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FOR AN EKPHRASTIC POETICS OF VISUAL ARTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

DORU POP

ABSTRACT. The essay uses the Greek term ekphrasis, as it was conceived by the rhetoric tradition of Homerid descent, and puts it into a transdisciplinary context. Ekphrasis and ekphrastic poetics is transferred into the field of contemporary arts of representation and is used mainly as a concept to describe an interpretation tool. The key question of the essay is how can we speak about cinema, photography, theater and all the other visual narrativities, without losing significations? The author suggests that there should be a continuous conversion and reconversion of the term ekphrasis for the benefit of the „Sister Arts”, one that allows a wider interpretation range, one that puts language and vision together. Ekphrastic poetics is a way to open the visual arts to all the new forms of expression, like the cinema of reality, visual anthropology and the urban theater representations, all of them means of translating daily life into artistic production.

Ekphrasis is a term used in early Greek rhetoric and it comes from the combination of the Greek „*ek*”, meaning „out” and „*phrasis*” meaning „to speak”. In this sense, *ekphrasis is the mere effort do describe visual works, to present in words something that is mostly imaginary, or represented in images*. Simply put, it means to represent in words something that is represented visually.

Some visual art specialists like Nelson Goodman have expressed their mistrust in the relevance of the interpretative action itself - while not for the term ekphrasis - due to their disbelief in the relevance of verbal and textual description. For them, no verbal representation can represent the object on the same level, and with the same value as the visual representation. Describing reality, contouring it may not compete with the visual presence of the individual before the pictures themselves (Goodman, 231).

Some other art critics have put under scrutiny the impact of such a word. W. J. T. Mitchell (Mitchell, 1995) has coined the word ekphrasis between its narrow signification, in connection with the basic poetic function (Mitchell, 153). Here ekphrasis is the „voice” of the work of art, otherwise inexpressive. Thus ekphrasis gathers all the rhetoric efforts to depict artistic expression into mental images. On the other hand, taking over the signification attributed to the word by Murray Krieger (Krieger, 1967, later developed in Krieger, 1992), ekphrastic poetry engulfs all the productions of imaginary worlds, into a general doctrine of rhetoric, as a principle of reconstructing rationally something that is not subordinated to literary (that is textual interpretation).

For Krieger this „general principle of poetics” restricts ekphrasis to the literary canon, while for Heffernan ekphrasis is a representational function of art and poetry, the narrative response to pictorial products (Heffernan, p. 5).

On the positive evaluation of the term, one that abandons the literary component, we have a couple of practical definitions. One acception of ekphrasis was provided by James A. W. Heffernan (Heffernan, 2004), allowing us to move from one artistic period to another. For him ekphrasis is nothing but the art of putting into words the works of art, of transforming into a verbal representation something that belongs to the visual representation (Heffernan, p. 3). Expressing something silent into something verbal (or written) is similar to the contraction of the term in the classical notion of „prosopopeia” - the technique of having silent objects express themselves in the absence of the author.

But ekphrastic thinking should allow us to do more, while it makes possible the movement from one visual representational art to another. So basically when we discuss ekphrasis, we need to respond to the key question of all art criticism and of all media critics as well. How do we speak about cinema, photography, theater and other visual narrativities without losing their initial „aura”?

The term ekphrasis in and by itself provides one such possible answer to this question. Between being a minor poetic function and having an all powerful universal function of rhetoric end, ekphrasis is a term not only applicable to all art history, as W. J. T. Mitchell has it, and not an all inclusive word, as it is for Krieger.

Ekphrasis is a transcultural form that allows reading and including visual arts and their close connected domains. John Hollander, in his article on „The Poetics of Ekphrasis”, (Word and Image 4, 1988, cited by Mitchell 1994), distinguishes between a „notional” ekphrasis, one that means the depiction of works of art that do not exist anymore, and an ekphrasis of the widely known objects of art – an ekphrasis of the objects present and one of the object not visible. For Peter Wagner (Wagner, 1996) ekphrasis is a „visual poetics” that is to say a narratology of the arts.

Following this lead, I would exclude the pure semiotic dimension of ekphrasis and its functions as a rhetorical instrument for imaginary purposes. Neither it is a sheer linguistic principle, intervening on the art object, nor it can be a limited approach to visual representations. Ekphrasis includes all forms of narrativities of the visual (the representations being numberless), and is not only descriptive, but also a form of storytelling of everything that is „made visible”. Ekphrasis means, not only literarily, but practically, to fully express, that is to go beyond all that is visible and everything that is explicit.

In order to understand this conceptual movement we need to go back to the Shield of Achilles, from the homerid poem, where we find the quintessence of an ekphrastic visual object – what can be called the multilayered signification and transmission of visual signs. In the eighteenth book of the Iliad, an ekphrastic object is presented as a sign created by an absent Author (in the case of the Shield by the goddess, to be given to the hero), manufactured by another (the god Hephaistos) and used by another receiver (by the hero himself). But the ekphrastic conversion continues

since the object has a secondary function (as used by the muses to inspire Homer) and reused by this „secondary” user to depict it to the readers, as a third party (Homer presents it in words to the Illiad reader). More deeper, on another level, the shield is a representation of power, of personal power and of the attributed (symbolical) power, a moment where an ekphrastic interpretation allows the coexistence of all the interpretations of the various levels of interpretation. This multiple faced ekphrastic action and its disponibility continues at the inter-textual level, because later we have Virgil's account of the Iliad and even later Dante's description of the Purgatorio, where he shows us the plurivalent nature of ekphrastic action and interpretation.

So, ekphrastic multi-layering is possible in the material sense also; the shield is both sculpture, theatrical representation, a picture in time, a literary support, artistic form and intertextual object, a multilayered signification producer. Ekphrasis is for me such a term, bringing together several forms of visual representation and allowing the „reader” to use language in order to generate the interaction between all the forms of analysis. I suggest more a continuous conversion and reconversion of the term for the benefit of the the „Sister Arts”, one that allows us to put language and vision together. More so since these related arts have opened to new forms of expression, like the cinema of reality, visual anthropology and the urban theater representations, all of them are contemporary means of translating daily life into artistic production. The visual arts now have more siblings and a simple relationship between literature, rhetoric and pictorial representation is not enough.

Ekphrasis as a function of visual anthropology

On one hand visual anthropology has transformed picture making into an autonomous research method, by which the recording of the gestures of the human beings in their urban rituals or the visual recording of popular culture artefacts represents an instrument of keeping our collective memory. The production of images, as a narrative form, is recording life into a reproducible reality, that can become an art for. I see visual anthropology as one of the utilitarian functions of ekphrasis. Visual anthropology, once it abandoned the „primitivist” view of classical anthropology and the acknowledgement that – because all cultures are part of the modern world – they do not form isolated, self-contained entities, allows a form of applied anthropology, one that was looking for communities that provided the opportunity for fieldwork, communities being in close connection with the anthropologist and the team of students. This means that we can focus on local, small groups, not only exotic communities (like Innuits for Boaz), and by this to find our own „primitives” and to actively interpret their objects and visual manifestations. This approach allows the experience of smaller-scale studies, focused on individuals, common objects and on their ways of expressing their own life histories, specific social contexts (such as marketplaces, gangs, shopping centers), residential units, and workplaces (as for Kemper, 1996), all integrated into a description that goes beyond the simple field notation.

In this sense, a new context for visual anthropology was provided at the turn of the twenty-first century. This key moment in the development of visual anthropology was preceded by some important publications in the late 1990s (e.g. Banks and Morphy 1997, MacDougall 1998), and between 2000 and 2001 a series of new books, articles and websites about visual anthropology and ethnography came into the public domain. Between them these texts have considered the history of visual anthropology (e.g. Ruby 2000, Grimshaw 2001, cited in „Visual Anthropology Review” 17(2) 2001 2) and suggested a means by which visual methods of research and representation might play a fuller role in ethnography as a whole (Pink 2006, Edgar forthcoming) and as an opening to other functions of anthropology.

The photographic component of visual anthropology

Another level is the photographic component of ekphrastic interpretation. Although Roland Barthes in his article from 1961, 'Le message photographique', has put photography among the „unspeakable” visual arts, photography is turning, more and more, into one of the most commonly used instrument to generate self identity in the contemporary social structures. Ekphrastic intervention on photographic images gives them voice and power within the area of social relevance. A „still” image, suspended in its own aesthetic function is hard to be put into words, but a photographic depiction of objects and people in a reality that ceases to exist generates ekphrastic power. Visual recording of „anthropological facts”, that is of the human manifestations, is not just a practical activity, with an exclusively technological component, but also a space for human sciences dialogue. In this respect the most developed field of research – from the stand point of researching human activities by means of visual technologies – remains visual anthropology. As it was created and structured by Alfred Cort Haddon, Baldwin Spencer, Franz Boas, Marcel Griaule, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, visual anthropology was generated by the association between the technologies of recording culture with the interest for the social rituals of all the “manifestations of humanity” (according to Sol Worth, 1980). Visual representation of what humanity is, by means and techniques specific to photographic or cinematographic documentary, is a basic instrument of qualitative research. Applying these methods within the field of the arts of the spectacle has become a research necessity.

Ekphrastic approach on theater and theatrical representations of reality

Theater, on the other hand, can be opened to an ekphrastic dimension, deeper than the mere theatrical criticism or depiction. By this I mean that contemporary theater deals with the transdisciplinary nature of all contemporary “visual recordings” of reality, visual anthropology, the theater of the daily life, video arts and so on. In our post-modern societies the power of image narrativity has engulfed most of the „ceremonial” forms of humanity in the urban space, starting with dance and street

theater, all of the performance arts, urban arts, popular culture and so on; but, on the same time, the intimate space, by means of visual autofictions, videoblogs, and so on. So urban arts and culture involve the participation of every individual and their daily existence within the visual field, which means an almost physical presence in media and cultural activities belonging to the arts of the spectacle. Moving from „primitive cultures” as study object towards studying „urban culture” means the changing of the very understanding of the life of individuals considered to be „marginals”. The studies developed by Robert Park, E. W. Burgess and the Chicago University School made the creation of specialised centers possible, like the one that functions in the United States, in Philadelphia, since 1969 (The Center for Urban Ethnography), that allows the interest for groups considered to be at the „outskirts” of society, for ethnic communities or for other social parts of urban life – to be researched by means of cinema techniques and by other arts of the spectacle. Personal testimonies of individuals (from disenfranchised or minority groups) can become the basis for self representation in a dramatic mix, one of ekphrastic relevance. Theatrical performances based on personal experiences, recorded on video and/or with the use technical means of the cinema, photography and other visual media, may further develop our understanding of the relationship between the object viewed and the subject that sees.

The term is designed to put into place the means to include an all engulfing art forms, for instance the act of ethnographic study with the theatrical representation and the photographic recording, to introduce video camera in the process of recording social spaces otherwise inaccessible to „public viewing”, spaces like night asylums, shelters for people with social problems, prisons etc. (One of the examples here being the movie made by Frederick Wiseman: „TiticuttFollies”), an approach that allows the treatment of such „sensible” subjects from a far more deeper sense than a simple sociological or psychological stand-point, but also from their multiple visual and textual relevance. The theatrical experience can contain elements from docudrama and melodrama, from oral history and personal accounts, using, for example, the technique of Augusto Boal, to try to generate a social change by means of the arts of the spectacle, and not a simple „interpretation” of the visual.

Ekphrasis and the rhetoric of cinema

The cinema of the reality has put together a new field of visual production that was at the intersection between documentary journalism, photography, urban anthropology, the theater of reality and many other artistic activities like visual sociology, cultural studies, the movie theory, the history of photography and the studies on urban performance arts. Starting with the "observational" cinema (as described by Peter Ian Crawford, 1992, p. 77), the „literary” translation of a culture from the ethnographical practices was slowly substituted - in the XXth Century ethnography – by strategies of representation that belong to cinema as an art. „Representing culture”, a fundamental objective of qualitative research (see James

Clifford 1997, p. 19), does not belong strictly to sociology based research, with heavily quantifiable data, but also to each and every form of picture production. Ekphrastic approach is, in this sense, a „thicker” recount of reality, in the very sense Clifford Geertz has put it. The problems of urban cinematographers, including the basic techniques of *cinéma-vérité* (as practiced by Jean Rouch), elements from direct cinematography (with examples from Richard Leacock or D. A. Pennebaker productions), the rhetoric of movies like those of Roberto Rossellini and the Italian film school (de Sica, Visconti, Pasolini), all of these issues have applicable consequences into the contemporary visual production and interpretation.

These specific techniques, which have narrowed the borders of documentary movies and fiction cinema, have elaborated an entire art of “history recording”, by means of cinematographic instruments, and they are wide open to discussions and, more, to practical exercises in an ekphrastic approach. Viewing and commenting visual products of the neo-realism “cinema revolution”, and productions belonging to docufiction from Scandinavian and Danish moviemaking (Lars von Trier being one of them) or projects like “Blair Witch Project” can represent a basis for comments and discussions moving beyond simple „literary translation”.

Observational cinematography, the language of “*cinéma-vérité*”, “direct cinema”, the new “mockumentaries”, social documentaries (developed by Barbara Kopple and continued in the United States by the „Michael Moore phenomenon”), are interpretative contexts where video documentary is converging with visual autofiction, the techniques of modern cinema allow the expansion of the limits between fiction, art film and the recording of reality. Following the concept of “*cineaste plongeur*” (as defined by Edgar Morin), the visual producer that dives into life only to gather the depths of reality by participation. Here ekphrastic involvement means not only the involvement of artists and producers of visual materials into everyday reality, but also the mutual action of the reader/viewer. Since the fundamental concepts of urban cinematography have their roots in the trans-cultural role of observational cinema, this allows the participants to develop their own personal approaches to visual production.

One of the main objectives of describing the term ekphrasis in such a way is to develop a method and a practical way to apply multiple interpretations and reactions within the field of all the arts of the spectacle – cinema, urban theater, all other image productions like photographic, video arts and so on. One central level of ekphrastic approach is that it enables us of using pictures to describe and interpret human behaviour and of turning these pictures into another level of interpretation. For instance, in theatrical representation, body language elements, body movements in public space, analysing gestures and emotions as well as other „visible” aspects of urban culture, can become fundamental manifestations of cultural expressions. At their turn, these manifestations would further be processed and included in other artistic forms, themselves „readable” and subject to several readings. The description of the

ways images and other visual media (photography, film, video camera generated images or other ways of image recording), which offer pictoriality and life to ethnographic information can be put into place within a secondary transformation, useful in the development of a social group memory and in the artistic understanding.

As a methodological end, the term ekphrasis allows an approach that integrates all the research methods in the field of qualitative studies (coming from phenomenological thinking, psychoanalytical approaches and so on) and will generate illustrative contexts for developing personal and practical knowledge of the visual works. This means a cooperation among specialists from various fields of the arts of the spectacle, of anthropology and of cinema and television production, all made possible an interdisciplinary dialogue, so necessary for the specific practices of these domains.

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ACTION, SPACE AND EMOTION IN FILM: REALITY AND SPEECH ACTS IN BRESSON AND SCORSESE

PATRIZIA LOMBARDO

ABSTRACT. This paper refers to the issue of reality in film and includes some remarks on the emotions expressed by the character or the situation in the chosen filmic examples as well as on the emotions provoked in the spectator. The awareness of speech acts can pave the way to our critical work today, and renew the study of literature or art: it can offer unexpected interpretations, “mistreating” – as Barthes would have said – a text. The perspective of performativity can help me in refining my interpretation of some well-known films and filmmakers. I will concentrate on two examples: Bresson and Scorsese.

I believe that the study of emotion fully belongs to the concern with reality, since human reality is composed by our complex affective relations to the world, the other people (inter-subjective relationships), and to the self. Film, fictional film, can magnify several aspects of reality, and as some philosophers would say of fiction: fiction explores and discovers through conjectures and suppositions. The recent work of many philosophers reflects this. Ronald de Sousa, Keith Oatley, Noël Carroll, Martha Nussbaum, Kendall Walton, Gregory Currie and Peter Goldie¹ – all place just this emphasis on the idea that fiction, both in literature and film, displays more connections between events, actions and characters than real life does. Fiction extends the range of the possible, and develops what is indispensable for every sort of human exchange: imagination.

Cinema has inherited many characteristics of the 19th century novel, the novel being the literary form that, together with theatre, encompassed the mélange of genres and the continuous relationship between documentary reality and imagination (as the writer Robert Musil would have said: the possible, which is not

¹ See Noël Carroll, *Engaging the Moving Image* (New Haven. CT: Yale University Press, 2003); *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *Arts and Minds* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 2004); Gregory Currie and Jon Jurideini, ‘Art and delusion’, *Monist*, 86:44, 2003); Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); Keith Oatley Jennifer M. Jenkins & Dacher Keltner, *Understanding Emotions* (Oxford : Blackwell, 1996, and 2006); Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). See also Jacques Bouveresse, *La Connaissance de l'écrivain: sur la littérature, la vérité et la vie* (Marseille: Agone, 2008). Bouveresse had an important role in introducing analytic philosophy in France and is author of several essays on Musil.

the opposite of reality but comes with it). In spite of the difference of media, any film is necessarily unfolding in a sequential path that is not dissimilar to the novel's denouement; and compared to the novel, the film is combining its account of the time represented (a whole life, a year, a day, etc.) and of "existential" time (the internalization of *temps vécu*) with the compelling quantification of the real time of the shots and the film².

Film theory is a field in development obviously borrowing from literary theory; at the same time the awareness of the role of visual media pervades the large and multifaceted field of cultural studies. The criticism of the famous French film critic André Bazin, so concerned with the question of reality in film, is still seminal today, because of its grasp of both literary and cinematographic questions, of both historical and stylistic concerns. Bazin continues to be inspiring because in his theoretical insights fused with the most accurate close reading of filmic sequences. Not unlike Roland Barthes, he offers the model of the essay as the modern form of thinking, where journalism, erudition and interpretation are not separated but simultaneously contribute to the understanding of an artistic object in its specific nature, circulation, relationship with other cultural expression, as well as in its philosophical implications.

As it is well known, Bazin is one of the founding fathers of *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* at the beginning of the 1950s, and the mentor of the young critics who, shortly after, became the film-makers of the so called *Nouvelle Vague* (François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, etc.). Bazin's work has been fundamental in the 1940s and 1950s in his fight to give dignity to the newest medium as a form of art: in his approach to film, he considered all arts – literature, painting, theatre—, as much as the socio-cultural perspective, and the specific stylistic aspects of what he called the "language of cinema." For example, while applauding at the political impact of Italian Neo-realism as an anti-fascist statement, Bazin investigated their use of the camera and of the sequence-shot, and its consequences in film-making. He often insisted on film as popular art; his reading of Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* shed light on the aesthetic value of some techniques – such as in depth shots and long shots—and their role within the history of cinema.

But above all Bazin proved the degree of cognitive and emotional participation of the spectator. For example, in his famous analysis of the suicide attempt of Kane's second wife in *Citizen Kane*³ he displayed a very cogent reading. Susan, Kane's second wife, is not visible on the screen, but spectators see her night table with her glass, while they hear a heavy breathing and an always stronger knocking at the door. Without editing nor cutting the images that would show Susan drinking her glass filled with drugs, and then getting sick, Orson Welles can

² See the essential volumes by Gilles Deleuze, *L'Image-mouvement* and *L'Image-temps* (Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1991 and 1994).

³ See André Bazin, "Le grand diptyque. Géologie et relief", *Orson Welles* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1972), pp. 67-68.

communicate what happens increasing the dramatic effect: in fact, we are simultaneously informed of her suicide, and of her husband's desperate attempt to rescue her by finally breaking the door and entering her room. Objects and noises are thick with the emotions of the characters and fill the spectators with the most various emotions triggered by a psychological climax and the awaiting of a dramatic event to unfold. It is Kane himself whom we see through the keyhole in an extraordinary shot where he appears small and deformed in that tiny space: he is overwhelmed by what is happening in that locked room, and at the same time desperately determined to enter the room and intervene.

The theoretical impact of Bazin's reading of specific shots is important: he defines two very different ideologies of the circulation of film connected with two different camera techniques. One type of film-making supposes the passivity of spectators, the other fosters their active role; the first one is relying on editing, the second on long shots and in depth shots. Bazin proved that Welles for example rejected the frantic editing of Eisenstein and of German expressionism, allowing for a direct and democratic in-put of the spectators, who can interpret and evaluate the scene by themselves. Not unlike the readers of the modern texts, spectators, in the case of long shots, do not just receive the meaning constructed by the film-maker but have to construct themselves the meaning or meanings from what they see and hear.

Cinema is an audio-visual medium (even if we were to consider silent movies, we should recall that they were screened while music was played); consequently any film analysis ought to imply the interaction of the two levels of image and sound. I will be dealing with this converging of audio-visual in some of my examples. Cinema – this is Bazin's argument in his famous article "Pour un cinéma impur"⁴ ("For an Impure Cinema") – takes from literature, drama, and painting. Finally, like fiction or drama, cinema blends the major aesthetic genres of the comic and the tragic: the list of example would be infinite, for example Truffaut who was so close to Bazin whose reflections he developed both in his articles and in his film. *Les 400 coups*, *Jules et Jim*, *Tirez sur le pianiste*, and most of Truffaut's films are constructed on the fluctuation from a joyful and ironic atmosphere to a sad and tragic one; his films are moving in the most literal sense of the word, since they move us both because of their content and because of their almost ineffable shifts and nuances from an emotional state to another. Isn't it what happens in reality?

Les 400 coups (1959) starts with amusing scenes showing young pupils in a grammar-school, and with the caricature of the school-master; many scenes make us laugh and smile but others make us aware of the unhappy conditions of life of some teenagers: school, family, institutions do not offer them what they need. At the end Antoine (Jean-Pierre Léaud) escapes from the juvenile center he had been sent after his theft of a type-writer: he wants to reach the sea, which he had never seen; he runs away from the football field, through the countryside until he gets to the beach and walks

⁴ André Bazin, "Pour un cinéma impur," *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990), pp. 81-106.

into the water at shore (this is shown via an extremely long sequence shot following Antoine's run). In this shot following the real time of the adolescent running, is not simply a faithful chronological report of the real time of that run, but is filled with emotional implications. The final freeze of the film captures the adolescent's expression – filled with suffering, almost interrogating us. The filmic image becomes still: Antoine's photograph shows here an almost adult face, and looks at the spectators communicating them the inner, irreparable wound of his being.

Films juggle with high and low styles; love stories color gangster actions; thrillers do not discard sentimental and melodramatic elements; horror movies often display a moralizing intention; the fantastic can be satirical. Like in the novel, the possibilities of *mélange* of genres, and especially of aesthetic values are infinite in film, and, more than in the novel, the switches from one level to the other can be as quick as the twinkling of an eye.

I would like to get back to Bazin's article, "Pour un cinéma impur"⁵: here Bazin challenged any simplistic understanding of adaptation, while emphasizing the mixed nature of cinema and the realistic aim of the filmic image insofar as it is capable of capturing both the exterior and the interior world of human beings. Not unlike all arts, film constantly borrows from other media. Could we conceive – Bazin argues – the painting of Michelangelo without sculpture, or the 17th century novel by Mme de la Fayette, *La Princesse de Clèves*, without Racine's theatre? After silent movie, the cinema of the 1940s is more and more oriented towards the adaptation of novels; this shows its impure nature, which was evident also at its beginnings in its link with popular theatre, the vaudeville, musical and circus. The important question to ask is not how faithful the scenes of a given film are to the literary text, but what important literary formal innovations can be captured by films. The case of *Citizen Kane* is crucial for Bazin, since the fragmented and polyphonic character of the whole story is deeply informed by the narrative devices of Joyce, Faulkner and John Dos Passos.

The consequences of Bazin's investigation are important for the formal and historical analysis of the artistic object (aren't we always torn between the formal apprehension of art and the attempt to historicize both the artistic objects and our perspective in looking at them?). On the formal level, Bazin affirmed the freedom of the language of cinema, of its techniques and stylistic solutions. On the historical level, a new light is cast on the history of cinema. First of all, no nostalgia is expressed for the golden age of the birth of the motion picture, contrary to what so many critics felt in the 1940s and 1950s, who regretted the fall of the initial "aura" of cinema because of the new era of the talkies. Secondly, in spite of what could be seen as his idealism or spiritualism, Bazin stressed the material – and materialistic – convergence of literature and cinema in the new literary production of screen-

⁵ This article has been seminal for François Truffaut essay, and almost manifesto, "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" (*Les Cahiers du cinéma* January 1954), where he attacked the naive idea of a faithful transposition of narratives from novels to film.

play writing. The most obvious “idealist” vision of the interplay between the novel and film would entail that literature is in the privileged position – the position of being imitated by the “inferior” art of cinema. In the early 1950’s, one needed to have a good sociological grasp of reality and the role of arts in general, in order to subvert that hierarchy between literature and cinema. Finally, Bazin rejected the history of national cinemas paving the way to the contemporary approach of production theory; he pointed in fact to that crucial breaking within film practices between the film-makers who hired screen-play writers, and those who were imagining their screen-plays and transforming them while shooting – we could say re-writing them while shooting.

In Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le Mépris* (1963) an important, almost didactic scene stages the problem of film-makers conceiving their own scripts. The characters are in a projection-room of Cinecittà: Fritz Lang (who is interpreted by Fritz Lang himself) has just shown a few rushes from his adaptation of the *Odyssey*. The producer Jeremy Prokosch (Jack Palance) is spectacularly acting out his fury claiming that what had been shown was not in the script; Fritz Lang calmly replies that images cannot be the same thing as the script; the producer then hires a professional script-writer Paul Javal (Michel Piccoli). The whole sequence stages the theoretical debate which was important for Bazin and the Nouvelle Vague: the artistic film-makers, the “auteurs” should write their own script and freely mould it according to the needs of the audio-visual medium. What is interesting for us is that an important theoretical debate about film-making becomes, in films like *Le Mépris*, a performance, in the literal sense of the word (as we talk about performance arts), with *mise-en scène*, actors and obviously a spatial organization. (We will see later another film showing the importance of performance.)

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At this point I would like to reflect on a notion which is important to weigh the relationship between language and reality: performativity. We know that this notion, which has been imported in literary and cultural theories from John Austin’s linguistics, can take several meanings, maybe too many, especially when imported in literary theory. In Austin linguistics, performative utterances provide an evident link between words and the world; uttering words we do the things the utterance talks about; an abstract idea becomes an act through the very words expressing it. According to Austin’s famous phrase, speech acts reflect “how to do things with words.” This reflection on language could be easily connected to a major trend in literary studies since the late 1960s and 1970s, that of the linguistic turn, of the outcome of theory, stressing the primacy of language over reality, and reversing the old positivist and realistic vision where language had just an instrumental role. Hillis Miller recalled the weight of words in constructing whole worlds: “A true performative brings something in existence that has no basis except

in the words, as when I sign a check and turn an almost worthless piece of paper into whatever value I have inscribed on the check, assuming the various contexts of this act are in a correct order.⁶ Performative language does not show that something is true or false but simply that an act is performed⁷.

I would say that there are mainly three uses of the notion of performative in literary and cultural studies. One of these meanings suggests the meta-language dimension of speech acts theory in Austin himself, since, as Hillis Miller wrote⁸, he is often commenting on what he is doing as if he were two persons. A second use of performativity entails, as understood by Jean-François Lyotard in his *La Condition postmoderne*, the performance level required by contemporary technologies in mastering techniques, for the sake of techniques without regard to a specific purpose.

A third use deconstructs what Austin has neglected, the whole area of performance and theatre: the meaning of the performative here suggests the social construction of marginalized identities. "Gender performativity" is, according to Judith Butler, a key notion that highlights the *making* of genders; she echoes Foucault's idea that, for example, homosexuality came into existence by the act of naming it; at the same time she is also convinced that those meanings can be displaced thanks to the critical work unveiling their construction. Other critics focus on the theatrical implication of the term. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick for example stressed Paul De Man's insight: performative language is exorbitant, and she comes to the conclusion that any performance is fundamentally strange, *queer*. Performance is in its very nature aberrant, perverse. Sedgwick points also at the theatrical scene suggested by speech acts: these utterances imply the speaker and the addressee but also the real or supposed presence of a witness or several witnesses; no speech act implies just two agents, it supposes the real or possible presence of several agents, the witnesses being in the position of an audience. Performativity means ceremony (stressing this aspect of it, she is less interested in examples which would include one of the classical cases of performative language: the promise, which can take place just with speaker and addressee; but we could argue that even the promise in the most understated situation suggests a sort of domestic micro ceremony).

⁶ J. Hillis Miller. *Tropes, Parables, Performatives* (New York, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 139. And Miller adds that things might work even if the context is not right as in the case of counterfeit money or bad checks.

⁷ We can see that, for theory, the great fascination with performative language consists precisely on the possibility of freeing utterances from the true/false alternative: nothing could have been more attractive for Derrida than this escape from the coercion of logics at the moment he was fighting against the hegemony of the *truth* and trying the *jeux* (games) of language. It can also be easily understood why Derrida, more than forty years ago, objected to Austin's theory as grounded on the intention of the speaker. For Derrida's the deconstruction any text dismantles the intention of the author. Language or writing shows the discrepancy or the difference between the voluntary character of any project and the emergence what had been repressed. The close reading of words and rhetorical figures can prove the failure of human intention and the complete power of language (that *speaks* the human being as opposed to be spoken).

⁸ J. Hillis Miller. *Speech acts in literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

In order to get back to film making, I would like to hold closely on the definitions by Austin, and imagine the two different scenarios of the linguistic and the artistic performances. In a Renaissance-like vision, I propose two different theatres, and their parallel effects in a chiasmic structure. One – Austin’s linguistic reflection – is constituted by language and life. Austin conceives first of all that those specific words (promising, naming, ceremonial sentences etc.) *do* the things in question; the literary theorist stresses the power of words to create reality. The second scene I am imagining is cinema with its double nature of the written text and the shooting action (this last one comes with all its complicated network of image, sound, music, dialogues, and, later, the editing in montage).

A performative act, in the cinema world, takes place when the shooting puts into action (more or less precisely) the words of the script – dialogues and stage directions: the shooting, which is the first making of a film in front of the camera (before the montage session), brings about the fit between the “real” image and the script. It gives existence to the script, as, in the linguistic situation, the speaker names something and actualizes its existence by naming it. And the script has no other reason of existing besides its becoming a film.

“I am, or we are, shooting or making a film”: this is exactly one of those utterances in which people do things with words. If we enter the world of cinema, we enter the world of *performance*, and that speech act – “I am shooting a film” – gets moving, shifting again and again. And above of all, it can take the totally meta-linguistic or more precisely meta-filmic dimension: countless are the examples of films showing the shooting of films, as it happens in *Le Mépris*.

Then, we may say that many examples of films, like novels, are based on a performative utterance (a war is declared, a battle started, a marriage pronounced, a promise or a bet is made, etc.). One could even suggest that comedies are often based on the deformation or failure of a performative utterance; many film-plots are playing speech acts that are fulfilled or betrayed. “I give you my word that...:” we could amuse ourselves making a catalogue of films whose story springs out from this sentence.

The theme of performativity is somewhat obscure when moved away from its initial field of philosophy of language, and, so to speak, applied to literature or the arts. Being too metaphorical, it carries so many meanings that it can be anything (as we have hinted, in literary theory it becomes synonymous with meta-language; in cultural criticism with the effects of social constructions or with the theatrical exaggeration of an identity claiming its right to exist outside the social convention of genders). But on the other hand, the awareness of speech acts can pave the way to our critical work today, and renew the study of literature or art: it can offer unexpected interpretations, “mistreating” – as Barthes would have said – a text. The perspective of performativity can help me in refining my interpretation of some well-known films and filmmakers. I will concentrate on two examples: Bresson and Scorsese.

The case of Robert Bresson

Robert Bresson is one of the film-makers André Bazin studied in order to discuss the question of adaptation in film. As I reminded before, in some of his most theoretical essays, Bazin stressed the importance of free adaptation, turning upside down the relationship between cinema and literature. He believed that the true work of adaptation consists on transposing some stylistic effects from literature to cinema (as opposed to the most current – and still current! – idea that adaptation transfers a content from a novel or a play into filmic images). In “*Le Journal d’un curé de campagne* et la stylistique de Robert Bresson,” an important essay first published in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in June 1951, Bazin explained, through detailed analysis of sequences from Bernanos’ novel and Bresson’s film, how the film ends up being more literary than the novel. It does so by reducing the visual elements of descriptions. The final scene especially, which shows for more than a minute a thin grey cross, lets the voice over tell the tragic death of the priest with no concession for the eyes: the details of the protagonist’s final moments are related by the voice, reading aloud a letter written to the superior Father by the priest who assisted at that death. In Bazin’s opinion, Bresson reached here the same rarefaction and intensity of Mallarmé who refuses any trace of “reportage” and aims at the highest sphere of poetic language, dusting off all the weight of reality.

If we consider Bresson’s famous films *Un Condamné à mort s’est échappé* (1954) and *Pickpocket* (1959), we can easily see the importance of gestures: renouncing to the chattering of most films, there isn’t here much dialogue, the voice over is not very talkative. There are on the contrary many long sequences where the protagonist *performs* his activity using his hands, in one case in order to open his prison cell, and in the other in order to steal. It has been said that Bresson succeeded in giving to cinema the dimension of touching. We feel, in *Pickpocket*, the deftness of the hands in stealing from the bags or the jackets of the passers-by; we can guess the lightness of wrestles and fingers when the accomplices “work” on the train unfastening watches and bracelets, opening purses, sliding their fingers in the clothes of people, pretending to help people getting on the train, and throwing in the garbage their emptied wallets.

The same is true for *Un Condamné à mort s’est échappé*: the spectator follows the patient movements of Jean Fontaine (prisoner of the Nazis) un-nailing the wooden door of his cell, day after day, with a metal spoon. The sense of touch and that of hearing are continuously alerted: like Fontaine we hear a noise from outside the door, we keep our breath, while he interrupts his work. The fear that a Nazi guardian would suddenly open the door and discover what Fontaine is doing takes the concrete form of a movement frozen in the middle of a tiny, meticulous action: the feeling of wait suddenly inhabits the restricted space of the cell, wall, mattress, dust and the splinters of wood accumulated by the grating of the spoon against the door’s boards.

The actors chosen by Bresson – who never are stars – do not play in an expressive way: their faces and their features are always almost motionless. Bresson firmly rejected any theatrical effect in his *cinématographe*, as he liked to call cinema precisely in order to refuse any spectacular dimension of dramatic psychology. Nevertheless there is a subtle psychological dimension of different order: I would call it the concrete psychology of things, the way in which objects both resist to and are bent by an act of will. The emotion of what is at stake in both films is not *expressed* through eyes, lips, face and or words – the most obvious human ways of giving lee to affective life. The emotion is *meant* in the matter, in the sounds of things, and, if there is some human presence, that presence is in gestures, not expressively directed to the unveiling of what is felt but concretely directed to the craft work that connects human beings to things. Will, intention, intentionality and objects are condensed: when we see the details of the cell door, for example, we seize at once the intention of Fontaine, and that intention is tangible, concrete, almost without project, almost as if the idea of evasion is built little by little by wood, spoon, cloths, and cords, and noises and breathing. Bresson wrote in his *Le Cinématographe* that “objects are much more important than people” and “events⁹”.

We could say that space in these films is often investigated in its minimal dimension: as Bresson suggested: “There is just one point in space from where one thing, at a given moment, asks to be looked at.” Space is more matter than geometry, and a small corner of the ground or the wall is able to convey the whole relationship between human beings and space. Things are imbued with action and will. The same could be said about action: Bresson’s films are often in an area that is neither the rambunctious activity of what is called action-film, nor the nihilistic – and psychological – attitude of the complete suspension of action. Bresson works focus on a small scale action where things call for human will to operate on or via them – barely, without hope or despair.

Let’s now interrogate Bresson with our concern with performative language: surprisingly enough we can see that both *Un Condamné à mort s’est échappé* and *Pickpocket* are structured by speech acts, as if an implacable bet or promise were holding all the events and the repetition of gestures typical of these films. Jean Fontaine moves between the death-sentence and his promise to himself, to the boards of his cell, and to the prisoners he manages to talk to during the collective rituals of washing and walking in the prison courtyard. “We condemn you to death” and “I promise I will evade” are the two speech acts determining the whole film. And *Pickpocket* is the wicked series of events stemming from an intention formulated as a solitary promise to the self in a sort of nihilistic or self-destructive challenge (Michel, the protagonist, reads Dostoevski): “I swear I will become a thief.”

⁹ Robert Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), my translation.

The case of Scorsese: urban space and performances

Baudelaire, *the* poet of modernity, knew that human beings are torn between words and things, symbols, allegories and reality. What else are his famous “Correspondances” if not the unsettling allegories that are inside and outside us?

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

The act of reading proves our will to act with words in the present, and it is in this sense a true performative: it gives real existence to books, artistic objects, films. Not unlike a novel, a film comes into life when we *read* it, therefore construct some meaning where we negotiate between the attempt to capture the ideas it embodies and the attempt to express our concerns via it. Theory and analysis go hand in hand, one is feeding the other. I believe therefore that what is true for literature can be true for cinema, and the analysis of a film – or of some aspects of it – can shed light onto some questions on performativity, and, vice versa, looking at a film with the perspective of performativity can nourish our interpretation of that film. In fact, if we want to avoid the almost religious repetition of the catching mottos theories might be reduced to, the frame of the important notion of performative compels us to use our intellectual imagination, and to find the fit between that general – and somewhat vague – concept and the artistic work that can be correctly related to it.

Not unlike the films by Bresson I talked about in the first part of my paper, *Gangs of New York* (2003) is then, in my opinion, a good example for reflecting on performativity, and for several reasons. Cinema’s mission is in some ways to challenge our perception of space and to contradict the elements of Euclid’s geometry; if the metropolis means, since the 19th century and Baudelaire’s expression of it, the enhancement of human experience because of its rhythm and spatial variety, cinema can offer a concentrated metropolitan experience. The close-up, just to give an example, jeopardizes any evidence that the whole is greater than the part. The movement of the camera, the use of special effects, the various types of shots, and the rhythm of editing have such an impact to our perception of space – and time – that we can say, following Paul Virilio, that cinema is responsible for a new way of perceiving that is now integrated into our eyes. Cinema, as much as the metropolitan experience since the 19th century, has forged in some ways our sight, pushing the retina to such speed that the power of abstraction is included in our grasping of images and our experience of concrete objects¹⁰.

