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Special Issue: Theatricality, filmicity and spectatorship

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“FATE IS NEVER FINAL?” WHY MOVIES REENACT RPG EXPERIENCES

MIRUNA RUNCAN

ABSTRACT. Starting from a complex debate in a focus-group with four teenagers (aged between thirteen and fifteen), on why and how they enjoy or dislike the movies based on role-playing games (RPG), this paper tries to raise some questions about the differences and relationship between the condition of the spectator and that of the computer-gamer. Its central focus is on the circular road of self-presence representations, from linear narrative to level-stratified experiencing of the computer game, and back. After a short summary of the current tendencies in interpreting the mutations from spectatorship to game-controlling representations, the paper will try to sketch a hypothesis-theory concerning the displacement of the moral and aesthetical values, as classical foundation of audience motivations in cultural consumption, towards the “experience” value, seen as a chance to identify, build and consume different and alternative constructs of the Subject/Self.

The paper-essay constitutes a small part from The Everyday Drama Research and Creation Program, a complex interdisciplinary research project conducted over the last five years by the author and by C.C. Buricea-Mlinarcic PhD, both from the Theatre and Television Faculty of the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj, Romania. The actual theme/field of this program – “The X-Men & Women Generation”- focuses on the young people’s representations of self based on their cultural consumption. The Everyday Drama Research and Creation Program was awarded a two year grant from the Romanian Ministry of Culture (2007-2008) and produces empirical and theoretical studies, video-productions, written journalism, plays and theatre productions.

Keywords: Video games, film, theatre, spectatorship

ARGUMENTS FOR REVISITING SPECTATORSHIP

*„Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in”.*
Leonard Cohen, Anthem

At the end of a level-episode from the well-known computer game, *Prince of Persia*, the hero meets a powerful and aggressive enemy who pretends to know the hero’s fate. The enemy attacks but the hero jumps away, fends off and cries from the depths of his soul, before executing the enemy: “Fate is never final!” Can we imagine a more accurate and expressive line to emphasize the pure “jouissance” of the gamer when he manages to master his/her skills?

Fate is an artificial concept, partly rational – in its causality dimension -, partly metaphysical – in its external, deterministic, freedom-annihilating dimension. The role-playing game abolishes – even for a while – the perception of one’s individual destiny, and invalidates fears of implacable fate, by the replacement it operates between the real and the fictional identity of the player/gamer.

But doesn’t film or theatre watching operate in the same way? No, because fictional films and theatre performances operate by interpretative-mediated transfers, while Role Playing Games permit to the player much more...

In my childhood (but I am sure even in our days, in some courtyard or in any playground) things were, somehow, the same, even if not technologically-based. Two or more boys and girls agreed (with some difficulty) on a scenario, made the casting and used – based on their will and skills – mimetic schemes in order to perform a fictional situation. “I’ll be the Witch, you’ll be the Knight. Ana will be the Princess; fat-boy will be the Dragon!” “Why me?”- fat-boy was always predisposed to complain. “I was the Dragon last time, I’m bored. Let’s change for once!”

Obviously, in my childhood, the role-playing games - usually based on fairy tales, novels, comic-books or TV series – had elastic rules, the narrative could always be modified as you went along, and the casting-performing actions could always admit free improvising procedures. Taking the risk of parodist reactions, the fat-boy could perform, from time to time, not only as Knight, but also as Princess. But, still, fate was final: the narrative core was kept intact; the moral judgment was, more or less, the same each time.

From Moreno (1953) to Goffman (1959), the meaning, functions and consequences of role-playing became constant topics for anthropological, psychological, sociological or artistic research. But, between the therapeutic re-enacting and reinsertion of self and the everyday negotiation of usual social roles, right in the middle, lays the boiling point of pleasure: the pleasure of transgressing predetermination. This crucial point legitimizes and underlies the joy of playing – by investing you, body and soul, into – a story different than your own. This crucial point is even older than humanity, insofar as ethology confirms the mimetic procedures and the role distribution in so many species that display social behaviors. Its importance is based on the fact that it contains the dialectical energies of both acting and watching, otherwise judiciously distributed in any type of culture, old or new. Actor and spectator are, in a role playing game, one and the same. The frame, the dramatic action, the performativity, the competences and abilities, overlap and melt into free enjoyment. What can be more different from daily life? I believe that this position of the human being, deeply rooted into the subconscious ground of individuals and communities, reveals that role-playing games are not only a general practice, but also, in our days, one with expansionistic tendencies. And thus, it engages us to re-think – more than ever – the status and the dynamics of the relationship between actor, acting, framing and spectator.

SPECTATOR VS. PLAYER/GAMER. DENEGATION VS. IMMERSION

From a theoretical point of view, the role-playing game enjoys a strange destiny. In the first half of the last century, well-known writers, philosophers, anthropologists or psychologists (from Huizinga to Caillois, and from Levi-Strauss and Bourdieu to Greimas) offered ludology an important status in the field of humanistic research. Paradoxically, after the sixties, the role-playing procedures – and especially gaming – got stuck in a boundary space, between the performing practices and the ritualistic ones. In other words, the role-playing games were cut off from their basic condition of game practices, and were pushed – with good intentions, but still artificially – to the extremities of scenic activities. For a good part of the research interests or theoretical approaches, *playing* overwhelmed *gaming*. These restrictions were carried along by the similarities with initiation rituals or shamanist transfers, on the one hand, and by the enormous difficulty in measuring the structural distance between *watching* and *being watched* (with their social and psychological implication and dynamics), on the other. As important and fruitful as they proved to be, the studies of aesthetical/performing (theatrical and filmic) practices, and the psycho-therapeutic researches and actual applications are only marginal compared to RPG’s meaning and extending implications.

In everyday life, role-playing formulas and procedures expanded in a direct (and natural, I would say) relationship with the enormous expansion of leisure and entertainment. The shock of the new technologies transformed an ancient childhood practice into an inter-personal one, indifferent to age, profession or social status. “I’ll be the witch, you’ll be the knight” became RPG, a concept that covers an infinity of subdivisions, on or offline, single or multiplayer. What once seemed to be – as Konrad Lorenz (1974) proclaimed more than thirty years ago – a symptom of the “universal neotenia” (the unprecedented extension of childhood practices and attitudes into the adult life) became nowadays not only a common and global form of mediated communication and cultural exchange, but also one of the most diversified and lucrative industries of our world.

We are living in a culture of simulation, in which the role of new technologies is continuously growing. This is the reason why identity – cogitation on how to define our “self” under the new conditions – is a key notion for the analysis of the present-day human condition (Filiciak, 2003, p.90).

Such a change could not remain without consequences on human mind and behavior. To paraphrase McLuhan (1964), the individual who built his/her system of perception and representation playing, as a child, more than four hours a day on his/her computer is as different from his predecessor, who spent more than four hours a day watching TV, as the latter was from his father, who was only reading comic books and magazines.

I will not try to sum up here – even briefly – the most representative theories concerning games and gaming. I will try only to focus on the gamer position as the mediating/central one between actor and spectator. Leaving aside the countless definitions of the game concept, let’s remember the one Huizinga offered such a long time ago:

...a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (Huizinga, 1955)

Of course, Huizinga's generous and idealistic (Calvinist) refusal of any “material interest” can no longer be taken seriously today. Still, the substance of the definition survives, and we can put the accents on:

1. The difference between the game's coherent and consistent universe and the real world
2. The conventional structure of its rules
3. The capacity of the “diegetic” universe of the game to absorb - body and soul – the user/gamer

The role-playing games - particularly the computer-based ones - share with the film and theatre practice the obligation to offer a coherent and consistent (self-sufficient) universe of representations. Both spectatorship and PC gaming practices apparently share the need of conventional rules and, of course, both seem to produce a similar effect of absorption into the fictional world. More than that, a large part of RPGs (and many other kinds of computer games) borrow from film and theatre performances the dramatic and narrative vehicles, static and dynamic frames, and – of course – casting and characters.

What we have to consider here, just in the middle of this borrowing-challenging competition between spectator and gamer, is the distance between the position of the spectator and that of the gamer/user.

The process of secondary identification taking place in cinema theatres depends paradoxically on distance while in the case of games we encounter something more than just intimacy. Identification is replaced by introjection – the subject is projected inward into an “other”. We do not need to complete imitation to confuse the “other” with the “self”. The subject (player) and the “other” (the onscreen avatar) do not stand at the opposite sides of the mirror anymore - they become one. (...) During the game, the player's identity ends in disintegration, and the merger of user's and character's consciousness ensues (Filiciak, 2003, p.91).

On the spectator's side, we have to deal with the assumed “denegation”¹: the spectator consciously and willingly leaves – for a definite time and in secure

¹ Cf. Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, London, Methuen, 1980, p.38; see also Ubersfeld, Anne, *Lire le Théâtre*, Editions Sociales, Paris, 1978, p. 47-49; or Runcan, Miruna, *Pentru o semiotică a spectacolului teatral*, Cluj, Editura Eikon, 2003, p. 24

conditions – his/her own identity, in order to confound, identify with and interpret the fictional world of the performance. In other words, he/she empties the pot of his inner self with the goal of filling it up – by interpreting and re-constructing – with a different identity, capable of being invested with a global significance.

On the other hand, in computer games – and particularly in RPGs – we have a re-mediated activity, which forces the practitioner to interpret information step by step, in order to configure his/her own identity and actions. Denegation is here just a starting point for a set of more complex processes, similar in a way to stage or film acting. The classical actor’s paradox of Diderot, - “the conscious and systematical lie” – becomes here, simultaneously, the attribute of the one who plays and the one who observes the game, insofar as we are speaking about the same person. In other words, the paradox covers both conditions and melts them, as much as the gamer/player builds his own conventional presence as avatar, observes and controls it, in order to win new abilities and skills and, eventually, to win the game.

To generalize: in art we might have to configure in order to be able to interpret whereas in games we have to interpret in order to be able to configure, and proceed from the beginning to the winning or some other situation (Eskelinen, 2001, p.9).

To rephrase, the gamer strategically and tactically empties his/her self **in order to be and to do what the internal fictional world of the game offers/orders him as a definite goal**. At this point, the spectator/actor condition, completely melted for a while, get unbalanced again, because the global significance becomes, if not completely absent, at least neutral or less important than ever. The avatar’s presence and actions are practically indifferent to any ethical or aesthetical burden; instead, the emptied space of meaning construction is refilled with the ecstatic energy of watching the action at the very moment of performing it.

Since our actions are visible on a television or computer screen, it is there where we actually act, especially because our actions on the screen are highly visible to others. It may be the effect of incessant associating with mass media; we are not only voyeurs, but we want to appear on the screen as well. Since our “window on the world” was replaced by Windows, we ourselves want to appear on the screen. The Internet allows fulfilling this need. To be visible means to be real. (Filiciak, 2001, p.100).

In the parallel universe of the game, the **functionality** of the narrative-image compound, goal-oriented, becomes the major dimension we have to consider when thinking about the motivational differences between the spectator and the gamer. The gamer/hero has to decipher the rules and methods as he goes along, in order to pass from one level to another. Therefore, he assumes a permanent state of configurative interpretation. In this respect, the spaces, the objects and tools, the time-situation contexts, as much as the other characters (helpers, enemies or indifferent), they all count only as **functional subordinates**.

Consequently, in computer games the distinction between static settings and dynamic characters transforms into a more complex continuum of combinations, alterations, and middle terms, because the distribution of static and dynamic game elements doesn't have to mimic any practices in other modes of expression and communication. (Eskelinen, 2001, p.4).

To come back to the spectator's motivational point of view, in cinema – like in theatre – the enjoyment that legitimizes the use of fictional narrative-image compounds is founded on the processes of 'inventing a temporal scheme in terms of another temporal scheme' (Mets, 1974). The entire complex of cognitive and psychological processes is motivated by the pleasure of being in and of confounding with a different world for which narrative chains and symbolic images are the major vehicles. The spectator cannot and will not break this complex of analogical processes, except in case fear, disgust or misunderstanding should block his/her identification or should make the shields of protection insecure. By comparison with that motivational ground, in the role-playing game the functions of the narrative vehicle are profoundly weakened. In a role-playing game, one wants to impress and defeat other players and/or to simply win the trophy. More than in the spectator's case, Victor Turner's idea of *liminal* condition (Turner, 1982), matches the gamer/player's situation, as it conserves and supports the (fully conscious) possibility of an '*in between worlds*' position². Only when perfectly settled "between" the two worlds, the gamer can find the perfect solutions for winning.

In literature, theatre and film everything matters or is conventionally supposed to matter equally - if you've seen 90% of the presentation that's not enough, you have to see or read it all (or everything you can). This is characteristic of dominantly interpretative practices in general. In contrast, in computer games you either can't or don't have to encounter every possible combinatory event and "existent" the game contains, as these differ in their ergodic importance. Some actions and reactions in relation to certain events will bring the player quicker to a solution or help him reach the winning situation sooner or more effectively than others (Eskelinen, 2001, p. 6).

I would like to avoid the complex (and somehow useless) debate about the active/passive opposition between actor (performance) and spectator (audience). I could never agree with the idea of seeing the spectator as a prey or a victim. Participating, as a spectator, to a performance is, we can now agree, an active process. Besides that, the key-word here is **control**. As a spectator, the individual voluntarily limits - in a conventional way - his chances to produce a complex response to the stage/screen offer. He can only applaud, boo, whistle or...leave the

² One can find a more complex argumentation of the topic in Ericsson, M., 'Play to Love', in Gade, M., Thorop, L., Sander, M., *As Larp Grows Up. Theory and Methods in Larp*, Bookpartner, Denmark 2003. See also Copier, Marinka, 'Connecting Words. Fantasy Role-Playing Games, Ritual Acts and the magic Circle', *Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 Conference*

cinema or theatre hall. In film/viewing things are even stricter, considering the fact that no living person is present as an opponent for inter-personal communication. When watching a TV show or a movie on DVD, one can only switch the channel or shut down the TV set. The spectator cannot interfere with the set, the drama structures, situations or narrative vehicle. His/her mental and physical reactions are mediated by the immersion in the imaginary world of the show. Anne Ubersfeld (1974, p.47) was perfectly right to compare them with the consistency of the dreaming experience. Instead, “The relation between the player's psychophysical presence and his or her virtual presence in a game is usually designed to be both control- and consciousness-oriented” (idem, p.7). What motivates the gamer/player – especially when he/she is totally absorbed by the game – is the extraordinary illusion – well managed by the games’ system of programming – that he has a deterministic control both over the evolution of his avatar and over the game’s development.

In the long run, the video-game – including and particularly the RPG – is never really lost, it can only be abandoned. It ends only by winning, even if winning comes after several strategic failures. This can offer us a rather consistent explanation of the huge success of the movies that borrowed not the story, but the repetitive structures from video games: well known productions like *Run, Lola Run* (1998, directed by Tom Tykwer) or *Memento* (2000, directed by Christopher Nolan), for example. But a strategic failure brings with it better managed techniques and skills for the gamer’s avatar. By abolishing any determination external to the game’s universe, - in other words, fate – the RPG player’s fundamental condition is **to be there**. Consequently, it completely excludes the tragic condition of the hero, and all its philosophical and aesthetical aura of mythologies. Aristotle can – at last – retire.



WHY REENACT RPG'S IN MOVIES? LET'S ASK THE VIRTUAL AUDIENCE.

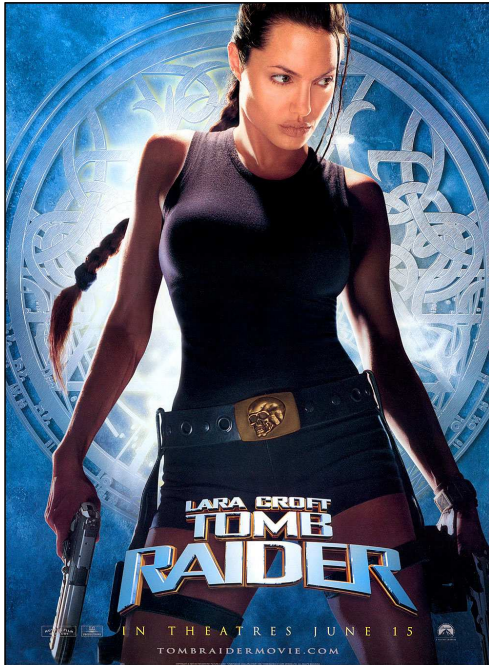
There is also an important connection or at least a functional similarity between computer games and so-called lower forms of cinema, especially the genres that cause or arouse physical reactions in the viewer-spectator, including melodrama (tears), comedy (laughing), horror (fear) and pornography (sexual excitement). Certain simulations, especially those loaded with action to be handled with quick reactions and excellent hand-eye-coordination, often cause physical or physiological reactions, the control of which is in the best interest of the player (Eskelinen, 2001, p.7).

So, if the similarities enforce the fundamental difference, why reenact on film such poor drama supports and such uninteresting narratives as the ones based on RPGs? To find out what motivates the young audiences (which consist, primarily, of computer game practitioners and RPG fans) our small group of researchers conducted an online couple of conferences with teenagers. The first one was dedicated to the video and computer RPG activities, the central problem here being how the gamers balance the relationship between the personal identity and the avatar's identity. The second conference was dedicated strictly to the motivations and reactions/responses to the movies based on RPGs.

Both online conferences were planned by the author of this article, at the methodological level: questionnaires, themes, specific topics. But, like in a detective story, two members of the research team infiltrated the target group. On one hand, our young researchers were RPG fans, and were sincerely interested to confront the issue and to challenge ideas related to the specific topic. On the other hand, it seemed reasonable - in terms of methodology and techniques - to have competent insiders who can discreetly control the consistency of the survey and keep the group focused on the theme.

The online conference's teen participants were selected from a gamers' forum and were studying at different schools in Cluj. It's time for you to meet <CatatonickName> (Vladimir, 13 years old), <addablo> (Aron, 14 years old), <titanus_9> (Sergiu, 14 years old), <bob_wrestler> (Bogdan, 13 years old), but also our honest snitches <masquerade> (Raluca, PhD candidate, 27) and <cheViva> (Mihai, MA student, 27). We decided to simplify, for reasons of space and concision, the reading of both conferences by filtering out all contextual jokes and detours unessential to our research, and also by "translating" the specific internet-slang by equivalent "literary" sentences, including usual abbreviations and emoticons, without altering the meaning or the style. Of course the names of the participants are the very names they accepted to use in order of the actual publication.

Act one. The first meeting: Gaming experience and identity



In the first conference (11.07.2008), the participants begin by discussing their preferences: <CatatonickName> and <addablo> are more interested in the D&D (*Dungeons and Dragons*) type, for example *Baldur's Gate*, *Icwind Dale* or *Planescape: Torment*; <bob_wrestler> was and still is more a *World of Warcraft* fan, a preference sheared with <cheViva>. They all liked, sometime ago, shooters and horror adventures like *Resident Evil*, or *Tomb Raider*, but now this experience doesn't seem to matter anymore. Rather old, even classical fighters, with RPG elements, like *Mortal Kombat*, are, paradoxically, still challenging for the group of four teenagers. On the other hand, <masquerade> prefers MMORPGs, especially *MU Online*, a preference shared with <titanus_9>, even if the last one does

not frequently visit *MU Online* and is more of a fan of *9Dragons*. <CatatonickName> and <bob_wrestler> are both enthusiastic about *Final Fantasy*. Even if they all equally like to play single and offline, they feel much more excited by playing online multiplayer.

The motivation of the preferences on game style or type is, usually, simple. <CatatonickName>, <addablo> and even <cheViva> like to impersonate virtual strange heroes, they like the medieval fantasy atmosphere and dramatic challenges. More direct, <bob_wrestler> declares he likes to fight and, generally, he likes the quest and adventure situations, which make him feel strong and clever, even cunning. On the other hand, the mystery and the strange exotic atmosphere counts as extremely important for the fans of *Final Fantasy*, who are also fans of manga and anime TV series. The MMORPG enthusiasts like “to be someone else” and to “communicate”, to “interact” with other (more or less) unknown people, to build virtual-fictional spaces for themselves, and even to fantasize about the real people underneath the avatars they meet.

When asked to define the kind of pleasure the game – especially RPG – offers them, they are inclined to separate at least two different but equally important types of enjoyment. First, <CatatonickName>, <addablo>, <bob_wrestler> and <cheViva> agree that the main pleasure is “*doing extraordinary things*”; or, more specifically, “*doing things you could never try (dream) to do in real life*”. Then, when <masquerade> argues that she “*understands by doing even communicating,*

changing impressions, ideas, etc.”, <titanus_9> emphasizes that one of his major pleasure is “*not really fight, but to make fun of stupid people in the MMOs, and make friends with the clever ones*”. Still, the conversation shifts abruptly, when <cheViva> asks “*But what about winning? Isn’t it such a great pleasure?*” After <masquerade>’s intervention: “*Even I have to admit that, when I am really playing adventure, quests or shooters, the winning is orgasmic!*” all the participants express a common “*HURRRRAAH!!!!*” In order to keep the conversation’s method intact, <cheViva> asks about the number and the type of pleasures one have to consider here. They all tend to agree about two principal types, “*the pleasure of being/doing*” and “*the pleasure of winning*”.

To refine the double identity issue, <masquerade> asks about how each of the participants builds their avatars: “*Does the avatar resemble, in any way, your real personality*” The answers are, here, apparently confusing. “*Why choose an avatar, if it’s not completely different from you? The fun is that you can be another person, a wizard, or a champion or whatever*”, says <bob_wrestler>. When challenged by his mates, <addablo> has to admit he usually impersonates women, and builds his avatars to be apparently naive and practically cunning. “*Why are you doing that?*” asks <cheViva>. “*Because he’s preparing to be gay!*” interferes <titanus_9>. “*NO WAY! But, you know very well everybody is helping dames*”, answers <addablo>. “*It’s so funny to trick people into giving you skill books, money, tools, weapons...And then to kick their asses!*” Then, <masquerade> offers her example of her avatars’ appearance in *MU Online*, which is always redheaded (like she really is), wears sexy biker clothes (as she does, again) etc. “*Oh, we all understand now that you’re a schizo*”, answers <CatatonickName>. “*Define schizophrenic*” tries <cheViva> to mediate the emerging conflict. “*When you have two personalities inside, and you desperately try to ride on both*”, answers <addablo>. “*Then you’re the most schizo from all of us*”, says <masquerade>. “*Or the biggest crook!*” points <titanus_9>. Collective laughter. Then, <cheViva> tries to enlighten the crowd: “*It’s not about how you look, it’s more about your character and personality!*” “*Ok, but if I like to choose especially killers, how can it be about my real personality?*” argues <bob_wrestler>. “*Maybe you would like to be a killer in real life, who knows? Maybe you live in denial!*” attacks <CatatonickName>. “*Are you often dreaming to kill me, dear?*” asks <addablo>. “*LOL! I don’t need to dream about it, I kill you everyday!*” <bob_wrestler> defends himself. “*So, let’s say that most of our avatars resemble only a little bit, or not at all with ourselves!*” concludes <masquerade>.

As planned before, <masquerade> tries to link the last topic with the “making friends” one, already anticipated by one of <titanus_9>’s interventions. “*Did any of you really make friends with unknown people inside the game?*” A bunch of stories and accidental anecdotic facts begins to flow. I select here the most significant ones for our exploratory purposes. <addablo>: “*I once made friends with a couple of Hungarian*

guys in Silkroad, and I still speak to them from time to time!” <masquerade>: “Are you sure that it’s about friendship, or they are only friendly game companions?” <addablo>: “Hard to say! It’s difficult to find Hungarian people of my age on an MMO, and it’s better, because you can switch the language. And feel comfortable. But I didn’t hang out with them, as they are not from Cluj...” “Maybe they are some pedophile bastards!” comments <bob_wrestler>. “Define friend!” urges <masquerade>. <addablo> “A person you like to be with, to talk with, who helps you in the game and in real life”. <CatatonickName> intervenes: “I made a friend in Warcraft3, and I was surprised he was from here, and then we continued to communicate on messenger. And after a while we even went to a concert together, he’s a rock fan”. “Thus, it seems to be not only about helping each other into the game, but about sharing preferences, having the same tastes” comments <cheViva>. “Yeah, but if I find a helping nice guy inside a game, it’s cooler if he is a foreigner” says <titanus_9>. “I once made a friend who lives in Dublin; I just don’t remember what game I was playing. And he still sends me funny links from YouTube, and music and so on”, remembers <CatatonickName>. “I even got engaged with a girl from Argentina, in a MMO. But I was only eleven...” “Are all of these really friendship relationships?” <masquerade> insists. No clear conclusion on this point.

Act Two: The film experience. Why watch an RPG based movie?

The second online conference took place several days later (18.07.2008) and had the same composition of participants. The questions were, this time, stricter, even if the participants were still free to improvise or to make fun of each other. First, we had to find out if our subjects had seen movies inspired or based on RPGs. Obviously, they had, even if: “Most of the movies are not really inspired by RPGs, but based on other kind of games, fighting games like Mortal Kombat, shooters adventures like Tomb Raider, survival horror like Resident Evil” .

For methodological reasons, we previously decided not to allow ourselves to be trapped in such complex debate about the subdivisions of videogames classifications, so <cheViva> strategically suggests: “Let’s not limit ourselves strictly to the true and absolute RPG’s; otherwise we’ll have only the Dungeons & Dragons in our minds” “Then, what kind of movies are we talking about?” asks <CatatonickName>. “Movies based on video games which offer at least some elements of role-playing. Even first person shooters, I would suggest. Is it possible?” asks <masquerade>. “Possible all right, but not entirely correct. Seems too large, in a way” says <titanus_9>. “It’s a working concept”, explains <cheViva>. “A WHAT?! Never mind, we agree!” concludes <bob_wrestler>. The movies that were considered were, in this session, the *Mortal Kombat* series (<bob_wrestler>), *Resident Evil* (<masquerade>), *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, *Final Fantasy VII: Last Order*, *Final Fantasy Unlimited* (<CatatonickName>), *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (<cheViva> & <addablo>), *Dungeons and Dragons* (<titanus_9>, <addablo>, <CatatonickName>).

The first question was if the production of a movie based on a video-game seems logical and needed, from their point of view. “Yes, because the majority of the producers lack imagination, and then they have to borrow from others”, answered <addablo>. “It’s not that, it’s about a product that has to extend. You have a good product, the game, and you make a sub-product, the movie!” <titanus_9> ironically comments. “As in McDonalds’, when they make toys from cartoon characters. Only backwards”, adds <addablo>. “Aren’t you all a little bit hypocritical? I bet you all die to see, let’s say, the Prince of Persia movie, announced for 2009!” <masquerade> frontally attacks. “Yeah, right, and we all saw all of the movies we are speaking about... Still, I would not really die to see any of them again, now that I have seen them” <titanus_9> defensively intervenes. “Why, do they look stupid, do they look bad, unsatisfactory when compared to the game?” <cheViva> asks abruptly. And thus, we enter the next topic, related to the quality of the movies. “I really enjoyed the Final Fantasy VII movies. Maybe as much as the game” says <CatatonickName>; “But, on the other hand, it’s probably because they are cartoons, I mean animes, they are not with actors” ... “Usually, I feel completely frustrated, after seeing one of them. Something is missing”, answers <titanus_9>. “Well, what’s missing? Is it the story, is it the set, or the poor special effects?” insists <cheViva>. <titanus_9>: “A little bit of all. Maybe, I feel like I miss action?!” “There’s enough action in Tomb Raider. And enough special effects, on computer, in Resident Evil. Maybe too much” <masquerade> strikes again. “I can still watch Mortal Kombat, even if the sets and the effects feel old. But I can still have the same joy when I see them fight, especially Raiden, or Liu Kang” <bob_wrestler> counterattacks. “Yeah, and the next two days we have all to play Mortal Kombat again” <titanus_9> teases. “I also like to see Dungeons and Dragons, even if the effects are dicky. But, still, it’s nice” says <addablo>. “Maybe because you feel like a child again, you are remembering. But, then, you didn’t clear the frustration mystery” insists, once more, <cheViva>. <masquerade> tries to become personal “I disliked, for example, the actors and their performances in Resident Evil, but the story, as re-written for the film, seemed ok. Instead, I really liked the actors and the set design in Lara Croft. It looked rather satisfactory”. “Well, I’ll say that when they are with real actors they look somehow unsatisfactory. Better when animated” answers <CatatonickName>. A big and collective “NOO!”, “Stupid”, “NO WAY!” even a “YOU MISSED THE POINT HERE!”

“Then, what? What’s missing?” <cheViva> again. “Being there! The possibilities” answers <titanus_9>. “Define being there” urges <masquerade>. “I said action, I said action!” <bob_wrestler> rushes in. “You may be right, you know” says <CatatonickName>. “So I have to understand that the fact you cannot be there, on the screen, is somehow frustrating?” “Yeah, in a way. I do not want to see myself on the screen, I think. But it’s so much better when you actually play it, than when you see it” concludes <titanus_9>.

“Then, why go to the cinema hall? If you feel frustrated and you know it from the beginning, why spend the money?” <masquerade> stubbornly attacks. “Well, It’s fun. And it makes you curious to see what they managed to do with the game” answers

<addablo>. Then, he adds: “*And you are curious to see the spaces, the sets and so on*”. “*And now they are big, and the characters are real people, actors*” says <bob_wrestler>. “*Famous actors, you mean. If you see your avatar, you like to imagine yourself as Daniel Craig*” <masquerade> tries to go deeper. “*I don’t know. It’s possible*” <addablo> tries to back out. “*It’s more probable that you (masquerade, N.A.) are imagining yourself as the jolly Jolly*”, <CatatonickName> counter attacks. Big and collective laughter. “*I can bet on that*” intervenes <cheViva>. And, after a while, he tries to sum it up: “*After all, it’s not a complete pleasure. Or entertainment, or whatever. So why are we still seeing such movies?*” “*Because they are beautiful?! And I have to go to the mall, see some movies, to make mother happy?!*” <titanus_9> tries to find a conclusion. “*Yeah! And it’s better to see them than other comedy crap. At least, it’s something you are interested in. Something you have been into. You know what it is about*” adds <CatatonickName>.

THE EXPERIENCING VALUE AND THE SYMBOLIC RECOVERY

The **experiencing value** seems to be, in our global era, the engine for an enormous quantity of social practices, urban rituals and cultural products. Not only the overwhelming industry of tourism is founded on this value, but also a good part of secular ceremonials - from the political parades to carnivals and reality shows. The experiencing value articulates its own constellation of attitudes, spaces, current activities and symbolic images that, at the end, can be meaningfully translated only by “*I’ve been there*” or “*I’ve done/practiced that*”.

Even if, most of the time, it associates with or is contaminated by other kind of traditional values, the experiencing value is fundamentally an independent one, and, most importantly, it is completely neutral to moral, religious or even aesthetical significance, for which cultural products used to work as common vehicles. “*You have to experience*” (this or that) is not only a frequent advertising slogan; we can understand it as a relevant symptom for a profound mutation of the social and individual axiological system.

When asked what is missing from a film that re-enacts a video-game, the group of teenagers we investigated seemed to agree that, at the end, they long for “*Being there! The possibilities*”.... And thus, they pointed to the symptom. The film’s universe offers, after all, a linear and determined type of experience, the interpreting-identifying-configuring one. We have to admit, if compared to the opulence of variables of the game’s universe, this kind of limitation has to be a frustrating one. The importance of the experiencing value tends to exceed – more and more – the traditional values; in a way, some of them became secondary or even subordinate to it. The symbolic universe, in its lacanian definition (Lacan, 1991), with all its mythological configurations, seems to be swallowed by the experiencing hunger, while the deterministic/spiritual super-ego loses its central position. In this respect, the question: “*what makes people buy a ticket to see a RPG-based movie?*” seems to function as an equivalent for: “*why turn back from the most common cultural vehicle for the experiencing value – the video game – to the (now) classical audience position?*”

The user/gamer perceives the computer program, hidden behind the game, as a set of rules and technologies totally immune to ideological, moral or religious significance; and thus, lacking authority on the super-ego level. Thus, the computer program is, for the gamer, a rather protective medium, the main characteristics of which are coherence, configurative capacity and functionality. In his representation sphere, the user conducts and controls his immersion by extracting and stocking the climax moments of each level of the game, depending on their capacity to offer a maximal experiencing satisfaction – both cognitive and emotional. No responsibility, no parental or religious authority is allowed to govern here, the ethical or aesthetical preconceptions less than everything else. “*Fate is never final*” became a metaphor for an entire class of cultural concepts, whose significant –signified unity is irreversibly separated from any analogical-objective reference. The situation, the axiomatic line of dialog, the climax moment, reunited all in one action, turn into an operational matrix, based on mental and emotional shortcuts, similar to the notion of “*conchetto*”³ in Italian-“manierismus”. In other words, they turn into sign/signal operational forms, stored into a vocabulary, and using a specific perceptive “grammar” for each and every player-gamer.

The obsession of contemporary film producers with using video-games (especially RPGs) as supports for their fictional constructions was interpreted – with good reasons – as a sub-species of the larger phenomenon of the (so called) second-hand mythologies, for popular culture use. Most of these cultural products are directly dedicated to young people, and reenact fictional universes borrowed from comic books, cartoons and Sci-Fi, horror or fantasy novels. We are all easily tempted to assimilate, in the same category, successful comic book transpositions - like *Batman*, *Spiderman* or *X-Men*, ample epic fantasies - like *Lord of the Rings* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and video-game based screen constructions - like *Doom* or *Resident Evil*. Obviously, the regularity and the coherence of the “*weltanschauung*” which underlies and legitimises this deployment of film production make the perception of the operating differences really difficult. The market demands and the targeted audiences for both seem, if not similar, at least comparable. On the other hand, the processes of transposition from one class of cultural product to another are, we have to admit, completely different: bringing a book, or even a comic book, to the screen implies another type of rhetorical procedures than transforming a video-game into a film. In fact, even the supposition that the audiences of the first two categories and the audience of game-based movies are similar seems, in this respect, weakened.

³ See Hocke, Gustav Rene, *The World as Labyrinth – Manners and Mania in European Art*, Rowohlt 1957, and *Mannerism in Literature*, Rowohlt 1959, Romanian versions: *Lumea ca labirint*, București, Editura Meridiane, 1973, *Manierismul în artă și literatură*, București, Editura Univers, 1977

The transfer from comic book to film (with actors or animated) is based, from the audience’s point of view, on the mediated browsing of the reading processes (configurative-interpretation). Video-game filmic transposition, instead, has to re-mediate what was already re-mediated, and in this process they are constrained to exclude the experiencing/playing in itself. The vivid core of the gamer/player’s motivation – being there, doing that, controlling the liminal “in between” status of his real and fictional identities – cannot be achieved⁴. In other words, the experiencing value cannot be compensated by or exchanged with any symbolical transfer. In exchange, it completely substitutes the (religious and secular) free will value, with all its moral implications: apparently, “being” there and “doing” this or that refuse to implicate practical - and final – consequences.

So, how do we explain the box-office success of such productions? Our research doesn’t completely elucidate this mystery, but, at least, it leaves room for a working hypothesis. And the hypothesis was born, somehow, from one of the conference’s interventions. I quote:

“It’s not that, it’s about a product that has to extend. You have a good product, the game, and you make a sub-product, the movie!” (...) “As in McDonalds’, when they make toys from cartoon characters. Only backwards”.

Maybe we have to do, here, with a (typically postmodern) process of re-mediation which aims to inscribe a cultural practice on the axiological scale of another – more traditional and, thus, more legitimate – cultural practice. The process seems, in a way, homologous with that of movie novelisation. It could be, somehow, a social taming (as in the French “*apprivoiser*”) of the experiencing value, on the symbolic traditional-value level. This kind of detour could ennoble the experiencing value – the cognition-emotional processes of game-performing included – and re-position it into the “establishment” of patrimonial cultural exchanges. From this perspective, the film is, once more, a symbolic simulacrum. But, this time, it doesn’t only simulate a mimicked reality, or build a parallel/fictional universe. It has the almost impossible task to fix (and symbolically transfer) the ergodic force: immortal as a human concept, fate comes back, and is final.

I do not believe that such a transfer can be more than a temporary sidestep. It very much resembles to the habit of young students’ to replace the reading of a novel with the –much more comfortable – film watching, when the novel has been filmed. The gamer accepts himself as a spectator, as much as going to movies is a legitimated social practice, related to entertainment and leisure. At least, he can agree on the aesthetical pleasure – whatever that means.

