuelle et la montée du néo-nazisme durant cette dernière année. Alors que la pièce avait été écrite dans une période très différente de celle-ci, elle devient en quelque sorte prophétique, vu le changement abrupt dans la vie socio-économique et politique en Grèce.

### **La place de la poésie dans l'écriture dramatique grecque contemporaine : conversation avec Stamatis Polenakis**

**Athéna-Hélène Stourna.** Quelle est la place de la poésie dans ta dramaturgie ? Quel est son influence sur ton langage théâtral et sur les sujets que tu choisis ?

**Stamatis Polenakis.** La dramaturgie consiste pour moi d'une activité artistique parallèle à la poésie. L'un pénètre constamment dans l'autre et il n'est pas facile pour

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<sup>6</sup> La première à eu lieu le 16 avril 2010 à la Pinacothèque Nationale Grecque, à Nauplie. Le spectacle a été repris en octobre 2010 au Théâtre Fournos, à Athènes et il a été également présenté en juin 2012 au Théâtre Na Pràdle, faisant partie du Festival International « Fringe » de Prague.

moi de les discerner. J'aime beaucoup le théâtre. Le moment dans lequel l'auteur dramatique voit, à travers l'acteur, la vivification des mouvements et des répliques d'un personnage sur scène est en effet unique. Et ce parce que l'acteur fait graver les mots sur son corps et crée ainsi un monde entier. Je crois que l'art est une unité et que tous les arts sont liés entre eux d'une manière mystérieuse. Le théâtre est un art tellement complexe qui peut tout incorporer. Ce sont les paroles et les silences et la vie-même dans sa complexité et dans son état énigmatique.

**Athéna-Hélène Stourna.** Y-a-t-il de la place dans le texte dramatique pour une forme plus poétique dans la dramaturgie grecque contemporaine ?

**Stamatis Polenakis.** Je ne peux pas connaître les chemins que la dramaturgie grecque prendra sous le poids des conditions spécifiques qui ont été développées en Grèce et qui menacent de broyer tout effort d'activité artistique. Je pense qu'un nouveau théâtre sera formé petit-à-petit et qui fera l'effort d'exprimer cette nouvelle réalité. Je me rappelle d'une phrase du peintre, Paul Klee. Il disait que « *Plus le monde est terrifiant, plus l'art devient abstrait* ». Je me réfère à cette citation pour dire que je crois que tout ce malheur terrible et la crainte pour l'avenir qui sont occasionnés par notre époque conduiront les jeunes dramaturges à affronter la réalité à travers une écriture plus poétique et abstraite.

**Athéna-Hélène Stourna.** Dans tes pièces pour le théâtre tu prends comme point de départ un fait historique spécifique, qui n'est pas pourtant lié à l'histoire grecque. Y-a-t-il une raison pour laquelle tu évites l'histoire de ton pays ?

**Stamatis Polenakis.** Il est vrai que mes pièces ont très souvent un point de départ qui se situe à un fait historique précis, lequel pourtant ne reste que comme point de départ pour parler ensuite de quelque chose qui se passe dans le présent, ce moment exact. L'Histoire est une interminable chaîne d'événements qui sont liés entre eux d'une manière que nous sommes incapables de comprendre ou d'interpréter. Je ne dirais pas que j'évite l'histoire grecque. Bien au contraire, elle me préoccupe constamment mais je ne suis pas arrivé jusqu'à ce jour de trouver la clé qui me permettra de la transformer en texte. En tous cas il est vrai qu'il ne m'est pas facile d'enfermer mes personnages dans le cadre stricte de la réalité grecque. Les événements que je décris et les personnages que je crée pourraient exister à n'importe quel endroit. Je me réfère souvent au passé en essayant de comprendre le présent obscur dans lequel nous vivons. L'art ne peut faire autre chose que de prévenir des dangers terribles qui tentent de nous faire disparaître. Dans l'excellent film d'Ingmar Bergman *L'œuf du serpent* qui se passe à Berlin en 1923, le frère du protagoniste se suicide au début du film laissant une note qui consistait en un mot uniquement : « Nous nous empoisonnons ». Je crois que si nous les Grecs, nous ne prêtons pas

attention et que nous ignorons cette leçon amère de l'Histoire, nous nous trouverons en un danger sévère de vivre ces situations d'horreur qu'a vécu l'Allemagne avec la montée du Nazisme.

**Athéna-Hélène Stourna.** Comment penses-tu que l'écriture dramatique contemporaine se détermine en Grèce ? Comment est-ce que la crise économique et sociale influence la production au niveau de la dramaturgie ?

**Stamatis Polenakis.** La situation en Grèce est très mauvaise en ce moment et tout paraît très difficile. Avec tous ces problèmes de nature surtout économique, le théâtre est une sorte d'héroïsme. L'état grec éprouve une haine mortelle envers la poésie et le théâtre. Il devient alors de plus en plus difficile pour les auteurs et les groupes de théâtre indépendants de présenter leur travail. En dépit de tout cela, nous voyons sans cesse des salles de théâtre et des compagnies qui rebondissent de nulle part, comme l'herbe qui pousse sur la terre brûlée. Il s'agit d'un acte de résistance et en même temps d'un signe d'espoir.