¹⁰ See Paul Virilio. *Esthétique de la disparition* (Paris: Ed. Galilée, 1998), and *La vitesse de libération* (Paris: Ed. Galilée, 1995). In English: *The Paul Virilio reader*, ed. by Steve Redhead (New York : Columbia University Press, 2004).

In a beautiful shot of *Gangs of New York* Scorsese shows the body of the leader of the Irish Catholic Dead Rabbits, Priest Vallon (Liam Neeson), killed by the leader of the rival Protestant gang, the Natives, William the Butcher or the Cutter (Daniel Day Lewis). He is lying on a cart his people move away from the site where the battle took place, Paradise Square. On the ground of the square the snow is red with blood, and the faces of the Dead Rabbits are disfigured by the signs of the combat and the sadness of the defeat. Then the frame widens, more and more, until people and objects lose their individuality to give rise to a vision that comes from above showing the pattern of streets and houses of the whole neighborhood called the Five Points. The frame widens yet again on the roofs and the urban grid, and we see the whole city of Manhattan, like in a map; and the moving space becomes time, the time of some transformation of the city, until we read: "16 years later," and we hear the voice over preaching forgiveness while the son of Vallon (Leonardo DiCaprio) stands to receive the far-well from his orphan institution in Hillgate. The same technique of widening and transforming the image, is used at the end of the film, when a final sequence accumulates the epochs of New York from the 1860's until the 20th and beginning of the 21th century, since we can see the towers of the World Trade Center.

Among the many examples of the treatment of space, it is worthwhile to recall the very beginning of *Gangs of New York*, when, in front of a black screen, we first hear the noise of the razor on the skin, and then we see, from below, the face of a man – Priest Vallon. He is shaving, purposely cuts his cheek, and hands the blade stained with his blood to his son. This perspective from below is in fact that of a child's gaze: his son is looking up at him just before the battle the Natives. The physical space and the symbolic implications are but one: after the few words exchanged in the shaving scene, the boy follows in a sort of long martial walk his father through the dark labyrinth where the Dead Rabbits live, the so called Brewery. Then father, son and the people of the gang get out on Paradise Square. Several shots during the ferocious battle show that Vallon's son is looking at the whole event and then looks at his dying father. That gaze of the child looking up in the initial shaving scene is first out of the screen and then included in the image of Vallon's arm towards him; it will determine the life of the young protagonist, later called Amsterdam (Leonardo DiCaprio), when, after several years at Hellgate orphan institution, he will get back anonymously to the Five Points (where William the Butcher has now been for a long time the absolute boss). The day of the battle where his father is knifed to death is imprinted forever in his mind: Amsterdam's determination to kill the murderer of his father is hosted in that initial gaze.

Cinema can operate powerfully, on a narrative level and on a meta-discursive one, playing with the converging of genres, and of senses-sight, hearing, touching. Cinema reaches a grandiose synaesthesia of several senses and of the mind, because the effect on the spectator comes from both what is shown and what is not shown, from inside and outside the frame. Films can be like novels, plays,

poems, paintings, and operas. But where a novel needs explanations by the narrator or analysis by the characters, dialogue or monologue, cinema can synthesize with just one shot, punching into the guts and the brain of the spectators who do not even have the time to adjust to what they are feeling in a scene that they are brought to something else, must continuously correct the information given by an image with the following one – quickly, more quickly than the wink of the eye. And where theater cannot but accept the full presence of the body on the scene, and a relative stillness in spite of the movements of the actors and the change of décor, cinema can cut, fragment, displace, combine, move up and down, and track on one side and on the other, from below and from above. Everything is possible for the camera.

Gangs of New York contains different forms of performative speech acts and of performance arts (in the literal sense). The first striking speech act is the beginning of the battle between the two rival gangs – exemplary as the easiest of Austin's examples: "I declare the war." The Dead Rabbits and the Natives are face to face, their respective bosses in the middle of the group, as if they were displaying themselves on a theatre which is Paradise square whose space is indeed opened up by a slow and vast wide-angle lens movement, as if the curtains were lifted for the beginning of the show allowing the vision of the whole space. After the first brief exchange, where Priest Vallon recalls the promise for a battle, the boss of the Natives, William the Cutter pronounces those words that are able to do things: "On my challenge, by the ancient laws of combat, we have met at this chosen ground to set, for good and all, who holds way over the Five Points..." The Irish Catholic leader of the other gang pronounces at his turn: "I accept the challenge", and the battle starts.

All the conditions of the speech act are fulfilled: the presence of the two parties and of testimonies, and the ceremony like character of the whole action. The combat cannot be understood without this collective ritual. I would say that this scene is so deeply rooted on a social setting and the pronouncement of some kind of law that it recalls the inaugural reflection on speech acts by the philosopher who was the for-runner of Austin and Searle: Adolf Reinach (1883-1917), who contributed to the understanding of the link between language and action. In his *Die apriorischen Grundlagen des bürgerlichen Rechtes*, he criticized Hume vision of the promise as being confined to the mere expression of an act of will on the part of the person who declares his intention to act in favor of the addressee of the promise. Reinach believed that the main problem of this type of utterance is how it can create a mutual obligation on the side of the two parties. In other terms, Reinach displaced the center of the problem from the question of personal will to the social structure required for the promise. The two-ways structure is important as the frame in which juridical activities take place: as it is clear also for Austin, on one hand there is the a-priori need for figures having the authority to declare certain things, and on the other of an audience receiving and accepting those utterances (as Austin says: speech acts require uptake). Most of Austin's performative speech acts

suppose an addressee, and need that the addressee understands what the speaker is doing. Austin gives the example of some rare speech acts which are not directly addressed to someone – for example when a government speaker promulgates a law by saying: “I hereby promulgate the following law.” Nevertheless one could argue differently. It is true that the promulgator of a law doesn’t need to be addressing the interlocutors, but the addressees are the essential logical counterpart. What could be the enacting of a law in a desert, even if pronounced by a state officer? Or in a destroyed country where no citizens exist any longer?

Indeed, the scene of the battle between the two gangs in Scorsese’s film stages the exchange between the two parties and the presence of the community (or communities) witnessing the declaration of combat. The action of fighting is made possible by that mutually agreed promise in front of testimonies. We could notice also that this unambiguous and immediate social involvement in the name of the “ancient law” is contrasted with the other speech act that unfolds the historical events in the film: the abolition of slavery and the subsequent Civil War. Scorsese shows two cases of promulgation of law and declaration of war. He shows also that the supposed addressees are not so easy in accepting, and how difficult can be for utterances to become reality: the juridical act doesn’t mean the “cultural” acceptance of the abolition, and revolt defies state authority during the New York draft riots refusing the war. The ancient, brutal, violent local battle between the two gangs was based on a mutual agreement, while the modern, mediate presidential or governmental decisions are depicted through social disharmony. Racist feelings and acts persist in spite of the Abolition; and the legalized violence of a state taking to war the poor can cause rebellion. I will comment at the end of my essay on the presence of another type of speech act (between Vallon and his son), where command, swear and promise are illustrated.

A remark should be made about the canonicity of the film – and this kind of question in cinema means lots of money, and not simply the classroom or the academic curricula as in the case of literature: *Gangs of New York* is indeed a Hollywood style film aiming to realize one of the most Hollywood genres: historical fiction¹¹. All the ingredients for the Hollywood “canon” are there: famous actors (Leonardo DiCaprio, Daniel Day Lewis, Jim Broadbent, Brendon Gleeson etc.), huge budget, costumes, a powerful machinery for the reconstitution of places in Cinecittà studios in Rome. Scorsese dreamt to make this film on New York for about thirty years, since the 1970’s when he read the 1928 book by the British historian Herbert Asbury about the gangs of New York in the 19th century. Finally the film is produced by a major production firm, Miramax, which collected many Oscars (and actually had to face decline because of that Scorsese movie). Nevertheless we could argue for the ambivalence of the filmmaker towards the institution financing him: like Orson Welles with *Touch of Evil*, Scorsese tries to be faithful to his style – and in spite of the cuts imposed by the

¹¹ Scorsese had already tried the staging of New York upper class life at the end of the 19th century with *The Age of Innocence*, 1993, an adaptation of Edith Wharton’s novel.

producer Harvey Weinstein. Scorsese doesn't give up his shooting techniques, the use of long sequence shots with unexpected changes of places and situations. *Gangs of New York* continues the filming style Scorsese learned from Truffaut, Rossellini, Welles etc... Scorsese has always fused fiction and documentary, joining the lessons of the French Nouvelle Vague and American Independent Film. And he has never hidden his passion, since his childhood, for gangsters movies and westerns (wasn't the protagonist of *Taxi Driver* both a Vietnam soldier and an "urban" cowboy?). Sociologists can understand a lot from Scorsese's depiction of New York in the 1970's; the highly fictionalized characters he conceived are capable of representing some important tension of their own time, very much like the protagonists of the 19th century European novel.

What is the challenge of the huge historical fiction that is *Gangs of New York*, of this film which encountered much criticism and disappointed the lovers of "true history"? I would say that its bet is to hold all together history and myth, the past and the present, while a main stream historical movie would either aim at accuracy or at the spectacular Hollywood-like construction. Scorsese has at least a triple intent. He wants to represent History as the history of a Nation (Abolition, the draft for the Civil war, and the making of the United States), in the line of political history based on great events. But Scorsese wants also to account for local history: the history of the gangs in Manhattan and their presence in the life of the city, as a chapter of cultural history stressing the role of groups and small communities, their everyday life and their religious beliefs (the opposition between Catholics and Protestants is important for the gangs in Asbury's book).

Scorsese's ambition is not simply "erudite:" in depicting New York in the 19th century, he wants to explain the United States' past as the making of the law through corruption. He reads the past through the eyes of the present, through the fresh memory of September 11 in Manhattan. He accentuated the multi-cultural elements, increasing, for example, the real number of Chinese population in New York. What question can be more pertinent today than the construction of a national identity? What perspective could be more up to date than multiculturalism? Past and present nourish each other; quite un-canonically, Scorsese combines the battle scenes in the reconstructed Paradise Square around 1850s with a complex editing of contemporary music. The screening of violence so often criticized transcends the accuracy of costumes and types of arms used by the rival gangs or by the national army in the mid of the 19th century: it tells the horror of any war; it is a way of writing a pacifist message, in our tormented beginning of the 21st century, through the emphasis of an audio-visual construction of the fight. At the same time, Scorsese is conscious of the history of cinema and the infinite representations of violence cinema has been showing since its beginnings (a close reading of some postures and movements in the first battle between the Dead Rabbits and the Natives would show many similarities with the famous battle on ice in Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevski* (1938), and, not least, the snow covered Paradise Square).

A single long shot of more than four minutes could exemplify the broadness of Scorsese's intent and his ability in holding together many elements belonging to both the sphere of fiction and of history (and of those complex historical treads I mentioned). On the side of fiction, in a scene before his revenge and betrayal of Bill the Butcher, Amsterdam already is “under his wing”, works for the big boss, and actually enjoys his activity of collecting the money of the bets on boxing, while the match is starting in the middle of a noisy crowd. Fiction is colored with historical elements: in fact criminal life in lower Manhattan is organized and regulated by Bill the Butcher (William Poole, called Bill the Butcher, who died in 1855, was the leader of the Bowery Boys gang). The politician William Tweed, the boss of Tammany Hall (the society controlling all the activities and businesses of the Democratic Party), tries to get hold of the area dominated by the Butcher in order to get votes from the Irish immigrants continuously arriving from Europe. Scorsese represents the passage from the criminal gang power to the corrupted political power of William Tweed: in a sequence continuing the boxing episode where Tweeds tries unsuccessfully to intervene banning public bets and games, we see on the harbor peer William the Butcher and William Tweed engaged in a discussion ending up with the Butcher's refusal to cooperate with Tammany Hall. The camera first follows Bill the Butcher walking away with Amsterdam, and suddenly, without any cuts, it flees back towards the street where we see immigrants called by state employees to sign up for the draft. The real reason for entering the army is the hope of being fed: we hear and see two immigrant soldiers getting on the boat. From the street then, without editing, the camera moves with a broad movement towards the boat and the sea. We are still hearing the conversation about food when the camera plunges quickly down, towards the shore where many wooden coffins are lined up on the ground. Up and down camera movements are swinging from the shore to the ship, following a crane which puts down a coffin. While we still see that coffin Scorsese uses another of his film techniques: we hear already a voice that belongs to the following sequence – that of the actor playing *Uncle Tom*. Scorsese's powerful stylistic solution embraces all together fiction (the relationship between a boss and a favorite, and the tension between two bosses), local history (street life and crowds), and national history (draft and turmoil about the Abolition).

We should not forget in *Gangs of New York* the presence of what could be called “the Hollywood gloss” – i.e. the love-story and the stereotypical treatment of the main female character (Jenny, interpreted by Cameron Diaz). And then, almost like in a Balzac novel, there is the “type” of the boss: Bill is corrupted, abusive, racist, vulgar, at the same time cruel and sentimental, and faithful to a forlorn and boastful sense of honor. But Scorsese adds yet another dimension to his historical research, the mythical one: like in epics and novels, heroes are here moved by revenge. This mythical dimension bounces into another myth, confirming the tie between literature and cinema: revenge constitutes the main theme for so many gangster and western movies.

The theme of revenge plunges *Gangs of New York* in the heart of the history of cinema, but also bridges with a fundamental subject in the history of theatre. Revenge: what could be more Shakespearian? “Very Shakespearian”: this is the phrase one of the characters pronounces when he understands that Amsterdam is the son of the Priest Vallon, at the crucial moment in the film when Amsterdam prevents the attempt to murder Bill the Butcher (in order to be sure that he will be the one killing him).

We can understand now the presence of so many performances in this film: people freely improvising dances in the street or in the tavern, a ball organized by the Reformers, popular sports, such as box and fights with animals (and with bets!), circus and theatre shows. And there are always crowds assisting to the theatre of life or to the various shows (representing the crowd still remains a challenge for filmmakers). The theater performance of *Uncle Tom* is interrupted by the racist reactions of the audience – among which there is the “nationalist” boss of the Natives – and by the attempt to murder Bill the Cutter. In another major circus like performance we see the knife’s number of Bill with Jenny (Cameron Diaz) in the Chinese Pagoda, when Bill has already being informed about Amsterdam’s plan to kill him.

All these performances are dictated by something stronger than the logic of narration; they have a meta-filmic flavor. They are allegories of the cinema as an art whose beginnings were marked by popular theatre and musical. All the performances in *Gangs of New York* allegorize cinema as the art form that is profoundly impure, to use André Bazin’s term. Filmmakers contemplate their medium and reflect on its nature and history: it can be done directly by quoting scenes from other films, or just by alluding to them, or by transforming them more or less ironically, or by emphasizing some already used cinematic effects. After having refined in his various films all these modes, Scorsese shows here that cinema can englobe all the other arts thanks to the power of the camera editing, cutting, magnifying, multiplying, fragmenting, or “amplifying” the *mise en scène* of theatre, musicals, circuses, shows of any kind.

It is time now to get back to the gaze of the child in the first minutes of *Gangs of New York* and we will see that it abides another speech act. We have seen how that gaze condenses the treatment of space in both its physical and symbolic dimensions. The child’s gaze in the shaving scene becomes an act of will, obeying to the words pronounced later in the battle by the dying Vallon: “Oh, my son. Don’t ever look away.” These words are echoing the imperative “don’t” pronounced by Vallon when his son tries to wipe off the blood from the razor. They are a command and call for the mutual obligation between father and son. In fact the Priest’s son will never look away from that blood. A silent promise is uttered by those childish eyes. Hidden, continuously nourished in his heart, secret or finally revealed to one or two people, one single speech act readable in the child’s gaze, and obeying his father’s imperative utterance, holds the whole film with all its performative speech acts and theatrical performances. That gaze confirms a long term action that is constructed throughout the film: taking revenge for his father’s killing. The words are never pronounced by Amsterdam himself but they are

always present, in his gestures, in the events of his life, in the expression of his face: "I swear I will revenge my father's death." And nothing will stop this promise to become an act.

The spectator feels the intensity of the promise in the quick move of the boy who, at the end of the battle, takes the knife from his dead father's chest, runs back to the Old Brewery where the Dead Rabbits live, and hides that precious token into the soil. Amsterdam will get back to his buried knife and dig it out, a few years later, after his long stay in the Hellgate House of Reform, as a young adult who has nothing to do with the teaching of the Bible he has received. Quitting Hellgate Amsterdam throws away from the bridge the sacred book, while we hear the voice over of the Reverend exhorting to the detachment from all human passions: "The Lord has forgiven you, you must also forgive." But the Christian commandment cannot weaken the words that father Vallon told sixteen years before to his son: "Don't ever look away." Nothing can break the mute swear between the living and the dead, silently witnessed by the collective blood of the battle. Neither time, nor love, nor friendship, nor pleasure, nor power, nothing can break the obligation of keeping one's word, of obeying the pact of the wild justice of revenge. The silent speech act of what belongs to "the ancient laws of combat" stands in this movie like the memory of a pre-modern type of world and of art, as savage as feelings in a Greek tragedy, or in what can be seen as the correspondent of it in cinema: the classical Western movie. "I swear I will take revenge," is a speech act where the time of the fit between the words and the thing may take a whole life. But there is no doubt about the uptake.

Almost with the insight of the cultural historian Johan Huizinga, Scorsese has depicted criminal life in lower Manhattan around 1850's with the smell of blood (as the historian described the middle Ages). Like the historian, Scorsese tried to show the discrepancy between the new age and the old one at the very moment they collide, between old and new values. The cultural divide is so well expressed by the solitude of the second battle between Bill and Amsterdam, between the Natives and the re-born Dead Rabbits (since Amsterdam reconstituted the gang after the failure of his plan of killing Bill). Alone, terrible alone, fighting with knives, in the midst of rifle powder and canon shots – the weapons used by the state army and the Navy in the repression of the New York draft riots (1863) – Bill and Amsterdam kill and embrace each other, almost like the two lovers (Jennifer Jones and Gregory Peck) at the end of *Duel in the Sun* (1946), a film by King Vidor that greatly impressed the imagination of Scorsese when he was a child¹². Like in that famous Western, the revenge between the two protagonists takes place against rocks, earth and dust. At the same time, like in the falling down of the twin towers on September 11, white and grey clouds and debris bury human bodies.

¹² See Martin Scorsese, *Interviews*, Peter Brunette, ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), p.34.

REFLECTIONS ON *THE SCOURGE OF ALCOHOLISM*

ELLA VERES

ABSTRACT. *Reflection on the scourge of alcoholism* is an applied study based on the Theater of the Oppressed method, combined in a series of interviews, with the purpose of healing and change, giving a voice to relatives who still suffered quietly after they lost their loved ones to alcohol. All the materials can be used as a base for dramatic writing. The applications are a direct result of the field research made in various locations such as Zalău, Cluj, Budapest. The research was carried out with the help of students from the Babeș-Bolyai University, Department of Theater and Television, the Cinematography, Photography, and Media Wing.

Preamble

A month ago, I returned from Transylvania, Romania where I worked with local people and the students from the Babeș-Bolyai University, Department of Theater and Television, The Cinematography, Photography, and Media Wing on a series of cultural products about alcoholism. For the following days, I slept and slept and slept. Then I plunged into tumultuous New York life during recession. Fellow artists would eagerly ask me how my trip was. I'd recount, I'd entertain, I'd marvel, I'd try to sort things out, and couldn't. Even my travel notes would not get into a coherent report. Finally a few days ago I was asked by Professor Doru Pop, the organizer, to write about my experience, my methodology, the people I collaborated with, so here I am today, endeavoring to write a relatively academic report that measures the success of our enterprise.

I belong to a school of thought that finds the objective/omniscient third person used in academia alienating and inaccurate. I can speak at ease only from my subjective perspective.

Methodology

I use the self as a vehicle for my work. I use my personal experiences as a starting point of exploration. I am a testimony and an exploration, a sacrificial guinea pig and a cultural agent of change. At times it is dangerous, it cuts to close to the bone.

We decided with Professor Doru Pop that we'd create a series of cultural products about alcoholism. I felt strongly about the horrific situation in my hometown, Zalău. My younger brother died because of alcoholism, my father stopped drinking only last year, when he was 74 and a diabetic with a blood clot in his brain he acquired falling on the ice while being drunk. All the friends I have in Zalău had at least one dear person dead because of drinking.

Yet, there wasn't much talk about it in the public arena. Among others, I am a journalist by training, so I use interviews as fodder for my stage work. I also am a Theater of the Oppressed practitioner, in which is I use theater, photography, video etc. as a tool for social change. I hoped these techniques would help the enterprise, but I was ready to shift gears in case they proved inadequate in the field. In preparation for the trip, I researched the situation on the internet and made various contacts that could lead to interviews. The main one was the Alcoholics Anonymous at St. Dimitrie Church. Its founder Floyd Frantz was eager in his support.

Budapest Interviews

In Budapest, where I landed, I was reminded that this was not just a Romanian state problem, but the entire Eastern Europe, Russia was drowning in alcohol. Come to think of it, it's a global problem. My host in Budapest, Patrick Mullooney, took me to a party that I had to flee, since the revelers were smoking me out of my lungs and merrily emptying bottles. On the street, in bus stops, you'd see gatherings of red-nosed workers sipping from bottles in the middle of the day.

Zalău Interviews

Upon arrival in my hometown, we went to the cemetery with armfuls of chrysanthemums to sanctify the tomb of my brother, since it was the Day of the Dead. The entire town converged on its tight alleys. Many tombstones showed how young were the deceased. However medieval it sounds, the alcoholism is a scourge, a plague. I interviewed my friends. Their sorrow and anger nested in me. I observed my own family, and tried to imagine how our lives would have been different without alcohol. Too late. Yet, to see my father sober, working the garden, joking with my mother, felt warm.

But my younger brother is gone. One of my main fears was that I wouldn't be able to rein in my own sorrow during the trip. I often prayed for strength so I could fulfill my duty, lead the participants on a journey of discovery, thought, and change, without me crying, and to my surprise, I was always in control of my emotions, to the point of polite numbness. I said to myself, *This is my brother's funeral, this is his tombstone, my wreath of flowers for him, may his death not be in vain, may he be loved in death, may we be forgiven that we didn't know better to stop death.*

Cluj

Upon arrival I met with a volunteer group of acting students (Lavinia Cosma, Florina Florian, Rares Lucaci, Raluca Lupan, Gina Murgu, Ingrid Robu, Raluca Sava, Eliza Tuturman and Alexandru Vacarus) that I'd contacted over the email, thanks to Michael Page, their previous Shakespeare professor. I was a bit anxious as to how to approach them. My Romanian was rusty and they were utterly quiet. After I described the aim and timetable of the event,--we had one week to

gather the material, experiment with it and then make a public presentation,--I asked them to read various fragments from two texts that I brought with me. They found them interesting and not at all traumatizing. Good.

For the next days, we followed the routine: in the morning and early afternoon field videotaped interviews, in the evening rehearsal/experimentation with the students. In the field we - my assistant Mihai Leaha, and I - had to win the trust of the members of Alcoholics Anonymous. After three days of visiting, we managed to interview several of them. We also interviewed the managing staff, a social worker and the priest-in-chief. Overall, it was a good material. We proceeded to transcribe several chunks of interviews. It was a tedious affair, my assistant being a busy graduate student, and myself juggling rehearsals and making appointments. But we managed to have enough material in the end. We also interviewed various professionals, from the Anti-Drug state run program to university professors like Eugen Băican that specializes in addictology, and Ruxandra Cesereanu, a cultural and social philosopher. We hounded down policemen and psychiatrists but didn't manage to meet anyone willing to be interviewed.

As to the students, they were extremely obedient. At the beginning never offered an opinion, unless painfully coaxed to. We had a discussion, inviting them to be more outspoken, we were collaborators, I deemed them artists, they were already that, life didn't start upon graduation.

In the end, I came to regret that, alas, because to my surprise the anti-American sentiments were strong. Not that they'd previously traveled to America. I guess Bush and other ugly Americans abroad ruined America's image. Oh, well.

We had sessions in which we worked with texts based on the interviews, or we experimented with Image Theater techniques, creating sculptures of oppression. Then we created scenes based on newspaper articles. One of them, a brawl in a casino, won the prize, which is why we developed it for the public presentation. It was an interesting material because when I went back on the internet and found more texts about the incident it seemed that actually the drunken aggressors were in truth victims. I explained the students about Forum Theater and offered them new lines from the internet material. They were splitting with laughter at the colorful, bawdy lines, but when it came to use them on stage, none of them volunteered. The impulse to be 'nice' to the audience at the cost of misrepresenting reality won. I blamed it on self-censorship, a sequel of communism. It was amazing to observe it. Twenty years had passed since the fall of communism but people didn't seem at ease to exercise their freedom of speech.

Anyway, we presented the material to the symposium participants. Various professors gave us much appreciated feedback. The next day we had the second presentation. The interviewees, the press, the townspeople and studentship flooded the theater hall. The actors begged me to preface their performance with a disclaimer, explaining the interviewees that we used their words just as a launching pad for our artistic process, so they shouldn't take offense. They didn't. It was a

warm audience. I introduced the interviewees to the actors that portrayed them and the actors were amazed how appreciative the real persons were. My understanding was that these actors never performed a text based on real people before.

I also hoped that they understood they could become themselves agents of change, that the entire society is a stage, that they shouldn't measure their professional success only by the work in black box theaters. Or when they have a booking slump and have to take menial jobs like many actors in New York do, they could still be artists. Students rolled their eyes at the dire prospects. But truth is they all fear their future since there's an inflation of actors in Romania.

Evaluation

I think I accomplished what I promised. I introduced some new techniques to students and professors. I made them think about alcoholism. One evening they started discussing it spontaneously. Then, while we interviewed, we were an agent of healing and change, giving a voice to relatives who still suffered quietly after they lost their loved ones to alcohol. Then the two professors that we interviewed had interesting points to make, though some contradictory. It was great to give a place to their thoughts too. The most moving thing was the presence of those from AA in the audience. The anxiety of the actors, and then seeing them embracing at the end of the show. The warm appreciation of faculty. Also, we had a media presence. Paula Boartă published a large article in the *Adevărul* newspaper.

The people from Zalău were eager to see the pictures and the texts we created based on their words, since they weren't able to come to the event. The St. Dimitrie staff was inquiring about creating a publicity spot together. Mr. Frantz also was excited about possibly creating various short films based on the texts, to raise awareness. Prof. Băican can't wait to show the resulting DVD to his addictology students.

Also by presenting these techniques and controversial subject matter, I was invited to see the dismal situation of the people at the garbage dump in Pata Râtului, and we will create another awareness campaign there.

Future

My hope is that after we all spend happy winter holidays, we manage to process the material, we get some sponsorship and finalize the transcription and transposing for stage of the written material, both in Romanian and English, and we have it performed both in Romania and in the USA. I aim for a bigger impact.

APPLICATIONS

Sudden letter from my brother

Anda imagines a prison cell. Her **Brother**, a charmer, painstakingly scribbles a letter. He has a hangover.

My Dear Sister From America:

Know that the other day both our parents died in their sleep and I'm right now already across the border heading to the Canadian Consulate in Budapest to ask for visa for Canada since many people from home went to Canada. I have several high school pals now living in Montreal who admired me since I was the best in our class at algebra and often let them copy the answers to the midterm tests and finals; actually all of the tests. They gave me cigarettes in return, of course. I'll be heading towards Canada, so I won't be at the funeral, but I thought you should know what's going on before our sister, the doctor, calls you.

He stops writing.

The lies she always tells concerning me!

The other day she started to roll the so-called "Persian" rug from the guest room to take it to her new backwoods husband and I told her it was not hers, it was yours, but she said it wasn't true and I was a drunk and she knew all I waited for was for our parents to die so that I can get it and sell it for nickels to my good-for-nothing drunk muggers. Sell it for a bottle of plum brandy, such an excellent rug! I don't even drink plum brandy anymore, for that matter, and the rug was not hers! But she thinks she can do whatever she likes just because she got married again and is a doctor. I'm a highly educated chap myself, as you know, and though it took me ten years to graduate from the National Aircraft Design Institute, I did it in the end, though I wanted to drop out every so often. You know I hated it. What's the point in designing airplanes, helicopters nowadays? What's the deal? Work on a military base, an obscure one of course, where the captain didn't even finish his primary school but got to be a captain because he had a healthy social origin and kissed the right communist party asses. And have all those buggers order me around? No, thanks. Or go to work for the Russians? No, thanks. It's not that the money won't be good, but the first time they wanted us to practice piloting and parachuting, I vomited my guts from fear and that was the end of my highly elevated career.

I will never forget how I saw those cabbage patches from up there, like skulls of all those former hopeful souls that were protecting the father land from the capitalist aggressors, and I had a vertigo and puked on my instructor who hollered at me *Sunofabitch! Yellow faggot! You'll never graduate from my course, you idiot! Daisy faggot!*

I'm not a faggot! Half of our town young ladies can testify to it! I'm a stud! Anyway, I paid for the dry cleaning, and father brought him ten bottles of plum brandy. You know mother and father, pushing me to graduate, and nagging me to death, so I finished it, slowly... It was okay. I would have dropped it altogether but I liked night-life in the capital.

But you know all that, what's the point of this recap? I just wanted you to know that while you're there meeting famous people, I'm on my way too; and to give you the news about our poor mother and father. Such an unfortunate event! You should have seen how she fell on the rug, like a cotton-filled doll. Didn't even squeak. I was

amazed this was so easy! Well, at least now we don't need to wait until they die to squabble over the house and garden. I can't tell for sure, but I think our doctor-sister made them sign the will that she would inherit the house. Now I know for a fact, as well as I know my name, that mother don't want to do that! She said this is the parents' house, each of us should have a place to come home, each of us should have a room. But then our dear sister cornered her while I was hung-over after a one-week festivity and told her she was the one who would take care of her and father, obviously, not me, since I was a drunk, or you, who went to America to become rich and famous!

I have a splitting headache. I need a shot of plum brandy, but they don't let me out of the detention center until they finish fingerprinting and interrogating. They say,--listen to them!--that they called home and my sister told them I killed our parents! I told them I did not, it was our sister who did it! Mother was on the rug, saying to her, *You'll have this rug only over my dead body!* and the sister said *Very well, then*, and went to the kitchen, grabbed the rolling pin and hit her in the head, and poor old woman fell on the rug saying, *Your American sister will take care of you two, scoundrels! She'll take care! You'll be punished by the appropriate authorities*, and she gasped and died. Her nightgown with lavender flower pattern was rolled above her knees and her skin was alabaster white and smooth like a baby's.

I immediately took off, let your sister roll the carpet and take our mom into the woods and bury her, or chop her with the axe and give her to the pigs, whatever, I'm out of here! The only thing that made me stay in that town was her. Not that I helped her a lot, but I just couldn't get the courage to go away, so much she nagged me! I wanted to be a rock star, but she said I had the voice of a bullfrog. Drinking, I can drink, I can drink, I'm a king at drinking! When I drink I don't need to answer foolish questions, I just drink and am happy. I get my booze whichever way I can. Lie to her, steal it from papa's cellar, talk my pals into buying some for me, anything. The women, oh, they love to drink with me. Then, they want to reform me! But still they give me some money to cheer up so that I can jump their bones. Which I do. I do very well. I'm a king at it! I'm a stud!

Anyway, this is crap! I just wanted you to know the truth about our parents.

Father died yesterday, too. None of my fault there either. He came home dead drunk and gave me a sermon about how a drunk pig like me should be ashamed and is a curse on his old days. I should go and work, he doesn't need my help in the market. For all the help I give him, he loses money on the days I carry bananas for him in the market. I denied it, but it might be true. I always pinch a bit of money when I deliver the bananas and he is busy with the boxes and counting the fruit bunches and plastic bags and checking the invoice. I get some dough and whistle to the pub. What does he want? I'm a man! I know what I'm doing! And I don't pinch that much!

So he was pissing me off and I told him to shut up! Our dear mother was dead. I just hit her by accident with the rolling pin and she fell flat, bleeding on your rug, yelling at me I was a murderer! Me, who was protecting her from my sister who hit her with the rolling pin!

I told him *Shut up, if you please! Shut up!* He screaming like that in my brains! and he didn't shut up, 'cause he had to say how I was a miserable parasite and I could pee on my airplane diploma, I could fly on a broom to Canada, for as much as he cared and I told him to shut up! but he went on how at my age he had a family and kids and his own house and was well respected. Crap like that makes me see red! So I took that rolling pin and cracked his fucking baldhead! He looks like an ostrich! Hope I won't look like that. Didn't take much, one fine melon bash! Hit him once more to get him on the floor and I let the fucking Madam doctor deal with the stained carpet.

I had to go. I told them I'd leave three nights before. Cross the green border to Hungary in the night with my buddies, then go by boat. Warned them. Mother was again bitching with the neighbour on the porch that *Young people fall drunk on the street! It's full of them. It's a painful misfortune. He has weak will. The doctor said his liver is huge, he should stop drinking.*

I don't think so. That day I get up. I tell her I'd not drink this time, but in an hour all was crappy so I go, tell the old woman I'm going somewhere to fetch something, meet some buddy on urgent business, but I go for a stinky shot at the Cherry Brandy Tavern and I decide it's time to have some action: *To Canada, my friends!* I tell mom! The nasty sister says she'll take the rug then! Everybody goes to Canada, goes to the USA, she'll at least take the rug for herself. Feather her nest. We should just all go to Canada, let her take care of the old folks! Let her bury them and feed them when they'd be all slobbering, paralyzed around the house. Yeah, right! She can't wait for them to die so that she can put her big butt in the house and kick me out.

I haven't killed our parents.

Please, dear sister, expedite the visa for Canada for me, and help me get out of here. I'll give you my share of parents' house, or take care of your kid, teach him how to be a man! I'll sleep in the kitchen if you don't have much space there in the USA, and we'll be one happy family again, until I find an Asian girl for myself, what do you think? I'm still good looking! I'm your little brother who loves you, though you don't write home and don't call as a good, nice daughter and sister should. So if the detention authorities call you, tell them I'm an okay guy and didn't murder our parents! Please vouch for me, and get me out of here so I can establish myself a grand future like you did.

God help us all.

Blackout.

Learn to love what you have

*An imaginary visit back the parents' home in Transylvania. In the kitchen. **Mother**, 70s, small, white hair, tattered clothing, stirs the polenta boiling in a cast iron cauldron, sits and looks at a picture of her grandson. **Anda**, unpacks her suitcase and a pulley bag that are spread around the floor. We hear **Father** in the backyard chopping wood.*

Mother: What a pity you couldn't bring Sandu with you. *Looks at the picture.* He's so handsome, my darling little grandchild!

Anda: He has a girlfriend, what do you know! He bought her a stuffed animal for Valentine's Day.

Mother: What's Valentine Day?

Anda: Something they have in America. Sweethearts' holiday. They give each other gifts wrapped in red or pink heart-shaped boxes. Mostly red.

Mother: Do you have a sweetheart?

Anda: I don't know. Where do you keep the toothpicks?

Mother: You're funny! In the lower drawer.

Anda: It's the jetlag....

Mother: You need to marry again.

Anda: Oh, no. I've lost the ability to love.

Mother: You can't lose that! I've loved your father for 52 years. You just haven't met the right one! It's hard to meet a decent man when you have a child.

Anda: It's not hard at all, Mom. I've met about four decent guys since... October? No, November. What's today? April. November, December, January, March... six months. Four guys. Each of them interesting, charming, exciting and I went out with all of them.

Mother: At the same time?

Anda: Well, at times with two of them.

Mother: Oh, dear!

Anda: Mom, it's not like here where you know everybody in town!

Mother: But still! Four men! You slept with four men in six months!

Anda: I didn't! Not because I'm virtuous! It's a bit funny! One day I daydream about one, the next day about the other! I wish I could make one out of two. I would say *I love you* to one, but then in a few days, or weeks, or months, or hours, I'd love the other one and say *I love you truly* and mean it, but in the end,—and there is no end of guys there, people from all over the world!—in the end I'd just not trust myself anymore, Mom. How can I love one, then not love him, then love another one... And you know what's even more perplexing? I just forgot about them all. Not that they were very insistent either. We just drifted away. I have no ability to love! I space out! I'm a balloon. I drift in the wind, not even a decisive blowing wind. A breeze would do. How have you stayed married to Papa?! I can't feel anything!

Mother: I love him. We had you, children.

Anda: What's to love about Dad? A stinky drunk.

Mother: He is old now, but... He loves you.

He's better now. He stopped drinking when the Pope died.

Anda: *Doubtful.* It'll be something if he stays sober while I'm here. All I want is quiet. No yelling. No body odors. No crying. No hugging. No kissing....

Mother: You should call more often. You can even call just to whine about things! I'll listen!

Anda: I'll call, but I won't talk to him! He gets weepy when he drinks. Ugh, how he used to curse and smash things! Beat us up! I hope he has a fast death to spare you.

Mother: Please, don't...

Anda: "Don't-don't"... Why can't you just all die at once?! First my husband, then my brother, then my boyfriend, then my granny, now my father. Just die all of you NOW! Once and for all.

Mother: We're trying...

Anda: *Laughs. Hugs her.* Sorry, it's the jetlag. I'm actually sleepy all the time. I couldn't sleep well this spring. I don't know if it's because of the bad news or the endless rain or the neighbor. We live in a basement and I was apprehensive we'd be flooded. We weren't, but I couldn't sleep. Also about the time when my brother wrote me about dad, our neighbor with whom we share the basement is a drunk too, started to lose control over his bowels.

He vomits in the sink. We find residue of food in the drain. Probably pees too. We disinfect the sink before touching it. We didn't catch him at it, so what can we do? Besides, he is a quiet drunk. I hate the smell of him. And he is not even a friend or a lover or anything for us to put up with him.... Only if he moves out we might get a worse neighbor, one that screams at our door in the night, or beats his girlfriend, so we pretend he is an imbecile pet, a dog that shits all over the place, the nuisance. One day I was coming home thru the endless rain and he was in front of the house, his pants down his hips, his big belly running out. He was carrying yet another six-pack. He couldn't open the door for the last half an hour, couldn't think what was wrong with that door.