“Because they are beautiful?! And I have to go to the mall, see some movies, to make mother happy?!”

⁴ See, on this topic, an interesting case study in Lay, Samantha, ‘Audiences Across the Divide: Game to Film Adaptation and the Case of Resident Evil’, in *Particip@tions* Volume 4, Issue 2 (November 2007)

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BEATING THE HELL OUT OF SADO-MASOCHISM? TOWARDS A CINEMA OF THE OPPRESSED THROUGH MICHAEL HANEKE'S FUNNY GAMES

MIHAI GĂDĂLEAN

ABSTRACT. Transylvania may be an extreme place. Maybe that's why Cluj-Napoca annually hosts an International Film Festival that brings into the attention of the public many (and I mean *many!*) films that may be considered extreme – or at least provocative, in one way or another. For example, one year, there was a „focus” section dedicated to Haneke. Another, it was Roy Andersson. In 2007, the festival opened with Cristian Mungiu's „4 luni, 3 săptămîni și 2 zile” („4 weeks, 3 months and 2 days”). Last year, it was again Haneke's turn. His „Funny Games (U.S.)”, projected as the first movie of the Transylvania International Film Festival (TIFF), had such an effect that many viewers, from the biggest movie buffs to plain curious „tourists”, refused to watch it and left the Republica theatre before the movie was over.

So, while Transylvania may indeed be a place of extremes, its inhabitants seem to be quite balanced people.

But is it really a question of balance with Haneke's viewers and non-viewers? What seems to have bothered most of the latter is the directors' apparent superiority in his „relationship” to them. Some friends of mine, really passionate about cinema and cinema studies, that have left the theatre then have later said that Haneke is a fraud and they couldn't stand to be taken for fools any longer. They were particularly intrigued (and discontent) with the Brechtian „fourth-wall-breaking” of the lead character in „Funny Games U.S.” (and „Funny Games”, for that matter). More or less exactly, their reaction can be summed as: „Not only did Michael Haneke make abuse of violence, now he makes the criminal mind speak to me? Speak directly to me?”

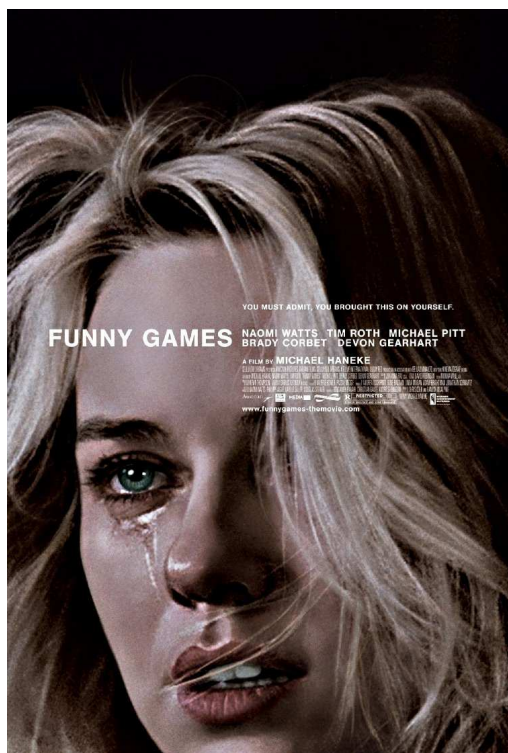
What Michael Haneke might reply to the revolted spectators is the classical annoying cliché line: „I was only trying to help!” Indeed, he might have a point. But does his method really succeed?

Keywords: theatre of the oppressed, sado-masochistic dynamic, spectatorship

Masochism and oppression

In the opening pages of his book, „The New-Brutality Film. Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema”, Paul Gormley speaks of a “fundamental dynamic of aggression and masochism between cinema and the viewer”. Then he asks the following question, in reference to a violent scene in Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*:

If repressive power is laid bare, what is the point of uncovering it? The film already assumes that this (sado-masochistic) dynamic is part of the viewer's knowledge. If this is the case, and the film is self-reflexively displaying this knowledge and playing on the viewer's knowledge, can we label the viewer's response to the scene as affective?



It is undeniable that, in “Funny Games”, the “repression” is “laid bare”. Or should one say “oppression”? Since the movie has oppressed characters (Anna, Georg and their son), oppressing characters (Haneke’s “apostles”, Paul and Peter) and, above all, oppressing acts, one couldn’t be more specific.

It’s to be noted that the oppressed characters may be included into the category of what John Langer, in his essay “Truly Awful News on Television”, named the “good victims”:

Their lack of importance, the inability to fight back, and the „style of the conflict” between the one that inspires sympathy and the bad character that causes trouble are all aspects that contribute to the creation of a good victim. The contexts that produce victims must be understood as being unexpected and of such “magnitude” as to “evoke disaster”.¹

Furthermore, Langer also explains the relationship that is created between the spectator and the victims that the news he watches are built upon:

When it constructs good victims, the news must provide for the reader not only the position of a simple spectator, but also the possibility of involvement. A good victim is first of all a person / a character for which we can feel compassion or we can identify with. The process that generates compassion demands that the news include, in a very short time, a means by which the viewer may establish a relationship with the individual(s) involved in that respective event.²

¹ Langer, John, “Truly Awful News on Television” in Dahlgren, Peter, Sparks, Colin, “Journalism and Popular Culture”, Polirom, Iași, 2004, p. 127 (re-translated from Romanian by the author);

² *Id.*

This identification with the “good victims” would have been a sufficient condition to assert, as in the case of a “plain” extreme scene, that the viewers too become oppressed “characters”, in a way. But, while Paul Gormley suggests that “the film already assumes that this (sado-masochistic) dynamic is part of the viewer’s knowledge”, is this also true for the viewer? Is the film spectator aware that, while affected by the things he sees on screen, he is also oppressed?

Haneke seems to suggest that no, the viewer is not aware of this identification with the “good victims”. Therefore, in what seems to be a Freudian impulse, he sees this masochistic submission to the sadistic “news system” as a condition that he, as a director, must... direct towards healing. He does this by breaking the fourth wall in front of which the spectator masochistically sits and bears with his tribulations, in other words by trying to beat the hell out of this almost traditional sado-masochistic mediatic / cinematic dynamic.

This attitude towards the spectator – one may call it a responsible attitude of the creator towards the audience his work arrives at – is no more, no less than what pushed famous theatrical and political figure Augusto Boal into conceiving the “Theatre of the Oppressed” movement, back in the 1970s, and the subsequent branches later on (the Forum Theatre, the Image Theatre, the Invisible Theatre, the Newspaper Theatre and the Legislative Theatre).

In the “Theatre of the Oppressed” Declaration of Principles, it is stated that

*The **oppressed** are those individuals or groups who are socially, culturally, politically, economically, racially, sexually, or in any other way deprived of their right to **Dialogue** or in any way impaired to exercise this right.*³

Having this in mind, is it not plausible that Michael Haneke sees his viewers – and *all* viewers, for that matter – as oppressed individuals in their position as spectators, impaired to dialogue with the oppressing form of cinema? Film theorists have stated the “monologue”-like quality of the filmic projection in its relation to its viewers ever since psychoanalysis became a concept that explained all that was un-explainable before. But the monologue constitutes itself into a relation of power, as simple as the basic communication scheme: while the source of the message is active and persuasive, the receiver is passive and unable to interfere with the message (the most he can do is to refuse to receive it – and leave the cinema hall, for instance).

So Haneke turns himself into a doer of justice. He, as Augusto Boal in theatre, seems to think that the artistic act is also social, since the preoccupation for the “social” effects is ultimately absent in the (non-artistic) media. Remember “Benny’s Video”? It’s nothing else than a meditation on the effects of media on the human

³ Principle 10 in the “Theatre of the Oppressed Declaration of Principles”, see <http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org/en/index.php?useFlash=0>

spectator, just as “Der Siebente Kontinent” – the first part of Haneke’s “Vergletscherungs-Trilogie” (“glaciation trilogy”) – is a disturbing meditation on contemporary loneliness and alienation. The director himself acknowledges that his films are deeply socio-political and aimed at “awakening” the viewers. Just like a Boalian principle of the Theatre of the Oppressed, he once said:

My films are intended as polemical statements against the American 'barrel down' cinema and its dis-empowerment of the spectator. They are an appeal for a cinema of insistent questions instead of false (because too quick) answers, for clarifying distance in place of violating closeness, for provocation and dialogue instead of consumption and consensus.⁴

You’ve all noticed the same propensity towards dialogue as Boal’s. Thus, through “Funny Games” he does more than just... meditate. He acts. While Boal stated that “every human being is theatre”⁵, Haneke confirms that he himself, as a director, is a “theatrical” person. And, in this quality, he takes the matter into his own hands. He takes action, in order for us, as spectators, to take action. Andrew J. Horton describes this in his article “De-icing the Emotions”, published in the Central Europe Review, in October 1998:

As the duo try to entertain us by playing their games with the family, Haneke plays games with us in order to awaken us to the senselessness of the increasing lust audiences have for blood on the cinema screens. He builds up tension and then destroys it. He gives us what we want and then takes it away. He pulls us out of our comfortable cinema seats and forces us to recognise our role as protagonists in the film and de facto initiators of the bloodshed. The ultimate object is to restore to violence its real properties, as opposed to its cinematic ones, and to faithfully represent the very real suffering and distress that actual violence causes.⁶

This can also be an answer to those that wonder “why” did the two youngsters, Paul and Peter, insinuate themselves in the lives of the beautiful three-member family and aggress / oppress each of them. Many of Haneke’s viewers try to find a reason for the violence - and for them, the same John Langer seems to have an answer, too:

In order to efficiently guarantee the victim status, one insists on the way in which the normal course of events is destroyed by an interruption apparently beyond any individual’s or any community’s control.⁷

⁴ From Michael Haneke’s “Film as Catharsis”, according to

<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/haneke.html>

⁵ Principle 3 in the “Theatre of the Oppressed Declaration of Principles”, see above

⁶ <http://www.ce-review.org/kinoeye/kinoeye5old.html>

⁷ Langer John, id., p. 129

The Games and All...

Making abstraction of the games that Peter and Paul play with the characters, let's focus on those they play with the spectator.

As all games begin, there's first of all a call for playing. This happens after the killing of the family dog and the beginning of the hot/cold game that Paul plays. At that moment, he winks to the camera. By this, he tries to make the spectator his accomplice. But the viewer barely begins to acknowledge that he might become a participant in these games and the ones that would follow (the most important being the "bet" as to whether the family is still going to be alive or not), and through this incipient acknowledgement "Funny Games" starts to look like Boal's "Forum Theatre". In an attempt to define the "Forum Theatre", Boal compares this to another technique he mastered, that of the "Invisible Theatre".

In the invisible theatre, the spectator becomes a protagonist of the action without being aware of it. He is the protagonist of the reality he sees, since he ignores the fact that its origin is fictional. That's why it is indispensable to move further, to proceed in such manner that the spectator take part into a dramatic action with utter awareness and responsibility.⁸

In all of the two golf-players following games with the spectator, this intentionality seems to float underneath the messages themselves. Actually, the resemblance between Haneke and Boal's ways of thinking is striking if one takes into account the dialogue between Paul and Peter, approaching the "feature-film length". More or less exact, here's how it sounds:

- *The fiction is real!*
- *Why?*
- *You see it in the movies, right?*
- *Of course.*
- *Therefore, it is as real as the reality you see otherwise, right?*

The title of the film, „Funny Games”, also connects Haneke and Boal, since the „Theatre of the Oppressed” is mainly based on what he calls game-performances or game-shows. „The spectacle is an artistic game between the artists and the spectators”, he adds.

But it is exactly here where the difference is and maybe where Haneke's failure shows itself. The rules of Boal's game-performances state that, after the conventional representation of the spectacle, the viewers are to be asked if they agree with the solutions suggested by the protagonist and the actors will perform their performance again and again until the spectators are satisfied. With Haneke, the viewers don't have this option. The movie can't be modified after its release. The viewer is left with the unsatisfied possibility to have modified it, but the fact that this possibility is never achieved only makes Haneke a teaser. Thus, while failing to become a „director of the oppressed”, he and his films risk of becoming oppressors themselves.

⁸ Boal, Augusto, "Games for Actors and Non-Actors. Theatre of the Oppressed in Practice", Fundația Concept, București, 2005, p. 24

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MODELLING COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

MIHAI PEDESTRU

ABSTRACT. We assume the enunciation is the basic element of communication. If, with respect to the verbal discourse, we are able to impose, in order to facilitate interpretation, an analogy between enunciation and sentence, with respect to the media discourse such an approach is not only impossible; it is also useless. An important mutation generated by the modern media and the *New Media* in the field of communication interpretation is the change of perspective with reference to the moment when meaning is produced. In 1988, speaking about television, but the asserts stays valid for *Media 2.0*, too, the American theoriser John Fiske (1988) observed that “Text as meaning is produced at the moment of reading, and not at the moment of writing, and it takes away from that text the status of being the originator of that meaning.” (p. 305). In the previous sections, we were examining the fact that, in the *Web 2.0* media products, communication is built on a multilayer discourse, only apparently unidirectional. We think that, because of the production of meaning at the moment of reading and because of the fact that the reading of the *Web 2.0* media product engages the reception, if not simultaneous, at least successive of the previous feed-back, this type of discourse is in a permanent fractal, unforeseeable and only tangentially controllable mutation. The constituent enunciations, whether textual or contextual, visual, audio, linguistic or any other form allowed by the medium, are reorganised and restructured incessantly, irrespective of the initial author of the text. We will attempt to synthesise below the most interesting communication models theorised until recently and examine to what extent they manage to define digital communication on *Web 2.0* platforms.

Keywords: *Communication, Spectatorship, New Media, Non-linearity*

The communication process has been accompanying and structuring the human society since its early stages. Whether to transmit cultural information, life experiences or to balance the rapports within a group, people have turned to this process and created technical means that should facilitate it and make it transcend the physical limitations of the individual and of his or her material sphere. Therefore, the communication process evolved parallel to the evolution of the society, respectively to that of the material supports that such society generated for it.

The human beings' need to communicate is constant historically, but the mutations in their life style, emerging along with the industrial society and more and more visible along with the development of the corporatist society, have increasingly limited their field of action, their social sphere. The 1970s men found

themselves isolated in their “cubicles”, under the pressure of an increasing work schedule and finding it mandatory to communicate in a formalised way, under strictly controlled circumstances.

For such an individual, the sudden development of the electronic means of communication equals an outstanding outlet. Suddenly, from the tight sphere inside which society isolated them, the individuals find themselves linked to the world, by means of a screen and a keyboard, having the possibility to share their thoughts and express their repressed social sensitivity. In the manner observed by Marshall McLuhan (1964), the technological media have become extensions of man (p.45-52).

The means of communication evolved exponentially, starting with the second half of the 20th century, arriving, nowadays, at exceptionally complex, interactive supports, which constitute something similar to a “supraindividual brain” in which the information and meaning exchange is performed almost instantly, as anticipated by McLuhan (1964):

Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man – the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media. (p. 1)

This study will examine and outline the changes that such rapid development of the media stimulated in the structure and functionality of communication.

Our opening assumption, which we want to confirm, is that, along with the emergence of the *Web 2.0* platforms and directly linked to it, the communication process starts attaining new features that one cannot arrange in a linear manner. We will assess comparatively the main attempts at configuring the communication process.

Essentially, communication is an exchange of information between two or more partners, mediated by a shared list of signs and organised according to a set of rules known and acknowledged by all the participants in the process.

For a basic definition of the communication process, we will adhere to Paul Watzlawick’s principles (1967), describing it by five axioms that we find remarkably relevant:

1. **One cannot not communicate:** any behaviour is a form of communication. This perspective is the basis of Barlund’s communicational model, which we will describe in a subsequent section.

2. **Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect, so that the latter classifies the former:** therefore, any communication incorporates simultaneously an aspect of meta-communication.

3. **The nature of a relationship is dependent on the punctuation of the partners’ communication:** this axiom emphasises, despite its rather vague enunciation, that the communication process is an unbroken one, displaying non-linear causality, and that the relationship between the partners is structured depending on the manner in which each of them understands such causality.

4. **Human communication is concurrently analogue and digital:** considering Griffin's reading (1997, p.170) of Watzlawick's axioms, digital communication presents whilst analogue communication represents. Therefore, the communication process integrates both elements.

5. **Communication is either symmetric or complementary:** this axiom asserts the dependence of the communication process on the individual communicator's relationships status. Between equals, communication is symmetric; if the partners are not equal, it is complementary. By disjoining the two types of communication, the axiom asserts the impossibility of an efficient communication in a situation of accumulation of statuses.

We assume the enunciation is the basic element of communication. If, with respect to the verbal discourse, we are able to impose, in order to facilitate interpretation, an analogy between enunciation and sentence, with respect to the media discourse such an approach is not only impossible; it is also useless.

An important mutation generated by the modern media and the *New Media* in the field of communication interpretation is the change of perspective with reference to the moment when meaning is produced. In 1988, speaking about television, but the asserts stays valid for *Media 2.0*, too, the American theoriser John Fiske (1988) observed that "Text as meaning is produced at the moment of reading, and not at the moment of writing, and it takes away from that text the status of being the originator of that meaning." (p. 305).

In the previous sections, we were examining the fact that, in the *Web 2.0* media products, communication is built on a multilayer discourse, only apparently unidirectional. We think that, because of the production of meaning at the moment of reading and because of the fact that the reading of the *Web 2.0* media product engages the reception, if not simultaneous, at least successive of the previous feedback, this type of discourse is in a permanent fractal, unforeseeable and only tangentially controllable mutation. The constituent enunciations, whether textual or contextual, visual, audio, linguistic or any other form allowed by the medium, are reorganised and restructured incessantly, irrespective of the initial author of the text.

We will attempt to synthesise below the most interesting communication models theorised until recently and examine to what extent they manage to define digital communication on *Web 2.0* platforms.

2.2. *Linear models of communication*

2.2.1. *The Lasswell model*

The American political scientist Harold Lasswell introduces, in 1949, a simple model of communication, which, in fact, is the basis of the majority of the models developed subsequently. He states that any communication process may be described by a structure of the type:

Who (says) > What > (to) Whom > (in) What Channel > (with) What Effect

The main objection to this model, in the literature, is that it does not take into account the feed-back or the context. However, we may consider that the last element of the structure, i.e. the effect, circumscribes the feed-back, whereas the antepenultimate – the analysis of the channel of communication – although discreetly, also integrated an analysis of the context. Certainly, the pattern is a simplification for operational reasons, but it may constitute a solid basis for the analysis of communication.

2.2.2. *The Shannon-Weaver model*

This model, presented by Claude Shannon (1948) and made known by the mathematician Warren Weaver, is the first one to consider communication in the terms of a systemic process, the main elements of which are the information source, message, transmitter, channel and noise on it, receipt and, finally, receiver. The following diagram will provide a graphical perspective:

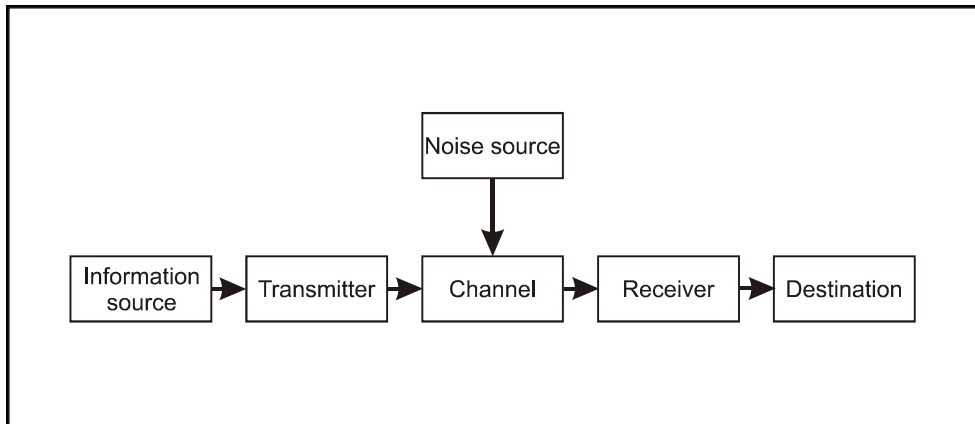


Figure 1. *the Shannon-Weaver communication model*

The information source selects the message, transmits it (1.) to the transmitter, who codifies it and emits (2.) a signal. The signal then travels along the channel, subject to interferences from the source of noise, in order to be received (3.) by the receiver, deciphered and then transmitted (4.) to the end destination.

With respect to interpersonal communication, the information source is the human brain, the transmitter is the speech organ, the source of noise is given by the noisy environment, the receiver is the destination's hearing organ, and the end destination is his or her brain.

Shifting this model to the level of the classical media communication, for instance, a newspaper, the information source is the journalist, the message is the article, the transmitter is the printing press, the source of noise may be formed by other articles on the same page or by the environment in which receipt takes place, the receiver is the reader's visual organ that sends the message decoded to his or her brain.

The Shannon-Weaver model simulates in a remarkably accurate manner the physical transfer of information, but its main deficiency is, perhaps precisely because of that, the disregard of the level of social structuring of the communication process.

2.2.3. Newcomb's model

Introduced in 1953, this model describes the communication process from the perspective of inter-relating the directions that communicators hold with reference to the object of communication.

Each participant in the process holds simultaneously a direction to their partner and to the object; therefore, communication, in Theodore Newcomb's approach, is, on the one hand, an instrument for one's positioning in the relationship with the world and, on the other hand, an instrument for preserving social balance.

Graphically, Newcomb's model is given by the following diagram:

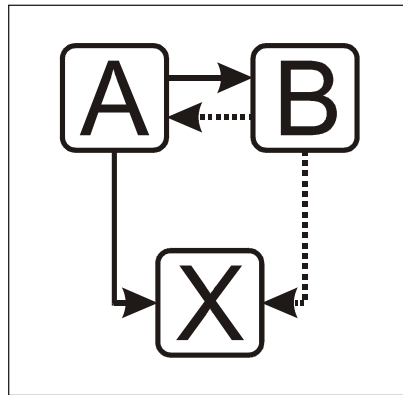


Figure 2. *Theodore Newcomb's communication model*

In the diagram above, A and B are communicators, individuals or groups of individuals, at the same time emitters and receivers, and X, the object of communication, is an element in their environment (an object, an activity, an event, etc.), to which each is positioned in a certain manner. The ABX triangle is a system, which means that the relationships between its elements are co-dependent. If the relation of A to X changes, the system will be balanced, either by changing the relationship of B to X, or by changing that of B to A.

In Newcomb's approach, A and B hold a natural propensity for balance (in fact, the author uses the term "symmetry") in the system. For instance, if A presents a positive attitude to B and a negative attitude to X, and B presents a positive attitude to X, then A will attempt to change either B's attitude to X, by information transfer, or their own attitude to B or to X. Thus, each communicator's actions are defined simultaneously by attitudes towards partner or object, as well as by the

understanding of the partner’s attitudes. Therefore, according to Newcomb’s model, communication is a constant game of prediction and balancing, the end goal of which is social existence.

2.2.4. Gerbner’s model

Introduced by George Gerbner in 1956, this model focuses on the dynamic and subjective nature of human communication, taking into account the factors that engage message mutations. In this model, the communication process displays two alternative dimensions, a perceptual dimension, including one’s relationship to an “event” and a communicative dimension, including one’s relationship to the representation produced of the event.

Since we deem the traditional graphical representation of Gerbner’s model as obscure and unreasonably difficult, we will restructure and extend it in the following diagram, in which we will also include the end receiver, in order to understand systemically the communication process, on the one hand, and in order to use this model for the generation of our own suggestion, on the other hand:

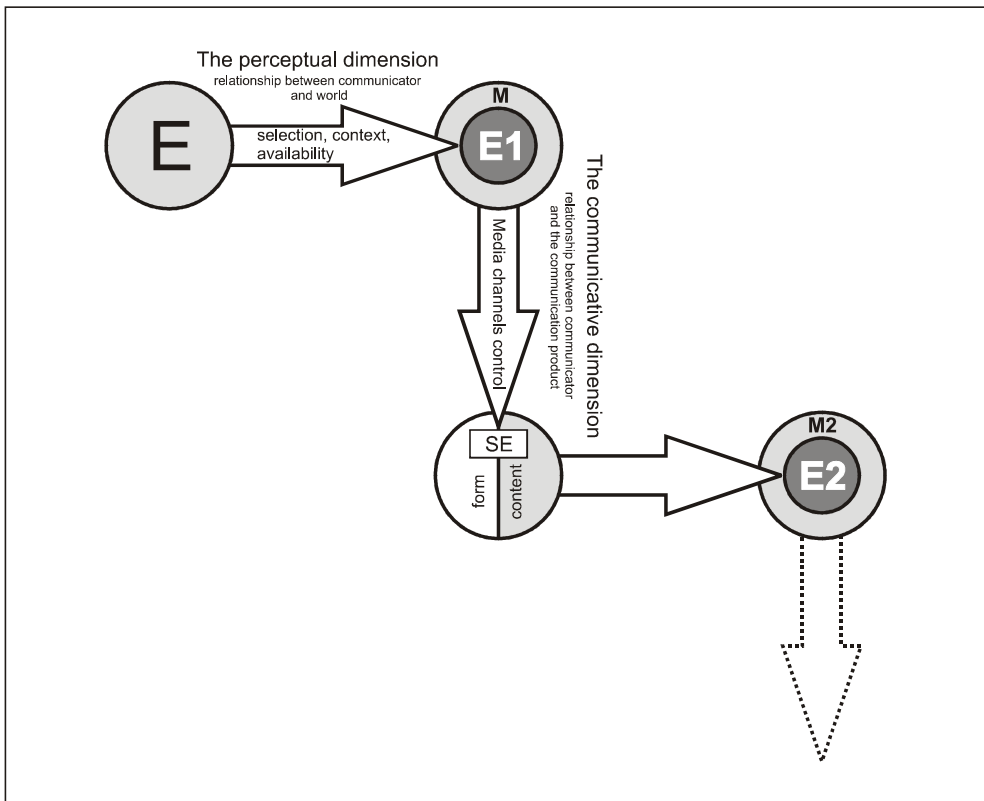


Figure 3. an extension of the diagram for Gerbner’s model

In the diagram above, E is an event occurring in the real world, and M is an individual perceiving it. E is perceived by M, not fully, but selectively, by a process of interpretation, defined by a set of factors internal to M, such as his attitudes, points of view, beliefs or life experience. Although Gerbner uses the term “event”, one must not comprehend it with its traditional meaning. It may be a real event, a situation or even an enunciation.

The perceptual dimension is impacted on by three factors:

a. **Selection** – as stated above, M does not take over E entirely. They select the aspects in which they are interested, depending on their own criteria, on their sphere of interests and, eventually, on their understanding possibilities.

b. **Context** – is that dimension rather easily neglected in the analysis of communication, pertaining to elements that are foreign both to E and to M, elements that are manifest on the moment of the perception.

c. **Availability** – the greater the number of events M contacts, the vaguer the perception. Conversely, the smaller the number of events, the more detailed the perception.

In Gerbner’s diagram, E1 is the product of M’s perception of E and may differ from the latter to various extents, depending on M’s perceptual competence.

With respect to the communicative dimension, we see that M becomes a source of information about E. It produces “an enunciation about E”, SE. In order to further convey this enunciation, M needs to select, from amongst the various channels of communication available, the one on which they exert maximum control and which is, simultaneously, the most efficient. Depending on the channel selected, and on their competences of using this channel, SE will display a binary nature: on the one hand, the contents E1, and on the other hand, a form, specific to the relevant channel.

Once disseminated, communicated and perceived by a third party, M2, SE becomes, for the latter, E2. Although, at the contents level, M transmits to M2 information about E, the real information reaching M2 passes through three independent filters: M’s perceptual filter, M’s communicational filter and M2’s perceptual filter.

2.3. The non-linear configuration of communication

The linear models, while of use in order to facilitate the understanding and analysis of the communication process, do not manage to meet satisfactorily the phenomenology of the globally networked communication, as they consider the phenomenon in a sequential manner. The contents of a *media 2.0* message are time-dynamic and complex. They do not just generate other events, as in Gerbner’s model, but they also hold the possibility of editing themselves, as a reaction to the feed-back received. In addition, the message is multilayered, made of numerous elements dependent or not on a primary transmitter.

Noting the inability of the linear models of systematising the psychological and cultural aspects of communication, different theorists have proceeded to developing approaches to remedy it.

The most interesting model of such type, with respect to our study, is *The Transactional Model*, suggested by Dean Barlund (1970), who sees the communication process as continuous, circular, non-repeatable, dynamic, irreversible, and complex, based on an infinite series of coding and decoding. The communicators, in the transactional model, transmit and receive messages simultaneously, having in view not only the exchange of information, but also the joint production of meaning.

Graphically, in the author's original representation, the model is below:

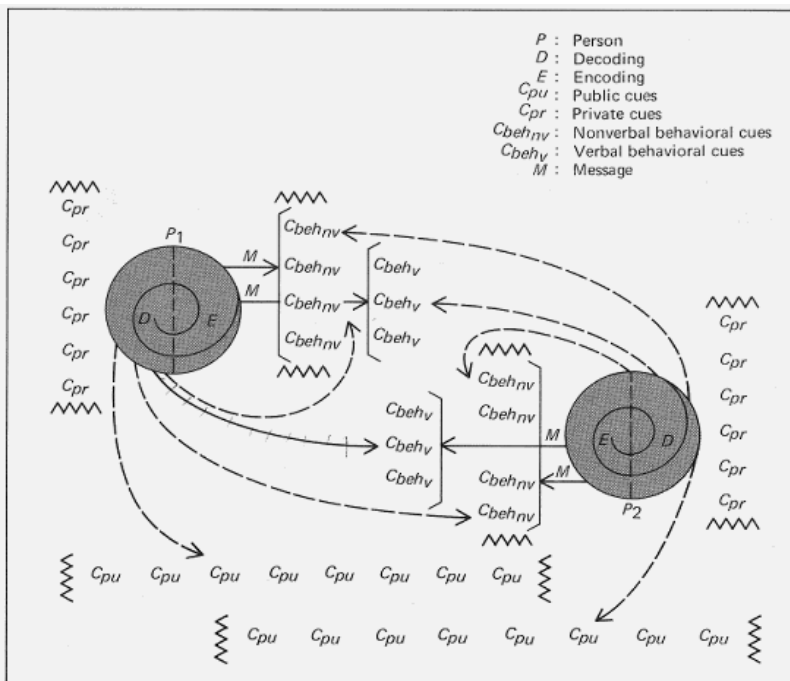


Figure 4. Barlund's transactional model

One of the main theses of the transactional theory postulates the independence of the communication process with respect to the communication intentionality. Any behaviour is a cue and has the possibility of generating meaning, therefore the partners no longer hold absolute control over when and what they communicate.

The main deficiency of the transactional model, which makes it impossible to apply in our field of interest, is given by the fact that communication is deemed as unrepeatable (the existence of cloned messages contradicts this assertion) and irreversible (as we said, products may be modified, updated and, thus, the receiver's perception of the message may be modified).

2.4. *Communicational interaction in Media 2.0*

In the following sections, we will try to outline the main features of the communicational interaction specific to *media 2.0* and to synthesise according to them a viable model suggestion. This approach will concern mainly the Youtube *content sharing* platform, and, in particular, those structures of video clips deriving one from the other, such as *Leave Britney Alone* or *Star Wars Kid*, occasionally named “Internet phenomena” or “Internet memes”, as we consider that they illustrate an exceptionally visible and analysable sample of *Media 2.0* system of communication.

2.4.1. *The meme*

In order to be able to model more coherently the phenomenon we intend to model, i.e. “Internet memes”, we need to define the meme and the manner in which it develops, in a memetic approach.

The meme is, in the meaning assigned by its creator, Richard Dawkins (2007), a discreet unit of cultural transmission, similar to the gene, holding cultural meaning, supraindividual, organic and independent in evolution (illustrations of memes could be given by the artistic or philosophic currents, abstract and universal notions, such as *freedom* or *property*, the heroic poems of antiquity or the proverbs). The authors applies to the cultural evolution the model of the Darwinian evolution, since the memes, in his opinion, are subject to a process of natural selection, based on genetics and variability. As “live organisms” under a process of natural selection, the memes also present genetics and variability, defining features of any evolving entity.

Starting from Dawkins’s definition, Marion Blute (2005) identifies two possible models of memetic circulation, applicable with reference to the cultural and social evolution:

a. **The genetic model:** this model focuses on the intentional nature of the memetic transmission, a vertical transmission, based on “instruction”, believed to be the only one able, on the one hand, to sustain the transmission of a large number of features and, on the other hand, to prevent the deterioration determined by variability.

b. **The viral model:** this model, the most appropriate for our subject matter, in our view, engages the horizontal transmission of the memes, based on contagion. Once produced, the meme turns into a “parasite” of the individual, developing increasingly efficient, the greater the number of the “infected” hosts is.

Although the *Internet memes* are considered memes, we find such classification to be rather frivolous. Even if they behave similarly from many points of view, it is obvious that we cannot view a structure including hundreds of derived contents and received and completed by tens of or hundreds of millions of individuals in the terms of a discreet structure or one holding a unified cultural meaning. However, the viral model of the memetic transmission does apply and, as such, we cannot remove it under any circumstance from the analysis. Instead, in order to name such

structures, we will use the term “cluster”, which we find to be the most appropriate, in a meaning tangential to that assigned by the computer science, i.e. group of interconnected elements, functionally similar, almost identical.

2.4.2. *Anatomy of a cluster*

On September 9th, 2007, Chris Crocker, a regular American adolescent, has launched on his personal page on the Myspace online social network, as well as on the Youtube content sharing network, an amateur video¹ in which, playing or not a part (it is impossible to tell and, in the end, it is utterly irrelevant), he is seen as an effeminate individual, deeply troubled emotionally, who, while crying, builds a childish defence for the American singer Britney Spears. During the first 24 hours from its posting, according to Wikipedia², Crocker’s clip gathered more than two million visualisations. Currently, in June 2009, the clip on Youtube gathered 26 million visualisations, 400,000 comments and generated no less than two thousand video responses, in the form of video clips reinterpreting it in a parody-like manner. Each of these reinterpretations, in their turn, generated a large number of comments and responses, in the range of thousands or tens of thousands.

Thus, the cluster “Leave Britney Alone” is made of the initial film, of its clones, as well as of the unquantifiable amount of the responses and of the responses to the responses that resulted and continue to result from this initial video clip. Each video response (SE, in the Gerbner model) takes from the original video (E) a set of signs (E1), depending on the author’s (M) filters, and adding others, random or not.

Therefore, the cluster holds as its defining and cohesive element this set of signs (mainly icons, following Peirce’s typology), which are transmitted in the community following the viral model of the memetic transmission.

By joining together the reception and the production of meaning, according to Fiske’s suggestion enounced previously and by considering Watzlawick’s second axiom, we believe that the meaning carried by the message, for each individual video, is constituted from the sum of the text (the video as such) and of the meta-text (the comments, mainly, but other meta-textual elements, too). Figure 7 provides a potential plotting of the meta-text associated to the E subject to reception:

¹ Crocker, Chris, *Leave Britney Alone!*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHmvkRoEowc>

² *Chris Crocker*, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Crocker_\(Internet_celebrity\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Crocker_(Internet_celebrity))>, (accessed on June 23rd, 2009)



Figure 5. the main meta-textual areas of a Youtube video

We observe the following zones:

1. **The zone of the auctorial meta-text:** represented by the comments selected by the author to accompany his products. These will provide an initial Barlundian clue.
2. **The zone of the meta-text of authorisation:** includes the number statistics of the previous receptions, providing the viewer with information on the number of individuals in the community who have viewed the video, the rating they gave to it, as well as the number of comments accompanying it. It is an unintentional form of feedback, helping the receiver in repositioning his or her video on a value range level.
3. **The zone of the connective meta-text:** includes hyper-textual links to other videos in the cluster, providing continuity to the reception.
4. **The feed-back zone:** includes the comments as such from the community with reference to or based on the video.

These four zones, together with the video, constitute the structural and functional unit of the cluster, which, for the purposes of clarification and by analogy, we will name *cell*. This unit is dynamic, transmitting with each reception a subtly deviated meaning.