Le théâtre est un art primordial et en même temps le miroir du visage humain. Pour cette raison il sait toujours trouver une façon de survivre à travers toutes sortes de catastrophes. Nous nous réfugions au grand théâtre qui nous fait apprendre la vie : chez Ibsen, Strindberg, Tchekhov. Le théâtre sera toujours le lieu où on peut se réfugier pour retrouver l'un l'autre. Il y a un exemple qu'il ne faut pas oublier : à Belgrade, en 1999, au milieu des bombardements effectués par l'OTAN il s'est passé quelque chose qui paraît incroyable. Chaque soir les salles de théâtre étaient pleines. Elles étaient pleines parce que nous voulons vivre et parce que nous sommes des êtres humains et nous n'avons rien d'autre que notre corps. C'est la seule réponse que nous pouvons donner à la barbarie.

**Athéna-Hélène Stourna** est scénographe et metteur en scène. Elle a étudié la Scénographie à Rose Bruford College en Grande Bretagne, puis, elle a effectué des Etudes théâtrales en France où elle a obtenu, sous la direction de Béatrice Picon-Vallin, un doctorat à l'Université Paris III. Elle a publié l'ouvrage *La Cuisine à la scène. Boire et manger au théâtre du XXe siècle*, Collection "Tables des hommes" (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes / Tours : Presses Universitaires François Rabelais, 2011. Elle a enseigné la scénographie, le costume et l'histoire du théâtre en tant que chargée de cours aux Universités de Salonique, de Patras et du Péloponnèse. Elle assume les fonctions de directrice artistique de la Compagnie Okypus en Grèce, où elle a mis en scène des spectacles en langue grecque, espagnole et anglaise, ayant tourné en Grèce, en Argentine et en République tchèque.



## PERFORMANCE, FILM AND BOOK REVIEWS

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### « Rompre les silences invisibles qui tuent »: la collaboration Mauvignier/ Dana pour une pièce d'aujourd'hui/ „Breaking the invisible silences that kill“: the collaboration Mauvignier/Dana for a today play

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(Sur *Tout mon amour*, texte de Laurent Mauvignier, création du collectif Les Possédés dirigée par Rodolphe Dana, et programmée au Théâtre de la Colline à Paris du 21 novembre au 21 décembre 2012 / *Tout mon amour*, by Laurent Mauvignier, creation of Les Possédés group, conducted by Rodolphe Dana, played at Théâtre de la Colline, Paris, from 21 novembre to 21 decembre 2012)

« Le théâtre aujourd'hui », qu'en dire? Comment le dire? Cela semble si divers, si ouvert. Une pièce pourtant, jouée à la Colline en novembre 2012, s'est aussitôt imposée pour répondre à ces questions: *Tout mon amour* de Laurent Mauvignier. Tout, dans ce texte et ce spectacle, promet de révéler la donnée contemporaine du théâtre. La date de création, d'abord: la pièce a été jouée à l'automne 2012. Et le livre a été publié le même mois. Sont donc contemporains le texte et la mise en scène non seulement au sens où ils appartiennent à notre actualité mais aussi au sens où l'événement scénique accompagne la sortie en librairie. Si



*Rompre les silences*

être contemporains se définit par la date, le livre comme la pièce le sont résolument, radicalement. Il n'est pas jusqu'au théâtre qui l'a programmé, le Théâtre de la Colline, qui n'expose cette contemporanéité. Temple de la création contemporaine, où l'on « tent[e] d'inventer des formes qui rendent sensible le temps présent » (S. Braunschweig, Editorial 2013), la Colline a de plus présenté ce spectacle dans le cadre du Festival d'Automne – « un Festival à la proue du temps », précise le site de

l'événement. Tous les signes convergent donc pour faire de *Tout mon amour* l'expression du théâtre aujourd'hui.

Or, quels sont les éléments qui le composent? Il y a, d'abord, le sujet de la pièce, emprunté à l'actualité, aux allures de fait divers: 10 ans plus tôt, une petite fille de 6 ans a disparu, plongeant les parents et le frère dans la douleur d'un deuil éternel et du silence. La pièce s'ouvre sur le retour de la famille dans la maison du grand-père qui vient de décéder, la maison d'où la petite fille s'était échappée. Et en même temps que le fantôme du grand-père revient hanter son fils, une jeune fille réapparaît, elle aussi, comme revenue du royaume des ombres, mais bien vivante; elle prétend être l'enfant perdue. La fiction se fait actualité actualisant les histoires sordides dont les journaux à sensation sont si friands. Mais ce faisant, elle rassemble deux auteurs qui, en bon contemporains, réalisent tous deux ce projet-là la même année: Laurent Mauvignier avec *Tout mon amour* et Régis Jauffret avec *Claustria*. L'un et l'autre racontent au fond un enfermement, l'un dans l'impossible souvenir comme dans l'impossible oubli, l'autre dans la cave de Fritzl, cet autrichien qui a séquestré sa fille 24 ans et lui a fait sept enfants. La suffocation que raconte Jauffret explose dans *Tout mon amour* dans la tirade finale de la mère qui jette au visage de sa fille la souffrance de vivre dans cette prison du temps: « Tu pourras faire ce que tu veux, sa voix je l'entends tous les jours, toutes les heures que je vis, c'est sa voix à elle qui me supplie de venir la chercher. Crois-moi, cette voix, je la connais, et c'est celle d'une petite fille de six ans, de six ans, tu entends? Elle a six ans et elle aura toujours six ans. Non... non, non, elle n'a