The great man never cleans after himself. Sandu said the pig peed all over the bathroom floor, and so he, my son mopped up the pee—it is his chore to clean the bathroom floor and wipe the mirrors.

I still didn't say anything. That night, shower time, my son comes with one of the towels I love, and shows it to me, full of yellow brownish marks. "Did you do this?" he asks me outraged. "No." "What is this?" "Well, shit is what it is." I say, "I'll deal with him tomorrow, please."

Sandu said, "Well, we don't have to say anything, Mom. We'll take our towels away. When he enters the bathroom he'll see the door of the closet on which we hang our colorful bathrobes and various towels, empty, barren. Not even a hand towel. All gone. That will say clearly to him, 'Don't shit on our towels anymore!'" I felt bad. My son shouldn't know about all this! I wanted to give him a better life. I'd stay up late in the night remembering ugly things about my childhood, my father. My own father is dying of drinking, my brother died because of that too. Squandered life. He had a pungent smell of sweat. Why didn't men use deodorant then?

Mother: There was no deodorant... Or warm water, or toilets, cars, TV. Why can't you remember the nice things? Unpack later. You have to eat now!

Pushes the suitcase aside so she can sweep. Clamps it shut.

Anda: I struggle to, but the bad ones stick out their noisy heads. It's not that he abused me or anything, like you see on TV, or he fondled me or anything. He just beat me, burned my library books, remember?

Mother: No.

Anda: He shouts. Never talks; he just grunts and orders.

I ran away from my drunken father, so you know. It was not communism or this provincial town. It was the smell, the sight of my drunken father that drove me across the ocean.

Why can't we have a loving family?

I said to my son, "Sandu, you have no idea how lucky you are that I'm your mom! You don't know how horrible it was growing up with your grandpa! How horrible to have your own parent shit on your dreams!"

Mother: Watch your tongue!

Anda: Sorry. Sandu says grandpa is funny and talkative. Maybe father is different with him. Sandu small, grandpa big.

Anda sets the table.

All I knew was absence. Your constant fights. The disgust he provoked in you. Where is the silverware?

Mother: In the corner. Your sister moves things around...

Anda: Mom, once when you quarreled he said in anguish, "You made the children hate me."

Mother: He was drunk...

Anda: Maybe you did... Maybe I'm brain washed. He did work hard and people always praised him how kind he was and how he always smiled. Peasant women at the cooperative farm beamed when they met him which was startling because around the house he was despicable. Mumbling with a hangover or in degrading drunkenness.

Mother: He was the boss. He cheated on me with any dirty wench!

Mother sweeps.

Anda: Did he?... He never stood up for me. When hoodlums gang raped me, he blamed it on me. You locked me in the house until the bruises on my face went away.

Mother: But the neighbors...

She sweeps the dirt under the carpet.

Anda: Sorry, Mom... I came home to see spring green and flowering trees... I really don't want to bring up the past. I sorted out the past.

There are perfumed memories too. When I was a small girl my father took me in the buggy. The auburn back of the horse, the clip-clop, the whip speeding it up...

The huge pyramids of straw... The peasants following my father's orders... Or when he took me to ride his horse. Me, small in the slippery saddle, high up there in the saddle, clip-clop on the paved village street, tiny kids running around the horse, cheering.

Do you remember? When I came out of the hospital recovering from hepatitis and it was pig killing time and I was confined to bed and the doctor and you forbade me from eating pork. I was enraged, "I'll never, never forgive mom! She won't let me have just a bit of pigskin!" Father was crying by my bed.

Mother: You were a willful child! *Calling out.* Papa, dinner is ready!

Anda: I should have brought Sandu. He would make him happy. Sandu will be a great father! He is already so supportive and responsible, though he's just 14! He goes, "We shall overcome, Mom! We'll make it, you'll see! I love you very much, Mom!" It's just the two of us and we are happy. He is very wise. I should say, "That's it, father! Don't shit on our towels anymore."

Mother: It would be nice to see Sandu one more time.

Anda: Come on! Granny lived to be 96! And she had twelve kids, not four like you! I wish you'd say something to make me love my father. I read all these books they have there, about anger and how parent figures impact your love life, and I believe some, but what can I talk to him about? He doesn't listen anyway. He won't turn into someone else... Well, at least I came to see you, then I'll go back. But I'd like to do something for him. I'd like him to understand who I am.

Mother: *Settles at the table.* He always loved you children. What's the matter with you? You're a bright girl. You don't need to say anything special to him. He'll make peace his way. You came home. Good. The little time he has to live we should try to be happy. Then at least there'll be no remorse left after he dies. It's hard to live with remorse.

Anda: I don't know what to say to him. I came to make peace with him, but it's revolting....

How are you, Mom?

Mother: Oh, I'm well. Your sister is an angel. My son-in-law spoils me. We had an exquisite Easter feast. I planted flowers in the garden, I listened to music. My aunt invited me to go to Paris for a month, or two. I couldn't be happier. Were it not for the untimely death of my son, I'd be happy. I still can't believe he's gone. *Silence.* We gave away Babette.

Anda: What a weird dog.

Mother: She wasn't weird!

Anda: She would barely give birth to puppies then the next morning she would bite their heads off!

Mother: It happens. This is what our motherland did to us. Ate us alive. You can't judge us! We had it very hard. Most of the relatives on my father's side died in concentration camps.

Anda: Mom, we are not Jewish!

Mother: That's right. We are Gypsies, which is worse. We were lucky. In our village a kind family hid us, though we were Gypsies. My father was a good blacksmith. I lived thru two wars and two revolutions. We lived under the Russians and under Stalin and Ceaușescu. It was not easy! What did your generation go

thru? Not much. You yourself have had a hard life too, you should understand us more. Your father worked all day in the sun and rain for you children! A bit of drinking now and then, what...

Anda: It was not "a bit!" It's.... One would like to have an ideal father...

Mother: But we wanted to be ideal! I kept two jobs to earn money to take care of things!

Anda: Well, my father is Robert Redford. Robert Redford, my father, when something bad happens to me is full of wrath and fights back. Robert Redford, my father knows who he is and is proud. Robert Redford, my father is elegant, stylish, witty. Daring. Robert Redford, my father knows how to turn tables and doesn't succumb to stupid tyranny. My father was none of this.

Mother: There is a saying, *Azt kell szeretni ami van*. Learn to love what you have. *Wood chopping noises stop off stage. Anda gets up.*

Anda: I should help him with the wood...

Mother: Yes. His hernia bulged out. He's not supposed to lift things. You can make new friends, but parents... you can't buy.

Anda: Every month I'll send you a bit of money thru Western Union. After he dies I'll bring you to America. You should sell this enormous house he bought against your will anyway, and come!

Mother: The house will go to the dogs without me. Father drinks himself to death when I'm not around. Besides I can't speak English.

Door bangs off stage. Anda is on her way to help Father.

Anda: In our neighborhood there are plenty of little old ladies you can have coffee with, gossip in Hungarian, Romanian, even Russian. You can go to your own church, Reformed, Protestant, what is it? The church you were born into and had to give up for father.

Mother: Reformed.

Anda: If you prove to be a tyrant, a disheartening bitch, we'll ship you back to my sister. Then you can go to the cemetery every day for the rest of your life. Talk to the tombstone. "How are you, Papa? Do they have plum brandy in Heaven?"

Mother: Watch your tongue! *Calling*. The soup is getting cold, Paaa!

Blackout.

Button – Jewelry bride

A sidewalk café in Budapest across from the Synagogue. Marylyn a Welsh-Hungarian elegant blonde, mid-30s, poses for quite a while for her bridal photo album. She's dressed in a diaphanous lacy tulle white gown. Her Mother shows up in a pink satin faux-bride gown split in front. She has an incongruous Jamaican bandana, sunglasses and black leather pants under the gown. Colorful socks drop around her ankles. The Photographer takes pictures, unaware of Mother.

Mother: Hi sweetie! What's the occasion?

Marylyn: My wedding photo album.

Mother: In this unsightly garb?!

Marylyn: Mom! Get out of my way! It cost me a fortune to hire this chap! Once in a lifetime is my wedding and you're upstaging me again!

Mother: Hardly! You look like a refugee. Did you buy it from a thrift store?

Marylyn: It's my wedding gown. I got married.

Mother: Joke aside, I could have made you a fabulous gown! Look at mine! No old hag here! We went with Alfonso for a ride to Balaton Lake. We got lost for three days in the country! What a delight! We stayed at a hunter's lodge! You should have seen the retiree couples giving me and my juvenile Alfonso with his cute driver cap and hot pants the evil eye! I rummaged in a small boutique in Győr and bought for nothing this pink satin. I made my gown last night waiting for you to show up for our bridge party.

Marylyn: You'll have to find yourself another partner. I go on my honeymoon.

Mother: You don't spend time with me.

Marylyn: Mom, I devoted half of my life to you! I never remind you that you left your mom behind and never saw her until she was on her deathbed!

Mother: Ah, but it's not the same! I had to flee the country. I was endangered. It was the bloody '56 revolution. Your father would love to see you. He'd have a grand time. A few palinka shots and he'd be a delight. Flirting with the ladies, flattering every one, pinching their love handles.

Marylyn: Gross. Forcing unwilling people to make a conga line. An embarrassment. My worst nightmare, father ruining my wedding feast.

Mother: I wondered why already 37 and not a sign of getting married. He just needed a bit of palinka, to get over his shyness.

Marylyn: Mom, let's not go there. He was an alcoholic. We should have never come back to Budapest. We should have stayed in London where liquor was expensive. You saw we couldn't control him here. In two years he was gone. He was drinking palinka at breakfast!

Photographer: Please don't fidget so much! It will come out blurry!

Mother: He died of leukemia, not alcoholism! French people drink wine. A glass of red wine a day is healthy.

Marylyn: Mom! Red cells are manufactured in the liver. His liver was sick with alcohol!

Mother: Were we to just listen to his ailment litany. I thought it was just his usual hangover whining, "I need a drink to stop my pain!"

Marylyn: Binging, hangover, grand resolution: no more drinking, two days later binging again. Then leukemia.

Mother: Such a kind man. He never said a bad word about anybody. Never.

Marylyn: He loved me so very much. I need a smoke. I waited for the Giant since four! He's never late. Only once when the police caught him.

Mother: You should try again therapy, Marylyn. Making beads out of plastic buttons is hardly a career. You don't mount to much.

Marylyn: In rehab they said I don't have a drug problem, I have a mom problem.

Mother: It might be an underlying depression. Your serotonin is low...

Marylyn: A mom who is jealous of me. Jealous of my father loving me, sharing his attention. Seeing me young while she grows old, stealing her lime light. Jealous of me. Never loved me, mom never loved me.

Mother: I labor over your beads! I've organized the women at my assisted living to make your beads. It is not my fault you don't focus, to teach you fashion design. I had a good life making gorgeous gowns. I share my money with you. We live comfortably.

Marylyn: He was a good man. A fine writer.

Photographer: We should try some standing.

Mother: Did you get in touch with Meryl Streep? Her publicist? Her agent? I'm sure she's little Emese. Reach out to her. She'll be a sister for you.

Marylyn: *Stands up.* Mom, Meryl Streep was just acting in *Sophie's Choice?*, she's not an Auschwitz survivor. Little orphan Emese was what? four years old when they took her away to America.

Mother: I know she's Meryl Streep. I hold that child in my arms for two years! I fed her. I made her dolls and watched over her playing with the kittens. When she cried she looked like Meryl Streep. I should have hidden her.

Marylyn: But you have me! You've always pushed me away. Did you fear you lose me like you lost Emese? Did your love dry out? You never have that look of tenderness for me like you have when you remember little orphan Emese.

Mother: Perhaps. Perhaps. Perhaps. Perhaps. Perhaps. Perhaps. Perhaps. *[Exits]*

Photographer: Will the bride smile?

Marylyn: Yes, the bride shall smile.

Marylyn poses. Blackout.

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REALISM(S) AND SOCIAL NETWORKS. TOWARDS A COMMUNICATION CONTINUUM

CESARE MASSARENTI

ABSTRACT. What I've been working on during the past few years is a rethinking of our understanding about communication and the paradigms that have been and still are to a large extent the points of reference for the media industry. Basically, what we can see is that we had some explicit trends until a few years ago that repeated themselves several times in the 20th century, and that gave a sort of direction to where communication was going, in a media world dominated by the mass media and the one-to-many model of communication.

One fundamental point of reference was provided by Marshall McLuhan. The second contribution was not really about communication, but about relationships between people and small groups. One came in the late 1940s-early 1950s from Fritz Heider, a pupil of Wolfgang Köhler, in the tradition of Gestalt psychology. On this matter, there is Heider's fundamental book published in 1958 called "The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations" on which a whole new concept was built, now known as Small Groups Theory. In a similar vein was the research carried out by Solomon Ash, who did some fundamental work on conformity. This was at the times, about 1952, when in America social change was beginning to change that country, so conformity was a major preoccupation for sociologists and psychologists.

Another type of contribution, which was highly formalized mathematically, was developed at Stanford University during the 1960s; this provided an entirely new framework for studies of interpersonal relations and behavior within small groups. Some of the early examples of learning with computers were derived from this context. A further contribution came from communication from Ervin Goffman. He wrote several very important books and one of them is "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life". Here he proposed a paradigm that tries to explain how people behave in small groups when they meet face to face. The second aspect of Goffman's theory is that people work in social contexts as if they were on a stage. So, the whole area of interpersonal relations, on the one hand, goes under the influence of Fritz Heider and everything that came after him. On the other hand, there's the very important contribution of Goffman. In this context, McLuhan is sort of in the middle - apart, but also strongly connected to these areas of research.

Many years later came the Internet and many things changed in the modes of communication. Most likely, the fundamental aspects for communication with Internet are interactivity, speed and networking. Speed, as underlined by Paul

Virilio, influenced the way communication channels are used and the way people communicate with each other (email, etc.). The big jump was not only the enormous amount of information that became available, but especially the speed at which information became available and could be circulated. The speed has two ways of influencing the communication process: one is what comes to us, and the other one is our response, thus a connection with interactivity can be established.

More recently we have witnessed the growth of three very wide areas of concern in communication and the media: multi-channel content delivery, multimedia, and cross media. What can we say about them?

Multi-channel content delivery is a system of distribution that was already practiced by the press in the 19th century (a novel would be published first in installments in daily newspapers or in magazines, and then republished in book form) and was re-invented between the late '20s and early '30s by Walt Disney. When he started making his cartoons, he realized that he could publish comic strips in the papers at the same time: comic strips were derivatives of the transparencies drawn and painted to shoot the cartoons. These became regular, weekly or monthly publications, and later would become fully developed books. This is a good example of what multi-channel content delivery means: a piece of content is produced once and is distributed/delivered by means of several channels in different formats. Each channel has its own economic model and return on investment, but derivative versions of the original product cost only a fraction of the original production: the overall revenues and profits are increased.

This was multi-channel until television came about. The studios in Hollywood soon realized that broadcasters were willing to pay a sizable amount of money for the rights to show a movie a second time after the programming in the movie theatres. Furthermore, this brought about first a production for the movie theatres and a second market, that was much larger than the initial market - the cinemas, and provided for the studios high profits practically at no cost, because the only cost to be borne - generally by the broadcaster - was only the transfer of the 35mm film print to video. It represented a marginal production cost and it was sustained by the television station, not by the studio that produced the original movie. So, the producer had only benefits from this.

Later, a big change in multi-channel content delivery came with George Lucas, who put together the original pieces of the game, as devised by Disney, but with many, very important additions. This was not accomplished with "American Graffiti", but with the first of the Star Wars saga. This movie was programmed from the very beginning to be distributed by exploiting the potential of multi-channel content delivery. The story was written in such a way that it could have many downstreams for distribution. For example, the laser sword became a toy; there were video games that came out of Star Wars, some of the first video games; puppets, books, and so on. So, the big difference between Walt Disney in the 1930s and Lucas in the late 1970s, was that George Lucas provided a global framework for multi-channel content delivery and

one writing for all these declinations of the main product - the movie. When the film editing was finished and delivered to the cinemas, six months after the first showing, Lucas made a new version, only for American television. Ten or fifteen minutes were different from what we saw in the cinema. That was done because Lucas estimated the need for more close-ups and a slower editing in some parts of the film, taking into account the way people look at the TV screen, which is different from the way we look at the big screen in cinemas. Then, he made further versions for the release of DVDs in the early 2000s. The big difference was also that the first Star Wars film wasn't released as it was customary in America in those days: the first showing was usually done in four main cities, in 3-4 cinemas in those four main cities. When Lucas was left with no money, practically with no money at all, in London, towards the second third of the shooting, he had no idea if he could finish this movie. He was totally bankrupt, and by the way, the same happened to Walt Disney when he was totally bankrupt in 1938 while halfway in the production of "Snow White and the seven Dwarfs". Disney was saved by a banker in New York that decided to give him the money for the remaining production. Lucas moved differently. 20th Century Fox was experiencing serious difficulties and they had to find a solution. Lucas went to Hollywood and talked to people in the right way and convinced the top managers of 20th Century Fox to assure the distribution. Only Lucas had a condition. Probably he said something like this: "Gentlemen, we're not going to go out with 15-16 copies, but with 1.200 prints to be shown in 1.200 movie theatres at the same time, across the whole territory of the United States, and first projection date will be the same. I, George Lucas, tell you this, because you're investing all this money and you're entitled to get you're money back as soon as you can. The only way you can get your money back as soon as you can, is to have a massive distribution all of the sudden coming out in the cinemas and, if the movie works, in three weeks everything will be paid and we'll have very huge profits".

The managers of 20th Century Fox didn't really have a choice, so they decided to go ahead with the proposed program and they went out to convince the owners of the movie theaters. Movies are rented out to distributors and cinema operators in a way that is very different from what happens in Europe. The "buyers" meet in a room and make offers and/or offer guarantees, and whoever guarantees the most gets the film. So, to get twelve hundred cinemas to distribute the film in the same day was a really difficult task. But the people at 20th succeeded and the movie paid for itself in about two weeks, after which there was profit.

Since then, all over the US, in Western Europe, in Japan, Brazil and other countries, now big production movies are issued on the same day in hundreds of cinemas. They invade the market. Coupled with the increasing existence of multi-room cinemas (multiplexes with 8-10-12 rooms), 4 or 5 movies can "occupy" the whole market, or at least 80% of the market. So, what started as a solution for recouping in a short period of time the cost of production has become a big danger for the future of cinema, for smaller budget films and a great majority of national productions made outside of Hollywood encounter great difficulties in distribution.

If we now take multimedia into consideration, we must underline that this modality of communication has not been introduced as recently as most people think. One of the early examples I can mention is the way the cemetery of Pisa was built - the “Camposanto” in Italian, which lies at the northern edge of the Cathedral Square, also known as “La Piazza dei Miracoli - The Square of Miracles”. The cemetery has a wall that separates the piazza from the tombs. On the side of the wall that is on the inside of the cemetery there are very important frescoes. The wall was commissioned by the Dominican friars, which made it the main area for public speeches, for the oral transmission of the Scriptures. The iconography was dictated entirely by Dominican friars, including the choice of the columns, and several art historians report that that was the place where the Madonna’s dress was painted in blue for the first time. It became blue from then onwards and it was the official color for the Madonna dress in Western art. Beyond that, the friars asked all of their painters to paint in such a way so they could use the paintings to illustrate what they were saying with words. Their speech could find a coherent structure behind the speaker, by means of indicating specific areas of the fresco. This is a very strong example of multimedia, and a very specific communication need is fulfilled in this manner: in the 13th century most people were illiterate and uncultured, so a one-to-one correspondence between words and iconography was fundamental. Multimedia has come to be what we know and have now and, in practice, we have two ways of making multimedia projects. One is to put together several, different media, each one sort of independent, and the other, which is more difficult and much more expensive to produce, is to use different media to build one single object of communication. Interactivity, even at the lowest level, is not an essential component of multimedia projects.

Cross media is a quite different story, because it involves not only digital media - this is the case also of multimedia, which nowadays is entirely digital -, but can include parts that are not digital, and interactivity is a fundamental characteristic that is built in cross media projects. Cross media has to carry one message through different access devices and this is a major difference, from my point of view, from multimedia. Multimedia is not concerned so much with access devices. Cross media is concerned first of all with delivery of the content. This means a variety of devices, from the cell phone to the television set, to cinemas, to books. The project must be constructed in such a way that the user can access the story at any point by means of any access device. Although there isn’t any widely accepted definition for cross media, I’ve tried last year to provide one, which says, practically, that there are two types of cross media: one is a form of content construction and delivery, by which the interactive channels are either navigational or functional. This means the users can access the content, but they cannot change the database, i.e. they cannot change the “story” and its structure. They cannot interfere and put information in the database. The second type of cross media, on the other hand, is a communication project that involves adaptive types of interactivity, whereby users can modify the storyline, that is the database can be accessed, additional data can be included, and modifications can be brought by the users. Wikipedia is an example, although it does not use many media, but it has some key characteristics of cross media.

Today we have three large areas of communication modalities: multi-channel, multimedia, cross media. On the other hand, we have a multiplicity of devices for access and we can combine these three with the way content is created, is post produced, is distributed, reaches the audience and the audience can respond - that is, there can be a form of dialogue between the users and the system -, we must ask ourselves: How do I produce for that? If you produce for television, you are closed within the TV box, if you produce for daily newspapers, you are in another box. The three areas I just mentioned, plus the variety of available devices that provide access to the content, make it impossible to continue production in those ways, totally blocked inside a single box, with its unique rules and methods.

We have to rethink the whole chain of production. Theory has to be not only taken into account one way, from transmission to reception, but also from reception back to the original transmission. The receiver becomes an transmission agent and the original sender becomes the reception agent. This means that we have to take networks into account. Networks are available to whoever has received the message and talks back. If the two channels do not have the same bandwidth, then the system is unbalanced in favor of whoever controls the widest channel. The thinner channel has less power and less influence.

This was true until a short time ago, but it's not true anymore. With the resurgence of certain types of communication, there is the possibility of creating channels from the bottom, without even caring if there is somebody else of the old type of media to get the messages back. It can be a totally enclosed world, like Linked In, like FaceBook. They don't need a referent from the world of big media producers and distributors. With so-called Web 2.0 it's not only the creation of social networking, it's a total subversion of the way media, as it is being re-organized.

This is something that most of the people don't want to realize. Social networking involves a type of discussions where everybody puts in anything they want. That's very superficial. In economical terms, that's a disruptive technology, because it creates communication spaces that did not exist before. Many people upload text or pictures or video on MySpace, YouTube, etc. without caring about money. Therefore, the economic model of these websites has nothing to do with the traditional models of communication. It's a totally different way of organizing one's personal communication network. So these are just some of the main points. In the end of all this there is this big question mark: How are we going to produce in the future? What will be the chain of acquisition, from the new materials put into postproduction - what kind of postproduction? What kind of distribution? The complexity of communication systems has become such that it requires a totally different approach to the way we produce content and the content production-distribution industry must come to terms with this mutation.

We need a very different model for the economic aspects of communication, because many elements are transferred to another type of organization. One solution is convergence. Convergence seems an obvious option, but I'm not very happy with

the current definitions and I prefer to define convergence in 2 ways: one, the technological convergence and the other one, the global convergence. And both types of convergence refer to the market: the reference points are not the devices or between devices, not the networks or between networks, but on the market.

So if we have everything in digital formats, including digital cinema - which I have not mentioned so far, but is an increasingly important area, because it's the last medium that is becoming digital, in the global transition of the media to digital -, all this converges on the market, and we have this type of convergence where we have the contents, the consumers, the computer digital technologies, every existing access device, the whole infrastructure of wireless and wired communication system. So we have all this intertwined and the competition at all levels of the communication systems happens on the market and refers to it.

Now, the other thing is that all this brings about an extremely visible increasing noise; so, with increase in noise, what happens is that the attention of the user is more difficult to attract, and not only to attract, but especially to maintain. The attention span decreases because there are so many events that go around you at the same time, that the choice is difficult; paying attention to something becomes difficult; but especially the attention span decreases, not so much as a consequence of increased noise, but also as a consequence of diminished capability of the temporary memory, of the short-term memory. With so many things happening at the same time, the short-term memory is locked on trying to find out what it wants to send to the long-term memory and this exerts undue pressure on mechanisms of the brain that become cut out from the linear flow of data. The consequence is that when the brain receives a non-linear flow, it has problems.

Convergence is not anymore an issue that is being discussed a lot nowadays. Convergence was a big item of discussions in the late '80s, in the '90s, early 2000.

Now the main issue concerning technological aspects of communication is interoperability. But interoperability is a complete mess, in terms of connecting multiple media. For example think only of television: we are still in two worlds (50 Hz and 60 Hz), Standard and High Definition TV sets are not interoperable, television on the internet is not interoperable with the other TV signals. If we consider mobile phones, 99% of the services available - financial, news, sports, whatever -, are not interoperable, they're blocked, locked onto that specific set of technological rules and modalities. If we have a Vodafone phone, we cannot watch any tv or music program coming from a company that has an agreement with another company, another mobile operator. Most of this is due to the fact that many companies have a very hard time deciding how much a given patent can be worth, which has direct consequences on the terms of the possible licence to use that patent. This is a big, big problem. The other one is that the many manufacturers of television or mobile equipment have no interest at the moment to make products that are interoperable, either because of hardware configurations and/or of software enablers. Again, think of television: at this very time

we have a range of Panasonic video cameras and recorders, we have a range of Sony equipment; both are made to produce the same types of images, e.g. high definition images with certain technical characteristics; but nothing is interoperable, absolutely nothing. Even the family of compression algorithms MPEG-2 is not fully interoperable, because we have the variants of MPEG-2 with video 4.2.0 for DVDs and standard digital television transmission, 4.2.2 for higher quality production, and 4.4.4 or even 4.4.4.4 which is used inside the studios for very high quality work and MPEG-2 is not interoperable with more recent and more efficient families of compression algorithms, such as MPEG-4 and H.264. All this brings about complex operations in processing signals, with notable losses in the quality of the final product.

Another set of problems in the transition to digital is linked with interactivity and the use of interactive systems. Still nowadays, most of the media industry does not have a wide use of interactivity and remains very much linked to the one-to-many model of communication.

In the access to content, another important variable to be considered is that it's not the content that is important, but it's the network, that is how the connections are made: this becomes the narrative. The narrative is not in the single video, it is in the connections of the videos that are made by sets of users. This is now very strongly visible, in my opinion.

Another area that is necessary to consider is that it is now impossible not to take into account at the same time content, technologies, and economic models. I have come to believe the fact that for communication students nowadays it is absolutely impossible to go about studying communication and the media without having the three domains combined. It doesn't make any sense. If one does not understand the nature of costs that have to be covered by making the projects, then one is not likely to be able to make it. It's very simple. For example, if the technology is left out of the picture, especially in professions like publishing and the press, also for graphic artists the technology is an intrinsic part of the mental framework that one has to have. Think only of a TV editor that receives material to work on - it happens every day, everywhere in large TV stations - that was originated in the US at 525 lines and 60 Hz, and has to use this material with other material originated in some other country at 625 lines 50 Hz, maybe with different types of compression: what must the editor do? If he does not know what he is going to lose and gain by following a certain work procedure, he will not be able to deliver a finished product that will offer the audience the quality that is expected. So the editor, but this is true for any profession now in the media, has to know in depth how decoding or recording whatever material will entail in terms of final quality of the product that is to be delivered to the audience.

If we talk now about user experience...

What we are witnessing is that we are moving from a model of industry generated content to something that is a mixture of passive users, active users, user driven content, user generated content. This a component of the future in communication and the media.

We are moving forward with issues that are being modified almost continuously.

I want to mention very briefly that the last sector of the media that is being slowly transforming itself into a digital world is out-of-home communication - billboards, information on big displays, displays in supermarkets, hotel lobbies, etc. We are moving also in other countries towards landscapes of the sort that you can see if you look at pictures of Shanghai, or Beijing, or Times Square, or Piccadilly Circus: some of the central areas of several major cities are not very different from baseball or football fields, if we consider the displays and the surface that they occupy.

What is happening to the images? I mentioned before that the mobile phones, the smartphones, are becoming the preferred communication instruments, not only in mobility. The reason is that on the manufacturing side of the smart phones, the manufacturers are already moving towards the use of a new type of displays, called OLED for Organic Light Emitting Diodes, which is about to become available also for TV sets, e-books, and many other uses.

Their molecules assure a very high resolution, with very good contrast ratios, very good black, and accurate rendition of colors. But a very interesting characteristic of OLED displays is that they can be manufactured by applying the stratum of molecules on flexible surfaces. This will allow OLEDs to be purchased at the dimensions required by a specific use, but it will also be possible to roll it or fold it: in this manner the display can be connected to any new type of mobile phone, providing the phone with a viewable surface that will be decided by the user according to his needs at a given time at a given place.

Another field in full bloom is stereoscopic films and, with some delay, stereoscopic television. In Hollywood and in France, many new films are produced in stereo and major US broadcasters are preparing the ground to show in stereo several major football and basketball games to audiences in various cinemas around the country.

I have tried to provide a description of the global picture beforehand, but little has been said about what is happening on the Web.

In a certain sense, still quite unclear in my opinion, Social Networks and other types of web activities are bringing about a redefinition of what realism is, and what it concerns. Realism has many different definitions according to the different fields of human endeavor. So it's not a term that has a definition that is widely agreed upon; realism in the more recent mutations of the Web - or Web 2.0 - is meant here as something that lives on the web by the way people are presenting themselves, so I chose the kind of realism in the line of Erving Goffman, revisited in function of what I would call "a virtual theatre or a virtual stage" - that is, the presentation of self is mediated by the websites to which people subscribe and participate in. It is a form of interaction that was not something viable until certain kinds of web sites came about - e.g. YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, and many others. There you find a wide range of "presentations of self", from those that are

extremely crude, at one of the lowest levels of realism that has been available, in other terms people who talk about themselves in real time, without any sort of “editing”, without adding anything, to “presentations” that are nearing professional quality, or presenting events that could not be shown by broadcasters - e.g. images of the tsunami in South East Asia (December 2004) or the bombings in the London tube (July 2005), or of the Twin Towers in Manhattan being hit by the terrorists with the hijacked airplanes.

The presentation of self is left to viewers'/visitors' interpretations and to levels of acceptance of what is real: realism on social network websites seems to work in an interactive environment, where quite often those who present their images and spoken words present these expecting some kind of answer, which can be simple visualization of what is offered to very short comments to the establishment of a two-way communication scheme, which can start the build-up of a network, which may or may not grow over time. As in Goffman's original proposal, also on these websites presentations of self live on forms and levels of interactivity, and evolve dynamically.

It could be interesting to analyze the birth, growth, decrease and demise of social groups on the web by utilizing mathematical instruments that can help predict certain type of behavior. Contrary to “live” social interactions, groups on social networks leave many traces which can be collected as data for further research. Graph theory can help the mapping of groups, and, by giving weights to levels of one-to-one interactions, can also provide information about the balance or imbalance of the group as related to the participants' expectations. The use of Poisson's probability theorems can be an important tool in predicting the growth, or lack of it, in situations like those that are encountered on the web when a person starts presenting herself: at the beginning of the process, we have very small numbers, but we have an understanding of the context (the rules imposed by the software the underlies the social network website) and an understanding of the social environment within which people “act” on these websites. This satisfies two conditions that allow us to study and predict behavior as “eigenbehavior”, and Poissons' theorems provide the mathematical tools to describe the dynamics of these types of groups. Finally, under certain circumstances, we can use also theorems of Markov chains to predict, as simulation over variable periods of time, growth, the reaching and the maintaining of behavioral balance, beginning of unbalances, further unbalances that will eventually lead to the demise and disappearance of a group on a social network.

These analyses could be used also to trace behavioral forms of “realism”, by attaching specific values to specific types of behavior that we may define as belonging to the realm of “realism”. This might help us to clarify issues regarding realism, allowing us to categorize and rank various types of behavior.

As can be easily understood by this short digression, the question of realism on the web is an open field, and unfortunately I must admit that very little research has been or is being done on this matter. It is my opinion that one of the reasons lies in a basic misunderstanding of which tools should be used: the web is generally associated with large numbers, and this leads most researchers to approach behavioral studies using tools that adapted to large sets of data, large populations and large samples. My understanding is that there are very widespread types of behavior on the web, and especially what is allowed by social networks, that require the use of analytical tools that are better suited to studying small numbers of participants.

Some examples of various types of “realism” that can be viewed on the web:

- Prof. David Weinberger - Harvard Berkman Center - 2007

Everything is miscellaneous

<http://www.youtube.com/user/theconnectedrepublic>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3wOhXsjPYM> - Geriatric 1927 - first try

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_YMigZmUuk - Girl

<http://www.youtube.com/user/journalgirl> - Imaginative realism - improvised videos by boys

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ImaginativeRealism> - Emotional realism - from France

<http://www.youtube.com/user/LEGRANDDURIEN> - Optimistic realism - faces smiling

<http://www.youtube.com/user/cabelindsay> - Boys and girls in schoolyard in China

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ddreitanmama> - Toronto propane explosion Aug 10th 2008

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ya11Z3TW26g&feature=PlayList&p=0E653DD2DE26B579>
&playnext=1&index=2 - Video by film student - “the video describes me better than my words”

<http://www.youtube.com/user/JetSetProdigy> - Scientific realism

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ow4VgYvajPM>

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- **Group formation, evolution, disaggregation:** virtual aggregation, sharing modes/discovery processes, clustering, zero-sum exchanges (Game Theory), fissuring, distancing, virtual disaggregation
- **Poisson distribution vs. Gauss distribution:** Small groups - larger and larger groups
Connections on Internet more important than single communication units
Size-interrelations-activity
Speed (Paul Virilio)
Multiple layers (Obama campaign)
Multiple spread with fast-continuous feedback
- Martin Nowak:** Mathematical models for: evolutionary dynamics, evolution, mutation, selection, sequential space

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NOTES TOWARD A THESIS ON THEATRE AND MEMORY

MICHAEL PAGE

ABSTRACT. This essay initiates an enquiry into theatre as an action of memory. From a consideration of Foucault's concept of heterotopic spaces it moves to a review of the imaginary spaces of classical mnemonic techniques and theories, and thence to their incorporation into the mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages. From there it goes on to engage with the imaginary spaces of the Renaissance, known as Memory Theatres, as well as the physical space of the actual theatres of the Elizabethan period. It then seeks to discover some ways in which these conceptions of space and memory are reinvented in the 20th century and contemporary European theatre in the work of Beckett and Kantor, and finally in the reappearance of memory through the image in the work of contemporary eastern European playwrights and directors. Here the discussion focuses particularly on some recent productions at the Hungarian National Theatre in Cluj, which to this writer strongly suggest that the work of some contemporary Romanian and Hungarian directors implicitly acknowledges that theatre is, in some of its forms at least, a reification of memory images in space.

...memory is the same as imagination...
(Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, 1725)

I

In his essay "Of Other Spaces", Michel Foucault speaks of the modern era as one characterized by concern with – and anxiety about – space. This space in which we live is "a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (OOS, 23). He describes these sites, or spaces, as being of two main types: utopian and heterotopian. Utopias are "sites with no real place," but heterotopias are "real places... that are formed in the very founding of society... which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites... are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Ibid., 24). Not surprisingly, Foucault cites the theatre as a heterotopia which juxtaposes "in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Ibid., 25). Though Foucault does not pursue the theatrical example, it goes without saying that representing, contesting, and inverting are exactly what theatre has been about to a greater or lesser degree throughout history.

Michal Kobialka designates the room of Tadeusz Kantor's *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* (1980) as a heterotopic space, and I would go further to suggest that Kantor's work particularly, and much of Beckett's are prime instances of theatre as heterotopia, and that – most evidently in Kantor and in Beckett's *Endgame* – the locations are memory spaces. Still further, I would like in these “notes toward a thesis” to explore the notion that certain kinds of theatre constitute an interface in which memory and heterotopic space uniquely come together.

The conception of memory as spatial and imagistic has been present in the thinking of mnemonic theorists since the earliest times, and our enquiry should start with a brief review of the classical treatises on artificial memory and its cultivation from which so much later theory developed.

The first surviving treatment of memory and its enhancement through the art of mnemotechnics is found in Book III of the treatise *Ad C. Herennium*, which dates from 86-82 B.C, and was once thought to be by Cicero. The unidentified author calls Memory “the treasure-house of the ideas supplied by Invention” (ACH, 205), and goes on to distinguish natural, innate memory, and artificial memory, that is, memory activated by training and discipline. His conception of the latter lays the foundation of our enquiry:

The artificial memory includes backgrounds and images. By backgrounds I mean such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on a small scale... so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory – for example, a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like. An image is, as it were, a figure, mark, or portrait of the object we wish to remember; for example, if we wish to recall a horse, a lion, or an eagle, we must place its image in a definite background. (Ibid, 210)

The imagination, the author goes on to say, can embrace any region whatsoever and in it at will fashion and construct the setting of some background. The operation of the image against this background is illustrated by the author with a scenario that is essentially dramatic. It demonstrates the power of “one notation, a single image” to evoke an entire narrative sequence, and it is worth quoting in full:

For example, the prosecutor has said that the defendant killed a man by poison, has charged that the motive for the crime was an inheritance, and declared that there are many witnesses and accessories to this act. If in order to facilitate our defence we wish to remember this first point, we shall in our first background form an image of the whole matter. We shall picture the man in question as lying ill in bed, if we know this person. If we do not know him, we shall yet take someone to be our invalid, but not a man of the lowest class, so that he may come to mind at once. And we shall place the defendant at the bedside, holding in his right hand a cup, and in his left tablets, and on the fourth finger a ram's testicles [from which purses were made]. In this way we can record the man who was poisoned, the inheritance, and the witnesses. (Ibid, 215)

Of such iconographic specificity is theatre made: the man in bed, the poisoner, the cup, the tablets and the ram's testicles are images containing past action, and were this a scene in a play the audience would experience it as both a symbolic and actual imaging in which a complex history is made instantaneously accessible. Later, the author goes on to point out that artificial memory needs to make use of unusual or striking images or events, and not ordinary, everyday ones, and again his instances of these are active and dramatic. We must, he writes, set up images that can "adhere longest in the memory," and they will do this if they

...are not many or vague, *but doing something*; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we dress some of them with crowns or purple cloaks, for example, so that the likeness may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images... (Ibid, 221, emphasis added)

Cicero himself in *De Oratore* (55 B.C.) pursues the central conceit of memory operating as images placed or stored in localities, and - alluding to the famous tale recounted by Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* (A.D. 96) of Simonides remembering the identities of the victims of the collapse of a dining hall by retaining an accurate image of their placement before the disaster (see QOE, 63-4) - reminds us that memory images are the product of sensual experience, particularly that of sight; and further, that things heard, not seen, are best somehow translated into a visual equivalent which is then, like the others, placed in a location (CDO, 469). Interestingly, Cicero describes the images of things to be remembered as masks representing them (CDO, 360), an indication of his acknowledgment of the theatrical dimension of memory. It was Cicero, too, who established the essential connection between rhetoric and moral virtue that was to be one of the foundations of medieval scholasticism and the guiding rationale of its theatre. Memory was one of the three parts of Prudence (along with intelligence and foresight), which was in turn one of the four cardinal virtues - the others being Justice, Fortitude and Temperance (See CDO, 327).