Succinctly, the constituting elements of a cluster are:

- a. **The germ**, primary cell, from which the cluster starts developing.
- b. **The communicators**, community members actively involved in the communication process.

c. The meme, the shared and limited list of signs, the taking over and reorganisation of which provides the cluster with cohesion.

d. The attachment, the signs added by the communicators in the derived cells, which cannot be retrieved in the germ.

e. The cells, generated by the communicators based on the meme.

In what follows, we will try to describe each of these elements, applied on the *Leave Britney Alone!* example.

2.4.2.1. *The germ*

From amongst the millions of videos hosted on a network such as Youtube, only some manage to generate clusters. When attempting to identify the elements that convert a regular video in a germ, the first hypothesis we may claim, the most obvious one, is that selection is made depending on the contents and on the manner in which such contents “reach” the community. However, this hypothesis is not fully accurate.

In a recent study that models mathematically the cultural evolution, with reference to the evolution of the memes, the authors note:

“The manner in which the contents of the memes match the cognitive structure of the human mind is not the sole aspect central to the understanding of cultural evolution. [...] People tend to be extremely selective when choosing the persons from which they should learn or whom they should imitate. An individual’s talent, success or prestige increases considerably the chances of his being imitated or adopted as a model. Therefore, the strength of a meme will depend simultaneously on how attractive its contents are to the human brain and on the extent to which it boosts an individual’s chances to be chosen as a cultural model by its fellows.” (Henrich, Boyd & Richardson, 2008)

For the case analysed, what we believe determined the development of the video into a cluster is not in the contents of Chris Crocker’s verbal message, but in the presented character’s degree of maximum social undesirability. The community members, presenting a negative Newcombian orientation to X (in our case, the effeminate male) and assuming a similar orientation with respect to their partners, feel they are compelled to say something in order to confirm the system symmetry, and parody is the most efficient and basic means of doing it.

Thus, we think that, in order to become the germ of a parody cluster, a video must be negatively oriented to two partners seeking an equally positive orientation.

2.4.2.2. *The communicators*

Even if the members of the community are equal, from the perspective of their status in the system, we may be able to notice a series of roles that each of them may perform, even cumulatively, in the communication process:

- a. **primary producer of contents** – the one producing the germ;
- b. **secondary producer of contents** – those members producing videos derived from the germ;
- c. **participants** – those members who, even if they do not produce a derived video, contribute, by comments, to the meaning of a cell. Depending on the contents of the comments, they can be:

1. *interpretive*, whose comments interpret the message of the cell and generate an epistemological gain in the community (e.g. “This girl/boy is a psychopath. Plus this is the one of the most watched videos of youtube! You people are really messed up...³”);

2. *qualifying*, whose comments do not generate an epistemological gain (e.g. “wooooooooooww....” or “This is weird”);

3. *explanatory*, usually the contents producers intervening in the discussion in order to clarify certain aspects;

4. *responsive*, whose comments represent reactions to the contents (e.g. “Ok, I’ll leave Britney alone!”);

5. *phatic*, whose comments, although irrelevant with respect to the message, fulfil a social function (e.g. “Calm down, guys! No point starting a flame war”);

6. *trolls*, whose comments, often injurious and unjustified, merely stimulate reactions from the other participants (e.g. FUCK YOU!!! CUMGUZZLING FAGGOT ASS MOTHER FUCKER HOPE U DIE BY CHOKING ON A BIG DICK!!!).

d. **passive receivers** – those members who merely receive the cell, without putting in their own and direct contribution. Of course, their fingerprint will remain in the zone of the meta-text of authorisation. The passive receivers, depending on the role they fulfil in the memetic transmission, may be classified in:

1. *terminal receivers*, whose function in the system ceases once reception is completed;

2. *vector-receivers*, who, even if they choose not to contribute directly to the development of the cluster, transmit the link to a third party, drawing them in the network.

2.4.2.3. *The meme*

As we stated previously, the meme is the list of signs, originating in the germ and shared in the cluster. As this is a fuzzy set, we cannot identify precisely the number of signs constituting this list. At best, we may say that the presence of the meme in a cell contains the number of signs in the germ necessary to the perception of the cell as inscribed in the cluster of the relevant germ. However, for our example, we notice a potential typology of these signs:

a. verbal signs, signs taken from the discourse of the message in the germ video. For instance, when analysing the cell “Leave Chris Crocker Alone!”⁴, produced by Seth Green, we see that, although the object of the discourse is different, the structure “Leave X alone, he/she’s only human” is sufficient to integrate the cell in the cluster.

b. paralinguistic signs, signs pertaining to the vocal tone and timbre. For the cells derived from “Leave Britney Alone”, such signs are taken over very often.

³ The examples are taken from the comments to the cluster “Leave Britney Alone”

⁴ Green, Seth, *Leave Chris Crocker Alone!*, < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiqkDm9UoKo>>

c. **non-verbal signs**, which pertain to the visual background of the video. In Seth Green's cell, he uses the yellow background, the framing, the character's "stage" business and makeup.

2.4.2.4. *The attachment*

We notice that the attachment, the signs that the communicators choose to add in the cell they derive, come, mainly, from cultural references acknowledged as accessible to the community of communicators, originating in a well-established cultural setting (Darth Vader⁵, Michael Jackson⁶, Spongebob⁷ etc.). Such attachments set the clusters in a relationship to the noosphere, inter-textually and enrich them in a content-related approach, juggling meanings in an exceptionally captivating manner.

2.4.2.5. *The cells*

Within a cluster, the cells derived may approach different references to the germ, depending on the latter's content type and on the nature of the communicators' direction. Given the producer of the derived cell A, the germ X and the community B, we note the following possible situations:

a. **parody** – this is the main reference in clusters originating from germs towards which the partners' attitude is negative. Most of the cells originating in "Leave Britney Alone" indicate a parody-type referencing;

b. **mimetic** – if A's attitude to X is positive, A will also think that B's attitude to X is the same;

c. **agonistic** – if A's attitude to X is different from the manner in which the former perceives B's direction.

2.4.3. *Proposal of a network communication model*

By synthesising and corroborating our previous observations, we seek to identify a model that should mark efficiently and functionally the phenomenology explored. As we stated before, we do not consider that the linear models are adequate, whereas the existing non-linear ones are either unreasonably intricate (Becker's mosaic, for instance), or, despite appearances, they are still linear (Barlund's model).

The model that we submit attempts going beyond such limitations, by the representation of the communication process in the form of a network system. Certainly, this is not a universal model, since it is built on *Media 2.0.*, and, as such, its applicability is restricted to this new communicational phenomenology.

Since it is a dynamic model, the network model is difficult to represent in a diagram; however, figure 8 illustrates a depiction of the communication process in a cluster made of a germ (G), six partners (P1-P6) and three derived cells (C1-C3):

⁵ Lord Vader says "Leave everyone alone!", <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXnRinsccVg>>

⁶ Leave Michael Jackson Alone!, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Xmubtbvi6k>>

⁷ Leave Spongebob Alone, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5EpJuK91zE>>

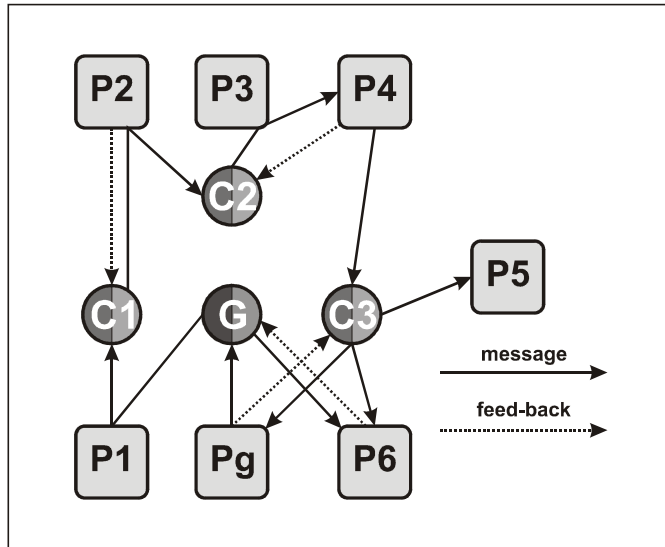


Figure 6. *topology of a cluster at a given moment*

In a first stage, from a certain reason, one of the network members (Pg), for instance one of the Youtube users, posts a video that, because of a certain set of factors, turns into a germ. The video is received by P1 who, because of his attitude to Pg or to the content of G, decides to create, as a response, a derived cell (C1). Simultaneously, P6 receives the same video, but decides not to construct a response, but to merely contribute with feed-back, (comments) to G. P2 receives C1, provides feed-back, but decides to create a derived cell, too, C2. P3 receives C2, but decides not to give direct feed-back. Instead, he uses the relay, the vector, transmitting to P4 the link to C2. P4 contributes with feed-back to C2 and creates, starting from it, the derived cell C3. P5 receives C3, but decides not to act. Pg, this time mere spectator of the cluster the origin of which he is, receives C3 and develops it with feed-back. P6, in his turn, receives C3, developed with Pg's feed-back and, using the meaning he has extracted from all the reception, contributes with feed-back to G. Because of the attachment we were mentioning, the cells are not strictly the product of the internal evolution, but also, to a great extent, a result of the partners' interaction with other clusters or with other linear-type systems.

Essentially, this communicational model describes the evolution circuit of signification in a network, depending on the decision to act or not to act that the participating nodes (the communicators, the network members) made with reference to the passive nodes (the cells), stores of signification. Since reception is multiple, repeated and made of a series of outcomes of previous receptions, the process does not hold actual conclusiveness.

For the example analysed above, “Leave Britney Alone”, the thousands of successive iteration do not illustrate any teleology. Certainly, taken individually, separated from the system, some of them serve the purpose of social critique, purely entertaining or argumentative. However, in a systemic approach, we may postulate that the purpose of this type of communication is communication itself, the participation in the network, as fulfilment of a necessity of integration in a group; a team game whose object is given by the breaking of signification, while the dominant function is the phatic one.

Despite its apparent complexity, this model could provide us with an interesting methodology of analysis of the current collective mindset, of its mechanisms, depending on the memes selected for the derivation of each cell, as well as on the decisions to act made with reference to the relevant cell.

Translated by Magda Crețu

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**ADAPTING SHAKESPEARE'S ADAPTATIONS
IMAGE, CONTENT AND NARRATIVE PROBLEMS
(AND SOLUTIONS) IN SHAKESPEARE'S ADAPTATIONS,
A STUDY CASE ON ROMEO AND JULIET**

DORU POP

ABSTRACT. Shakespeare is one of the most “adapted” classical authors, and the desire for adapting Shakespearean plays and plots seems to increase over time. From George Cukor, Franco Zeffirelli and Akira Kurosawa, to directors/writers like Baz Luhrmann and actors/directors like Lawrence Olivier or Kenneth Branagh, the temptation to adapt „Old Will” to new contexts has remained intact. Over the years more than 250 movies were made on Shakespearean sources. These movies were inspired, developed from, adapted from, transformed from or transcribed from the plays and ideas of the XVIth Century author. No production limits were given to the Bard, Hollywood expensive productions, BBC faithful series, independent cinematographers, Japanese and Thai filmmakers, Bollywood productions, a range of various genres from basic filmed stage representations, to complex television productions or film adaptations or animations and manga productions reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world the works of the most important drama writer of all times. In the past 200 years Shakespeare’s works were reworked in different mediums; they were transposed into poems, paintings, operas, and other melodramatic context, and now with the on-screen transcoding of his works the public has them more easily, the Shakespearean text being available to large publics and to new and challenging artistic contexts. A couple of questions come out of this: is the popularizing of the Great Will affecting the content of his plays? What is “truly” Shakespearean and what is just “like” Shakespeare or inspired by the Bard in these new versions? Some critics, like James Agee and Norman Berlin, have used methods of evaluating these problems according to degrees of fidelity and/or distortion of the text. How many lines were included, how faithful was the movie production to the original source in terms of textual fidelity is one way to see the adaptation process. Another would be to consider the fundamental question of fidelity in the general context of adapting Shakespeare’s works into movies.

Keywords: Shakespeare, movies, adaptations

Fidelity, the key problem to Shakespearean adaptation

Obviously, there are countless the problems of adaptation and particularly of Shakespearean adaptation, that are as wide as the range of approaches to the plays themselves, and thus are impossible to cover in a single paper. My approach is based on finding those elements of adaptation that are closely related to the

works of the playwright himself, and is concentrated on a single play: *Romeo and Juliet*. I consider that Shakespeare himself was dependent on adaptation processes and this play offers the best resources for such a work hypothesis.

My contention would not go as far as some critics like Warren Hope, Kim Holston (writers of *The Shakespeare Controversy*) suggested when they expressed doubts that „William Shakspere” was the real author of the plays. But, on the other hand, my argument is that Shakespeare, although the greatest dramatists of world literature, is not necessarily preoccupied by originality and fidelity himself. He borrowed his plots from multiple sources, reworked this material into multiple layered forms. As Stephen J. Lynch showed in his study on Shakespearean intertextuality, Shakespeare's plays emerge from raw materials like plot and character borrowed from other sources, in a dynamic way, and often his texts involve layers of subtextual and intertextual suggestions and assumptions. As Lynch proves is that Shakespeare does not simply borrow selectively from his sources but appropriates, reimagines, and reacts based upon these sources, sometimes by developing and expanding and in other circumstances by contracting and reducing the initial work.

In this respect I consider that the intertextual nature of the Shakespearean work is fundamentally connected with adaptation, as practice and theory. Following the terminology of Linda Hutcheon, there is enough proof to say that Shakespeare creates a “multilaminated” (Hutcheon, 21) narrative assembly, where he integrates recognisable elements from other works in order to obtain a new medium, a new form of expression. Bricollage, intertextuality, multiple usage of elements from other sources is a Shakespearean method. And, as Douglas Brode pinpointed very clearly this concept, when we compare the movie director and the writer we get the same fundamental approach to the source text. “The director perceived himself not as interpreter of Shakespeare, akin to a live-theater director, but as an auteur: the primary artist, freely adapting the play to his own medium, much as Shakespeare felt free to transform a preexisting Italian *novelle* into an Elizabethan play—taking from the tale what he needed, shaping it as he saw fit, and discarding all else” (Brode, 2001, p. 50).

Not matter what levels of appropriation we identify in the process of adaptation - for instance Andrew described a typology of adaptation based on the following triad: borrowing, intersection, transformation and for Linda Hutcheon there are three elements of adaptation, adaptations are recognizable transpositions of a given work or works, a creative and interpreting process by which a work is salvaged or appropriated, and an intertextual involvement with the original work – adaptation has a profound cultural role to play.

Following this line of thought and coupling it with one simple definition of cinema adaptation which entails any form of transformation occurring to a “source text” that is turned into a motion picture one can say that the process of adapting from literature to movie involves the textual transposition. At the other end of this argument is another perspective on adaptation, presented by Linda Hutcheon in her

book on the theory of adaptation/ Novelist John North, quoted by Hutcheon, suggests that any adaptation is a process of simplification, with “little tolerance of complexity. Later Hutcheon supports the idea that adaptation is a profoundly inherent process in the European culture, Shakespeare being one of the authors able to transfer cultural stories from “page to stage”, that is the derivative nature of art is one of the most important features of adaptation, but for Linda Hutcheon adaptation is a derivation object without being derivative work.

Two levels are important here, one is that of proximity and fidelity between the source and the secondary work and the second is the ability of the secondary author to produce a work that is aesthetically autonomous. Also there are two warning notes necessary here. In first parenthesis I must note the argument provided by Worthen, that Shakespearean drama is privileging *auteurs* (like Olivier, Welles, Kurosawa, Kozintsev, Branagh) who undertake seriously the “author-function” as “stand-ins for Shakespeare” (Worthen, 1997). Another element to be taken into consideration is the technical nature of the medium. Literary fiction and cinematic fiction are two fundamentally different artistic media. Fidelity to a literary source is hard to maintain when the fictional work is adapted to the screen (Gene D. Phillips, 1997, 151). The cinema director perceives himself as an “auteur”, a minor version of the Author, where the *auteur* makes a reading of the source text and approaches it with the critical eye of the interpreter.

Multiple derivates of the Text

It is widely accepted that Shakespeare's inspiration for Romeo and Juliet was the poem "The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet", written by Arthur Brooke. The complexity of the problem comes from the fact that, at its turn, the poem was a translation of an Italian story, first published by Matteo Bandello and that Matteo Bandello himself was retelling a popular story common in Medieval oral tradition, and thus the true love story of two real people living in Verona. So when we say that Shakespeare used Brooke's poem, we actually accept that he was inspired by Bandello, who took his idea from several stories in his culture, who were based on real life.

David P. Stone has traced several sources for the story of the Verona lovers, a story widely used in Elizabethan drama and literature. Bellforest's 'Histories Tragiques' had a version of the story as well as William Painter's 'Palace of Pleasure', and, according to the introduction Arthur Brooke wrote for his poem, there was a play on the subject. Most of the scholars agree that Shakespeare worked on Brooke's poem, written in 1562. The first version of the story appeared in Salernitano's 'II Novellino' in 1476. This version was about two clandestine lovers, a helping Friar, a killing that caused the young man's banishment, a rival suitor, a sleeping potion, the thwarted message, and the unhappy conclusion; but without any suicides. Later Luigi da Porto, in "Istoria novellamente ritrovata di dui Nobili Amanti", published about 1550, laid the scene in Verona and identified the

families as Montecchi and Capelletti. In da Porto's story we have the Friar named Lorenzo and the slain young man named Thebaldo Capelletti. Da Porto introduced into the story the ball, the balcony scene and the double deaths inside the catacomb. Also relevant is the fact that da Porto used the first the name Marcuccio. In da Porto's story Juliet committed suicide by holding her breath. Da Porto's tale circulated widely in Italy and France, but Mateo Bandello was the one who put the story into his "Novelle", published in 1554, making it famous by his clear story. Immediately after Bandello printed the story, the first adaptation was published, in 1559, by Peirre Boaisteau, and was included in Bellforest's 'Histories Tragique'. Boaisteau introduced into the story the relationship between Romeo and Rosaline and developed the moral dilemma of Juliet, when she learns of Tybalt's death at the hand of her husband. In 1567 Painter translated the version of Boaisteau and from here was derived Arthur Brooke's poem.

So, according to David Stone, we have multiple plot sources for Shakespeare's play: Salernitano, da Porto, Bandello, Boaisteau, Painter's translation and finally Brooke. Of these, Shakespeare used Brooke directly, but derived his work from all the series of adaptations made to the story. The Bard borrowed freely from Brooke, who himself had made use of the previous sources. The the question is how much of Romeo and Juliet belongs to „the Bard” and how much is it a part of Bandello's creative process or the literary sources in the folklore of the XVth Century?

This fluidity of sources and inspirations could allow us to say that Shakespeare was not concerned with narrative authority (and Authorship) issues and that one of the most important of Shakespeare's legacies in this respect is the integration of plots, names and actions freely into a single story without concerns about conformity. Still, the issue of fidelity is key to modern adaptation of the Shakespearean texts.

Bardolatry and the conservative limitations of cinematic adaptation

It is relevant that the first adaptation of a Shakespearean play was created, according to Brode (2001), and the first movie adaptation was in the silent era. The movie made by Georges Méliès after Romeo and Juliet is lost today, but another adaptation was made by the father of contemporary cinema, D. W. Griffith. In 1908 he re-made *The Taming of the Shrew*. Latter pre-recorded Shakespearean dialogue appeared in the movies in 1929, with Romeo and Juliet as a spearhead, featuring a traditional reconstruction of the balcony scene by Norma Shearer and John Gilbert.

As Howard Felperin indicated (1991) “bardolatry” (a term coined by Bernard Shaw) is still today a form of perverted reverence towards the original source of Shakespeare's plays. Coupled with what Daniel Rosenthal (2000) has identified as the limits of cinematographic representation, that is the compulsion for realism and realist transpositions, we obtain in the first attempts to translate Shakespeare into the new medium which is cinema (and television) a double negation of creativity. The idealization of the plays and their cultural role turned

into a worship of Shakespeare's every literary and aesthetic intention. Using the line of thought developed by Catherine Belsey (cited in Shaughnessy, 1998), who claims that the film medium is inherently conservative because the cinematic frame, like the nineteenth Century proscenium arch stage, reduces the multiplicity of potential meanings to a single, unified point of view which is imposed on the passive viewer, we have a couple of examples of Shakespearean film adaptations where this "classic realist" approach to the text generates a selective and limited significance to the source text. Cinema conveys meanings to an audience without involving any participation from these audiences.

When George Cukor made the first Hollywood adaptation of the great play in 1936, with a movie simply entitled „Romeo and Juliet" this was promoted as a grand-scale production following and the tradition of theatrical presentations of Shakespeare. One of the main problems of the movie was the casting. Norma Shearer and Leslie Howard, the main couple, were already old in 1936, when the adaptation was made Shearer was 34 years old and Howard was 43 years old (playing a Romeo and Juliet half their age). So, although the movie was nominated for 4 Academy Awards, it received none, and was also a financial flop, regardless the large sums of money MGM invested into this production – this costly production was to over 2 million dollars. The movie is boycotted from within by a certain respect for the literary „prestige" of the source text. With all the efforts to build a powerful scenery, most of the scenes, like the classical balcony scene, were constructed in a semi-modern style and the sets, costumes and music score (borrowing themes from Tchaikovsky) induced a certain „conventional" air to the picture. Another flaw of the movie is that Cukor's production was based on first-hand photographs of Italian Renaissance architecture and an entire Italian city was constructed on a Hollywood set, with huge financial expenses. But the efforts of the director, focusing on recreating a „Renaissance" that was outside the textual construction of the play, and which can be described as typical Hollywoodian interpretation of what „golden age" should be, generates a stern reproduction of the Shakespearean universe.

Trying to preserve a certain „historical" Shakespeare, Cukor generated a conservative, American like backdrop for the psychological confrontation of two characters that were not believable. In a sense, this utopian world, looking very much like a Hollywood musical, is particularly relevant for the contextual adaptation of Shakespeare and for what Fredric Jameson defines as "nostalgia film", where the producers use cinematic technologies in an attempt to "appropriate the past" for the benefit of contemporary ideologies. Cukor's Romeo and Juliet is nothing but conservative cinema, directed as a glossy magazine.

The next adaptation made by Hollywood was Renato Castellani's Romeo and Juliet (1954), a movie also anchored into the realism of the Italian Renaissance – at some point, when Romeo meets with the Friar, there is a reproduction of a piece from Fra Angelico's Annunciation, a visual clue for this dependence on the historical

context generated by Shakespeare. In fact, the movie begins with the presence of the Author himself, positioned in the center of narration. A “false” Shakespeare begins by reading to the audience the prologue of the action and then we enter into a medieval town, having the name “Verona” written in stone above its main gate. Although the movie made by Castellani has several innovations, amongst the most important the fact that young performers were chosen to authenticate the main characters, the choice of locations and the scenery remained dependent on a certain conservative approach to the authority of the source text. The same aggressive realism, coupled with an inadequacy of the characters – most of the supporting characters were downcast in order to support Romeo and Juliet. Although the movie got the Golden Lion in Venice, mostly for the overly Italian scenery, it did not convince the critics or the public.

The Zefirelli model – Pictures growing in the shadow of the Sacred Text

Franco Zefirelli made some of the most spectacular adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays. He directed three adaptations made after Shakespeare’s plays and in his first production, *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967) he used well known actors - Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Unfortunately, starting with the selection of the actors, implicitly the movie was concentrated around the inter-relational dynamics of the two main characters: Kate and Petruchio.

But the following year Zefirelli launched a second project based on Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (1968). Here, for the first time in the history of screen adaptations of this play, the main actors were teenagers of the same age with the characters in the source play. Zefirelli, criticised for the fact that the main actress, Olivia Hussey was only fifteen when re-enacted the sex scene with the young Romeo, managed to generate a faithful representation of the play, while constructing a cinematic version of the story. Maybe it is not by chance the fact that Zefirelli undertook other Shakespearean subjects only after 22 years, starting with *Hamlet* (1990), where Mel Gibson plays a very disturbed prince of Denmark. Although in his later films he included adaptations, like *Jane Eyre* (1996), *Tea with Mussolini* (1999), and *Callas Forever* (2002), or with transcodings from operas to film, such as *I Pagliacci* (1981), *Cavalleria rusticana* (1982), *Otello* (1986), and *La Bohème* (2008), Zefirelli remained dependent of his *Romeo and Juliet* approach – seen in the faithful reproduction of the New Testament in the block-buster *Jesus of Nazareth*.

It is relevant that the type of adaptation Zefirelli puts into place can easily be fitted in the category described by Robert Stam și Alessandra Raengo under the name of *logophilia*, or “verbal valorization” of the source text. This in itself encumbers the fact that the second author, here the cinema director, accepts and reveres the existence of a unique and privileged “Text”, that is the work of Shakespeare, one that prevails and precedes in all aspects the cinematographic “text”, implicitly accepting an inferior stance. For in this approach, the “sacral” nature of literature makes the adaptation discourse dominated by a silent acceptance of the fact that there is a given axiomatic “superiority of literature over movies” (Stam și Raengo, 2005, 4).

It is incontestably the most successful adaptation of Shakespeare to that day, *Romeo and Juliet* was partially constructed as a "youth" movie, with elements from the hippies culture that was growing in that period. The innocence of the actors, coupled with passionate scenes in the nude looking like a breeze from *Playboy* magazine, make the work of Zeffirelli provocative for that moment. But still, his adaptation is nothing but a form of aesthetic "reverence" to the source text, because the entire movie is spoken in the exact wording of the Bard, as a means for perfect cinematographic mimesis. Zeffirelli worked with the screenwriters Franco Brusati and Masolino D'Amico and they tried (and succeeded) to provide a conservative approach to Shakespeare.

Subject innovation and character creativity

Zeffirelli himself recognized that he was influenced by the treatment of Shakespeare via *West Side Story* (1961). The development in *West Side Story* anticipates an important direction for the Shakespearean adaptations. Again, using the terminology of Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo who see the relationship between literature and cinema in terms of *anteriority* and *seniority*, where the adaptation process is hindered by the self assumed idea that "older arts are necessarily better" ones, with the apparition of *West Side Story* there was a source sources of hostility between cinema and literature. This *dichotomous thinking*, which for Stam and Raengo presumes a bitter rivalry between film and literature produces the *the myth of facility*, which wrongly assumes that films are "easy to make and suspectly pleasurable to watch"; this dichotomy assumes that cinema vulgarizes and dumbs down literature even uses literature in a certain type of *parasitism* that sucks out the vitality of their literary hosts.

Of course, if we are looking at the play based on the story of the Verona lovers from a thematic perspective, the motive of the tragic lovers is one of the oldest in universal literature. Ovid, in *Metamorphosis* describes a similar story, when he develops the history of Pyramus and Thisbe, who's love is forbidden by their parents. While fighting for his love, Pyramus wrongly believes that his loved one is dead and he dies himself. Xenofon from Ephesus writes another similar story (*Ephesiaca*, available only from the Latin translation made after the original Greek by Aloys Emeric in *Liber Baro Locella*, Vienna, 1796, revised by Gerard Helzel, Hamburg, 2001). This is a tragic history about Habrocomes and Anthia, two teenagers from Ephesus falling in love and forced by their parents to break apart - Xenofon from Ephesus even uses the magic poison in order to resolve this irresolvable narrative conflict.

The Broadway musical *West Side Story*, developed with a musical score from Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim provided a re-contextualization of the Shakespearean work. The story is no longer based on Italian soil, although it has an Italian gang from New York, and abandons the names of the two main characters. The new protagonists are Tony, one of the Puerto Rican gang Jets, falls in love with Maria, the sister of Bernardo, the leader

of the Sharks gang, mostly first-generation Americans. The first stage production of the musical play opened in 1957 and influenced since the cinematographic approach to adaptation. It is relevant that the movie received eleven Academy Award nominations and won one – the Best Adapted Screenplay, and the simple reason is that it provided a re-shaping of the context, characters and of social relevance. *West Side Story* is about new social phenomena: poverty and racism, gangs and urban violence; and simultaneously deals with old social realities: generation conflicts, miscommunication and aggression, sexual prowess.

Shakespeare for dummies. Adaptation as means of popular culture

Known otherwise as „MTV Shakespeare”, the version Baz Luhrman created for the story of the Verona lovers, *Romeo + Juliet* (2000) was in a way a natural continuation of *West Side Story*. The democratization of the story and the modernization of the cinematic narrative used for Shakespeare’s play makes out of *Romeo + Juliet* and example of how “conservative” approaches to the Bard can be rejected and how a new historical and cultural relevance can be provided. Luhrman creates a work designed not for theater audiences, but for cinema audiences, considered to be different not only because of their cultural differences, but also because of the new expectations at technical level. It is not by chance that this movie begins like a typical “action movie”, with a chase, followed by a television-style “introduction” of the central characters.

There are some negative reactions to Luhrman’s approach, as in the case of the movie critic Gary Taylor (Taylor, 1999) who interprets the Luhrman movie not only as a teenage audience film, but also as a negative accesibilization from the story. Young people do not read Shakespeare anymore, but a piece containing music and images belonging to popular culture. Nevertheless, Luhrmann himself describes his *Romeo + Juliet* as a response to doublet-and-hose Shakespeare, as an aggressive attempt to “reclaim” Shakespeare for an MTV generation and a “renegotiation of a relationship with its own history”. In this respect Luhrmann and Zeffirelli can be compared in their approach to create versions of *Romeo and Juliet* from the stand point of their final goal. Zeffirelli is produces a classic Shakespearean production, with expensive resources, while Luhrmann is creating a pop-culture Shakespeare with a small budget movie (about \$25 million).

Luhrman “updates” Shakespeare in an extreme and postmodern fashion, integrating elements of the Elizabethan plays into modern world: the advertising in the movie uses Shakespearean words as slogans (“Prospero’s finest whiskey: the stuff dreams are made of”; “I am thy Pistol and thy Friend”) or the ironic reading of the space, like with the pool hall called “The Globe” where the action takes place. Luhrman places his movie in Los Angeles, USA, in an area named "Verona Beach". Changing the guns for "swords", using car chases and other extravagant props and sets Luhrman provides a bizarre universe full of sex, violence, murders, conspiracies, use of drugs and of other illegal activities that makes the action more

aggressive. At this level re-writing of the meaning can be seen as having a given ideological intent, that is in the benefit of the types of social interactions that are considered to be dominant.

A movie with very visible actors (Leonardo di Caprio and John Leguizamo) and spectacular success, Luhrman's adaptation provoked the fringes of cultural representation and was soon followed by other „pop-Shakespeare” versions.

Karate Romeo and manga Juliet

Romeo Must Die, (2000) a karate version of Shakespeare's hero, *Chicken Rice War* (2000) a Singapore film from the director Cheah Chee Kong, both an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* and of Baz Luhrmann's film and several manga animations were developed in the years that followed Romeo+Juliet. Romeo Must Die is a modern day kung fu action movie, where Jet Li plays Romeo and hip-hop singer, Aaliyah Haughton plays Juliet. Chinese mafia replaces the Capulets and American mobsters replace the Montagues and this conflict is resolved by kung fu action. This superficial treatment of the story can be found in *Chicken Rice War*, for example, where the two feuding families have chicken-rice stands in Singapore and are fiercely fighting for customers and for whose chicken rice is best. Premiered in 2007 in Japan, *Romeo x Juliet* was a manga series for television that was based on Shakespeare's characters, taking place in a fantastical aeropolis of Neo Verona. Reiko Yoshida created a universe parallel to that of Shakespeare, but nonetheless viable and submerged into the anime culture. The animated series was followed by comics and other related materials, pushing the process of Shakespeare adaptation into the future.

Conclusion

There is no way of predicting how the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays is going to unfold from here, but one thing is certain: the Bard's words and works are open-ended creations, accepting by design intertextuality, the integration of various discursive elements, permitting replicas and ironic elaborations and stimulating a critical and self-critical development of multilayered significance.

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QU'EST-CE QUE LA « THÉÂTRALITÉ » ? PETITE RECHERCHE HISTORIQUE

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ABSTRACT. Historians of theatre and art historians often use the term of “theatricality” when talking about the specificity of the art of Theatre, when describing pictures or more complex artistic phenomena. This article aims at introducing the reader to the plural significance of the word “theatricality”, through a short historical course. This question “What is Theatricality?” has preoccupied more than one specialist and its answer still remains problematic, mainly as we are going to see, because of its plurality. We are thus going to cross the different meanings of the word “theatricality”, asking ourselves what this theatricality implies, what is it referring at, how it takes birth and manifests itself generally, in Life, but also in domains closely connected to that of the artistic realm of Theatre.

Keywords: *theatricality, theatre and life, didascalical process.*

Cette question qui hante plus d'un homme de théâtre se voit souvent revisitée par les chercheurs, bien que l'histoire de ce terme si simple et complexe à la fois ne soit pas si ancienne. Elle reste pourtant problématique. Nous allons donc passer à travers les différentes acceptions du mot « théâtralité » en nous demandant ce que cette théâtralité suppose, à quoi elle se rapporte et comment elle prend naissance et se manifeste en général et dans des domaines connexes à celui du Théâtre.

Une analyse linguistique du terme met en évidence le mécanisme de sa constitution. À partir d'un substantif (*théâtre*), par ajout successif de suffixes, on peut former tout d'abord un adjectif (*théâtral*) et, ensuite, un autre substantif (*théâtralité*). Si le premier substantif est très ancien (attesté déjà au XIIIe, cf. *Le Petit Robert*, à époque où le théâtre médiéval se diversifie énormément) ou l'adjectif assez ancien (attesté au XVIe, cf. toujours *Le Petit Robert*), le substantif formé au bout de la chaîne dérivative est attesté seulement vers le milieu du XXe, quand la langue semble avoir eu besoin d'exprimer, de circonscrire l'essence du théâtre. La lexicologie ne peut cependant pas, malheureusement, réduire à un schéma strict la multiplicité des contextes (linguistiques et sociaux) d'emploi d'un mot, et les ambiguïtés qui découlent de ces emplois : ainsi, puisque *théâtral* signifie, dans les dictionnaires, à la fois a. « ce qui est propre aux exigences du théâtre, de la scène », et b. « faux, joué ; antonymes *naturel, spontané* », la *théâtralité*, dérivée de *théâtral*, se charge, par le phénomène même de la dérivation, de ces ambiguïtés du lexème de base. « Théâtralité » signifierait donc à la fois a. : qualité de ce qui est propre aux exigences du théâtre, de la scène, et b. : fausseté, jeu, mensonge, masque, artifice, etc.

Le substantif « théâtralité » apparaît donc relativement tard et cette apparition a été précédée, au XIXe, par un emploi fréquent de l'adjectif « théâtral » dans les deux sens mentionnés, ce qui a ouvert la voie aux théories de la théâtralité élaborées au XXe siècle. Un grand nombre de critiques littéraires et de théâtre, de philosophes et d'esthéticiens, de sémioticiens et de psychanalystes se sont arrêtés sur le problème que pose la circonscription de ce terme qui apparaît au début du XXe siècle, chez Craig, chez Nicolas Evreinov dans plusieurs ouvrages russes ou français¹, et chez Meyerhold, qui prônait une « rethéâtralisation du théâtre » et un « théâtre théâtral », essayant de retrouver ainsi l'essence de l'acte théâtral à même de renouveler l'art de la scène².

En essayant de circonscrire la théâtralité en tant que qualité spécifique à l'art du théâtre qui le distingue foncièrement des autres arts, Evreinov arrive à parler d'un véritable « instinct théâtral », qui va de pair avec le pouvoir mimétique originaire de l'être humain :

La théâtralité est pré-esthétique, c'est-à-dire plus **primitive**, et d'un caractère plus fondamental que notre sens esthétique. Il serait ridicule de parler de l'esthétique d'un sauvage ; on ne saurait concevoir, en effet, un sauvage jouissant de « la beauté pour la beauté ». Mais il possède certainement **le sens de la théâtralité** et, par conséquent, l'art théâtral est **essentiellement différent** des autres arts.³

Il est évident que pour le critique russe opposé à Stanislavski, la théâtralité précède le théâtre⁴, et que le sens de la théâtralité a pu rendre possible l'art théâtral, c'est-à-dire, dans ce cas-ci, l'art *du* théâtre. Il s'agit donc pour Evreinov, d'un avant-texte, d'une capacité de « concevoir » ce qui n'est pas et de « personnifier » ces figures imaginaires, de les *présentifier*, comme il le dira par la suite. Bien que ce ne soit pas « le sens de la théâtralité » mais plutôt la manière dont celle-ci se manifeste, qui différencie le théâtre des autres arts, ceci nous renvoie quand même aux origines « primitives », « rituelles » de cet art, que Nicolas Evreinov semble avoir bien saisies, malgré des carences plus qu'évidentes au niveau de l'argumentation.