pas grandi. Elle ne peut pas grandir. »<sup>1</sup> La pièce révèle peu à peu cet enfermement dans le temps, dans cet instant de la disparition qui arrête l'avenir: peu à peu on s'aperçoit que les paroles et les pensées ne tournent qu'autour de cette absence, n'ont jamais été dites ou pensées que parce que cet événement premier a eu lieu. L'histoire échappe à la circonstance du fait divers pour accéder à l'éternel présent de cette tristesse « au-delà de tout savoir » que Marguerite Duras prête à la femelle gorille Africa, « triste de tristesse » – de la perte et de la disparition menaçant son espèce<sup>2</sup>. La pièce nous est donc contemporaine, quant à l'histoire qu'elle raconte, d'une troisième façon: en traitant l'histoire comme une mémoire, le temps comme une réserve d'oubli et de souvenir qui se gonfle, se contracte, se dilate ou s'assèche selon comment il est vécu, selon comment l'affect nous permet de l'habiter, *Tout mon amour* rejoint une pensée du temps qui nous est contemporaine<sup>3</sup>.

Voici pour le texte. Et maintenant, la scène. Les Possédés, la troupe qui a prêté voix et corps au texte, s'organise sur le mode ultra-contemporain du collectif. Stéphane Braunshweig fait d'ailleurs un clin d'oeil

<sup>1</sup> Laurent Mauvignier, *Tout mon amour*, Paris, Éd. de minuit, 2012, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> Marguerite Duras, « Cette grande animale de couleur noire », *Outside*, Paris, POL 1984; rééd. Gallimard, « Folio », 1995, p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> Voir par exemple Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images*, Paris, Éd. de minuit, 2000, et *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes*, Paris, ed. de minuit, 2002. Le philosophe et historien de l'art montre que le temps des œuvres échappe au temps des horloges (linéaire, orienté, chronologique) et obéit à cet autre temps, intime, archaïque, de la mémoire qui se recompose indéfiniment.

à cette mode dans ses *Six personnages en quête d'auteur* représentés à l'ouverture de la saison 2012-2013 de la Colline: le personnage de metteur en scène réfléchissant avec ses comédiens à comment mieux travailler interpelle une comédienne en lui rappelant son expérience dans un collectif; « j'en suis revenue du collectif! », lui répond-elle. On connaît bien les collectifs des années 70, ceux des théâtres de l'Aquarium ou du Soleil pour citer les plus connus, qui s'inscrivent parfaitement bien dans le paysage des utopies communautaires alors triomphantes. Pourtant, le théâtre aujourd'hui assiste à un retour des collectifs, qui n'expriment désormais plus leur temps et ses idéaux mais vont contre celui-ci, contre l'individualisme triomphant, contre la soumission aux critères favorisés par les politiques de subvention, comme la structuration en compagnie rangée en ordre de bataille derrière un chef. Il est certain que les collectifs d'aujourd'hui (DRAO, D'ores et Déjà, Les Possédés) sont en eux-mêmes un geste politique plus fort, plus contestataire, opposant à une société mercantile et à l'isolement des individus un art de la communauté: non seulement les membres de la troupe co-mettent en scène le spectacle mais le rapport au spectateur se veut moins distant, et moins injonctif. Ces collectifs conçoivent le spectacle comme un cheminement possible dans le texte, et non comme une interprétation définitive, et le public comme un partenaire, et non comme un réceptacle. *Tout mon amour* se présente d'emblée comme une scène ouverte : les acteurs sont là au moment où les spectateurs entrent, discutant face à eux, comme si la scène et le hors scène communiquaient sans rupture. De manière plus générale, le choix d'un tel dispositif scénique – pas de coulisse, un

plateau délimité comme un ring de boxe, et des comédiens toujours à vue – souligne le mouvement de recherche qui a animé les acteurs et marqué l'histoire de la mise en scène. Quand les acteurs sortent, ils restent sur le bord de la scène et celui (ceux) qui reste(nt) sur scène est (sont) regardé(s) par tous les autres qui tantôt s'allient contre lui (le fils et le père contre la mère dans la dernière scène) tantôt se lie à lui (le grand-père mort au début de la pièce semble ainsi aider son fils). Tout se passe donc comme si l'action hors scène des acteurs prolongeait, nourrissait et éclairait l'action sur la scène, comme si le regard porté les uns sur les autres au cours de la création, cette pluralité de points de vue qui relativise l'absolu d'une interprétation fixée d'avance ne cessait pas de se faire entendre dans le spectacle même.