For Augustine, memory was one of the three parts of the soul, and in Chapter X of the *Confessions* (A.D. 397-399), he perpetuated its metaphor as a natural place like a cavern, or a constructed one like a palace, a hall or a storeroom, all of which he saw as places wherein the "inward actions" of sensory memory take place (*Confessions*, 1998, 186). He identified memory with mind and mind with self, and thus ascribed to it a high moral significance in the context of Christian faith. "Great is the power of memory", he says, "And this is mind, this is I myself." The infinitely diverse power of memory is a profound gift through which he is able to reach God, but it is also something that he must *transcend* in order to reach him. (SAC, 194).

In the Middle Ages the art of memory was installed unequivocally in the pantheon of virtues. From the *Ad Herennium* and from Cicero medieval writers on memory took over definitions of the four cardinal virtues, and in this context laid particular emphasis on Prudence, which consisted of three parts, *intelligentia*, *providentia*, and *memoria*. That memory was defined as part of one of the cardinal virtues is of central importance to the nature of medieval theatre, especially of the form which prevailed after 1400 – the morality play. Frances A. Yates' seminal book *The Art of Memory* (1966) deals extensively with medieval mnemotechnics, but curiously she does not extend her enquiry into miracle, mystery and morality plays, which are nothing if not dramatic enactments of what every Christian needs to know and remember for salvation.

For Albertus Magnus, in *De Bono* (1246-1248), memory was the most necessary part of Prudence, and for Albertus' student, Thomas Aquinas, writing about artificial memory twenty years later, , “the memory exercised and improved by art”, as Yates defines it, is “one of the proofs that memory is a part of Prudence” (YAM, 67, 74). Inculcating the virtues and vices, retelling the stories that make up the liturgy, teaching right conduct for salvation, all of these were imperatives that drove the art of preaching in a religious culture that predated printing, and which therefore relied profoundly on memory through the image, rather than through written or even spoken language. In their important anthology, *The Medieval Craft of Memory*, Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski consistently show through their selections that the locational model of memory as images stored in places, and the reconstituting of them as an *active* process, were fundamental to medieval teaching. As they point out in their introduction, “medieval *memoria* took the inventive function of human memory for granted, and emphasized it” (MCM, 3); in other words, “memory depended on imagination, the image-making power of the soul” (Ibid, 11). It is important to remember, though, that imagination and innovation were *aspects* of memory, which was “the faculty regarded as prior to both, and an essential aspect to understanding” (Ibid, 22).

Yates links the medieval need to remember through imagery to the iconography found in manuscripts and sculptures, and the paintings of such artists as Giotto and Lorenzetti. This iconography is frequently grotesque, and invariably exists in significant *loci*, and thus satisfies at least two of the requirements recommended by the author of *Ad Herennium*. But another clear link can be made to medieval drama. In the mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages, both of which primarily were intended for religious and moral instruction, space and location, and the deployment of images within them, were of central importance to the message being conveyed. The mansions or *loci*, established within churches and cathedrals for the performances of liturgical dramas in the early Middle Ages, were essentially memory locations, whether they stood for standard features such as paradise or hell, or places specific to the story being told, such as Noah's Ark, or the temple at Jerusalem. In later vernacular religious drama, performed outside in town squares or fields, pageant wagons or scaffolds fulfilled the same function as mansions.

The supreme surviving example of the theatrical use of space for moral instruction is the morality play *The Castle of Perseverance*, which has been dated from 1400 to 1425. Not only is the conception highly elaborate, but it is visually schematized in a plan attached to the manuscript. This clearly delineates where the mansions are located, what the central structure is, and where the audience is required to be. In this play, which enacts “the whole scheme of man’s life...from birth to death, from innocence to salvation” (SAS, 1), the Castle itself is represented by a tower placed in the center of a large circle, with “mankind’s bed” placed in the lower half of it. At the edge of the circle at the four points of the compass are scaffolds, which are another form of *loci* and which represent the locations of Deus (east), Mundus (west), Flesh (south), and Belial (north), with Covetous at a north-east point between Deus and Belial. The locations and personifications of vices and virtues, and the fact that the audience would not have been stationary but, like the actors, moving from place to place as the action demanded, meant that the impact of the moral instruction was highly dependent on its images being physicalized and so remembered. Morality plays were truly a theatrical translation of classical and medieval arguments on the centrality of artificial memory to the exercise of prudence and right conduct. In *The Castle of Perseverance*, Mankind encounters such Vice-embodiments as Lust-Liking, Pleasure, Folly, Pride, Wrath and Envy, who entice him to the various scaffolds until Penance draws him to the Castle. The Vices attack the castle and Mankind is tempted away then claimed by Death, but through the intercession of Justice, Mercy, Truth and Peace his soul is saved by God’s mercy and ascends to the Deus scaffold.

It is interesting to juxtapose this actual enactment of what is to be remembered for salvation with a one-dimensional scheme – “The Tower of Wisdom”, a pictorial diagram made by John of Metz in the 13th century. Like the castle in the morality play the tower is an allegorical structure intended to act as a mnemonic device, with Humility as its foundation, the cardinal virtues as columns, and multiple rooms each containing a virtuous action or a prohibition against a sinful one. At the top of the tower sit actions of judgment, discipline and punishment. Running up one side of the tower is the inscription “Height of the tower is perseverance in the good.” (The diagram and the translations of its inscriptions are from Lucy Freeman Sandler’s essay, “John of Metz, *The Tower of Wisdom*” in MCM, op cit., 217)

II

In her preface to *The Art of Memory*, Frances A. Yates tells us that her book grew out of pondering two questions. The first was “Why did Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas regard the use in memory of the places and images of [*Ad Herrenium*] as a moral and religious duty?” (YAM, xii). The answer was that it seemed evident that “the Middle Ages might think of figures of virtues and vices as memory images” (Ibid). Again, Yates does not specifically mention theatre, but if this assertion is correct then we can safely draw the inference that

both the religious morality plays, like *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Everyman*, *Mundus et Infans*, and *The Interlude of Youth*, and the secular ones, like *Respublica*, *Magnificence*, and *All for Money*, the virtue and vice characters are essentially memory images operating in mnemonic *loci*.

The second question was, “Why, when the invention of printing seemed to have made the great Gothic artificial memories of the Middle Ages no longer necessary, was there this recrudescence of the interest in the art of memory in the... Renaissance...?” (Ibid). In seeking the answer, Yates examines in detail the work of three hermetic philosophers of the period, Giulio Camillo (c. 1480-1544), Giordano Bruno (c. 1548-1600) and Robert Fludd (1574-1637). Of these three it is Camillo and Fludd that particularly concern us here because they were the creators of the mnemonic devices known as Memory Theatres. Though these were not actual theatres it is the intention of this essay to suggest that the construct is more than an image of memory processes and memory enhancement, but a conception of theatre itself.

Camillo’s Theatre was unique in that it was a physical structure made of wood and big enough to accommodate two people. It was, according to the account of Viglius Zuichemus who saw it in Venice, marked with images and full of little boxes, and as Viglius describes it, embodied Camillo’s conception of the mind:

He pretends that all things that the human mind can conceive and which we cannot see with the corporeal eye, after being collected together by diligent meditation may be expressed by certain corporeal signs in such a way that the beholder may at once perceive with his eyes everything that is otherwise hidden in the depths of the human mind. And it is because of this corporeal looking that he calls it a theatre. (Quoted in YAM, 131-2)

This reminds us immediately of the etymology of the word ‘theatre’, which derives from the Greek *theatron* – a place for looking at something, with that something implicitly being live and active. However, as Yates shows, the normal configuration of stage and auditorium is reversed in Camillo’s theatre, with the ‘audience’ – i.e. the person whose mind is being exercised – standing on the stage and the “corporeal signs” occupying the seats of what looks like a Roman theatre. What the theatre essentially does is to present a scheme wherein the entire universe can be placed in the mind, and its physical and mystical particulars accessed through memorized locations. It is worth quoting Yates’ summary of Camillo’s vision. It represents, she says,

A new Renaissance plan of the psyche... Medieval man was allowed to use his low faculty of imagination to form corporeal similitudes to help his memory; it was a concession to his weakness. Renaissance Hermetic man believes that he has divine powers; he can form a magic memory through which he grasps the world, reflecting the divine macrocosm in the microcosm of his divine *mens*. The magic of celestial proportion flows from his world memory into the magical words of his oratory and poetry, into the perfect proportions of his art and architecture. (YAM, 172)

Such an exalted conception of the power of memory as a space in which universal truths can be explored and comprehended plays directly into the micro- and macro-cosmic implications of the Elizabethan “wooden O”, wherein can be contained not only “the vasty fields of France” as in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, but the whole celestial order, whose all-encompassing presence was represented by the emblem of the zodiac painted on the canopy above the inner stage of the Globe Theatre, which was known as “the Heavens.”

Hamlet calls his mind a “distracted globe” in which “memory holds a seat”, and it has been suggested by at least one scholar that *Hamlet* the play is a “complex memory system”, full of memory objects like Yorick’s skull, and macro- and micro-cosmic images like the “nutshell” of physical limitations and the “infinite space” of the imagination (see RDK, 153, and the chapter “Bruno and Shakespeare: Hamlet” *passim*).

Another notable Renaissance Theatre Memory system was that of the English philosopher and hermetic scholar Robert Fludd. In his *History of the Two Worlds* (1619), Fludd describes how he based his system on the configurations of actual London public theatres of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, particularly the Globe Theatre. As Frances Yates shows, he was familiar with the mechanics of how theatres worked and with the practical elements of theatrical production, so when he called his memory buildings ‘theatres’ he was not simply making use of a conceptual image. That said, it is important to note, as Yates does, that by ‘theatre’ Fludd actually means a stage, not a stage plus auditorium. Fludd explains in his *History* that artificial memory consists of two types, the *ars rotunda* or ‘round art’ and the *ars quadrata* or ‘square art.’ The first is that of “the ethereal part of the world,” of ideas, “which are forms separated from corporeal things”, and turned into what Yates calls talismanic images, and the second is that of corporeal images – people, animals, inanimate objects (see YAM, 327, 329). The locational paradigm of this memory system, Fludd insists, must be drawn from a real theatre, and lest there be any doubt that he is thinking in dramatic terms he introduces his memory theatre with these words:

I call a theatre (a place in which) all actions of words, of sentences, of particulars of a speech or of subjects are shown, as in a public theatre in which comedies and tragedies are acted. (*History*, quoted in YAM, 331)

Shakespeare’s “wooden O” – the Globe Theatre – which consisted (in both its 1599 and 1614 incarnations) of a hexagonal exterior, a round interior and a square stage, thus becomes itself an image of Fludd’s memory system, with the ‘square art’ being able to contain the cosmic dimensions of the ‘round art’.

In a later book, *Theatre of the World* (1969), Yates explores in more detail the interconnectedness between such memory systems as Fludd’s and the actual Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres, and the world view that they embodied. The Renaissance concept of *theatrum mundi* was the seminal image behind the theatre

of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and for this reason it had enormous moral significance. Though not didactic in the manner of the medieval morality plays, the works of the Elizabethan theatre were not a break from, but a continuation of the moral resonances of those earlier dramas into cosmic rather than theological or liturgical realms. In her chapter “The Theatre as Moral Emblem”, Yates quotes the Jacobean dramatist and poet Thomas Heywood, who, in his *Apology for Actors* (1612) makes the through-line very clear:

Then our play's begun
 When we are borne, and to the world first enter,
 And all find exits when their parts are done.
 If then the world a theatre present,
 As by its roundness it appears most fit,
 Built with starre galleries of hie ascent,
 In which Jehove doth as spectator sit,
 And chief determiner to applaud the best,
 And their indeavours crowne with more than merit;
 But by their evill actions doomes the rest
 To end discrac't, whilst others praise inherit;
 He that denyes then theatres should be,
 He may as well deny a world to me.

(Quoted in YTW, 164-5)

With the theatre holding such centrality in English moral, cultural and imaginative life, the significance of Fludd adopting actual theatrical space for the deployment of his memory system is very great. Yates concludes that in the English Renaissance “the ancient theatre could be moralized and transformed into a building which was not only a Theatre of the World in the cosmic sense, but also in a sense compatible with Christianity and its teachings” (YTW, 168). The cultivation of memory as a moral imperative is there in the earliest writings on the subject; it is taken over and intensified by medieval mnemotechnicians; and in its humanist form it is there in the hermetic philosophers of the Italian and English Renaissance. Common to all these systems is the conception of artificial memory as locational and spatial, and implicit in them (and in Fludd's case explicitly) is the sense that what happens in these spaces is most effective when it is dramatic. This suggests that the equation can work both ways: that if memory can be thus imaged theatrically, theatre itself can be conceived of as a memory system, and that when it is so conceived it has moral purpose akin to that which necessitates the cultivation of *ars memoriae*.

III

The square platform stages of the Elizabethan and Jacobean public theatres, with their five entrances at stage level and a balcony above, did not lend themselves to playwrights and actors following literally Hamlet's injunction to the

players to “hold the mirror up to nature”. Hamlet’s mirror was not a realistic or illusionistic one, but one that operated metaphysically. With no obligation to “reproducing” life the Elizabethan-Jacobean stage was a singular example of a heterotopic space, a counter-site in which the cosmic drama of man’s life could be represented, contested and inverted.

After the demise of the great public theatres the cosmic frame diminishes and disappears.

The artificiality and illusionism of Inigo Jones’ court masques and some of the productions in the private theatres in the Jacobean age signal a narrowing of focus and a reduction in the resonance of theatre. When the theatres were reopened in 1660 with the restoration of the monarchy the dominant preoccupation was comedy of manners, with highly artificial tragedies not far behind. For over 200 years the image of theatre as a memory space disappears, being replaced in many and varied forms by the theatre of illusion, mannerism, naturalism and realism, more often than not confined behind the proscenium arch of a picture stage. In a real sense the pictorial, illusionistic, fourth wall stage is the opposite of a memory stage because it is concerned with the reproduction of reality outside the mind, rather than making tangible the inner life and workings of the mind itself.

One of the first theorists to place theatre back in the mind was Edward Gordon Craig, who, in “The Actor and the Über-Marionette” (1907) asserted that to “restore its art” theatre needed to banish “impersonation” and “the idea of reproducing Nature” (OAT, 75). For him personally the creative inspiration needed to do this came

...from that mysterious, joyous, and superbly complete life which is called Death - that life of shadow and of unknown shapes, where all cannot be blackness and fog as is supposed, but vivid colour, vivid light, sharp-cut form; and which one finds peopled with strange, fierce and solemn figures, pretty figures and calm figures, and those figures impelled to some wondrous harmony of movement – all this is something more than a mere matter of fact. (Ibid, 74)

With this release from any “reproductive” necessity theatre would, Craig believed, reconnect with its ancient spiritual origins. At the conclusion of his essay he writes:

I pray earnestly for the return of the image – the über-marionette to the Theatre; and when he comes again... it will be possible for the people to return to their ancient joy in ceremonies – once more will Creation be celebrated – homage rendered to existence – and divine and happy intercession made to Death. (Ibid, 94)

Though Craig does not speak of memory specifically, his vision of theatre here suggests a memory structure: if theatre in this ideal form articulates “the complete life which is called Death”; if, in other words, it resurrects that which is

already past, then it is a location in which memory images –shaped by the artist - can now acquire a life of their own, not circumscribed by any requirement to reproduce an actual past, or to be “real” or “natural”. The dramatic performance becomes the endlessly re-enacted ritual of death and resurrection: we enter the theatre space, we witness the ceremony that celebrates creation and intercedes with Death on our behalf, and we are renewed, to die again, and again return to be renewed.

We participate in such a process when we witness the infinitely recurring process that is Beckett’s *Endgame*. It may be hard to think of this play as a “joyous” celebration, replete with Craig’s “wondrous harmony” or “vivid colour”, but in the sense in which we have discussed above it *is* a celebration, particularly if we take the word in its original Latin meaning of “to honour by assembling.” The witnesses to Hamm and Clov’s “life” in the ante-Purgatory that is their room watch a piece of memory theatre in one of its clearest forms. Their play is a cyclic ritual in which fragments of the past are endlessly recounted and reconstituted, in which memory images are rearranged and relocated, and - if, as many critics interpret it, the room of the play is the mind itself – a ritual in which the two main characters are themselves memory images.

This sense of mnemonic ritualized engagement with Death is explored by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980), a book of reflections on photography in which he sets up an important triangular relationship between Death, theatre and photography. Barthes argues that the art of photography is not akin to painting but to theatre, that its origins are in *camera obscura*, dioramas and animated light shows. But the connection goes deeper:

...if Photography seems to me closer to the Theatre, it is by way of a singular intermediary... Death. We know the original relation of the theatre and the cult of the Dead: the first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the Dead: to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead...; however “lifelike” we strive to make it (and this frenzy to be lifelike can only be our mythic denial of an apprehension of death), Photography is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of Tableau Vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead. (CL, 31-32)

Just as Craig maintained that it was futile for the art of the theatre to reproduce life, to “pretend”, as he put it, so Barthes decries the confusion between “the Real and the Live” that characterizes our common perception of the photograph: “by attesting that the object has been real”, Barthes writes, “the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past (“this-has-been”), the photograph suggests that it is already dead” (Ibid, 79). Not surprisingly a few pages later he remarks that “Photography has something to do with resurrection” (Ibid, 82). He does not, however, equate the impact of photography with that of theatre, and he makes this significant distinction:

... the dead theatre of Death, the foreclosure of the Tragic, excludes all purification, all catharsis. I may well worship an Image, a Painting, a Statue, but a photograph? I cannot place it in a ritual... unless, somehow, I avoid looking at it... (Ibid, 90)

Barthes' "dead theatre of Death" brings us of course to Tadeusz Kantor and his Theatre of Death. In an important manifesto of 1988 called "Memory", Kantor defines the central triangulation of death, memory and space. After declaring that he gradually discovered that "THEATRE was the right place for" memory and that "THE STAGE/became its/A L T A R !" he goes on to quote from a commentary he made on his memory play *Wielopole, Wielopole*:

It is difficult to define the spatial dimension of memory.
Here is a room of my childhood,
that I keep reconstructing again and again
and that keeps dying again and again
with all its inhabitants.
Its inhabitants are the members of my family.
They continuously repeat all their movements and activities
as if they were recorded on a film negative shown interminably...

These *D E A D F A Ç A D E S*
come to life, become real and important,
through this stubborn *R E P E T I T I O N* of actions...
Maybe this pulsating rhythm...
Is an inherent part of *M E M O R Y*... [sic]

My "DISCOVERY" (made already in *The Dead Class*)
introduces new psychological elements into stage acting
and a new type of "SPACE," a nonphysical space.
The *CONDITION OF DEATH* – of the *DEAD* –
[was] *RECREATED IN THE LIVING*...

They are dead but at the same time
alive...
Pulled out of a three-dimensional,
surprisingly flat
practice of life...
They lose their life's functions...
To become *E T E R N A L* ...
They become a *W O R K O F A R T* .
(TKM, 157-9)

Michal Kobialka usefully summarizes the significance of these statements for the purposes of our enquiry when he writes that in the "Theatre of Death" manifesto (1975) Kantor "articulated his desire to abandon a theatre grounded in

physical reality for a theatre of the mind”, and that this “space of the past, which existed dead in memory” provided an opportunity to enter another dimension in which the Self encountered its double, the Other (KQO, 325). What Kantor articulated in his writings and particularly in the four works that incarnated the death/memory/space configuration – *The Dead Class* (1975) *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980), *Let the Artists Die* (1985), and *I Shall Never Return* (1988) – is a logical outcome of all those conceptions of theatre with which we have been dealing. The morality plays were not concerned with physical reality but with the mind of the faithful Christian, and later with the right mind of the secular ruler or the secular citizen leading to right conduct. Their impact was predominantly through the activation of memory images. The Elizabethan theatre which grew out of them was concerned with physical reality, but with these major differences: its context was cosmic, and its elements were not realistically reproduced but embodied on a square platform whereon the mind could through poetic and emblematic images “entertain conjecture”, as the Chorus puts it in *Henry V*. As the theatre subsequently moved through pictorial artifice and thence to psychological realism its space was not “of the mind”, but of physical actuality, however variously conceived. But early in the 20th century, with artists and theorists like Craig, the theatre of image and memory is reactivated and reinvented, and continues vibrantly into the present day.

IV

It seems particularly vibrant in the work of Romanian and Hungarian directors over the last decade or so, and by way of conclusion (and of opening the door to another essay), I would like to cite a particular example of the contemporary presence of this theatre of memory-image. During the course of several visits to Transylvania over the last three or four years I have witnessed extraordinary manifestations of it in Romanian and Hungarian national theatre productions. They include Mihai Maniuciu’s *Woyzeck*, Tompa Gábor’s staging of Visky András’ *Long Friday*, Andrei Șerban’s *Uncle Vanya* (staged in a configuration that evokes Camillo’s memory theatre), Silviu Purcărete’s *Faust*, and Dragoș Galgoțiu’s production of Thomas Bernhard’s *The Hunting Party*. It is this last I would like to discuss, in part because of its obvious debt to Kantor.

The Hunting Party (which dates from 1974) is in essence a Kantorian memory play, and its space – the hunting lodge – is a space of the mind, in which memory, image, repetitive speech and action, disease, disfigurement and encroaching death are brought to play in grotesque and mechanized ritual. It is winter and the hunting lodge is located in a forest that is dying of infestation by a bark beetle. Inside the lodge are operetta-like personages out of Austria-Hungary’s imperial past: a Prince and Princess almost devoid of life, scheming ministers, a maimed and dying General with a wife who is frozen into endlessly repeated card-games and compulsive talk that can only delay the onset of death. Also present is an ‘outsider’, a writer who articulates the existential death-consciousness of the play:

When we look at a person
no matter who
we see a dying person...
We are condemned
to immobility
we are dead
everything is dead
everything in us is dead
(THP, 118)

The General puts this into its theatrical context: “Our writer/writes a comedy/and all of us sitting here/appear in his comedy,” and then makes the theatre of the mind explicit: “You see he scribbles/all over the walls of his mind/all over/a mind covered with writing” (Ibid, 127). In this sense the characters themselves are phantoms, dead people existing only in the hunting lodge of the writer’s mind. The echoes of *Endgame* are clear: the hunting lodge and Beckett’s room with two windows are both skulls, memory spaces, outside which the world is dead or dying, and inside which the characters are mental images frozen in time and locked in repetitive rituals.

Dragoş Galgoţiu’s recent production at the Hungarian National Theatre in Cluj actualized these elements with great power and imaginativeness. From Bernhard’s spare, almost non-dramatic text he created an elaborately ritualized performance characterized by the interplay of iconic images: marionette ministers, a Prince and Princess operating like wind-up toys, the General’s Wife and her double despairingly re-incarnating Klimt’s and Schiele’s hauntedly erotic women, and most or all of these at one time or other either photographically arrested in suspended images or obsessively repeating gestures, speech and actions. As if to throw these elements into sharper relief Galgoţiu introduced a relationship not existing in the text, an unrequited love of Anna, the cook for Asamer the woodcutter. Played ‘naturalistically’ this affair was all the more poignant for being not only set apart from the stylized dance of death of the other characters, but destroyed by it.

Bernhard’s dramaturgy, Gitta Honegger writes, “is deeply rooted in a tradition which has been drained of its original life and serves now only as a... diversion from the overpowering obsession with decay and death.” His theatricality is “intentionally frozen, mechanical, a ‘reconstructed’ one” (TBI, 97). The Hungarian theatre production notably articulated this dramaturgy, and in a conversation with Visky András reproduced in the program Galgoţiu not only confirms it but also acknowledges his debt to Kantor.

Galgoţiu is just one of several directors currently working in Hungary and Romania whose productions sustain and reinvent the heterotopic theatre of the mind that is at the heart of the dramatic form. Mihai Maniuţiu’s *Woyzeck*, for example, used the backstage space of the Hungarian National Theatre in Cluj and transformed it into

a space/memory/death location, and suggested at the end that the militaristic and mechanized torment that Woyzeck endured would be repeated *ad infinitum*. The degrading and humiliating rituals, and the images – both human and mannequin – took Büchner’s ur-Expressionist play and made it a play of mind and memory. Tompa Gábor’s production of Visky András’ *Long Friday* used the same space to similar effect. The current vitality of theatre in this part of Europe has much to do with the work of its playwrights, directors, actors and designers restoring the central equation of space and memory that underlies and sometimes triumphantly surfaces in western European dramaturgy from the Greeks to Kantor and beyond.

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EVERYDAY LIFE DRAMA: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT IN PROGRESS

MIRUNA RUNCAN, C. C. BURICEA-MLINARCIC

ABSTRACT. How do young people react and represent themselves in the actual post-communist society? What kind of images do they have about the recent past, especially related to the socialist era? The field of political and social representations of youngsters seems blurred, and the so called refutation of civic implication of the new generations became a stereotype of daily conversations between adults, school teachers and media anchors. In real life experiences, this stereotype suffers profound corrections: a strange interest for religious experiences tends to fill the gap of the political distaste; the urban groups of teenagers in Romania, especially the male ones, reveal a flexible universe of representations and a particular rhetoric of discourses, built on fragmentary quotations from popular culture, parody of media clichés and a lot of paradoxical sadness related to the recent past – including their intra familial experiences. But, this uncomfortable combination – “Kill Bill”-like – is not entirely escapist and does not exclude the accuracy of social observations.

The research and creation program *Everyday Life Drama* was born in 2004, as an interdisciplinary project with two immediate and even urgent dimensions: the first one was to re-link the playwriting practices to the social and political context, after more than one decade of aesthetical escapism and symbolical dominance of the theatre directing in Romania; the second one was the need of renewal in educational methods, by joining together the students from different programs, in a common effort of rebuilding a coherent perspective about their lives and their discourses. The program combines the workshops for video-journalism, creative writing in media and theatre, and photo-journalism, but also direct anthropological field research, in a research camp of ten days, each of the last five years. The importance of the program is that it offers each year a new bunch of artistic products: video-productions and documentaries, plays and film scenarios, written reports and interviews, photo exhibitions. The last two years, the program was awarded two consecutive grants for Cultural Intervention from the Ministry of Culture in Romania.

From 2007, the theme is “*X-Men & Women Generation*”. Next year, the interest of the team will focus on the ways recent history - and especially the communist period – was absorbed by the young people representations. The paper will resume some of the actual conclusions of this work in progress, and will present a small part of the plays and scenarios founded on recent history and everyday life stories...

Keywords: Theatre, History, Young people, Self-Representations

1. Tradition and History Representation in Romanian Theatre. Documenting the real life, past and present. The socialist communist heritage double bind.

A small part of Romanian theatre critics and historians – but also the majority of the foreign critics and journalists visiting Romania - reported, at the end of the 90th, that the beauty and the aesthetical value of the theatre performances is not balanced with a substantial playwriting. It was hardly possible to find Romanian contemporary plays on stage, especially plays based on profound reflections about recent past issues, or debating the dramatic changes the society was passing through. Even if some interesting and provocative plays were written and published in volumes and collections – as, for example, *Țara mea* by Radu Marcini¹ (*My Country/My Wound*) - no company and no important theatre directors were willing to stage them. Even if this strange resistance to the social and historical reflexive dimension of theatre has its own complex explanations, we have to admit now that the struggle and tensions between the “universalistic” theatrical performance, freely interpreting well known literary masterpieces (from Sophocles to Shakespeare and from Chekhov to Beckett) and a more actual and direct drama seems to continue till our days².

The resistance towards the social and historical problematic subjects on stage continues to be significant not only in the theatrical milieu – companies, managers, stage directors and theatre critics – but also characterizes the mentalities and dispositions of the usual audiences, especially late adult and old people who still use theatre as a social ritual, or as a leisure practice. The profound roots of this “cultural” and “museum like” attitude are stratified and tangled. In principle, we can split them in two large categories: first, *the aesthetical canon* of Romanian theatre, settled in the last three decades before communism failed; second, the *contextual allergy to realism and social-political implication*, shared both by artists and audiences in the late 80s, due to a prolonged exposition of artistic environment to the dogmatic and propagandistic discourses. None of these two categories of reasons benefits from some theoretical manifesto, nor would we dare to speak about a visible and assumed argumentation of the theatrical community in their favor. But, in fact, these roots of perception, representation and attitude about “*what theatre does, or has to do*” continually work and nourish, like some invisible pith, the entire establishment of mainstream – public financed - theatre in Romania. With some significant exceptions, most of them born after 1997 and belonging to younger writers, directors, actors and critics who expressed their intention to work freely in independent companies, or to accidentally co-produce with public ones, the implication of theatre in the social, political and militant life of communities is still perceived as a marginal oddity.

¹ Radu Macrinici, *Țara mea*, București, Editura UNITEXT, 1997

² See, on this topic, Miruna Runcan, *Modelul teatral românesc*, Bucuresti, editura UNITEXT, 2001, or, Marian Popescu, *Scenele teatrului românesc*, Bucuresti, Editura UNITEXT, 2005

The resistance – aesthetically founded – to the debate and reflection of our own personal and collective history, as much as the resistance to the direct response to the everyday life provocative issues, has several historical premises. The public institution of theatre, financed by the centralist state, suffered a slow and continuous process of modernization in the last century, and the communist era was considered by the majority of the members of artistic communities, if not benefic for the freedom of expression, at least comfortable. Even in the inter-bellum period, the model of public “repertoire” theatrical institution had not to confront a consistent competition from alternative forms of theatrical discourses, like vanguard companies, independent theatre groups, or political cabaret. After the Second World War, the communist nationalization and the harsh ideological control and censorship made all alternative movement impossible. In the crucial moment 1957³, a new generation of stage directors (such as Liviu Ciulei, Lucian Giurchescu, Sorana Coroama, Horea Popescu and many others) manages to impose itself in the context of a large theoretical and professional debate, run by the *Contemporanul Cultural Magazine* and by the new reborn monthly *Theatre Review*. Afterwards, the theatre performance aesthetics release itself, step by step, from the “socialist realism” dogmatic rules, but also from any obligation of militant implication into the social-political life, and thus manages to protect the theatrical communication from the ideological and propagandistic aggression. The dominance - or even the hegemony – of the stage director’s power over the performance, combined with a more and more sparkling prestige of the “cultural” and “universalistic” value of theatre into the public opinion, produces a sort of consensus about the functions of theatre itself. More and more, the show is not perceived as a public form of usual entertainment, nor as a public arena of debate, but as an escapist shelter, where both artists and spectators can exercise their small but substantial part of freedom by – what was called then, and it is called till now - “cultural resistance”. In this process, the theatrical discourses became more and more abstract, allegoric, inter-textual –very much similar to academic essays of philosophical, metaphorical literature: basically, lyric. The super-ego of the stage director - seen as the one and only master of the theatrical experience -, and the super-reality of the stage artificial universe, melt together in huge, complex and expensive productions, with captive spectators inside.

What the 60s founders intended to be a normal and healthy process of authentic theatrical freedom of expression, including the challenge of the spectator’s imagination and direct reflexivity, became after 1990 an *undeclared canon of aesthetical self sufficiency*. This phenomenon of “canonization” was widened by the enthusiastic reaction of the western audiences, confronted in the first years after the 1989 revolution with a perfectly exotic product, exported by the eastern countries: “*Le Theatre D’Art*”, as in its Russian definition from 1920, but with a concentrated century of cultural-artistic-philosophical experience inside. Acclaimed

³ See, on this topic, Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea si reatratizarea teatrului in Romania. 1920-1960*, Cluj, Editura EIKON, 2003

from Paris to London and from New York to Tokyo, the great Romanian performances labeled by directors like Silviu Purcarete, Alexandru Darie, Tompa Gabor, Mihai Maniutiu and others, returned home and became not only the foundations for Romanian theatrical brands, but also a kind of new-academism norm: “that’s what theatre does, that’s how theatre has to be”.

But, the second root of the lack of interest for historical and social reflection and intervention has, we have to say it clearly, a political dimension, even if it is a contextual one. Subconsciously, the theatrical establishment and its captive oldish audiences perceive all direct reflection to recent past – and to present even more – as leftist political gestures, fearing both propaganda and “commercialism”. That’s why we called this level of representation “an allergic reaction”. Paradoxically, in the same time, the theatrical mainstream community manifested a constant rejection of any liberal reform of theatre institutions; but it conserved also a constant self sufficient rightist attitude about theatre’s means, themes and functions. Recent history, past debates, actual controversy topics and issues were expelled till recently from Romanian stages as vulgar and suspect of the capital sin: politically leftist tendencies. In a society dominated for decades by former communists moguls dressed in Armani costumes, the mainstream theatre people and their usual conservative audiences are ashamed to question social structures and political developments, acting like a fashionable undeclared Tory club, where prestige and aristocratic fame is founded on theatre products box-office on the western festivals market.

2. Arguments and themes for a change in attitude and in methods. The theatrical education as re-linking research to creation.

At this point, is really important to mention that the mutation of the mentalities and representations in terms of “what theatre does and has to do” begun after 1997, pointed out by some critics and playwrights, such as Marian Popescu, Alina Nelega, Radu Macrinici, Miruna Runcan and others. But two factors contributed also to this shift: in the artistic environment, the completely different orientation of the new generation of film directors, protected and encouraged by Lucian Pintilie (first, Nae Caranfil, then Cristian Mungiu, Cristi Puiu, Radu Muntean, to cite just the few internationally known now). Their productions stated firmly a direct social implication, and also an assumed critical perspective on the Romanian past, especially on communist era and its consequences. On the other hand, the mutation on mentalities, attitudes and theatrical practices become really consistent and fruitful only when a new generation of audiences –not marked by the old canon, raised and educated in freedom - grew up. Of course, it is futile to draw a clear cut between old and young audiences in theatre, without a sociological and psychological support of field researches and academic studies. Still, it seems obvious that new drama and new performing arts forms couldn’t be perceived as such and couldn’t become a substantial alternative without the younger audience’s needs and support.

Alexandru Dabija, maybe the only important stage director of the eighty's generation who directly participated at this change, declared once, in a press conference: *"I do not say that I dislike the metaphorical and allegorical style of theatre that me and my generation used to make. I like to see it, sometimes I even love it, but I cannot stage it anymore"*. But, maybe more eloquent seems to be the apparition of a new theoretical concept, born simultaneously in the public works and essays of a playwright and of a stage director, Alina Nelega and Radu Alexandru Nica⁴: the so called *"de-theatricalisation"*. The concept is invented in opposition with the *"theatricalisation"* of theatre, a term used by the press debate on theatre directing from 1957, documented in a book of theatre history published in 2003⁵. Alina Nelega, a constant fighter for new playwriting formulas and a stubborn constructor of debate platforms on alternative theatrical expression, uses the concept as a weapon: theatre has to re-link with real life, has to suffer a nearly ascetic process of poverty on its imagery, by turning back to the simple story foundation, to human direct experiences and to the consistent depth of the spoken word. It is exactly what their most known recent plays – as *Hess (2005)*, or *Amalia takes a deep breath (2006)* – do, reinterpreting social experiences from personal historical bases. On the other hand, Radu Alexandru Nica, whose interest for new plays was proved by a series of well received performances, refers to *"de-theatricalisation"* as to an instrument to produce a fresh relationship between the performance and its audiences, a renewed syncretistic dimension of perception, founded both by the urgency of problematic content and by the almost cinematic dynamic of *"editing"* the staging processes. That's why, for example, one of his most acclaimed productions, *The Ballroom* (scenario by Mihaela Michailov, 2007), based on the Ettore Scolla's idea of a space that contains an imaginary life of its own, resuming collective and personal historical experiences, synthesizes in a non-verbal show, whose fragmentary composition and dramatic personal loading becomes, on music and dance grounds, an epopee re-interpreting the history of a Transylvanian town, with maximal emotional effect.

Even if the two artists seem to have different angles in putting a meaning into the *"de-theatricalisation"* concept, one thing is clear: a new, alternative perspective made room, the last decade, opposing to the allegorical canon of mainstream theatre a strongly consistent effort of rewriting, and reinterpreting on stage, social and historical problems and issues, for fresh audiences interested in a more direct (as Habermas would say) *"communication actions"*⁶. But such a shift of direction in alternative theatre forms and formulas, supposes not only intuitions and talent, but also a change of perspective regarding the relationship between

⁴ Alina Nelega, 'Intoarcerea dramaturgului: resuscitarea tragicului si deteatralizarea teatrului', in *Observator cultural*, nr. 269, November 24, 2005, and Radu Alexandru Nica, 'Noul realism si deteatralizarea', in *Man.In.Fest*, nr.2, 2006

⁵ Miruna Runcan, *Teatralizarea si reteatralizarea teatrului in Romania. 1920-1960*, Cluj, Editura EIKON, 2003

⁶ Habermas, Jürgen, *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1*, NY/London, Beacon Press, 1985

history and everyday life, as much as between methods and techniques of social and inter-personal research. That's where the theatre educational (and academic research) system has to assist and serve. If we start by realizing the fact that each spectator and each theatre person is, first of all, a citizen of the post-industrial media society, the fact that we share the same social, political and communicational benefits and aggressions, the necessity of re-linking social research to theatrical and media experimentations becomes instantly not only clear, but also urgent.

