



RIKU ROIHANKORPI

## From A Darkness to A Blind Spot

Encounters between Theatre, Modern Continental Ethics of  
Responsibility and the Concept of Evil



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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*This work is dedicated to all of you.*

Riku Roihankorpi

Tampere, 8 April 2010

## Tiivistelmä – Summary in Finnish

Tämä tutkimus tarkastelee teatteritaiteen, modernin mannermaisen vastuun etiikan ja pahan käsitteen välisiä suhteita filosofisesta näkökulmasta. Sen tutkimusstrategiat muodostavat sarjan havaintoja, joiden avulla voidaan voidaan pohtia entistä tarkemmin teatterityön, draaman ja modernin eettisen ihmiskuvan välistä problematiikkaa. Tutkimus ei oleta taustakseen mitään yhtenäistä käsitystä teatterin suhteista eettisiin kysymyksiin tai näiden sosio-poliittisiin kytkentöihin, eli kysymys ei ole minkään vakiintuneen filosofisen, tutkimuksellisen tai teatterillisen yhteisön eetoksen tarkentamisesta tai vahvistamisesta. Sen sijaan työ analysoi prosesseja, joilla useat historiallisesti ja ideologisesti erilliset ja eriävät filosofiset sekä taiteelliset lähestymistavat ovat osallistuneet ja osallistuvat inhimillisen olemassaolon, sen ilmaisullisen/teatterillisen ulottuvuuden ja näissä päällekkäisissä konteksteissa ilmenevien vastuukysymysten välisten suhteiden käsittelyyn. Samasta syystä tutkimus ei käsittele teatteria yhtenäisenä taiteellisenä traditiona, vaan taiteellisenä ja luovana toimintana, johon ihmiseläin (Badioun terminologiaa seuraten) osallistuu *olemisesta kiinnostuneena ja huolestuneena toimijana*. Huolimatta työn metafysisistä alkuehdoista siinä käsiteltävät teatterilliset kysymykset kohdistuvat tiettyihin tekstuaalisiin teemoihin ja esityskuvauksiin. Strategia perustuu paitsi välttämättömiin käytännöllisiin lähtökohtiin, myös pyrkimykseen informoida sellaisia näkökantoja, jotka perustavat eettiset merkitykset representoinnin ja epistemologian kautta määräytyvien ja problematisoituvien lähestymistapojen varaan.

Tässä kontekstissa termi *representaatio* liittyy paitsi olemisen moninaisten piirteiden jäljittelyyn, uudelleentuottamiseen ja muokkaamiseen, myös saksan kielen sanaan *Vorstellung*, joka jo rakenteellaan viittaa kaiken ilmitulevan (olemisen) ennalta ajateltuun, ennalta aavistettuun ja ennalta kuviteltuun luonteeseen ja näin ollen mahdollisuuteen painottaa tiettyjen ilmiöiden näkyvyyttä ja havaittavuutta toisten kustannuksella. Termi *teatterillisuus* seuraa työssä tiettyjä Richard Wagnerin (1813-1883) jälkeisiä näkökantoja, joiden mukaan teatterin ilmaisulliset elementit tai *eleet* kantavat mukanaan representoitavasta ilmiöstä riippumattomia eettisiä ja ei-eettisiä merkityksiä. Nämä merkitykset taas nojaavat vahvasti käsitteen *mimesis* vaikeasti määriteltävään olemukseen, siihen teatterilliseen ja kokemukselliseen elementtiin, joka sallii ilmaisun ainutkertaisuuden, toistettavuuden ja vaikuttavuuden samanaikaisen olemassaolon. Lyhyesti sanottuna käsite *mimesis* merkitsee tässä työssä rajoittamatonta (ja vallitsevaa) mahdollisuutta havainnoida ja hyödyntää ilmaisun, käyttäytymisen, toiminnan ja havaittavien ilmiöiden monimerkityksisyyttä. Tästä syystä teatterillisuus tulisi käsittää työn konteksteissa myös olemassaoloon liittyvänä tilana tai tietoisuutena, jolla ihmiseläin iskostaa itsensä ja eleellisyytensä maailmaan, tietoisuutena olemisen sosiosymbolisesta merkityksestä ja perustavanlaatuisesta näytteilläolon tunteesta.

Tutkimuksessa tarkastelluista draamoista, esityksistä ja teatteriteoreettisista näkemyksistä yksikään ei toimi yksiselitteisenä esimerkkinä modernista eettisestä ihmiskuvasta. Jotkut eivät myöskään sijoitu historiallisesti määräytyvän modernin ajanjakson piiriin. Sen sijaan valitut työt valaisevat modernin ihmissubjektin eettistä problematiikkaa useista eri lähtökohdista.

Itävaltalaisen näytelmäkirjailijan Peter Handken (1942-) varhaiset työt tarjoavat tutkimukselle haastavia kielellisiä ja epistemologisia näkökulmia inhimilliseen toimintaan, sillä ne avaavat tutkimusreittejä etiikan, kielen, kommunikaation, ilmaisun ja merkityksen välisiin ristiriitaisiin ja toisinaan *radikaalia paha* ilmentäviin suhteisiin. William Shakespearen (1564-1616) *Macbeth* (1606) ja Jean Racinen (1639-1699) *Phèdre* [*Faidra*] (1677) sekä tietyt analyysit niiden identiteettipolitiikasta ja ontologisesta problematiikasta tuottavat työssä perustavia kysymyksiä koskien ihmiseläimen ja olemisen välisen suhteen eettistä ydintä ja ratkeamattomuutta/mahdottomuutta. Sarah Kanen (1971-1999) *4.48 Psychosis* (2000) puolestaan kääntää tulkitsijansa tarkastelemaan tarvetta rakentaa ja ylläpitää kommunikoinnin inhimillisiä merkityksiä ja teemoja sekä tämän tarpeen suhdetta eettisiin kysymyksiin ja pahan mahdollisuuden olemisen rakenteessa itsessään. Työ keskittyy myös yhteen Buchenwaldin keskitysleirin vankien valmistelemaan teatteri- ja kabaree-esitykseen, joka heijastaa ihmisilmaisun, kielen, politiikan ja etiikan välisiä monimutkaisia suhteita sekä näiden suhteiden tuottamaa *eettistä yhteismitattomuutta*. Tutkimukseen sisältyy myös muita huomionarvoisia tutkimuskohteita teatteritaiteen piiristä, mutta mainitut esimerkit valaisevat sen eettisen ongelma-alueen laajuutta.

Teatteria, taidetta ja työn tutkimuskohteita koskevat teoreettiset näkökulmat rakennetaan ensisijaisesti Herbert Blaun (1926-), Roland Barthesin (1915-1980), Denis Guénounin (1946-), Hans-Thies Lehmannin, Martin Heideggerin (1889-1976), Esa Kirkkopellon (1965-), Zeami Motokiyon (1363-1443), Slavoj Žižekin (1949-), Janelle Reineltin, Oliver Felthamin, Jacques Rancièren (1940-) ja Alenka Zupančičin (1966-) ajatusten varaan. Koossapitäväksi voimaksi tutkimuksen teoreettisille lähestymistavoille hahmottuu se seikka, että vaikka teatterintekijät, sen teoreetikot ja filosofiset tarkkailijat usein (ja syystäkin) pidättäytyvät töidensä eettisten johtopäätösten liiallisesta tarkentamisesta ja kieltäytyvät näin minkään eettis-moraalisen varmuuden propagoinnista, vastuun etiikkaa voidaan lähtökohtaisesti tarkastella näiden töiden elimellisenä osana tai ongelmana.

Tutkimuksen eettiset näkökannat perustuvat pääasiassa kolmen vaikutusvaltaisen mannermaisen ajattelijan tuotantoon. Huolimatta merkittävistä näkemyksellisistä eroistaan, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) ja Alain Badiou (1937-) suuntaavat kaikki eettisen pohdintansa ihmistoiminnan ja inhimillisen vastuun alueille, pyrkien ylittämään tai läpäisemään mainittujen kontekstien ennakkoehdot tai jopa näiden ennakkoehtojen muodostumisprosessit. Valitut kolme ajattelijaa rakentavat syvällisen perspektiivin *modernin ihmissubjektin* eettisten statusten ja ongelmien tarkastelulle, ei vähiten siksi, että moderni ihmissubjekti merkitsee tutkimuksessa toimijaa, joka käsittää itsensä autonomiseksi mutta vastuulliseksi tekijäksi siinä määrin kuin sen luonnolliset ja sosiaaliset ympäristöt toimivat esteinä, huolenaiheina ja mahdollisuuksina sen (jokseenkin) itsenäiselle tahdolle ja ajattelulle. Samaan problematiikkaan viitaten termi *moderni* merkitsee tutkimuksessa käsitystä ihmisyydestä, jonka mukaan maailmaan sijoittuneet ontologiset ja eettiset asemat ja asemoinnit altistuvat monenlaisille yhteismitallisille ja –mitattomille yksilöiden välisille ja luonnollisille suhteille sekä hierarkioille. Nämä suhteet ja hierarkiat eivät hallitsevasta olemuksestaan huolimatta pysty kumoamaan tai sulkemaan pois etiikkaa (tai vastuuta), joka on

luonteeltaan *transsendentaali* (tässä yhteydessä *riippumaton mutta perustava suhteessa kokemukseemme*) tai etiikkaa, joka on käsitettävissä vain kaikkivoipaisesta ja kaikenkietävästä perspektiivistä.

Kant lähestyy tätä problematiikkaa ja sen ehtoja (muun muassa) *rationaalisuuden, autonomisuuden, radikaalin pahan ja moraalilain* näkökulmista. Badiou puolestaan etsii sen sisältämiä tai tuottamia tapahtumallisia *totuusprosesseja*, näiden prosessien muodostamia perustavanlaatuisia muutoksia olemisessa sekä niiden inhimillistä velvoittavuutta. Levinasin mukaan *olemassaolon perustavan etiikan* ja sen myötäsyntyisen velvoittavuuden tulisi aina jo valmiiksi hallita ihmisen tiedollista olemista ja toimintaa, jopa siten, että tämä minäkeskeinen tiedollisuus *korvautuu* — tai on aina jo valmiiksi korvautunut — eettisellä vastuulla. Tutkimuksen keskeisimmistä havainnoista mainitsen tässä kolme:

Huolimatta Levinasin ehdottomuudesta etiikan esiontologisen aseman painottamisessa, tarkastelen tutkimuksessa hänen kieltä ja ilmaisua koskevan filosofiansa kautta teatterin ontologista merkitystä suhteessa tähän painotukseen. Guénounin ja Kirkkopellon teatteria koskeviin ajatuksiin viitaten voidaan havaita, että teatterillinen toiminta ja sen tarttuminen ihmisen ilmiöön ovat aktiviteetteja, jotka eivät peräänny *keskinäisen olemisen haastavuudesta* tai siitä seikasta, että tämä haastavuus *merkitsee* jotakin. Nämä aktiviteetit käsittelevät siten akuutteja ihmistenvälisiä suhteita kosketuspintoina, joissa etiikan hallitsematon velvoite tematisoidaan, jotta jotakin sen velvoittavuudesta nousisi esiin, edes olemisen uppiniskainen välinpitämättömyys ja väkivalta etiikkaa kohtaan. Tässä mielessä voidaan sanoa, että teatteri koettelee etiikan ontologista ja esteettistä uskottavuutta (sekä toisin päin).

Badioun teatteria koskevan pohdinnan yhteydessä hänen termiään *teatteri-idea* (tai *-ajatus*) tarkastellaan kompositiona, joka edellyttää että teatterin inhimilliset elementit — esiintyjät, katsojat sekä molempien asemien sosio-poliittinen *läsnäolo* ja *ele* — pyrkivät luomaan *epäyhteisön*, jota voidaan kuvailla ilmaisulla *'radikaali me'* (Reinelt). Tämä epäyhteisö perustaa ajallisuuden/olemisen tavan, joka on hetkittäistä, potentiaalisesti toistuvaa sekä sosiaalisesti ja poliittisesti määrätymätöntä osallisuutta jostakin *totuudesta*. Se on kuitenkin kytköksissä politiikan, estetiikan ja etiikan välisiin epäsäännöllisiin ja totuuden *kaltaisiin* (ja siten badioulaisittain *pahoihin*) suhteisiin (Rancière). Hyödyntäessään kaltaisuuden (tai harhakuvan) problematiikkaa teatteri voi osallistua mainittujen suhteiden poliittisten ja eettisten kysymysten purkamiseen sekä uudelleenrakentamiseen ja osoittaa näin poliittisen sekä eettisen pyrkimyksensä *olla toisin*.