¹ Voici des titres d'ouvrages russes : *Sur la théâtralité d'Oscar Wilde*, 1915 ; *Le démon de la théâtralité*. Léonid Andreïeff et le problème de la théâtralité dans la vie, 1922 ; *Le Poète théâtralisant la vie*, Moscou, 1922 ; *Le Théâtre chez les animaux*, Leningrad, 1924. L'ouvrage français le plus important, sur lequel nous nous appuyerons, est *Le Théâtre dans la vie*, Cinquième édition, Paris, Librairie Stock, Delamain et Boutelleau, 1930. Pour une bonne compréhension de l'activité de cet inégalable théoricien et praticien du théâtre, voir Gérard Abensour (textes recueillis par), *Nicolas Evreinov, l'apôtre russe de la théâtralité*, *Revue des Études Slaves*, tome 53, Paris, 1981 ; Sharon Marie Carnicke, *The Theatrical Instinct: Nikolai Evreinov and the Russian Theatre of the Early Twentieth Century*, New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 1989.

² Vsévolod Meyerhold, *Le théâtre théâtral*, trad. Nina Gourfinkel, Paris, Gallimard, 1963 ; voir surtout le « Le théâtre de la convention consciente ».

³ Nicolas Evreinov, *Le théâtre dans la vie*, *op. cit.*, p. 24, c'est nous qui soulignons.

⁴ Anne Ubersfeld reprend cette idée, avec laquelle nous sommes aussi entièrement d'accord : « Au reste, il est difficile (sauf cas rarissimes) de comprendre la production du texte de théâtre sans prendre en compte le fait capital que le texte de théâtre ne saurait être écrit sans la présence d'une théâtralité antérieure. On écrit pour avec ou contre un code théâtral préexistant. D'une certaine façon la "représentation" au sens le plus large du mot préexiste au texte. », *L'école du spectateur*, Paris, Éditions sociales, 1981, p. 15.

Pour Craig, la question de la théâtralité ne vient pas d'un souci anthropologique ou d'une recherche des origines du théâtre comme chez Evreinov. C'est effectivement, comme le remarque pertinemment Maria Ines Aliverti, la recherche d'une circonscription du théâtre dans le cadre des autres arts (la littérature dramatique, les arts plastiques), participant eux aussi à l'élaboration scénique d'une représentation, qui mène Craig, sur les traces de Diderot, à s'interroger sur la spécificité du théâtre. Car « [...] l'image visuelle – et elle seule – investit tous les aspects du processus théâtral et ce processus même dans son ensemble : le rôle du spectateur, les facteurs situationnels, le fonctionnement et les formes de la représentation, les images produites dans leur spécificité artistique, et les sujets qui les produisent. Soit Diderot soit Craig arrivent par là à bouleverser la relation traditionnelle du drame à la scène. Ce n'est pas le drame qui produit la scène, mais c'est bien la scène qui produit le drame. »⁵ Il s'agit donc d'un aspect fondamental du théâtre que Craig met en évidence : la place de l'*œil actif* qui regarde et qui participe à la construction de la scène théâtrale, dont la théâtralité change en fonction du *point de vue*, de la *perspective* adoptée par son spectateur.

Un autre élément important, dont Craig a l'admirable intuition, est la naissance de l'interprétation créatrice que suppose tout travail théâtral de mise en scène, en d'autres mots, dirions-nous, la mise en marche du processus de théâtralisation, qui détache le théâtre du texte, bien qu'il y puise son énergie. La première chose que le *Stage-director* doit faire, est de parcourir très attentivement le texte dramatique ; c'est alors – en lisant – qu'il commence à *voir* « the whole colour, rhythm, action of the thing ». En laissant la pièce de côté pour un certain temps, il commence à travailler mentalement sa matière tout comme un peintre impressionniste le ferait sur sa toile : « and in his mind's eye mixes his palette (to use a painter's expression) with the colours which the impression of the play has called up », pour que peu à peu, « harmoniously must the whole design develop, so that the eye of the beholder shall be satisfied. While this pattern for the eye is being devised, the designer is being guided as much by the sound of the verse or prose as by the sense or spirit. »⁶ La théâtralité, bien que non nommée ici de cette manière, apparaît donc, comme le dira plus tard Roland Barthes, en tant que « langage extérieur » qui fuse à partir de l'argument écrit, dans toute sa « plénitude » visuelle. Et Craig insiste à nouveau sur le poids essentiel de l'œil extérieur et intérieur, et par conséquent sur la production imaginaire (l'image mentale construite, dessinée par « the mind's eye ») concrétisée dans un schéma visuel palpable qui donnera le produit fini de l'image visuelle de la scène dramatique au théâtre.

⁵ Maria Ines Aliverti, « Plus théâtral que le théâtre. Stratégies de l'imaginaire et images pour un théâtre à venir, de Diderot à Craig », in Christopher Balme, Robert Erenstein, Cesare Molinari (éd.), Maria Chiara Barbieri, Sandra Pietrini (dir.), *European Theatre Iconography, Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Network (Mainz, 22-26 July 1998, Wassenaar, 21-25 July 1999, Poggio a Caiano, 20-23 July 2000)*, Roma, Bulzoni Editore, 2002, avec CD-rom, pp. 93-120, cit. pp. 108-109.

⁶ Edward Gordon Craig, *The First Dialogue*, dans le recueil *On the Art of Theatre*, London, William Heinemann, 5e édition, 1957 (1^{ère} éd. en 1911), pp. 155 et 158. Voir éd. française : Paris Circé, 1999, avec l'introduction de Georges Banu et Monique Borie.

Dans la même lignée de pensée, Barthes essaye de définir, cette fois-ci volontairement, *la théâtralité*, dans son admirable article de 1954, « Le théâtre de Baudelaire » :

Qu'est-ce que la théâtralité ? C'est le théâtre moins le texte, c'est une épaisseur de signes et de sensations qui s'édifie sur la scène à partir de l'argument écrit, c'est cette sorte de perception œcuménique des artifices sensuels, gestes, tons, distances, substances, lumières, qui submerge le texte sous la plénitude de son langage extérieur. [...] Naturellement la théâtralité doit être présente dès le premier germe écrit d'une œuvre, elle est une donnée de création, non de réalisation. Il n'y a pas de grand théâtre sans théâtralité dévorante, chez Eschyle, chez Shakespeare, chez Brecht le texte écrit est d'avance emporté par l'extériorité des corps, des objets, des situations ; la parole fuse aussitôt en substances.⁷

Comme nous pouvons le remarquer, pour Barthes aussi, la théâtralité est émanée par un texte (dramatique ou non, puisqu'il se réfère principalement à l'œuvre poétique de Baudelaire) ; elle germe dans le texte écrit pour fuser en substances dès que le lecteur-spectateur s'en approche et se laisse envelopper par cette « épaisseur de signes et de sensations » qui finit par submerger le texte qui l'a générée, par le dépasser, en lui donnant un corps scénique. La « scène », pourtant, peut être aussi une scène mentale, une projection demandée par l'œuvre théâtrale mais non nécessairement concrétisée dans le cadre d'une représentation de théâtre, comme ce fut le cas pour l'œuvre de Baudelaire⁸. Pour Barthes, la théâtralité, même « dévorante », peut ne pas aboutir au théâtre et cette remarque, loin d'être subjective, est un fait valable non seulement pour l'art de la littérature, mais aussi, chose très intéressante, pour les arts plastiques et surtout pour l'art sacré et religieux. Quel qu'en soit le support, le regard, l'œil intérieur qui « perçoit », qui est le sujet de « cette sorte de perception œcuménique des artifices sensuels, gestes, tons, distances, substances, lumières », joue un rôle extrêmement important dans la naissance de cette théâtralité souvent insaisissable ; et il s'agit ici des « regards » conjugués de l'auteur-créateur et du lecteur-spectateur, qui interprète, tout en refaisant le chemin de la création.

Dans la suite des réflexions de Roland Barthes – par rapport auxquelles il prend ses distances –, Michel Bernard essaie, en 1976, de définir la théâtralité en la regardant à travers le statut du corps de l'acteur, à la fois chair et apparence spectaculaire, et à travers le rapport d'échange perpétuel du corps et du langage, et des corps entre eux, qui caractérise toute mise en scène d'une pièce de théâtre :

La théâtralité, à nos yeux, est, en effet, ce qui, dans un même mouvement, double et différencie corporellement le langage jusqu'à le contredire et creuse, dualise, spécularise le corps [...] pour faire le lit de la binarité

⁷ Barthes Roland, « Le théâtre de Baudelaire », in *Œuvres Complètes*, tome I, 1942-1965, Édition établie et présentée par Eric Marty, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1993, pp. 1194-1195.

⁸ Voir l'étude approfondie de cette théâtralité baudelairienne dans Ioan Pop-Curșeu, *De l'homme hyperbolique au texte impossible : théâtralité, théâtre(s), ébauches de pièces chez Baudelaire*, Thèse de doctorat, Université de Genève, 2007.

signifiante de la parole qui s'y loge, le remplit et ainsi l'unifie. Nous croyons, en ce sens, devoir corriger la définition proposée par Barthes dans la mesure même où, loin d'en être exclue, la textualité, par son seul procès du sémiotique et du symbolique, est déjà, comme l'a bien vu J. Kristeva et analysé Stephen Heath, un théâtre. [...] La théâtralité désigne, par conséquent, la connivence qu'introduit entre le corps et le langage l'ordonnement ou mieux la disponibilité des structures ex-pressives du corps créées par transvocalisation aux exigences impérieuses du pouvoir signifiant.⁹

Corps et langage entrent en scène, à côté de la mise en miroir et du dédoublement. Bien qu'inspirée par Barthes, cette définition de la théâtralité reste assez singulière, et c'est pour son étrangeté que nous la citons. La plupart des critiques nourris de sémiologie semblent ignorer la corporéité du personnage et de l'acteur, et regarder la théâtralité comme une simple et banale « spécificité du langage théâtral ». L'originalité de la définition de Michel Bernard consiste dans « l'interférence vocale du corps et du langage et a fortiori des corps entre eux » qui est posée à la base de la théâtralité dans la représentation¹⁰. Car il s'agit, pour Michel Bernard, de ce qui est montré sur scène, donc de ce qui fait partie du théâtre en tant que représentation et non, comme pour Barthes de quelque chose qui appellerait la scène, tout en existant en dehors de celle-ci. Bien que M. Bernard introduise effectivement dans sa définition la notion de corporéité qui se distancie tout en spécularisant le langage verbal présent (ce qui n'apparaît que de manière diffuse chez Barthes), sa critique de la définition barthésienne n'est pas fondée, puisque Barthes n'« exclut » pas du tout la textualité du théâtre, mais du spécifique théâtral, c'est-à-dire de la théâtralité, elle-même générée par un texte dépassé. Dire que « la théâtralité est le théâtre moins le texte » équivaut à affirmer que ce qui est effectivement spécifique au théâtre est surtout ce qui n'est pas spécifique à la littérature, mais ce qui dépasse cette littérature pour un monde artistique où le lecteur est pratiquement transformé en un « œil vivant » extrêmement réceptif, pour reprendre une formule de Jean Starobinski. Or, cette présence du spectateur potentiel ou effectif n'apparaît pas chez Michel Bernard, alors qu'il nous semble qu'elle est indispensable pour une circonscription correcte de ce que pourrait être la théâtralité.

Le problème du double et de la dualité est mieux expliqué, mais cette fois-ci justement en rapport avec le spectateur, par Henri Gouhier, dans l'article « Théâtralité », du *Dictionnaire du Théâtre Encyclopaedia Universalis* : le spectacle *théâtral* est « un spectacle où le spectateur pense, sent, vibre, *comme si* les histoires dont il est témoin se passaient réellement. Ce *comme si* tient à l'essence même de la théâtralité, il constitue le désintéressement qui permet le divertissement. »¹¹ Bien

⁹ Michel Bernard, *L'Expression du corps. Recherches sur les fondements de la théâtralité*, Paris, Jean-Pierre Delarge, 1976, pp. 388-389.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 392.

¹¹ Henri Gouhier, « Théâtralité », in *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*, 2^e édition, Paris, Albin Michel *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, 2000, pp. 763-765.

qu'Henri Gouhier ait raison d'affirmer que le *comme si* relève de l'essence même de la théâtralité, il est un peu réductif de dire qu'« il constitue le désintéressement », puisque, il faut le souligner, le *comme si* a aussi le pouvoir d'impliquer encore plus le spectateur (en exerçant une certaine pression psychologique) à partir du moment où les portes du monde fictif ne sont pas complètement fermées derrière ce même spectateur. Il s'agit ici d'un jeu, parfois dangereux, des présences et des absences que semble bien saisir Michel Corvin quand il affirme que « la théâtralité se définit par trois faits : elle est présence (l'adresse) ; elle ne vit que d'absence (ce qu'elle figure n'existe pas) ; et pourtant elle fait en sorte que cette absence soit une présence ; elle est à la fois une marque, un manque et un masque »¹². Car dans le contexte religieux par exemple, la prise ou la non prise de conscience du *comme si* peut faire basculer le théâtre dans le rituel ou le rituel dans le théâtre¹³, danger saisi par les théologiens chrétiens réticents envers les spectacles, depuis les origines du christianisme à nos jours.

Dans son livre *La Théâtralité : étude freudienne*, publié en 1993, Yves Thoret souligne aussi la place extrêmement importante du spectateur et de ce qu'il nomme la *spectature* (c'est-à-dire l'équivalent de ce que la « lecture » représente pour le lecteur, mais cette fois-ci dans le cas du spectateur) dans le processus théâtral. Pour le psychanalyste, il ne peut y avoir de théâtralité que par rapport au théâtre bien que, « le concept de théâtre étant clairement défini¹⁴, la théâtralité peut s'appliquer à d'autres types de situations, en sachant qu'il s'agit d'une **comparaison** de ces événements avec une représentation théâtrale, non d'une assimilation de ces manifestations à un spectacle »¹⁵. Malheureusement, la définition de Thoret s'avère être non seulement incomplète mais tautologique :

¹² *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du théâtre*, Paris, Bordas, 1991, pp. 820-821. Michel Corvin affirmait aussi à un autre moment que « la théâtralité est quand même une expérience du spectateur, c'est-à-dire une façon de recevoir un certain nombre de signes qui vont devenir cohérents parce qu'on a la possibilité de les rendre cohérents et cette possibilité ne sort pas d'un chapeau. Donc finalement cette théâtralité que je refuse comme antérieure à la vision du spectateur est quand même une sorte d'apriori. », dans le cadre des discussions autour d'Adamov, in *Lecture d'Adamov, Actes du colloque international Würzburg 1981*, éd. Robert Abirached, Ernsperger Ruhe, Richard Schwaderer, Tübingen/Paris, Günter Narr Verlag/Éditions Jean-Michel Place, coll. Etudes littéraires françaises, 1983, p. 23.

¹³ Pour l'étude de ces frontières très poreuses dans les rituels païens voir Alfred Métraux, *Le vaudou haïtien*, Paris, Gallimard, 1998 (1ère éd. 1958), pp. 120, 141 e passim ; et Jacques Bourgaux, *Possessions et simulacres : aux sources de la théâtralité*, Épi, 1973.

¹⁴ Il le définit comme il suit : « il me semble important de réserver le terme "théâtre" à un spectacle se déroulant dans un lieu désigné comme tel, dans l'espace de temps d'une représentation et en présence d'un public auquel il est destiné », Yves Thoret, *La Théâtralité : étude freudienne*, Paris, Dunod, coll. Psychismes, 1993, p. 14. Dans son livre, Y. Thoret propose au lecteur une confrontation entre théâtre et psychanalyse, qui met en évidence les correspondances secrètes entre scène et fantasme, entre coup de théâtre et scènes primitives sexuelles.

¹⁵ *Idem*. C'est nous qui soulignons. À notre avis, comme nous essayerons de le montrer par la suite, il ne s'agit pas d'une « comparaison » mais d'un renvoi plus ou moins conscient, d'une association d'images et d'idées tournant autour de la représentation théâtrale. Une chose que Thoret oublie de clarifier est la différence entre représentation de théâtre et spectacle.

La théâtralité désigne la qualité qui permet, à l'aide d'effets et de mécanismes divers, la transformation d'une représentation scénique, associant texte, performance et spectature, en une œuvre théâtrale.¹⁶

Elle reste ambiguë, malgré ses prétentions à l'exactitude : quels seraient ces « effets et mécanismes divers » qui aident la théâtralité à transformer en œuvre théâtrale une simple représentation scénique ? Et surtout, qu'entend-il par « représentation scénique » en opposition à une représentation théâtrale ?

Arrivés à ce point, il est important, pour éviter toute confusion, d'opter pour une différenciation terminologique entre *théâtral* et *de théâtre*. Ainsi, à la place de l'adjectif « théâtral » qui se rapporte directement au théâtre en tant qu'institution, lieu, scène, salle définis comme tels, et représentation donnée en ce lieu, nous utiliserons le syntagme « de théâtre » (représentation de théâtre, scène de théâtre). Pour tout ce qui est chargé de « théâtralité » mais en dehors du théâtre ainsi défini, et se rapporte donc au phénomène du théâtre indirectement – comme il en sera question par la suite – nous garderons le mot « théâtral » (une scène, qu'elle soit en peinture, en littérature ou dans le quotidien, chargée de théâtralité sera nommée une scène théâtrale)¹⁷.

En appliquant le terme de « théâtral » à la littérature non-dramatique, Antoine Raybaud, dans sa *Fabrique d'« Illuminations »*, définit le « texte » comme « un mouvement de représentation, représentation opérée », comme « théâtre des images qui y affluent »¹⁸. Chez Raybaud, il ne s'agit pas du texte (poétique) qui deviendrait un produit mimétique, miroir d'une représentation de théâtre, mais d'un texte qui s'approprie le rôle de scène et qui accueille un flux d'images qui défilent. Ce point de vue, dont un seul élément serait à retenir – le texte comme scène, idée qui penche du côté d'une coexistence du visuel et du textuel –, se rapproche plutôt d'une interprétation cinématographique, tout en encadrant des éléments propres au théâtre en tant que lieu de la représentation, sans pourtant aller plus loin et sans chercher la cohérence spécifiquement théâtrale de ce défilé d'images et de simulacres.

Un nouvel élément, essentiel pour la circonscription de ce que peut être « théâtral », est apporté par l'étude d'Elisabeth Burns, *Theatricality : A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life* ; comme le titre de son ouvrage l'indique, il s'agit du lien étroit entre le conventionnel, la convention et ce qui est perçu comme « théâtral ». Pour Elisabeth Burns, la théâtralité est justement une qualité attribuée par celui qui regarde à ce qui est regardé si le spectateur repère dans l'action, la mimique, les gestes, de la personne regardée une série de conventions qu'il reconnaît comme étant liées au théâtre et qui attirent son regard et son esprit dans ce jeu du double créé par l'illusion. Dans la lignée de Craig et de Barthes, Elisabeth Burns affirme donc que la théâtralité est un terme employé par le spectateur, « an audience term », car la théâtralité n'est pas « un mode de

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

¹⁷ Ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'il ne peut y avoir, par exemple, un geste plus théâtral qu'un autre sur une scène de théâtre.

¹⁸ Antoine Raybaud, *Fabrique d'« Illuminations »*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1989, p. 27.

comportement ou d'expression, mais se réfère à tout comportement *perçu* et *interprété* par les autres et décrit (mentalement ou explicitement) en des termes théâtraux. [...] la théâtralité elle-même est déterminée par un point de vue particulier, par un mode de perception »¹⁹.

En prolongement de cette définition, Maria Ines Aliverti propose dans son article déjà cité, « Plus théâtral que le théâtre. Stratégies de l'imaginaire et images pour un théâtre à venir, de Diderot à Craig », de repérer la théâtralité à trois niveaux temporels différents, qui recourent les trois fondements de la théorie de la théâtralité élaborée par E. Burns : les conventions, le mode de perception et le pouvoir de l'illusion.

[...] je dirai que la théâtralité se manifeste par rapport au temps selon trois modes différents : dans la diachronie, en tant que langage conventionnel qui laisse son sédiment ; dans la synchronie, en tant que pratique basée sur la relation entre acteurs et spectateurs ; et finalement dans une espèce d'achronie en tant qu'illusion, car on peut considérer qu'une suspension temporelle est nécessaire de la part des participants à une action, pour s'y livrer complètement.

Il me semble qu'un changement radical de notre conscience du théâtral, qui soit capable d'affecter et de renouveler en profondeur la dynamique de la théâtralité, devrait se proposer d'agir à ces trois niveaux [...].²⁰

Nous avons déjà vu dans une étude plus ample²¹ que le degré de superposition de ces différentes couches temporelles de manifestation de la théâtralité détermine aussi le degré de théâtralité globale du « spectacle » regardé. En d'autres mots, c'est en fonction de la manière dont la théâtralité se manifeste à ces trois niveaux temporels (auxquels il faudra ajouter et ajuster la mise en espace) que l'on pourra parler d'images picturales ou scéniques plus ou moins théâtrales. Mais arrêtons-nous un instant sur un article de Josette Féral, consacré à la recherche de « la spécificité du langage théâtral », où le problème de la théâtralité apparaît dans toute sa complexité.

En proposant trois scénarios différents – 1. l'entrée dans une salle de théâtre avant que la pièce ne soit commencée ; 2. une scène de « théâtre invisible », dans le métro ; et 3. une scène quotidienne qui n'implique qu'une personne regardant les gens dans la rue –, elle arrive à parler de *théâtralités* au pluriel et à distinguer entre une théâtralité qui se dégage d'un lieu qui parle « théâtre » (la salle, même vide, se charge de théâtralité puisque baignée dans l'atmosphère de théâtre), une théâtralité qui n'arrive qu'avec une *sémiotisation* consciente de l'événementiel, *a posteriori* (puisque les gens du métro qui ont assisté à la scène n'ont remarqué la théâtralité de la scène à laquelle

¹⁹ « Theatricality is not [...] a mode of behaviour or expression, but attaches to any kind of behavior perceived and interpreted by others and described (mentally or explicitly) in theatrical terms [...] theatricality itself is determined by a particular viewpoint, a mode of perception. », Elisabeth Burns, *Theatricality : A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life*, London, Longmans, 1972, p. 13, souligné par nous.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

²¹ Ștefana Pop-Curșeu, *La Théâtralité de la peinture post-byzantine, XVe-XVIIe siècles*, Thèse de doctorat dirigée par Martine de Rougemont, Université Paris III- Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2008.

ils avaient assisté qu'au moment où les acteurs leur ont dévoilé qu'il s'agissait de théâtre), et une théâtralité du quotidien, définie par le regard qui encadre et redéfinit dans l'espace les corps et la gestuelle de ceux qu'il observe. En spécifiant que les contraintes imposées au « spectateur » deviennent à chaque fois moindres, Féral tire une conclusion très proche des observations d'Elisabeth Burns :

La théâtralité ne semble pas tenir à la nature de l'objet qu'elle investit : acteur, espace, objet, événement ; elle n'est pas non plus du côté du simulacre, de l'illusion, du faux-semblant, de la fiction, puisque nous avons pu la repérer dans des situations du quotidien.²²

Pour Josette Féral, la théâtralité n'est pas une « propriété », mais un « *processus* », une

production, qui tient tout d'abord au regard, regard qui postule et crée un *espace autre* qui devient espace de l'autre – espace virtuel, cela va de soi – et laisse place à l'altérité des sujets et à l'émergence de la fiction. Cet espace est le résultat d'un acte conscient qui peut partir soit du *performeur* lui-même (performeur au sens large du terme : acteur, metteur en scène, scénographe, éclairagiste mais aussi architecte) – c'était là le sens de nos deux premiers exemples ; soit du spectateur dont le regard crée un clivage spatial où peut émerger l'illusion – c'est là notre dernier exemple – et qui peut porter sans distinction sur les événements, les corps, les objets, et l'espace autant du quotidien que de la fiction.²³

L'ensemble de cette théorie de la théâtralité repose, chez Josette Féral, sur quelques piliers de base, qui nous semblent d'une importance maximale : la relation *regardant-regardé*, la création d'un *espace autre* à travers un processus de *cadrage*, la mise en place d'une *codification tacite* entre spectateur et performeur (en d'autres mots, les *conventions*), la *sémiotisation* de cet espace et de l'événement qui devient ainsi *spectacle*, la construction d'une *fiction*. Dans un premier temps, Josette Féral parle d'une théâtralité qui se trouve en dehors de la représentation de théâtre ; en continuant sur le problème que pose la théâtralité sur la scène même, dans le triangle « acteur-jeu-fiction », elle revient, pour conclure, vers la théâtralité transcendante par rapport au théâtre, à la théâtralité qui « déborde le phénomène strictement théâtral »²⁴.

La première chose à mettre au point est le fait que la théâtralité impliquée dans le premier scénario donné comme exemple n'entre pas directement dans la question, puisque le lien direct avec le théâtre est suffisamment clair : il y a théâtralité du lieu, puisque les repères nécessaires à la reconnaissance d'un lieu *de théâtre* par les futurs spectateurs sont en place. Le deuxième et le troisième scénarios nous intéressent de plus près, étant donné que leur relation au théâtre n'est plus si évidente. C'est ici que se pose véritablement la question : Qu'est-ce que la théâtralité en dehors du Théâtre ?

²² Josette Féral, « La Théâtralité. Recherche sur la spécificité du langage théâtral », in *Poétique*, n° 75, septembre 1988, p. 350.

²³ *Idem.*

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 358.

Dès le début, il faut spécifier que, en effet, il ne peut y avoir de théâtralité sans la participation active d'un *regard*, et encore, d'un regard créateur, dirions-nous qui puisse être capable de cette perception œcuménique dont parlait Barthes. Il s'agit d'un regard qui *transforme* ; qui fait du regardant un spectateur et du regardé un objet spéculaire, un « acteur, fût-ce malgré lui »²⁵ ; qui fait de l'espace du quotidien un espace « autre », donc différent, à travers un « effet de cadrage », où le regardé se trouve automatiquement inscrit. En prenant donc ce *regard* pour point de départ, Josette Féral insiste à voir dans la théâtralité « un processus » plutôt qu'une particularité, qu'une propriété de ce qui est regardé :

La théâtralité⁽¹⁾ consiste ainsi autant à situer la chose ou l'autre là où la théâtralité⁽²⁾ peut advenir dans cet espace autre, par cet effet de cadrage où j'inscris celui, ou ce, que je regarde (cf. notre troisième exemple), qu'à transformer l'événement en signes (un simple fait devient ainsi spectacle – cf. deuxième exemple). Plus qu'une propriété, la théâtralité apparaît donc à cette phase-ci de notre réflexion comme un processus qui repère des sujets en procès : regardé-regardant.²⁶

Or, nous croyons qu'une distinction entre *théâtralité* en tant que propriété et *théâtralisation* en tant que processus s'impose. Ce n'est pas la théâtralité qui consiste à « situer » et à « transformer », mais la théâtralisation, dont le résultat est la théâtralité visible de ce qui est regardé. De plus, un problème se pose : qu'est ce qui fait que la théâtralité (le mot utilisé en deuxième position dans le passage cité) « advienne » dans cet espace autre ? Car, il est clair que le cadrage, à travers lequel le regard réalise une sélection de l'espace et du regardé qui y est inscrit, en les séparant de leur contexte quotidien, ne suffit pas à appeler la sélection opérée, « théâtrale ». Josette Féral ajoute qu'il s'agit aussi d'une *sémiotisation* de l'espace, d'une transformation de l'événement en signes. Deux choses sont à prendre en considération : Premièrement, tout regard – même celui qui ne théâtralise pas – sémiotise l'espace, et l'événement est toujours un ensemble de signes même dans le cadre du quotidien. Ce qui veut dire que le regard théâtralisant ne sémiotise pas, mais *re-sémiotise* l'espace et *interprète* les signes de l'événement – tout en les ré-organisant – en fonction d'autre chose que des données du quotidien. D'un autre côté, qu'un « simple fait divers [devienne] ainsi spectacle » implique le *spectaculaire* et seulement dans un deuxième temps le *théâtral*.

Bien qu'ayant affirmé à un moment donné que la théâtralité « n'est pas non plus du côté du simulacre, de l'illusion, du faux-semblant, de la fiction, puisque nous avons pu la repérer dans des situations du quotidien », Josette Féral se contredit et reconnaît que le regard qui crée l'« espace autre » laisse place à « l'émergence de la fiction » et de « l'illusion ». Malheureusement, elle n'insiste pas assez sur ce côté qui implique la participation active de *l'imagination* du spectateur qui arrive à se voir en tant que spectateur – donc à être conscient de sa condition qui le situe hors du quotidien – tout en étant conscient de son *être-là* dans ce même quotidien. Ce n'est qu'à propos

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 351.

²⁶ *Idem*.

de la relation scène-salle, dans le cadre bien défini d'une représentation de théâtre qu'elle affirme que « relevant de simulacres, d'illusions, ces structures [les structures symboliques codifiées par l'acteur et reconnues par le spectateur] manifestent sur la scène l'émergence de mondes possibles dont le spectateur saisit à la fois toute la vérité et toute l'illusion »²⁷, sans voir en quelle mesure cela s'appliquerait à la théâtralité qui se manifeste en dehors du théâtre. Car c'est justement en cela que réside une des différences entre le « spectaculaire » et le théâtral dans le quotidien : un événement regardé est spectaculaire quand celui qui regarde saisit l'événement dans toute sa vérité exceptionnelle et sensationnelle montrée, dans un ici et maintenant réels, alors qu'il ne peut se charger de théâtralité que lorsque le spectateur saisit à la fois toute la vérité et toute l'illusion de l'événement qui, resémantisé à travers une représentation mentale, devient un fragment de représentation de théâtre *in potentia*.

Pourtant les choses ne sont pas si simples que cela ; la question essentielle qui se pose est : qu'est-ce qui fait que l'événement ou le fait devienne ou, mieux dit, soit perçu en tant que scène, en tant que représentation théâtrale ? Il est clair que l'initiative (consciente !) peut venir – comme le précise J. Féral – ou bien du performeur (acteur, metteur en scène, auteur dramatique, etc.) ou bien du spectateur qui devient par cela même – et c'est en cela aussi que nous nous distançons de la théorie féralienne – un « metteur en scène » virtuel. Mais, aucune de ces initiatives ne pourrait se « concrétiser » sans l'aide de quelques *repères* qui seraient à même de signaler les *conventions* plus ou moins tacites, qui permettraient, d'un côté, le regard double du spectateur, et, d'autre côté, le dédoublement imaginaire (ou réel) de l'homme ou des gens regardé(s), en acteurs jouant des rôles²⁸. Ces conventions sont absolument nécessaires pour que quelque chose – un geste, un regard, une mimique, un lieu, une action, une pose, etc. – soit chargé de théâtralité ; et si les conventions ne sont pas signalées à temps par ces repères qui confèrent une certaine *autonomie* à ce qui est regardé tout en l'insérant dans une suite ou dans une cohérence qui a besoin de la reconnaissance du dédoublement opéré, l'action, le geste, etc. regardés ne seront pas perçus comme théâtraux (voir deuxième exemple de Josette Féral). Ils resteront au simple niveau de *spectacle réel*, qui est, lui aussi, de l'ordre de l'événementiel.

Quelques-unes de ces conventions sont, justement, les interdits imposés par le théâtre, que nous retrouvons dans la théâtralité mais qui ne s'appliquent pas au spectaculaire, c'est-à-dire à ce qui tient du spectacle non théâtral²⁹.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 353.

²⁸ Il s'agirait d'un dédoublement réel lorsque le regardé est conscient de son double jeu, quand il est volontairement « acteur », et d'un dédoublement imaginaire quand le spectateur voit dans celui qu'il regarde un « personnage », un rôle joué, bien que le regardé en cause ne s'en aperçoive pas.

²⁹ Josette Féral parle de ces interdits et remarque à forte raison que « une fois transgressés, [ils] font éclater le cadre du jeu et débouchent sur la vie ». « Parmi ces interdits, il en est un que nous pourrions appeler la *loi d'exclusion du non-retour*. Cette loi impose à la scène une réversibilité du temps et des événements qui s'oppose à toute mutilation ou mort du sujet. Sont refusés ainsi comme n'appartenant plus au théâtre des scènes de morcellement du corps [...] de telles scènes rompent le contrat tacite avec le spectateur. », *op. cit.*, pp. 357-358.

Ces interdits [affirme Josette Féral] constituent précisément les limites du théâtre parce qu'ils menacent le cadre du jeu et transforment momentanément le théâtre en piste de cirque. Si la théâtralité de l'événement est toujours là, le théâtre, lui, en revanche, a disparu.³⁰

La dernière phrase de cette citation pose problème. À notre avis, ce n'est pas la théâtralité de l'événement qui est toujours là, mais le spectaculaire. En effet, la théâtralité préfigure le théâtre, elle appelle le théâtre justement à travers ces repères qu'elle fait voir et qui poussent le regardant comme le regardé à respecter des conventions qui sont, elles, de théâtre, repères qui fonctionnent de la même manière que les *didascalies* d'un texte dramatique. La théâtralité implique un passage virtuel au théâtre, une possible re-contextualisation ou un ré-encadrement de ce qui est théâtralisé, sur une scène de théâtre, ce qui n'est pas toujours le cas du spectaculaire. Il est donc impossible de ne pas voir que ces « limites », ces « interdits » existent dans la théâtralité.

Prenons par exemple un *événement* historique, tenant toujours de la sphère problématique du religieux : le crucifiement de Jésus Christ sur le Calvaire, dans les environs de Jérusalem. Il faut bien reconnaître que, pour les Juifs, les Romains et les Grecs de l'époque, ce que nous nommons aujourd'hui la « Passion de Jésus », avait le caractère d'un événement, d'un fait comme les autres, d'une crucifixion pareille à tant d'autres, puisque c'était de cette manière que l'on punissait les brigands et les malfaiteurs. La mise à mort était un spectacle qui amassait des gens en train de regarder, des gens qui devenaient « spectateurs » détachés, dans le cadre même du quotidien ; un spectacle réel, aboutissement d'une suite épique d'événements quotidiens qui avaient porté à la condamnation. Mais il y avait aussi une autre catégorie de gens, les amis de Jésus, pour qui cette mise à mort était un spectacle affreux, une réalité poignante. Ces gens-là n'assistaient pas au supplice avec la conscience de voir un spectacle divertissant dans cette mise à mort, ils étaient plutôt des participants tacites, impliqués directement et émotionnellement dans ce qui se passait sur le Calvaire. Jusqu'ici, il ne peut y avoir une théâtralité de l'événement, puisque, bien que le regard des spectateurs encadre les trois condamnés sur le Calvaire et opère un clivage de l'espace entre le lieu du supplice qui inscrit les regardés et la place des spectateurs, le tout reste ancré dans un face-à-face où personne n'est autre que ce qu'il est dans la réalité quotidienne du temps.

Il suffit pourtant qu'un de ces spectateurs ou un œil extérieur au cercle des spectateurs voie dans Jésus un homme qui n'est pas ce qu'il semble être, un homme qui se distancie de soi-même à travers un rôle³¹, pour que les repères, que nous nommerons dorénavant *didascaliques*, soient mis en place et que le processus de théâtralisation démarre. L'image ne correspond plus, ne se superpose plus entièrement

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 358.

³¹ « Rôle » dans le sens de comportement autre, mais conséquent avec soi-même, que l'on peut imiter, reprendre, de manière à ce qu'il soit reconnu par ceux qui regardent ; « rôle » dans le sens que les sciences sociales donnent à ce concept.