This new philosophy of educational and academic research practices emerged simultaneously in Bucharest and Cluj, at the beginning of 2003. A small group of actual and former students in stage directing - from the Theatre University of Bucharest - founded, with the support of their professor Nicu Manda, a program meant to encourage the young playwrights to scan and document actual social-psychological issues. Entitled "*dramAcum*" (a words game between "*Drama*" and "*Now*") the program who still exists is, in the same time, a process of selection for new talents, by means of continuous creative writing workshops, and also a system of staging the plays in their final and improved forms. The initial team of young directors grew, and eventually started different other interventionist theatre programs, such as *Tanga Project*, or *The Offensive of Generosity*, meant to revitalize and help pauper communities, marginal groups or orphans by involving them in theatre performances built particularly in these goals. Meantime, some of their best theatrical accomplishments managed to travel and gained an international recognition, such as *Stop the Tempo* or *MadyBaby.ro*, written and directed by Gianina Carbuariu, or *The Sunshine Play* by Peca Stefan, directed by Ana Margineanu, to cite only the most famous.

In Cluj, first under the umbrella of both an independent company, Teatrul Imposibil, and of the Faculty of Theatre and Television, another group of students and professors, who also previously founded the alternative performing arts magazine *ManInFest*, started in 2004 a research-creation program dedicated to young writers, journalists, stage directors and video artists, namely *The Everyday Life Drama*. Its goals: to re-link and educate the team working of media and theatre people on one hand, to document, report and process in artistic fictional scenarios the sensitive and dramatic stories of everyday life.

3. Everyday Life Drama Research and Creation Program. Hypothesis, field experiences and actual results.

The research and creation program *Everyday Life Drama* was born in 2004, as an interdisciplinary project with two immediate and even urgent dimensions: the first one was to re-link the playwriting practices to the social and political context, after more than one decade of aesthetical escapism and symbolical dominance of the theatre directing in Romania; the second one was the need of renewal in educational methods, by joining together the students from different programs, in a common effort of re-building a coherent perspective about their lives and their discourses. The program

combines the workshops for video-journalism, creative writing in media and theatre, and photo-journalism, but also direct anthropological field research, in a research camp of ten days, each of the last five years. The importance of the program is that it offers each year a new bunch of artistic products: video-productions and documentaries, plays and film scenarios, written reports and interviews, photo exhibitions. From 2007, the theme is “*X-Men & Women Generation*”. Next year, the interest of the team will focus on the ways recent history - and especially the communist period – was absorbed by the young people representations.

One of the leading sources of the program was the - now classical - work of the Canadian anthropologist and sociologist Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), and particularly the key concepts of “*social acting roles*”, “*symbolic interaction*” and “*dramaturgical analysis*”. But, in the same time, the elaboration of directions and methodologies were strongly inspired by the effectiveness of other Romanian group works, especially the Bucharest sociologists and anthropologists (coordinated by Professor Zoltan Rostas and his assistant Sorin Stoica) who documented by means of interviews some recent history topics like the Second World War, the dramatic passing from democracy to communism in the fifties, the condition of women in communism era. Also, a great impulse was given to us by the anthropological journalists group coordinated by Professor Ruxandra Ceserean, who published several volumes of interviews and reports dedicated to Romanian resistance to communism, or to every day life rituals, behavior, or marginal communities in Cluj.

But, to be honest, the most important model of research we had in mind was an older one, and – in a way – it represented for us the most precious tradition we had to, modestly, continue: that is the sociological field researches that Dimitrie Gusti and his team conducted between 1935-1938 in the Arges and Valcea Counties, for documenting the economical, institutional status, family systems and ethnographic production of countryside’s people. This monumental and courageous collective work on discovery and archive constitutes till now one of the most brilliant examples of dedication and intervention in the social, anthropological and artistic fields.

First of all, our group focused on its three goals: to reconfigure the relations between the field research and the experimental creation of artistic personal projects, to find and document sensitive and urgent social phenomena and sensitive issues by collecting personal stories, to transform all this material in convincing and emotionally powerful cultural products. If possible, we hoped the products to be aesthetically fresh and well done.

Moreover, we had to build a methodology in progress, combining teambuilding sessions, workshops and trainings for field research, for creative writing in media and theatre, and for rewriting the scenarios in inter-personal relationship writer-director, in order to see them staged. Working together and developing individual potential is a hard process, but it worth to be done, especially when one starts from a shared idea and focuses one’s energies on a generous and creative experience.

Last but not least, the group had to find and agree on a paradigmatic theme of the research, capable to coagulate the interests of each member. The first stage – between 2004 and 2006 – we choused to focus on one of the most dramatic and traumatic problems Romania confronts our days: the working migration and its effects on the home-staying individuals involved, on families and communities. It was then considered that more than two million Romanian people were – legally or illegally – working abroad. They are, most probably, more today.

We started this three years long journey with a research camp in a small village in the northern county of Maramures, Baiut, where a three centuries old mine was to be closed. We have to admit now the beginnings were really modest: the team was small, inexperienced, without any technical and financial support; thus, we obtained no significant results, except a bunch of written interviews, reports and non fictional stories. The next year, we choused a town in the same county, Baia Mare. The group grew, coagulate and begun to forge an improved methodology, developing teambuilding and trust exercises, and extending the creative writing workshops. We had our first consistent results in playwriting, with two plays, one of them becoming the scenario for an experimental short fiction movie. Then, we moved in our third year to south, again in a mining county, settling a partnership with the local theatre of Targu Jiu. We managed to produce our first small documentaries, video reports and interviews, but also to publish, in the ManInFest special issue, four plays inspired by the personal stories the interviews revealed.

The second stage of the program produced a significant change both in choosing the new theme and also in the complexity of both methods and techniques. For this new level, we managed to receive a small but important support from the University, and we were awarded a grant from the Ministry of Culture. The new and ambitious theme was - what we called – *The X-men & Women Generation*, trying to scan and analyze the profound mutations produced by the technological developments in psychology, behavior and interpersonal communication of teenagers and young people, as much as their universe of representations. The fourth edition of the Everyday Life Drama Camp took place once more in Targu Jiu, but was largely preceded, a couple of month before, by workshop in focus group conducting, different types of interviewing, story selection and dramaturgical development of conflict situations and characters. The resulting material, in media and drama, were visibly more consistent and aesthetically valid. This new methodology was continued and improved at the fifth edition, now taking place in Targu Mures, in partnership with an independent theatre company, *Teatrul 74* and with the Theatre Arts University of Targu Mures. A new and generous location, an extended team of 22 students, 2 journalists and 3 professors, as much as a better video equipment offered, probably, the ground for an unexpected evolution of the results: six video reports, documentaries and portraits, a large section of written journalism and 18 fresh and stylistic different new plays and scenarios, all published in only a month after the camp, in a 114 pages special issue of *ManInFest*.

How do young people react and represent themselves in the actual post-communist society? What kind of images do they have about the recent past, especially related to the socialist era? The field of political and social representations of youngsters seems blurred, and the so called “refuse of civic implication” of the new generations became a stereotype of daily conversations between adults, school teachers and media anchors. In real life experiences, this stereotype suffers profound corrections: a strange interest for religious experiences tends to fill the gap of the political distaste; the urban groups of teenagers in Romania, especially the male ones, reveal a flexible universe of representations and a particular rhetoric of discourses, built on fragmentary quotations from popular culture, parody of media clichés and a lot of paradoxical sadness related to the recent past – including their intra familial experiences. But, this uncomfortable combination – “Kill Bill”-like – is not entirely escapist and does not exclude the accuracy of social observations.

What our interviews, focus groups and story collecting process really did, in two successive editions was, first of all, to modify in a discreet but determined way, our first hypothesis. For example, we expected girls and young women to communicate more freely and more enthusiastically than young men. On the contrary, we hardly found young women willing to freely speak about themselves, about their real life, problems or even tastes. On this matter, Targu Jiu, from the southern side of the country, seemed to be more generous than Targu Mures, from Transylvania. It is, probably, a symptom for the regional differences in customs and education-family systems.

On the other hand, we presumed that young generation suffers from a drastic reduction of vocabulary and verbal communicative skills, due to the continuous and uncontrolled exposure to the computer and internet practices and formats. We were again wrong in some extent, because the field situation proved itself more nuanced and complex. First, we discovered in Targu Mures that teenagers between 14-17 years old were no more so interested in spending hours and hours at their computer desks, but were surprisingly active and involved in direct inter-personal or group pastime.

More, we were charmed by their capacity to combine funny group slang, melting cultural experiences, musical taste and practices, quotations and hints from cartoons, comic books or sports, in some kind of strange and parodist manner.

It doesn't mean we didn't find real and emotionally involving subjects, situations or stories. But the stories do not become theatre or film scenarios by a simple process of translation. Some of the plays of this year's crop were based on media news involving young people or family dramatic crises, some of them even gathered from the morning papers. But news combines one with another, melt in personal and cultural experiences, the characters can mix and stratify; the dramatic situations create a complex network of significance. That's how, let's say, *Veronica does not decide*, by Andreea Chindris and Alexandra Bacanu (initially inspired by the Tanacu convent's scandal) is born. In the same way, Georgiana Truța wrote *On the balcony*, or Mihai Gadalean wrote *About Monsters, Mothers and Men*, to mention but a few.

The style, the structure, the ideology or the meaning of each play is different and depend on the authors' imagination, talent and aesthetical preferences. What the program does is to provoke, to stimulate and to develop this skills, to encourage competition balanced by team spirit.

Are young people interested in recent history? When starting this new stage of our research, we used to be very skeptical on this matter. We proved again to be influenced by stereotypes. Young people are not only our field subjects, but also the members of our team. Some of our interviews subjects, as much as some of our colleagues, are really interested not only on historical debate, but also on ideological criticism, as *On the house*, by Mihai Pedestru proves. The excellent reactions this play obtained, even during the camp's workshops and readings, determined the whole team to debate the possibility of using recent past as theme for our next step. Next year, we will all celebrate twenty years from the Berlin Wall fall. How do teens and young people, born after 1990, see themselves in this context? What do they know about? What family stories influenced their perceptions and judgments? How do they feel their lives were influenced by communism, if they still are? How personal past combined with the historical phenomena? How do they integrate the cultural experiences of their parents?

Using this questions as a starting point, the coordinators of the program choused to make an example, an offered to the group a new play dedicated to the parents/children relationship and different perspectives about 1989: *Play List*⁷. Then, we unanimously agreed that young peoples representations on recent past will become our next theme of research. We want to document and to work on it, the year to come.

⁷ C. C. Buricea-Mlinarcic, 'Play List', in *Man. In. Fest* / Special Issue, October 2008

DEGRÉS DE LA REPRÉSENTATION ESTHÉTIQUE: PEINTURE, LITTÉRATURE, CINÉMA

IOAN POP-CURȘEU

ABSTRACT. The matter of this article – originally that of a seminar given at the University of Geneva in 2004-2005, and soon the subject of a book – intends to explore different degrees and manners of representation. I distinguished three degrees of representation, according to the difficulties which the artist finds in working with the specific materials (colours, words etc.): the representation of reality, of feelings, of vacuity. Then, I compared painting and literature: the first one is functioning easier at each level, but the second one has problems even in representing exterior reality through words and sentences. Things become more complicated when it comes to “copying” feelings or speaking about vacuity: the demonstration takes into account various examples: mystical texts of the Antiquity and of the Middle Ages, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Flaubert, Beckett. In the last part of the article, I speak of cinema (Tarkovski, *Andrei Rubliov*), which combines manners of representation coming from painting and from literature: the profound nature of the representational phenomenon is changing on the screen.

Le problème de la représentation m’a toujours semblé capital dans les arts, et tout particulièrement en littérature (art «abstrait» qui met en jeu un grand complexe de systèmes sémiotiques différents). Bien entendu, la panoplie d’objets représentés peut être extrêmement vaste, depuis les plus simples, banals, figés dans leur univocité, objets que les arts visuels sont capables – par exemple – de «copier»: qu’on se figure un peintre flamand du 17^{ème} siècle (Jan Bruegel, Pieter Claesz, Willem Kalf, Frans Snyders), ou bien Jean-Baptiste Chardin, installé devant le chevalet, en train de peindre une nature morte. L’effort, si l’on simplifie énormément les choses, n’est pas ample: le peintre n’a autre chose à faire qu’à se concentrer sur les formes et à reproduire fidèlement la couleur de la citrouille, des noix, des raisins et des pommes, à donner l’illusion de la tridimensionnalité par la mise en perspective, et tout l’épineux problème de la représentation «parfaite» se trouve rapidement résolu. Diderot, dans ses écrits esthétiques, a d’ailleurs bien saisi l’essence de ce type de peinture. Grand admirateur de Chardin, Diderot cherche – dans les natures mortes de son contemporain – la véracité de la chose représentée et semble mesurer la valeur du tableau en fonction de la puissance à créer l’illusion de réalité: «Il y a au Salon plusieurs petits tableaux de Chardin; ils représentent presque tous des fruits avec les accessoires d’un repas. C’est la nature même. Les

objets sont hors de la toile et d'une vérité à tromper les yeux.»¹ Le peintre du 18^{ème} siècle a copié la «nature» avec une telle exactitude, que le fragment découpé pourrait s'inscrire de nouveau dans le monde d'où il provient: les yeux du spectateur sont «trompés» et il se prépare innocemment à mordre dans la pomme que l'artiste lui fait prendre pour un fruit vrai.

Si maintenant je me figure un écrivain réaliste ou vériste posté devant les mêmes objets que le peintre, je me rends compte qu'il rencontre beaucoup plus de difficultés dans sa tentative de faire croire aux lecteurs à l'illusion qu'il leur présente. Il est incapable – sauf talent extrême – de produire sur les gens qui lisent l'illusion sensorielle: ce n'est que très rarement que ceux-ci croient voir un légume ou désirent manger un fruit. Les mots sont approximatifs, fluides, et réveillent dans l'esprit du lecteur des échos que l'écrivain ne contrôle pas au moment où il rédige son texte. Le signifiant employé par l'écrivain recouvre chez le lecteur un univers de signifiés qui peut différer substantiellement de celui de l'écrivain. Un passage descriptif reste beaucoup plus vague que la représentation picturale imaginée plus haut, malgré les adjectifs relatifs aux couleurs employés à profusion: «Sur la vieille table en bois, parmi des noix fraîches à écorce encore humide, flanqué par deux grappes de raisins violacés, à côté de quelques pommes d'un rouge flamboyant, trônait une citrouille géante, à la peau vert sombre, striée de jaune. Sur cette surface ronde, on pouvait distinguer plusieurs proéminences semblables à des verrues, ce qui la faisait ressembler au visage d'un vieillard plus ou moins sage.»

Mais que se passe-t-il si l'on quitte le monde des objets pour celui des sensations, des sentiments, des états d'âme et des passions? Que se passe-t-il lorsqu'un artiste veut représenter l'amour, la haine, la fureur, l'amitié, le renoncement, la mélancolie, l'exaspération, le plaisir, l'énervement, la contemplation, la sérénité? Les arts plastiques (pour employer cette catégorie encore viable) ont ici aussi l'avantage d'un impact immédiat sur le récepteur, surtout lorsqu'ils misent sur des procédés expressionnistes. Je pense automatiquement, sans creuser dans les tréfonds de la mémoire, aux tableaux d'Edvard Munch. Rien ne traduit mieux la peur, visuellement parlant, que le tableau intitulé *Le Cri* (1893): l'expression du personnage est réduite à l'essentiel, à une gueule invraisemblablement ouverte et aux yeux béant vers une apparition évidemment terrifiante, bien que non figurée. De même, toutes les lignes bizarres du tableau contribuent à l'exacerbation du sentiment de peur éprouvé par le personnage asexué, ayant l'apparence jaunie d'une momie qui s'étire verticalement dans une crispation communiquée au paysage. On retrouve la même construction dans *L'Angoisse* (1894): les silhouettes serrées les unes dans les autres, la couleur terreuse des visages, les commissures des lèvres arquées vers le bas, les yeux brumeux, un ponton à peine suggéré, et le même type de fond fait de différentes nuances de rouge, jaune, violet, expriment beaucoup mieux l'inquiétude

¹ Denis Diderot, *Salon de 1763*, in *Diderot et l'art de Boucher à David*, Paris, Éditions de la Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1984, p. 150.

que n'importe quelles séries savantes de paroles, fussent-elles signées par Kierkegaard, Camus, Heidegger ou Sartre. Enfin, un dernier exemple: lorsque Munch, dans *La Séparation*, peint un homme en train d'arracher son cœur et une silhouette féminine qui s'éloigne, il réussit à créer une des plus prégnantes images du désespoir de toute la peinture occidentale.

J'aimerais m'arrêter à présent sur un écrivain qui essaie de représenter presque les mêmes sentiments que Munch, mais qui – bien qu'ayant beaucoup réfléchi sur les arts plastiques – est dépourvu de la ressource essentielle du symbolisme visuel:

Dans les caveaux d'insondable tristesse
Où le Destin m'a déjà relégué;
Où jamais n'entre un rayon rose et gai;
Où, seul avec la Nuit, maussade hôtesse,

Je suis comme un peintre qu'un Dieu moqueur
Condamne à peindre, hélas! sur les ténèbres;
Où, cuisinier aux appétits funèbres,
Je fais bouillir et je mange mon cœur,²

Dans les deux quatrains des *Ténèbres*, Baudelaire s'exerce à circonscrire l'«insondable tristesse» à laquelle le condamne le Destin. L'adjectif accolé à la «tristesse» semble souligner une impossibilité de la pénétrer, de la comprendre, de la dire: elle est «insondable», pareille en cela à la Nuit, allégorique et «maussade hôtesse» du sujet lyrique. Et pourtant, les analogies ne manquent pas, qui permettent de contourner l'insondabilité. Ainsi, la tristesse du poète est comparable («je suis comme») à la fureur d'un peintre qui serait «condamné» à peindre sur les ténèbres, lieux vague qui annihileraient toute tentative de donner forme et contour au monde, ou à la nausée du cannibale «héautontimorouménos», contraint à ingurgiter son propre cœur, à l'instar de l'amoureux de Munch.

Cependant, les sensations, les sentiments et les états d'âme, même lorsqu'ils paraissent inabordables et «insondables», relèvent d'une possibilité claire et nette de la représentation. La situation se complique pourtant si un artiste – qu'il soit peintre ou écrivain – a l'ambition de travailler à la limite extrême du représentable, là où il n'y a plus d'objets et de sentiments, mais seulement le néant, le rien, le vide ou... Dieu. En dehors de Dieu, les trois autres concepts de mon énumération aléatoire sont négatifs, d'une négativité irréductible, irrémédiable. Dans «le rien» et «le néant», on ne peut discerner aucun référent: ces mots sont des formes pures, des signifiants sans signifié, des vocables libres de toute contrainte, des points où la tension du langage – artistique ou non – est égale à zéro.

² Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, édition établie par Claude Pichois, Paris, Gallimard, «Bibliothèque de la Pléiade», 1993, vol. I, p. 38.

Alors, comment le néant, le rien, le vide ou... Dieu peuvent-ils être représentés dans la peinture, la sculpture, dans un texte littéraire ou dans une œuvre cinématographique? On sait que le néant, le rien, le vide ou... Dieu existent, quelque part, souvent on les conçoit comme la substance même de la vie, du cosmos, mais la question concerne très spécifiquement la manière dont l'œuvre d'art les appréhende. Le vide peut être très facilement traité dans la peinture, dans cet art d'une image unique, qui comprend ou non d'autres images insérées dans l'espace clairement déterminé par le cadre-limite. Et ce cadre, saturé d'une seule couleur, jaune, rouge, vert, ou plutôt blanc et noir, selon l'exemple de bon nombre d'abstractionnistes, pourrait recevoir un titre explicatif du genre *Vide + nom de la nuance*: ceci résoudrait dans une bonne mesure le problème de la représentation de l'irreprésentable. Je pense ici à Yves Klein, influencé par les idées occultistes des Rose-Croix et à ses monochromes: orange (1955), variés (1956), bleus ou dorés (le *monogold* de 1960). Ses monochromes bleus, nommés IKB (International Klein Blue), suites de recherches obsédantes sur une seule couleur particulière et symbolique, concrétisent pour le peintre l'expansion infinie de l'Univers sous le signe du vide.

Mais comment les mots peuvent-ils nous faire éprouver le vide, nous dissoudre dans le néant, ou sentir Dieu? Comment ces concepts abstraits, purement intellectuels je dirais, acquièrent-ils une réalité presque palpable dans les tissus complexes de signification que propose la littérature? Dans les lignes qui suivent, j'essaierai d'esquisser quelques réponses.

Au cours du temps, on a donné deux types de solution à ce problème de la représentation. Les textes religieux de l'Antiquité, en dehors du fait qu'ils mettent les bases des cultes à rendre aux diverses Divinités, essaient aussi de circonscrire l'essence des dieux dont ils parlent. Le *Rig-Veda*, dans un des hymnes les plus connus, après une liste infinie de diverses déités, Indra, Agni, Rudras, Aurore, Sarasvati, surprend le lecteur par l'affirmation qu'avant ces dieux importants il y a eu autre chose dans le cosmos, une matière inconnue, un magma, un mélange de choses inconnues d'où tous les dieux sont nés ultérieurement. Les noms de cette matière «insondable» s'annihilent réciproquement dans un jeu lexical familier au lecteur roumain par la transcription qu'en a donnée Eminescu dans *Épître I*: «Lanceput, pe când ființă nu era, nici neființă, / Pe când totul era lipsă de viață și voință / Când nu se-ascundea nimica, deși tot era ascuns... / Când pătruns de sine însuși odihnea cel nepătruns. / Fu prăpastie? Genune? Fu noian întins de apă? / N-a fost lume pricepută și nici minte s-o priceapă, / Căci era un întuneric ca o mare fără o rază. / Dar nici de văzut nu fuse și nici ochi care s-o vază. / Umbra celor nefăcute nu-ncepuse-a se desface, / Și în sine împăcată stăpânea eterna pace!...»³

³ Mihai Eminescu, *Scrisoarea I, Poezii tipărite în timpul vieții*, vol. I, Ediție critică îngrijită de Perpessicius, cu 50 de reproduceri după manuscrise, Bucurest, Fundația pentru literatură și artă «Regele Carol II», 1939, p. 132. L'édition de l'hymne védique retranscrit par Eminescu, *Rig-Véda*, traduit par A. Langlois, 2^{ème} édition, Paris, Maisonneuve et Cie, Libraires-Editeurs, «Chefs-d'œuvre littéraires de l'Inde, de la Perse, de l'Égypte et de la Chine», Bibliothèque orientale, 1872.

Si l'on passait d'Inde en Chine, on découvrirait une tentative similaire de circonscription du surnaturel. Bien sûr, la mythologie chinoise ancienne est pleine d'empereurs légendaires, de dragons, de sages, de *yin* et de *yang*, mais avec tout cela on se situe dans la sphère des réalités (des *realia*) aisément représentables, bien qu'imaginaires. Mais qu'y avait-il avant? Comme en Inde, il y avait quelque chose d'indistinct, impossible à percevoir par les sens et à concevoir par l'étroit esprit humain. Dans le *Tao-tö king*, un des livres «saints» du taoïsme, ce qui précède la naissance de l'univers n'est pas explicable; l'état pré-cosmogonique de l'univers est «sans nom, [il] représente l'origine de l'univers». Il faut pourtant nommer l'innommable, l'impalpable, insaisissable. Pour l'expliquer, un des poèmes rituels utilise le «il» impersonnel et donne une définition ouverte à toutes les interprétations, à toutes les (con-)figurations: «Il y avait quelque chose d'indéterminé avant la naissance de l'univers. Ce quelque chose est muet et vide. Il est indépendant et inaltérable. Il circule partout sans se lasser jamais. Il doit être la Mère de l'univers.» *Tao-tö King* affirme: «Ne sachant comment dénommer cela, je l'appelle le Tao.» Le «Tao» est partout, c'est lui – absence extrême – qui constitue le moteur de toute chose: «Trente rayons convergent au moyeu mais c'est le vide médian qui fait marcher le char. On façonne l'argile pour en faire des vases, mais c'est du vide interne que dépend leur usage. Une maison est percée de portes et de fenêtres, c'est encore le vide qui permet l'habitat. L'Être donne des possibilités, c'est par le non-être qu'on les utilise.»⁴ Or, ce «Tao» est à la fois la substance du cosmos, le vide («wu»), et la voie qui mène le sage à la connaissance de tout ce qui échappe aux sens, de tout ce qui se dérobe au langage, aux formes, à la représentation. Donc, pour le taoïsme, ce qui a existé avant les dieux, les êtres légendaires et les humains, ce n'est pas une Divinité suprême, mais l'essence ultime de cette Divinité-là: le vide. Isabelle Robinet donne une merveilleuse analyse du «wu» et de la «voie» que l'adepte taoïste doit suivre pour parvenir à l'illumination mystique:

Il y a un *wu*, un absolu indéterminable, qui ne peut être mis en regard du *you*, du «il y a quelque chose de déterminé», et qui subsiste à la fois comme origine, comme fondement et comme fin de toute chose à l'intérieur même des êtres particularisés, d'une part; et, d'autre part, un *wu* relatif, le blanc dans la peinture, le silence dans la parole, l'espace vide qui accueille, la limite des êtres qui leur permet d'être, qui n'est que l'image du *wu* absolu, la négation opposée à l'affirmation qui disparaît lors d'une affirmation contraire. Ce *wu*, corrélat du *you*, constitue avec celui-ci l'un des deux extrêmes qu'il faut écarter (ou tenir en même temps pour les neutraliser l'un par l'autre). Le ou plutôt les *wu* relatifs, le blanc, l'espace, apparaissent en contraposition aux *you*, les traits dans la peinture, les mots, ou les choses, qui les encadrent. Le *wu* originaire n'apparaît jamais. Les manifestations du Tao montrent qu'elles ne peuvent le rendre visible ni discernable, qu'elles sont frappées d'incapacité à tout dire et à ne rien dire de particulier.⁵

⁴ J'ai consulté le *Tao-tö King* dans une traduction Liou Kia-Hway dans *Le Taoïsme*, Paris, Le Grand Livre du mois, 1993. Voir aussi, dans le même volume la traduction de Benedykt Grynpas du *Vrai classique du vide parfait*, pendant pratique du *Tao-tö King*.

⁵ Isabelle Robinet, *Comprendre le Tao*, Paris, Albin Michel, «Spiritualités vivantes», 2002, p. 96.

Le *Rig-Veda* et le *Tao-tò King* instituent une descendance que je qualifierais comme tradition de la nomination. L'homme antique a l'intuition de la Divinité en tant que répandue partout dans le cosmos, donc en dernière analyse l'intuition du vide. Mais, soit qu'il ne peut pas accepter cette «réduction au vide», soit qu'il n'est pas capable de concevoir des réalités sans nom, l'Ancien s'efforce de nommer même la Divinité-vide, en créant des mots censés la contenir. Les seuls qui échappent à l'obsession de la nomination sont les bouddhistes: les textes canoniques primitifs (*Dhammapada*⁶), recommandent aux adeptes non pas de nommer le vide ou de le circonscrire rationnellement, mais de s'y plonger, de se laisser pénétrer, habiter par le vide. Ceci en vertu de la croyance bouddhiste que toute représentation est une illusion, tout comme l'objet que l'on veut représenter est une illusion à son tour. – Si je ne craignais pas les anachronismes, j'affirmerais que l'on trouve dans le bouddhisme la forme extrême de la théorie platonicienne de la représentation. – Dans les textes antiques, la contrepartie stylistique de l'obsession de la nomination est la répétition: par exemple, le *Tao-tò King* répète inlassablement, dans les contextes les plus divers, le terme clé «*Tao*». Le vide pré-cosmogonique devient de cette façon une présence permanente dans le texte, et c'est justement cette présence obsédante qui lui confère le statut d'entité représentable.

La généalogie des textes antiques – en ce qui concerne l'obsession de la nomination – est énorme, dans le temps comme dans l'espace, bien que la descendance soit plus souvent symbolique que directe. La grande majorité des mystiques médiévaux, qu'il s'agisse des *baouls* et des *krishnaïtes* dans l'hindouisme, des *soufis islamiques*, ou des chrétiens rhénans (surtout Ulrich de Strasbourg et Maître Eckhart⁷), font l'expérience de la Divinité comme vide, vide de substance, vide de passions, vide de qualités concrètes, etc. Cependant, ce genre d'expérience est toujours accompagné, comme chez les Anciens, d'un besoin constant de rendre réel ce vide, de le représenter, de le projeter dans la présence, de lui donner une certaine consistance. Selon Maître Eckhart, on ne peut rien dire de Dieu, pas même que Dieu est bon, à cause du fait que l'adjectif qu'on attribuerait à l'Être Suprême supposerait automatiquement un comparatif, relatif ou absolu: or, personne n'est meilleur que Dieu, pas même Dieu en personne, parce qu'Il reste toujours égal à lui-même et ne change pas en fonction de l'échelle des qualités sensibles imaginées par l'homme. On ne peut donc rien dire du «Néant divin»⁸, mais cette impossibilité de lui attribuer certaines qualités devient pour Maître Eckhart la base du système de présentification de Dieu dans les prières et dans les textes... L'attitude des mystiques médiévaux n'a rien en commun avec celle des scolastiques, qui rejettent

⁶ Voir l'édition suivante: Fernand Hû, *Le Dhammapada*, Paris, Ernest Leroux, Éditeur, 1878.

⁷ Sur la «téologie négative» chez ces penseurs chrétiens, voir Alain de Libera, *La Mystique rhénane d'Albert le Grand à Maître Eckhart*, Paris, Seuil, «Points Sagesse», 1994, pp. 105-106, 138-140, 284-287.

⁸ La formule est de Maître Eckhart lui-même, et Alain de Libera la commente ainsi, *op. cit.*, p. 286: «En cette vision du Néant, il n'y a plus ni objet, ni sujet, ni lumière, ni temps, ni lieu. [...] L'intellect qui a fait sa percée n'est plus rien. Il est totalement anéanti en Dieu.»

absolument la possibilité d'existence du vide. En effet, l'adage-cliché «la nature a horreur du vide» n'est nulle part aussi fort que chez les philosophes aristotéliens du Moyen Âge⁹.

Avec la littérature moderne, l'équation semble changer, ses termes s'inversent, surtout à partir de la seconde moitié du 19^{ème} siècle: on déchiffre la deuxième solution au problème de représentation de l'irreprésentable. Si dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Âge on croyait à l'existence de Dieu et à celle du vide, à l'époque moderne cette sûreté ontologique disparaît. Si dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Âge on parlait de l'intuition de la réalité suprasensible – même dans l'absence d'une perception directe – pour procéder à une nomination de la réalité en question, la modernité voit l'écrivain se situer tout d'abord à l'intérieur du système des signes qu'est la langue, par la libre manipulation de laquelle il parvient à signifier un vide de type nouveau, qui habite le cœur même de l'être humain, comme on peut le voir dans un poème tardif de Baudelaire:

Pascal avait son gouffre, avec lui se mouvant.

– Hélas! tout est abîme, – action, désir, rêve,
Parole! et sur mon poil qui tout droit se relève
Maintes fois de la Peur je sens passer le vent.

En haut, en bas, partout, la profondeur, la grève,
Le silence, l'espace affreux et captivant...
Sur le fond de mes nuits Dieu de son doigt savant
Dessine un cauchemar multiforme et sans trêve.

J'ai peur du sommeil comme on a peur d'un grand trou,
Tout plein de vague horreur, menant on ne sait où;
Je ne vois qu'infini par toutes les fenêtres,

Et mon esprit, toujours du vertige hanté,
Jalouse du néant l'insensibilité.

Ah! ne jamais sortir des Nombres et des Êtres!¹⁰

Il est évident que le poète mise dans le sonnet précédent sur la transcription d'une expérience intense, qu'il a l'intention de communiquer – brusquement et de

⁹ Sur la question, consulter J.-P. Fanton d'Andon, *L'horreur du vide*, Paris, Editions du CNRS, 1978. Un trait symptomatique de l'horreur médiévale du vide est visible dans une formule de Saint Bernard, *Traité de la conscience*: «La conscience humaine est un gouffre profond. De même qu'il est impossible d'épuiser l'eau d'un vaste abîme, il est impossible de vider toutes les pensées du cœur humain.»

¹⁰ Charles Baudelaire, *Le Gouffre, Œuvres complètes I, op. cit.*, pp. 142-143. La meilleure étude consacrée au «gouffre» chez Baudelaire reste à ce jour celle de Benjamin Fondane, *Baudelaire et l'expérience du gouffre*, Bruxelles, Éditions Complexe, 1994 [1942]. Voir le commentaire du sonnet cité ci-dessus et de la référence à Pascal, pp. 246-253.

manière concise – au lecteur, mais dans la même mesure il joue beaucoup. Baudelaire part d'un vécu personnel, qu'il transcrit d'ailleurs dans ses notes regroupées sous le titre *Hygiène*: «Au moral comme au physique, j'ai toujours eu la sensation du gouffre, non seulement du gouffre du sommeil, mais du gouffre de l'action, du rêve, du souvenir, du désir, du regret, du remords, du beau, du nombre, etc. J'ai cultivé mon hystérie avec jouissance et terreur. Maintenant j'ai toujours le vertige, et aujourd'hui 23 janvier 1862, j'ai subi un singulier avertissement, j'ai senti passer sur moi *le vent de l'aile de l'imbécillité*.»¹¹ Ce vécu, réel et réaliste – comme dirait son contemporain Champfleury – est très dilué dans le poème. Il y est filtré à travers l'expérience métaphysique de Pascal, qui sentait à chaque instant un abîme ouvert à sa gauche, et cette référence au sobre et mystique mathématicien janséniste donne au texte à la fois de la rigueur et une vibration spirituelle à part. La chute du poème renforce la référence initiale à Pascal: «ne jamais sortir des Nombres et des Êtres!», exprimant le désir ardent que le monde, menacé par l'abîme, soit gouverné par la réalité abstraite, sûre et parfaite du Nombre¹², qu'il soit rempli par la présence permanente et tranquillissante des Êtres. Cependant Pascal a non seulement la sensation physique du gouffre (dont parle Baudelaire), mais il fait aussi partie des premiers scientifiques qui s'intéressent au vide en tant qu'objet d'expérimentation. Élevé dans un milieu intellectuel hostile au cartésianisme, Pascal reprend une expérience d'Evangelista Torricelli (secrétaire de Galilée), qui consiste à placer verticalement dans une cuve de mercure un tube rempli de mercure avec l'ouverture en bas. Lors de cette expérience, on observe que, quelle

¹¹ *Hygiène, Œuvres complètes I, op. cit.*, p. 668. Baudelaire aurait-il éprouvé ce genre de sensation pendant la traduction d'*Eurêka* de Poe (mise en vente en 1863), où il est souvent traité du vide cosmique ? Voir le passage suivant, in *Œuvres en prose*, Traduites par Charles Baudelaire, Texte établi et annoté par Y.-G. Le Dantec, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, «Bibliothèque de la Pléiade», 2001, pp. 808-809: «Évidemment, là où il n'y a pas de parties, là est l'absolue Unité; là où la tendance vers l'Unité est satisfaite, il ne peut plus exister d'Attraction; – ceci a été parfaitement démontré, et toute la Philosophie l'admet. Donc, quand, son but accompli, la Matière sera revenue à sa condition première d'Unité, – condition qui présuppose l'expulsion de l'Ether séparatif, dont la fonction consiste simplement à maintenir les atomes à part les uns des autres jusqu'au grand jour où, cet éther n'étant plus nécessaire, la pression victorieuse de la collective et finale Attraction viendra prédominer dans la mesure voulue pour l'expulser; quand, dis-je, la Matière, excluant l'Ether, sera retournée à l'Unité absolue, la Matière (pour parler d'une manière paradoxale) existera alors sans Attraction et sans Répulsion; en d'autres termes, la Matière sans la Matière, ou l'absence de Matière. En plongeant dans l'Unité, elle plongera en même temps, dans ce *Non-Être* qui, pour toute perception finie, doit être identique à l'unité, – dans ce Néant Matériel du fond duquel nous savons qu'elle a été évoquée, – avec lequel seul elle a été *créée* par la Volition de Dieu. Je répète donc: Efforçons-nous de comprendre que ce dernier globe, fait de tous les globes, disparaîtra instantanément, et que Dieu seul restera, tout entier, suprême résidu des choses.»

¹² Cf. B. Fondane, *op. cit.*, p.251: «Le monde du gouffre exigeait-il, lui aussi, que personne n'y pénétrât qui ne fût géomètre ? Nous avons vu que Baudelaire et Pascal avaient été tous les deux géomètres (la doctrine du *Poetic Principle* le fait apparaître pour Baudelaire) avant que le Gouffre ne vînt le tirer, l'un et l'autre, d'une impasse pour les jeter dans une autre. Et ce gouffre, c'était la soudaine vision que leurs convictions – les plus fermes, les plus assurées – étaient sans fondement et qu'il fallait, sans le pouvoir cependant, renoncer à elles, qu'on était soumis à une espèce d'envoûtement et que le monde est inexplicable sans l'hypothèse de cet envoûtement.»

que soit la hauteur totale du tube, le mercure s'élève dans le tube jusqu'à 76 cm environ au-dessus du niveau de la cuve, le haut du tube étant vide. L'existence du vide étant ainsi prouvée expérimentalement, Pascal affirme dans *Expériences nouvelles touchant le vide* (1647) que celui-ci, ayant des dimensions, diffère du néant, mais, dépourvu de résistance et immobile, il se distingue également de la matière¹³.