Teatterissa kohdatun vastuun, olemisen, ajattelun, ruumiillisuuden ja kaltaisuuden välisen problematiikan tuottama yhteismitattomuus kääntää vielä esiin tietyn eettisesti (ja teatterillisesti) velvoittavan *sokean pisteen* inhimillisessä kommunikaatiossa ja olemassaolossa. Ihmissubjektin ruumiillisen olemisen ja käsitteellisen vapauden rinnakkaisuus viittaa paitsi olemisen ja ajattelun pyrkimysten yhteensovittamattomuuteen (Levinas), myös subjektin rajallisuuden ja olemisen rajattomuuden väliseen eettiseen epäsuhtaan (Zupančič). Tutkimus päättyykin Zupančičin näytelmäanalyysien kautta *apokalyptisen* vastuun etiikan äärelle. Sen mukaan kaikkia ilmaisuja ja kokemuksia vastuusta (teatterissa tai muualla) määrittää lopulta — ja ennen kaikkea — vain *olemisen (tai äärettömyyden) lopun* mahdollisuus.

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# 1. Introduction

What started out as an investigation of themes of evil in contemporary European drama became something rather different and perhaps more complex. It became a study on certain *modern* ethico-philosophical issues that may take part in or question the *thematic*, *representational* and *phenomenological* approaches utilised to enforce or analyse theatre's *ethical means* and *politics of subjectivity (or identity)*; in short, approaches that consider theatrical activity a valid interhuman context for discussing ethics and responsibility.

In such a context, human expression and experience appear to bear *strategies of signification and representation* which strive to highlight certain features of *being* while obliterating others, or even to stand in for the (ethical) problematique that concerns being and subjective existence. In other words, it appears that questions related to theatre's artistic methods and thematic contexts in addressing the human phenomenon and ethics remain far too complex and compelling to be disposed of with any ethical or moral schemes that follow mere socio-symbolic agreements. Instead, these agreements can be described as being rooted in more constitutive forms of ethics, ones concerning the very nature of our existence.

Thus, this study focuses on certain fundamental philosophical aspects which address the relations between theatre, modern continental *ethics of responsibility* and the *concepts of evil* pertaining to or arising from the socio-political tensions between the former two. The chosen viewpoints do not comprise or represent a comprehensive or uniform conception of theatre's involvement in our views on ethics or their socio-political implications, but they do form a line of questioning which may bring us closer to an unresolved ethical problematique at the heart of theatrical activity. The heterogeneity of the viewpoints results from an analytical strategy, which does not assume that its elements can be synchronised with some stable philosophical, academic or theatrical tradition and community. Instead, it strives to demonstrate how several historically and ideologically detached

approaches may participate (and indeed have participated) in the discussion concerning the relations between human existence, its expressive/theatrical scope and the questions of responsibility that emerge from those overlapping contexts.

Despite its largely metaphysical and impugning prerequisites, the theatrical topics of this work revolve mainly around certain textual themes and descriptions of performances. Apart from being based on practical necessity, this strategy may inform those standpoints that strive to establish the significance of ethics on representationally and epistemologically determined and problematised approaches.

In this context, the term *representation* refers not only to the possibility of *imitating, reproducing* or *reshaping* the multiple features of being, but also to the German *Vorstellung*, a concept which by its very composition emphasises both the *preconceived* (or *presentimental*, pre-imagined) nature of all manifestation, and the possibility of accentuating the visibility or perceptibility of certain phenomena at the expense of others.

The term *theatricality*, in turn, follows certain post-Wagnerian aspects, according to which theatre's expressive elements — or *gestures* — bear a (non-ethical and ethical) value and problematic independent of all 'sources of representation,' a value that relies largely on the intangible essence of *mimesis*, the experiential and theatrical element which enables, simultaneously, the uniqueness, iterability and effect of theatrical expression.<sup>1</sup> Briefly, by *mimesis* I refer in this study to the unrestricted chance to observe and utilise the ambiguity of expression, behaviour, action and perceptible phenomena in general. In addition (and largely by the same token), theatricality should be read here as an existential condition or awareness by which the human animal embeds itself and its gestures in the world, as an awareness that also gives rise to the socio-symbolic significance of being, to a fundamental feeling of 'being on display.'

As mentioned, the theatrical tradition or understanding this work strives to communicate with is thus not necessarily any distinct historical or artistic continuum, but the (more or less modern) problematique that connects the

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<sup>1</sup> On Richard Wagner's impact on the modern conception of theatricality (as well as its critique), see e.g. Puchner 2002a: p. 31 onwards.

performing and spectating human individual to its socio-political and natural contexts by seeing that theatrical/performative activity may serve as a valid, peculiar and substantial — yet structurally ambiguous — forum for discussing inter-human and existential relations. At the same time (and for the same reason), it cannot declare, without reservation, that its communicative means and ethical aims are independent of the communities and the social contexts it addresses, traverses and (sometimes) strives to transform. While this approach may still indicate that I wish to follow some common intuition of *what theatre is*, the aim is rather to explicate that neither theatrical activity and its socio-political surroundings nor the performative and spectatorial positions the human animal may occupy are necessarily localisable to any fixed oppositions or communicative roles. Chapter 2.1. endeavours to discuss the modern implications of this issue.

On the level of theatre theory, as noted, this means that I address and utilise various viewpoints and formulations which do not necessarily form clear dialogical connections based on theatre history or shared thematic interests. To borrow Janelle Reinelt's Badiouan reading of theatre and performance, the anticipated theoretical audience of this work is rather a chronologically and ideologically "radical fraternity"<sup>2</sup>/sorority, which contemplates relevant but often difficult theatrical issues with regard to the ethics of responsibility, and sometimes tacitly. The cohesive force in this approach would be the fact that, although theatre practitioners or theorists often (and quite rightly) refrain from over-explicating the ethical implications of their works, thus refusing to argue for any ethico-moral certitude, the ethics of responsibility can be examined as a constitutive element of or problem for those works.

Due to this heterogeneous — but modernly coloured and responsibility-centered — principle, the teatro-ethical themes discussed involve various works and phenomena which do not necessarily serve as legitimised examples of modern conception(s) of ethics, or even as historically accurate representatives of the modern era.<sup>3</sup> However, they have been chosen in order to *elucidate the*

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<sup>2</sup> Reinelt 2004: 89.

<sup>3</sup> The modern era can be roughly described here as the ideologically, scientifically, cultural-

*ethical problematique of the modern human subject* and of this study in a diverse manner.

For example, the early works of the Austrian playwright Peter Handke (1942-) offer us challenging linguistic and epistemological (knowledge-related) problematisations of the human individual, and thus informative excursions into the discordant — and sometimes *radically evil* — relations between ethics, language, communication, expression and meaning. Certain features of William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) *Macbeth* (1606) and Jean Racine's (1639-1699) *Phaedra* (1677), as well as certain analyses of their identity politics and ontological (being-related) problematique, bring into the discussion some fundamental issues that concern the ethical core of the human animal's relation to being. Sarah Kane's (1971-1999) *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), in turn, causes us to examine the need to construct and uphold meanings and themes in human communication and the relation of this need to ethical questions and the possibility of evil within the very structure of being. Lastly, one of the theatre/cabaret performances prepared by the prisoners of the Buchenwald concentration camp during the Holocaust brings us to reflect on the fact that the relations between human expression, language, politics and ethics appear to give rise to a disquieting — but *indelible* — ethical incommensurability. Although these are just few examples of the theatrical cases this study discusses, they illuminate the scale of its ethical questions.

Theoretical views on theatre (and the arts in general), which link up with the works and performances discussed, will be engaged e.g. with such thinkers as Herbert Blau (1926-), Roland Barthes (1915-1980), Denis Guénoun (1946-), Hans-Thies Lehmann, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Esa Kirkkopelto (1965-), Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443), Slavoj Žižek (1949-), Janelle Reinelt, Oliver Feltham, Jacques Rancière (1940-) and Alenka Zupančič (1966-).

The ethical views of this study rest mainly on the thinking of three influential continental philosophers, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) and Alain Badiou (1937-), all committed to ethical approaches

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ly, economically, artistically and politically defined historical continuum in the Western world from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

which surpass but embrace the *prerequisites of human initiative and responsibility* in their own distinctive manners. These thinkers have been chosen with a view to forming an in-depth perspective on the problems that concern the ethical status of modern human subjects; subjects who consider themselves autonomous but responsible in the sense that their natural and social contexts serve as obstacles, concerns and opportunities for their (somewhat independent) will and reason.

Therefore, the term modern does not signify *primarily* a historically determined worldview in this work. Rather, it denotes an understanding of humanity according to which our ontological and ethical statuses in the world are subject to various — commensurable and incommensurable — interpersonal (or natural) relations and hierarchies, which still cannot rule out an ethics or a responsibility that is *transcendental* in nature, i.e., independent but *constitutive* of our experience, or an ethics conceivable only from the perspective of an omnipotent and omniscient entity.

To bring to the fore the ethical problematique that both of these approaches try to tackle, one only needs to reflect on the constitutive motives of the communicative frameworks built to keep the human phenomenon and its ethical implications in sight. One pervasive problem that appears to colour theatrical activity, modern (Western) ethical philosophy and those aspects of this work that address the former two issues, is the fact that existence, its representational reaches and the ways in which these questions relate to human experience already seem to give rise to a *neutral* understanding of the human phenomenon; to a transparent, persistently non-specific but yet self-authorized model of human activity against which all expressions, interpretations and thoughts are projected (or are variations of). Kant and Badiou pursue this problem in their own peculiar terms; the former by investigating its conditions through such concepts as *rationality, autonomy, radicality* and the *moral law*, and the latter by searching for the *evental geneses, truths* and *human commitments* it may contain. Levinas, in turn, takes the view that the ethical import of human diversity, and the *responsibility* it 'auto-generates,' should always already occupy and govern this human frame, up to the point of *substitution*. Insofar as theatrical activity needs to pass through singular and peculiar instances of generally meaningful experiences

and observations, it attaches itself to the mentioned problematique in a rather intricate manner.

The socio-symbolic, artistic and philosophical approaches to (and agreements on) the human phenomenon can thus be described as attempts to render this neutral human frame visible, or as attempts to deconstruct its oblique (real) consistency. I consider that even the avant garde projects claiming to obliterate the anthropocentric world view, or the praiseworthy feminist approaches aspiring to expose the political dialectics that forms between this neutral frame and its (quasi-neutral) effects in reality, still stem from the assumption that the human phenomenon itself generates the (ethical) horizon all such critical endeavours should traverse.

As regards theatre, it is not at all evident that distrusting all artistic attempts to generalise the possible truths of humanity and being, or proclaiming theatre a site of postponed truths *ex officio*, would offer it a way out of the (in many respects ethical) controversy or confusion that forms between, e.g., such humane, ontological and mimetic concerns as *existence, authenticity, meaning* and *illusion*. The recurrent claim according to which the artistic tradition called theatre may make being (or the world) *visible*, implies that the former is operating as a certain ontological — and humane — *totality*, as a distinctive and distinguished harbour for being, and that we may depart this totality somehow (or at least present it with a meaningful outside). However, both conceptions of theatre appear to be pre-established by the problematic of being, by the fact that being itself may address human consciousness with the same radical but all-embracing strategy as theatrical means, transforming theatre into an *ontological field of dispute*.

For the present work, then, theatre denotes a more or less coherent artistic activity which the human animal engages as *a being concerned with being* (“*l’être soucieux d’être*”), to use Levinas’ reformulation of Heidegger’s thought.<sup>4</sup> I find that this premiss also describes the existential and ideological challenges facing the modern subject/thought rather well, and it arises in various ethical and non-ethical contexts in this study.

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<sup>4</sup> Levinas 1990:63.

Yet, largely by the same token, the above formulations do not form a cohesive or unambiguous guideline for those contexts, but will be reassessed and reformulated later. We may, however, describe the modern subject examined in this work as a subject of autonomous ambivalence, as an undecided humane status/position distinct from the medieval identity, which was more clearly *subjected to* the unquestionable yet incomprehensible authority of God, the socio-symbolically agreed *big Other* that constituted (or constitutes) Christian humility. This view — and approach to *human expression, experience and theatre* — then goes in its own specific way to the heart of the questions of modern ethics of responsibility.

The main body of this study is divided into four extensive chapters that strive to maintain a complementary dialogue with each other. The first two chapters concentrate mainly on constructing a theatrical context that determines many of the work's subsequent viewpoints. The last two main chapters engage more properly with the ethical aspects of the overall configuration from two rather different and even antithetical viewpoints. Next, I proceed to describe the contents of the four chapters in brief.

### *1.1 Positioning the audience and the stage*

Chapter 2 proposes certain concepts and speculations that emerge from the modern problematic concerning theatre. It does not follow any clear or rigorous theoretical guidelines, but explicates various artistic and theoretical views that strive to grasp the ethico-ontological statuses of theatre spectators and performers. The purpose of this strategy is to explicate some of the diverse and tricky questions that take part in defining the established modern view of theatre.