à la personne qui l'affiche et ce dédoublement peut être signalé par des éléments d'accessoires comme la mante de pourpre et la couronne d'épines ou par des gestes répétitifs (celui qui tomba trois fois sous le poids de la croix) ou par d'autres détails qui, dans l'imagination de celui qui regarde deviennent des repères pour un sens insolite de l'image inscrite dans le quotidien. Un sens global qui, tout en lui laissant la conscience du fait qu'il se situe toujours dans un espace du quotidien, l'attire, lui, spectateur, dans un univers (cadre : espace-temps) différent de celui de la réalité quotidienne – univers que le spectateur lui-même a re-sémiotisé, chargé d'une pointe de fiction, et a mis en scène dans son imagination.

Le spectaculaire est alors dépassé et des conventions propres à la réception théâtrale se trouvent établies. Pour ce regard, à la fois spectateur et metteur en scène, que nous venons de décrire, Jésus est devenu un personnage, une figure qui parle à la conscience de ce spectateur à un niveau supérieur, qui se détache de la réalité tout en l'englobant. Un personnage qui, par conséquent, ne mourra pas en même temps que l'homme cloué sur la croix : une *image vivante*. Cette *mise en personnage* de celui ou ceux qui sont regardés est essentielle pour la compréhension de la théâtralité et de la théâtralisation. Car ceci suppose l'inscription de l'image théâtrale dans une suite de *re-présentations* – pour utiliser le terme de Josette Féral, qui peuvent varier mais qui gardent toujours les mêmes repères didascaliques signalant les conventions de reconnaissance du dédoublement opéré.

Pour finir avec l'exemple donné, il est clair que la théâtralisation de l'événement cité a dû être très forte et peut-être surtout *a posteriori*, puisque même le corps de Jésus n'a pas été détruit, ce qui renvoie aux interdits spécifiques au jeu de théâtre. Mais – sans entrer encore dans des débats d'ordre théologique –, bien que les non-chrétiens contestent la possibilité matérielle de la résurrection, l'imaginaire et l'expérience essentiellement humaine qu'embrasse la figure christique effacent la destruction du corps et imposent inconsciemment l'interdit : l'événement prend une valeur atemporelle, et cesse d'être seulement un événement historique, alors que le Christ devient une image en mouvement, un personnage, qui peut être reconnu en fonction de certains repères didascaliques. Il n'est donc pas étonnant que l'on retrouve ces repères dans le culte religieux, dans les icônes byzantines et post-byzantines autant que dans les mises en scène des Mystères de la Passion au Moyen Âge.

Le théâtre suit de près la théâtralité, mais peut théâtraliser à son tour le quotidien ou le spectaculaire, par des références implicites, des *flash-back*, qui existent dans l'imaginaire culturel d'une communauté humaine et qui relient les images « théâtrales » entre elles et à l'expérience du théâtre que cette communauté détient. Il s'agit d'une structure de la pensée, de ce que Kernodle et les historiens des mentalités appellent les « habits of mind »³² qui déterminent un certain rapport de l'homme à l'image et un certain type de contextualisation mentale spécifique à une époque donnée et difficilement retrouvable pour l'historien du théâtre et de l'art.

³²Cf. George R. Kernodle, *From art to Theatre. Form and Convention in the Renaissance*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1944.

Le spectateur peut aussi surprendre des repères didascaliques déjà établis, qu'il reconnait comme tels, parce que le regardé est conscient du dédoublement qui s'opère et se met en scène ou met en scène un regard, un geste, etc., qui se chargent ainsi de théâtralité pour lui, aussi bien que pour le spectateur qui regarde. Ainsi, le regardé n'attend-il pas d'être investi d'un rôle par le spectateur, mais assume sa double condition d'acteur et de personnage (bien que ce que nous nommons ici « personnage » ou « rôle » puisse n'être qu'un fragment minimal de rôle ou un simple renvoi à un personnage connu ou non par le spectateur, à reconnaître ou à (re)construire). La présence signalée de l'« acteur » re-sémiotise de cette manière tout ce qui l'entoure et re-cadre ce qui est perçu comme théâtral dans la suite des événements, gestes, paroles, etc., puisqu'il s'agit d'un fragment qui se détache de cette suite, tout en s'y rattachant.

Ainsi, n'est-il pas tout à fait suffisant de dire que « ce que fait la théâtralité, c'est enregistrer pour le spectateur du spectaculaire, c'est-à-dire un rapport autre au quotidien, un acte de représentation, la construction d'une fiction », et qu'elle « apparaît comme l'imbrication d'une fiction dans une représentation dans l'espace d'une altérité qui met face à face un regardant et un regardé »³³ ! Il faudrait juste ajouter que ce *face à face* et l'imbrication de cette *fiction* ont besoin de repères didascaliques qui accrochent le regard et lui permettent le bon positionnement face au double statut du « regardé », repères qui projettent l'ensemble dans un espace virtuel de théâtre, un espace scénique. Par ailleurs, il est important que la fictionnalisation ne soit jamais complète et qu'elle entrecoupe quelque part la propre réalité du spectateur qui, dans son acte de réception, doit être poussé à pouvoir refaire, consciemment ou inconsciemment, le chemin inverse, du théâtral à l'événementiel.

Arrêtons-nous maintenant, avant de conclure, sur une vision plus récente et plus synthétique de la théâtralité qu'est celle de Martine de Rougemont. Plus méfiante, utilisant le mot théâtralité avec précaution, afin d'éviter le danger d'un concept fourre-tout, la spécialiste en iconographie théâtrale retient quatre valeurs du terme :

T1 : La théâtralité de ce qui est conventionnellement mimétique.

T2 : La théâtralité de ce qui est « capable de la scène », comme on disait au XVIIIe siècle, de ce qui peut être mis en scène en termes modernes, par opposition à ce qui s'adresse à la lecture et à l'imagination – c'est le sens principal défini par Patrice Pavis dans son *Dictionnaire du Théâtre*.

T3 : La théâtralité de ce qui est « en action », dramatique, voire sensationnel.

T4 : La théâtralité affichée comme rupture sur la scène des conventions mimétiques au profit de conventions « théâtrales », telle que la définit Elisabeth Burns et que Pavis appelle plutôt « théâtralisation » ou même « rethéâtralisation ».³⁴

³³ Conclusions tirées par Josette Féral, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-359.

³⁴ Martine de Rougemont, « La théâtralité relève-t-elle du visible ? Questions sur l'illustration théâtrale », in *European Theatre Iconography, op. cit.*, pp.121-139.

Pour Martine de Rougemont la théâtralité peut donc s'appliquer pour caractériser tout ce qui imite autre chose en étant reconnu, identifié tacitement en tant qu'acte mimétique par un spectateur visé, tout ce qui appelle la scène, qui est donc du théâtre *in potentia*, tout ce qui est pris dans une action conflictuelle, imprégné de dramatisme pour un autre regard, et finalement, tout ce qui, au théâtre, signale un surenchérissement, un renvoi méta-théâtral visible, une exhibition des conventions scéniques normalement tacites. Dans le cas précis de la peinture, par exemple, la validité de ces quatre types de manifestations de la théâtralité est amplement illustrée par l'histoire de l'art religieux occidental et de tradition byzantine, bien que chacune des deux cultures ait ses préférences en matière de théâtralité et penche pour une des valeurs citées plutôt que pour une autre.

Nous avons passé rapidement en revue quelques positions critiques relatives à la circonscription du spécifique de l'art du théâtre et de ce qui semble être l'essence de sa manifestation sur scène et en dehors de la scène, et nous pouvons noter le fait que la définition du terme pose problème et soulève une multitude de questions pour les esprits trop rigoureux. Plusieurs valeurs, plusieurs niveaux de manifestation de la théâtralité qui se laisse difficilement cerner et refuse de s'encadrer dans des limites inébranlables. Retenons pour l'instant que dans une acception très générale, *la théâtralité est la qualité de quelque chose qui renvoie au théâtre et qui, par conséquent, peut nous apprendre quelque choses sur le théâtre*. La manière dont s'opère ce renvoi (visuellement, auditivement), par quels moyens (différents types de conventions et de didascalies), le support de sa manifestation (image-objet, illustration d'un texte dramatique, jeu, scène du quotidien, scène de théâtre, etc.), le type d'information que ces renvois nous transmettent et la nature du théâtre-« référent », dépendent de la mise en place du processus de théâtralisation. Ce qu'il faut toujours avoir à l'esprit, c'est que l'imagination et la mémoire culturelle, « la forma mentis » du spectateur et de l'acteur (si acteur il y a), joue un rôle extrêmement important dans la théâtralisation. Imagination qui ne pourrait pourtant s'appliquer dans la direction du théâtre, sans une mise en place de repères didascaliques qui définissent l'objet regardé et établissent entre celui-ci et le spectateur un rapport spécifiquement théâtral. Repères qui peuvent encadrer des gestes, des espaces, des textes, des images, des actions, des scènes, etc., et qui peuvent leur faire parler le langage d'un *théâtre en attente*.

L'intérêt du concept de théâtralité, tel que nous l'avons évoqué tout en essayant d'en redessiner les contours flous et fuyants, résiderait dans l'interaction, dans le mouvement perpétuel entre ce qui renvoie explicitement au Théâtre passé, présent et à venir, et ce qui se construit en fonction de la didascalie, de cette marque spécifiquement théâtrale d'un clivage et d'une re-sémantisation dans le jeu imaginaire de la mise en scène. À partir de là, il ne nous reste qu'à aller plus loin, à chercher comment, à travers une étude du fonctionnement interne et synchronique d'un système artistique perçu comme théâtral, on peut arriver à se poser des questions sur le fonctionnement intime du théâtre, qui naît sans doute d'un besoin

irrépressible de l'homme de se mettre en scène, de se voir autre. Car, au-delà des formes qu'elle investit – textes littéraires ou images picturales – la théâtralité s'avère aussi être un *état* d'esprit ou existentiel, qui lie l'homme à sa propre image, qui le situe par rapport au monde réel et à l'imaginaire. Au-delà de toute définition, elle est la source intarissable de l'art du théâtre. C'est un état existentiel de représentation et de compréhension de ce monde, *l'être-là* dans l'ici-bas en tant que spectateur conscient de soi et des autres, que notre regard encadre, définit et, par cela même, charge de signification.

C'est seulement en fonction de sa **capacité de théâtralisation** de la vie que l'homme primitif s'inclina pour la première fois devant Dieu ou devant les dieux. Avant de **croire** aux dieux, l'homme dut d'abord acquérir le talent de **concevoir** ces dieux, de les **personnifier** comme un dramaturge personifie des idées, des sentiments ou des passions. Sans ce don de **transfiguration**, de **création imaginaire de choses et d'êtres** qui ne peuvent pas être vus sur cette terre, l'homme n'aurait pas de religion.³⁵

On se souvient que pour Nicolas Evreinov, l'homme primitif ne connaît pas la jouissance esthétique, mais il a l'instinct de jouer, de se donner en spectacle, de s'imaginer soi-même différent, autre. Il a « le sens de la théâtralité », à partir duquel peut commencer son aventure culturelle. C'est justement ce « sens de la théâtralité » qui permet à l'homme primitif de sortir de lui-même, de concevoir des dieux et de s'incliner devant eux : le « don de transfiguration » présidant à la naissance de la religion est le même que celui du dramaturge qui incarne les fictions de son esprit dans des acteurs en chair et en os. Cette belle pensée du critique russe nous permet de conclure et de laisser en même temps le champ ouvert à des études à venir.

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³⁵ N. Evreinov, *op. cit.*, p. 31, c'est nous qui soulignons. Une idée semblable apparaît dans *L'Expérience intérieure* (1943) de Georges Bataille qui affirme qu'« en toute religion la dramatisation est essentielle », voir *L'Expérience intérieure*, Paris, Gallimard, « Tel », 2001, p. 23. Dans cet ouvrage, Bataille emploie les termes « dramatisation » et « dramatiser » là où Evreinoff dirait « théâtralité » et « théâtraliser ».

**THEATRICAL COMMUNICATION AND THE RECEPTION OF
THEATER PERFORMANCES. THEORIES OF RECEPTION.
CASE STUDY: “KRUM, ECTOPLASM” AND THE
MESSAGE’S RECONSTITUTION**

RALUCA SAS MARINESCU

ABSTRACT. This work proposes a foray into the theories of reception with direct application to the play *Krum- Ectoplasm*, by Hanoch Levin, directed by Christian Theodor Popescu. Today one can no longer bring up the theory that says theater is not communication. Starting from the point of view of Keir Elam reception theories, this paper tries to identify the ways in which spectatorship is involved in a performance, how much of it is understood, and how the feedback is working, all of this applied on the 2009 romanian performance.

Keywords: *reception, communication, audiences*

The artistic activity represents a game and its forms, ways and functions evolve according to age and social contexts. “*New* is not a judging criterion except for the late detractors of modern art, who retain from present only what their traditional culture has taught them to resent in the art of yesterday.”¹ In order to invent more efficient conceptual tools and correct points of view, it is only right to perceive the transformations that operate today in the social field, to notice what has already changed, and also, what continues to change.

I think one can no longer bring up the theory that says theater is not communication. Both older and current semiotics has proven the fact that theater represents a form of communication that’s much more complex than meets the eye. From the occasional meetings in the foyer to all the messages relayed through multiple channels, both from the actors (thespians) to the spectators, and vice versa, everything represents a form of communication. The theatrical phenomenon can only be studied in its structures and systems if it is directly reporting to the whole culture of belonging. The fact that an immediate response is not given in speech does not mean, by definition, that it won’t be said later. Furthermore, in any show room the public sends signals towards the scene, often precisely coded. Moreover, as Franco Ruffini² says, “if the transmitter and the receiver know each other’s codes, it is not necessary that the two codes coincide to achieve communication,

¹ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Estetica relațională. Postproducție*, ed. Idea Print and Design, Cluj Napoca, 2007

² Ruffini, Franco, *Semiotica dell teatro*, Biblioteca Teatrale, nr.9, 1972

nor do they need to translate the messages to each other exactly, and nor that this double oriented communication take place on the same channel.” Certain extra-theatrical inter-textual and non-dramatic influences upon the decoding constitute cultural canonical references, and practically they cannot be eluded. For a contemporary intellectual spectator it is impossible to watch a show with King Oedipus or Hamlet without applying, in some form, even against his will, the principles of Freudian interpretation, since they have become not only a part of our common understanding, but, furthermore, a part of the history of the play itself³.

This work proposes a foray into the theories of reception with direct application to the play *Krum- Ectoplasm*, by Hanoch Levin, directed by Christian Theodor Popescu.

The Webster Dictionary online gives the next definition regarding the word reception: noun: The manner in which something is greeted. However, this definition excludes the semiotic message that we want to give this term in the present study, namely that of taking the message, decoding and recoding it in order to forward another message as a response. Also, the above definition excludes the action of ‘reading’ of a show/play or event. Any artistic act requires, since it is a form of communication, a relational level of the actant and his or her audience, or of a work of art and its spectator. The aesthetic, cultural and political objectives put in play by modern art bring to the fore a relational art, which chooses as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interactions and its social context, rather than assuming a symbolic space. We are witnessing a growing urbanization of the artistic experience. One of the qualities of the image is its power of relating: “flags, logos, icons, signs, all of which produce empathy and participation, they generate liaison”⁴. Theatre and cinema place small groups in front of images: what is seen is not being reviewed live the time for discussion is reserved for after the show, unlike television and literature which allow each individual his or her own intimate space, for private consumption.

Any daily event or ritual of a community can be categorized as a theatrical event because it is not the fundamental structure, but the context, which makes the difference between ritual, entertainment and ordinary life. This difference resides in the pact, conscious and unexpressed, between the actant and spectator.

In *Story- contenu, structure, genre*⁵, Robert McKee says that the ideal proportion between text and image, in order for reception to occur in optimal conditions, is 70% text to 30% image. We consider the statement perfectly valid provided that text does not necessarily mean written words, but the entire complex text of the performance. To analyze the codes and meanings of a theatrical presentation does not mean to rediscover what the author and director had previously established, but to “hold the show in a possible system of meanings whose coherence is more or less in agreement with the theatrical event itself, but

³ Keir Elam *The Semiotics of Theatre and drama*, second edition, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 79

⁴ Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Estetica relațională. Postproducție*, ed. Idea Print and Design, Cluj Napoca, 2007

⁵ McKee Robert, *Story - contenu, structure, genre*, ed. Dixit 3IS, Paris, 2007

more so with the one that examines the product”⁶, i.e. the audience. The receiver of a message is never passive, but an active producer of meanings. One of the ideological functions of the bourgeois media is to reduce this process of creating meaning, to which the receiver is subjected, to a minimum.

In any show-public exchange, the receiver’s feedback will be modeled according to the general system of the cultural relations to which the public is subjected and the audience is constantly exposed. Susan Benett says that “within that system, the process of reception will be immediately determined by the material conditions of production and placement of ‘the world is a stage’ to extra-theatrical referents”⁷. In other words, the social and cultural background has a determining role in decrypting the message. Text interpretation by each viewer is actually a new construction of it, according to the cultural and ideological disposition of the subject. The text, during decoding, is subject to a new encoding. The spectator has to understand the meaning of the show all by himself, but the usual process is hidden by the apparent passivity of the spectator. However judicious or aberrant the decoding performed by the spectator, he has the final responsibility for the meaning and coherence of what he constructs. Thus, the simple function of being a reader, which belongs to the viewer, now becomes the function of being a writer (not in the conventional sense, but as an effort of meaning construction).

The strategies of rewriting exist prior to the artistic act and the reading process, and they are activated when signing the theatrical pact and the acceptance of theatrical convention. In an ideal formula, the audience and the characters have the same information, supports McKee⁸; this statement does not exactly take into account the cultural and social context mentioned above. This formula can only function under the condition of a modern day playwright, of an immediate theatricality, automatically transposed on the stage. But this process requires the visible existence of the playwright, and at the same time, the playhouses’ opening to contemporary drama. Eventually, a theatre that chooses not to show contemporary pieces refuses to write its own history, because putting on a play twenty years later does not necessarily lead to a dilution of the initial message, but to a perception that is far from the social and cultural events that make up a character or an action.

Given the crucial importance of conventional rules at the level of transaction and interaction⁹, it is clear that the verisimilitude or the authenticity of the performance is not only determined by the “iconic” loyalty, but also by what is usually accepted by the canons of the show. In general terms, verisimilitude can be defined as what seems ‘natural’ on stage, but to an observer uninitiated in code rules, it may seem

⁶ Pavis, Patrice, *Languages of the Stage*, New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982, p.195, in Susan Benett, *Theatre Audiences. A theory of production and reception*, second edition, London and NY, Routledge, 2003

⁷ in Susan Benett, *Theatre Audiences. A theory of production and reception*, second edition, London and NY, Routledge, 2003, p. 33

⁸ McKee Robert, *Story - contenu, structure, genre*, ed. Dixit 3IS, Paris, 2007

⁹ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and drama*, second edition, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 79

astonishing: the authenticity of a Kabuki performance is more or less accessible to a Western spectator, believes Keir Elam, and this position is perfectly valid. At the same time, what is of great importance is the audience's capacity to 'ignore' the incidents that are excluded by agreement from the performance, what Goffman¹⁰ calls "activity outside framework", and what semiotics calls "noise". During a show, not only can various types of extra-textual 'noises' occur, which will have to be ignored or tolerated (late arrivals, equipment malfunctioning and, within certain limits, actors forgetting lines), but also some legitimate activities take place on the stage, which do not properly contribute to the representation; with few exceptions, they will not be taken into consideration by the spectator: for instance, stagehands entering and exiting during a set change, a custom borrowed and used in excess by provincial theaters in Romania, which does nothing but disrupt the flow of the show, forcedly reminding the spectator of the conventions. Members of a distracted audience engage less in counter-argumentations. Those interested may adopt a less positive position when distracted from reception. Noise can lead to a reduced perception of the message.

The type of immediate response that the public can resort to is applause. Some decades before the installation of Pope John Paul II at the head of the Catholic Church, even those in favor of ecclesiastical innovations would have been shocked at the idea of applauding in church. Applause represents a reaction of enthusiasm for a performance. However, even if the main character is the priest, the purpose of the two representations is essentially different. The church does not aim to please parishioners, whereas theater aims to please the consumer, to use a commercial term. But the traditional values of the church and theater have swapped: people accept being criticized or even humiliated in theater, which they have never done in church before; and the churches draw their congregations through music and dance. In this sense, we will draw attention to a recent example, found in the Summer Camp for Research and Creation *Everyday Drama*, the 2008 edition, Targu Mures, which consists of investigating methods of attracting, adopted by the *New Generation Church*, and that is rock concerts during Sunday sermon, cheerleaders or plays staged by parishioners. A culture whose creed is the showbiz, like the U.S., cannot pass on anything more than just a show.¹¹

It is true, especially in Romanian culture, in which the theater critic has become a sort of servant of a stage director or another, with few exceptions, that the period of whistling and leaving the room is somehow missing.

The proper understanding of the shows is conditioned by a theatrical competence shared more or less by both the actors and audiences, competence that

¹⁰ Erving Goffman, *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. London: Harper and Row, 1974

¹¹ For more informations on this topic see ManInFest magazine, Summer Camp for Research and Creation *Everyday Drama*, Targu Mureş, 2008, X-men and Women Generation, *Jesus* by Andreea Chindriş and Future „parents” by Roxana Magdalena Pântice articles.

includes knowledge of the types of codes and sub-codes. There is, however, a deeper form of competence that the spectator needs before he begins to decode the text correctly: the ability to recognize the performance as such. Theatrical events differ from other types of events according to certain organizational and cognitive principles, which, like all cultural rules, must be learned.

Given all these elements that make up reception and not barring the communication models proposed by recent semiotics, or the functions of theater language, I will try to analyze the performance with *Krum-Ectoplasm*, by Hanoch Levin, directed by Cristian Theodor Popescu, which premiered in 2009 at the National Theater in Targu Mures.

The first impulse for the spectator who enters the hall will be to decode the meaning of the conventional signs used as elements of set design. Thus, hanging by a rod, one can observe bright "iconic signs" that are usually found in airports: some of them recognizable as real, like the one showing a camera, others unknown, for example a garbage bin with a cat nearby. At the reception level, though, the message is decoded immediately after the convention imposed by such a location, and the mind begins to seek the meanings in automatic mode: only it cannot explain them. At another level, this installation interval also entails an agreed negotiation that is accepted automatically, at least out of curiosity to decrypt indicators. Returning to McKee's assertion that the ideal ratio between text and image is 70 to 30, the initial scenography suggests a desired imbalance, which will adjust along the way, at the same time as the decoding that each indicator represents the evolution of a character or another, thus gaining the function of text. An indicator quietly accompanies every action or state.

The choice in the use of space deserves a special attention: the performance takes place with the maximum opening than can be provided by the stage of the National Theatre, both in width and in depth, but also throughout the entire room. A semiotic interpretation states that the deliberate inclusion of the public within the story makes the dramaturgical spaces be dilated to a maximum, and the distancing, which the spectator must keep, as imposed by the depth of the stage, overlaps with the identification.

The issue here is: to what extent does this identification function, under the conditions brought forth by *Krum's* opening line, having returned from his initiation travels:

"Mother, it didn't work out for me. Neither did I become rich, nor did I find happiness abroad. I didn't move forward by one inch, I didn't have a good time, I didn't marry, I didn't even get engaged. I didn't meet anybody. I didn't buy anything and I didn't bring anything. I have only my laundry and toothbrush in the suitcase. There, I told you everything and now I'm asking to please leave me alone."

Designed in a space that suggests universality, the show however creates the sensation of an acute and painful, extremely Romanian present:

“Mother: Toils. In your world, on your parcel of life, it won’t be in your power to amass anything but toils, and that’s it. Toils, a desk job, a child to feed, then another child, and a housing loan to be repaid until you give your last breath. This is what’s in store for you, my dear, and nothing more. The world doesn’t have other toys to offer you.”

Each of the characters is waiting for something, but every one of them dizzying themselves with small ideals. But as soon as each character sees their ideal turned, they are running away from the responsibility that comes with it and is showing their discontent. Krum’s ongoing quest merely causes the characters to fulfill their shallow dreams, precisely because this quest does not materialize into anything palpable. This entire image resembles the Romanian world of “cultural slums” created by “telenovelas” (Latin American soap operas) and superficial stories. Even the character of Tswitsa Turtle Dove, presented as an exotic element in the world where we are, the alleged happy possessor of a successful career outside the hovel, remains superficial, having no other joy but to boast of her achievements to her old friends: they are the only ones who think she’s superior. The characters’ unreliable motivations lead to a false idea of freedom, available to the former Communist Bloc countries, which have merely condemn the individual to a financial prison without escape.

The subtitle of the play: “play with two weddings and two funerals”, used intentionally to highlight key events in the life of a man, reminds us of Genep’s rites of passage; but here they are not decisive and they do not change the characters’ evolution, which is condemned from the start, to linearity.

Shkitt Taciturn, who leaves the place at the end, represents the playwright’s cold distance. However, the question that arises is if the solution chosen by him, that of escape, is not identical with the other characters’:

“Krum: I know it. You want to get out, to become rich, to marry a beautiful creature, and to return here in an American convertible, to show her the neighborhood where you grew up! Come on, admit it! I don’t believe you! All these years of silence just so you can hide your ambitions from us! Yes, I know them, the dumb ones of your kind! They all secretly dream to have a career and to sleep with models!

Shkitt: I swear on my life, I will remain poor, alone and indifferent.”

The cinematographic structure the director approached, with scenes built even on three levels at the same times, does not allow the reception to suffer any moments of pause. Elements provided as noise, such as the deodorizers on the edge of the stage, (whose metaphor is obvious, but not functional) or the somewhat chaotic performance of the actors among spectators in the hall, virtually leaving the delimitation unfinished because of the imbalance between right and left, are, still, too small to alter the quality of reception or to change the message.

However, an observing study of the audience makes clear that the Romanian spectator is not prepared to be an integral part of the proposed story, because he is not willing to abandon the convenience of looking forward and prefers, in most situations, to collect the scenes that run behind him or to his side on sound channels, but not on the visual ones, too. This is where the cultural frameworks that the Romanian spectator is accustomed to comes in and interfere with the specific theatrical framework of *Krum*: to sit in the dark, like a voyeur, but without being involved, touched or bothered by the actor. The proximity embarrasses and makes the audience perceive it as noise, even if at the transmitter's level it does not have that function.

As a conclusion, the uninitiated audience still fails to distinguish the different levels of perception that he should possess in order to fully understand a type of approach as that proposed by a show like *Krum-Ectoplasm*. Nevertheless, one can appreciate that the message is being sent to different levels of understanding, thus allowing the decoding to be done in a fairly large proportion.

Conventionally removed from participation in stage events (nowadays) - in other words, clearly not taken into consideration by the actors, beyond the call to applause - the audience's reaction carries, however, a double influence: both on the show itself and on its reception. The communication between spectator and actor will affect at least the actor's involvement in his work. On the other hand,

“the communication between spectators, generally ignored as a semiotic factor, has three main effects, important for the homogeneity of the audience's response: stimulation (laughter in one side of the room causes similar reactions elsewhere), confirmation (spectators see their own reactions supported by others) and integration (an individual member of the audience is thus encouraged to relinquish his function for the greater unit to which he belongs)”¹².

The usual Romanian audience's attitude and meaning processes still have to step forward, in order to conquer the third step Keir Elam was talking about, integration.

Translated by Mihaela Banu

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ANNEX

Data sheet for the show Krum- Ectoplasm by Hanoch Levin

National Theater of Targu Mures

Artistic Director: Theodor Cristian Popescu

Romanian version: Cristina Toma

Set Design: Andu Dumitrescu

Music and sound design: Vlaicu Golcea

Choreography and movement: Eduard Gabia

Cast:

Krum Ectoplasm – Mihai Crăciun

Krum's mother – Elena Porea

Shkitt Taciturn – Ion Vântu

Tugati Miserable – Csaba Ciugulitu

Sweet, Bertoldo, The Photographer – Rareș Budileanu

Felicia, Sweet's wife – Anca Loghin

Tahti Jewel, Doctor Schibeugen – Costin Găvăză

Truda Zaluda= Toil Stupid – Roxana Marian

Dupa Fastacita= Dupa Confused – Vera Nica

Tswittsa Turturita= Twittsa Turtle Dove – Ionela Nedelea

The Nurse, The Barber, The Groom, The Mortician – Luchian Pantea

The Nurse, The Bride – Mihaela Mihai

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THE CURSE OF THE HEDGEHOG. AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL FILM BY DUMITRU BUDRALĂ

MIHAI ANDREI LEAHA

ABSTRACT. First of all, we are dealing with a cultural product, a feature-length film, an anthropological visual material performed within the style of direct cinema. *The Curse of the Hedgehog* is one of the first anthropological films made in Romania which plays an important role for the very recent history of Romanian anthropological cinema as well as for my own experience as a viewer. The director of the film, Dumitru Budrală, is a distinguished film director with an anthropological background.

Keywords: anthropological movie, analysis, cinema



I became quite an athlete while making the movie, I was both the cameraman and the film director, I was walking together with them through snow, 30 kilometers everyday (?miles) in the cold, harsh winter, carrying my video camera. While filming the most interesting part was that a friendship grew between us, they accepted me as a friend, so we reached a level of profound communication, thus I realized that these people are wonderful, profound, wise and philosophers. I ate with them, I slept with them, we suffered from hunger together, we drank brandy together, we joked, I never tried to disturb their life, to rummage their past, I wanted their story from the movie to appear with great discretion, I never tried to force anything.

Dumitru Budrală

The hedgehog cursed the gypsies not to have rest that is how the anthropologist's destiny is as well. To be an anthropologist means to travel tens, hundreds and even thousands of miles to speak with a person. Of course, a more prosaic definition of the discipline, but what defines and delimits anthropology as a research field and differentiates it among other disciplines, is exactly the practice of fieldwork as well as the temptation to discover the other one through what Geertz named "experience-near" as opposed to "experience-distant concepts"¹. In the *rites of written anthropology* this experience means the written translation of what the ethnographer observes on filed. After all, doing ethnography, means to rewrite an "experience – near" research, but in the absence of that experience, at home at the writing desk. In this case the only materials, as a support for the memory, are the well-known "fieldnotes". On the other hand, in *the rites of visual anthropology*, visual rewriting is done at the editing table, more in a presence of the absence, through "filmnotes" or "raw footage". The image, in this case holds place for a reality which is experienced by the ethnographer in a past continuous manner, a reality which is long gone but still present, affectionate and robbed from its own time. It's easy to understand now, that we are dealing with two different ways of constructing the anthropological message. One is more pragmatic, analytical, carrying a theoretical necessity and the other which assumes the proposals of the first but is more sensible, more artistic, and more reflexive than the first.

Why *The Curse of the Hedgehog*? Why Dumitru Budrală? Why the anthropological film? These are questions that have a strong connection but have different answers. First of all, we are dealing with a cultural product, a feature-length film, an anthropological visual material performed within the style of direct cinema. *The Curse of the Hedgehog* is one of the first anthropological films made in Romania which plays an important role for the very recent history of Romanian anthropological cinema as well as for my own experience as a viewer. The director of the film, Dumitru Budrală, is a distinguished film director with an anthropological background. In 2006, at the Astra Film Festival, the British anthropologist and film director Michael Stuart, PhD Professor, referred to Budrală as the best, and the only anthropological film director of Romania. Of course Budrală is the director and the initiator of the Astra Film Festival, one of the leading Film Festivals in Europe today, maybe the credits coming from the part of the British professor, were given also for this reasons. There is no doubt that we are dealing with an important personality and a very provoking film.

The domain of anthropological cinema, its history, the context of its birth is a hybrid one: "Film people consider me an anthropologist, and anthropologists consider me a filmmaker" This is the answer that Jean Rouch gave to Robert Gardner in the famous TV show "Screening Room". As strange as it seems, the general opinion about the matter, at least in Romania seems to be a similar one, until today. Although, we are speaking about a domain, with tradition in American

¹ Geertz, Clifford, *From the Native's Point of View, On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding*, Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, vol. 28 no. 1 (1974), pp. 26-45.

or European Universities, it is almost nonexistent in our country. Astra Film Festival, Dumitru Budrală, and *The Curse of the Hedgehog*, are breaking new grounds in the field of Romanian Anthropological Cinema.

What could Visual Anthropology be? In International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Science², Peter Loizos underlines two possible definition of the field. First of all, visual anthropology might be seen as a subfield of mainstream anthropology. In this sense visual anthropology plays an important role in communicating the observations of anthropologists with the help of photo and audio visual materials. This way of looking at the domain is practically a more objectifying manner of doing ethnography. Salvage Ethnography³ but also in a broader sense Observational Cinema. A second definition is concerned with the role of visual systems and their effect upon different cultures and societies.

In Encyclopedia Britannica, Akos Ostor, gives a similar dual definition of the term, but in the same time observes a tension that appears between the two. First we have *the promise* (researching the field by visual means) and then we have the dilemma (the effect of the visual means upon the field and the researcher). This tension gave birth, to various exciting discussions in the field about different issues regarding the problem of representation: objectivity, participation, reflexivity, ethics, etc. Basically these discussions announced the rising of a new way of producing anthropological knowledge, a new independent domain of activity and not a subfield of mainstream (written tradition) anthropology.

Jay Ruby, one of the professors of the Anthropology of Visual Communication department, from Temple University, sees Visual Anthropology firstly as an alternative to written anthropological research⁴. In *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*⁵, Ruby sustains the fact that mass-media central positioning, starting with the XX century has played a very important role in creating and developing cultural identities. This type of awareness brings with itself big responsibilities from the part of those who are manipulating this type of visual material. The main difference between an anthropologist, who uses or not visual means, and a non-anthropologist but who deals in diverse ways with the representation of reality, consists in the awareness of the ethical and political problems of representation.

² International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Science, Peter Loizos, Visual Anthropology p. 16250.

³ Margaret Mead, *Visual Anthropology in a discipline of Words*, in, Hockings, Paul, *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, NY, 1995. p. 3-10.

⁴ “Anthropology is a word-driven discipline. It has tended to ignore the visual-pictorial world perhaps because of distrust of the ability of images to convey abstract ideas. When engaged in ethnography, the researcher must convert the complex experience of fieldwork to words in a notebook and then transform those words into other words shifted through analytic methods and theories. This logocentric approach to understanding denies much of the multisensory experience of trying to know another culture. The promise of visual anthropology is that it might provide an alternative way of perceiving culture-perception constructed through the lens.” Ruby, Jay, *Visual Anthropology*. In *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, David Levinson and Melvin Ember, editors. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996 1351.

⁵Ibid. p. 1345-1351.

I preferred to answer at the question of the context, throughout a brief attempt of defining visual anthropology as an autonomous discipline. Among the answers we can find are the motivations which lead me to choose the topic of this paper and I refer in particular, to the discussion about the ethic issues. The way in which one highlights the others, gives a certain anthropological quality of this kind of film. The main difference between entertainment documentary and anthropological film consists exactly to a redirection of the main aspects of the film towards the ethical issues of a research and the option for an assumed truth.⁶

Is The Course of the Hedgehog a documentary film or an anthropological one?
D.B. There are films that could fit both categories. "The Course of the Hedgehog" can communicate with the field of documentary, but is also appreciated in the academic field. In any vision is very hard to make such films. All the other essay documentaries, have a controllable production – script, actors etc., and the reality is over filtered by the vision of the director and all the rest of production artifacts. However there is a trained public especially in the west, which is fed up with essay-documentaries or artificial TV docudramas. I believe there is an appetite for this kind of films that gives you the opportunity to enter into the intimacy of the social world that is being presented and allows the viewer to form its own conclusions without the interference of an off/voice, a script, or an expert.

For me the history of anthropological cinema, includes among Flaherty, Vertov, Ivens, Greirson, the prehistoric of the field, Jean Rouch (in my opinion the founder of the domain), Robert Gardner, David and Judith MacDougall, John Marshall, Tim Asch, the classics, also Dumitru Budrala. I have to confess that I found out about the distinguished authors mentioned before through the Astra Film Festival of Sibiu. A madness! Some sort of a sect, a clan, an event in the true sense of the word. A place were people gather from all over the world; films; master classes; lot's of questions, different people but willing to speak about others with lots of respect (I refer to the subjects of the films). The Astra Project, sustained by the Astra Museum, began its activity in 1993. Astra film Studio functions as the audio-visual department of the museum, but behind it there is also a visual anthropology foundation, first and unique in the country, Astra Film Foundation. All this accomplishments took form around Dumitru Budrala's personality. The film director from Sibiu is also author of the only book about anthropological cinema in Romania⁷. This book, a brief history of the domain, is unfortunately the only published book in the field of visual anthropology, in Romania. Sad. The example of Dumitru Budrala which created this institutional framework and developed the necessary structures for an inexistent field in Romania, is one worth all the credits.