Entre les deux extrêmes pascaliens (le «gouffre» et les «Nombres»), Baudelaire joue avec les signes de ponctuation, avec les séries énumératives, les métaphores, sur des étendues sémantiques très larges. Le poète concentre en quatorze vers tous les substantifs susceptibles d'exprimer le vide: gouffre, abîme, profondeur, silence, trou, infini, vertige¹⁴, néant... substantifs presque synonymes, et pourtant si étrangement différents! Les adjectifs qui qualifient ces substantifs – ou d'autres – renforcent l'impression de vide que cause le vertige du poème: affreux, captivant, multiforme, grand, vague. Et, pour faire pendant au sonnet *Les Ténèbres*, on retrouve ici une image emblématique de la peur et de l'horreur, le dessin sur fond d'obscurité, sauf que dans *Le Gouffre* c'est Dieu qui exerce ses talents de peintre, en traçant un «cauchemar multiforme et sans trêve» qui torture le sujet lyrique. D'ailleurs, il n'y a pas de période de la vie de Baudelaire où l'écrivain n'ait pas été obsédé par le néant. Il n'est qu'à voir là-dessus une lettre à sa mère du 11 septembre 1856, montrant l'ancienneté de l'obsession qui refait surface dans *Le Gouffre*: «Je ne travaille encore qu'avec distraction, et je m'ennuie mortellement. Il y a encore des moments où tout m'apparaît comme vide.»¹⁵

Si Baudelaire est obsédé par un vide intérieur, quasi-religieux, provoquant la «peur» et l'«horreur», Mallarmé va plus loin en se montrant plus préoccupé de mettre à nu le vide du langage, la rupture entre signifiant et signifié: «Le vide qu'il est en train de vivre, Mallarmé tente en somme de l'installer jusque dans les mots eux-mêmes dont il se sert pour le décrire.»¹⁶ Le signifiant, si tant est qu'il s'inscrit dans une belle structure rythmique et phonétique, se suffit à lui-même, tel le mystérieux *ptyx*, objet sans référent (éventuellement, «coquillage»), dont l'emploi est purement mystique, dans un sens presque taoïste: «Sur les crédençes, au salon vide: nul *ptyx*, / Aboli bibelot d'inanité sonore / (Car le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx / Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s'honore).»¹⁷ Paradoxalement, cet

¹³ Cf. l'excellente histoire philosophie et scientifique signée par Armand Le Noxaïc, *Les Métamorphoses du vide*, Paris, Belin, «Pour la science», 2004.

¹⁴ Voir, sur le sujet, un excellent article de Jean-Pierre Richard, «Le vertige de Baudelaire», in *Critique*, XIe année, 1955, nr. 101-102, pp. 771-792.

¹⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondance*, vol. I (janvier 1832-février 1860), édition établie par Claude Pichois avec la collaboration de Jean Ziegler, Paris, Gallimard, «Bibliothèque de la Pléiade», 1993, pp. 357-358. La meilleure étude du vide chez Baudelaire reste celle de Jean Starobinski, «Les rimes du vide. Une lecture de Baudelaire», in *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse. Figures du vide*, n° 11, Printemps 1975, pp. 132-143.

¹⁶ Jean-Pierre Richard, *L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, Paris, Seuil, 1961, p. 72. Voir plus largement, les quelques remarques concentrées que Richard consacre à la question du vide, sous le titre «L'invasion du vide», pp. 68-72, ou à celle de la «négativité», pp. 183-208.

¹⁷ Stéphane Mallarmé, [Sonnet], *Œuvres complètes. Poésie – prose*, Texte établi et annoté par Henri

écrivain obsédé par l'*abolition* (de la réalité, du langage, de l'art et de la poésie) libère tous ses successeurs de n'importe quelle contrainte relative à la question de l'irreprésentable: le rien, le vide, le néant... Dieu entrent dans le jeu d'une représentabilité libre, et c'est par là qu'ils échappent absolument à la représentation.

Les prosateurs de la seconde moitié du 19^{ème} siècle poursuivent des recherches parallèles à celles des poètes. Flaubert exprime dans une lettre à Louise Colet (16 janvier 1852) des vœux devenus célèbres: «Ce qui me semble beau, ce que je voudrais faire, c'est un livre sur rien, un livre sans attache extérieure, qui se tiendrait de lui-même par la force interne de son style, comme la terre sans être soutenue se tient en l'air, un livre qui n'aurait presque pas de sujet ou du moins où le sujet serait presque invisible, si cela se peut. Les œuvres les plus belles sont celles où il y a le moins de matière; plus l'expression se rapproche de la pensée, plus le mot colle dessus et disparaît, plus c'est beau. Je crois que l'avenir de l'Art est dans ces voies. Je le vois, à mesure qu'il grandit, s'éthérisant¹⁸ tant qu'il peut, depuis les pylônes égyptiens jusqu'aux lancettes gothiques, et depuis les poèmes de vingt mille vers des Indiens jusqu'aux jets de Byron. La forme, en devenant habile, s'atténue [...]» Les critiques du 20^{ème} siècle ont interprété de manière diverse ces phrases de Flaubert, en s'arrêtant surtout au syntagme «livre sur rien», sorti de son contexte de réflexion critique. Selon moi, et je m'en tiens aux dires du romancier, «roman sur rien» signifie à la fois roman à action minimale, mais aussi roman qui parle du Rien, du Néant. En effet, en recherchant une série lexicale qui traverse le texte de *Madame Bovary*, on est obligé de s'arrêter sur la suivante: vide-rien-néant. Tout l'effort du romancier se concentre sur la dissémination de cette série dans le texte. Chaque fois qu'un événement est sur le point de se produire, un concours de circonstances l'en empêche, barre sa route, et tout s'enfonce dans l'apathie de la succession mécanique quotidienne des faits et des gestes. Chaque fois qu'un sentiment est sur le point de fleurir dans l'âme d'Emma, un petit rien le contraint à ne pas se développer. Le vide s'insinue partout, tout-puissant et dominateur, et c'est justement cet aspect «métaphysique» que la critique a raté¹⁹.

Mondor et G. Jean-Aubry, Paris, Gallimard, «Bibliothèque de la Pléiade», 1965, p. 68. Sur ce sonnet, Jean-Pierre Richard, *L'Univers imaginaire de Mallarmé*, op. cit., pp. 167-169.

¹⁸ L'éther est une constante du discours culturel du 19^{ème} siècle, qu'il soit artistique ou scientifique, cf. Arman Le Noxaïc, op. cit.

¹⁹ Gérard Genette, dans un article de *Figures I*, «Les Silences de Flaubert», Paris, Seuil, «Tel Quel», 1966, pp. 223-243, semble cependant retenir deux aspects qui rendent compte correctement des enjeux de la création d'un «livre sur rien», ou traitant du rien. D'un côté, il s'agirait d'un «excès de présence matérielle», qui empêche l'action d'aller de l'avant et qui oblige notre attention de lecteurs de s'arrêter longuement sur les objets, en abandonnant les personnages et les vicissitudes de leur existence. D'un autre côté, il s'agirait des silences qui interviennent dans la narration aux moments les plus inattendus. Emma Rouault se tait lorsque Charles lui fait la cour, Emma Bovary se tait dans les bras de ses deux amants, Léon et Rodolphe, etc. Pourtant, dans la conception de Gérard Genette, même si la présence matérielle et les silences vont dans le sens de la création d'un «livre sur rien», Flaubert n'atteint pas très bien son but *poétique*: tout ce à quoi parvient le romancier, c'est d'étendre uniformément sur tous les sujets qu'il traite le voile uniforme et lourd d'une langue pétrifiée.

Dans plusieurs contes fantastiques de Maupassant, le personnage-narrateur vit sous l'emprise d'une peur permanente et sent toujours une présence torturante dans chaque pensée, dans chaque geste de sa vie quotidienne. Je pense à des textes comme *Lui?* ou les deux versions du célèbre récit *Le Horla*. Un être invisible habite la même maison que le narrateur, boit du même verre, se meut dans la même chambre et laisse transparaître sa présence à travers plusieurs signes symboliques. L'hypothèse de la folie n'est pas à exclure: l'être humain terrorisé pense que sa peur ne peut avoir aucune explication logique et qu'il craint ce quelque-chose-là à cause du fait qu'il est fou. C'est à ce moment précis que le personnage arrive devant un miroir et ne voit pas son image comme à l'accoutumée: la créature mystérieuse qui le vampirise acquiert un degré de réalité suffisant, pour que le narrateur ne prenne plus ses visions pour des rêves fous. Par cette stratégie simple – à la limite du visuel et du mythologique – l'irreprésentable fait irruption dans le champ de la représentation, en s'interposant entre le personnage et le miroir qui aurait dû refléter un visage humain.

Le plus connu des romans de J.-K. Huysmans, *À rebours* (1884), offre une situation particulière. On ne peut pas, à proprement parler, le définir comme un «roman sur rien», à cause du fait que la profusion d'objets luxueux dont s'entoure le protagoniste remplace l'action et l'événement extérieur. Et pourtant, une certaine immobilité du cadre et du personnage renvoient vers une poétique du renoncement, vers un projet romanesque qui se définit sur d'autres coordonnées que celui du naturalisme. Tandis que le naturalisme mise sur la présentation d'une «tranche de vie», c'est-à-dire sur une copie fidèle de la réalité, Huysmans cantonne le roman dans le livresque et le méta-textuel. Le principal état d'âme de Des Esseintes, hérité d'ailleurs de Baudelaire et partagé avec Mallarmé, est une sorte de degré zéro de la conscience, une disponibilité absolue, un vide où tout peut s'installer ultérieurement. Ce vide de la conscience est décrit au *Chapitre VII* en termes schopenhaueriens, et il ne faut pas oublier que Schopenhauer lui-même se nourrit d'une belle pensée asiatique du vide, à savoir le bouddhisme. Aux yeux de Des Esseintes, Schopenhauer «prêchait le néant de l'existence», «ne prétendait rien guérir, n'offrait aux malades aucune consolation, aucun espoir»²⁰. Ce pessimisme schopenhauerien, qui ne promet pas de vie après la mort, qui prône la vanité de l'existence et des ambitions humaines, ne représente autre chose – dans *À rebours* – qu'un point de départ pour le vécu chrétien (mais ceci est une autre histoire, dans laquelle on rejoint Maîtres Eckhart et les autres mystiques).

Au 20^{ème} siècle, le surréalisme multiplie à l'infini les images étranges, autosuffisantes, où le vide s'imisce sans qu'on ait conçu auparavant son degré de réalité. On trouve le vide dans les déserts de Dali, dans les tiroirs de «la girafe en feu», dans *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* de Magritte (1928-1929), dans les peintures magiques de Victor Brauner, ou bien dans les prouesses de la dictée automatique où s'accouplent des mots sans rapport apparent les uns avec les autres, voués seulement au culte d'une «beauté convulsive».

²⁰ J.-K. Huysmans, *À rebours*, Paris, Au Sans Pareil, «La bonne compagnie», 1924, pp. 83-84.

Le théâtre de l'absurde met en scène toute une série d'éléments destinés à donner au lecteur l'impression de vide et à matérialiser l'anti-matière. Les didascalies relatives au décor sont réduites à l'essentiel: des murs nus, quelques pièces de mobilier égarées dans un «salon vide» mallarméen, une fenêtre par laquelle on ne voit «qu'infini». Les personnages n'ont plus de consistance psychologique ni de structure morale, il ne pensent ni ne vivent plus. Les répliques échangées n'ont absolument aucun sens: que l'on pense à l'exemple cité le plus souvent, *La Cantatrice chauve* de Ionesco. *En attendant Godot* se joue subtilement des attentes du lecteur: le texte parle du vide, mais le met en scène de telle manière qu'il réussit à souligner que le vide est en réalité une présence si pesante et si matérielle qu'il n'est même pas besoin qu'on le *représente*. On attend Godot, ce Dieu petit et ridicule – dont on ne sait rien du tout –, mais celui-ci n'apparaît point: il serait difficile d'imaginer une plus claire présentification du néant. Les personnages qui attendent Godot ne sont rien, ils ne font rien, ils ne pensent à rien en particulier, ils parlent pour ne rien dire, le spectacle en tant que tel ne représente rien et l'écrivain lui-même écrit sur rien, il écrit le rien. Ce fameux rien est présent partout dans les textes critiques sur l'écrivain, sous des formes diverses et variées, et également dans l'œuvre de Beckett: le titre des *Textes pour rien* est une preuve supplémentaire de l'omniprésence de cet étrange concept. Les gestes de Pozzo et Lucky, Vladimir et Estragon sont peu importants, ce que font les personnages semble insignifiant dès le début, et pourtant cela s'amenuise encore à mesure que l'«action» avance. Beckett réduit aussi le statut de personnage à sa plus simple expression: ses héros ne sont personne, on ne sait rien d'eux, de leur passé, de leur avenir, et pourtant, ils sont de véritables personnages de théâtre. Le lien entre le monde et sa représentation est brisé, et les mots ne désignent plus rien.

Dans le parcours suivi rapidement dans les passages antérieurs, on peut observer que – tout en étant dépourvue de la précision et de l'infailibilité dans la représentation dont font preuve les arts plastiques – la littérature ne reste pas sans moyens dans sa confrontation avec l'irreprésentable. Il suffit qu'un écrivain emploie incessamment les mots miraculeux (vide, rien, néant et... Dieu) dans un texte, pour que le lecteur réagisse au signal et puisse imaginer un certain signifié derrière la matière du signifiant. L'obsession de la nomination, le jeu sémantique, la répétition obsédante des termes-clé, la synonymie approximative, la métaphorisation excessive, la libération des mots de la tutelle du sens, la réduction de l'action, l'amenuisement des caractères: voici quelques armes spécifiques dont le lettré se sert à la limite extrême du concevable et du représentable.

Que se passe-t-il dans le cas du cinéma, de cet art hybride, qui conjugue la mobilité des plans en succession, jamais vraiment isolés les uns des autres par le cadrage, avec la mobilité des mots, sur lesquels le spectateur n'a que rarement le temps de s'arrêter pour leur attribuer un signifié précis, étant donné qu'il est sans cesse menacé par l'émergence fatale d'autres mots encore, jusqu'à la fin du film? Bien entendu, les moyens techniques qui nous permettent maintenant de nous

attarder interminablement sur une image, un son ou une scène, ont résolu – en partie – ce problème. Mais, si dans le cas d'un texte littéraire on ne brise aucune cohérence par ces arrêts dans le fluide de la lecture, dans le cas du film la rupture est évidente et douloureuse.

Un des films qui, dans toute l'histoire du cinéma, réussit le mieux à exprimer le vide, à le faire signifier de plusieurs manières différentes pour les spectateurs, est *André Roublev* de Tarkovski (1964-1966)²¹, film construit selon ce qu'Antoine de Baecque appelle «une esthétique de la lenteur»²². Une première dimension du problème est celle de l'espace vide. Il est clair que tout le film s'édifie autour de l'image allégorique de l'église vide, contextualisée, dans les diverses séquences, en fonction de l'impact psychologique et visuel sur lequel mise le metteur en scène, en fonction des messages symboliques envoyés vers le spectateur.

Ainsi, dans le *Prologue*, où un groupe de gens préparent une expérience de vol à côté d'une église, il arrive à un moment donné qu'en suivant le personnage barbu qui s'envolera dans un ballon improvisé, la caméra sonde, comme pour souligner la déroute du personnage respectif, le long couloir de l'église, ouvert aux deux bouts²³: c'est le vide. Ensuite, la montée vers le ciel de celui qui vole se fait à travers la même église dépourvue de présence humaine ou divine, parce qu'on retrouve le barbu pendu au ballon quelque part dans la tour. En hasardant une petite supposition symbolique, je dirais que tout le film se nourrit substantiellement de la métaphore de la montée (vers Dieu) à travers des espaces toujours vides, pesants à cause de leur vide même.

Dans la séquence intitulée *Le Bouffon*, un regard distrait ne découvre pas de traitement du problème du vide. Et pourtant! Trois moines, partis du monastère de la Sainte Trinité, Daniel Tchorny, André Roublev et Cyrille, s'abritent de la pluie dans une isba paysanne, où un bouffon met en scène une histoire drolatique sur un boyard qui a perdu sa barbe. La caméra semble se centrer sur les mouvements rapides du bouffon, sur sa danse sauvage, sur les rires de l'assistance, c'est-à-dire sur un trop-plein du vécu qui ne laisse aucune place pour quoi que ce soit d'autre. Les trois moines qui entrent dans l'isba sont isolés, parce qu'ils ne participent pas à la joie un peu grossière du groupe de paysans, carnavalesque pour reprendre Bakhtine. Leur isolement est marqué par le cadrage: ils sont placés près d'une fenêtre de l'isba, très étroite, à travers laquelle on ne peut distinguer rien de clair, sauf le scintillement aveuglant d'une journée d'été après la pluie. Ici, le vide de la fenêtre à travers laquelle on ne voit rien est un symbole pour *autre chose*, pour un

²¹ Une problématique qui touche en plusieurs endroits celle qui me préoccupe ici est abordée aussi par Bertrand Bacqué, *Filmer l'invisible, vers une esthétique théologique: le cinéma de Robert Bresson et d'Andrei Tarkovski*, Thèse de doctorat sous la direction de Patrizia Lombardo, Université de Genève, 2007.

²² Antoine de Baecque, *Andrei Tarkovski*, Paris, Édition de l'Étoile/Cahiers du cinéma, 1989, p. 12.

²³ Petr Král, «La Maison en feu», in *Positif*, n° 304, 1986, s'occupe entre autres de «la figure récurrente de la maison ouverte, traversant l'ensemble de l'œuvre du cinéaste».

ailleurs à nuances et contours indéterminés. D'ailleurs, dans la séquence intitulée *La Fête païenne*, les ouvertures de l'isba ont le même rôle et la même signification que dans la présente séquence.

La séquence la plus importante, du point de vue de la problématique de l'espace vide, est *Le Jugement dernier*. Les peintres se trouvent dans la Cathédrale de la Dormition de Vladimir, en train d'attendre André Roublev. Certains d'entre eux essaient de travailler, d'autres se contentent de nous montrer leur frustration, un jeune apprenti a envie d'aller se baigner, mais la sensation d'inactivité est évidente dès les premiers mouvements de la caméra. L'église est vide, parce qu'aucune des fresques commandées à l'atelier de Roublev n'est exécutée: on entrevoit seulement quelques frêles motifs décoratifs. L'impression de vide qu'éprouve le spectateur est extraordinaire: les parois blanches sont immenses, l'espace est filmé en profondeur, au point qu'il semble ne pas avoir de fin, et on devine aux gestes des peintres qu'ils sont incapables de lutter contre le vide, au moins pour le moment. Après la première émergence de l'église vide, on trouve André dans un champ en compagnie de Daniel: ils sont en train de discuter de l'art et Roublev circonscrit sa position quant à l'obligation de peindre *Le Jugement dernier* par des syntagmes négatifs: «je ne peux pas», «je ne veux pas», moyen clair de faire transparaître le vide qui remplit l'âme de l'artiste avant le travail proprement dit. On retourne ensuite de nouveau dans l'église, où le vide se présente à nous sous un aspect neuf, inédit: la caméra n'insiste plus sur les murs nus, bien qu'aucun visage d'ange ou de démon ne soit venu leur donner vie, mais elle fait voir le vide en tant que réceptacle d'échos. L'église déserte – suspendue dans une temporalité indéterminée – devient un espace où les bruits venant du dehors et les réverbérations de la voix qui lit les *Épîtres* de Paul se multiplient à l'infini²⁴, en soulignant l'impression de vide. De l'impondérable, on retombe dans la réalité pour assister à la mutilation de «nouă meșteri mari, calfe și zidari», qui allaient construire un palais plus beau à Zvéniigorod pour le frère du Grand Prince; celui-ci, jaloux de son frère – et l'allusion au conflit biblique entre Caïn et Abel est transparente – envoie ses soldats crever les yeux des artisans. Sans aucune transition, après cette scène de cruauté, on se retrouve – pour une troisième fois – dans l'église vide, et l'on découvre que, malgré tout, André affronte le vide, violemment, exaspéré, en jetant de la peinture sur un mur nu. La tache (rouge) qui apparaît suggère que, pour dépasser l'immobilité du vide, l'artiste doit passer par une phase de l'informe, du chaotique, de la réalité sans contour. Dans cette troisième apparition de l'église vide, on rencontre la fille pauvre d'esprit qui accompagnera Roublev presque jusqu'à la fin du parcours initiatique et qui trahit le fait que la tache du mur est rouge, parce qu'elle pleure en l'apercevant – évidemment par suite de certains traumas – et s'efforce désespérément de l'effacer. Sur un fond fait

²⁴ Cf. Antoine de Baecque, *op. cit.*, p. 96: «Le temps des films d'Andrei Tarkovski est d'abord déconstruit et ne se reforme qu'autour de la temporalité de la prière; l'espace, décomposé, se réorganise à partir de citations bibliques.»

de paroles extraites des *Épîtres* de Paul, en quelques sorte à rebours du texte biblique, André découvre que la manière la plus sûre de dépasser le vide est la joie simple produite par l'innocence: ainsi, la pauvre d'esprit ne peut pas être considérée une pécheresse, bien qu'elle ait les cheveux libres, non pas couverts selon les prescriptions pauliniennes. Suite à cette révélation, on sait que l'impuissance a été dépassée, que le vide a été vaincu et qu'André pourra peindre. Celui-ci quitte l'église vide, suivi par la fille pauvre d'esprit. Les peintres, étonnés, immobiles, ne font aucun geste pour les en empêcher, tout devient de plus en plus noir, à l'exception de trois fenêtres blanches, illuminées, dans la partie supérieure du cadre. Ces fenêtres soulignent l'importance symbolique acquise par le chiffre trois dans le film tarkovskien. Déjà dans cette séquence, le spectateur se trouve trois fois dans l'église pas encore peinte, et trois fois à l'extérieur, dans le monde fou, et la caméra insistera longuement, de manière soutenue, sur une image de la célèbre icône de la *Sainte Trinité*, aujourd'hui à la Galerie Trétiakov, à Moscou.

Dans la seconde partie, le motif de l'espace vide réapparaît, mais acquiert d'autres dimensions symboliques. Dans la séquence de la *Conquête* de la ville de Vladimir par les Tatars, on se retrouve dans la même cathédrale où André Roublev et ses disciples ne réussissaient pas à peindre. Les guerriers forcent les portes de l'édifice à l'aide d'un bélier, tandis que s'élèvent vers le ciel d'émouvants chants religieux orthodoxes. L'église, cette fois-ci est pleine de gens inquiets, qui prient et, par-dessus tout, elle est peinte aussi. Les païens font irruption à l'intérieur, torturent et massacrent tout le monde, incendient les icônes, s'efforcent d'apprendre où est caché l'or, pillent puis s'en vont. Ici, on souligne que le vide dans une église est surtout le manque de croyants, leur insouciance ou leur mort. L'église du Christ apparaît ainsi non comme un simple édifice cultuel, aux parois nues ou couvertes d'images, mais comme une réunion des croyants autour de certaines valeurs et certains vécus partagés; je crois d'ailleurs que c'est là que doit être recherché le sens d'une phrase répétée deux fois dans le film: «Nous sommes tous des Russes, du même sang et de la même terre.» La tristesse de l'église vidée d'êtres humains est mise en évidence par un cheval qui entre à l'intérieur, parmi les cadavres et dont les fers résonnent de manière stridente sur le plancher, et par la neige qui commence à tomber à travers la toiture trouée.

Une dernière image, forte, de l'espace vide, imprimée instantanément sur la rétine, apparaît dans la séquence intitulée *L'Amour*. Il ne s'agit pas ici d'une église vide, mais d'un réfectoire des moines du monastère d'Andronikov, aux murs non couverts de fresques et dépourvus de la joie des icônes. L'impression qui marque l'esprit du spectateur en est une d'ascèse (maintenant presque forcée, car on se trouve dans un temps de grande famine), d'immobilité, de paralysie de l'immensité blanche et gelée, qui l'avait frappé aussi dans l'église où personne ne réussissait à peindre.

Deuxièmement, la problématique de l'espace vide, de l'église vide, est doublée par une problématique du vide psychologique. Tout le parcours d'André

Roublev, jusqu'à la fin du film, quand on le devine réconcilié avec le monde et l'art, est une incessante montée vers Dieu, à travers son propre vide intérieur²⁵. Les figures visibles de ce vide intérieur sont l'indécision, l'impuissance et le silence, et ces figures sont mises en scène dans des espaces suggérant l'infini, l'impalpable, l'impondérable, incommensurable. L'indécision et l'impuissance sont le reflux de la contradiction entre le désir sexuel et la pensée nauséabonde que «tout est vanité», qui remplissent l'âme de Roublev pendant la nuit troublante de la fête païenne, où il refuse de posséder une jeune femme: «Si attiré qu'il soit par ses sœurs, il ne peut que s'en détourner vers le vide qui s'ouvre devant lui.»²⁶ Je m'arrêteraï aussi un peu sur le silence. Pour faire pénitence après avoir tué un Russe qui essayait de violer la fille pauvre d'esprit, Roublev s'impose une pénitence âpre: celle de ne plus parler à personne. Le canon est respecté avec sévérité: André Roublev se referme sur son propre vide intérieur, sur l'impuissance de créer, sur des horreurs qu'on devine réifiées, gelées dans cette âme rétrécie et presque morte. La parole, lien sacré avec le monde, avec les choses et avec Dieu, est morte dans l'âme du peintre, qui est devenu un être crispé, dépourvu de joie. Le silence est brisé par André seulement au moment où il assiste à la lutte victorieuse d'un autre artiste – Boris, le fondeur de cloches – avec soi-même et avec la matière rebelle. Ce n'est pas un hasard que Roublev entre à nouveau en scène après une absence assez longue juste au moment de jubilation du jeune Boris qui vient de trouver l'argile appropriée pour la cloche et qui crie sa victoire.

Troisièmement, au niveau de la poétique générale du film, c'est l'esthétique noir et blanc qui correspond à l'insistance sur l'espace vide ou au vide psychologique matérialisé dans l'indécision, l'impuissance et le silence. Il faut souligner que si un espace vide est rendu en couleurs, l'impression de vide est très atténuée: les couleurs remplissent le cadre, l'œil se laisse dominer par les harmonies et ne perçoit plus la vacuité. Par contre, dans le cas d'un espace vide filmé en noir et blanc, l'œil ne se laisse séduire par aucun détail inessentiel, mais retient seulement l'impression de vacuité et de poids que le vide provoque. L'esthétique noir et blanc correspond aussi à une meilleure mise en évidence du

²⁵ Cette idée fait écho à quelques considérations de Petr Král, *op. cit.*: «Bâti de la sorte sur le vide, le monde et l'existence de l'homme, pour Tarkovski, ne sont pas pour autant dépourvus de sens. [...] Dans leurs actes les plus décidés, [...] les héros de Tarkovski ne font en fait que confirmer leur appartenance à Tout, et leur consentement à s'y dissoudre.» Ce consentement à se dissoudre dans le Tout (le «Néant» de Maître Eckhart) emporte sans cesse les personnages tarkovskiens vers ce que Petr Král appelle des «horizons absents».

²⁶ *Ibidem*. Petr Král continue: «Quand Andreï Roublev quitte les bacchanales nocturnes des païens, une femme nue, accoudée à une clôture, le suit longuement d'un regard plein de désir tout en se blottissant de plus en plus contre ses propres bras: c'est bien à partir de ce regard, invite lentement refermée sur elle-même, que l'homme doit faire son chemin, brûlant la maison maternelle pour mieux pouvoir la retrouver, ouverte, dans l'étendue et la lumière qui l'entourent. Prenant "ironiquement" racine dans son écartèlement même entre la dépossession et le désir de posséder, le paradis perdu et l'étrangeté ambiante, le néant qui le guette et la recherche d'une plénitude, il est certes loin d'oublier ce qu'il laisse derrière lui.»

vide psychologique qui, de cette manière, apparaît dans une lumière beaucoup plus crue que dans un univers trop «coloré». Les icônes de la fin du film, présentées dans de savantes et pures harmonies de couleurs, vont main dans la main avec la symbolique générale, esquissée dès le *Prologue*: pour s'élever au ciel, il faut s'avancer à travers le vide du monde extérieur et transcender le vide intérieur qu'habite chaque être humain²⁷; pour parvenir aux couleurs pures et à une harmonie divine et dorée, il faut traverser un monde manichéen, toujours réduit au noir de la souffrance et au blanc de l'espoir.

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²⁷ Le double mouvement ici suggéré est visible aussi dans la dernière, magnifique, scène de *Nostalghia* (1983), où Gortchakov accomplit une sorte de rite: il traverse une piscine vidée de son eau une bougie allumée à la main, et cette traversée initiatique – le rythme lent renvoie à une descente dans les tréfonds de l'âme – débouche sur l'immortalité par la mort...

“CECI N’EST PAS UNE ÉCRITURE...”

An Essay about Various Levels of Dialog “*In the Penal Colony*” by Franz Kafka

DIANA CHIOREANU

ABSTRACT. *In the penal colony* takes an apparently simple, but difficult story and creates an intricate system of interrelating at all levels. I chose to call these relationships **dialogs**, simply because they are both ingenious bridges between different categories and the very vehicles by which an elegant net of fading echoes are channeled. These hyperdialogs mediate through the subject matter and the naratological form, characters - narrator - narratee, and of course, between structure and texture. They are, in short, the nervous system of the whole ontology that the text signifies; they never qualify this fiction capsule, but highlight its main or underground freeways. To employ a graphical metaphor, I would say that they reveal a descendant pattern of a spiral. Why descendant?

Motto - a hyperdialog:

“*The word made flesh*” (John 1:1-14)
<“*It’s very artistic,*” said the explorer evasively,
“*but I can’t decipher it.*” > (*Penal Colony*, p. 7)

1. Miscellaneous conversation about hybrids

As I will try to demonstrate, this paradigm is by far neither simple, nor absurd. It undergoes a genuine “organic process” of gradual fledging, which naturally ends in entropy. The denouement (be it readerly, allegorical or poetological) is a phenomenological extension of one and the same leitmotif: degradability and failure. But there is no track of any explicit pathos related by the author or narrator to this generalized *passing away in different directions* - and that’s the real beauty and atrocity of it: aesthetically speaking, we are in the very middle of the **sublime**, even if it intimately flirts with the **grotesque**. Because only neutral hermeneutical tools are given to us by the text, all judgments remain relative. The point of view has the possibility of being omniscient, but it lucidly chooses a heterodiegetic position, with very rare variations into using a reflector, but only for a little while. This fiction entity is insurmountable: the author doesn’t make word into flesh, thus - we read conventions of ink and get cheated in our resurrection-addicted clichés, the prophecy turns out to be a black parody of “naïve” utopias, the machine is a dissolving demiurge, the officer dies unenlightened, the explorer never really

explores... No one and nothing completes their dialectics; existentially speaking, all these nameless entities (qualified according to their function: explorer, officer, soldier, the condemned etc.) are denied transgression. Even the most extreme of actions remains futile. It feels dubious, just like the guiding inner logic of this world is nothing but a funny auctorial sense of sarcasm...

To poorly exemplify this, I will prove how different dialogs fail to work, concluding that what Kafka (usually) depicted was the functions, sensations and memories (not feelings or thoughts) of a moribund hybrid. A hybrid world is that of the diegesis: the converging point of more incompatible energies. This is why not the climax of the *story* (that would be the First Commander's era) is the most interesting, but its ending: an overall blockage of channels and eventually its demise.

In this sense, I could qualify this text both as a potentially *open text*, due to the liveliness of its circuits and the intermingling of such aberrant meetings, or a *closed text* (*Umberto Eco*), because it lucidly dismisses itself by self-consuming. An example for the first paradigm is that the explorer/*reader* manages to escape/*surpass* the plot/*discourse*. While, at the same time, according to the second paradigm, this is a charlatan's escape because it's a counterfeit entering. According to the same code of superficial and limited access, he/we had never been granted real presence into that world: we are just pretexts for it to reveal its malignancy and accelerate its logical vanishing.

I'm more inclined to believe that this piece of literature is an eschatological text guided by ever-ending irony instead of a prophecy, a general apoplexy where no tomorrow lives, a bill of transience and extinction.

A little notification: I'm using the term "dialogue" not only in its meaning of exchanging opinions with somebody, but in its larger sense, that of an attempt to connect at two frequencies a common level. The latter requires a minimum of some reciprocal will to acknowledge the Other.

Not accidentally, Hegel's complex dialectics of recognizing the Other through the Self meets here, in Kafka's short story, its negative counterpart.

2. Dialogs of complaisance: blowing in the wind...

...however, they are the equivalent of the multiple strategies games. For example, inside the diegesis, they are useless. No bridge. But, metatextually, they are golden links thrown over the autarchy of various dimensions. They are the cognitive nuclei of what Barthes has called *the cultural codes*: "numerous codes of knowledge or wisdom to which the text continuously refers [...]"¹

The polite dialogs have something of masked retardation: "These uniforms are surely too heavy for the tropics," said the explorer, instead of inquiring about the machine, as the officer had expected. (p. 1)". Common sense - as I know it - would imply exactly the opposite: when confronted with a construction such as the machine,

¹ Barthes: *S/Z. An Essay*, p 18

even at first sight, the explorer should elaborate on something else than “the weather”: “The explorer had little taste for the machine and walked back and forth behind the condemned man with an almost visible lack of concern, while the officer saw to the final preparations” (p. 1)

3. **Dialogue with the narratees:** be they intradiegetic (explorer) or extradiegetic (implied reader)?

How much of that world is being shared with us? Is there a direct communicational pattern towards the narratee?

Not hazardously, the only times that the narrator resorts to a “personal narrative” and a reflector’s point of view is when he needs to highlight these discrepancies of cultural codes. But never gets deeper.

“The information about the judicial procedure had left him unsatisfied. All the same, he had to tell himself that this was, after all, a penal colony, that special regulations were required here, and that a military code had to be followed, even to extreme limits.” (p. 5) The *free indirect discourse* limits itself to these patterns, and this restraint in sinking into some character’s thoughts proves that this is all to know, really.

While we get at least some insight to the explorer’s mind, the two other characters: the soldier and the condemned man remain absolutely obscure, we can only see with perplexity how they react. They appear as autistic entities. Between them and the explorer stands the officer, about whose inner mechanisms only speculations are being made. The formula “*as if he were...*” constantly appears when referring to him. “the officer [...] smiled at the explorer, **as if** he were still expecting a few more peculiar utterances from him.”(p. 4)

Why? Because maybe, as he still shares some cultural codes with the explorer, like the language and some general representations, he’s still relatively comprehensible for the explorer.

Therefore, there is an exterior **focalisation** on the explorer, where the narrator knows even less than the character, but reports to his cultural codes. And yet, if this focalisation had been 100% genuine, than I believe the explorer wouldn’t have persisted in being only a carcass. He would have been made more vivid, more complex. But this adds to the auctorial overall *intention*: depicting forms, not contents. The symbolism behind each icon he presents are left to the reader’s own codes. This is why I won’t go into much detail about the meanings of the machine, even though it is obviously the most “erogenous” limb of this story (its multivalence according to different codes).

4. **Extreme Dialogue** which activates the critical conditioned responses.

On the other hand, the inequality stands in that the **officer** usually manages to relate with such a zeal **not** with its “diegetically correct” counterpart (his narratee

should be the **explorer**), but by a process of transfer, to rather different other parties. When he is pleading, he is doing this symbolically to the whole reluctant community of the island, or his past, or the godly first Commander. Kafka is intermingling the categories:

“What times those were, my comrade!” The **officer** had obviously forgotten who was in front of him; he had embraced the **explorer** and had laid his head on his shoulder. The **explorer** felt extremely awkward, and impatiently looked past the **officer**” (p. 9).

This is common in the case of extreme passion or obsession (maybe monomania associated to any cult for a fetish). His narratee is absent, and so are the other two figurants. On more levels: linguistic, cultural, epistemological, there is an undeniable shared autism. Until he primes the **explorer** with a familiar stereotype, Justice, he only communicates with a metacategory: the expected receivers of this “religion”, whether they exist or not. This is his ontological task. He is the only active engine of this story even when the Machine itself seems to betray him by its caducity, or the guiding specter of this cult is dead and not even planning to resurrect. His death is bitter and ironic: both the elaborated revelation and the artistry of it fail to work on their very last preacher.

The climax of the **officer**’s argumentation forces the **explorer** out of his sleepy routine. Politically correct up to the end, the latter is the very prototype of the self-dissipated occidental; during real crises when his underlying cultural identity is threatened (not a personal credo) their referential codes fight back any threatening influence in order to stay preserved. Thus the **explorer** is only the dummy of collective representations (he intervenes only to protect himself, not out of a humane instinct), while the **officer** is a hybridized victim of similar formatting, only fresher and more offensive. He is the most powerful man there because he has at hand both the totem and the actual miracle of his beliefs (the machine). Also, he is the most complex of all characters, as he has volitional energy and a beautiful *ars poetica* sustaining it.

Finally, according to his beliefs, the **officer** dies of a mock-tragic death, which redeems the inhuman in him. Whereas the **explorer**, according to his conditioned responses, runs away. His final gesture is in fact the ultimate realistic measure for his identity: “the **explorer** picked up a heavy, knotted hawser from the floor, threatened them with it and thus prevented them from jumping”(p. 17). Being safe now brings back his rejection responses, the inhuman in him. He had culturally posted himself above these barbarians and monsters and now he displays the same behavior, only that at a more perverse level: his compassion had been only an artifact of his weakness. Civilization appears to have a *hyena rictus* mirrored in this exponent.

5. The conclusion or Dialogue between “genain”, “poiesis” and “poesis”.

At all possible risks, I will base my conclusion on a very steep parallel. I will hazard myself into doing that because it is very obvious to me that this short story reports its deeper meanings neither to ethics, nor to pathology. So far, I only encountered these two kinds of hypothesis, that’s why I didn’t go into them anymore, but rather translate ethics into relative encoding processes and pathology into aesthetical hybridization. Certainly, they are re-discussed but also surpassed within the wider context of another paradigm, which would be the poetological approach. The human condition dilemma fits into a broader matrix, that of entities as shifters between creators and “createes”. The machine is an initial creation (the First Commander’s artifact) and a secondary creation (only a tool). Also, it is an “organism” which acts according to a poetical script and shapes up other peculiar works of art in flesh (the third level).

This central metaphor, the machine, is a sinister creative compound, a baroque torture beyond its creator’s death; sometimes but not always ends in illumination. What stands for “**genain**”, a process of magmatic beginnings of a genesis out of hazardous forces are the “many, many ornaments surrounding the actual letters” (p. 6), as the officer says. This is the point where the Word isn’t yet individualized out of its potentialities, which functions as both a force field around it and as its nurturing “subconscious” rhythms. Its matrix, a cryptogram which is carved into flesh, is the beginning of the genesis, a germination of flows that contain the virtual nucleus of sense. The second moment of genesis, the **poiesis**, is actually the moment of the sixth hour, when the word emerges from its convoluted matrix and floods the flesh, grasping form shaped as a Law: “Nothing further happens, the man merely begins to decipher the writing; he purses his lips as if listening to something. As you’ve seen, it isn’t easy to decipher the script with your eyes; but our man deciphers it with his wounds” (p. 7). Naturally, a reciprocal process of it being read, recognized and assimilated as a unit of sense (by its host) accompanies it; only that this happens at an organic level of comprehension, when the word is still depending on its fleshy womb (even if it’s a mental womb) - as the story itself depends on its textual womb.