Et puis, il y a l'entre deux, la navette entre le texte et la scène, les aller-retour du texte vers le plateau et du plateau vers le texte, qui ont modifié continûment l'un et l'autre. Cette collaboration transforme profondément le théâtre des romanciers que les années 60 ont connu: *Tout mon amour* s'est fait et écrit avec les acteurs. Une collaboration inter-artistique, comme on dit aujourd'hui, où roman et théâtre dialoguent, une collaboration telle que notre époque les aime, une collaboration, qui toute intéressante et riche qu'elle soit, est bien de son temps. Mauvignier le précise clairement dans un texte de présentation: cette pièce, son écriture, est partie à celui qui l'a faite, partie à celui qui l'a dite: « j'ai proposé la lecture à Rodolphe Dana et à David Clavel du texte que j'avais obtenu [en transformant un scénario en pièce]. Pour l'un comme pour l'autre, si le texte et le sujet étaient là, il manquait



cette réalité des situations et des présences qui donnent naissance à une pièce et permet au théâtre de s'accomplir. [...] Il y a eu plusieurs versions jusqu'à ce que nous nous retrouvions, *Les Possédés* et moi, en résidence au Théâtre Garonne, à Toulouse, pendant 8 jours. Cette semaine-là a été décisive pour dégager une version très proche de la définitive »<sup>4</sup>. Et pourtant si les personnages vivent en effet sur la scène, si le pari théâtral est réussi, l'origine romanesque de l'écriture de Mauvignier donne une tonalité très particulière à ce qu'on entend: les échanges explorent l'intimité psychique de chacun, qui se trouve comme dénudée, exposée. Cette parole impudique finit par mettre mal à l'aise le spectateur, qui sent bien, qui sait bien qu'il ne devrait pas entendre cela, pas en public, pas entouré de centaines de personnes. À moins qu'on ne le supporte

précisément parce qu'on y est accoutumé, parce que la télé-réalité nous a habitué à ce qu'une personne se « confie » à des millions de parfaits inconnus. L'impudeur même à laquelle nous confronte ce spectacle le marque de l'empreinte de notre présent. « Rompre les silences invisibles qui tuent », c'est dans cette folie et cette douleur que se débattent les personnages de Mauvignier, dans les creux et les pleins de cette parole intime paradoxalement incarnée sur scène, mais c'est aussi la hantise d'une société du spectacle dans laquelle chacun cherche à dire sa propre vérité.

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### De «l'état d'esprit performatif»/ About "the performative spirit"

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Joseph DANAN, *Entre théâtre et performance : la question du texte*, Paris, Actes Sud – Papiers, coll. « Apprendre », n° 35, 2013. / Joseph Danan, *Between theatre and performance: the question of text*, Paris, Actes Sud – Papiers, coll. « Apprendre », n° 35, 2013.

C'est en fin connaisseur des évolutions du théâtre immédiatement contem-

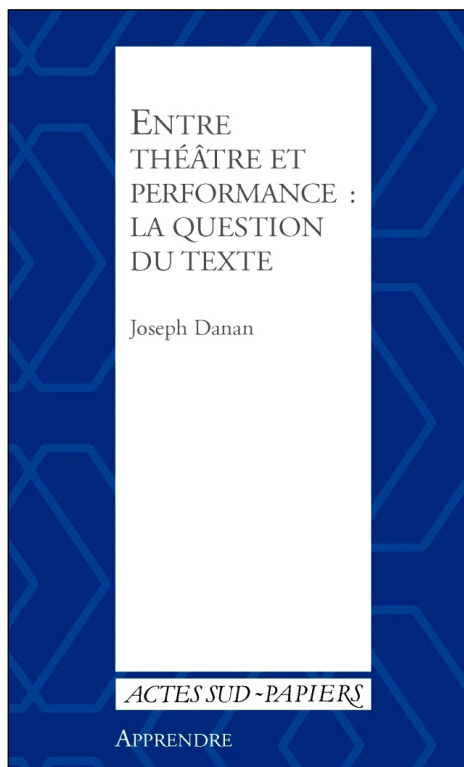
porain, que Joseph Danan aborde un sujet aussi important qu'actuel, celui de l'influence de la performance sur la scène théâtrale. *Entre théâtre et performance : la question du texte* revient sur ces hybridations et étudie, en contrepoint, les conséquences de tels transferts artistiques sur le texte de théâtre. La double qualité de l'auteur – à la fois chercheur et écrivain – lui permet de tisser une réflexion sensible et érudite, qui considère le renouvellement du matériau textuel et de son de venir scénique, lorsque celui-ci est « traversé par la performance ». Dans ce court essai, Joseph

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<sup>4</sup> Laurent Mauvignier, programme du spectacle distribué à la Colline avant la représentation, p. 8.

Danan qui avait déjà étudié l'influence du cinéma sur certaines écritures dramatiques<sup>5</sup>, puis la redéfinition de la dramaturgie – comme notion et comme pratique – sous l'effet des transformations touchant la scène contemporaine<sup>6</sup>, prolonge une interrogation centrée sur les mutations de l'écrit théâtral. Dépassant l'idée de « post-dramatique »<sup>7</sup>, l'auteur repère un ensemble de bouleversements de la forme dramatique, induits par l'immixtion de la performance sur la scène. Il envisage alors une éventuelle redéfinition de son identité, autrement dit, une réinterprétation du principe de dramaticité.