⁶ "There are these stereotypes about Gypsies, according to which they are either primitive ether unfortunate, either very dangerous. At the other extreme we have the romantic image of the representations of an exotic culture. In my film they are just people. Everything what the film is showing it is real. About some of the things it was hard also for me to believe that they still exist." Volkskrant magazine, Olaf Tempelman, 18.11.2004.

⁷ Budrală, Dumitru, *Momente din istoria filmului antropologic*, Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu, 2005.

The Course of the Hedgehog is a film with style, a film with life, a film with plenty of awards⁸. The film follows on the course of one year, the destiny of a very poor Baiesi family. The film is a *on the road film*, the viewer, along with the filmmaker, takes a journey from the small mountain village of the Baiesi to the valley villages where Romanians live. We witness the harsh making of broomsticks and baskets, and the often violent bargaining with the Romanian community. The winter road represents a road for survival, because the family doesn't have any other source of income. But, the film is not a film about poverty is a film about the social community of the Baiesi Roma and moreover about this particular group of people without an intent to generalize the problem. During the film we find out why our heroes stay away from agriculture, what is their opinion about the wealthy "bisnitari" who made fortunes out of cheating people with false gold rings. We can also observe a practical mythological thinking, a community with great religious feelings and strong principles. Maybe, by watching this film we can better understand their lives, with its sufferance and absurdities, by having this privileged closer look upon people like us.

Talking about *The Curse of the Hedgehog*, Cristi Puiu, categorizes the film as a direct cinema style genre⁹. Direct cinema is best described by its initiator, Edgar Morin. He created, together with Jean Rouch, the direct cinema manifesto, *The Chronicle of a summer*. Morin explains it by saying they wanted to create a visual document that desires to capture the authenticity of life just as it is. Most probably, this kind of intention will also fit to our film¹⁰. This stylistic expression of the film and the way I've naturally received the film, is obviously a mark of the intentionality of the author. But we, as a public have no access at the real intentionality

⁸ *The Curse of the Hedgehog* received The Best Documentary price in Docupolis, Barcelona, 2005; The best Film Price at *Festivalul filmului documentar roman-maghiar*, Film.Dok2, 2005; A Special Price at The International Ethnographic Film Festival, Belgrad 2005; A Special Price at The International Film Festival Dialektus, Budapesta 2007 and it was selected in the most important documentary competition Joris Ivens IDFA-2004.

⁹ "I am very attached by the direct style, as Budral's film is. I appreciate the documentary made from the position of the one who doesn't know and wants to find out, and I detest the attitude of the documentary filmmaker who knows what is the truth and wants to explain it to me, as a spectator, that's the trouble with this. In other words if the fiction film director is born to be a demiurge, the documentary filmmaker is born to be a prophet. Horrible thing to say! I want to be, together with the author, part in the quest of things, I want to clear things out, together with him... *The curse of the Hedgehog*, is an on a road film, taken by the documentary filmmaker which ask his questions using the naïve curiosity of a child and of an ethnologist" *Blestemul ariciullui*. Interviu cu Cristi Puiu, *Dilema Veche*, Year IV, no.188, 13 September 2007.

¹⁰ "I tend to surprise the people in their moats natural attitudes, and try to avoid their tendency of playing for the camera. I try to draw a portrait of a character through as fewer images, gestures and words as possible. That's way I prefer to film routine actions. I do not take advantage of their intimacy, once I own their trust. There is an unwritten moral contract. If I wouldn't respect it the characters with which I work with will be, for sure, disturbed and unnatural. What I can do is to provoke discussions on certain themes. On the other side, I don't like to treat a subject from only one point of view. I always search for all the valences, and I try to surprise the characters in all their complexity." *Romania Libera*, Thursday, 24 November 2005.

of the author. The only thing we can do is to draw some personal conclusions while the film imposes its “authorism”¹¹. I strongly believe, that the power of the author of creating a world that speaks to us depends, in visual anthropology on the ability of the director to create reflexive¹² and *transcultural cinema*¹³.

I believe that *The Curse of the Hedgehog* assumes a certain kind of reflectivity and not necessarily the reflexive method of visual anthropology. Budrala’s film, practices reflectivity in a formal manner, the participation of the author can be felt from the very beginning of the film. We can first discover pictures and the voiceover of the author, facts that make him an integrated part of the community. He is present and visible and throughout the film people address him by the nickname Marlboro. From time to time the author feels the need to interrupt the narrative of the visual with a voiceover. He gives details of the history of the Baiesi community, he introduces passages, like the wedding ceremony, but he does not draw value judgments. These formal devices of expression, makes ‘*The curse of the Hedgehog*’ a reflective visual product and not a reflexive one¹⁴. To be reflexive means to show formally in the structure of your film the awareness that your own reflectivity is tributary to the methods of ethnography¹⁵. To be reflexive means to apply the principle of “shared anthropology”¹⁶, it means to methodically and formally accept the idea that every visual research is a continuous process of negotiations. In this way, we consider that the creation of a visual anthropological product should necessarily present in its own structure, the methods of ethnographic investigations. Reflexivity is essential in an anthropological film because the ways in which an anthropologist negotiates his position in the field influences the logic of the research and the production of anthropological knowledge.

¹¹ Authorism – concept launched in the french cinema of the 50’s. It refers to the capacity of the director to create a world which is able to *speaks to us*. The author should have in mind the formal history of cinematographic art, and try to integrate the auctorial intentionality into the expectancy horizon of the public.

¹² “To be reflexive, in terms of a work of anthropology, is to insist that anthropologists systematically and rigorously reveal their methodology and themselves as the instrument of data generation.” Ruby, Jay, *Exposing yourself: Reflexivity, anthropology, and film*, Semiotica 30-1/2 1980, p. 153

¹³ Transcultural cinema means to transcend the limitation of cultures, to cross it’s boundaries, by recognizing in the image that you see the similitude in the difference. MACDOUGALL, David, *Transcultural Cinema*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1998. p.245-249.

¹⁴ In other words, one can be reflective without being reflexive. That is, one can become self-conscious without being conscious of that self-consciousness (Babcock 1977). Only if a producer decides to make his awareness of self a public matter and convey that knowledge to his audience is it then possible to regard the product as reflexive. Ibid, p. 157.

¹⁵ „an ethnography is the reflective product of an individual’s extended experience in (usually) an exotic society mediated by other experiences, beliefs, theories, techniques (including objective procedures when they are used), personal ideology, and the historical moment in which the work was done’ (Honigsmann 1976:259).’ ibid. p. 16.

¹⁶ „Film, is the only method I have to show another just how I see him. In other words, for me, my prime audience is (after the pleasure of the „cine – trance’’ during the filming and editing) the other person, the one I am filming.’¹⁶. Rouch, Jean, *Cine – Ethnography*, University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

As Budrală says, *'The Curse of the Hedgehog'* can be both a documentary and an anthropological film, it is more like a border situated film, between the genres. But the question remains, into what extent is *'The Curse of the Hedgehog'* an anthropological film? If we accept a certain illusion of the objectivity of the images and the way in which culture manifests itself through gestures, stories and emotions that have a certain rituality, than Budrală's film offers quite an anthropological feasting. If we can accept the destiny of Nanook as being authentic, although we know about its scenery, and we do not consider Flaherty's work as being a big anthropological fraud, than *'The Curse of the Hedgehog'* is anthropological in a very true sense. The scene in which a woman weeps after her child that had just burned alive along with the house and the few things that the poor woman had is very emotional. The scene is amazingly authentic, the reality in it is surprising and no actress could reproduce it, it creates emotion and is very hard to forget because it awakens the humanity in us. „, I cared for my donkey more that my man or my children. But now, he's dead. If I had a donkey right now I would live like in the parliament” says Turica, one of the main characters of the film. After we see her walking for miles together with the author and the other people, with her back burdened by tens of kilograms, Turica enters our own world through the empathy that our humanity feels for a woman in sufferance. The film has its ways of making us forget about ourselves by contaminating us with another world which is not ours but becomes one of our worlds. The characters of the film become humans like us and this deep connection (author – characters – viewer), becomes a new reality that belongs to our experience.

With an amateur eye, I saw *'The Curse of the Hedgehog'* for the first time in 2005, I have seen it three times since then. The second time I saw the film was at the Astra Film Fest in Sibiu, in a great atmosphere, numerous public, professionals and enthusiasts. It was an amazing experience, it was somehow normal, the film played in its own ground. Together with everybody else I have sighed in certain moments and laugh with tears because of the authentic sense of humor of the two Roma philosophers. After two years, I saw the film again at the Student Film Festival in Cluj. It was an empty hall, indescribable atmosphere; I watched a film with no public and no expectations. The film looked pale and used from a formal point of view. It had kept its life through the characters but their humor seemed exhausted. Had the publics have had a great impact over my expectancies? Why couldn't it happen as it does in a theatre hall? Or maybe my exigencies were at a higher level climbing right on the back of the hedgehog. We will see what will be my opinion in ten years. They say a truly great film resists over time. At least this is what I think.



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ORCHESTRATION DRAMATURGIQUE D'UN OUTRAGE

DARIA IOAN

*La littérature transforme tout ce qui est
réel, y compris l'engagement, en style.*

Peter Handke

ABSTRACT : *Orchestration dramaturgique d'un outrage* traite des moyens par lesquels Peter Handke réussit, en 1966, à apporter sur scène le paradoxe d'une dramaturgie guerrière, d'une simulation de démolition de l'institution théâtrale elle-même, dans une époque de forte descentralisation. Notre article poursuit la modalité par laquelle le public est transformé dans l'acteur de son propre spectacle, non sans l'explication méthodique de la nécessité de cette mutation. On essaye ici de répondre à la question suivante: la négation d'un théâtre dialogué, la destruction farouche du quatrième mur, la tentative de mise en scène de la réalité telle qu'elle apparaît le soir où on représente la pièce, fut-ce un projet dramaturgique durable ou bien un simple manifeste, essentiellement irrépérable, issu d'une terrible soif de restauration d'unité au sein de la crise langagière qui a dominé cette époque ?

Keywords: *Handke, public, acteur dramaturgie, anti-théâtre*

En se revendiquant du principe wittgensteinien qui impose le silence là où l'expression verbale devient impossible, Peter Handke va essayer de fonder un théâtre de la non-représentation, où l'image serait bannie en raison de sa fausseté. Il force les limites du théâtre au point où un projet de métadiscours d'un outrage deviendrait une démarche paisible. La dramaturgie qu'il propose dans son *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (1966) consiste en une violence intentionnelle faite au théâtre dans son essence de distance à l'intérieur organique du texte, mais à la fois, à l'extrême de tout niveau métadramatique, à l'institution théâtrale elle-même. Son projet d'outrager un public puise aux sources d'une crise du langage, qui ne signifie plus, qui a été épuisé, au profit d'une identification du même avec un double monstrueux.

L'*Outrage* déclenche un scandale lors de sa première représentation, à Francfort. Le goût de l'auteur pour la provocation s'exprime notamment à travers une opposition à l'esthétique du «nouveau réalisme », dont cette pièce sera une sorte d'antimanifeste. « Dans le théâtre de Handke », affirme Heinke Wagner, la première étape dans l'acheminement vers la parole sera marquée par une écriture analytique du *symptôme langagier* : l'atteinte à la parole est une conséquence de la désacralisation

radicale dont l'expression formelle est la choralité »¹ *Outrage au public* préfigure la grande remise en question du théâtre en Europe Occidentale, après les événements du printemps 1968. De toutes les activités artistiques, le théâtre a été «ébranlé dans ses structures apparemment les plus fermes »², affirme Bernard Dort dans ses essais de critique concernant la période 1967- 1970. Certaines des grandes institutions européennes se sont confrontées à des menaces et conflits qu'elles ont eu du mal à résoudre. C'est le cas du *Piccolo Teatro de Milan*, qui s'est vu déchiré entre des attaques de l'extérieur (des reproches d'un répertoire trop politisé) et de l'intérieur (causées par les disputes de succession de Giorgio Strehler), ou bien de *Berliner Ensemble* confronté à la soit disant première fin de l'ère brechtienne, tandis qu'en France, la politique de décentralisation théâtrale après la Libération semble, dit Dort, sur le point d'être remise en question, suite à des difficultés matérielles. Le mythe d'un théâtre considéré comme service public est frappé à mort. En République fédérale allemande elle-même, là où les institutions théâtrales paraissent les mieux assises, l'édifice se lézarde : non seulement certains grands théâtres municipaux ont vu leur subventions réduites, mais leur organisation comme leur rapport avec le public se sont trouvés [...] mis en question. [...] D'autre part, la sacro-sainte autorité de l'intendant ou du metteur en scène est de plus en plus discutée : assistants, acteurs, voire techniciens, parfois opposés les uns aux autres, aspirent à une plus grande liberté de travail et réclament leur part dans le spectacle ou dans la direction du théâtre.³ Dans ce contexte, le projet d'outrage du public de Peter Handke, crée un état de violence au sein même de la crise : une violence faite aux acteurs qui se voient dénués de leur statut habituel, ensuite au texte dramatique lui-même, qui devient juste des mots destinés à provoquer un fait réel, au public par l'action commune que les deux premiers sont censés accomplir en faux alliés, et à l'institution dans son ontologie. La négation d'un théâtre dialogué, la destruction farouche du quatrième mur, la tentative de mise en scène de la réalité telle qu'elle apparaît le soir où on représente la pièce, fut-ce un projet dramaturgique réalisable ou bien un simple manifeste, essentiellement irrépétable, issu d'une terrible soif de restauration d'unité au sein de la crise langagière qui a dominé cette époque ? Pour répondre à cette question nous allons considérer non seulement le texte de Handke, mais aussi le contexte de crise profonde qui a marqué le monde du théâtre pendant les années '60.

Della dissimulazione onesta

Dans son *Outrage*, Handke songe, à haute voix, à une mise en scène d'un nouvel état des choses auquel il tente paradoxalement d'imprimer un mouvement anti-théâtral. Le déplacement du centre de poids du spectacle, qui s'attaque à un public sans doute inquiet devant la violence de cette métaréalité qui se prétend réelle, est le signe d'un discours objectivant dont on force les limites. Nous

¹ Wagner, Heinke, *La mission théâtrale de Peter Handke*, Editions scientifiques européennes, Bern, 2003, p. 45.

² Dort, Bernard, *Théâtre réel*, ch. *La réalité théâtrale*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1971, p. 236.

³ Idem, p. 238.

assistons aux efforts d'instituer ce nouvel état des choses à travers la mise en scène de son manque de dissimulation. La dramaturgie que Handke emploie afin de réaliser cette *dissimulazione onesta* est une *dramaturgie guerrière*, corrosive, qui, à la frontière de la contradiction, sauve les apparences par sa sincérité déclarée. Son texte prétend tout régler d'avance dans un espace mixte qui n'est pas tout à fait propre à l'écrivain: scénographie, y compris décor et lumière, indications pour la préparation des acteurs à la pièce, aménagement de la salle en dehors de la scène, voire direction des réactions du public. Le texte n'est pas organisé selon un système clair de prise de la parole, et les voix censées le dire pourraient se multiplier ou diminuer en nombre sans que le discours en souffre des conséquences déstabilisatrices majeures. Mais Handke livre son texte à d'un nombre fixe d'acteurs : quatre. L'effet polyphonique est assuré dès le tout début de la pièce par l'indication qui tient place de liste des personnages :

« Quatre acteurs ». Voyons quel est le projet que Handke confie à ces quatre acteurs, explicitement délivrés de tout pouvoir symbolique.

D'abord, ils ne sont pas des personnages, il n'y a pas des rôles proprement dits, puisque les paroles qu'ils prononcent doivent être vides d'intention, tandis que la manière de parler doit être débarrassée de signification. Tous ces détails une fois réglés, « l'ordre dans lequel ils parlent est laissé à leur propre choix »⁴ On remarque déjà un double jeu de cette dramaturgie : d'un côté, le règlement stricte de l'interprétation, et de l'autre, le liberté au niveau de prise de la parole, l'absence de hiérarchie des voix. Le premier principe vise un ordre des contraintes prédéterminantes de la représentation, tandis que le second vient enrichir la structure donnée par l'intuition libre de toute règle dans le jeu d'improvisation. Handke compte donc à la fois avec une dramaturgie qui règle la représentation à partir du texte, et avec une autre, qui fait surgir ce texte à partir du jeu des acteurs sur la scène. Mais la dernière reste sans doute subordonnée à la dramaturgie propre au texte, puisqu'elle est prévue par celle-ci. Un art théâtral détaché du texte se préfigure, mais il n'a pas d'autonomie complète. Il peut arriver aussi que les deux soient réellement séparés, et que les deux dramaturgies fonctionnent en parallèle, mais le poids anticipatif de cette liberté des acteurs reste néanmoins puissant à l'intérieur du texte et difficile à ignorer par la dramaturgie extérieure issue du jeu intuitif des acteurs. C'est l'un des points où la démarche dramaturgique de Handke s'avère omnipuissante : prévoir même la liberté du jeu des acteurs ferme un système qui n'offre plus aucune issue alternative.

Préparation d'un voyage au *pays sonore*

Le haut degré personnel qui se laisse voir dans cette oeuvre inaugurale des autres pièces parlées de Peter Handke est saisissable surtout dans ce qu'il appelle « Instructions pour les acteurs ». Ce ne sont point des pratiques traditionnelles que

⁴Handke, Peter, *Outrage au public*, dans *Outrage au public et d'autres pièces parlées*, L'Arche, Paris, 1968, p. 17.

les acteurs doivent réaliser avant de « parler » la pièce, mais des indications très diverses, qui ne font que pointer une intériorité unique qui organise ce spectacle. Prenons quelques exemples :

Ecouter les litanies dans les églises catholiques.

Ecouter les exhortations et les invectives du public au cours d'un match de football.

[...]

Ecouter « Tell me » de Rolling Stones.

[...]

Regarder les films des Beatles.

Dans le premier film des Beatles, observer le visage de Ringo Starr qui sourit, à l'instant où, après avoir été taquiné par les autres, il s'assied à la batterie et se met à battre du tambour.

Regarder le visage de Gary Cooper dans le film *L'Homme de l'Ouest*.

Dans le même film, regarder la mort du muet qui, une balle dans le corps, traverse toute la ville déserte, en titubant et en bondissant, et qui lance un cri déchirant.

Regarder, au zoo, les singes qui imitent les hommes et les lamas qui crachent.⁵

Les indications sont visuelles et auditives. Handke prépare un état d'esprit désiré chez les quatre acteurs, un état d'esprit construit à partir des sens. Le rapport entre vue et écoute est quand même inégal, l'auteur montrant sans réserve sa prédilection pour le champ sonore, pour lequel, dans la description de la salle avant le spectacle, il prévoit même des normes : « Il faut classer les bruits, afin d'arriver à une ordonnance, à des normes »⁶. Par ces instructions qui ouvrent l'*Outrage au public*, Handke assure les didascalies pour le texte entier. Il pose ces instructions en tant qu'invariables du jeu, même si des acteurs différents vont réagir de manière différente aux pratiques étranges qu'il leur propose, et la dramaturgie externe au texte sera mise à l'oeuvre de toute façon. En ce qui concerne l'assimilation de ces pratiques, il y a un autre élément déstabilisateur qui intervient ; il s'agit du changement des époques. Les mélodies et les films recommandés par Handke aux années '60 ne produiraient guère les mêmes effets dans des acteurs des dizaines d'années après. L'effet visé au moment où Handke écrit la pièce serait forcément autre de nos jours. On va revenir sur cette question dans la troisième partie de notre étude, où on va considérer la durabilité du projet théâtral de l'*Outrage*.

Les instructions pour les acteurs constituent le signe d'une dramaturgie expansive, débordante. Handke projette un état d'esprit sur les *parleurs* de sa pièce. Le deuxième pas de sa démarche consiste en le réglage très détaillé d'un espace théâtral

⁵Idem, p. 13.

⁶Idem, p. 15.

qui mixe scène et salle de l'auditoire, étant donnée la négation de tout espace diégétique. Le lieu de la fiction n'existe pas puisqu'il n'y a pas de fiction. Cette question présente des points flous dans la conception de l'outrage « vrai », puisque tout serait censé se passer pour de vrai chez les spectateurs, mais le texte organise quand même le côté des acteurs, qui, eux, sont placés dans un méta-temps réel. On peut affirmer donc que la mise en scène du temps réel du spectacle relève de la fiction, et que la négation de la *diégèse* présente des contradictions dans la vision de Peter Handke. Mais il s'agit de contradictions qui n'empêchent pas le spectacle d'avoir lieu, le projet de se mettre en place. Elles jouent sur un double processus, tout comme celles qui concernent la tenue du public : généralisation de la notion dans un premier temps, suivie, dans un second temps, d'une déclaration de liberté interprétative extrême. Le dramaturge manifeste un soin particulier pour l'ambiance de la salle où le public va être reçu, ce qui fait l'écho des nombreuses instructions pour les acteurs :

En entrant dans la salle, les spectateurs trouveront l'ambiance habituelle qui précède le début d'un spectacle. En coulisse, on pourrait simuler un remue-ménage ou un trafic bruyant qui serait entendu de la salle. [...] Ces bruits seraient amplifiés au magnétophone.⁷

Dissimuler une préparation minutieuse du spectacle fait aussi partie du projet dramaturgique de l'outrage. Les spectateurs sont piégés par l'apparence non-soignée de ce qu'ils vont voir. La dimension du leurre est encore plus évidente lorsque Handke donne les indications pour les ouvreuses de la salle, qui, après avoir reçu le public d'une manière très élégante (« une élégance particulière »⁸), dont les gestes sont aussi prévus d'avance, *ferment* les portes de la salle: « Les gestes des ouvreuses qui fermeront les portes seront empreintes d'une gravité toute spéciale. Il ne faut pas cependant que ce soit interprété comme un geste symbolique »⁹. L'une des particularités de cette dramaturgie consiste en l'excès d'attention pour le public, qui n'est pas considéré en tant qu'élément libre, mais intégré du spectacle. Handke prévoit la tenue et les réactions du public. Pour que cet état d'esprit général qu'il projette dans tout l'espace théâtral tienne debout, il est nécessaire que les gens qui viennent au théâtre respectent des normes :

Les spectateurs dont la tenue ne sera pas soignée, n'auraient pas accès à la salle. Cette notion de tenue est à interpréter, bien entendu, dans le sens le plus large. Nul ne devra attirer l'attention, et moins encore choquer par sa manière d'être vêtu. Les hommes porteront un complet sombre, une chemise blanche et une cravate peu voyante. Les dames éviteront – si possible – les

⁷ Idem.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

couleurs criardes. [...] Un même silence règnera sur la scène et dans la salle. Les regards des spectateurs se fixent pendant un instant sur le rideau qui bouge presque imperceptiblement.¹⁰

L'intérêt pour la tenue des spectateurs excède celui pour les costumes des acteurs, qui sont habillés normalement. Handke construit explicitement son public idéal, dont même le regard lui est familier et prévisible. Sa dramaturgie s'étend sur la vie réelle qu'elle tente de phagocyter.

Un choix de l'éclairage n'est offert non plus aux metteurs en scène, tout faisant partie d'un même projet prédéterminé : « la lumière monte sur la scène et dans la salle. La lumière n'est pas éblouissante. C'est l'éclairage normal d'une fin de spectacle. Cet éclairage restera identique tout le long du spectacle, dans la salle comme sur la scène. »¹¹

La préparation du spectacle passe par l'apparition des acteurs et leur avancement vers la rampe en répétant en même temps, mais chacun en décalage par rapport aux autres, les mots outrageux « Caricatures, Marionnettes, Bovidés, Têtes de lard, Têtes à claque, Faces de rat, Pauvres citrons »¹², en tant qu'exercice d'insultes, suivi par leur silence commun et la concentration avant de commencer à parler. Handke joue sur une parole dépourvue d'intentionnalité qui s'engage à déstabiliser un public habitué à des conventions langagières et provoquer de cette manière des réactions réelles envisagées comme but et substance du spectacle : « Le sujet c'est vous. Vous êtes le centre d'intérêt. Nous ne traitons pas le sujet, nous vous traitons. [...] Vos oreilles perçoivent la même chose. Vous êtes un événement. Vous êtes l'événement. »¹³ Tout concourt à piéger le public dans une hypostase inédite, qui instaurerait l'événement unique, irrépétable, dans un théâtre éphémère de l'outrage. Mais là aussi on est aux confins d'une autre dramaturge extérieure, celle du public, qui, étant ici convoqué à participer au spectacle, acquiert aussi un rôle majeur dans la réalisation du projet. Les réactions prévues du public (ex : « Les regards des spectateurs se fixent pendant un instant sur le rideau »¹⁴) sont susceptibles d'engendrer un élément surprise, auquel le spectacle s'expose lui-même tout entier, puisqu'il est impossible que les spectateurs réagissent tous de la manière indiquée. Pour Heinke Wagner, chez Handke, « le texte se fraie un chemin vers le public en abolissant toutes les catégories théâtrales dans leur acception usuelle pour redéfinir la *pièce classique* au sens le plus radical du terme »¹⁵. Désormais, le théâtre « a pour mission d'être vrai au lieu d'être vraisemblable »¹⁶. Le temps est déclaré réel, la mimésis complètement exilée, la fable

¹⁰ Idem, p. 16.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² Idem, pp. 16-17.

¹³ Idem, p. 25.

¹⁴ Idem, p. 16.

¹⁵ Wagner, Heinke, *La mission théâtrale de Peter Handke*, éd. cit., p.47.

¹⁶ Idem.

est en train de se faire, comme dans le théâtre épique, le quatrième mur n'existe plus. On se trouve dans le chantier d'un anti-théâtre qui paradoxalement ne pourrait exister en dehors de l'institution théâtrale. Pour réaliser ce projet, Handke fait usage d'une dramaturgie de l'aversion, guerrière, censée faire violence afin d'exister. Cette violence serait censée redéfinir la différence au sein d'un même état d'esprit, instauré de manière tyrannique sur la salle entière, qui n'est plus séparé en deux par le quatrième mur. Selon H. Wagner, cette violence de l'outrage « relève la crise sacrificielle, mais l'unité nouvelle, existentielle, ne peut se construire dans ce rapport de frontalité violente et ce sera la tâche des pièces parlées à venir. »¹⁷

Douce répétition pour une guerre

Il ne m'intéresse ni de montrer ni de maîtriser la réalité, ce qui m'importe, c'est de montrer (pas de maîtriser) ma réalité.

Peter Handke

Il est temps maintenant de nous pencher sur ce que ce texte dit au public, voir comment Handke structure sa déclaration de guerre aux images et aux paroles dans le registre langagier. Les acteurs parlent directement aux spectateurs et leur expliquent le projet de la pièce, les statuts avec lesquels elle compte en finir, aussi bien que les risques qu'une telle participation pourrait impliquer :

Vous êtes bienvenus.
 Cette pièce est un prologue.
 [...]

 Ce qu'on va vous montrer ici n'est pas un spectacle.
 Vous risquez fort de rester sur votre faim.
 Ce que vous allez voir n'est pas une pièce.
 [...]

 Vous êtes un auditoire assis dans un théâtre. [...] Vous et nous, formons peu à peu une même chose. [...] Vous n'êtes plus dans la position confortable de spectateur assis dans l'obscurité. Nous ne sommes plus dans la position inconfortable de l'acteur ébloui qui doit faire face au trou noir. Vous n'êtes pas des spectateurs. [...]

 Vous ne pouvez pas vous reconnaître en nous [...]

 Nous ne jouons pas. Nous nous trouvons ensemble dans le même lieu. [...] Nous ne sommes pas des personnages. Nous sommes nous. Ce que nous pensons ne doit pas nécessairement rejoindre ce que pense l'auteur.¹⁸

¹⁷ Idem, p.51.

¹⁸ Handke, Peter, *Outrage au public*, éd. cit., pp. 19-23.

Nous remarquons, dans la dernière réplique de cet exemple, que Peter Handke remet en question même sa position de dramaturge omnipotent qui organise toute l'orchestration de la pièce. Mais étant donné que cela aussi fait partie de son texte, elle contribue à rendre vraisemblable cette confession dirigée des acteurs. La dramaturgie à laquelle on a affaire ici met en scène ses limites mêmes, arrivant à les circonscrire, à les dépasser, en les objectivant dans le discours qu'écrivain et acteurs tentent à présenter et expliquer au public. On assiste au métadiscours d'une conscience organisatrice, qui, aux moyens qu'une ancienne esthétique du théâtre met à sa disposition, tente de frayer une voie pour une nouvelle. Handke montre un tact extraordinaire vis-à-vis de son public outragé. Il l'accompagne dans toutes les réactions qu'il peut prévoir de la part de celui-ci, il lui tend une main amicale tout le long de cette aventure de guerre aux anciennes valeurs du langage dramatique. Et c'est en cela qu'il se différencie des pièces de théâtre dadaïstes, par exemple, qui étaient destinées à choquer, provoquer, imposer une nouvelle esthétique, mais qui n'offraient pas d'explication, en ce qui concernait leur nécessité, au moment de la représentation, sinon éventuellement, dans des manifestes théoriques écrits séparément. Le discours à prononcer par les quatre acteurs, tout comme la préparation de la salle de théâtre dans sa totalité, et la préalable instruction des acteurs, est, lui aussi, une préparation : celle du public en vue de la compréhension d'une nouvelle esthétique théâtrale. Nous considérons que situer le discours de l'*Outrage* dans le contexte de toute la production dramatique de Peter Handke facilite la compréhension de cette démarche dramaturgique. Les pièces parlées qui le suivent chronologiquement dans l'oeuvre de cet auteur témoignent de cette nouvelle esthétique théâtrale qu'il inaugure par l'*Outrage au public*. Il s'agit d'un théâtre dont le matériau de base est de nature sonore : des voix off, des programmes de radio, des sons divers enregistrés etc. Handke prépare le public à l'aventure des voix et des sons dans un projet de théâtre de la non-représentation. Mais le public n'est pas censé seulement lire le programme envisagé par un tel théâtre, sinon en subir le choque aussi, être secoué au sein même de ses habitudes. Le dramaturge ne veut rien cacher aux spectateurs, et c'est pour cela même qu'il s'engage à organiser leur leurre :

Vos conceptions sont faussées par la fréquentation des théâtres.

Ces conceptions-là, il faut vous en défaire.

[...]

Ici le monde n'a pas de failles.

Vous êtes les acteurs. Vous êtes nos antagonistes. [...]

Vous nous servez de cible. C'est une métaphore.

[...]

Il n'y a pas de pauses dans notre texte. Les pauses entre les mots, ça n'a pas beaucoup de sens.

Les sous-entendus, ce n'est que du vent. Chez nous, il n'y a pas de sous-entendus. Le silence n'explique rien.

Il n'y a pas de silence éloquent. Il n'y a pas de silence-silence. Il n'y a pas de silence mortel. [...] Dans le texte il n'y a aucune indication qui nous oblige à nous taire.¹⁹

Vous avez compris que nous rejetons quelque chose. [...] Vous avez compris que cette pièce est une transposition théâtrale. Vous avez décelé la structure dialectique de cette pièce. Vous avez flairé un certain esprit de subversion.²⁰

Il n'y a, ici, que le temps réel. [...] Il n'y a, ici, que le temps unique. C'est l'unité de temps. Voilà donc les trois unités : de temps, de lieu, d'action. Cette pièce est une tragédie classique.²¹

Ce métadiscours introductif crée la distance nécessaire pour que l'exercice des insultes puisse commencer et que l'outrage garde un air d'irréalité :

Vous êtes l'objet de nos insultes. Vous allez nous entendre. Espèce de bovidés !

[...]

Vous êtes des acteurs parfaits. Votre plus grande joie est de jouer dans un bain de sang. Vous, les bourreaux, les détraqués. Vous, les suiveurs. Vous, les demeurés, les bêtes de somme, les faquins, les foetus, les dévoyés, les dégueulasses. Votre technique de respiration est parfaitement au point, braillards, faux patriotes, capitalistes juifs, bouffons, marionnettes, prolétaires, blancs-becs, francs-tireurs, ratés, larbins, jésuites, nullités, pacotille, mornions, surnuméraires, honte publique, vermine, faces de rat, vous, premiers de classe.²²

La pièce finit dans la bienséance : les acteurs remercient au public d'avoir joué parfaitement son rôle, le saluent : « Vous étiez, ce soir, les bienvenus. Nous vous remercions. Bonne nuit. »²³ La sortie des acteurs de la scène et celle du public de la salle sont accompagnées et suivie d'hurllements et d'applaudissements diffusés par les haut-parleurs. A ce point, l'outrage serait arrivé à son terminus. Mais le spectacle ne finit véritablement qu'au moment où le dernier spectateur quitte la salle. Le projet de l'outrage accompagne le public même après la fin des déclamations du texte. En expliquant, en anticipant les possibles réactions des gens venus voir ce spectacle même en soupçonnant à peu près à quoi s'attendre, le

¹⁹ Idem, p. 27.

²⁰ Idem, p. 28.

²¹ Idem, p. 35.

²² Idem, pp. 47-49.

²³ Idem, p. 50.

dramaturge commence à résoudre petit à petit le dernier problème auquel son projet se heurterait : l'irrépétabilité de cette expérimentation aux fins déstabilisatrices. Avoir écouté parler de la pièce, l'avoir déjà vue, ce sont des problèmes auxquels un discours d'outrage s'expose sans cesse. Mais Handke inclut tout cela dans son texte, dans un dernier étage de cet art anticipatif qu'il pratique par rapport à son public. C'est à ce niveau-là que son projet se sauve de l'intérieur face à une possible diminution ou bien perte de l'effet d'outrage, d'autant plus fort que plus proche temporellement de ses premières représentations. Il n'est pas étonnant que le scandale déclenché lors de sa création à Francfort en 1966 n'ait pas été suivi d'autres, même si on continue à jouer la pièce. On découvre peu à peu les limites de cette dramaturgie expansive. A ce point, il nous semble légitime de poser la question suivante : dans quelle mesure ce projet dramaturgique est-il réalisable tel quel et à quel moment des dramaturgies extérieures devraient intervenir pour le récupérer ? Le texte de Handke rend compte d'une forte autonomie. On sait bien que pour l'auteur écrire du théâtre est d'abord faire de la littérature qui transforme tout en style. Le métadiscours de cette pièce peut effectivement être lu comme autre chose que du théâtre, même s'il est conçu explicitement pour être parlé devant un public. L'apparence dictatoriale des indications qui l'accompagnent peut facilement être détournée justement parce qu'elle affirme une clôture de vision qu'ensuite elle se charge d'ouvrir elle-même à la sphère herméneutique la plus large (comme dans le cas du critère esthétique du choix du public, qui à la limite, reste à interpréter au sens le plus large). En utilisant des contradictions de ce type, Handke rend l'outrage flexible, ouvert à des nouvelles lectures, malgré les choix uniques des éléments composants de l'ambiance d'un état d'esprit particulier. Le raffinement métadiscursif de cet auteur crée des espaces libres pour des dramaturgies externes, en vertu de sa structure extrêmement miroitée. Mais en même temps, la distance que Handke maintient par rapport au langage et à son texte lui-même est paradoxalement ce qui étouffe le plus les dramaturgies externes, puisqu'elle les prévoit. Un autre phénomène étrange que ce type de texte relève est la possibilité d'objectivisation par l'extérieur, en raison de son enracinement dans un état d'esprit extrêmement personnel et localisé historiquement. On peut effectivement continuer à représenter ce texte malgré sa perte de contexte, en l'objectivant. La distance qui ordonne sa structure l'ouvre vers l'universalité.

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SCENOGRAPHY-SCENE DESIGN THE ROLE OF THE SCENE DESIGNER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERFORMANCE

BIANCA IMELDA JEREMIAS

ABSTRACT. This project explains the importance of the scene designer in the development of a theater performance as well as the evolution of the term through time, from the Ancient world to the XX Century, the changes of its meanings according to the changes that took place in art in general along history.