It also suggests some key terms for this work. The term *gesture* is approached as an indefinite *surplus* of an action or ontological position; *appearing-for* as a form of being that *presupposes an observer* (of that being); *mimesis* as an expressional possibility and (non-)logic that transcends knowledge and (its) representation; *stageliness* as the pure experiential possibility of happening or taking place (to which we may attach various meanings, strategies, dramaturgies



and aims)<sup>5</sup>; *illusion* as a non-totalisable factor/potential in all human activity; the *stage* itself as an empty signal that allows *affective temporalisation* in a theatrical event and finally, *the human phenomenon* onstage as an issue which is naturally *sincere* but socially and morally *involving* — that is, *ethically binding*.

The first half of the chapter concentrates mainly on the theatre audience, discussing its modern challenges through four different hypotheses (or ‘fantasies’), the last one presented in the second half of the chapter. While such an approach may seem somewhat disorganised, it takes account of certain views (e.g. those of Herbert Blau) according to which theatre doers tend (or need) to assume various fantasies of a public or community to ensure (their conception of) the significance of their work.<sup>6</sup> This hypothetical standpoint appears to be particularly interesting, when discussed in relation to the darkened modern auditorium, which offers the performers a truly phantasmatic counterpoint. The discussion thus proceeds from the darkness of the auditorium to various views with which we may assess the ethical *gesture* of a modern theatre audience or a single member of it, a gesture which, despite its reliance on a certain passive customer status, appears to bear strong ethical implications and obligations related to questions of (active) presence and co-presence. In this context, an audience or an individual member of it appear to occupy a (mute and withdrawn) socio-ontological position which, in itself, gives rise to an *ethical surplus* or excess.

The main challenge to the modern audience is formulated through an interpretation of Peter Handke’s *Publikumsbeschimpfung (Offending the Audience)* of 1966. Handke’s work is not analysed in order to belie the

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<sup>5</sup> Psychologically speaking, the most extreme form of stageliness would be the state of *psychosis*, wherein everything becomes ‘pure potential’ on the level of potential meanings. Insofar as *dramaturgy* strives to structure and guide this pure potential, its most drastic form would be *paranoia*, where everything *must* embody a meaning, intent or purpose. The minimum requirement for stageliness would be the fact that something exists and is detected. Dramaturgy steps in at the moment when we become conscious of the fact that this existence and its observation bear consequences.

<sup>6</sup> While the term *fantasy* seems somewhat inapt for the analytical purposes of this work, I consider that it does also describe fairly well the unidentified — or phantasmal — aims of the modern tendency to pursue *other* ways of being and knowing, no matter how rational or scientific the means.

architectural, technical and artistic configuration of modern theatre, but to pay attention to the fact that questions concerning the audience's (ethical) participation and *responsibility* are still present in the practical and economic hypotheses that assign it a passive and aesthetically self-evident (or even compliant) status. By impugning spectatorial ideas and artistic arrangements that rely on a dichotomy between the stage and the audience, the text discloses the fact that, although such approaches to theatre strive to separate the 'proper' functions of the performers and their audience, they also, and inevitably, refer to a certain temporal, socio-political and ethical unity within the theatrical event. Suggesting with its provocative and disillusionary statements that a theatre performance is established on a sort of impossible instant of shared commitment, which can also be described as a 'utopian second,' a communality based on its very heterogeneity, the play serves as reminder of the audience's responsible status within the theatre event. Even the mute and withdrawn moral position or identity of a spectator carries with it an ethical surplus which affects or even *preoblige*s the theatrical apparatus.

The second part concentrates more properly on the theatrical stage, or, in fact, the 'phenomenon of the stage,' the ontological, phenomenological and transcendental outlines of theatre's *stageliness* (or *scenicity*). It still utilises the spectator's point of view, but focuses on the problematique that *enables* a spectator's point of view in the first place. Through a dialogue with Handke's *Selbstbeziehung* (*Self-Accusation*) of 1966, and some other theatrical examples, I construct a reading of mimesis that allows us to view the relations between the indefinite (and 'excessive') import of gesturing and communication as a system of socio-symbolic agreements. According to this reading, mimesis enacts a *stagely difference*, an incommensurability between all that is represented and all that represents, proclaiming its independence from knowledge, truth and representation (of the former two). It thus also declares that all *illusions* it may generate are *non-totalisable* in nature, fuelled by the 'pure potential' constitutive of the stageliness of phenomena and their observers' capability to grasp and support that stageliness. Moreover, by being an *incomplete* and questionable *representation of something to someone*, one's encounter with the operation of mimesis bears organic likeness to the fact of experiencing itself, highlighting and

problematizing the reaches of the very *ability to experience*. In addition, mimesis' incommensurability turns our attention to the fact that the surplus meaning aroused by an expression — or its *potential as a gesture* — is not necessarily compatible with the socio-symbolic systems and agreements on which human communication is built.

In this sense, it is equally incompatible with the moral import of those agreements and may thus disclose their artificial and contractual status. According to Handke, this disclosure (which in and through itself speaks of artificiality), is the only function of theatre that may offer it an ethically informative status. When we add to this standpoint an understanding of the human phenomenon which sees it as a hybrid of natural sincerity and moral involvement, theatrical activity and expression appear to embody a problematique that cannot remain ethically neutral.

## *1.2 The socio-political context*

Chapter 3 turns from these transcendental and ontological questions to certain social and political aspects. It understands politics as a social context in/through which ethics and theatre may problematise or even empower each other, and as a negotiation of (and between) the *affairs of the state* and the *state of our affairs*. Sociability, in turn, is discussed as an interpersonal and symbolic (*f*)act, which also establishes the *public nature* of a theatrical event.

However, theatrical activity — or the (*f*)act of performing — is examined as a process of *questioning* and *non-totalising* (or even reconfiguring) these political 'affairs,' as well as their essence as socio-symbolic phenomena. Drawing on the conceptions of *mimesis* and *stageliness* formulated in the preceding chapter, and following Denis Guénoun's teatro-theoretical views, this chapter then approaches theatre as an art form which may gesture towards a state (sic) of *otherwise-than-politics*, as a creative (pre- or non-political) process/factor which would not survive without the fact of politics but remains a welcome stranger to that fact.

Through (and out of) this peculiar connection drawn between politics and theatre there also emerges a more fundamental modern problematique that affects the human animal, an *autonomous ambivalence* that constitutes both its relation to the Lacanian *big Other* (to its *socio-symbolic exposure*) and its own mastery of/subjection to the ontological hierarchies of the world (its position as a figure of authority and submission).

Ethically speaking, this position has both a *binding* and a *creative* status. Considered in the latter context, theatrical activity can be seen as a *gestural opening* that relies on the cognitive or experiential investments (or ‘*bearings*’) of both the gesturing subject and her/his observer. This co-investment (in co-presence) also refers to a certain constitutive socio-political and ethical prerequisite of a theatrical event, a *third* (but unlocalisable) viewpoint on the situation, a *thirdness* surpassing but embracing the theatrical event and its participants (which can be approached via the concept of the big Other).

As mentioned, this configuration — concerning the *third viewpoint* — is organically tied to the co-presence of the performer and the spectator, but yet it appears not to be generated by either of those positions. It remains a socio-political fact (of communication)<sup>7</sup> that gives rise not only to the (mainly) communal effects of a theatrical performance, but also to a multitude of *binding doubts* and *questions* regarding the ethical motives of human expression.

Thus, the last third of the chapter analyses the formed teatro-ethical context from the viewpoint of Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) ethics; from the viewpoint of the indisputable order of the *moral law* and the possibility of *radical evil* the ‘non-contentual’ structure of the law, in itself, implies. Informed by Handke’s linguistically and phenomenologically analytic play *Kaspar* (1967), as well as the views of e.g. Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), Susan Neiman (1955-) and Slavoj Žižek, the discussion proceeds through some earlier observations to describe a *theatrical gesture* as an invariably *radical* phenomenon in proportion to the hollow but compelling ethical obligation that Kant pursues.

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<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the *thirdness* of the theatrical situation could be read here as a phenomenon organically tied to the mediating effect of language.

I do not cover the relations between Kant's ethical thinking and the constructed theatrical context — including gestural activity, spectatorship and the socio-political plus ethical implications the former two issues contain — through and through (via the concepts of *presentation* [*die Darstellung*] and the *sublime* [*das Erhabene*] or his aesthetic theory, for example), but rather strive to exhibit a fundamental ethical controversy at the heart of human activity. This controversy not only *radicalises* the question of responsibility and the ways in which it is expressed or interpreted in human interaction, but also sets the stage for many of Levinas' and Badiou's views on those issues. In short, Kant's thoughts should be read here as a brief (but radical) opening statement for the latter two theorists and the theatrical issues their views touch upon.

### *1.3 Theatre, responsibility and the ethics of otherness*

In Chapter 4 we encounter the most extensive and intensive ethical challenge of this study. As the Lithuanian born philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), who accomplished most of his life's work in France, states that the *human subject and its responsibility* are pre-obliged by the ethical injunction of *pre-ontological and pre-phenomenal otherness* (the *other*), as well as the *face* of the human *Other* — or its *pure (ethical) expression and demand* beyond all representation —, this cannot but challenge and widen our conception of an art form like theatre, whose function is, among others, to stir up socio-ethical reciprocity and meanings by various (self-)expressions, ontological propositions/investigations and dialogic operations. In Levinas' ethical project the neighbour encountered in social interaction, *the Other with an anterior, undefinable and overriding ethical (non-)status*, becomes the very source and denominator of the subject's ethical worth, responsibility and even existence. Yet, there are many other glitches imposed by his *ethics of ethics* or *metaethics* on the theatrical apparatus, its means of expression and its politics. For example, his views on theatrical *images* (or *figures*), *aesthetic experience* and

*phenomenality* or, to boot, *representation*, present them as issues which appear to suspend or interfere with ethics and responsibility in a fundamental manner.<sup>8</sup>

The Leviansian problematique concerning theatre is thus engaged in three consecutive stages. First, I concentrate on the frictional relationship Levinas' early works establish between the sphere and challenge of *being* and theatre as a site of *figuration* and *reflection* (on that figuration), by discussing his analyses of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Racine's *Phaedra*. (The latter play is also approached with Simon Critchley's perceptive reading, which problematises the relation between *being and thought*.) In the overall context of the chapter theatrical *representation, images* and *figures* are discussed as phenomena that lack the *seriousness of being* — or the 'one must' in being — and thus set up a game-like (i.e., non-serious, untrue and 'ontologically invalid') contract between their originators and observers, but not properly between being's 'summonses' and subjective existence (of an *existent*).

The main ethical challenge here is that the process of figuration or the 'sketching out' with/through which a theatre artist may communicate her/his art and its socio-political import, also appears to give rise to an ethically withdrawn and *evasive* but still *involving* realm of (*re*)*semblances*, which sustains a mythical and obscure 'meanwhile' *qua participation* — it engenders a *lifeless life* which cannot be properly approached in terms of truth. Instead, artistic creation affects us with the — one may say mimetic — *non-truth of being*.<sup>9</sup> The 'still enduring elsewhere,' or the allegoric complexion art bears on its face, leads us towards a state of bewitchment, which disengages ethical (and non-ethical) contemplation from the logical possibility of truth, from its very material, or even subsumes this contemplation into its non-truth.

However, Levinas is of the opinion that as philosophical and critical approaches to art can serve as platforms for comprehending its non-truth, they

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<sup>8</sup> For an introduction to Levinas' thought, see e.g. his *Existence and Existents* (1947/1978), *Time and the Other* (1947/1987b), *Discovering Existence with Husserl* (1949/1998), *Totality and Infinity* (1961/2005), *Otherwise than Being: or, Beyond Essence* (1974/1981) and *Collected Philosophical Papers* (1987a).

<sup>9</sup> For an extensive introduction to this topic, see e.g. Sivenius 1998.

can be seen as processes of bringing the fundamental evasion or *irresponsibility* of art to interact with the thought concerned with truth and being.

Yet the problems of figuration and *representation* remain issues that do attach a certain suspicion to the Levinasian approaches to art. With representation we are moving in an area where the *ethical relation* (to the Other or the other) must acquire a language foreign (and subsequent) to it, a language that teaches conceptually conditional and compulsive — albeit by nature incommensurable (and thus mimetic) — strategies of socio-political signification, negotiation and manipulation to the subject, the subject generated and nurtured by (its) *unconditional ethical responsibility*. Thus, one of the problems with utilising the problematique of ethics and being to serve this immediate but unsettled sphere (of conceptualisation), is that for Levinas “[t]he ethical relation is defined... by excluding every signification it would take on *unknown* to him who maintains that relation. When I maintain an ethical relation I refuse to recognize the role I would play in a drama of which I would not be the author or whose outcome another would know before me[.]”<sup>10</sup>

But even the *acute subjective significance of ethics* — or its status as a form of knowledge — remains a dubious issue in the Levinasian project, for it implies that ethical responsibility is thereby grasped, organised and utilised by the subject (or the *Self*) and transformed into an *egological* project of the *Same*, an ethically violent conceptual totality.