La réflexion débute par l'évocation des principaux traits définatoires de la performance, tout en rappelant qu'elle ne saurait être réduite à un ensemble de critères stylistiques figés. Une distinction fondamentale entre deux conceptions du même terme est toutefois énoncée : la performance désigne l'exécution d'une action devant un public et a été résumée par



Richard Schechner, au sein des *Performance studies*, par l'expression « showing-doing »<sup>8</sup>. Cette large acception se double d'un sens restreint, qui renvoie à l'art de la performance (*performance art*), une technique d'expression artistique issue des arts visuels. En citant, entre autres travaux, ceux de RoseLee Goldberg, Joseph Danan décrit l'art de la performance comme une pratique artistique qui privilégie la monstration à la représentation. Refusant la *mimésis*, le performeur entend réduire l'écart entre l'art et la vie, par l'effectuation d'un acte immé-

diat et non simulé. L'aspect authentique de l'agissement présenté reste donc primordial et ce, au détriment des qualités d'interprétation et au risque de l'accident ; quelques grandes figures des avant-gardes sont alors invoquées, comme John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Chris Burden et Marina Abramovic.

À ces exemples, s'ajoutent deux propositions théâtrales qui, au cours des années 1960-1970, s'appuient sur un texte pour mieux travailler, voire démonter les principes de la représentation dramatique ; c'est le cas de *Catherine d'Antoine Vitez* ou d'*Outrage au public* de Peter Handke. Ce dernier met en place un dispositif antithéâtral à la fois textuel et scénique,

<sup>5</sup> Voir. Joseph DANAN, « Écritures dramatiques que le cinéma travaille », in *L'Annuaire théâtral* N° 26 : *Regard croisés : théâtre et interdisciplinarité*, sous la responsabilité de Marie-Christine LESAGE, SQET, Montréal, Automne 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Voir. Joseph DANAN, *Qu'est-ce que la dramaturgie ?*, Arles, Actes Sud-papiers, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Voir. Hans-Thies LEHMANN, *Le théâtre postdramatique*, [Postdramatisches Theater] (1999), traduit de l'allemand par Philippe-Henri Ledru, Paris, L'Arche, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Richard SCHECHNER, *Performance studies : An introduction*, London, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 22.

visant à favoriser le surgissement de l'évènement réel au détriment de la représentation d'une fiction. L'intérêt et l'originalité de l'ouvrage résident dans ce positionnement non discriminant mais bien articulatoire, qui s'attache à rapprocher les deux arts. La perspective ouverte ici rejette le cloisonnement disciplinaire et tente, depuis les interstices, de repérer des points de jonction entre théâtre et performance. De fait, l'auteur décèle des correspondances entre les aspirations des metteurs en scène, acteurs et performeurs, tandis que les moyens mis en place pour y parvenir diffèrent. Depuis l'avènement de la mise en scène moderne, rappelle-t-il, le théâtre se préoccupe ardemment de faire de l'action représentée un acte le plus authentique et le plus réel possible, dans l'ici et maintenant de la « séance »<sup>9</sup>. La référence à la figure tutélaire d'Artaud s'impose, lui qui imaginait un renouvellement des formes théâtrales par une indistinction de l'art et de la vie. Cette remise en cause des codes théâtraux promue par l'auteur du *Théâtre et son double* (qui suppose le rejet de la pièce, du jeu mimétique, voire même du langage), inspirera les artistes de la performance comme ceux du théâtre, mais dans une radicalité moindre. En faisant apparaître une véritable continuité, Joseph Danan éclaire les motifs des emprunts effectués par le théâtre, à la performance artistique ; il s'agit de réaffirmer la dimension immédiate, authentique et non reproductible – vivante, en somme – du spectacle théâtral.

Ces références généalogiques servent à tracer quelques repères, sans toutefois s'appesantir sur une histoire des arts de la scène. L'essai est principalement consacré aux évolutions récentes du théâtre, interrogeant le vacillement récurrent de la frontière entre la performativité et la théâtralité, dans un entrelacement entre « effets réels » et éléments fictionnels. Ainsi, propose Joseph Danan, le théâtre s'inspire de la performance au sens restreint – mais également des pratiques qui s'en approchent, comme le concert *live*, la danse, le cirque – pour mieux « vivifier » la performance au sens large ; c'est-à-dire l'évènement unique, inscrit dans un contexte et incluant des spectateurs. L'« état d'esprit performatif »<sup>10</sup> qui traverse aujourd'hui le théâtre, permet d'insuffler un surcroît d'imprévu, de présence et de vitalité, en tentant de substituer – selon les termes de Deleuze et Lyotard – la présentation à la représentation.

Face au développement de telles *praxis* dans un contexte d'émancipation de la représentation<sup>11</sup>, l'évolution du texte reste à questionner. L'ouvrage postule que les transformations théâtrales récentes provoqueraient une obsolescence progressive de la pièce de théâtre. Ce n'est pas le texte à proprement parler qui tombe en désuétude (la présence de textes-matériau reste prépondérante dans la plupart des créations scéniques), mais bien la forme dramatique et ces caractéristiques représentationnelles : la fable, le personnage, l'action figurée, etc. La démonstration s'appuie alors sur quelques exemples récents, où la forme, la fonction et la place du texte sont entièrement déconstruites : ainsi du texte

<sup>9</sup> Christian BIET, Christophe TRIAU, « La complicité théâtrale. Pour une définition esthétique et politique de la séance », in *Tangence* N 88 : *Devenir de l'esthétique théâtrale*, sous la direction de Gilbert DAVID et Hélène JACQUES, automne 2008.