Keywords: scene design, history of design, scenography

The theater is ever evolving. Through time it suffered major changes in both writing styles and its forms of manifestation. These aspects reflect the vision of the society and the technological development as well. A series of influences affected the theater, the most obvious would probably be the television and the cinema. Theater became a more “hospitable” environment, permitting the audience to get more involved in the performance itself both physically and emotionally, opening a way to new artistic and conceptual manners. Probably the most shocking influence was brought through the new digital technologies and the use of the computer. These new technologies permitted a more complex movement and development of the set and lighting design, they revolutionized the way sound is manipulated in theater and in many cases they changed even the way the creative team is thinking, developing and presenting its work. As a result, a kind of “reeducation of the public” took place which obviously brought the theater performances to a higher level of expectations. The theatrical form of a performance represents the way through which the performers transmit a certain idea to the public. The text itself (the basic material) along with the concept developed by the creative team (meaning the interpretation of the text) are both necessary and become the starting point of the future set and costume designs.

The theater, as any other social collective manifestation, implicates a double presence: on one hand the presence of the performers and on the other hand the presence of an audience. The meeting point and the change of information between these two groups of people need some sort of space in order to take place. The art of organizing this space is called scenography. Another fundamental characteristic of the theater is that it represents a fiction. There is a specific antinomy that takes place here which transforms the space where the actors perform into a place that is part of our everyday reality and in the same time is part of a fictional world, the imaginary

place where the characters come alive. The scene design must provide answers to two important questions that naturally occur in any theatrical manifestation: how to focus the sight, the hearing and the attention of the audience on the performing group and how to determine the audience to project on the real space of the actors a part of their imagination so that the fiction would be born. The scene design has the duty to establish in a way both sensitive and intelligent the symbolic frontier between fiction and reality, between actor and spectator; more specifically between the hidden and the unveiled, between the visible and the invisible.

The contemporary scenography has very complex and diversified ways of expressing itself, however we can say that there are very clear marks that serve as starting point in the construction of a scene and costume designs, which obviously would have to stand for a certain state of mind and spirit of the play that is staged.

The word “scenography” is one of those terms (regarding a craft) whose origins are very old and that developed in time changing its meaning, keeping though if not entirely but at least in certain aspects the memory of its original sense. According to this, it is rather difficult to define it exactly. In order to better understand it we must go back to its origins. By classifying the different explanations of this word, we will find three major categories:

1. The meaning it had in the Greco-Roman Antiquity: the scenographer is a person that draws and paints the set and the stage itself.
2. In the Renaissance, the term gets a different meaning, defining the art of representation and the art of organizing space according to perspective.
3. In the second half of the XX Century in France, the meaning changes again and now the scenography is perceived as a general intervention on the space where the performance takes place, intervention based on a well preordained concept.

The word scenography comes from Latin, which also comes from the Greek *skenograpfia*. The translation of this term gives us the art of painting the set. The multitude of meanings that we incline to attribute to this term, probably come from the complexity of its originating words:

-*graphein*, on one hand, that can be translated through “writing” or “drawing” as well as “painting”. The first two translations guide “scenography” to a more general meaning, that of creating an entire concept, while the third term (“painting”) restricts it to a more classical one, that of a simple fabrication process.

-*skéne*, on the other hand, in the ancient Greek theater was a construction made of wood, located in the back of the actual playing area. For the Greeks, the term defined the hidden place of the actors, as in for us, today, it means the exact opposite, the place where the performance actually takes place.

In the Renaissance the Italian architects and theoreticians discover the term “scenographer” in a treaty by Vitruvius and by giving it a new meaning they apply it to the art of representing objects in perspective, as in the art of organizing painting, architecture and town planning and only in a few cases the art of organizing the set designs. Just like in the Ancient world, in the Renaissance the job of the creator

and the job of the craftsman that attains at materializing the object that's been designed, doesn't really separates one from the other. In some cases the scenographer has not only the duty of constructing the theater but to create the decorations for its plays, too. For example, Brunleschi¹, when he participates to the designs of a performance, is called "ingeniere", which in Italian means "the one who finds", the one who invents, as in the "inventor". In this case the inventions are the "ingeni"-es which we can translate by the term "machines".

Another similar example would be the "Bibienas"², a family that we today would call scenographers, scene designers, but who then were never called like this by their contemporaries. Ferdinando is called a "court painter" in 1689, "first ducal architect" in Parma in 1697, "first theater architect" by Charles the VI of Austria, in Wien in 1717. His son Giovanni Maria is called in 1746 "machinist and architect" at the court of Charles de Bourbon. So as a conclusion, the term architect included, beginning with the Renaissance, the meaning of what we call today by the term of scenographer.

In France during the XVII-XVIII Century the term scenographer isn't used more often than it was in Italy, probably because of the tasks being distributed among more people, the "troubles of the company" are now debated openly by all its members, decisions concerning these issues along with the problems of the scene and costume designs being taken collectively by them as well.

Mahelot³, today is called a decorator. What does this term mean? In his "Memoires" a sort of description of the performances at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, he mentions the task of the decorator, task that corresponds to the one of the machinist. The "Memoires" allow us to understand the multitude of functions exercised by Mahelot himself, sometimes set designer, sometimes stage director, on occasions machinist (in today's meaning of the word), and other times prop master and theater administrator, job that would, in our contemporary society, ask for special competencies.

The decorator from the beginning of the XVII Century and by the beginning of the XVIII Century was in a way the equivalent of a modern machinist, a technical director or a production manager with a few extra tasks as a painter. Progressively, in the second half of the XVIII Century, the separations of tasks occurs more often and becomes more clear, but the term "scenographer" is still not used, the architect designs the theater, but does not design the sets and the machinist takes over the task of organizing and creating the design of the stage, the construction of the sets and the performance itself.

¹ **Fillippo Brunelleschi** (1377 – April 15, 1446) was one of the foremost architects and engineers of the Italian Renaissance. He invented the linear perspective. All of his principal works are in Florence, Italy.

² **Bibiena:** (Galli da Bibiena), Italian family of scene designers, architect and painters who's activity spreads through Europe along four generations of artists from the end of the XVII Century till the end of the XVIII Century.

³ **"Memoires of Mahelot":** manuscript known by the title "Memoires of Mahelot and other decorators from the Hotel de Bourgogne and the Comedie Francaise from the end of the XVIII Century" was first published H.C.L. in Paris in 1920.

Moving further on, in the XIX Century the person who creates the decorations for the set is no longer a machinist, but a painter, a decorator, an artist. Blanchard and Lemaire are called by these names in their contract with the “Comedie Francaise”. The term decorator is perceived as having a different meaning than it had in the XVII Century, and it designates the one responsible for the design and the supervising of the production itself. In both cases the decorator and the painter create the models for the scene designs, supervise the production at a real scale in their own shops, where they lead a whole team of artists and craftsmen. The necessary competencies to imagine and create the visual part of the performance don’t ask for a “scenographer” just yet, but more for a painter, the space of the performance and the basic construction of the set being already established and organized “forever!” on a stage “a l’italienne”. The intervention does not consist in modifying the already existent volumes and does not decide to reorient and focus the public’s attention, because the architecture of the place has already done that when the construction of the theater was accomplished. This leaves us to establish the true role of the decorator, which is to transform, with the use of the painted sets, the appearance and the aspect of the existent stage.

For about three centuries, from the beginning of the XVII and the end of the XIX Century, a slow process takes the representations “a l’italienne” to a relative sterility of concept. The scene design and the perspective are emptied of their original meaning, becoming a mere exercise of virtuosity, that will provoke great revolutions in the theater lead by Appia⁴ and Craig⁵.

Abandoning painting and perspective, the theoreticians of the scenic revolution claim the changes of the space, of the volumes and the objects that are present in this space as well. The revolution of the mind and attitude concerning the theater gives birth to a new function, a new position, and if it by any chance isn’t entirely new, it does get a whole new meaning: that of the stage director, accompanied in the designing of the performance by the decorator-scenographer.

In the 1970 thanks to debating and arguing over the term “scenographer” it finally gets back to its real status. The scenographer regains the task that was given to him in the Renaissance and that is to be an organizer/producer of the concepts involving the space where the performance takes place. Nowadays the scenographer can apply to the image of the theatrical representation, which progressively tries to escape from the classical Italian stage, competences and experiences gained by

⁴ **Adolphe Appia** (1862-1928), Swiss architect, lighting designer and stage designer, director and theoretician. He started a reform of the theater staging based on the analysis of the Wagnerian drama and the criticism of the theatrical realism, giving a huge importance to the text, the actor, the volumes and the lighting, believing that shade was as necessary as light to form a connection between the actor and the setting of the performance in time and space.

⁵ **Edward Gordon Craig** (16 January 1872 – 29 July 1966), sometimes known as Gordon Craig, was an English modernist theatre practitioner; he worked as an actor, producer, director and scenic designer, as well as developing an influential body of theoretical writings. He defined theater as the of moving through space.

organizing other kinds of spaces than the classical theatrical one: exhibition spaces, catwalks and fashion design shows, garden designs, urban details and any other creative domain that could interest the public. We can finally conclude that the term “scenographer” kept only half of its original meaning through the passing of time, the contemporary scenographer being a creator of concepts and a producer of art by excellence.

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BALANTA/THE OAK (1992)
- THE HISTORY OF A RECEPTION -

RAUL BOTHA

ABSTRACT. In the context of Romanian post-communism (or neo-communism), views and images about the past can be easily shifted or misremembered by the present state of affairs. Through the movie *The Oak*, director Lucian Pintilie attempts to refresh old dusty impressions about our own late-communist period. This essay is an attempt to touch upon personal history events and movie events in order to delineate what could be named as a version of authentic reality.

Keywords: reception, movie, Pintilie

Forewarning

The actual writing stage of this paper suffered numerous delays and countless false starts¹. The postponement comes from a quasi-utopian approach that I cannot seem to thoroughly discard or disregard: the complete interpretation. I don't know if there is such a concept "in the field", but if there are anti-aging creams, pills that produce miraculous healing, immutable truths given away in forms of compensated recipes, then why not *complete interpretation*?! Briefly stated, it means receiving full comprehension or at least the maximum assimilation one receiver is capable of during the intimate process of interaction with the work of art.

I believe this whole myth of total extraction of sense from a work of art leads to a constant restlessness, precisely out of the desire for tranquillity and cohesion with that particular work. The tension of overlooking any detail can lead to an unhealthy obsession, the same feeling I get ever since I have decided to write about Lucian Pintilie's *The Oak*².

When attempting to talk about things that penetrates deeply inside, often times one remains mute, perplexed and enclosed in one's own wish for exteriorization. By all means, not the lack of actual material creates this blockage, but on the one hand, the possibility of borderless discussions and countless approaches, and on the other hand, the receiver's hardship of finding the right pitch, the exact tone of voice once he lays down in the author's seat. The first obstruction can be relieved

¹ In Linguistics, *false start* is a concept which denotes an unsuccessful attempt to communicate due to incoherence or erroneous articulation (in this case, the hardships of a right beginning).

² The Romanian title is *Balanta* (En. Scale, balance). In accordance with the Romanian title many secondary titles from this essay directly allude to a search for a personal balance.

through a rigorous selection; the second one can be removed only through a state of spirit diligent enough to produce a voice of feeling, of an inner re-production, if the other voice, that of critical reason succumbs.

In one of his essays, Constantin Noica talks about the human ability to recognize himself in the person he faces, once the latter one reveals himself to the former. The otherness will never know us, mostly it will recognize us, says the philosopher, hence the failure to approach a complete understanding of a work of art. Ideally there may be a “complete” recognition of a work, not as a collective sum of countless pilgrimage in the universe of the author, but as a dissimilar and different road with each re-immersed experience. This is perhaps unfulfilling, never holistic, because we, in our turn don’t know exactly who we really are when we return to meet again that same work.

1. Introduction. *The history of a personal event.*

In 2005 I was during a process of longing after pictures, movies and other forms of visual links that could bring back my childhood days – those times of awkward feelings, nostalgically dipped in a personal and collective history. I was looking for a return to a “normal” state of mind, as only that period could have brought back, but without having to enter in simulacra worlds or purely stage reconstructions as most of the films delivered about that era. I was aspiring to relive that kind of authenticity inherited only from the first years of my life, *a version* of reality established during the last period of Romanian Communism, when everything in my book was still *new*, still *alive* and still so *natural*.

Like Proust, I was looking obsessively for a *madeleine*, a link, an instant time access that could rummage all the senses - interior objects, typical spaces from that period, distinct sounds or faded images (when I was little, I thought the world had the same colour as shown on film footages – black and white during the ‘30s, ‘40s, a sepia tone during the ‘50s and ‘60s, washed colours during the ‘70s and ‘80s, and last but not least, to my personal amazement, colours emerged during the ‘90s). Thus, I was aspiring after a “teleportation of being” and since the visual seemed the most convenient bridge to the past I began to investigate the shortest path to my infant memory.

The Revolution – The Scale between past and present

If in 1989, the Revolution had not been broadcast live, and on top of that, if during the years afterwards I had not been watching with a strange and ravish interest the reruns of those December events (in the first years shown for hours, later on more and more condensed and passed through censored editing), this unintentional and purely coincidental memory cultivation could not have created links of such strength between *now*, *then* (December '89) and *before then*. Watching those events (literally a more or less documentary film) became in time a form of tradition, as strong and present in instinct as Christmas or the Pascal Holidays.

Thus, every year I found myself drawn by the perspective of a new episode from December '89, with each event that temporally preceded it or followed it (particularly the Mineriads at the beginning of the '90s). Yet, to my disappointment, the years brought fewer and fewer motion pictures from those scenes, and the power to refresh the past was reduced, matter of fact for which I woke up undertaking - purely out of instinct - a "riccerca", a search of lost time.

From this point of view *The Oak* meant the first type of image that reopened the door to the history of personal emotions. Viewing this movie meant an instant access to a lost world, missing altogether from the present time, a world where space had its own dynamic, objects presented particular shapes, while people, with their simultaneously synchronic and anachronistic language, left the impression of safely bottled old wine, much too dear to be opened intrusively.

The screen as a space of exploration: The visual Scale. The social "balance".

With such awaiting horizon I greeted Lucian Pintilie's *The Oak* and the outcome was a special rendezvous. Tone, atmosphere, reconstitution...reliving the past. Due to the still unaltered life-based background (garbage and dirt everywhere you looked, "old furniture", unchanged hospitals with unchanged lack of sanitization, factories still actively polluting etc.) the past became again the present, framing a surface perception, one raw yet deeply emotional awareness. As any primary level of encounter between the receiver and the work of art, this intersection was no different than naïve. Naturally, through naïve I imply the viewers' allowance to be led by the author, being more or less in control of what is happening to them and to let themselves directed without opposing (at least not in this point in time) to the creator of impression, the patron of the directed visual narrative. The outstanding thing *The Oak* produces is to capture one's attention no matter how many times one viewed the film. To be inside the movie after seeing it several times is equivalent with to be seduced or to be mesmerized by a powerful story – one of the movie's strong points.

From a thematic viewpoint, *The Oak* embodies a social fresco *par excellence*. Within the movie several cliché figures are contoured: the doctor (white smock, lewd, Kent smoker, always open to accept pecuniary "attention" or tips, often reaching high positions through upstartness), the militiaman (vociferous, blunt and always aphasic), the country priest (Ion Creanga's distinctive replica, driving a "mobra" and always keen to intonate "manele") the Securitate agent (lascivious, easy to blackmail and fearful – especially in front of his wife) the female teacher (smoker, coffee drinker and thirsty for the latest gossip in town), the miner (a brute, manipulative entity – with clear hint to the Mineriads from 1990 and 1991), the worker (integrated in the overall landscape), the soldier (young, mostly in the wrong place at the wrong time, manoeuvred by his superiors in order to liquidate his compatriots – an apropos given to the Revolution), the mayor (a drinker and an outstanding orator), as well as the common people, those very many, with identical

faces, sealed destinies and swallowed by the system³. And when it comes to deal with the Romanian mentality, Pintilie cannot stand aside, not to mention his affinity in critically provoking his contemporaries, often objectively, controversially but constantly pigmenting it with humour. As in most of his movies, Pintilie puts emphasis in *The Oak* on transposing images and dialogue into the Romanian way of being, into the sweet bucolic plain which is Romania. In this sense it is memorable the heated discussion from the banquet scene at the village priest's home, where the viewer partakes in a dialog of ideas (embraced by Bacchus' spell) between the major and the priest, culminated with the former's monologue: *the stupidest man in the world is the American*.

2. *Pintilie's Heroes, Our Heroes.*

The movie's stake somehow surpasses the social frame and thus these typologies (archetypes) come to be perceived as decorous characters, designed only to highlight the protagonists – Nela, an army colonel's daughter, a former French psychology school graduate and Mitica, an excellent urologist who practically gets removed by the system and expatriated in a village at the end of the Romanian land. In front of us there are two heroes-combatants, reactionary, anti-system beings (although brought up in line with the system). Their peculiarity lies in the desire to actually do the things other just invoke to be done. Although theatrical, they don't mimic, although they are forced at each of their step to abandon they don't abdicate in front of the human gutter, they retaliate in spite of their extremely sensitive nature. Moreover, their individuality comes from a form of hyperactivity, an ecstasy expressed through verbal haste or alert dynamics: they talk fast, act quickly, as if they have a very short time available for their own existence. Still, why this fast? "Because of nerves", answers Mitica, evidently in contrast with the unperturbed atmosphere of the "let me be so I can let you be" that surrounds him. "Everything I do, I do it quickly; I don't have patience". As a result, they circumscribe themselves under the constellation of impatience.

The fact of being anti-social models originates from a deep frustration as well, a type of burdening impossibility to personal fulfilment, which drags them to a continuous resolution, to the action accomplished out of necessity. They take action because they reach the limit of their strength, because that string which was keeping the being together just broke. No matter the context both of them are strong characters. Even during her psychological downfall Nela replies: "I don't cry out of weakness. I'm just very tired". Her counterpart, Mitica during his moments of acute anger reaches out to the boxing bag and isolation into physical effort. Being

³ In *Pink Floyd The Wall* (1982, director: Alan Parker) there is a generic image of people with creepy-looking identical faces entering into a huge meat trencher. The director insists to show the other end of the trencher – freshly trenched raw meat. Shocking images that refer to the poisonous aspect of conformism in a social system. Pintilie is subtle when delivering anti-system messages, nonetheless his critical standpoint is visible especially from the way his protagonist's story is revealed.

so close to the edge of mental madness in an oppressive system might serve as an explanation to Mitica's need for weekly fighting with patients or patient's siblings.

If in Nela's case, her interior drama is carried throughout her personal itinerary (from the death until the burial of her father in a continuous metaphysical crescendo, often producing climaxes of hysteria), Mitica seems to live strictly a social tension (daily frictions with his superior doctor or quarrels with a patient or two).

The two protagonists' relationship appears as one of mutual sustainment, a communion which resolves constringent social and moral problems (their first kiss arrives only at the end of the movie). Although they live in a profound intimacy, their tenderness towards each other could be described only as a brother and sister relationship. Sexuality is simply not there; perhaps this is the director's subversive message regarding the Children of the Decree phenomenon ("decreteii")⁴. Nonetheless, in Nela's quest Mitica corresponds as a helping companion, a type of guardian angel, one that aids her during limit-reaching moments. This fact is reinforced by the enhanced attention given to Mitica's story after the first third of the movie (a clear incentive directing), while Nela's figure remains on a secondary level, only to realize in the end that Nela's character was always intended to be the main protagonist. We are therefore purposely sent into a narrative trap only to be brought back on track.

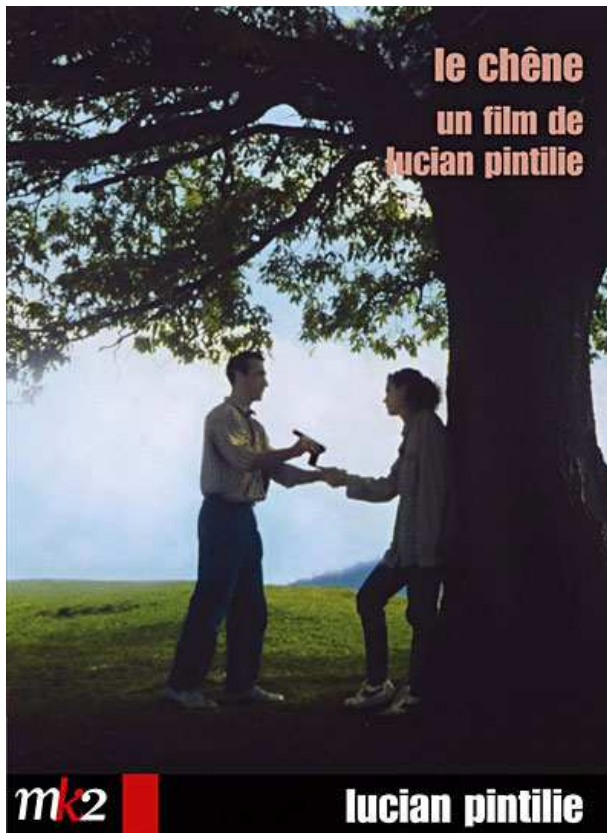
In order to enter his own becoming, every hero is forced to confront antagonist characters and situations. A constant enemy to hunt Nela and Mitica in *The Oak* is the "eye" of the Securitate under the mask of The Evil Bunny (Nela's sister), an apparition meant to emphasize the belief that any type of resistance is futile, any thought or personal involvement is belittled, any sign of desire to break out of the system is amended. Their obstacles are in a perpetual metamorphosis, reason for which Pintilie's characters seem to be continuously aggressed by the outsiders. Nela, for instance, gets assaulted, vandalized, verbally offended, to the point where she is refused even to be served with a sausage. Most often she appears as an object of desire in the eyes of most men, one fact she is most conscious about, profiting of this advantage as often as she gets the chance, the same way one can profit from the coercion of a defence mechanism. Perhaps this is why, most paradoxically, the more closer to Mitica, the less sexually involved she is.

The Oak's heroes see the world as it is – sad, devoid of magic, decadent, hopeless, monstrous – reason for which they must state out loud what the eye no longer bears to see. They are simultaneously inside the world and outside of it. They wish to take part of yet they are repelled from it. Mitica restores his nerves evading out in nature, in an acute search for freedom and intimacy, while Nela attempts to sustain a precarious equilibrium by escaping either inside her headphones

⁴ In 1966 Ceausescu promulgated a Decree which legally interdicted abortions and contraceptive methods in order to increase birth rate. Thus, a new generation of unexpected (unwanted) children was born. For more than 20 years, thousands of women and children died because of improvised abortions or unprofessional medical treatment. This chain ultimately influenced the sexual lives of most husbands and wives, many married couples deliberately avoiding intercourse.

(to an Edith Piaf type of French music) or with the help of her instant Polaroid camera she seeks to withdraw back to her own memories, a place where the Communist Party was insistently aiming to enter and seize control. She photographs her dead father, his incineration, her sneakers received as a gift from Mitica, a calf (before and after his unintentional massacre by the Romanian military troops), Mitica himself (in a position similar to that of the living veil), her exceptional children from school, Mitica's hamster which got saved from laboratory experiments – compiling a memory of moments still undisturbed, still pure.

Yet all the photographs, her father's ash as well as her entire image regarding her own future will be buried under an oak, in an atmosphere of peace and inner tranquillity (the first and last one in the movie), cut in the next scene by the noise of the Securitate's helicopter, a clear image passed on by Pintilie about the totalitarian regime: there is no way for a man to be alone, intimate, unsupervised, even in the most personal moments of his existence. Still, these heroes make the podium serving as a visible recognition for all the known or unknown but less visible martyrs that went through the communist prison re-education program.



3. Intersection

The Oak is a film full of allusions and meanings addressed to us and to our Romanian past. Pintilie's language and his obsessive occurrences as a director have not avoided this movie. But exactly these idiosyncrasies leave their marks on what I personally consider to be his best and most representative work. Motives such as nudity (Nela's eroticism is often times suggested, while the nudity of the corpses laying haphazardly one next to each other in the morgue brings in mind in a terrible way the images of the dead bodies from the December '89 Revolution), the feast (Pantagruel-like in a Romanian context), simplicity (Mitica's room), disorder (Nela's room), the train (full of people, in a claustrophobic sense of the word), the road (as in the way, the path to a personal destination), the fight (here namely the confrontation between the young and inexperienced soldiers and the protesters from the finale). All these frequently intersect with themes obsessively explored in all of his movies – death, survival, material and human degeneration, Romanian mentality and last but not least the comic, an essential reference in Pintilie's work.

The double ending, “the murder of the innocent” (as Pintilie himself named this scene) and the Adamic hope (*the oak* metaphor, as well as that of the two lovers) deepen the complexity of the film pointing out through its last scene a message of tremor: a pistol pointed towards us - the spectators of the illustrated events, the actors directly responsible for the present state of affairs. The pointed gun seems to utter: *Beware of mediocrity, assume your past, be free and believe in art – truly the only one capable of atonement.* These are ordinary words which to some may not mean much. But if the message does not thrill the audience, it indicates that they lack eyes – the eyes of freshly viewing *The Oak*.

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LE PRIX DE L'AMATEUR DES PRODUCTIONS ROUMAINES
– L'IMPACT DES FILMS DE NAE CARANFIL SUR LE SPECTATEUR (A
PEINE) SORTI DE L'ANONYMAT –

CAMELIA TOMA

*„Le rire ou les larmes du spectateur anonyme
est la distinction suprême d'un film – plus importante
que toute autre distinction”*

Sever Voinescu

ABSTRACT : Qui est-ce qui compte le plus dans la démarche cinématographique qui porte la marque de Nae Caranfil? Les spectateurs anonymes? La critique professionnelle? Indifféremment de la réponse, il surgit la sensation que, parfois, le metteur en scène (un esprit critique histrionique) nous fait des clins d'œil, en nous révélant la réalité tragi-comique de la vie. Mais l'illusion d'une comédie amère persiste: **E pericoloso sporgersi**, **Filantropica** ou **Le reste est silence** ne sont pas des simples contes sur des personnages plus ou moins fictifs, mais des provocations pour ceux d'entre nous qui endosse un rôle dans le spectacle quotidien. Le film a survécu. Vive le spectateur!

***Mot-clés:** Nae Caranfil, metteur en scène, scénariste, le film roumain, l'impact au public*

Je récompense Nae Caranfil, en spectateur anonyme, par des éclats de rire, qu'il s'agit d'une première ou d'une reprise. Par rapport au rire qui fait la preuve de la puissance de socialisation (s'il est sain), le pleur extériorise la vulnérabilité, donc en ce qui concerne l'impressionnabilité de mes cordes graves ... „le reste est silence”.

Dès la première pellicule de Nae Caranfil, **E pericoloso sporgersi** j'ai su que l'auteur m'inclut parmi ses spectateurs (potentiels/idéals) qui, en outre, suivent des *cours* de film dans les cinémas de province. L'effet ne venait pas tellement d'une prédisposition à me rapporter aux certains personnages (par comparaison, si non par identification), mais surtout de la sensation que, quelque part, le scénariste-metteur en scène me faisait des clins d'œil et mon rire venait confirmer „une arrière-pensée d'entente, je dirais presque de complicité, avec d'autres rieurs, réels ou imaginaires.” (Henri Bergson, éd. cit., p.11).

Sur un fond dramatique dévoilant des existences dérisoires marquées par la délation et la médiocrité Nae Caranfil crée, par un scénario conçu de manière réaliste-moderne (distingué, au 1993, par l'Union des Cinéastes de Roumanie), quelques formes tragi-comiques de l'écart par rapport à la règle. Le discours

cinématographique se fonde sur la modification de l'angle de focalisation. Sans devenir des narrateurs à part entière (comme il adviendra en **Filantropica**), les protagonistes de **E pericoloso sporgersi** sont impliqués dans „la mise en scène d'un processus dialectique: voir/ être vu” (Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, éd. cit., p. 137), pour faciliter l'accès du spectateur au jeu polyphonique d'une comédie amère, où la plupart reçoivent le rôle de regarder le passage devant leur yeux d'un train interdit. La rencontre plus ou moins hasardeuse, mais évidemment passagère entre l'élève, l'acteur et le soldat est une occasion de l'expression du refus d'accepter les cadres de l'uniformité, et alors se pencher en dehors de la vitre de l'existence devient dangereux en rapport avec la réaction de ceux qui restent inutilement sur le perron ou qui font de leur échec une question d'intérêt général. L'adolescente (interprétée par Natalie Bonifay) n'apprendra sa leçon ni à l'école, ni à la toilette où elle met au point son répertoire, mais dans une chambre d'hôtel. Elle y découvrira la vulnérabilité de son idole, un comédien quasi raté, qui se prend pour un Don Juan provincial (George Alexandru est très convaincant dans ce rôle), jusqu'au coup de fil anonyme de menace. La troisième perspective, surprise à travers la perception d'un soldat, initié en physique, mais non en érotique (Marius Stănescu assume avec succès la partition), vient de compléter partiellement, les pièces manquantes d'un puzzle à différentes variantes combinatoires: c'était lui l'anonyme du bout du fil et non, comme on pouvait supposer un „securist” alarmé par les traits d'esprit subversives (involontaires) du comédien. Le spectateur réalise l'ironie du sort, surit tristement et je ne crois pas qu'il est encore intéressé du destin individuel des héros qui apparaissent seuls, à la fin, chacun allant de son côté. En somme, les trois personnages centraux sont un prétexte pour définir des situations exceptionnelles propres à une entière génération.

Au-delà de ces drames (crédibles surtout si on a vécu soi-même les réalités des années '80), il reste des scènes mémorables qui ironisent les aberrations du régime communiste roumain. Par exemple, le dialogue des figures – madame le professeur poussiéreux, mais cynique, devant l'élève malin – obéit une dynamique de la perception ludique. Le scénariste et le metteur en scène (Nae Caranfil dans les deux hypostases) jouent la même carte du déclenchement de l'effet comique fondé sur une communication (verbale et non-verbale) fonctionnelle par la manifestation de l'esprit critique histrionique:

„– Quelle est la politique démographique et politique de notre Etat?

– Notre parti et Etat encouragent...

– Qu'est-ce qu'ils encouragent?

– Aaaa.... la reproduction.

– Ils encouragent la natalité, Mînzatule. La natalité et non la reproduction.

Personne ne te demande de te reproduire. Tu es archi suffisant dans un seul exemplaire. ”

Est-ce que Nae Caranfil serait le détenteur d'un mécanisme cinématographique qui déclenche l'intérêt du public? Immédiatement après la sortie du film **Filantropica**

(2002), deux des prix qui ont récompensé cette œuvre certifiaient l'impact de la production sur les spectateurs: *Le prix du public* au festival de film de Paris (2002), et *Le prix pour l'audience* à Würzburg International Filmweekend (2003). Le grand nombre des sources utilisées dans le réseau électronique, pour télécharger la pellicule, représente une autre preuve valable aujourd'hui dans le dossier de l'audience. Pouvons-nous en conclure que le scénariste et le metteur en scène Nae Caranfil travaille plutôt pour ses clients anonymes, mais fidèles, et moins pour la critique de spécialité?



Le spectateur reçoit à son tour un rôle, celui de *lecteur*, dès la première minute du film, par le prologue paratextuel – un exemple de “opening information” - du générique: „Il était une fois une ville où les habitants étaient partagé en princes et mendiants. Entre ces deux mondes, il n’existait que les chiens vagabonds. Ils constituaient la classe moyenne.” C’est juste après que les noms des comédiens apparaissent, affichés sur la première image visuelle: un chien vagabond qui cherche dans les déchets – possible allusion au critère selon lequel Nae Caranfil a choisi les interprètes, le même utilisé par le „versificateur des mendiants” de film (Pavel Puiu/ Pepe, interprété par George Dinică): La clarification métatextuelle, énoncée par Pepe, vient à peu près à la moitié du film et elle est adressée au professeur de lycée (joué par Mircea Diaconu): „Tu as exactement le visage qu’il

me faut. Et une qualité de plus: Tu es assez triste.” La confusion (ou la concurrence) entre le plan réel et le plan fictionnel atteint son point d’orgue dans les séquences soutenues par Florin Călinescu, dans le rôle de Florin Călinescu: „Bonsoir. Je suis Florin Călinescu et je dois vous dire que je suis dégoûté.” L’objectif surprend inclusivement le prompteur du studio. Si jusque là le spectateur se s’était demandé „dans quel pourcentage s’y trouvent la vérité et la mensonge?”, du moment de la reconnaissance d’un réalisateur (jadis) à la mode, il sait que tout est réel et il est tenté, probablement, d’appeler pour entrer en direct en émission. „Ce n’est pas pooooooooossible” - disons-nous (comme la chanteuse), mais une voix nous répond „Mais si, c’est pooooooooossible” (comme écho des barons – c’est-à-dire les types avec du fric), en rappelant à certains les accordés d’une chansonnette à la mode „Le Petit Paris” d’autrefois – image paraphrasée ironiquement, au début du film, par l’enseigne d’un local modeste.

Comme professeur, Ovidiu Gorea n’est pas capable de mettre en scène sa prestation, car ses élèves jouent dans un autre film, où il n’est tout au plus qu’un personnage épisodique. Comme écrivain débutant il n’a (encore) rien à chercher/ à trouver à la table des „piêtres ivrognes”, des poètes de l’époque d’or, qu’il a du étudier au lycée et qui „ont été les premiers à remarquer les contradictions antagoniques entre la vodka russe et le *spritz* roumain”. Ainsi l’auteur du volume „Personne ne meurt gratuitement” se contentera de contrôler le monde de ses œuvres: „le niais de la librairie”, parce qu’il a renvoyé à la maison d’édition les exemplaires du premier livre d’Ovidiu Gorea „est mort le lendemain. Je l’ai toué dans des souffrances atroces à la page 3”. La crise d’inspiration et la crise financière se consomme dans l’atmosphère d’une famille *unie* „qui vivait un Noël perpétuel”, créé artificiellement par les chansons de Noël écoutées en septembre („Avec quelqu’un comme toi à la maison – explique le père retraité – qui nous bouffe la retraite, il n’est pas sur que je tiens jusqu’au Noël”). Le stop-cadre, préféré par Nae Caranfil dans certaines scènes (de famille ou du café des écrivains) établit une sorte de complicité entre Ovidiu, le personnage narrateur (un guide dans le plan fictionnel de flash-back) et le spectateur (un possible œil critique dans le plan réel du présent). Nous *visitons* un musée des figures de cire, où la sortie de l’inertie est annoncée par l’interruption du monologue narratif est dicté par l’entrée en scène de Ovidiu parmi les tableaux vivants – il a regardé pour se laisser regardé.

Le pittoresque des scènes est soutenu par la technique du détail exotique qu’on remarque, d’habitude, seulement après avoir *appris* que dans les films de Caranfil il est indiqué de garder l’œil éveillé et de chasser les allusions pour les connaisseurs: sur les stores verticales du bureau de sous-sol de Pepe est imprimée l’image des tours jumelles de New York (détruites en 2001; le film sort en 2002); la suggestion du rêve américain est anéantie tout simplement en tirant le cordon: dans un plan horizontal coupé par le vasistas bas, les gueux bougent et défilent sur le trottoir, devant la grille qui protège Pepe et Piedone, affaissés dans des fauteuils comme au théâtre/cinéma (le scénariste-metteur en scène et l’impresario des mendiants), en premier plan, et derrière, au fond, Ovidiu Gorea, le professeur avec sa tête de „personne en prose”.

Le cynisme de Pepe est d'un naturel débordant; ses répliques n'ont pas un caractère individuel, mais une valeur générale, en synthétisant l'opinion, et surtout la réaction (ou l'absence de réaction) de la société devant les cas dramatiques. Les sentences de Pepe sont l'écho de la voix d'un public indifférent et son regard reflète l'opacité des yeux des citoyens:

- un enfant orphelin malade infesté d'HIV ne provoquera pas de pitié, car „SIDA ne marche pas en Roumanie. Chez nous, on meurt de grippe.”;

- une vieille, ancienne détenue politique ne verra pas un rond et „risque une bonne raclée pour anti-communisme primaire, c'est pourquoi, elle reçoit un costume de mariée, la photo de son mari décédé comme accessoires, les églises comme lieu de travail et la réplique: „Mon mari revient tout de suite. Il est parti chez Dieu et il m'a demandé de l'attendre ici.”;

- un retraité estropié, „comme trois quart de la population” n'arrachera pas une larme; en échange, il va impressionner vêtu d'une uniforme militaire avec des décorations, après „l'avoir rendu borgne avec une balle de tennis de table”, et à côté d'une béquille on lui fixe un panneau avec un message politiquement correct: „L'œil et la jambe sont restés à Stalingrad”; ce candidat à la mendicité dépasse par le rire sa condition, en s'amusant du rôle reçu - moment dans lequel l'objectif retient la mimique déconcerté du professeur, ahuri par le spectacle.