Thus, second, I examine the ethical problems related to theatrical activity when understood as an acute interhuman encounter. This issue discloses the most discordant connection between theatre and Levinas’ ethics of responsibility. When he establishes the criteria for ethical contemplation (or indeed for the whole of philosophy) by understanding the *otherness of the Other* as something that precedes and transcends the conceptual (and violating) totality of ideas and ideals, the totality negotiated within the realm of the *Same*, it means that the Other is fundamentally unattainable for the subject (or the *Self*). The compelling ethical demand of responsibility, the commandment the living and concrete Other presents to a subject is, as mentioned, the very initiation of the subject’s

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<sup>10</sup> Levinas 2005: 79.

existence. (This also makes the subject's relationship with alterity an *asymmetrical* relationship, where one is responsible not only *for* the Other, but also *on behalf of* the Other [to the point of *substitution*].) From this understanding emerges Levinas's dedication to the *face of the Other* as the very founder of an ethical relationship, as a concept that transcends form and is always "beyond manifestation: it represents itself without representing itself, it has access to infinity."<sup>11</sup>

The infinity the face speaks of also announces the Other's her/himness (*illeity*),<sup>12</sup> the infinite 'height' and nature of responsibility that cannot be reduced to the intimate interhuman relation that proclaims it. Although non-thematisable and irreducible, this surpassing of the intimacy of the ethical relation also approaches the possibility of communal ethics, the possibility of law and the state, a shared political dimension of justifying the ethical relation. Here we encounter the concept of the *Third*, the plurality of ethics and responsibility that stands in the *trace of the Other's illeity* and obliges the socio-political realm, unapproachable but commonly binding.

Yet, as we shall see, total acceptance of the grounds of the above formulations yields a certain notional and communicative deadlock between theatrical — or otherwise 'phenomenal' — interhuman relations and Levinasian ethics, which my analysis of theatre does not aspire to surpass.

Third, I therefore turn to certain later formulations in Levinas' work, mainly to the concepts of the *Saying* and the *Said*,<sup>13</sup> with which he approaches the possibility of *communicating* the primacy of ethics and responsibility. The Said defines, and expresses the linguistic and conceptual hierarchies of communication (even if there is no receiving end). The Saying is the very orientation of the Said, the initial call and the response in facing the Other. Thus it is understandable that Levinas' thinking lays stress on the Saying rather than the Said. The Saying is the ethical possibility to communicate, preceding all linguistic meaning. It (inevitably) consists in language, but fundamentally allows the Other to respond;

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<sup>11</sup> Eaglestone 1997: 114.

<sup>12</sup> Levinas 1987a: 69-72.

<sup>13</sup> The terms are capitalised in order to emphasise their conceptual nature.



even to propositional statements.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the ‘manifesters’ of the Said (and also *textual subjects*) are constantly forced to return to a state of self-assessment, to question their own position.<sup>15</sup> The Saying is then inexhaustible as an idea. As an ethical concept, it reaches no conclusions and its essence — or its (non)presence — never becomes the Said.<sup>16</sup> The ethical themes of the Said are, in themselves, always betrayed in advance or hopelessly late, they do not support ethicality as independent projects. What they do is to settle themselves into the ethical encounter as the very possibility of Saying. In this possibility “the Said should be said, denied and ‘made unsaid’ over and over again, so that the trace of the Saying could emerge from (and in) the Said.”<sup>17</sup>

The mentioned concepts, as well as their relation to Levinas’ views on signification, expression, communication, *thematization*, human *proximity* and *(de)nomination* (of being and ethical issues) in his *Otherwise than Being* (1974/1981), appear then to be fairly useful tools for analysing how theatrical activity — with its thematisation/(de)nomination of being, and its corporeally and conceptually organised Said — could approach and question the ethical injunction that always already conditions subjective and anonymous existence. It would do this as an ontological investigation which adheres obstinately to its ‘post-ethical’ nature. These issues are examined in the light of philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s (1913-2005) reading of *Otherwise than Being*, with which we may grasp more lucidly the ethical weighting of theatre’s persistent reversion to the *problematique of being*.

The theatrical dimensions of Ricoeur’s views are approached more properly through Guénoun’s and Kirkkopelto’s theoretical aspects. With them, I examine

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<sup>14</sup> Levinas 1981: 45-47.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Korhonen 2000: 285.

<sup>16</sup> Jokinen 1997: 29.

<sup>17</sup> Jokinen 1997: 29, translation mine. Levinas (1987a: 69-70) mentions how “[a]ll speaking is an enigma. It is, to be sure, established in and moves in an order of significations common to the interlocutors, in the midst of triumphant, that is, primary truths, in a particular language that bears a system of known truths which the speaking, however commonplace it is, does stir up and lead on to new significations. But behind this renewal, which constitutes cultural life, *the saying*, that is, *the face*, is the discretion of an unheard-of proposition, an insinuation, immediately reduced to nothing, breaking up like the “bubbles of the earth,” which Banquo speaks of at the beginning of *Macbeth*.”

the fact that theatre and its treatment of the human phenomenon are activities that do not shy away from the difficult situation of being with one another or from the fact that this situation *means* something, but present acute interhuman relations to us as the surface/interface, where these invisible and essentially uncontrollable themes are released because something (rather than nothing) has to be expressed and Said. In this sense, theatre also tests the ontological and aesthetic credibility of ethics. If it ignores ethics, it is because ethics, in itself, has no voice or language to (S)ay so — and neither does ignorance.

Lastly, I assess the ethical grounds of theatre's thematic investigation of being — which does not (or chooses not to) bypass or deny ontological, phenomenal, or conceptual mediation of ethics — with a reading of Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*. A text that approaches and depicts — i.e., communicates — psychosis, a serious and acute state of mental illness, can be considered as a prime example of an interpretational challenge which transcends the boundaries of ethical (and non-ethical) *meaning* and questions its integration in the Self; as a textual dimension where all structural and thematic substance appears to be out of proportion with any strict aim that strives to crystallise and convey something of the meaning(s) of ethics or, moreover, of the *problem of evil* entangled in the *problem of being*.

#### *1.4 Theatre, responsibility and the ethics of truth(s)*

In the last main chapter, Chapter 5, I turn from the Levinasian problematique to a quite different approach to theatre and modern ethics, namely the thought of Alain Badiou (1937-). With Badiou one can assess more specifically the ethical problems that pertain to the *immanent* artistic configurations of theatre and the *real* socio-political assembly these configurations bring together. Janelle Reinelt considers that his philosophy, “a philosophy that separates Being from Event and privileges the power of the latter seems to offer a useful paradigm for an art form like theatre that may lack substance but always takes place. An ethics that does

not base itself on rules or moral principles but rather describes a process of fidelity to an event seems well suited to the exigencies of performances.”<sup>18</sup>

Badiou offers us an intricate system of thought, which can be seen as an active search of disruptive and novel ‘sameness,’ a determination that may prove useful if we want to analyse the *politics* or *means* of theatre in mediating such concepts as *alterity*, *meaning*, *ethics* and — most importantly for Badiou — *truth*. His thoughts on *subjectivity*, the *politics of art* and the role of ethicality in those contexts are quite informative for an investigation that approaches theatre as a socially and politically committed practice.

Briefly, the *ethical orientation* that Badiou promotes is formed concordantly with what he calls *truth-processes*, the *becoming(s)* of truths that are “indifferent to differences” and “*the same for all*.”<sup>19</sup> From this understanding emerges his *ethics of truths*, where ethicality comes to mean *circumspect* following of — and *fidelity to* — truths that may arise from *artistic practices*, *politics*, *love* and *science*. Badiou is thus of the opinion that “[e]thics does not exist. There is only the *ethic-of* (of politics, of love, of science, of art).”<sup>20</sup> The *fidelity* to the truths that emerge from *events* — events such as the appearance of theatrical tragedy with Aeschylus — forms then the basis of his perception of ethics. This fidelity and the ethical problematique that colours it therefore come to mean a determination to examine the *consequential (and ‘truth-bound’) continuum of an event* ‘to its infinite extent;’ to follow and re-assess its meanings as a vocation to a truth it gives rise to, problematises and thus carries with it.<sup>21</sup>

The term *alterity* is seen in this context as an articulation of the diverse, multiple and complex structure of *being* itself, which cannot exhaustively explain the possible *truths* of this world, or the fact that we need to employ lines of thought which carry ethical motives and meanings.

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<sup>18</sup> Reinelt 2004: 87. For an introduction to Badiou’s thinking, see e.g. his *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2001), *On Beckett* (2003a), *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (2005a), *Being and Event* (2007a) and *Theoretical Writings* (2006). I also recommend (e.g.) Peter Hallward’s *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (2003).

<sup>19</sup> Badiou 2001: 27.

<sup>20</sup> Badiou 2001: 28.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Badiou 2001: 41-42, 67, 69.

Consequently, the Badiouan conception of truths and events already requires us to search for some kind of *evental site of thought* in which their future possibilities could mature. We need to look for a *subject of the event*, a subject whose fate is to transform from being a mere situation, a happening, a case in history or an ensemble of thinking human animals into a creation, a *process* of (self-)assessment and communication that strives to uphold meaningful (and ethical) lines of thought committed to an event.<sup>22</sup>

As regards art, we may say that a subject of an event (of art) can never be a single human being named as *the* subject of this or that truth-process, an ‘identity qua truth’ or a ‘truth-identity;’ instead, it may be “a singular production” to whose composition a human animal may take part in as a ‘*some-one*’ that may enter it — while the composition always exceeds this *some-one*.<sup>23</sup> Speaking of artistic processes and situations that may serve as starting points or committed *subject-points* for *art-truths*, Badiou explains that “the subject of an artistic process is not the artist (the ‘genius’, etc.). In fact, the subject-points of art are works of art. And the artist enters into the composition of these subjects (the works are ‘his’), without our being able in any sense to reduce them to ‘him’ (and besides, which ‘him’ would this be?).”<sup>24</sup>

To return more specifically to theatre, Badiou’s views present the spectator also as a *possible some-one* who may participate in composing a (truth-bound) subject of theatre art. But this situation is largely dependent on theatre’s (and the spectator’s) ability to think, their ability to put together *theatre-ideas*, ideas that may emerge only “in and by the performance, through *the act of theatrical representation*.”<sup>25</sup> A theatre-idea is thus “irreducibly theatrical and does not preexist before its arrival “on stage.””<sup>26</sup> Yet, it is also a composition which is, essentially, ‘caught in incompleteness’ and must remain open to *chance*. This view entails that a theatrical subject of a (theatrical) truth and event as well as the *some-one* that enters its composition need to take the chance of deciding an

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<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Badiou 2001: 43-44, 60, 132-133.

<sup>23</sup> Badiou 2001: 43, 44-45.

<sup>24</sup> Badiou 2001: 44.

<sup>25</sup> Badiou 2005a: 72, italics mine.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

event; they need to participate in an investigation which may extract a (*real*) process of truth from the complex sphere of meanings a theatre-idea gives rise to.

The chapter proceeds through these issues and their relations to theatre's ethical possibilities in five successive stages. First, I discuss Badiou's theoretical views and their broader relations to art and theatre by utilising some of the abovementioned concepts.

Second, I examine the immanent artistic-theoretical composition of theatre and its potential to give rise to an event and a truth-process via Oliver Feltham's essay on Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) and the aesthetico-politically synergetic examination of truth his (Meyerhold's) works and thoughts set forth. With this reading we arrive at an understanding of the theatre which emphasises its potential as an *art of presentation*, as something which may educate the state (of human affairs) in rivalry with philosophy, as a *mimetic process* of re-figuring (and dis-figuring) the ways in which our subject positions and ideas are seen and utilised.

Third, I return to assess and intensify the public ethico-political context of theatre outlined earlier in the study. Here, the term *theatre-idea* is examined as a composition which entails that its human elements — the actors, the spectators and the socio-political presence (or gesture) of both positions — put together a '*radical we*,' a discontinuous and demographically indeterminate instant of sharedness. This radical we may construct its own *evental time* — and (subjective-evental) relation to *being* — that 'takes its place' in various other (real) instances following this evental sharedness, various other subject-points that address the possible truth-process the initial (singular) theatre-idea implied.

Yet, the indeterminate community formed with these elements is still involved with the *uneven* and possibly *simulacric* relations between politics, aesthetics and ethics, the relations that Jacques Rancière (1940-) discusses with the key term *distribution of the sensible*.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, what colours the above approaches and the theatrical problematique they point at is the problem of *simulacrum*, which in the Badiouan project

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<sup>27</sup> See Rancière 2006.

becomes a problem of false — and fundamentally *evil* — truths, truths which may not comprise a *real radical we* or a an investigation that supports a genuine innovation in being, an innovation based on the we and its infinite future resources.

I choose, however, to discuss (in a rather Brechtian fashion) the conception of simulacrum characteristic of theatre as both an ethical challenge and an eventual possibility, which may betray any strict or solid but overarching articulation of the relation(s) between ethics, politics, human sociability and artistic procedures. In this context, a certain (Badiouan) form of evil also becomes a surface/interface which may unveil the structure of simulacric evil by its own exposure to simulacric meaning as a gestural and socio-politically captivating phenomenon.