<sup>10</sup> L'expression fait explicitement référence à celle de Bernard Dort, « L'état d'esprit dramaturgique », in *Théâtre/Public*, n°67, janvier-février 1986.

<sup>11</sup> Voir. Bernard DORT, *La représentation émancipée*, Arles, Acte Sud-papiers, 1988.

« invisible », « digéré » ou « palimpseste » de Dante dans *Inferno* de Roméo Castellucci, du montage textuel (documents, autofiction et narration) effectué par Angélica Liddell dans *La casa de la fuerza*, ou encore de la forme apparemment dramatique d'*Une racle* des Chiens de Navarre, née de l'improvisation scénique, sans écrit préalable.

Devant l'affluence de textes-matériel, les interrogations affluent : comment continuer à écrire pour le théâtre ? Comment penser une réinvention de la forme dramatique en adéquation avec les attentes des artistes et des spectateurs ? Une nouvelle fois, la solution se nicherait dans l'« état d'esprit performatif », permettant le surgissement du réel au cœur du théâtral. À l'instar de la création scénique, l'auteur repère une porosité nouvelle entre écriture et performance, offrant une revitalisation qu'il juge nécessaire, « sous peine de mort ». L'une des caractéristiques remarquables de cette incursion s'affirme à travers la mutation du statut conféré à l'acteur, depuis le texte : les écrits de Jacques Jouet, Jon Fosse, Roland Schimmelpfenig, Peter Handke et tant d'autres, privilégient tour à tour la choralité, le spectacle-récit, ou exposent un acteur-performeur ostensible et non plus effacé derrière la figuration d'un personnage. Joseph Danan prend pour autre exemple la performance musicale, venue pénétrer ses propres textes, comme ceux de David Lescot, Philippe Dorin ou Yvan Viripaev. La superposition de la musique et de l'écriture traduit une quête d'énergie et de rythme, ainsi que le désir d'un geste authentique, vivant et non reproductible.

À travers ces illustrations, l'ouvrage de Joseph Danan décrit et analyse un ensemble de pratiques contemporaines travaillées par la performance, qui mettent en cause l'idée d'un art théâtral « à deux temps »<sup>12</sup>. L'expression désigne la séparation

<sup>12</sup> Voir. Henri GOUHIER, *Le Théâtre et les arts à deux temps*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989.

– voire l'isolement – des activités du metteur en scène et celles du dramaturge, dont la reconfiguration engage le renouvellement des formes de dramaticité. Par contagion avec le plateau et par une indistinction de plus en plus fréquente entre la fonction de l'écrivain et celle du créateur scénique, l'écriture se transforme. Dès lors que le texte appartient au dispositif scénique, il se rend perméable à l'évènement et donc à la performance, dans son acception la plus vaste.

Empruntant à la « miniature théorique »<sup>13</sup>, l'essai fait habilement dialoguer le point de vue d'un praticien et les recherches d'un théoricien. Les enjeux sont soulevés avec clarté, grâce à la limpidité de l'écriture et la précision du cheminement intellectuel, dont la concision formelle ne sacrifie rien à la complexité du propos. Joseph Danan convie le lecteur à l'accompagner dans une réflexion toujours subtile et nuancée, ayant à cœur de rendre compte des mouvements de fond qui ébranlent le théâtre contemporain. L'empirisme et la subjectivité du regard alliés à une analyse précise et cultivée, laissent se déployer une pensée tout en finesse, qui atteste le dynamisme du théâtre et son renouvellement constant.

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<sup>13</sup> Voir. Georges BANU, *Miniatures théoriques : repères pour un paysage de la scène moderne*, Arles, Actes sud, 2009. Ailleurs, Georges Banu suggère également que « l'écrit sur le théâtre tient plutôt de la nouvelle que du roman », in *Le théâtre, sorties de secours*, Paris, Aubier, 1984, p. 8.

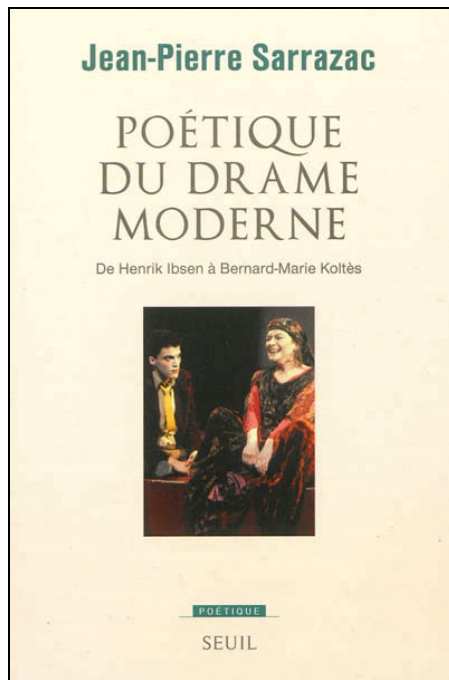
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## *Le drame émancipé / The emancipated drama*