Les mendiants, par leur imprésario (Piedone) payeront à Pepe un pourcentage de leur gain comme droit d'auteur (comme „versificateur des mendiants”). Nous, les spectateurs, de quoi couvrirons-nous le prix de leçon d'éthique offerte par le philanthrope Pavel Puiuț, qui après le dernier récit lève le verre de cognac à notre santé? „Enceinte de sept mois, tu lui donnes une poussette pour promener une poupée; la poupée en guenilles. Texte: qu'au moins le petit vive”. Vive aussi monsieur Pepe, car il est „grand artiste”! Et Nae Caranfil pareillement, car il est „cet oiseau rare du cinéma roumain qui a des choses à dire sur les questions graves (...) et, en même temps, il sait amuser son public, il sait donner ce qu'on lui demande” (Andrei Gorzo, art. cit.)

Dans le paysage narrative mis en scène par Pepe, il y a bien évidemment un rôle pour un chien vagabond intellectuel (le professeur de lycée) qui veut vivre un jour par semaine au moins au monde des princes, surtout qu'il ressent douloureusement les conséquences d'une réponse affirmative à la question rhétorique de son bienfaiteur: „Avec ton pognon, te permets-tu d'avoir de la dignité?” Ainsi, il acceptera de jouer et de vivre dans la peau du célèbre anonyme monsieur Popescu, conduit par Pepe et sa partenaire et, à la fin, par les médias. Qu'est-ce qu'il se passera avec Ovidiu Gorea? La fin reste ouverte: le protagoniste a le contrôle de sa vieille machine à écrire et de sa télécommande, mais qui aura droit de signature pour son compte bancaire et existentiel?

Peut-être parviendrons-nous de se demander quel rôle nous accepterons (si nous n'en sommes pas déjà) dans le spectacle quotidien? Peut-être avons nous l'impression de „s'être tromper d'adresse”, comme le protagoniste (le professeur

prosateur) qui a encore de éclats de fierté devant la proposition de Pepe de pratiquer l'escroquerie comme moyen d'arrondir ses revenus? Que faisons nous devant une porte que nous préférons de la trouver fermée au lieu de la voir claquer à notre nez? Sommes-nous intéressés ou indifférents? Rions-nous ou pleurons? Dans la scène finale, le *Dieu des clochards* (Pepe) nous regarde dans son rétroviseur (nous occupons virtuellement une place sur la chaise arrière de la voiture, à côté de Robert, un lycéen raté, un exemplaire de la „racaille de la société” et il nous enseigne sa dernière leçon: „Vous compatissez? J'ai raflé vot' fric!”



Si dans **Filantropica**, Nae Caranfil (metteur en scène et scénariste) prend le rôle épisodique d'un chanteur de karaoké, en anticipant la fin de la farce - “And now, the end is near/ And so I face the final curtain”, dans **Le reste est silence** (2008), Caranfil apparaît dans la scène de début, en tant que représentant de la commission d'examen des candidats pour la profession de comédien: „Le théâtre, messieurs... noble et difficile entreprise...” Le déplacement de l'auteur dans le monde des personnages en a la fonction de signaler un thème actuel, après que le générique nous avait averti (par métatexte) de notre statut de témoin à „une histoire tragi-comique cinématographique». Le film de la création d'un autre film (le premier film roumain) est aussi une *histoire* du rapport comédien- spectateur de théâtre, comédien – public de cinéma. L'actualité des thèmes proposés par Caranfil est prouvée par la crise du théâtre et du cinéma roumain (dont on parle abondamment). Le récit du premier metteur en scène d'un long métrage roumain (sur la Guerre d'Indépendance) ne semble être que le prétexte pour définir la liberté d'option de l'artiste.

La Société du Théâtre National pour des Images Animées devient la Société pour le Film et pour l'Art, menée par Leon Georgescu, déterminé par une mise en scène comique, d'investir dans une production cinématographique: Grig/ Grigore Ursache le *distribue* dans son premier rôle dans une salle de cinéma. „Il y a quelque chose de pourri au Danemark.”, apparaît dans un interlude de la pellicule „Hamlet -avec la divine Sarah”, quelques secondes avant la provocation du personnage- spectateur, par une insertion à titre persuasif: „Léon fais confiance à ce jeune homme.” Le tour joué par Grig fonctionne; Leon Negrescu s'élève de sa chaise, transfiguré (dans le cinéma pourri) et répond à „l'ombre mouvante” de la toile: „Très bien, Père!”. En somme, l'habile jeune homme, attentif aux détails, avait mis en scène quelque chose de similaire avec l'histoire racontée par Leon, sur le signe divin qui lui avait révélé son destin de Mécène (qui „protège les arts et non les artistes”).

Refusé suite à l'examen médical, Grig, le fils de Iancu, une star du Théâtre National, choisit de faire un film, „une faiblesse de basse condition”. Dès la boîte cinématographique portable - „Le soleil a bougé, on bouge à notre tour.» - un décor en carton pour des scènes théâtrales immortalisées par un „égrugeoir” on arrive à „l'entreprise mise sur les raits” dans un chronotope véridique qui suppose l'existence d'un œil hétérodiégétique. La réplique tendancieuse du protagoniste surprend exactement ce rôle du metteur en scène qui endossera finalement les conséquences des faits des autres: „Je règne, Sire”, répond Grig au roi agacé de ne pas voir „Que diable lui reste à faire à ce gosse?”

La grande comédienne Aristizza Romanescu (personnage dans le film de Caranfil) apparaît comme une image vivante des réactions bizarres du monde du théâtre, par son geste volontaire de sacrifier son image (néanmoins éphémère) de monstre sacré de la scène, pour quelques millimètres de pellicule qui l'immortalise comme „ombre mouvante”, même si épisodiquement, pour les générations futures, en dépit du fait que le „cinéma est une horreur.” Dans une scène d'un pathétisme intentionné (placée dans le séparé d'un restaurant), Aristizza (jouée par Ioana Bulcă), drapée en dentelle et voiles blanches, explique à Grig, par des sentences qui condamnent les „imitations” en théâtre et remémorent la condition de „dieux” des anciens comédiens. Mais immédiatement après, il suit en un contrepoint tragico-comique, un autre cadre avec la même Aristizza, endeuillée, sous la pluie et dans la boue, attendant les tournages. L'échange des répliques de l'équipe, abritée dans une baraque met en évidence l' (auto)mystification:

- „- Que peut faire cette femme dehors? La danse de la pluie?
- Elle prépare son rôle.
- Qu'est-ce que tu racontes?
- Tu ne me crois pas? Sors et demande-lui. Elle prépare son rôle!
- Mais quel rôle. Elle n'a pas de rôle. Elle fait signes aux soldats qui partent pour le front. Elle est une des mères du groupe.”

La séquence suivante pourrait être considérée comme emblématique pour la manière dont le metteur en scène alterne les focalisations comme échanges de regards avec le spectateur. La caméra se bloque; l'équipe conclut qu'il est nécessaire de recourir à une „escroquerie basse” pour satisfaire Aritizza, qui ne doit que croire qu'elle est filmée: „Autant qu'elle vit, elle est convaincue qu'elle a été prise en photo”, illusion augmentée par le fait personnage collectif est présenté de loin. A partir du moment où les tournages commencent, l'objectif fait alterner le groupe des mères affligées et le groupe de producteurs; les déclamations inattendues de la diva (sortie en premier plan) provoquent la stupéfaction des hommes qui suivent le monologue théâtral ébahis. D'un côté la parole ample et pathétique du théâtre classique; d'un autre l'immobilité et le silence significatives. En tant que spectateur, il nous reste la liberté de passer d'un état à l'autre.

L'impacte de ces images se vérifient dans le temps par le besoin de revoir le film; soit pour un simple rappel; soit pour une analyse des techniques et des effets. Une illustration pourrait être faite par les scènes construites dans un parallélisme antithétique qui provoquent des émotions contradictoires: l'eau jeté timidement, d'un verre, sur le nu d'une modèle d'une féminité sensuelle, en opposition avec l'eau jeté ostentatoirement, d'une pinte dans le visage de l'ancienne modèle, habillée cette fois, au sens propre, mais aussi au sens figuré des vêtements de l'arrivisme. Avec l'actant (Grig, rôle destiné à Marius Florea Vizante) nous vivons d'abord le sentiment du plaisir esthétique ensuite celui de la satisfaction éthique: la belle, mais la superficielle Emilia, a eu ce qu'elle méritait. Les deux séquences de l'incendie de la pellicule cinématographique sont complémentaires: la première n'est qu'une démonstration de force (les pellicules de la concurrence sont détruite par le feu) et une occasion pour encore une réplique *de balcon* („Peut-on faire quelques chose de durable de quelque chose aussi fragile?») pour Leon (joué par Ovidiu Niculescu d'une manière qui rappelle le feu George Constantin); la deuxième scène, vers la fin du film, a la consistance d'un geste fou, qui déclenche une véritable tragédie: les rouleaux allumés par Leon provoquent l'incendie du théâtre, dont le bûcher ardent serra la prima donna, la même Emilia, sur qui personne ne jettera plus de l'eau. Sauf Grig, dans un plan parallèle, jette un verre d'eau sur un tableau du nu d'Emilia, par le plaisir pur de revivre un moment de grâce; on lui a volé le droit aux applaudissements pour le film, mais non le droit à la réplique. Le spectateur s'éveille à la réalité, comprenant la tragédie, mais gardant inaltéré le souvenir des éclats de rire (du film ou de la salle) qui lui ont donnée l'illusion d'une comédie.

La dernière scène, de théâtre et de film, définit, par les paroles de Hamlet, la fonction de représentation de l'acte scénique (et cinématographique) dans la conservation de la mémoire collective „il a ma voix mourante; raconte-lui, avec plus ou moins de détails, ce qui a provoqué... Le reste... c'est silence...” Si on ne se précipite pas pour sortir de l'atmosphère du film, on a droit à un épilogue au générique de final, dans un paratexte encadré comme les intertitres du film muet: „Grig est mort d'une tuberculose, quelques années plus tard. Leon a vécu le reste de

ses jours dans un asile.” Et le premier film roumain? – demanderons ceux qui n’ont pas oubliés que les enjeux de la pellicule de Caranfil n’étaient pas une simple histoire tragi-comique avec des personnages de fiction. La réponse vient dans quelques seconde: „Le film a survécu.” Ainsi, le spectateur peut commencer sa carrière.

trad. Claudiu Gaiu

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RADIO DRAMA AND MIHAI ZIRRA

ALEXANDRA SOFONEA

ABSTRACT. The invisible version of the theater holds many “tales”. Radio Theater is an 80 years old entity that lived through comforting and also hard times, being born as a surprising experiment, growing up fast with the help and interest of many great people, suffering its first decline in the war period, making it through thanks to great friends like Mihai Zirra, becoming the crown jewel of theater at one point, at maturity, than starting to be neglected, being considered capped and worn out along with its parent, the Radio, for it to finally become nowadays a precious antique jewel, the delicacy of culture perhaps. In a collection of notes and portraits, Mihai Zirra brings out the first monograph of Radio Theater in his work “Am ales teatrul radiofonic...”, recently edited in his memory.

Keywords: *radio drama, history of radio theater, Mihai Zirra*

Radio Drama in Romania

The beginnings and development of radio drama in Romania

The inauguration took place on Romanian Radio, November 1, 1928. Before the first plays for the radio were broadcasted there was the recitation-in-the-studio “phenomenon”. The performers were Victoria Mierlescu, G. Baldovin, Dorina Demetrescu, Alexandru Marius, A. Pop Marțian, Ion Manolescu, George Conabie, V. Valentineanu, Constantin Nottara. Radio recitations were the first sparks of what was to come of the radio performing arts.

The first “studio play” was announced on January 23, 1929, by “*Radiofonia*” magazine. It was the lyric poem in one act “*O toamnă*” by Alfred Moșoiu, interpreting actors Lilly V. Popovici and V. Valentineanu. This lyrical poem was rather a directed dialog, but it represented the initiation of the Radio in the Dramatic Arts (the initiation of the Dramatic Arts in the Radio came later, with the birth of the first radio script). Following the examples of France and Austria the introduction of the „microphone theater” was finally happening in Romania. Radio drama in its true sense was introduced in February 18, 1929, by broadcasting the play “*Ce știa satul*” by V.Al. Jean. The author is “an inspired and high spirited comedy writer”, as G. Călinescu characterized him in his work “*Istoria literaturii*”.

Before the writing of the first plays especially created for the radio, dramatic works more easily adaptable for the microphone were used. This involved a certain type of dialog, a simple structure and precise continuity between scenes,

pronounced visual effect given by the dialogue, etc. “*Săptămâna luminată*” by M. Săulescu offered these features, as determined by press time which called it “a sensation on Radio București”, because of “all the characteristics that make it a play written especially for the radio”. The play “*Patima roșie*” by Mihail Sorbul followed, whose adaptation for the microphone proved to be successful. Then the broadcasting of a long series of works by I.L. Caragiale began. The author provided the radio with a wonderful “library” of pieces easily adaptable for the microphone (mainly because of the pronounced verbal character of the texts, bombarded by spicy and spiritual lines; Caragiale's work, in my opinion, stands little visual suggestion, but more natural character of the lines and dialogue). Among foreign authors, A.P.Cehov's adaptations were preferred for the radio.

Then came the transition from these adaptations to the original screenplay for radio. More and more romanian playwrights were attracted by the concept of radio drama plays: V.Al. Jean, Mihail Sorbul, Victor Eftimiu, Victor Ion Popa, Mircea Ștefănescu, Tudor Mușatescu and others. Romanian authors began to discover the potential of the radio in shaping and promoting a new type of theater. They started to take initiative, encouraging writers.

The path to radio drama was open for both romanian and universal literature, plays being directed since the beginning by important theater directors of the time, Victor Ion Popa, and Victor Bumbescu, with the direct contribution of the studio directors Al. Lohan, Dem Psatta, Atanasie Mitric and under the leadership of the cultural institution provided by Gh. D. Mugur, Vasile Voiculescu and Horia Furtună.¹ During five decades the Radio Theater (as was to be called in time) kept evolving towards the complete transformation to a real “National Theater”, as required by Tudor Vianu from the start.

The setting noise and backstage acoustic noise (sound slide, or the „audio scenography”) are initially launched by BBC.

Victor Ion Popa was named director of the radio theater. He formed a team of people, working on the idea of radiogenic voice. V.I. Popa will take that role very seriously, making a number of rehearsals just to give the show that shape that would make it not only easy to “swallow” for the public, but also attractive and exciting. It was necessary to “give freedom to the auditors' fantasy, so people can fill what is transmitted through the loudspeaker with their own images”.²

In 1931 a competition for writers was launched. Its purpose was to encourage radio drama. Involvement was high, both from candidates and from the jury, which include some major names: Dimitrie Gusti, I. Al. Brătescu-Voinești, Octavian Goga, Al. Mavrodi, Adrian Maniu and Victor Ion Popa. This way the development of radio drama scenarios was stimulated. The rapid development of original drama

¹ Victor Crăciun, “*Stălpnicul Teatrului Radiofonic*”, from the work of Mihai Zirra “*Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic...*” Casa Radio, 2009, p. 5.

² “*Radio și Radiofonia*” journal, no.332 from 27th of January 1935.

even prompted Victor Ion Popa and Liviu Rebreanu to discuss the issue of the authors of scenarios and their rights, in the Romanian Playwright Society meeting of November 11, 1937.

If the start for the radio drama was rather shy, bringing only some adapted consecrated plays that were broadcasted weekly, now its role was far more important, bringing a daily show with various forms of performance: short Theater, Theater series, Documentary Theater, Investigation Theater, children's Theater etc., with radio scenarios written by authors who already got the taste for this new kind of dramatic text.

The Radio Theater had a difficult period in the late '30s and early '40s. Although in 1932 it had the benefit of a pretty well equipped studio for that time in terms of technical equipment and specialists, the Radio Theater was passing through a great decline during the war. At that time fewer and fewer plays were broadcasted.

The precarious situation of radio drama transmission determined leadership to try its rehabilitation. For this purpose a debate was organized in the spring of 1943 on the prospects of the Radio Theater. This debate was attended by the director of the institution, Vasile Ionescu, and also by Gheorghe D. Mugur, Al. Hodoș, Horia Furtună, Vasile Voiculescu, Val Mugur, Al. Lohan, as well as playwrights and other professionals: V.I. Popa, Tudor Mușatescu, Victor Bumbești, Mircea Ștefănescu. This famous meeting is kept on record on decelith system. It launched remarkable ideas which, unfortunately, were difficult to implement due to war and then bombing of the Broadcasting Company.³

Its rebirth required much effort and compromise situations. Mihai Zirra, Constantin Moruzan and Paul Stratalit were the front-line fighters who supported the Broadcasting, coming up with ingenious solutions that were, at that time, saving elements. One example is the makeshift studio at "Sf. Sava" high school nearby. These ideas saved the institution by giving it a chance to regain its status (eg. the following construction of a new building where Radio Theater was given two specially equipped studios).

The solution found in autumn 1944, by improvising a studio on the second floor of the "Sf. Sava" high school, brought Radio Theater a difficult yet comic period. At the second floor of the high school the Broadcast Company had "built" some studios, out of which one was given to the Radio Theater, as Mihai Zirra confesses. He also mentioned that, of course, no matter how thoroughly the isolation for the studio was studied, during school courses, each and every hour, when students came out in the yard for recreation, work in studios had to be stopped. The larm caused by the 700-800 students was captured by microphones and the crew could not work. "Since the tape recorders were brought – says Zirra-

³ Victor Crăciun, "*Stălpnicul Teatrului Radiofonic*", from the work of Mihai Zirra "*Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic...*" Casa Radio, 2009, p. 5.

work was even more complicated. The noise was recorded along with the other sounds and lines appear on a wrong audio background. A teacher who was missing - say – would immediately rise out all the students in the school yard, the huge noise surprising the studio during recordings. Easy to imagine that the recording would have to be resumed, using a new tape. This would be a difficult challenge, especially since the studio was at the “Sf. Sava” high school while the tapes and tape recorders were in the new building that was starting to take shape. To avoid these constant trips between one location and another, the engineers who oversaw the recording had to stop as soon as they heard any undesirable sounds. When the script happened to claim a total silence apart from the lines, imagine the surprise when the tape caught the larm of the children, even during classes. Many long negotiations were held with the students, the supervisors, the teachers. Still, the silence was hard to obtain.” However, the audio library of the Radio Theater still keeps some records of those in Sava, especially for several prestigious voices of actor who disappeared. Even some of those who retained some unexpected “recreations” on the background (recordings that could not be restored).⁴ Under such circumstances, the Radio Theater, however, had made a number of outstanding productions that retained the public and even multiplied it.

Starting with 1949, the Radio Theater takes on its national attributions. That includes weekly performances. And from November 1950 the performances took place twice a week, regularly, Saturdays and Sundays. In 1951 The Radio Theater was already working on organizing a stable repertory. It already had a remarkable audience, technical progress and experience in directing. Also in 1951 a change in the broadcast program was made: broadcastings no longer took place two days in a row, but in the middle and end of the week, giving time for more efficient rehearsals. As for the repertoire, it is obvious that success made radio drama increase the number of productions and a broadening of the thematic area. Works of national and universal drama, contemporary creations of French writers, Soviet, Italian and German were broadcasted. What is remarkable is the insistent encouragement of local creativity.

Some titles of plays being presented at that time are: “*Nevestele vesele din Windsor*” by Shakespeare, directed by Ion Șahighian, “*Avarul*” and “*Vicleniile lui Scapin*” by Molière, directed by M. Zirra, “*Revizorul*” by N.V.Gogol, directed by Ion Șahighian, “*O scrisoare pierdută*” and “*O noapte furtunoasă*” by I.L. Caragiale, “*Hagi Tudose*” by Barbu Delavrancea.

⁴ Marius Iorgulescu, “*Teatrul Național Radiofonic, o istorie de 80 de ani*”, interview available on <http://www.reporterspecial.ro/articol1157/Teatrul-National-Radiofonic-%20%20%20%20%20o-istorie-de-80-de-ani--.htm>

The great revelation: the band tape

The invention of magnetic recording brought the suppression of the improvisation, leaving way for the word to be sovereign.⁵ The theater director could now more easily juggle with sound effects and have much more freedom in his creativity. He was now able to resume each line until its perfection, saving him from accepting compromise. Neither music, nor noise could lead to effects of shrillness. Everything could now be polished and brought to perfection. Suddenly the work of improvisation, based on the maximum intuition and compromise, became a work with recoverable material that allowed detailed study. Obviously, it took sometime to achieve remarkable results. And that was because the director's work changed in character, for one, but also because new technology required the user experience to provide exceptional results. Tape was at its beginning. Recording technique could only be acquired in time.

In addition to art direction and technical direction, the band tape called for special studio directing and musical directing. Therefore more and more people were needed in the directing crew to increase quality.

Tape recordings were experimental in the years 1948-1949 and were not kept. The use of the band tape for the radio in implementing programs and then its systematical use since 1951-1952 resulted in a significant leap in the life of the RadioTheatre. When this whole thing started, the new kind of theater already had two decades of existence, of which the early years and the war period had not been favourable for its development.⁶

Radio Theater now has 80 years of existence, out of which the last 60 years include the introduction and ongoing use of the band tape. The use of the band tape was an enormous step forward for this type of theater, a revolution even. It brought the development of the Radio Theater by increasing artistic and technical quality, and also a fantastic opportunity for the programming policy by the fact that any show could be resumed in its original and unaltered version, however and whenever, depending on need and demand . If before the use of the tape any small error in the planning of the program brought unpleasant effects like postponing or cancelling shows, now the solution of a "playback" was always there to save the program. In addition to this opportunity, however, there is a great, and perhaps most important advantage brought by the tape, namely that since that moment great voices could be kept on record for years and years, voices of canonical shows "preserved" even to this day. Time has only added them more value.

⁵ Victor Crăciun, "*Stălpnicul Teatrului Radiofonic*", from the work of Mihai Zirra "*Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic...*" Casa Radio, 2009, p. 6.

⁶ Victor Crăciun, "*Stălpnicul Teatrului Radiofonic*", from the work of Mihai Zirra "*Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic...*" Casa Radio, 2009, p. 7.

Mihai Zirra, the Titan of the “no-seats Theater”



*„[...]I am being indiscrete when saying this
– I was no exceptional man. There are many
like me. It's just that I also admit it.”*

Mihai Zirra

Who Mihai Zirra was and how he contributed to the development of the Radio Theater

Out of the 7,000 performances recorded by the Radio Theater, since its beginning, almost 500 are interpreted, adapted or performed, first as director of studio and then as artistic director, by Mihai Zirra. The impressive amount and quality of his work in the Radio Theater brought him his fame. The more so as this art was happening before 1940, and crossed the difficult period of the war which wanted to reduce to silence not only the Radio Theater but the entire initiative that supported it to.

Mihai Zirra was first fan, then apprentice, follower, supporter and symbol of the Radio Theater. He was one of its leading artistic directors, one of the most well known protagonists of this art, his achievements conserving to the memory of Romanian culture names of great actors. From amateur actor to drama teacher, Mihai Zirra went through a long list of "roles" in the theater. This, even he confesses, helped him understand theater in its depth, by knowing each piece of the great puzzle by heart.

So, in September 1, 1938, the National Radio Theater opened its gates for Mihai Zirra, a name already known in the theater business. He had already been introduced to theater life in 1926, when he graduated in Ploiești. He was a supporter of Compania Maria Filotti, where he worked as an actor and director behind the scenes.

At the age of 31, when he joined the Romanian Radio Theater crew, he already had a rich artistic activity. Hence, the entourage of figures of the time, as Victor Ion Popa, Victor Bumbęști, H. Acterian, Ion Sърbul, Ion řahighian, G.M. Zamfirescu, could only make Mihai Zirra and his career rise. He worked first as director of the studio, then as a performer, having a well known radiogenic voice which lead him to take the role of professional radio announcer at one point, then becoming artistic director. His evolution made no sudden jumps, not because he could not progress quickly (Mihai Zirra's talent would have propelled him to the maximum peak easily in a few years), but because of his perfectionist nature, insisting to deepen each role played in the Radio Theater, studying each activity until he understood all the secrets of the theater work.

Being started his career in radio as a studio director (part often marginalized) has only served Mihai Zirra to put even more efforts into demonstrating the importance and necessity of the studio director and also the need of talent for any job in the theater, even for the technical ones. He expressed it as follows: "The work of the studio director is an artistic work, if it is not made at random, but regarded as a profession thoroughly studied."⁷

He then got the job of the announcer (he was nicknamed "The Number One Voice of the Nation") and played in many radio plays. But when he was proposed to take on the role of artistic director he evaded, testifying later that he didn't feel ready for that. For a brief period he worked as a stage director in a theater as well as the announcer on the radio.

Why radio drama and not stage drama?

When finally the decision day came, Mihai Zirra was asked to choose between the "curtain and chairs theater" and radio drama. He chose the Radio Theater instantly. "I couldn't explain why I did that, but I did it without hesitation. Perhaps for the more varied artistic work, for a richer and more varied repertoire. Perhaps because even I did not know exactly why. However, starting the day I took over as artistic director, in 1945, I fell in love with my work at the microphone and I couldn't leave it."⁸

Thus giving up the career the "regular" theater could have given him, Mihai Zirra finally chose this theater that had no stages, no long tradition of millennia, that was pretty young (it only celebrated ten years when Mihai Zirra joined the crew), but had a magical "something".

"At the end of forty years of theater out of which twenty-eight years I remained faithful to the microphone, I was tempted to seek a definition for the profession that I had chosen, just in a few words, but I only managed to convince myself that this art is far too full of contradictions for it to be summarized in a short formula...The radio director, who has no scenography and and no light problems,

⁷ Mihai Zirra, "Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic..." Casa Radio, 2009, p. 22.

⁸ Mihai Zirra, "Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic..." Casa Radio, 2009, p. 61.

has to solve, along with the actor, the mystery of words, which is the most complex ... Therefore to me it seems that directing is the essence of all aspirations to the highest peaks in Radio Theater..."⁹

Mihai Zirra was truly a man dedicated to his profession. The long list of radio creations he directed stands proof that he worked with passion for this theater. Mihai Zirra brought to life the radio adaptation for "*Chirițele*" by Alecsandri or "*Tănase Scatiu*" by Duiliu Zamfirescu. He made the radio adaptations for the entire work of Camil Petrescu, Mihail Sebastian, Al. Kirițescu, V. Eftimiu, T. Mușatescu, Mircea Ștefănescu, George Mihail Zamfirescu and Victor Ion Popa, and for the most important creations of Aurel Baranga, Lucia Demetrius, Eugenia Busuioceanu, Mihail Davidoglu, D.R. Popescu, Ioan Grigorescu and others. From Shakespeare's works he adapted "*Hamlet*", "*Romeo și Julieta*", "*Richard al III-lea*", "*Comedia erorilor*", "*Mult zgomot pentru nimic*", as well as works belonging to GB Shaw, Beaumarchais, V. Hugo, Molière, Goethe, Schiller, Hauptmann, Cehov, Gorki and many others. There are radio adaptations that Mihai Zirra made famous, like "*Înșir'te mărgărite*" (with G. Vraca, Birlic, G. Calboreanu, N. Brancomir, Al. Giugaru, Niki Atanasiu, Agepsina Macri, Ștefan Ciobotărașu), "*Leonardo da Vinci*" (with G. Vraca and N. Bălțățeanu), "*Michelangelo*" (with G. Vraca, I. Manolescu, Tanți Cocea, Ion Aurel Manolescu, Geo Maican, Ion Manta), "*Take, Ianke și Cadâr*" (with Șt. Ciobotărașu, Jules Cazaban and Ion Manta) or "*Regele petrece*" (with G. Vraca, Ion Manolescu, V. Valentineanu, Emil Botta, N. Bălțățeanu, Ion Talianu).

To these we add his own scenarios, adaptations for great literary works, children's theater and hundreds of current radio shows. The complex activity of Mihai Zirra surprises and inspires even today. The more so as the present form of Radio Theater has evolved mostly thanks to his efforts.

Finally it appears that Mihai Zirra had the "wand"¹⁰ in his hand from the start, even if he sometimes felt unprepared.

"I chose Radio Theater ..."

When he felt that he could reveal this, Mihai Zirra showed his partners his personal writings that included many memoirs and portraits of theater personalities. All these brought together between the covers of a single book ("*Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic...*") have become not only a fascinating reconstruction of the beginning and completion of the new theater, but in fact the first monograph of radio drama. Before his time there were only articles and essays that discussed specific facts in radio theater life, on scene and backstage. These short works were signed by Victor Ion Popa, Emil Petrașcu, Alexandru Lohan, Dem Psatta and other forerunners of Romanian Radio

⁹ Victor Crăciun, "*Stălpnicul Teatrului Radiofonic*", from the work of Mihai Zirra "*Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic...*" Casa Radio, 2009, p. 9.

¹⁰ This expression was used when referring to the talent to direct a crew. Mihai Zirra explains this concept in his book "*Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic...*" Casa Radio, 2009, p. 61.

Theater. Nobody until then decided to develop a historical reconstruction of more than five decades of "microphone theater", an evocation of experiences and a theorization of problems that configure the specific elements of the radio.¹¹

What is more interesting in this work is how, in many pages of narration and characterization of the different personalities of the theater who came into contact with Mihai Zirra, he succeeds, maybe unintentionally, to make a comprehensive self-portrait. The way he talks about the beginnings of his career, mixing facts with some pride and some modesty, makes this book a very special diary-portrait-monograph-biography-essay-outline of a non-fiction novel-ars poetica. This book gathers the highly literary personal notes of a passionate man who shaped his memories influenced by his emotions, probably altering facts from the way they really happened. The entire work carries a smack of nostalgia for some idealized time, unique for both history and the author's personal evolution.

"Finally, what is radio drama?"

"It is a drama that is addressed to the great mass of listeners, which penetrates the far corners of the country, which crosses the frontiers and can be an artistic show held for millions of people at once. It is the show that can keep the attention of those millions of people, with the single condition of indisputable artistic quality."¹²

My Opinions

Who listens to radio drama today?

I thought I was alone. I now find out with surprise that current statistics say radio theater ranks second, after Radiojournal, in radio broadcasted shows. Trying to visualise this public, I see people passionate about theater / culture in general, children, elderly, victims of the "happy chance" (those who most often say "I was only surfing the channels when I saw this program that I liked so much that I became a fan") and the inevitable handful of snobbish, or those who "wear" culture like an expensive fur coat, just for show-off. Except for the first and last category, the rest are in constant quantity. So when I noticed the increased interest in radio drama, the first question is: because of those who appreciate its true value, or because a new cultural trend has been set? I'm inclined to believe that the real radio drama listeners' number exceeds that of the snobbish, due to an unfortunate attribute related to this kind of theater: it's outdated and dead.

I would gladly turn to deny these attributes, but after a self-analysis I discover that my attraction to this type of drama could easily just come from my passion for the '50s atmosphere, the old, the past, and sepia photos. It might be that

¹¹ Victor Crăciun, "Stălpnicul Teatrului Radiofonic", from the work of Mihai Zirra "Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic..." Casa Radio, 2009, p. 8.

¹² Mihai Zirra, "Am ales Teatrul Radiofonic..." Casa Radio, 2009, p. 27.

the dust time laid on this type of drama is precisely what makes it more interesting for most of us. Not the current character of it, but its old scent is what brings it out.

I am sticking to say that it is *possible* that radio drama is really a beautiful jewel of grandmother's, worth so much only because it is the list of antiques, because it lasted until today, its defining characteristic being that if changed / upgraded / improved it loses its charm.

Why this kind and not some other?

Radio drama has the enormous advantage of NOT having what is most important in "regular" theater: the image that the director offers the viewer. Radio Theater trusts that the listener can imagine the best deployment of images for the show. Perhaps this trust is unfounded if we think that the mental images of many of those who listen to "*Faust*" at the radio will not meet the aesthetic and originality offered by Silviu Purcărete in his show. Therefore ... a great loss for the listener. But what surely a theater play on stage won't be able to do better than a radio play is to penetrate the mind and all the hidden parts of your being so strongly. Radio theater is, in my opinion, the personal drama, the psychological drama, the theater of your own capacity to understand the world. It is a superb psychological practice where each listener's own memories, own preferences, beliefs, desires, fears, visions are brought to light. Radio drama is the most powerful machine, the perfect snake that slips with indiscretion through all the ins and outs of the listener's mind.

In addition to this attribute of "hidden psychologist", radio drama also has some easier to recognize qualities such as the capacity to gather infinitely more public (within the statistics from the census) than any piece played on stage (except TV drama ... but its weaknesses make it incomparable with any other form of drama). In addition, the Romanian Radio Theater reaches today the impressive number of 7,000 broadcasted and recorded performances, this way becoming the "stage" with the most shows and the most various possibilities of repertoire.

Special effects and "scenography" for the radio theater

Dem Psatta, actor, director and play writer, then Head of the Radio Theater, told the story of how sound effects were made in the 30's in radio theater: "When we had to imitate the noise of working engine, I made it by rubbing rhythmically a dustpan with a broom. The airplane in motion was even funnier: a moving fan hitting a card. Thunder was done by the long trembling of a zinc board, while the lightning was brought in the studio by hitting two brass Cymbals, taken surreptitiously from the orchestra. "

Apparently, there also were some imitators of animals and birds. Chroniclers praised a particular interpreter from the Radio Orchestra, Moschitz, who managed to imitate anything. This phase ended in 1935, when the "discs with noise" came into use, purchased from abroad. They, however, gave technicians hard work. "On one play - Dem Psatta confesses - the line was: "And the dog barks!". Since the

same disc held more than one sound, the technical director, instead of playing the barking, accidentally played the sound of a crying child.¹³

As any amateur, I find it sad that recorded noise replaced the natural one. Wouldn't it have been much more intense to know that every sound that you hear is live? That every sound your ears capture is untouched and comes out alive with its own energy, brought to life simultaneously with the voice of the actor? It would indeed be an effort too great and perhaps with lower quality results, but it would (once more) turn the radio theater in a small trial of worship, a ritual with sounds that have their own masks!

But I admit that in this case the broadcasting would have to be live (otherwise it is a pointless effort to create noise on the spot), and, if possible ... not *broadcasted* but *listened to* ("radio" drama whispered in the ear while you sit with eyes closed). This would clear the essence of the "invisible" theater! But, obviously, we couldn't call it radio drama anymore, but ritual theater or ... utopian theater.

As for the virtual scenography, created and customized within each listener, I think these words of the most famous scientist in the history best go here: "*Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.*" All the special effects brought by technology all the theaters of the world own won't equal what imagination can create in a single moment.

We are all endowed with imagination (the quantity varies). If we were all able to live with maximum intensity everything we imagine ... we would have the most exciting performances possible, carried out in the minds of each. And nobody will ever say "what an awful show that was!" again, because each and everyone will have his favourite version of the show in front of his closed eyes.

I am not idealizing now the power and role of the imagination. Actual implementation has its purpose and unique strength. But because of the "illness" of this century (the self-expression and the need to show yourself at the expense of the analysis of what is around), a mild tyranny has been created in art and in any form of expression: "This is me and this is what I have to say. And I will be the one to show you how to understand what you see". "Theater creates a desire to show everything, therefore limiting the possibility of a viewer to imagine." Liviu Ciulei says in his article, "*Teatralizarea picturii de teatru*", in 1956. This tyranny is supported by the excessive fear of the public, who always asks "What did that mean? Why didn't I understand anything? Why didn't I get the explanation?". Man's mind has been educated to accept information for far too long. It now sometimes forgets to create it or to transform it. We are bombarded by codes and rules of communication that give us the false impression that we are evolving in this area. But the more we try to perfect our ways of communicating, by inventing more and more words and channels and more complex and strange codes (the messenger language: brb, asl pls, etc.) the less we manage to actually understand each other.

¹³ Marius Iorgulescu, "*Teatrul Național Radiofonic, o istorie de 80 de ani*".

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