From this premiss I proceed to examine a description of a theatre/cabaret performance prepared by the prisoners of the Buchenwald concentration camp in Nazi Germany in 1938, which highlights the problematique that comprises the simulacric (and *incommensurable*) ethical significance of human communication and condition. Combining certain earlier views of e.g. Badiou, Levinas, Reinelt and Žižek, we arrive at an understanding of theatrical ethics which cannot surpass the linguistic or the ontological problematique, but utilises both fields as a basis for a myriad of ethical guidelines, none of them valid in themselves, but all bearing an eventual possibility because of their organic relation to simulacra.

Lastly, I propose a more detailed analysis of the *ethical incommensurability*, questions of *responsibility* and conceptions of *evil* that condition the mentioned *simulacric relation*, with an early essay by Levinas and an analysis of Sophocles' *Antigone* (c. 442 BC) and Paul Claudel's *The Hostage* (1911) by Alenka Zupančič. The first text discusses the confusion organic to the modern subject through a certain (racist) problematic inherent in the gap between the human animal's corporeal existence and the conceptual freedom promoted by transcendental idealism, hinting at an understanding of ethics according to which there remains an indelible 'ethical blind spot' between the Self and its being, as well as between separate individuals. Zupančič, in turn, reads Sophocles and Claudel through Lacanian theory and the *ethics of the Real*, providing us with a view of responsibility which reserves it an unattainable status and turns the

subject into a finite agent of the infinite (and '*subjectively parasitic*') alliance between being and the ethics of responsibility.

The study then concludes with an apocalyptic vision of *ethics of responsibility*; a vision which suggests that all expressions and experiences related to or negotiated through this concept (theatrical or not), are fundamentally conditioned only by the possibility of the *end of all*, by the fact that responsibility is a project measured only by the end of *infinity*.

## 2. Remarks on the possibility of a modern teatro-ethical context

In one of his stories about Herr Keuner, Bertolt Brecht ruthlessly asserted the Platonic core of ethical violence: “Herr K. was asked: ‘What do you do when you love another man?’ ‘I make myself a sketch of him,’ said Herr K., ‘and I take care about the likeness.’ ‘Of the sketch?’ ‘No,’ said Herr K., ‘of the man.’”

Slavoj Žižek: *Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence*<sup>28</sup>

If one wishes to compress Emmanuel Levinas’ famous and radical quest for ethicality into one sentence, it could be the opening line of his *Totality and Infinity* (1961/2005): “Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality.”<sup>29</sup> Of the highest importance or not for the present task, Levinas’ statement speaks of a conspicuous and troublesome echo in our ethical thinking. The communicative framework built for ethics as *something lived*, i.e., the morphology of moral expression and experience, remains a territory that stresses the durability and recognition of its boundaries, but still constantly blurs them by re-framing itself with any spatio-temporal need or gain — in short: history (a problem central for Immanuel Kant already). It is even as if ethics would be a surplus or a slippage of moral expression, a disquieting uncertainty every moral statement carries with it but cannot govern, even that by Levinas above.

There is then evidently something quite troublesome also in the ethical questioning that concerns theatre, or the *teatro-ethical environment*, if such a formulation can be used without suggesting that the ethical ‘stance’ of theatre is

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<sup>28</sup> Brecht’s *Prosa 3* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1995): 24 quoted in Žižek 2005: 134.

<sup>29</sup> Levinas 2005: 21.



something adopted from outside of its composition. But before Levinas's claim for sincerity can be uttered within theatre, or employed to examine its ethical potential without leaving it or grasping it with external motives, we must first return to address the specific and problematic ways in which theatre is able to articulate ethical concerns and its inherent means that guide those concerns. Even though our aim is not to search for the *ethical spirit of the means of theatre*, or the *means of the ethical spirit of theatre*, we would still be compelled to turn our attention to the specific nature of its *appearing as theatre*.

The task in this chapter is then to examine some ontological (and phenomenological) aspects with which we may assess how theatre constitutes an ethical gesture towards the world and itself. While this is not to suggest that there could ever be a comprehensive ethical theory of theatre (or a theatrical theory of ethics), the remarks presented here will serve as a conceptual framework for further discussions on ethical topics in this work. Insofar as theatrical activity needs to 'sketch out' the possibilities of being and expression in its operations and to 'take care about their likeness' in those processes, its means constitute an ethical challenge in themselves.

## 2.1. After the shocking utopian second: re-fantatising and offending the audience with Handke, Blau et al.

When I first saw *Not I* performed, I was alone in an empty theatre, sitting to the back, lucky enough to be watching a run-through of the entire play. Without the reassurance of other bodies breathing and coughing, I was perhaps more intensely conscious of the intentional isolation of visual metaphor on the stage and of my own peculiarly transformative response to that isolation, but I trusted that response as real. After the voice had ceased, I sat alone in the dark, my mind racing, aware perhaps for the first time that "I" was not "me," that the only "self" I could claim was the communicative energy I had just experienced as activity -- outside my body and moving away from any identity that I had previously thought mine...

If we contend that at least some notion of an audience is needed to construct or supplement the modern (Western) understanding of the theatrical stage or the art of theatre itself, it conditions the manner in which we think of the latter two; and as this baseline already generates certain bilateral tensions concerning the ethical, economic and socio-political scopes of theatre, it also requires us to assess what kind of ontological questions and problems an audience would attract or produce to have such an effect on our overall conception of modern theatre.

Thus, to disentangle the mainly ethical issues concerning spectatorship at hand, let us start by imagining one of the most concrete manifestations of the producer-consumer duality within contemporary theatre, namely the darkness common to most modern theatre auditoriums before, during and after performances. This previously often natural (or avoided) condition that was later developed into an artistic question and tool by e.g. Angelo Ingegneri, Richard Wagner, electric lighting, Appia, Craig, Svoboda and Irving,<sup>31</sup> seems to owe a lot of its fascinating nature to some basic human insecurity regarding the *ontological statuses* of such acts as *witnessing, observing, experiencing, judging and participating*. As this insecurity also invites one to form various hypotheses concerning its origin and aims, I shall suggest a few of them here in order to elaborate a context for some closer analysis. The actual task is to assess what kind of ethical grounds and meanings we would find for such '*fantasies of a public*,' which Herbert Blau observes at work already in the suspicious systems of signification that strive to articulate the very purpose of having an audience.<sup>32</sup> I shall present four '*fantasies*' (or hypotheses) in total, three in this chapter (2.1.) and the last one in Chapter 2.2. If the route through them appears to be coloured

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<sup>30</sup> Ballantine 2006.

<sup>31</sup> For a description of the development of theatrical lighting in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as its effect on (Western) theatrical presentation, see e.g. Baugh 2005: 11-13, 25, 135-136, 94-144; some earlier developments in e.g. Barlow 1973. See also Kaplan 1968 and Mackintosh 1993.

<sup>32</sup> Blau 1985: 205.

by a certain idealism or hyperboles, it is due to the fact that ethical assessments, as vital and contested as they are, cannot escape the fundamental (but necessary) naïvete that guides all quests for consolation or consensus in intersubjectivity, as they too must rely on certain systems of signification.

The **first** hypothesis would imply that the darkness of the auditorium, the difficulty of grasping its actual location, or the ‘located obscurity’ it contains, appears to have a soothing and at the same time suspicious quality about it — an atmosphere of simultaneous dusking and dawning that addresses our consciousness, but leaves our intentions and sociability without direct counterparts. There is surely a common awareness of fellow spectators in this *locus suspectus* (insofar as there are any), but the relief from acute sociability and its demands seems to leave us in a state of insecurity that is both solitude and auspiciousness — or sometimes (pre)tension — that proceeds or lulls towards anonymous criticality, a status in which we escape the direct and responsive responsibility of social interaction. This way, an audience or a single spectator appears to occupy no particular position, except that of an indecipherable address. Blau, taking note of the suspicion with which many original thinkers within theatre (like Brecht and Artaud) have approached the idea of an audience as a gathering, or a group of witnesses to an “exhausted” theatrical illusion, claims that “[i]f the audience is not altogether an absence, it is by no means a reliable presence.”<sup>33</sup> Even though there is mostly no need to question or deny its physical presence (even in the shelter of darkness), it bears an uncertain potential that appears to surpass or fall short of any proper means of articulating it; not least because it seems, strangely enough, to be both the reason for and the corollary of two different ontological positions in the theatre, itself and the stage.

Nicholas Ridout, for one, raises some concerns related to this problematique in his reading of Michael Fried’s *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (1967/1998). Ridout explains that while discussing modernist artworks, Fried speaks for “the possibility of a spectator who is all consciousness, who has vanished, as it were, from the scene of her own spectatorship, receded into the complete darkness of a non-existent auditorium the better to contemplate the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 199.

wholly unsituated picture that is suddenly almost both subject and object of this act of contemplation or absorption.” On the other hand, Ridout mentions that the literalist — here: *minimalist* — works that Fried addresses in his project emphasise the fact of “*co-presence in the act of spectatorship*,” which, in itself, necessitates some kind of divergence of (corporeal) presence(s) in the situation, a *theatricality*, in Fried’s terminology.<sup>34</sup> This would be due to the fact that the minimalist work, in its plain objecthood, occupies and engages this world in much the same manner as I do; it encounters my spectatorial position accordingly and makes me aware of somehow ‘being on display’. Without delving deeper into this specific aesthetic enquiry, we may say that the ambiguity its aspects speak of reveals a fundamental problematique not only in the way we see ourselves as (modern) spectators or consumers of culture, but also within the ontological position of the spectator her/himself.

The uncertainty (or even dispersion) that concerns the spectator’s presence and function here makes one thus consider whether the alledged *anonymity* and *insecurity* offered by the darkened theatre auditorium are the ‘opening status’ or obligation that gives a modern audience its ‘true shape’ and responsibility — or, moreover, an instant of sharing induced *by* that responsibility. The quotation from Tia Ballantine above suggested that the awareness of others in the auditorium often ensures an experience of being addressed collectively, as a ‘legitimised board’ of some kind, but at the same time her acute sense of solitude seems to articulate something that cannot be shared, essentially: a rupture, or an opening of the self that exceeds it(self) in the darkened auditorium. The outreaching silence in Ballantine’s act of being present, or the *withdrawal of her identity as a means of being-there*, seems to lean towards some inexplicable original unity, which would always already haunt the experience of dispersion that constitutes an audience, Blau’s “mysterious rupture of social identity in the moment of its emergence.”<sup>35</sup>

This withdrawal of identity — or the *gesture of responsiveness* that stresses the *minimality of gesturing* — does not, to be sure, suggest that we are not able

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<sup>34</sup> Ridout 2006: 8, italics mine.

<sup>35</sup> Blau’s *The Audience* (1990: 10) quoted in Auslander 1997: 100.

to sense, feel and judge in a given situation; instead, this would all be inherent in the minimality of the audience's gesture (taking into account the possible sensory limitations of the spectators). It seems as if it indeed announces the *Not I* of the *I* — what Ballantine observes as “communicative energy”—, the appearing of a ‘human animal with a self’ without any *direct* announcement of its appearing as a part of the verbal and conceptual world, the world that operates as a system of intentions and becoming through perception and judgement.

Since Ballantine sees this ‘energy’ as activity that is “outside my body and moving away from any identity that I had previously thought mine,” I take it that she refers to experiencing some novel (but horizonless) *extension* of being, a *distance* or even a *light* relative to the actual reaches of the existent (i.e., in our case, the *human animal as a spectator*). As an experience, it seems already to problematise its own potential by eluding all subjective self-definitions and constantly (and inevitably) returning to them. It even seems to assume the form of a negation, a negating version of the spectator, which, in its appearing, still *by no means denies her or bears any reference to her value*, but which conditions the spectating self as a response that is not fully under her control.<sup>36</sup>

One is then tempted to present here the **second** hypothesis, a certain paradox concerning the ‘spectatorial authority’ of a modern audience. The withdrawal of the identity to which its members are subject would suggest that the audience's sense of perception and judgement, i.e. its very *consciousness*, would be largely based on the fact that it cannot decide the actual aim of its silent judging, of the *minimal gesture of responding that makes it an audience*. Once it announces itself, once it starts to clap, cheer, laugh, cry, boo, or even to cough or sneeze as politely as possible, it seems to have concealed some of its ‘*audienceness*,’ the minimal gesture of appearing as a silent, insecure but responding darkness. This is not to say that an outbreak of cognitive-emotional responses (emphasis on the hyphen) would obliterate an audience, or do actual violence to its (supposed)

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<sup>36</sup> Although the operation of this negation is suggested through a hypothesis here, its full meaning and contribution to the present work will become clearer through the reading of mimesis and the theatrical experience I propose in the next subchapter. The postponement of those issues, while regrettable, is symptomatic of the difficulties we face in the present enquiry.

ontological position, but that those reactions would be possible precisely because of its fundamentally withdrawn or uncertain nature.