After the moment when the word is made relatively material, it flies away from its by now useless chrysalides to complete its dialectics as a sublimed entity: The **poesis** corresponds to the moment where the word spreads its wings into abstraction, becoming fully independent; it has its own structure, plurality, its laws and meaning. The remaining matter which gave birth to it falls apart in dissolution (or in the damp). Now, this new entity has its own potential of irradiating meaning, out of the previous synthesis. This would be the story itself, as a whole, transcending the sum of its components, the ephemerality of its parts. Poesis recreates the words into worlds at another level. This is when the discourse communicates with its structure, and the whole entity is mirrored in one of its vital nuclei. From this point of view, the machine contains all three levels; it becomes an abominable and sublime apparatus for making

art. Where the creating process is also the object...No one understands it but the officer (craftsman and worshiper), the ideal *expected reader*.

Why does it collapse in the end and the short story disappears? I don't know.

Maybe because numberless repetitions render it impotent. Or because no one else understands it, hence it becomes a mortified residue unable to regenerate because there is no more nurturing dialog. The machine belongs to another dimension, the hybrid one.

After all, even the witches die when they're forgotten, as they say, let alone this magic torture! To adapt Breton's famous saying, in the Penal Colony we have the nonrandom meeting on a vivisection table between a dead god and an ink-jet printer.

The very manifest of paradoxically communicative art, or as Magritte would have said:

“Ceci n'est pas une écriture...”

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THE THEATRE OF PRESENCE – THE THEATRE OF ABSENCE TADEUSZ KANTOR AND THE LIMITS OF MEMORY

SORIN CRIȘAN

ABSTRACT. The following study takes a close look to the work and theatre activity of Tadeusz Kantor, one of the most important directors of the XX century. The paperwork explains the preparation, the exercises and the theory of absence in Kantor's play and representations. According to Kantor, the body becomes evidence of and witness to present and past existence. There are also similarities among Kantor's and Brook's theatre works. The theatre each of them brought forward to the public is an exclamation of life by a survey of memory and by assuming that which could allow there presence, namely, the void. This study demonstrates the importance of this two creators in the development of theatre studies both at a theoretical and a practical level.

If we wonder again about the condition and the destiny of the actor's body in the 20th century¹, we should consider the theatrical art of one of the most important stage creators: Tadeusz Kantor. Since, during the theatrical performance, the actor's body cannot ignore the requirements of the art to which it is devoted, rendering value to corporality and defining it can only be done within the concept of theatricality. Let us start with a first observation, namely, that the management of emotions (real or feigned) within the acting space can be prepared by means of the instruments the actor disposes of: voice and body. Once the artistic performance status is obtained, the actor's movements become denaturalized to different degrees: barely noticeable in Stanislavski's realistic theatre and radically, dramatically in the theatre of *conscious convention* defined by Meyerhold. There is another situation, when the actor's movements are abolished and replaced with the gesticulations of puppets, as it is with Gordon Craig's übermarionettes.

According to Tadeusz Kantor, the body becomes evidence of and witness to present and past existence. Therefore, there is nothing surprising, in *The Dead Class* where puppet-corpses are carried by the characters who take their places in the desks of "memory". As a matter of fact, the entire directing work of Kantor was marked by pragmatic ontology, the body being the binding matter between both the subject and the context to which it belongs and between existence and the deceased world. In the work of the Polish director we are surprised to discover a theatre

¹ We make reference to this period as it seems relevant for the changes in substance that occurred in the art of performance, but also due to new creators who seem preoccupied with matters referring to the actor's body and the mechanism of corporality.

where there is a stage of lapidary life and of the existence that exposes itself through its double, death. Thus, in the theatre he proposes, *presence* is not involved in the structure of the dramatic construction, but it preserves itself as a theme of utmost importance, peculiar to life, equal in importance with that of memory. We can speak about a duality body-memory as presence and memory are intertwined.

Kantor appeared “unexpectedly” in the world of Polish and European theatre and his attitude was unforgiving with the established values. Likewise, when he left the stage and life, in December 1990, he took with him the “magic” of performances that could not be held in the absence of the master. The Theatre Cricot 2 (founded in Krakow in 1955, replacing the Independent Theatre) made one performance without Kantor: *Today is My Birthday* (1991). It was his last show and the one that proved – as so many times before – that life is a tragic farce, an immobilization of memory in the conjugation of “to die”.

Tadeusz Kantor – director, painter and scene painter. It is a difficult task to define the author of *The Dead Class* using one of these professions as, since the debut of his career until his last stage direction he positioned himself in a permanent avant-garde (even this term seemed inappropriate to Kantor). When one speaks about Kantor the most adequate denomination is *creator*. Between 1934 and 1989 he studied scene painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow; here he was the student of Karol Frycz, friend and admirer of Edward Gordon Craig and he was won over by the German and Russian Constructivism, Dadaism, and the surrealism of Marcel Duchamp from whom he probably, took over the idea of the re-recognized reality, by Francis Picabia, who, after 1940, would create what he named “sur-unrealism” and after 1948, the physical nonfigurative. Until 1975, the year of international acknowledgement with *The Dead Class*, Tadeusz Kantor defined himself as a creator with a personal touch both through the formal originality of his performances and by structure, writing an autobiographic theatre, namely, a theatre in which the director finds his own existence the major source. *The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1979) would become the clearest expression of theatre as memory.

The manifestos in this period theorize the options for a certain type of creation and describe the evolution of the concepts of interest. *The Informal Theatre*, published in 1960, is an answer to the *formism* between 1917-1922 of the Polish expressionists L. Chivistek, T. Czyzewski and S.I. Witkiewicz, considered art as “pure form”, entirely detached of content. Certainly, we notice here a closeness to the “informal art” – which appeared in France in the early ‘50s, with the critic Michael Tapié, an art which is fairly similar to the “abstract” one. In this combination of circumstances, Kantor tried to regain the value of raw matter through the so-called destructions of form. In the manifesto *Emballage* (1962), which is a completion and correction of *The Informal Theatre*, he intended to put forward the disinterested gesture and the use of rejected objects. The manifesto was not, as one might believe, a consequence of pop art, which transformed “the mass-

media products” into a fetish, but it was the result of an endowment with an autonomy in itself of certain “inferior” objects, abandoned by humans. This reference considers Marcel Duchamp’s ready-made objects; later, in *The Water Hen* by Witkiewicz, he will return to this thesis using wrapping-actors, trying to suggest the object condition of the human being, displayed by reality. Here, the issue is not that of an association and relationship guided by an aesthetic conscience, but that of an equal ontological significance of the objects brought to the acting space. In spite of appearances, Kantor constantly denied the forms, opposing to them attitudes, behaviors, moods : “I reject the form – he admitted in an interview taken by Tereza Krzemien – I do not acknowledge anything but my own expression, my ideas, all this conceptual context”². Being a creation and not a laboratory, the theatre became an art determined “to change people’s existence and conscience.”³

In the manifesto *Zero Theatre* (1963) the emphasis shifted from the words uttered “in a law tone” towards gesture and corporality. Reduction to nothing means denial and detachment from the daily reality practice, return to the remains of the spirit by means of memory. However, the text preserves the quality of a companion to the stage performance and it has an equal importance in meaning and significance with the rest of the performance elements:

“[...] For me, the literary text has an extraordinary importance, it is a concentration of reality, a concrete reality. It is an explosive-head that must explode. It is not a basis for the theatre. It is neither impulse nor inspiration. It is a partner. Basically it is as follows: we do not play Witkiewicz, we play with Witkiewicz. It seems to me that this is the only honest solution. If we consider theatre a work of art, we have to put up with all the consequences; this has to be an autonomous work which cannot refer to a pre-existing reality.”⁴

The unity and openness of the theatrical art is achieved through the essence that emerges from each element of the stage (the actor’s body, the uttered text, the marionettes). The actor, whose hidden virtual possibilities are challenged, resembling so much the models that assist him, will finally impose to the amorphous universe a vitality that no one would imagine.

A few years after *The Dead Class* was staged, in the *The Water Hen* by Witkiewicz (1967), when he introduced in the theatre performance the “imitation” of a readymade reality, the actors were treated as the objects. They became objects. “Who said that in the art the objects have a lower rank than the human element? As a matter of fact, the humans are living matter.”⁵

² *Apud* Teresa Krzemien, *L’objet deviant acteur, entretien avec Tadeusz Kantor*, in “Le Théâtre en Pologne”, Varsovie, 4-5, 1975, p. 35.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

The roles are created by Kantor according to the personality of the actors, allowing them to show their individuality: “There is nothing but the actor, a concrete creature; nothing but the reality relieved from illusions”⁶ the director himself behaved as in everyday life, moving and stage-directing according to the mission he assumed. Other manifestos followed, *The Theatre of Events* in 1968, then *The Impossible Theatre* in 1969 and *Manifest* in 1970. The last one was a continuation of *Zero Theatre* which was written due to “the price of existence”. “The work of art has always been illegitimate. / Its free existence has always disturbed the spirits.”⁷ This was the time when Kantor conceived theatre as a true, real art. According to him everything that happens on stage is a reality impossible to deny, the act of creation being an excursion into the knowing and acknowledging of the real. And the role of the theatrical creation consists in the transformation of a fictional, illusory reality into a *real one*⁸.

In 1975, when he started to work on *The Dead Class* – a performance he named “a dramatic reunion” – Kantor became well-known. With this show he reached international recognition. Staged at the Krysztofory Galleries in Krakow *The Dead Class*, used as starting texts Witkiewicz’s text *Brain tumor*, Bruce Schulz’s *Treaty on Mannequins* and *The Pensioner*. Other references can be made to Witold Gombrowitz, with his confessions about the school years. Actually, the three authors were, throughout Kantor’s artistic career, his spiritual family. The performance reveals itself to us as the fruit of frustration-release of a nightmare character in a grotesque and bizarre atmosphere. The bodies of decrepit students, reunited in the desks of the class and accompanied by cadaver-like puppets, signs of previous egos “grafted” onto their bodies, trying to bring the past to life for a moment. They are assisted by tag-characters, similar to the wax figures in the Grévin Museum: *The sleepwalker prostitute*, *The woman behind the window*, *The woman with the mechanic cart*, *The little Old Man on the bike*, *The little Old Man in the toilette*, *The little, exhibitionist Old Man*. They form the “maggot in which the whole memory of the abandoned and forgotten childhood period is deposited, lost because of the lack of tenderness, because of the absolute pragmatism of life.”⁹

Childhood, old age, death unfold syncopated in front of our eyes during a lesson in which there are questions, answers, hesitations, obligations spontaneous and happy remembrances, denunciations, apprehensions and consequences of inexperienced gestures. A final class tour ordered by the woman behind the window: “Take a tour, children!” – and the students leave the stage, a clear symbol for an exit from life, for banishment or even for mass assassination. The volute of events follows, managed by the Cleaning woman, the hermaphrodite-character, the executioner and silent mourner of the dead mannequins (whom she wipes): the

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁷ Tadeusz Kantor, *Manifeste 1970*, în *Le théâtre de la mort*, textes réunis et présentés par Denis Bablet, nouvelle édition revue et mise à jour, Lausanne, Éditions L’Age d’Homme, 1977, p. 191.

⁸ Cf. Teresa Krzemien, *L’objet deviant acteur*, p. 37.

⁹ *Apud* August Grodzicki, *Les metteurs en scène du théâtre polonais*, p. 123.

account of the death of the Duke of Sarajevo, the presence of the Old Man from the toilette as Tumor Mózgowicz, of the little Old Man on the bike turned into his own son and of the Woman with the mechanical cart in Rozhulantyna. The movements of the characters are cataleptic, chaotic, diffuse, the whole stage looking as if it showed the nightmare of machine-beings, the rehearsal of an announced death.

Kantor is on stage, as he is in most of his plays, in order to emphasize the anti-illusion effect and to engage the connection between actors and audience, directing the entire performance like a conductor without having the role of a character¹⁰. In Kantor's theatre the spectator interprets himself by self-contextualization, by placing the self in the context of history and memory. This happens because, as Plesniarowicz explains, the Polish director does not appeal to hazard to allow free will to reevaluate the performance but to reorganize the performance structurally, generating a *con-figured reality* or a constructionist-like reality¹¹. Kantor, "the man in the corner", is here what he is in everyday life: a director, suggesting us as a first impulse of the stage that of the happening. Time and memory are transformed into space, rendering the stage and fiction their dimension. The action unfolds like in a film engaging the cataleptic movement of some old man-student characters who wipe out the trace between the living world and the world of the dead and this takes place on the *French Waltz*, well-known at the beginning of the 20th Century.

The mannequins used by Kantor, "intermediaries between life and death"¹² are opposites of the marionette brought onto the stage by Craig and not only in terms of size. Kantor's mannequins associate emotionally with the actor. The dead body and the living one are linked like Siamese twins – while Craig's marionette replaces the actor, announcing its absolute supremacy and eliminating emotion by outstripping the character it represents. A short time after the first performance of *The Dead Class*, its writer said:

“THE DEAD CLASS
 ceased to be theatre
 in course of time
 it became
my laic prayer book
 I find here
 Lessons of rare silences
 Commandments almost divine
 Heretical warnings

¹⁰ In an article signed by Brian D. Barron, "Festival Times", from 1976, Kantor was appreciated as "having the qualities of a choleric master and of a careful undertaker". See "Le théâtre en Prologue", 3, 1977, p. 25.

¹¹ According to Valentine Protopopescu "For a theatre of total reality. Interview about Tadeusz Kantor with Krzysztof Plesniarowicz", in "Apostrof", 1997, 7-8, pp. 28-29.

¹² Bogdan Gieraczynski, *L'art de Kantor dans le coin lamentable où nous cachon secrets. Entretien avec Tadeusz Kantor, par...*, in: "Le théâtre en Pologne", 1, 1981, p. 11.

Answers that insult the holy spirit,
 pragmatic, constructive and loyal
 Infamous and salutary advice
 Indications against everything
 Consolations
 Hope
 And Liberty.”¹³

The reality of the characters becomes valid through the impact of the stage creator’s (Kantor’s) memory, and through the conflict with the fiction of the literary work. *The Dead Class* is the performance that puts into practice the theoretical principles of the *Theatre of Death*, yearning for *total art*. The manifesto, of utmost importance for his entire work, considers creation as a staging of a ceasing world. The literary text, in his opinion is the owner, in the word’s strict sense, of a happened-happening. The literary text is alive only when is written and can be revived by the help of the actor, through a new appeal to the actor’s body and memory but, this time, by an adequate use of “emotion”. The option of treating the text as a finished word is explained by Kantor: “Only the dead are remarkable”, only they define the tragedy of life.

In 1979, Kantor started to work on *Wielopole, Wielopole*, a homogenous construction in which memories from the director’s life were revived (and even - he said- from a “pre-birth life”), from the martyrdom of the Poles, from the past of the Catholic Church etc. It was the play which might have decisively emphasized corporality and the visualization of memory. A year later the performance was shown in Florence’s Saint Mary Church. With *Wielopole, Wielopole*, (the title repeats the name of the director’s birth town), he tried to widen the scene towards the limits of mnesic hyperspace. When he theorizes, Kantor often speaks about this space, producer of creation, “the chamber of memory”.

The chamber of my childhood
 is obscure, a CRAMMED HOLE.
 It is not true that our childhood chamber
 stays sunny and bright in our memory [...]
 It is a DEAD room
 and a room OF THE DEAD.¹⁴

The memory-characters, the soldier-father, mother Helga, uncles Karl and Olek, identical both in countenance and outfit, their repeated gestures emphasizing memory, are treated with no indulgence and create an atmosphere similar to the road of the cross. Making an effort to treat the theme of the double, Kantor allows

¹³ Idem, *My book of laic prayer*, in “*Le théâtre de la mort*”, p. 243.

¹⁴ Idem, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, in *Le théâtre de la mort*, p. 262.

himself to be conquered by the ghost of his own past like the poet from *Divina Comedia*, descending in the Purgatory. In this case, Kantor takes over Witkiewicz's idea according to which the categories of art are not the categories of life and he suggests the term : "theatrical art", because *the action* in the performance cannot take place without the body movements, whereas the act can be immobile.

After *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor was successful with *Let the Artists Die!* (1985) and *Today is My Birthday* (1991). The first one is a journey in memories with the character Wit Stwos (Polish sculptor of the Renaissance, author of famous altar in a church in Krakow) and a meditation upon the condition of the artist. Kantor places himself, from the stage point view, in the middle, between memory and presence, as if he wanted to argue brutalization of the daily sight and to acknowledge the existence of something that exists beyond the limits of what we can naturally see. The altar turns from a place of worship into a jail cell, and the character Kantor finds himself again like in a reflection of many mirrors, in a past time that conveys shivers of death. Detention is not a physical one, it is rather a detention of memories. In *Today is my Birthday*, Tadeusz Kantor's chair remained empty. His voice, coming from speakers was accompanied onto the stage by characters from the *Dead Class*, from *Wielopole, Wielopole*, etc, from the history of Poland and of the world (the assassination of Meyerhold by Stalin, casting on the audience the stigma of metaphysical guilt), all these sketch a "waltz" of death, a lost laic service. Tadeusz Kantor's entire creation confronted tradition and this made his theatre a theatre of restlessness. In his performances we find a drifting world and chaos "directed" by evil minds and, also, a direction towards saving the calcified values. All these, as well as many others put the audience's destiny under the sign of astonishment¹⁵.

Theatre will be seen as a representation of memory by another famous creator of the 20th Century: Peter Brook. Like Kantor, Brook, appealed to the functions of the imaginary, but his approach meant particularly the extreme exploration of space,

¹⁵ For an introduction in Kantor's theatre, see: Tadeusz Kantor, *Leçon de Milan*, traduction de Marie-Thérèse Vido-Rzewuska, Paris, Éditions Actes Sud, 1990; idem *Ô, douce nuit. Les Classes d'Avignon*, Paris, Éditions Actes Sud, 1991; Guy Scarpetta, *Kantor au présent. Une longue conversation*, Paris, Éditions Actes Sud, 2000; Jan Klossowicz, *Le théâtre d'émotion de Tadeusz Kantor*, in "La Théâtre en Pologne", 3, 1981, pp. 3-4; Juliusz Kydrynski, "Wielopole, Wielopole" de Tadeusz Kantor. *Creation mondial à Florence*, in "La Théâtre en Pologne", 1, 1981, pp. 3-6; Giovanni Lista, *La scène moderne*, Paris, Éditions Actes Sud, 1997, pp. 250-255, 630; Michel Corvin, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du théâtre*, 1: A-K, Paris, Éditions Bordas, 1995, p. 500; Jean-Pierre Léonardini, Marie Collin, Joséphine Markovits, *Tadeusz Kantor. La mort objet trouvé*, in *Festival d'Automne à Paris. 1972-1982*, Paris, Éditions Temps Actuels, 1983, pp. 115-121; Jan Klossowicz, *Le théâtre de la vie arrêtée. Le "Cricot-2" en ses nouvelles demeures à Cracovie et à Florence*, in "La Théâtre en Pologne", 6, 1980, pp. 3-4; August Grodzicki, *Tadeusz Kantor et son "Cricot-2"*, in "La Théâtre en Pologne", 8, 1977, pp. 3-4; Krzysztof Miklaszewski, "Une classe" de Tadeusz Kantor ou le nouveau traité des mannequins au théâtre "Cricot-2" de Cracovie, in "La Théâtre en Pologne", 4-5, 1976. See and Anca Arghir, *Tadeusz Kantor în atelier și pe scenă. Spectacol în serviciul imaginii*, in "Secolul XX", 5-6, 1975, pp. 134-137; Geta Brătescu, *Un exercițiu plastic în spațiul teatral. Tadeusz Kantor*, in "Secolul XX", 1, 1976, pp. 119-120; Geo Șerban, *Brelan de ași*, in "Secolul XX", 5-6, 1975, pp. 108-124.

radical in its references and ending, reminding the absolute infinite space proposed by Newton, the so called *sensorium dei* tutored by divine emanation. It is a space where one find *nothing*, that is, void understood in terms of *absence*, the one *around* the void as *non-being*. Void is revealed in a space beyond contingents, the real, and movement, being possible on any temporal ax, makes liberty become absolute. Both in Brook's and Newton's works there is an idealization of space (absolute and physical) unburdened by any objectuality, with an escape spot that constantly changes, neglecting the logic of albertian perspective. The space is void. It is an absence that allows imagination, illusion, objects dematerialize, leave the real world, but they gain virtuality. In a free space, surrendered to its own non-determination, any journey in time is possible, any mental representation of a place is allowed: everything is allowed: "if we find ourselves in an empty place all conventions are possible and imaginable, they depend [only] on the absence of forms."¹⁶ Let us recall, for a moment the stage and the Versailles theatre hall that welcomes you only after you passed through a corridor made of unfinished stone, a corridor that lacks any ornaments whatsoever, a passage of the spirit of the exeresis, of purification, of getting ready for the lavish space of the theatrical event.

Getting rid of the forms of the sensitive reality, well, this is the aim of this empty space. This is an idea that might be rooted in Newton's opinions: the whirligigs, he said in *The Axioms or the Laws of Movement* – would go on their rotation for ever "if their movement weren't stopped by friction against air [...]", while the planets and comets continue their motion for much longer because they face less resistance in freer space [...]"¹⁷. Obviously, the concepts of the two creators are similar, Newton's void and Brook's empty space attain an absolute level of freedom. When Brook finds temporal discrepancies in Shakespeare's text, he only notices a descent into an undefined space. And this happens because, for example when Shakespeare says via one of his characters: "Bring me the tea!" (indicating apparently an interior intimate space), and the next line is: "Look at these leaves" (what actually he suggests with no effort, that the characters are outdoors, in the middle of the forest), the author chooses in this case an atemporal stage description, he is no longer interested in rendering exact chronotopic dating, but as Brook said, in decoding human relationships which are fed from any inconveniences of the random context.

In Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class*, one could notice real desks, books, catalogues, obituaries, which warn the audience about the death of former students, but whom paradoxically one meets again in the course of a lesson. The director allowed himself to be won over by the virtues of the void, but in a hidden way or, at least, a

¹⁶ Peter Brook, *Le diable c'est l'ennui*, p. 41.

¹⁷ *Apud* Michel Paty, *Le vide matériel, ou la matière crée l'espace*, in Edgar Gruzic, Simon Diner, *Le vide. Univers du tout et du rien*, Revue de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1997/1-2, Bruxelles, Éditions Complexe, 1998, p. 31. Newton associates space to a metaphysical determination. The vacuum space is absolute space, a reality in itself (identical in itself, immobile, unperceivable to senses, irrespective of bodies). Suggesting the *sensorium* of God, with help of vacuum space, the material universe is perceived directly.

corrected one, imagining the performance/ acting space in strict relation to the bodies it contains. The motion of the actors becomes relative, accepted, probably, according to Galileo's and Descartes' philosophy, sketching the limits of an *ethos*:

“This creation of illusion, this
 Improvising, negligence, this load of worn-out objects
 This superficial side, these broken sentences,
 These failed actions which are
 Nothing but intentions, all this
 Mystification, as if a play were truly performed, this "uselessness"
 Can, by themselves, convince that we have
 This experience and sense of the BIG
 VOID and of the last frontiers of DEATH
 the sequence of the lesson from Dead Class
 “in collision with the void” contains
 in an unambiguous way the theatrical core
 Of this Big Game.”¹⁸

It means an implicit motion of the objects, an inertie motion, that is, the bodies/objects breaking the void space, reach an equal speed motion (it reminds us of Galileo and his *Discourses and Mathematical Demonstrations Relating to Two New Sciences* 1638). The space of the dead objects, of memories buried in the director's childhood, in the dramatic text or even in a pre-birth universe, marked by the shadow of death, can only have an equal condition, that of an extreme situation, of a reality brought to life through by creative act of *mis-en-scène*.

It is a mistake to believe that Kantor's and Brook's theatre are creations about finished things, or of non-being that claims its “presence”. The theatre each of them brought forward to the public is an exclamation of life by a survey of memory and by assuming that which could allow their presence, namely, the void. “The only justification of the theatrical form is life” said Peter Brook and Kantor confesses in the *The Dead Class*, the despair to prolong, by a revival of the spirit, the past that would otherwise have closed its gates. Both Kantor and Brook accept the empty space as a justification of a world that re-creates itself, but whereas the first adopted the solution of a “quasi-void” space corresponding to a rarefied universe, in the sense of the absence of the objects of the present and the rebirth of the dead objects, the former chose to free the stage of any objects, thus opening for the character a way towards an original primary time and space, and hence the ontological relations which make theatre more than a mere artistic exercise.

¹⁸ Tadeusz Kantor, *La classe morte*, in *Le théâtre de la mort*, p. 232. For Descartes the vacuum space becomes relativ. In addition, pertaining to the thinking ego, it gains a metaphysical and subjective dimension, consequently for the author as *Metaphysical meditations*, imagining the space in itself is the result of act achieved the judgment of the subject.

This *relation* on which Brook funds his theatrical work seems sufficient during the stage of the *Empty Space*, of the encounter of two individuals, one who passes through the space, the second who watches the first, then, as he would confess years later, it would be necessary to call the third one, the spectator¹⁹. The void space has an energy of its own, a space where the body, reason and the actor's emotions find themselves in a *form* of movement. The conflict that emerges is between tensions and not between *presences* emptied of content. The spectator of the *The Dead Class* is offered a performance of what had happened and what now *is real* to a mechanism theatre owns, just like the spectator of *Mahâbharata* is lead to the sacred space, in which any object would seem caduceus, overlapping fiction and the emotions of the audience.

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¹⁹ See Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, translated into Romanian, by Marian Popescu, preface: George Banu: "A man pass crosses this empty space while somebody else notices him and that is all that you need for the theatrical act to begin" (p.17). From *Le diable c'est l'ennui* by Peter Brook: "Today, I would add a third element that it is necessary"; "a person who watches and who can be alone while another one watches and there is a third person in order to get in contact" – the public (p. 25).

„FIECARE TREBUIE SĂ-ȘI ȘTIE FOARTE BINE MESERIA, DAR SĂ NU SE SEPARE DE RESTUL!”

INTERVIU - RALUCA SAS-MARINESCU

ABSTRACT. Scenografa Judit Dobre Kóthay nu are nevoie de nici o prezentare. Totuși, sunt câteva elemente esențiale care merită menționate. Este absolventă a Institutului de Arte Plastice, Facultatea de Arte decorative și design, secția scenografie. În țară a lucrat în teatrele din Sibiu, Ploiești, Târgu Mureș, Cluj, Târgu Mureș, Satu Mare, Craiova sau București, iar proiectele din străinătate au inclus Limoges (Franța), Budapesta și Debrecen (Ungaria), Subotița (Iugoslavia). Poate fi numită scenograful fetiș al lui Bocșárdi Laszlo. În prezent, pe lângă spectacolele la care lucrează, este lector universitar drd. la Facultatea de Teatru, Universitatea de Artă Teatrală Târgu Mureș.

Apreciata scenografă Judit Dobre Kóthay a mizat, în toată cariera sa, pe munca în echipă

- Când și cum s-a produs întâlnirea cu scenografia?

- Mi-am dat seama, copil fiind, că locul meu nu este pe scenă, deși mi-aș fi dorit să joc. Și la școală, eram înnebunită să joc, dar am avut revelația că eu nu sunt bună pentru acea meserie. Mă uitam la colegii mei, care erau mai adevărați, și atunci am început să mă gândesc, aproape cu disperare, la ce aș putea să fac să fiu totuși în teatru. Acuma, întâmplător, eu desenam, eram la școala de arte plastice, încă din clasele primare. Și mi-am zis atunci că, dacă e așa, aleg scenografia. Încă nu știam exact ce e scenografia, dar eram încântată că există un domeniu pe care îl pot adopta cu mai mult curaj și mai multă încredere. Așa că, la 13 ani, eu ziceam că mă fac scenograf fără să știu despre ce vorbesc. Nu știu dacă, acum, la liceele de arte plastice există această specializare, atunci nu era. Așa că, la liceu, am făcut grafică, dar am fost tot timpul cu gândul la teatru. Am avut și noroc pentru că am intrat din primul șut la scenografia de la Grigorescu. Și asta a fost.

- Și pe urmă au urmat întâlnirile și mai importante...

- Da. Am terminat facultatea, perioadă despre care am amintiri plăcute, dar și câteva neplăcute. Vorbesc acuma de probleme de meserie, evident. Nu știu, cred că și acum situația este aproximativ asemănătoare, dar, pe vremea aceea, Institutul Grigorescu nu era în relații foarte strânse cu Institutul de Teatru. Nu aveam decât legături personale, amicale, cu cei de la regie sau de la actorie. Practic, nu am lucrat împreună, ceea ce,

într-un fel, a reprezentat un handicap. Dar ulterior, când am rememorat perioada aceea, mi-am dat seama că a avut și un uriaș avantaj acest fapt, adică am fost puși în situația de a gândi nu numai scenografic. Nu poți face scenografie, dacă nu gândești un spectacol întreg. E drept că, printre colegii mei, au fost și oameni care s-au axat mai mult pe latura plastică, e o chestie de structură în fond.

Scenografia nu e o meserie individuală

- Cum simțeai că era structura dumneavoastră?

- În ce mă privește, în momentul în care citeam textul, construiam un spectacol. Iar acel spectacol trebuia să aibă un decor și niște costume, pe care le și făceam la planșetă. Dar țin minte că n-a existat nici una dintre teme la care să nu mă fi gândit efectiv la ce se întâmplă, începând de la povestea în sine și până la sensurile ei mai adânci, pe care încercam într-un fel să le cristalizez și în proiectul de decor sau de costume. Mult mai târziu am realizat că nu trebuie să spui prea mult cu tot acel ansamblu de obiecte de pe scenă, nu trebuie să încerci să reprezinți cu disperare acele semnificații pe care le-ai descoperit, pentru că lucrurile, în mod normal, trebuie să se completeze. În momentul în care un spectacol este rezultatul efortului unui grup întreg, cea mai mare prostie e să încerci tu, repet tu, să spui mai mult decât trebuie să spui. Aceasta este o lecție pe care, după ce termini facultatea, încet-încet o înveți. Acolo era greu din punctul ăsta de vedere, pentru că totul se făcea la planșetă și proiectul risca să fie sărăcăcios sau să nu ia ochii, decorul în special, iar costumele să fie foarte epatante. Și eu am făcut din astea (râde). Dar mai târziu mi-am dat seama că nu acelea sunt soluțiile. De exemplu, discutăm de multe ori despre decor. Imediat după terminarea facultății, și eu foloseam cuvântul decor. Dar acum, dacă mă gândesc în urmă, îmi dau seama că, slavă Domnului!, foarte rar am realizat într-un spectacol partea scenografică care putea să fie numită decor. Întâlnirile cu anumiți regizori, de la care am învățat foarte mult, au existat din primii ani. Dar dorința de a realiza un spațiu, chiar dacă nu îl numeam așa la ora aceea, a pornit de la mine din interior. A fost o chestiune de instinct. Cred că și pentru că nu puteam să fac abstracție de munca regizorului și de munca actorului. Din momentul în care spectacolul necesita un anumit tip de spațiu, în momentul acela eu trebuia să realizez spațiul acela, nu să fac... decorul. Eu, în ultima vreme, folosesc acest cuvânt cât se poate de rar, spațiu mi se pare un termen mult mai potrivit. Cu atât mai mult cu cât acesta s-a și diversificat. Dar noi așa am fost învățați. Nu e rău pentru că sunt primii pași, înveți niște lucruri, pe care după aceea le perfecționezi. Mai ales că eu am beneficiat de cursurile lui Dan Mihai Jitianu, patru ani, de fiecare dată îi ceream părerea. Am avut un foarte mare respect pentru el, în afară de faptul că a fost un excelent scenograf, a fost și un pedagog foarte bun. Dar lucrul la planșetă este oarecum individual.

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- *Și receptarea spectacolului prezentat pe planșetă este individuală și ține de construcția individului respectiv. Și atunci întâlnirea fundamentală s-a produs cu regizorii.*

- Bineînțeles. Mai ales că nu exista o tradiție a lucrului cu colegii de la regie, dacă nu mai mult, atunci cel puțin pentru lucrarea de diplomă, care să se materializeze într-un spațiu și niște costume create, realizate efectiv în regia unui tânăr absolvent de regie, nu? În momentul în care acest lucru nu exista, sigur că era o experiență absolutamente individuală, în care nici nu puteai să acuzi studentul de la scenografie care nu ținea cont de celelalte elemente ale unui posibil spectacol și nu gândea mai departe de ceea ce avea de realizat la planșetă. De ce gândeam eu mai departe? Pur și simplu pentru că mie îmi plăcea teatrul, în ansamblul său, din copilărie. Și, pentru mine, actorul era esențial.

„Să cadă șandramaua”

- *Povestiți-ne puțin despre spectacolele dragi, ca să nu zicem neapărat importante sau speciale.*

- În perioada în care am fost la Sibiu, am creat un spațiu care mi-a fost foarte drag, pentru un spectacol cu o piesă bulgărească „Haina cu două fețe”, montată de Mircea Marin. Pe de o parte, pentru că era un fel de hibrid, în sensul acelei măsurii între a spune prea mult sau a spune mai puțin. Știam ce vreau să exprim cu acel spațiu. Norocul a fost că a putut fi foarte bine folosit, că nu a fost o chestiune în sine. De aceea spun că era o formă hibridă pentru că, oarecum, spunea prea mult. A fost o structură metalică foarte agresivă. Primii spectatori au fost membrii comisiei politice de vizionare și mi-am dat seama că a avut un impact asupra lor, pentru că Mircea Marin, care a putut să ocolească toate capcanele care se iveau cu asemenea ocazii, capcane de genul „schimbat în regie cutare sau nu ai voie să spui cutare...”, a ieșit învingător din această luptă care se dădea la fiecare spectacol. În momentul acela, șefa acestei comisii a venit și a spus: „Dar măcar să cadă șandramaua aceea”. Sigur că acest lucru a însemnat că noi am câștigat bătălia definitiv, fiindcă șandramaua nu putea să cadă. Nu se putea face de fiecare dată un alt decor, pentru că acest lucru nu implica doar niște chestiuni ideologice, ci și materiale. Dar atunci am realizat că a avut impactul pe care l-am sperat și mi l-am dorit în momentul în care m-am gândit la spațiul acela. Asta a fost ceva foarte timpuriu. La Sibiu am stat foarte puțin timp angajată și Tompa Gabor a insistat să mă duc la Cluj la Teatrul Maghiar, iar pentru mine a fost un pas foarte important. Și colaborarea cu Gabor a fost foarte importantă. A fost o colaborare timp de 13 ani. În acea perioadă, s-au născut niște spectacole pe care le socotesc importante.

Marioneta unor păpuși

- *Ce înseamnă un spectacol important?*

- Sigur, este o satisfacție imensă să-ți fie apreciată munca, dar cred că cele mai importante spectacole la care lucrezi sunt acelea care reprezintă niște stații ale

preocupărilor tale profesionale. Lucrurile noi pe care le descoperi sau pe care vrei să le aplici. Nu știu la care să mă refer.

- *De pildă, la stația în care ați stat cel mai mult.*

- Cred că stația în care mă aflu acum este cea mai importantă. Cea care cred că ține și de maturitate, nu? La Cluj, “Cântăreața cheală” a fost un spectacol foarte important. Felul în care Tompa Gabor a găsit forma cea mai apropiată de spiritul acestui spectacol, cel care s-a realizat într-un final. De fapt, felul în care am găsit noi soluțiile. Nu neapărat legate de piesă. A fost un moment de comunicare extraordinară, pentru că am ajuns la o soluție, mă refer acum la acea cutie, discutând de fapt niște probleme ale vieților noastre personale. Întrebările pe care ți le pui vis-a-vis de când încetează comunicarea dintre tine și cei din jurul tău, dintre tine și partenerul de viață sau alți oameni apropiați. Noi discutăm despre aceste probleme ale noastre. În momentul în care ne-am pus reciproc întrebarea „în fond, de ce încetează comunicarea?”, amândoi am dat același răspuns și am știut despre ce e vorba. De acolo a venit povestea cu păpușile, completată de propunerea lui Gabor de a inventa acel personaj care nu există.

- *Marioneta.*

- Marioneta a inventat-o mai demult, pentru acest spectacol, cu vreo două luni înainte, așa... la discuții. Ba chiar, la un moment dat, știam că va fi spectacolul studio, el își imaginase un anumit spațiu și trebuia să facem un trucaj pentru a-l realiza. Și știu că o dimineață întreagă a fost rezervată acelei încercări, vreo două ore a durat montarea. Era ceva cu totul diferit. Am stat amândoi și ne-am uitat în tăcere încă vreo jumătate de oră la ce era în fața noastră. La un moment dat, se ridică și zice: „Nu!”. Și atunci am venit acasă după acea discuție și, pornind și de acolo, dar și de la faptul că Tompa spunea că vrea să folosească o marionetă, deodată mi-am pus întrebarea „oare ce poate să însemne o marionetă, nu a unor oameni, ci marioneta unor păpuși?”.

- *Da, pentru că vorbim despre niște păpuși umane.*

- Pentru că păpuși suntem noi când nu mai suntem noi, când ne-am transformat ireversibil. Adică o situație ireversibilă vizavi de o persoană sau vizavi de niște relații. Și ne-am întâlnit din nou cu Gabor și abia atunci s-a născut spectacolul. Nu printr-o comunicare între regizor și scenograf, ci printr-o comunicare între doi oameni care, într-un anumit moment, au avut câte o experiență asemănătoare. Apropo, trebuie să spun un lucru care ulterior a fost formulat nu de mine, ci de un alt regizor care a spus: „Caut, în fond, cheia unei colaborări bune între scenograf și regizor. Și nu numai între scenograf și regizor, ci în interiorul întregii echipe care lucrează la un spectacol.” Dacă fiecare din aceste persoane se află la o stație asemănătoare a vieții în momentul respectiv, atunci este mult mai ușor să comunici,

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este mult mai ușor să fii pe aceeași lungime de undă. Sigur că lucrul acesta ține de hazard. Ține de bunul Dumnezeu, dacă vrei, cu cine și când te întâlnești. Când ai aceleași nevoi de exprimare, vrei să spui același lucru părții adverse, te frământă lucruri asemănătoare. Atunci mult mai ușor ajungi la un numitor comun.