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Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, Poétique du drame moderne, Paris : Les Éditions du Seuil, coll. « Poétiques », 2012, 416 p., EAN 9782021054200. / Jean-Pierre Sarrazac The poetics of modern drama, Paris : Les Éditions du Seuil, coll. « Poétiques », 2012, 416 p., EAN 9782021054200

Jean-Pierre Sarrazac est auteur dramatique et universitaire, désormais Professeur Émérite d'études théâtrales de l'université Paris 3-Sorbonne nouvelle, Professeur Invité à l'Université de Louvain-la-neuve et fondateur, dans les années 1990, du Groupe de recherche sur la Poétique du drame moderne et contemporain. Son dernier ouvrage se propose d'analyser le drame moderne apparu à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le présupposé affirmé est qu'il existe un même paradigme unissant le drame des années 1880 à celui d'aujourd'hui, faisant de Strindberg un contemporain de Sarah Kane... J.-P. Sarrazac bâtit son propos en regard de l'ouvrage de référence de Peter Szondi, *Théorie du drame moderne*<sup>14</sup>, prenant ses distances avec l'analyse hégéliano-marxiste du drame ainsi qu'avec le concept de « post-dramatique » de H.-Th. Lehmann<sup>15</sup>. De nouveaux éléments d'analyse sur le drame moderne jaillissent de l'étude d'un corpus ultra-contemporain, pour lequel J.-P. Sarrazac se pose en entomologiste du vivant : ses riches analyses de spectacle forment de grands ensembles, sans jamais prétendre à aucune exhaustivité. Il



s'agit bien là d'une « poétique du mouvant », d'une « poétique ouverte » qui sied à un art vivant.

Si Adorno, dans son étude sur *Fin de partie*<sup>16</sup>, a prédit la mort du drame, J.-P. Sarrazac est convaincu que le drame, dans les crises qu'il subit, n'en finit pas de se réinventer. Tout d'abord, en remettant en cause la fable, qui est secondarisée (le drame a déjà eu lieu quand la pièce commence). On assiste alors à un métadrame « analytique » : les personnages passent au crible leur passé, donnant lieu à une « dramaturgie du retour » (p. 42). Six personnages

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Szondi, *Théorie du drame moderne*, Belval, Circé, coll. « Penser le théâtre », 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Le Théâtre postdramatique*, Paris, L'Arche, 2002.

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<sup>16</sup> Theodor Adorno, « Pour comprendre *Fin de partie* », in *Notes sur la littérature*, Paris, Flammarion, 1984.

en quête d'auteur de Pirandello, pièce canonique du drame moderne, présente davantage une situation qu'une histoire linéaire dont les événements s'enchaînent de manière causale. Ce « désordre organisateur » (p. 24) signe l'abandon de l'unité de la fable dramatique (héritée d'Aristote, reprise par Hegel) et la fin du « bel animal » littéraire. Est-ce à dire que le drame moderne ne raconte plus rien, que la fable y est définitivement bannie ? Non. Elle est toujours au cœur du spectacle, mais y apparaît morcelée.

La « dédramatisation » du drame s'assortit d'une « redramatisation » contemporaine : la progression dramatique mute en une série discontinue de micro-conflits relativement autonomes. J.-P. Sarrazac dresse une typologie des procédés à l'œuvre : la « rétrospection » (le sens du drame est tout simplement inversé : les personnages régressant, surplombant leur existence passée, prennent le pas sur les personnages agissant), l'« anticipation » (la pièce commence en annonçant le but visé), l'« optation » (le drame montre ce qui pourrait être et non ce qui est), la « répétition/variation » (la fable spiralaire traduit la vie quotidienne répétitive de l'homme moderne), l'« interruption » (le drame est constitué de séquences autonomes selon un principe d'irrégularité).

Ces procédés entraînent l'émergence d'un nouveau paradigme esthétique : le drame moderne est un « drame-de-la-vie », rompant avec la forme du « drame-dans-la-vie » qui s'est imposée de la Renaissance à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le « drame-de-la-vie » se caractérise par l'abandon du conflit entre personnages et l'adoption d'une dramatisation de la vie. Il cesse d'être agonistique pour devenir ontologique. Le « drame-de-

la-vie » implique un changement de mesure au niveau de l'étendue, du temps, de l'espace et de la métaphysique. Le drame moderne s'étend jusqu'aux limites d'une vie complète, montrant comment le milieu, l'Histoire, la société interagissent sur le personnage, alors que le « drame-dans-la-vie » couvre un épisode limité de la vie d'un héros. Il représente une vie à rebours, non linéaire ; un « drame en moins » (p. 83), drame de la perte et du ratage, porté par des personnages passifs, se penchant sur le cours de leur existence. Le « drame-de-la-vie » est immanent (c'est la vie elle-même qui persécute le personnage) alors que le « drame-dans-la-vie » est transcendant, toujours soumis à une puissance extérieure. Enfin, le drame moderne donne lieu à des « pièces-paysage », propres à convertir le temps en espace.