And this would then be one of the unique, uncanny, yet somehow familiar properties of audienceness a darkened modern auditorium offers to an audience. It remains, itself, hidden in the very hiddenness of the spectators and the auditorium, letting us escape and conceal ourselves, but also constantly offering itself to be consciously inhaled — as an announcement of something that is about to begin, or has maybe already begun; a vague contract between the spheres of the everyday and the outside (or letting go) of the everyday.

Accordingly, it appears to become the contract the spectators make with the theatre and the stage it provides — the famous but still mysterious *stage contract* between a promise to appear as a minimal (responsive) gesture and a promise to appear precisely *because of* that gesture.

### 2.1.1 *The Handkean offensive*

The idea of audienceness considered above is, of course, constantly challenged and problematised in the theatre and all performing arts. Audience participation and the dissolution of the physical and mental boundaries between *skēnē* and *theatron* — let us remember that these Greek terms can both separate and unite the performers and the audience in their original architectural and practical meaning — has been an essential part of theatrically embellished human interaction throughout its existence; from the forgotten prehistoric rites approaching the unknown, or the ecstatic Dionysian celebrations of Hellenistic cultures to the Brechtian creation of an ethico-politically determinate spectator, or even the confused tourism of the site (non-)specific performances by Forced Entertainment<sup>37</sup>. These boundaries become even more blurred, or *seem* to

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<sup>37</sup> This last example refers mainly to their *Nights in This City* (1995/1997), “perhaps the first ever guided tour of Sheffield, ... a performance with both audience and performers on board a moving bus. Later restaged in Rotterdam, the project created a guided tour conducted by male and female tour guides who avoided facts in search of a different truth. [...] The public were bused around a particular route whilst commentary from the performers renamed and

disappear altogether, if we think of Teatro del Lemming's *Odisseo – viaggio nel teatro* (2000/2001)<sup>38</sup>, a constantly varying spectatorial odyssey through all the working spaces of the given production with (and even for) the performers, or Hermann Nitsch's *Gesamtkunstwerke*, the six-day Orgien Mysterien Theater cult proceedings in Schloss Prinzendorf that embrace all senses of the participants.<sup>39</sup> When one hit the streets of Kolkata or Berlin as a spectator of Rimini Protokoll's interactive project *Call Cutta* (2005), and followed the instructions given via cell phone by an actor, the meaning of being a theatregoer must have felt radically altered.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, as mentioned, this kind of experimentation is not something that characterises only very recent developments in the theatre. When Peter Handke's *Publikumsbeschimpfung [Offending the Audience]* (1966/1997) turned the lights on in the auditorium and claimed to conduct an "argument with the theatre," it created a (self-)distinctive perspective on spectatorship by making the public mindful of the theatrical mechanisms and of its own position, its contribution to those mechanisms. Handke's instructions for the production demanded that the audience should be made confident that they were going to see a conventional

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re-invented real-world events beyond the window." (Information obtained from Forced Entertainment's web site, 21.11.2006). See also Etchells 2001: 61, 80-81, 100.

<sup>38</sup> For making me aware of Teatro del Lemming and the work of Hermann Nitsch, I wish to thank Gabriella Calchi Novati. For the former example, see Berisso & Vazzoler 2001 and the company's website: <http://www.teatrodellemming.com/lemming/odisseo/odisseo.htm> & <http://www.teatrodellemming.com/lemming/menu/lemming.htm#>.

<sup>39</sup> See Nitsch 2006; Green 1999: 170-177.

<sup>40</sup> See e.g. Rimini Protokoll's *Call Cutta* web site: <http://call-cutta.in/index0.htm>. "CALL CUTTA is a kind of remotely guided tour through a city, a sort of user interface for theatregoers. It has an interactive stage "set" which takes you behind the scenes and beyond. However, the conversation can only be controlled up to a limit, swinging between small talk, intimacy, and the biography of the people talking, all of which is used to manipulate information. At the end it is always up to the theatre-goer to decide how far he wants to get involved in the game. Other "callers" or actors may switch to a waiting call, or take over another tour. Sometimes the "audience" gets switched to a pre-recorded piece of music or is told to sit somewhere: I'll call you back later, have a coffee till then – and all of a sudden the assistant or guide is no longer in comforting earshot, the film reels are being changed, the city returns with all its unknowns!" (Ibid.)

theatre piece,<sup>41</sup> only to encounter direct statements by the actors (or “speakers”) that left their customer status without relevance or justification:

You are thinking along. You are not thinking along. You feel uninhibited. Your thoughts are free. Even as we say that, we insinuate ourselves into your thoughts... Your thoughts are following in the track of our thoughts. Your thoughts are not following in the track of our thoughts. You are not thinking. Your thoughts are not free. You feel inhibited. [...] You are not watching us. You are looking at us. You are being looked at... You no longer have the advantage of looking from the shelter of darkness into the light. We no longer have the disadvantage of looking through the blinding light into the dark... In this way, we gradually form a unit. Under certain conditions, therefore, we, instead of saying *you*, could say *we*... We are a closed society.<sup>42</sup>

June Schlueter suggests that the aim of Handke’s arguments is to transpose the stage and the audience, and “[o]nce the role reversal has been achieved, the speakers can concentrate on their ultimate goal, which is to make the audience aware of the fact that it *is* an audience and as such has the primary obligation of consciousness.”<sup>43</sup> The “closed society” or “certain conditions” the play offers to create between the performers and the audience with its (deceptively) contradictory and intimidating statements is then in fact a society that emerges from the participants’ inability to take each other’s place, and thus from their obligation — or ‘necessary willingness’ — to co-operate *as* an altogether heterogeneous, unpredictable and internally divided entity. It strives to deconstruct the duties handed down to each participant at the (alleged) signing of the stage contract, in order to rebuild them, as positions perhaps more committed than before. There is no comforting distance between the performers and the spectators in Handke’s theatre (which, according to his strange but analytic manoeuvre, would abolish the audience’s specific duty and position).

But this is far from being the whole story, or Handke’s conclusion of the matter. As Bonnie Marranca tells us, here “the audience witnesses theatre as

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<sup>41</sup> Handke 1997: 4-6.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.: 7.

<sup>43</sup> Schlueter 1981: 21.



theatre—the actual *making* of the work on stage;”<sup>44</sup> the making that *would not take place* without an audience whose constant transformation and uncertainty are not only the aim of the performance, but give the performance its very existence. By witnessing ‘theatre as theatre’ in this way, and thus by being very much involved in the theatre event itself, the prior expectations the spectators may have had turn into a questioning of what those expectations have to offer to the actual making of theatre (that needs both the performers and the audience as its workforce).<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, as this questioning is performed *through and qua the stage*, Handke chooses to take a path where the play of its language is not concealed but performed in the ‘obvious,’ in the theatre’s self-evidence, where it contradicts or neutralizes its earlier statements as if thus creating some non-synthetic *surplus*. This approach appears to create a novel horizon of meanings that ‘comes onstage’ later in the text but remains disturbingly undisclosed:

You have made up your minds now. You have recognised that we negate something. You have recognised that we repeat ourselves. You have recognised that we contradict ourselves. You have recognised that this piece is conducting

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<sup>44</sup> Marranca 1976: 53.

<sup>45</sup> Even though our main interest here is not the question of the theatrical image (onstage), it is still worth noticing how Petri Tervo (2006: 11) sees this image as something “that [already] gives performativity – representationality – to us as representationality of a heterogeneous group with multiple factors [or authors]. Emphasising the role of a spectator or an audience is the heuristic purpose of the theatrical image. To be witnessed, [it] needs to be represented in the passing moment of the performance situation. The performance is dependent on the spectator’s understanding, culture, compassion, willingness to participate in the movement of the performance. The spectator is [thus] an unknown, uncontrollable factor in the representation of any [‘oeuvre’] identity – an accident [or fortuity] of [and in its] autonomous work-of-art-ness.” He also stresses the fact that “the spectator’s alienation and heterogeneity can also be denied. A modernistic spectacle offers different possibilities of doing this: genderisation makes the spectator [somewhat] knowable and foreseeable again. Universal depth psychology (the presence of the unconscious, instinctive energy, the logic of dream, the primitive, a child or an insane person “in all of us”) or sensation and perception psychology attains the spectator as a witness, who [needs] to be brought under the overall control... of the spectacle (also in the form of a scandal or a shock).” (Ibid.: n. 17, translation and brackets mine.) What strikes us with *Offending the Audience*, is that it seems to address both possibilities at the same time through its dialectical movement, by exposing them, but leaving their ‘proper’ purpose undisclosed.

an argument with the theatre. You have recognised the dialectical structure of the piece. You have recognised a certain spirit of contrariness. The intention of the piece has become clear to you. You have recognised that we primarily negate. You have recognised that we repeat ourselves. You recognise. You see through. You have not made up your minds. You have not seen through the dialectical structure of the piece. *Now you are seeing through.* Your thoughts were one thought too slow. *Now you have thoughts in the back of your mind.*<sup>46</sup>

There is a peculiar dialectical movement in the text and in the order in which it is disclosed, a *negation of the theatre back to theatre* that confronts the audience as a suggestion of not relinquishing its uncertain presence, even if it cannot (or chooses not to) articulate itself as an audience. Taken as a question of the audience's responsibility, the power of the text would lie in its way of reminding the spectators annoyingly of the theatrical 'errand' they have promised to *attend to*, but which they have perhaps put off *for the time being*, for the duration of the performance. (Everyone knows this from being reminded of obligations one is already well aware of.) It is no wonder that Handke ends the notes for his early works by saying that their purpose is not to "revolutionize, but to make aware."<sup>47</sup>

The Brechtian voice we hear behind these observations is no coincidence. As — unofficial and unadmitted — successors of Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, Handke's early *Sprechstücke* (or *speak-ins*<sup>48</sup>) were indebted to the former's theory and practice within theatre, even though they renewed Brecht's "montage of images" to a more verbal direction, comprising "a collage of words."<sup>49</sup>

In addition, Handke's "pamphlet against the theatre inside the theatre" was of course dependent on the energies of the performance it used as its medium.

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<sup>46</sup> Handke 1997: 13-14, italics mine.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Hern 1971: 31.

<sup>48</sup> See Marranca 1976: 52.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*: 57; see also *ibid.*: 55-56. Handke (2000: ix) describes the speak-ins for example in the following manner: "The speak-ins have no action, since every action on stage would only be the picture of another action. The speak-ins confine themselves, by obeying their natural form, to words. They give no pictures, not even pictures in word form, which would only be pictures the author extorted to represent an internal, unexpressed, wordless circumstance and not a *natural* expression."

According to Tom Kuhn, director Claus Peymann and his four actors turned the first production of *Offending the Audience* in Frankfurt in 1966 into a “wonderful spectacle.”<sup>50</sup> As an ironic coda, this “stark essay against a theatre of representation” returned to embrace the very idea of theatre it was directed against — the reiteration of its statements not helping the situation.<sup>51</sup> And yet, the text anticipates this outcome in its own peculiar way:

We are theatrical because we are speaking in a theatre. By always speaking directly to you and by speaking to you of time, of now and of now and of now, we observe the unity of time, place and action... We and you form a unity because we speak directly to you without interruption. Therefore, under certain conditions, we, instead of saying you, could say we. That signifies the unity of action... There are no two places here. Here is only one place. That signifies the unity of place... Time is not bisected here into played time and play time. Time is not played here. Only real time exists here. Only the time that we, we and you, experience ourselves in our own bodies exists here... That signifies the unity of time. All three cited circumstances, taken together, signify the unity of time, place and action. Therefore this piece is classical.<sup>52</sup>

It should not be forgotten, then, that this dependence on the performance itself, or the very *happening* of theatre with its originary unity in simultaneous but separated elements (as ‘performed’ also by darkness and light), appears to pull groups and authors like Forced Entertainment, Nitsch, Rimini Protokoll and Teatro del Lemming back to address the initial question of what it means to

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<sup>50</sup> Kuhn 1997: xii. For a history of the play’s production and reception, see Defraeye 2006. For its translation into English, see e.g. Roloff 2000/2008. Claus Peymann (1972: 49-50) himself depicts the piece as a “beat[or rock]-opera for actors” and “the theatre sensation of the year.” (Brackets mine.) He describes how during the first performance “[t]he commotion in the theatre was considerable at the end. There was a half-hour battle between those who rejected the work and those offering enthusiastic approval.” Rather ironically, he also reports that in the future performances “[l]arge groups of spectators tried to take part in the action on stage. Again and again, the audience understood its role to literally join the play and turn the performance into a discussion. Unfortunately, neither I nor the actors were prepared for this situation. We could not detach from the fiction of the performance in order to open a conversation with the audience. Thus, each performance always remained a new adventure.”

<sup>51</sup> Kuhn 1997: xii-xiii; Peymann 1972: 50.

<sup>52</sup> Handke 1997: 19.