Bocsárdi – fanatic al teatrului

- *Pe cine mai includeți în seria întâlnirilor care v-au marcat ca artist?*

- Am să sar acum la Bocsárdi. Anul acesta am avut posibilitatea să lucrez mai mult cu el. Munca aici e diferită. Și cu Gabor am stat la repetiții, dar cred că la Bocsárdi e altceva. Poate e vorba și de stația respectivă, dar m-a interesat foarte tare modul în care el comunică cu colegii de lucru și adevărul e că m-a cucerit felul în care construiește fiecare spectacol. Structural, este un fanatic al teatrului. Dar m-a cucerit și din alt motiv. Sigur că el are un canafas al spectacolului de la bun început, dar construirea pe rând a scenelor, în majoritatea situațiilor, se face în funcție de temperatura la care se află cei implicați. Astfel, el are posibilitatea să lucreze foarte multe variante ale aceleiași scene. Un fel de atelier.

- *Work in progress...*

- Da. Sinceră să fiu, mie îmi place foarte mult felul acesta de a lucra. Mai ales că îmi dă posibilitatea de a ocoli capcanele propriei mele meserii. Prin natura ei, scenografia își termină treaba mai repede. Dacă scenograful este suficient de atent și are și puțină experiență, atunci există modalități de a termina în așa fel lucrul, încât, fără sacrificii materiale ulterioare, să se poată schimba anumite detalii, în funcție de traiectoria spectacolului. Pentru că, să fim serioși, spectacolul își are viața sa. Lucrând în acest mod mi-am dat seama că de fapt asta vreau. Eu nu fac o diferențiere între feliile care iau parte la construirea unui spectacol: regie, actorie, scenografie, lumini și așa mai departe. Nu se poate să fie numai scenografie. Fiecare trebuie să-și știe foarte bine meseria, dar nu are voie să se separe de restul. Sigur că există multe trupe unde nu se lucrează cu acest crez. Dar am avut surpriza extraordinară în ultimii ani, ca de fiecare dată când mergeam în câte un teatru și lucram cu oameni pe care înainte nu îi cunocusem personal, după un timp oarecare de acomodare, să ajungem la o comunicare în această direcție. În momentul în care abordezi un spectacol, comunicarea e importantă: tu, ca scenograf, să discuți, de exemplu, cu câte un actor, despre o scenă pe care tocmai o lucrează.

Nu cred în nimic mecanic

- *Și în care lucrează costumul.*

- Da, lucrează costumul. Și să-l întreb: „ce ai zice dacă ți-aș da niște mănuși?”. Până atunci nu a fost vorba de așa ceva. Și asta poate să fie în orice moment al lucrului, chiar și în timpul repetițiilor generale. Pentru că în momentul în care vezi

că un actor se chinuie cu o anumită scenă, obligația ta profesională, dar și umană, este să încerci să-l ajuți în măsura în care poți. Secretul ca munca ta să fie apreciată este să fii concentrat pe munca celuilalt. Singurul secret. S-ar putea să îți iasă și dacă uiți treaba asta, dar este întâmplător.

- *Și cu spațiul se întâmplă același lucru. Spațiul trebuie să ajute să creeze o relație.*

- N-am să-ți ascund faptul că a existat o perioadă în care m-a interesat să construiesc spații și costumele m-au interesat mai puțin. Ulterior, sigur, prin natura împrejurărilor, mai ales la Cluj, la spectacole-mamut, s-a întâmplat ca cineva să facă decorurile și altcineva costumele. Și atunci am ajuns să descopăr farmecul deosebit de a realiza costumul. Dar, apropo de faptul că îmi place să elaborez detaliile uitându-mă la ce fac actorii în timpul repetițiilor. În „All That Jazz” este un moment în care, la o repetiție, erau gradenele puse în sală și aparatul de filmat s-a plimbat de jur împrejurul acelei săli, și era o doamnă care stătea cu o țigară într-o mână, picior peste picior, se uita la dansatori, avea un bloc de schițe pe genunchi și desena, în timp ce se uita la dansuri. Când am văzut filmul prima dată, încă nu fusesem în situația fericită de a experimenta această modalitate de lucru, dar venise momentul. Însă mă gândeam cu foarte mult dor și mă gândeam cu foarte mare invidie la situația în care scenograful care creează costumele are posibilitatea de a lucra în modul acesta, organic.

- *Atunci și acolo.*

- Exact. Adevărul e că se poate organiza scoaterea la public a unui spectacol, deci tot procesul de lucru, de așa natură încât scenograful să poată lucra în felul acesta care este cel mai sănătos, după părerea mea. Asta în special la costume. La spațiu e altfel. E bine ca de la prima repetiție să fie clarificat spațiul și chiar dacă e doar un marcaj, marcajul acela să fie cât mai aproape de realitate. Vorbesc de condițiile din România, pentru că în altă parte e altfel, se discută cu jumătate de an înainte, e dat proiectul, când încep repetițiile la scenă atunci deja se repetă în decor, are dezavantajul său și treaba asta, pentru că fixează mult prea devreme niște lucruri. Eu cred că felul în care noi lucrăm în momentul de față nu este un mod de a lucra rău, cu marcajul care este acolo. Odată încearcă marcajul, vezi cum funcționează, încearcă să-l dezvolți în continuare. Vorbesc din punct de vedere regizoral, ce poți face în spațiul acela. Este și scenograful de față. Și, dacă mai trebuie ceva sau trebuie renunțat la ceva, atunci asta se poate face în timp util. Să nu-mi spună nimeni că o asemenea modalitate de lucru îngreunează...

- *Procesul scenic sau de creație al spectacolului.*

- Procesul scenic. Eu cred în lucrul de atelier, eu cred în creația care înflorește la fața locului. Nu cred în nimic care ține de mecanic în materie de teatru. Vezi, e o chestie interesantă, că în felul acesta se poate evita și rezultatul mai mult sau mai

puțin amuzant, în sensul că îți alegi o piesă, se face o distribuție, regizorul discută cu scenograful, lucrează cu actorii și se știe foarte bine despre ce și despre cine vom vorbi în acest spectacol. În momentul în care nu îți organizezi lucrul la modul acesta, de atelier, de câte ori nu s-a întâmplat ca spectacolul să înceapă să vorbească despre altceva sau altcineva. Nu este sigur că vorbește greșit. Nu este un lucru negativ, mai ales dacă este valabil. În cazurile acestea, este hotărâtor care dintre actori ajunge să domine acel spectacol. Atunci, automat, centrul de greutate se mută în direcția aceea. În fond, cu un spectacol poți să spui foarte multe lucruri. Dar întrebarea se pune în felul următor: în momentul în care alegi o piesă, ca, prin intermediul ei, să comunici un lucru în care crezi, atunci ai parte de o anumită doză de dezamăgire în momentul în care nu reușești să spui exact lucrul acela, chiar dacă spui altul, foarte valabil. În momentul în care procesul acesta de lucru în grup, de creație la fața locului, are loc, se elimină în mare parte acest risc, pentru că încerci foarte multe variante.

Studentii, instalații, obiecte

- *Poate de aceea aveți și înclinarea către instalații.*

- Cu instalațiile, situația e următoarea: eu, ca artist plastic, nu mă ocup cu așa ceva. De altfel, nici nu mă consider un artist plastic. Dar m-am gândit foarte mult în ce fel pot să provoc și să dezvolt ochiul regizorului. Regizorul trebuie să vadă lucrurile. Este, evident, un nonsens să pretinzi ca la secția de regie să existe niște studenți care să știe să deseneze. Este un nonsens să le ceri la cursurile de scenografie ca ei să își facă proiectul sub forma unor schițe de perspectivă sau să deseneze costume. Dar, în momentul în care studentul de la regie are posibilitatea să lucreze cu niște elemente reale, obiecte reale, să cunoască obiectul, să-l aprofundeze...

- *Să vadă cum funcționează.*

- Exact. Dincolo de semnificațiile lui semantice, pe care oricum le învață, trebuie să cunoască obiectul, iar lumea obiectelor trebuie să îi fie foarte apropiată și sub alt aspect. Atunci am găsit această soluție, care se pare că a funcționat. Noi avem două materii, de fapt: scenografie și așa numitul curs de arte vizuale. Nu pot să le separ pe cele două. Dacă nu există, din păcate, istoria artei, m-am gândit ca la arte vizuale să o trecem în revistă. Dar nu este suficient. Dacă studentul nu are nimic mai mult de făcut decât să scrie niște referate, să facă niște lucrări, în care să facă eventual pe criticul de artă, vizavi de un autor sau o operă, sigur că învață și din treaba aceasta. Dar el trebuie să cunoască obiectul. Când el cunoaște obiectul, face cunoștință și cu amplasarea obiectului într-un anumit spațiu. El trebuie să simtă spațiul cu corpul său și, în plus, să-i dea și semnificațiile pe care trebuie să le aibă. Se pare că a funcționat, pentru că lor le-a făcut plăcere să lucreze astfel. Adevărul e că a fost o surpriză imensă pentru mine, când, de la prima încercare, ei realizaseră, în diferite săli de clasă, niște instalații, de fapt niște spații, foarte valabile. Nu credeam că vor izbuti atât de bine. La a doua

încercare să nu mai spun. Culmea știi care e? Am zis: „Din moment ce ați făcut niște expoziții, niște instalații ca acestea, voi nu le-ați realizat doar ca să vă verific și nu voi fi eu singurul spectator. Vă rog să vă invitați colegii. Este munca voastră, care trebuie văzută”. A fost foarte interesant cum au reacționat studenții de la actorie când au intrat în aceste spații. La început foarte mulți dintre ei au fost timorați.

- *Au privit această expoziție ca și cum s-ar fi dus la un vernisaj la fondul plastic sau la muzeu...*

- Da, dar ei puteau să circule pe acolo.

- *E adevărat, dar... „nu mă apropii de exponat”.*

- Exact. Atunci i-am îndemnat să folosească obiectele acelea. „Acestea nu sunt niște exponate, încercați să simțiți și voi spațiul”, le-am spus. Aceasta este o altă foarte mare problemă, că generațiile de actori nu sunt educate în acest sens. Sigur că sunt și excepții în care un actor are simțul obiectului. Vorbesc și de costum aici, pentru că și corpul tot un obiect e. În momentul în care simte obiectul, în momentul în care simte spațiul în care se mișcă, e mai ușor. Dacă nu are acest reflex format, pentru actor este un efort în plus, care de multe ori schimbă rezultatul muncii lui în momentul în care iese spectacolul la scenă. Dacă ar avea acest reflex al obiectului, ar fi mai firesc, mai organic.

Totul pentru actor

- *Sau ar lucra costumul și obiectul pentru el.*

- Da! Asta e ca în puzzle: eu am pus asta, tu pui asta. În aceeași măsură joacă costumul pentru el, în care măsură joacă el costumul. Asta apropo de ce spuneam, că munca mea nu are nici un rost în momentul în care nu pentru, sau în folosul, actorului creezi costumul acela. Atunci, poate să fie o expoziție de artă plastică toată scenografia aceea cu tot ansamblul de obiecte. Actorul trebuie să domine spectacolul. Și nu din punct de vedere al ideii de vedetă sau de star. Aici nu vorbesc de faptul că există niște personalități actricești care, în orice situație sau în orice mod, reușesc să subjuge publicul.

Acum doi ani, noi am avut un proiect foarte interesant, al lui Bocsárdi Laszlo, când a făcut două spectacole pe aceeași concepție regizorală, „Regele Lear”. Un spectacol s-a realizat la Sfântu Gheorghe și un spectacol la Teatrul Național Budapesta. A existat o perioadă de pregătire, un workshop, timp de trei săptămâni, cu trupa de la Sfântu Gheorghe. La începutul acestei perioade, noi toți am fost la Budapesta și s-au repetat diferite scene din „Regele Lear” cu cele două trupe. Când o trupă repeta, ceilalți stăteau în sală, iar imediat după aceea cealaltă trupă repeta aceeași scenă. Ulterior au repetat în cruce, adică unii cu alții. Au ieșit niște chestii foarte interesante, mai ales că felul de a gândi teatrul este atât de diferit între cele două trupe din cele două școli.

După ce a luat sfârșit acest workshop, am venit acasă, au început repetițiile la Sfântu Gheorghe, a ieșit spectacolul și, după o pauză de o lună, am început lucrul la Budapesta. Ți dai seama că a fost în aceeași concepție. Și totuși nu, deoarece căile de a ajunge, rezolvările care au dus la concretizarea ideii au fost diferite. Și asta nu numai din punctul de vedere al lui Bocsárdi, ci și din punctul meu de vedere, dar și al lui Bartha József, care a făcut decorul. Iată, în momentul în care trebuie să montezi un spectacol pe două scene atât de diferite, evident că nu poți să realizezi două spații identice. Nu ai voie. Până și culoarea fotoliilor pentru public influențează atmosfera, aerul unei săli de teatru, a unei clădiri. Bineînțeles, influențează și felul în care poți porni un dialog cu o trupă care gândește diferit de tine. Acest dialog nu se poate realiza făcând două decoruri identice. Să nu mai vorbim de costume, unde și în momentul în care este înlocuit, într-o distribuție, un actor, o foarte mare prostie este să-i dai același costum.

Lumina

- *Să revenim la Lear...*

- Revenind la „Lear”, acolo evident situația era de asemenea natură încât nu puteai lucra la fel. În plus, am mai descoperit o chestiune pe care probabil că am neglijat-o înainte. La Learul din Budapesta, am lucrat împreună cu un light designer foarte bun, Bányai Tamás. Cu el am lucrat și la Ploiești, la „Don Juan”. (Teatrul „Toma Caragiu” Ploiești, Don Juan, regia Bocsárdi Laszlo). Și ce văd la un moment dat? Era scena în care se întoarce Cordelia, când Lear deja a trecut într-o altă dimesiune. Aveam un spațiu destul de mare, în față gol, în care Cordelia avea o traiectorie destul de lungă de parcurs până să vină lângă tatăl ei. Și eu o îmbrăcasem într-o rochie galbenă, o să îți povestesc mai târziu de ce. Dar atunci am avut surpriza și spaima că impactul pe care trebuia să îl aibă, asupra publicului, venirea ei și relația pe care trebuia să o stabilească cu tatăl ei care doarme, acest impact, de-a lungul traiectoriei, nu este același. Ba slăbește, ba se intensifică, ba slăbește, ba se intensifică.

Care era problema? Problema era că o parte a scenei, evident din niște considerente foarte serioase legate de scena precedentă și următoarea, o anumită zonă a scenei era luminată cu lumină rece, pe când cealaltă parte a scenei era luminată cu lumină caldă. În momentul în care ieșea dintr-o zonă și intra în cealaltă, se schimba tot. Am fost disperată, bineînțeles. Am început să urmăresc fenomenul acesta. Și am observat că același lucru se întâmplă și cu venirea celorlalte personaje. Regia, mizanscena, cerea o anumită grupare în spațiul de joc. Dar acea grupare, aceste grupuri de oameni, intensitatea relației care se stabilea între ele era fluctuantă. Din cauza luminii, care schimba culoarea costumelor. Și nu erau costume foarte colorate. Nu era o orgie de culori. Atunci, am vorbit cu Laszlo. Nu a trebuit schimbat foarte mult. El avea nevoie de cald-rece, cald-rece. Însă s-a putut, prin mutarea, numai cu o jumătate de metru, a unui actor sau a doi actori, să ocolim povestea asta. Dar am rămas foarte surprinsă, pentru că, până atunci, nu conștientizasem sau nu am fost pusă într-o astfel de situație, să îmi dau seama ce rol important poate avea lumina.

Rochia galbenă sau salvarea Cordeliei

- Revenind la rochia galbenă a Cordeliei: inițial nu fusese îmbrăcată așa. Cred că costumul Cordeliei din a doua parte a spectacolului, era pe jumătate asemănător cu ce a fost la Sfântu Gheorghe, exceptând o haină pe care o lua deasupra. Actrița care a jucat-o pe Cordelia la Budapesta este foarte diferită de Kicsid Gizella, care a jucat-o pe Cordelia la Sfântu Gheoghe. Un actor cu altă structură, alt fizic... Dar rezultatul la care se ajungea trebuia să fie același. În plus, au fost multe probleme cu fata aceea, pentru că ea nu se simțea foarte sigură în acest rol. Desigur că acest fapt pornește un tăvălug la un moment dat și îți trebuie foarte multă răbdare să îl oprești și să diluezi tensiunile. S-au reluat la nesfârșit scenele cu ea. La un moment dat, Töröcsik Mari, marea Töröcsik Mari care juca rolul nebunului, ținând foarte mult la această colegă tânără, a încercat să o abordeze altfel decât regizorul. Tot nu s-a ajuns la rezultatul scontat. Ea nu era rea, dar nu era ceea ce ne doream noi. Și am început să mă gândesc: „Ce-ar fi să-i schimb costumul?”. Dar, de această dată, nu puteam să îl schimb de așa natură ca ea să folosească costumul, pentru că ar fi fost o sarcină în plus pe care ar fi trebuit să o îndeplinească. Vroiam să schimb costumul cu unul care, din punctul de vedere al actriței, să nu existe. Ca ea să poată face abstracție de costumul acela. Atunci m-am gândit că, în momentul în care ea face același lucru pe care îl face acuma, putând eventual să mai crească un pas, ceea ce lipsește, respectiv pasul al doilea și al treilea, să fie reprezentat de costum. Deci costumul să înlocuiască acel hiatus care exista. Da, dar cum să fie costumul acesta, nu aveam nici o idee. Mă uitam la tot spațiul acela, mă uitam la ceilalți, la lumini, la decor, la fiecare detaliu. Și nu se poate, trebuie să fie și justificat, să nu contrazică restul.

Am ajuns, după un timp destul de lung de gândire, de vreo două zile, la concluzia că eu am s-o îmbrac în galben. Mai ales că am verificat că în locul în care ea se află în momentul în care îl descoperă pe tatăl ei, este lumină caldă. Nu mai contează dacă ea între timp mai parcurge și restul. Momentul acela conta. M-am dus la Bocsardi, i-am spus de propunerea mea, el a zis că i se pare ceva destul de radical, dar să încerc. Știi care e culmea? Culmea e că există cei de sus care te ajută când trebuie. M-am dus în magazia teatrului și, după cinci minute, a apărut o rochie care avea exact nuanța de care aveam nevoie. Nuanța aceea galbenă pe care o are o lămâie uitată pe raft, uscată. Un galben foarte obosit, pai dacă vrei, dar mai obosit. Culmea e că era o rochie la nuanță și îi era și bună. Actrița a repetat în rochia aceea. Pentru ea, a fost benefic acest gest, din punct de vedere strict psihologic. Faptul că ești atent la un coleg, că încerci să îl ajuți îl face să se simtă ocrotit. Pe de cealaltă parte, faptul că ea nu trebuia să joace costumul a fost foarte bine și se putea concentra pe ce are de făcut, oprindu-se în acel punct al scenei, când își descoperă tatăl, lumina fiind așa cum era, parcă era de miere. Ea fiind și blondă, emana o căldură extraordinară. Era atât de caldă prezența ei, încât, în momentul următor, când începea dialogul, chiar și părțile mai puțin izbutite dintre ei doi erau atenuate de primul efect. În felul acesta, s-a putut ajunge la o chestiune mai rotundă, mai realizată, am reușit s-o șmecherim, ca să zic așa.

„FIECARE TREBUIE SĂ-ȘI ȘTIE FOARTE BINE MESERIA, DAR SĂ NU SE SEPARĂ DE RESTUL!”

- *Nu, vorbim de meserii.*

- De meserii, de un întreg. Pentru că actorul este cutia de rezonanță a muncii tuturor, a mecanismului spectacolului. De aceea trebuie să ne concentrăm cu toții asupra lui. Pentru că, în momentul în care regia sufocă, soluțiile regizorale sau scenografice sunt prea vizibile și subliniate, ele înlocuiesc ceea ce ar putea să spună actorul foarte bine despre ele. Actorul e mijlocul prin care tu îți poți etala absolut toate ideile, și îți spui părerea și poți să comunici cu cel mai mare impact și mergând direct la țintă. Este foarte simplu, în fond, dar este foarte greu să crezi acest simplu.

O altă chestiune care mă preocupă este povestea eclectismului, atât în spațiul de joc, cât și în realizarea costumelor, dar și prezența costumelor de stradă, tehnică folosită tot mai des în spectacol. Nu este un lucru rău. La Târgu Mureș, am lucrat la o piesă foarte frumoasă, dar foarte greu jucabilă, pentru că este practic o teză filosofică, „Locțiitorul lui Caligula”. Eu am mai lucrat la acest text, cu totul și cu totul altfel, într-o altă regie. Îl apreciez, dar nu-mi este apropiat, pentru că e o uriașă capcană în ceea ce privește jocul actorilor, care sunt tentați să recite, să fie bombastici, foarte solemi. Nu are viață, după părerea mea.

Dacă tot am mai lucrat pe textul acesta, am zis „hai să vedem cum s-ar putea face, ce aș putea eu să fac pentru a-i ajuta pe actori să ocolească aceste capcane ale textului”. În primul rând, am convenit cu Kincses Elemér, care semnează regia, să facem un spectacol studio, pentru că textul nu este de scenă mare. Și am imaginat un cort militar octogonal, care să fie amenajat exact cum sunt amenajate corturile militare contemporane. Am verificat în text să nu existe contradicții caraghioase. Costumele, evident, tot contemporane: romanii erau îmbrăcați în niște haine militare actuale, nu neapărat ale unei anume armate, iar tabăra adversă, delegația evreilor, rabinul și ceilalți, sunt îmbrăcați ca niște politicieni contemporani. Am sperat și se pare că, într-o anumită măsură, lucrul acesta s-a și realizat, că actorii, îmbrăcând niște haine care le sunt familiare, se vor putea apropia mai mult și într-un mod mult mai firesc de acest text care comportă niște adevăruri foarte grele în fond. Nemaivorbind de faptul că problematica piesei este actuală.

Am sperat acest lucru, mai ales la cei doi actori tineri care joacă bodyguardii, ca să folosesc acest termen, respectiv Bányai Kelemen Barna și Bokor Barna. Toată lumea știa cum va arăta decorul, mai ales că am făcut o machetă destul de detaliată, pe care am dus-o deja la repetițiile de la masă. Cortul nu putea fi realizat în marcaj. Sigur că amplasamentul obiectelor era același, dar nu asta conta. Conta senzația și sentimentul care apărea în momentul în care ai intrat în acest cort verde-oliv. Cortul l-am dat la executat la o firmă pe care am găsit-o pe internet și l-au executat excelent. În fine, a apărut, l-am montat pe scenă, și publicul urma să stea în cort. Au venit cei doi băieți, nu m-au văzut, au intrat în cort și au zis: „Mă, da’ spațiul ăsta te obligă!”. A fost o bucurie foarte mare să aud replica asta, pentru că ea constituie dovada că legătura actorului cu obiectul nu este pierdută și că, totuși, există această sensibilitate a actorului, chiar dacă ea nu este educată încă începând din școală.

Dintre premiile obținute de Judit Dobre Kotay ar fi de amintit Mențiunea pentru scenografie la Festivalul Teatrului Contemporan, Brașov, 1979, cu spectacolul „Jocul” de Ion Băieșu, Premiul pentru cele mai bune costume, la Festivalul Național de Teatru, Szolnok (Ungaria) 1992, cu spectacolul „Cântăreața cheală” de E. Ionesco, Premiul EMKE pentru realizări de excepție în domeniul scenografiei 1993, Premiul Banffy pe stagiunea 1995-1996, Premiul pentru scenografie, Festivalul Național de Teatru, Iași, 1996 cu spectacolul „Cabala Bigoșilor” de M. Bulgakov, Premiul Jászai Mari, 2005. A mai lucrat cu Tompa Gabor, Iulian Vișa, Tompa Miklos, David Grant (Irlanda), Kincses Elemér, Claudiu Goga, Alexandre Colpacci, Tomory Peter.

DAH THEATRE SERBIA THE THEATRICAL RESEARCH CENTRE

INTERVIU - OANA POCAN

ABSTRACT. Representing initially only an ambitious theatrical project, which couldn't find its place in the cultural context of former Yugoslavia not even from a legal point of view, DAH theatre had been existing since 1991 and intensifies year by year its national and international impact. Talking about DAH meant for the one of the trainers, Sanja, not only a mere interview, but the affirmation of a real profession of faith; the passion in evoking what work in this team, the past and future projects. Even the single fact that this contemporary theatrical laboratory was born and manifested in parallel with the war, that shook completely the former Yugoslavia, is enough to understand the purifying, elating, salvaging function of theatrical art (understood as a joining between dance, voice, movement and acting).

DAH - the theatre with a social implication

DAH Theatre was formed in June 1991 as the first theatrical laboratory in Yugoslavia. It is an independent company concerned with the development of contemporary theatre. By its experimental work, the theatre stimulates the potential of artists and individuals to contribute to a society in transition. In 1993 DAH Theatre expanded its activities by forming the Theatre Research Centre. The latter hosts workshops, lectures, seminars, guest performances and festivals. The work of the Centre is aimed towards a constant exchange of knowledge, experience and ideas among artists and participants from various theatrical and national traditions.

DAH Theatre performances

The International School for Actors and Directors takes place annually, and the first session took place in June/July 2002 in BELGRADE, Serbia, with the participation of artists and theatre students from different parts of the world and Serbia. The School is an intensive three week program of events and practical working sessions designed for both actors and directors based on contemporary theatre techniques, and DAH Theatre's specific path of creation. The starting point of the School is the new approach in which both directors and actors will indulge in a creative process of physical and vocal training, creating materials and through the process of montage, of creating a performance. During this period the students work and learn from the core members of DAH Theatre: director Dijana Milosevic, and actresses Maja Mitic and Sanja Krsmanovic Tasic, renowned voice and movement specialists.

DAH performances are impressive, but they always refer to social, exterior events, even important political events, or to essential moments from the performers' personal life and development: **Crossing the Line - Women Build Peace** (2008-2009) (a collection of women's authentic testimonies about the wars, that had happened on a soil of former republic of Yugoslavia from 1991 till 1999); **In/Visible City** (2007-2008) (make the multi-ethnic structure of the cities in Serbia and the richness of different ethnic cultures more visible); **In Search of the City** (2007), and so on.

Sanja Krstanovic Tasic (1963) Graduated at the Philological Faculty, University of Belgrade, and at the Faculty for Physical Education, University of Novi Sad, group for Modern and Jazz Dance. Core member of DAH Theatre since 1993, she created programs and performed as one of the principal actors. From 1982-1990, she became soloists of the Belgrade Contemporary Dance group. She works as a dance and movement pedagogue since 1984 and from 1995-2001 co-founds and leads the "Center for Artistic Dance" in Belgrade. She conducted workshops on movement and acting world wide.

O.P: First of all, thank you for accepting to answer to my questions. The first one, S.K.T.: you are a dancer and when you came to DAH you had to put the dancer and the actress together. How these two completed each other?

S.K.T.: It's a good question actually because it's funny. I remember when I was young I was acting a lot in school, the British school, but when I came back to Serbia I did not speak Serbian so well. I could not say [r] (this is very important), I was pronouncing [a:] like in English. So, I was very shy to speak and then, because dance was my first love, I decided to continue dancing because I do not need any words. But for me, at the beginning, it was very difficult because my body has these clichés from dance. And for a while - it took maybe two years – I had to get rid of these body clichés that dance puts into you, to find my own body expression. What was interesting it's that I had very bad muscle pains. So, if you have problems with your body when you are doing your training it's normal. I was much trained, my muscles were very strong and for two years I had muscle ache because of the training that we did in *Dah Theatre*. Because it was a completely new way how I was using my body. I remember I couldn't climb the stairs how much my muscles could hurt - can you imagine!-. I think the biggest turning point in my life, in theatre was "*The Kelly Heller Case*" because in this performance we worked very long with very deep material, very strong material and what was happened actually I really connected my acting-being and my dancing-being into one. This was my turning point. Dijana, my colleague, mentioned that there always are some performances very important in our development, who make you grow a lot, change a lot; for me, this was the performance that really represented a big step further, a big jump. This was the moment when I went back to dance - in a way. I realized that all I knew was only spoiling what I was doing as an actress, because there was too many clichés, it reflected the way how a dancer thinks, not an actor way of thinking. It's a completely different path, because the dancer thinking is very abstract - it's entirely in movement, shape, colors, and rhythm...

O.P.: There is a lot of technique in the development of your body...

S.K.T.: A beautiful technique with the body is important, because the body is able to express feelings, but sometimes it is empty, and acting makes the feeling very concrete. It's really something about real life, you have to offer the concrete thought that it is behind the movement. This makes it reach and very close to life - in a way- because for me sometimes dancing is like a dream, it's like painting; it's like music, unreal. Acting is something that is really here and now, someone's thought can be sad, and can be happy, and can be rude, and can be bad, but also can be very human and noble. I really prefer to concentrate on these thoughts, this message.

O.P.: So, what does DAH mean to you?

S.K.T.: For me, it is strange because I am an ordinary woman, I have a family: a husband, two children, a cat, a home; but for me, *Dah* is like a monastery, it's like a Buddhist monastery. It is a place where you go because you want to develop as a human being, in a spiritual way. In this monastery, you have different rituals and you have different exercises. But this way of life and work – as an artistic horizon of expression - what you achieve is some kind of a change into the world. I think this is important, and it is a very peaceful change. It is not a change that you go out and protest, or put a bomb around your waist and you go somewhere to make a drastic political statement. On the contrary, it is something that we do every day and doesn't have to be only performance, when people watch what we have done. We perform this ritual every day of our life and with a group of people around, and we really believe in that very human, noble spiritual way of transforming the world.

O.P.: Like a catharsis?

S.K.T.: It could be like a catharsis, but it's like some kind of a natural change. You go on this way of change and you develop your personal world, and, probably, the world of human beings.

Jasmina: (*one student from International School*): Sorry to interrupt you. Do you remember the story from this movie *Offret* (The Sacrifice -1986) by Tarkovsky. It has a story in the beginning, about a monk who planted a tree; and for years and years he was watering that tree, and I don't know in how many years the tree came to life just because every day he was watering that tree. I think that's what you are talking about

S.K.T.: That make sense, because sometimes people said "Why do you do what you do?" There are not many people who watch us, we don't make mass performances for thousands of people, and we don't like this. We want that any person who comes to watch us have a strong experience of the performance: we do not like to be watched from some two hundred meters, like some little actors doing something on the stage. We really want this direct exchange of energy. And I have this deep believe that this requires a lot of sacrifice, a lot of quiet dedication, it requires every day testing your personal skills. It's very difficult. But, I realized it really makes sense in a much deeper way than just ordinary life.

O.P.: So, this every day training was like salvation in dark times, I mean during the war. Dijana told us about your rehearsal during the war, about the bombing. It was like a shelter: Dah was a place where every problem was gone, a place where you could rediscover yourself like a human being.

S.K.T.: Yes, because this is a practice that makes you feel very safe - in a way. In the same time you risk very much, because you are offering your own body when you do the training. When we were in New Zealand and the bombing started in Serbia (1999) my entire family was here in Belgrade. I felt – and you know because you, also, have a child - it was a terrible moment- if you are a mother you want to take your babies, this is all you think about, nothing else exists. At those moments it was a very hard workshop, very demanding – the Tadashi Suzuki workshop. We were unhappy and crying and sad about the whole situation, and I was to this workshop and they ask me: “Why are you going to this workshop in this terrible situation?” And I said this is the only way I can survive this period before we go home. Because this workshop is so strong, this technique is so demanding that you have to be here and now. You have to be present and think only of this moment, just to be able to save your body, not to get hurt. I discovered that this is a way you can overcome difficult situations. In our work, you became very focused on what you are doing, and if you do it hundred percent focused, you don’t care about what is going on around you, and you find your own path to resist. Simultaneously, you discover how to say things that are important to other people. For example: when we performed “*Documents of time*”, people were crying so much after the performance and we asked: “Are you sad? Why are you crying?” And they said “No. Thank you. We are sad in a beautiful way, and we need this sadness to overcome the whole experience of bombing, the whole story; to put it behind. We needed this experience to be able to go on”. And this is very nice. It is really what we said about healing, forgiveness and how to go on.

O.P.: How was the training at Odin Theatre?

S.K.T.: For me it was a whole new world. Actually, we mentioned a lot of Odin Theatre because for us it was the model for our entire work. Can you image to work with a group of people for forty two years? To be married with someone for forty two years? It is a big success and it’s also very difficult; you can love this person very much, but you cannot imagine working, developing, to going on with somebody for such a long time... It’s fantastic! We came here and we discovered how much everything it is important for them: the spirit, the relationship with people, the giving, and the dedication. It’s very beautiful. I felt connected with them when I saw how much they are connected with India, theatre anthropology, researching ... And for me it was like home, because I lived so many years in Asia. I did Indian dance and I was also doing classical ballet; somehow it makes sense to me, because what we are doing in *Dah Theatre* is also connecting things and connecting audiences with us. Then Eugenio Barba explained it so well – because they have the same principles - so this is why we felt connected.

O.P.: I want to ask you about performances “work in progress”. What is the idea of such a performance?

S.K.T.: It was 2000, after the bombing, and for a while – for ten months - Dijana and Maja went to America. I was alone in Belgrade, I was working with *Youth Drama Group*, fundraising for *Dah Theatre* for our ten years anniversary. Because I was alone, I was doing a lot of work by myself, in the working space. Actually, it was a good period for me, because I created two important pieces for myself: one is “*Dancing with darkness*” my solo, and the other one comes from thinking of all my characters that I did in *Dah Theatre* and who are completely different. I thought that it will be interesting to show how I worked on these characters, what is the elaboration story. Maybe it will be interesting for people to know some secrets of the performance. I worked many, many months on this, and when Dijana came back - I didn't know how to put the parts together. I asked her how to connect them and she said: “Chronologically”. Because she's a director, I thought she will invent a very complicated way of editing, for putting all these parts together. Instead, she said: “Just chronologically! You play the first year, the second year and so on...” So, we worked together and I performed for the first time on our Tenth Anniversary. I wanted to do something for this event, to show what I made and become these years. I wasn't working for ten years on *Dah*, only eight; But my question was S.K.T.: “What did I do in these eight years?” It went well and I think it was interesting, but now I am thinking maybe to create another work. But you shouldn't do it often, maybe once in ten years. Ten years is a good period because you have a lot of material.

O.P.: How did you feel the character after eight years? Was it different? Was it the same approach?

S.K.T.: Because of the way we work all the material, it is very fresh. It is all there.

O.P.: Because of the inner story?

S.K.T.: Yes. Because of inner story, it comes from you, it's deep inside you. It is not something imposed, and because of that it's very much still in you, it's still alive. In a way, what happened is that when you did it, years before, you just did it. And after a while, new experiences make you analyze more profoundly, you realize some details, you realize why you are doing this. For example, I had this big impulse to change something in my life in 1993, because of the war. I wanted to do performances on myself; I wanted to protest against the war. I found a theatre where I could speak and I could express myself, it's very political involved theatre. I thought then it was very important and beautiful for, but it was later, when I analyzed, that I realized the connections and how important was to fulfill these needs. In that moment I didn't think “This is the theater where I can express my thoughts about the war”. It all came later.

O.P.: How is it to teach at an International School? How do you see yourself as a teacher?

S.K.T.: I was teaching many years before *Dah Theatre*, and this is one of the most beautiful things that you can do in life, because you are able to share something you know with somebody, you develop a very deep connection with this person. I am very interested in this new idea that we practice every year in school, in life: that is “interactive teaching”. It not only you that teach, but you learn something from the person you teach, and this offers a permanent an exchange. A very important interpersonal exchange.

The three of us we have a lot of experience giving workshops alone, but the School is always very special, because of our relationship between ourselves. It is about how we work as a team, how we try to complement each other and to inspire each other. It’s like building something, and is also similar to how we work on performanceS.K.T.: this exchange, the impulse you give and you get it back. It is a lot about how I, and Dijana, and Maja work in theatre. So, this is why the school is so important and special for all of us.

O.P.: We noticed that you all are so involved and enjoy what you do; and after all these years, we would expect – somehow - the teacher to be bored. I never noticed any sign of boring or tiredness all these three weeks.

S.K.T.: Every time the work seems new, because the group is new and also we are trying not to repeat ourselves. All these years we had so many different processes, in different ways of techniques, and what we are trying to do now is to offer different aspects. We have people who are coming again for two times, three times, and it is very challenging, because it is something new that these people should learn.

O.P.: How about the future? What are your plans?

S.K.T.: What we are very much involved in a perspective from inside the war, a very engaged work. Also, Maja and me, we are planning to do performances for children about our cats, different stories...

O.P.: I know that you are going to do some workshops for people with disabilities and special needs.

S.K.T.: Yes. This is a project that I am involved in, and I will start very seriously this summer and in December it will finish. This is one of the types of activity that I am very interested in. In away it is like a circle, because I am back to some of my origins with dance and choreography, and we will work with people who are deaf, who are blind and people who are in wheeler chairs. We will create a performance with these people. We want it to be a very high quality performance and we will have dancers, very good dancers, from Belgrade, and they are already involved in this project and they will work with these people.

O.P.: Good luck with your projects and thank you for your time. I know that you were several times in Romania and we hope you will come again.

S.K.T.: I would like that.

The interview was taken at the seventh edition of the International School for actors and directors, organized by the DAH Theatrical Research Centre of Serbia, gathering 14 participants from all over the worlds (Australia, New Zealand, USA, Sweden, Japan, Romania, Serbia). The artist S. K. T., the “soul” of this workshop, among with the other two colleagues (the same as in all editions), was very open-minded, proving professionalism, sociability, emotional availability, spreading – at the same time – freedom, and creative energy. There were three weeks of vocal and movement training and demonstrations of those belonging to DAH (“work in progress”). We were not only a group, but a team, although each of us was coming from another cultural area, with very different experiences, we were all “open minded”, we satisfied our appetite for acting/dancing/discovering ourselves; but, especially, we proved that passion for theatre does not have geographical or linguistic borders.

For more information on DAH (founding, performances) please contact the official website: http://www.dahteatarcentar.com/index_eng.html