Le personnage en action du « drame-dans-la-vie » est supplanté par le personnage en question, le personnage agissant remplacé par le personnage récitant. Le personnage moderne est « choralisé » (p. 202) car il est témoin de l'action. Il devient aussi sans qualités, « personnage en moins » (p. 226), subissant une perte d'identité et de présence au monde, pris dans un « devenir-fantôme » (p. 194). Reprenant l'idée d'« impersonnel » aux écrits théoriques de Mallarmé, J.-P. Sarrazac forge le concept d'« impersonnage », signe d'un « passage au neutre » caractérisé par ces symptômes : sentiment d'étrangeté à soi-même, catalepsie, évanouissements, absence aux autres et à soi-même, personnalités multiples... L'impersonnage incarne une humanité morcelée, discontinuée, multiple, transgressive.

Les modalités du dialogue s'en trouvent changées : le drame moderne implique

un nouveau partage des voix. L'homme étant ontologiquement et socialement séparé de ses contemporains, le conflit est impossible. Le dialogue ne peut plus être agonistique, mais devient ouvert, discontinu.

Le silence creuse l'écart entre les répliques : les personnages parlent dans le vide, s'évitent les uns des autres, peinent à trouver la bonne distance avec leurs contemporains. Mais cette perte s'assortit d'un gain : le rapprochement du personnage et du spectateur. Si le dialogue perd en latéralité (les relations interpersonnelles entre personnages sur scène ne sont plus au cœur du dialogue), il gagne en frontalité. Cette « redialogisation du drame » (p. 246) passe par la mise en scène d'un « dialogue autre », polyphonique, que J.-P. Sarrazac qualifie de « polylogue » et qui désigne une coexistence de soliloques, dits ou tus, entrecoupés de longs silences.

Reprochant à H.-Th. Lehmann de vouloir faire disparaître le drame moderne à jamais derrière son néologisme de « post-dramatique », J.-P. Sarrazac prône davantage une émancipation du drame, qui revendique sa nature fragmentée, morcelée, déconstruite. La « pulsion rhapsodique » permet à la pièce de théâtre de s'agencer tel un montage de formes brèves, de différents modes poétiques mis ensemble (épique, lyrique, dramatique)... La voix du rhapsode se fait entendre à côté de celles des personnages. Chœur venant commenter l'action, voix qui se confie au lecteur, hypostasiée en didascalies, personnage-témoin, compagnon du personnage qui reste à distance, le rhapsode peut être aussi un opérateur de type mallarméen, une « machine actoriale »,

ingénieur de signes et de forces qui construit et agence les éléments de la représentation. Le rhapsode a une puissance d'hybridation : il dynamite la fable mais assume les discordances et les interruptions. Il suture ce qu'il a mis en pièce. Se succèdent alors des tableaux hétérogènes d'où le sens jaillit parce qu'ils provoquent des chocs entre eux : ce chaos organisé n'a rien d'anarchique mais relève bien d'une construction qui tient de la décomposition ou du démembrement. Le rhapsode est un constructeur de l'hétérogène, faisant émerger des mondes toujours au bord du chaos.

À ceux qui ont prophétisé la mort du drame, J.-P. Sarrazac répond que le drame moderne est évolutif, épousant les mutations ontologiques de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, subissant la déconstruction propre au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le drame moderne n'en finit donc pas de subsister. Si le drame s'éloigne de lui-même, c'est pour se développer hors de lui. Mais cette déterritorialisation du drame ne se traduit pas par une rupture nette avec lui-même, mais plutôt par des procédés multiples d'hybridation, de distances et de retours qui en font une forme résolument ouverte.

Le « drame-de-la-vie » invite à rompre avec une approche textocentriste du théâtre et à considérer le drame du seul point de vue de la scène. Fini le théâtre du texte, voilà le théâtre du jeu, qu'il soit *game*, *story*, « jeu-de-la-vie » (p. 344-345), *agôn*, *mimicry* ou fin de partie (p. 351). Les drames de la présence, de la cérémonie, de la performance s'émancipent de la fable, montrant une autre scène où le corps est libéré de l'emprise de la parole. L'essai de J.-P. Sarrazac coud et recoud des analyses de plus de cent vingt pièces de

théâtre avec des mises en perspective théoriques, mobilisant un fonds référentiel philosophique mais aussi spécifique à la théorie des études théâtrales. Au lecteur, habitué des précédents textes de J.-P. Sarrazac<sup>17</sup>, qui se demanderait quelle est la valeur ajoutée de ce volume publié aux Éditions du Seuil, je répondrai que la Poétique du drame moderne se présente comme une nouvelle strate de réflexion, ne redoublant pas les propos déjà tenus, mais opérant une répétition propre à faire émerger de nouveaux questionnements sur le théâtre tout à fait contemporain.

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<http://labo-laps.com/>

<sup>17</sup> Citons par exemple *L'Avenir du drame* (Lausanne, L'Aire, 1981, rééd. Circé/Poche, n°24, 1999), le *Lexique du drame moderne et contemporain* (Circé/poche, n°29, 2005), *Critique du théâtre. De l'utopie au désenchantement*, Belfort, Circé, 2000, ainsi que l'article « *L'impersonnage. En relisant "La crise du personnage"* », *Jouer le monde. La scène et le travail de l'imaginaire* (Pour Robert Abirached), Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, Denis Guénoun (dir.), *Études Théâtrales*, n°20, 2001, p. 41-51.