*appear as theatre*. However, since Handke's early works were so obtrusively built to problematise the very platform they used to convey their viewpoints and the idea of an audience they were constructing by offending and confusing it,<sup>53</sup> I strive to uphold an informative dialogue with his *Offending the Audience* and *Selbstbeichtigung* [*Self-Accusation*] (1966/1997) in this chapter (2.) — and with *Kaspar* (1967/1997) in the last section of the following chapter (3.3.).

Even though the statements of the *Sprechstücke* may seem somewhat obsolete for the (post-)modern reader/spectator, they raise some essential questions concerning our assumptions of the 'original duty' of a theatre audience or the performers. Situated in the late transitional age between dramatic and postdramatic theatre,<sup>54</sup> and informing both traditions, they may serve as points of reference that allow us to examine more closely certain specific (ontological and phenomenological) questions concerning theatre's self-consciousness and the possible ethical import of those questions.

In the case of *Offending the Audience*, its strategic importance and challenge for contemporary theatre seems to rise from the need to *re-examine* the fact that, as Tom Kuhn tells us, "[t]he destruction of the experience of the theatre in the theatre could only ever succeed for a shocking utopian second of theatre history. Thereafter, the dim-witted passivity and consumerism of the public were sure to reassert themselves; and a public that actually wanted to enjoy the rehearsal of its own disappointment and humiliation was no longer a worthy audience or subject for the play."<sup>55</sup> Being, perhaps, just a passing moment in (and through) which the self-confidence of the audience was truly questioned, the birth and (pseudo)death of *Offending the Audience* still link up with Blau's observation of 1985 that "[t]here is, in [the] suffusion of theatre coeval with urban sprawl, not only a

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<sup>53</sup> Blau (1985: 204) observes the effects of Handke's (somewhat suspicious) construction of an audience through its problematisation as follows: "[T]here has been—in the fallout from the participatory ethos of the sixties into the performative consciousness of new critical thought—a reconception of the activity of the audience, which can't quite be deferred to because it can't be taken for granted. It can't be taken for granted because, as Handke says in the instructions to the speakers who will perform the offense against it, "*the audience does not yet exist and has to be conceived.*" (Italics mine.)

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Lehmann 2006: 5, 24.

<sup>55</sup> Kuhn 1997: xiii.

confusion of genres but a demoralization of roles. When we think of the scale of awareness required to live consciously in this world, we're not entirely sure, in the illusory passage of current events, whether we are spectators or participants."<sup>56</sup> In such a context, the questioning that concerns the audience's position and function would remain an open enquiry; that is, we are still required to assess whether Handke's 'offensive' would not be a truly obsolete act, even in its singularity.

So what would be the relation of the abovementioned theatrical phenomena (excluding *Self-Accusation* and *Kaspar* for the time being) to the insecure audienceness that we saw taking part in constituting a stage contract within the darkened modern auditorium? It could be claimed that they do not make it an idea suitable only for a passive or a 'degenerate' audience, or a bygone speculation altogether. All the works mentioned, and the ideas of performing and spectatorship they wish to problematise still deal with the question of *appearing-because-of*, or *appearing-for*, with the question of addressing and being addressed as a part of a communicative promise and choice. Without discussing here the actual aims of Josette Féral's article 'Performance and theatricality. The subject demystified' of 1982, one might want to remember how she mentions that "[t]heatricality cannot *be*, it must be *for* someone." (And taking cognisance of the coming chapters, we also need to notice that "*for* someone" means here "*for the Other*."<sup>57</sup>)

It appears that Handke does not offend his spectators because he considers them unworthy of his play, but because the responsibility they bear is a potential, which seems to leave all other definitions concerning them secondary, however precarious or annoying they may be — i.e., the ethical weight of being a spectator seems to embrace the very risk of being exposed as a human animal in all its vulnerability and insecurity, or, indeed, in its need to hurt and offend.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Blau 1985: 200, brackets mine.

<sup>57</sup> Féral 2003: 214. It is reasonable to say that this *being for someone* concerns also *performativity*.

<sup>58</sup> As though referring to the (possibility of) self-assessment brought about by the imaginative potential in the agitation of Handke's *Sprechstück*, Gilman (1974: 278) says that the title of the piece would, perhaps, translate better as "*Saying Mean Things to the*

Thus, the actual (but still confusing) insults at the end of *Offending the Audience* are designed to give its audience a final wake-up call and to praise its persistence in upholding the uncertain audienceness that constitutes it:

... before you leave you will be insulted... By insulting you we can be straight with you. We can switch you on [...] While we are insulting you, you won't just hear us, you will listen to us... But we won't insult *you*, we will merely use insulting words which you yourselves use. We will contradict ourselves with our insults. [...] You were one of a kind. You had one of your better days tonight. You played ensemble. You were imitations of life, you drips, you diddlers, you atheists, you double-dealers, you fence-sitters, you dirty Jews. [...] You were priceless. You were a hurricane. You drove shudders up our spines. You swept everything before you, you Colonial hangmen, you savages, you rednecks, you hatchet men, you sub-humans, you fiends, you beasts in human shape, you killer pigs...<sup>59</sup>

The choice and promise of communicating required for a theatre event to take place are not described here merely as an intimidating commitment, but as an ongoing responsibility of awareness. It is not surprising, then, that Handke considers his text to be a “prologue to [the audience’s] future visits to the theatre.”<sup>60</sup>

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*Audience[.]*” The ‘mean things’ not only pre-exist the text and its performance (in real life) but are present in both as such, as statements; they are laid before the audience as potential elements of future stocktaking, as things to reflect on. The purpose of “the series of litanies” the play contains are, according to Gilman, “twofold: to drive out of the audience the expectations it unquestionably has of witnessing some theatrical work which reflects both the world and other theatrical works (of experiencing, that is to say, the traditional action of drama as the communication of emotion in stylized ways); and to create, out of nothing but language, a drama in which words are used to expose themselves, to strip themselves, as it were, of their habitual function as surrogate experience.” (Ibid.)

<sup>59</sup> Handke 1997: 28-30.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.: 27, brackets mine.

### 2.1.2 *On the responsibility of being aware*

Without the risk of saying anything revolutionary about the theatre, it can be argued that the promise and responsibility Handke is after should be assumed in order to shed a momentary but specific light on the toil and enjoyment of being by *distancing* (but not detaching) the spectating or the performing *cogito* from its willingness to announce its own existence ‘properly,’ and to re-introduce being to its existence from a novel perspective or awareness: an awareness that ‘there once was light, shed here, on this, which I *think* I know now, but which is no more in the light, that light, which I *think* was here...’ With such a move, we seem to enter an even more speculative sphere in investigating the self-consciousness and identity of theatre.

Approaches to this kind of ontological and, inevitably, metaphorical problematique vary, as it seems to concern not only the minimal but necessary distance between the stage and the auditorium, but also a certain distance between (and within) theatrical representation and what is represented. If I understand Blau’s rhetoric correctly, for him the spectator’s commitment to being *aware* (or, why not, staying awake) arises from the tension or arousal that observing the “seeming” of the stage brings forth, as what is represented onstage is also the ‘thing’ behind its own seeming, the ‘thing that is the thing precisely because it only seems to be the thing,’ striking us with an awareness that being a spectator comes with a responsibility to take part in a process of deciphering some minimal but still evident distance in all that is observed.

When appearance is doubled, it introduces us the gripping fact that being aware of something is also being aware of what it might *not be*, that what goes on onstage (or in the theatre) is a peculiar compression of ontological *distances* and *differences*, making it subject to various theories concerning (mainly scopic) drives and taboos. For Blau,

the fascination of theater is in its *precipitations*. I mean the inaugural moments and instances when the theater appears—unless the world *is* all a stage—from whatever it is that it’s not. More theater, less theater: in the *doing* of theater we solicit, rebuff, try to entrap that *thing* (has it appeared again tonight?), though

we're never quite sure we have it or that the audience can or should see it when, for a moment out of memory, we think we know what it is.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, in a rather different context, while speaking of questions of identity that define theatre history and the relations between theatre and drama, Erika Fischer-Lichte mentions that “theatre symbolises the human condition of creating identity to the extent to which it makes the distancing of man from himself the condition of its existence.”<sup>62</sup> As if to crystallise (and thus to problematise further) something of this issue, Samuel Beckett suggested in an interview in 1961 that “[i]f there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable... where we have, at one and the same time, darkness and light, we have also the inexplicable.”<sup>63</sup>

While Beckett had surely more fundamental existential concerns in mind, the mentioned *inexplicable* seems to describe what we saw happening with Ballantine’s experience of “communicative energy,” her *outreaching* solitude, and with the emergence of Handke’s heterogeneous theatre community, especially as the latter proposes that we cannot find (our) darkness unless we turn the lights on. Thereafter, this simultaneity of darkness and light, *as it was*, is undoubtedly gone, unregainable, but it has left an apprehension of something *revealed as it was*, in its situational being, which still has not committed itself to any actual logic of truth or falsity concerning our experience of it.<sup>64</sup>

The lesson of Handke’s arrogant dialectics appears to be that the audience is always waiting to see an *impossible performance*,<sup>65</sup> or the *performing of the impossible* as something given and possible. It is then through the dissection of the impossible marriage of the audience and the stage (or of darkness and light)

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<sup>61</sup> Blau 1990: 39-40.

<sup>62</sup> Fischer-Lichte 2004: 5.

<sup>63</sup> Tom Driver’s ‘Beckett by the Madeleine’, *Columbia University Forum* (iv, Summer 1961) quoted in James Knowlson’s *Light and Darkness in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett* (1972: 11).

<sup>64</sup> The issues concerning this problematisation will be discussed more thoroughly in the following sub-chapter.

<sup>65</sup> I wish to thank Dr. Matthew Causey for suggesting this formulation.



— although in large part metaphorical<sup>66</sup> and reprehensible by any traditional logic — that his audience is given something to take home with it, the perhaps dystopic memory of that *shocking utopian second*. And yet, more importantly, an apprehension of the mentioned impossibility appears to be performed precisely by the emergence of this memory, as an examination of the interdependence of the situation's contradictory elements. The audience's yearning for some original unity (in its fragmentation), as described earlier with Blau, has not been satisfied, but seems to survive in the 'desired impossibility' of the performance.

Understood this way, as a (shocking) utopian second, the theatrical experience is then undisputedly beset with further problems. As a more phenomenological question, a question concerning the conscious experience of a spectator or a performer<sup>67</sup>, the retrospective desire to understand the actual 'theatrical moment' would be challenged by what Jean-François Lyotard tells us of the way introspective psychology understands the experience of a "situated and dated individual... which [in and as itself] cannot be reproduced... [T]he experience must be grasped immediately, failing which the experience reflected upon afterwards may be a new experience—the link between the one and the other bearing *no guarantee of fidelity*."<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, if we (rather cursorily) think of Martin Heidegger's idea of *unconcealment* of beings — *alētheia* — as the becoming of truth in art *as it is*, as it has "set itself to work" in them,<sup>69</sup> it seems to bring out the same inability to speak of or access the essence of an artistic composition as it appears (or has appeared) to us. All forms of analysis of artworks would be somewhat hurried attempts to 'unpack' *alētheia* — the truth of beings in the work, bearing its own potential — and thus even violent acts towards the works themselves. To

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<sup>66</sup> The inevitable 'metaphorical weight' on the relations between darkness and light is not telling us to avoid the elusiveness of the issue, or suggesting that these conditions themselves do not articulate their meaning to us. Instead, Jacques Derrida (1998b: 102) notes how the term *metaphorikos* still designates in modern Greek "that which concerns means of transportation," thus already offering us a vehicle for approaching (but not necessarily reaching) the 'inexplicable.'

<sup>67</sup> See note 60.

<sup>68</sup> Lyotard 1991: 77-78, italics mine.

<sup>69</sup> Heidegger 2002: 162.

formulate an enlightened and scientific critique of an artwork is also to take the risk of interfering with the 'truthwork' that it is already offering us in its becoming and appearing, something that can only be witnessed as letting-be, by allowing the 'world world' in (and as) it — a task far more difficult than we might think (since most of us do think and conceptualise).<sup>70</sup> (It has to be mentioned, then, that Heidegger's argument also refers to an essential freedom in observing artworks, to a grounding nonjudgemental condition for pondering them. As an additional problem, we might argue that being itself, being *as* being, certainly does not concern itself with the ways in which it is introduced to our existence, or how we conceive of it when it is distanced and re-embraced.)

Thus, as the phenomenological and ontological questioning that disrupts our discussion here would demand a whole new pathway by the side of the one taken, I revert to theatre, but with the approach revised by the remarks. With artforms like sculpture and painting (which is Heidegger's showcase), we have often the opportunity to return to let-them-be (affected by the in-between, of course), but theatre — as well as live music — still remains quite distinct from them. While a certain iterability and repetition concern all arts, the uniqueness of a live performance seems to imbue a unique sense of appearing-for. Moreover, as I am mainly concerned with the audience here, it is perhaps not to the purpose to address the gesture of being itself, but rather an atmosphere that calls into question a mode of being that is *non-indifferent*, an ethical gesture and issue — something that is able to observe and judge, but unable to determine how this observing and judging eventually affects the world.

It is then necessary to take an even closer look at the actual task of being an audience. So far, the term *gesture* has not been properly situated in the present context — partly because the context already defies our mastery, and partly because the word gesture seems to both contain and release its meaning in an uncontrollable manner. Thus, in his clear yet rich way of thought, Roland Barthes comes to the rescue. Even though we still have to borrow from an analysis of pictorial works of art, Barthes gives us a very comprehensive

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.: 157.

description of the gesture I am after. To present a lengthy quotation from him, it is “[s]omething like the surplus of an action[:]”

The action is transitive, it seeks only to provoke an object, a result; the gesture is the indeterminate and inexhaustible total of reasons, pulsions, indolences which surround the action with an *atmosphere* (in the astronomical sense of the word). Hence, let us distinguish the *message*, which seeks to produce information, and the *sign*, which seeks to produce an intellection, from the *gesture*, which produces all the rest (the “surplus”) without necessarily seeking to produce anything. The artist... is by status an “operator” of gestures: he seeks to produce an effect and at the same time seeks no such thing; the effects he produces he has not obligatorily sought out; they are reversed, inadvertent effects which turn back upon him and thereupon provoke certain modifications, deviations, mitigations... Thus in gesture is abolished the distinction between cause and effect, motivation and goal, expression and persuasion.<sup>71</sup>

Barthes’ formulation becomes particularly interesting if we boldly choose to apply it to a theatre audience. While his ‘point of gesturing’ is the artist, the same description, when examined in relation to the minimal gesture of a spectator (as an artist?), shows us again how an audience would condition the performance situation simply by its responsive insecurity, which appears to dispell any *agreed* distinction between cause (darkness) and effect (light). It is also thus that the effect it produces, by being an audience, is not something “obligatorily sought out” — it remains indefinite. As an operator of this indefinite gesture — or the

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<sup>71</sup> Barthes 1986: 160. Another interesting definition — emphasising an organic transformation or particularity in the very becoming of an artistic or theatrical gesture that draws on repetition and the symbolic order — can be found in Kenneth Burke’s and Richard Schechner’s work (Puchner 2006: 46-47). Acknowledging the viewpoints of both theorists, Puchner (2006: 47) states that “[a] unique act becomes a gesture, a characteristic attitude, only if it is seen as being part of a series of repetitions. Gesture, or attitude, thus establishes a connection between various forms of symbolic action, from repetitive gestures in everyday life to the patterns of images and repeated associations in poems.” Although far from Barthes’ understanding — by establishing an equivalence between a gesture and an attitude, and stressing the importance of our ‘symbolic competence,’ thus binding a gesture to the relation between knowledge and representation — I find that this formulation also admits the unforeseen and unpredictable qualities of gesturing, although from a more epistemological perspective.

surplus of its *action as an audience* — it also seems to enact the problematic relation between moral expressions and their ethical *excess*, which I discussed at the very beginning of this chapter: In much the same way as ethics remains a surplus of moral expression, the ethical gesture of the audience seems to be a surplus of its minimal appearing. The mute moral position it occupies remains ‘ethically noisy.’

And this would be where we encounter the **third** hypothesis concerning the modern audience: it seems to be an ethical gesture and a problem simply by showing up (as darkness), sitting still and keeping its eyes and ears open. The uncertain ethical surplus of its mere presence indicates that *an audience is always responsible for everything it witnesses*, whether it realises this or not. (It is important to acknowledge, however, that it is highly questionable to treat *an audience* here as a monolithic *subject*. We may only use that particular approach here as an abstract — or, indeed, fantastic — rhetorical instrument.)

Yet, even this kind of proposal seems to be somehow external to theatre. The proper ontological status of a theatre audience is then quite difficult to describe, or even to propose, because it appears to be there already, in the theatre, proposing itself — always different but yet the same in its differing, never looking back to what it was (as an actual possibility to regain a bygone event as such), but always looking ahead *as it was*.<sup>72</sup>

The *happening* and *witnessing* (of that happening) characteristic of theatre seem to articulate in their own particular way the survival of meaning in communication, echoing Derek Attridge’s description of aphorisms and proper names in his introduction to Jacques Derrida’s essay on *Romeo and Juliet*, ‘Aphorism Countertime.’ Attridge explains that

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<sup>72</sup> This can be seen as quite a ‘textual’ and deconstructive approach to the happening of theatre, with allusions to the Derridean notions of *différance* and *iteration*, which are certainly not unfamiliar to performance theorists. Suzanne M. Jaeger (2006: 128) mentions how “[f]or [Peggy] Phelan, like others who have applied deconstructive semiotics, performances are texts to be read and interpreted. The words and gestures, the costumes, music, sets, actions, and so on, are all material marks of differences in the surface of the text. The audience will be more or less familiar with the system of differences in which these marks meaningfully function. There are, however, always new and different ways of interpreting texts given the many ways in which texts are reproductions of repeatable signifiers.”

[aphorisms and proper names] are characterized by their capacity for surviving the deaths of those who employ them or are designated by them, and are therefore structured by the possibility of death; they thus exhibit in a particularly striking way the working of iterability that makes possible any utterance or recognisable act. *So do plays, for they live on in the repetition of dramatic productions, each one affirming in a different way the uniqueness of the text they repeat, and each one repeating differently the play's staging of theatricality itself.*<sup>73</sup>

And while we are again talking here of the self-evidence of theatre, it should be noted that this self-evidence, taken as such, appears also to provide an opening for a mutilation of the theatrical experience. Without suggesting that such a mutilation is a cardinal offence against the theatre, or even possible without theatre *as* theatre, the Barthesian way of looking at the audience's gesture entails an *ethical excess*, which should be greeted with a certain caution, even in its auspiciousness. As an uncertain factor in our apprehension of what it means *to judge*, this surplus seems to be one of the crucial ethical reasons why theatre requires an audience. Ballantine, touched by the minimal but thus all the more challenging metaphorical call of Beckett's play, or the Not I of the I, cannot escape the way the horizonless need to respond, or her own gesture as an audience, is able to transform the nebulous role of the spectator:

Even before the first word was spoken that afternoon in the emptied theatre, I was overwhelmed by an awareness of loneliness so acute that it felt as if attached to my skin with invisible barbs. I was both separated yet incomprehensibly linked to the two fixed figures on the stage -- the cloaked standing shadow man and the moving Mouth. I felt the weight of the space between performers and empty seats settle as marked distance on my spine. My bones itched, and by the end of the performance, my mind was melting as if thawed by unexpected winter warmth. I was as speechless as the solitary Mouth had been overrun with rapid overflow of words. In less than one-half hour, I had collided with a complete life compressed into an explosive energy that, when

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<sup>73</sup> Attridge 1992: 415, italics mine.

released, flooded the surrounding dark and entered my every pore. Somehow, that released life belonged *with* me but *not to* me.<sup>74</sup>

It is even as if there were no such thing as free theatre: it comes with a cost of *attending*, with a promise to let go of the horizon of our actuality, or existence, in order to apprehend it again, transmuted, perhaps (and we are certainly not far from Brecht here)<sup>75</sup>. We may even say that failing to perform that promise — walking out, dozing off, or staging an absent-minded version of an already dim-witted text for sheer financial profit — would still be to acknowledge its mesmerising quiddity by trying to avoid its demands.<sup>76</sup> Joe Kelleher, for one, hears in the word attendance “waiting; patience; being ready to take up again what has already been done; the renewal of promise; a taking care of things; and a vigilance, a paying attention to things.”<sup>77</sup>

The gesture of attending (or ‘audiencing’) that underlies the very difficulty of making it disappear (the fact that *it is there*) and the gesture made because of that gesture (*to make use of the fact that it is there*), would then be axiomatic motives for a human animal to be a part of *theatrically realised appearing*, the enactment only live theatre and performance appear to be capable of in their singularity and

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<sup>74</sup> Ballantine 2006, italics mine.

<sup>75</sup> Timo Heinonen (2005: 44-45) states that “[t]he classical, and linear dramaturgy in general, correspond to the fundamental philosophical gesture *as ontology*.” Therefore “the dialectical movement of the Brechtian dramatic theory that strived to separate itself from the Aristotelian one, produced, in fact, a *metaphysical gesture*, even though it anticipated the post-structural theatre theory expressly on the methodological level.” (Translation and italics mine.)

<sup>76</sup> Playwright Howard Barker (2005: 41) seems to acknowledge this issue in his philosophical musings on the theatre when he states (to an imaginary spectator?) that “[l]eave if you wish. Leave without barbarity, however. The fact of your leaving is of no interest to others. Above all, in leaving do not demonstrate you have *escaped*. If *the art of theatre* is a prison, it is one where the incarcerated *willed their ordeal*...” (It has to be acknowledged here that Barker distinguishes *the art of theatre* from *the theatre*. He declares that “[t]he theatre purports to give pleasure to the many. *The art of theatre* lends anxiety to the few.” And later: “*The theatre* reproduces life. *The art of theatre* invents life. This act of invention may be perceived as a critique of the poverty of existence. It is not *social criticism*... *The art of theatre*, in its impatience with the world, utters in its own languages. Moreover, it understands these languages to be the means by which its public is *cleansed* of the detritus of familiarity, domesticity and recognition.” (Ibid.: 1, 6-7.)

<sup>77</sup> Castellucci, Guidi & Kelleher 2004: 111.

irrevocability. If one wished to add a certain sentimental value to it, it would be where patience and passion meet, where the patience practised by an audience to encounter the passion for that patience practised by the performers comes to be, as a minimal but always expanding gesture.

The salience of this issue could also, perhaps, be the reason why the relatively thin layer of Western culture is so easily offended or delighted by a performance that insults the seemingly cultivated and civilised nature of its vitality (like *Offending the Audience*), or by an audience that will not chew and swallow (read: consume) this ‘refined libido’ quietly. Being an audience, whether one full of laughter, tears, attention or boredom, appears, at its core, to be serious business — far more serious than the monetary affair it sometimes tends to be. The Watchman of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (2002) still today talks “willingly to those who know [this and listen], and for those who do not...,” he chooses to forget.<sup>78</sup>

In another recent English version by Alan Shapiro and Peter Burian, the same character announces that “[m]e, my words are meant for those who know already what I mean to say; for those who don’t, I don’t recall a thing.”<sup>79</sup> To know ‘already’ that there is an unpassable concern in the Watchman’s words and in himself (as himself, as a gesture), is to avail oneself, to enter a situation where the audience becomes a true addressee without any explicit demand.<sup>80</sup> It is to acknowledge how, in Blau’s words, “[t]o be the audience remains the burden of those who understand, who see without his [the Watchman’s] saying what it is he might forget.”<sup>81</sup> In light of the translations given (but without discussing their actual linguistic challenges), even the ‘choice to forget’ can be thought of as ‘not recalling a thing,’ something already subject to the audience attending the performance *as an audience*, instead of being a conscious decision by the performer (or the character). And this appears to be one — if not the most important — ‘expectation’ Handke, too, wants us to bring to theatre and reassess.

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<sup>78</sup> Aeschylus 2002: 4, brackets mine.

<sup>79</sup> Aeschylus 2003: 46, brackets mine.

<sup>80</sup> This suggestion also harbours the metaphorical allusion that the addressee might not be at the address s/he has chosen, but must return to in order to receive a communicative gesture.

<sup>81</sup> Blau 1985: 208, brackets mine.

And yet, while promoting our attentiveness and imagination, this inexplicable contract of attendance and counter-attendance seems to lure our being solely to itself, by offering itself to us as a medium for another medium — it would be, in itself, a gesture made in the name of theatre, or, why not, the very promise of theatre. But where might this gesture derive its communicative energy, as a contract and an experience? To assess this, we need to pay attention to what the theatrical stage offers to the happening of theatre. The following chapter will therefore concentrate on the stage as a *mimetic opening*, or an *embodiment of pure possibility*, which, in itself, always differs from and thus fundamentally problematises the alleged illusion offered to the spectators, thereby imparting to the performance situation much of its intensity.

## 2.2. The gesture of theatre as the phenomenon of the stage: transcendental viewpoints and self-accusations

I saw. I saw what I had seen before. I became conscious. I recognised what I had seen before. I recognised what I had recognised before. I perceived. I perceived what I had perceived before. I became conscious. I recognised what I had perceived before. [...] I was able to perform gestures. I was able to question. I was able to answer questions. I was able *to imitate*. I was able *to follow an example*. I was able *to play*. I was able *to do something*. I was able *to fail to do something*...

Peter Handke: *Self-Accusation*<sup>82</sup>

Handke's early works for the theatre, as experimental and thought-provoking as they are, certainly offer us more than a conceptual re-education to subjective or collective awareness. As his "spectacle without pictures"<sup>83</sup> suggests above, the seemingly self-evident biological process the human animal goes through in

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<sup>82</sup> Handke 1997: 35-36, italics mine.

<sup>83</sup> See Kuhn 1997: xi; Marranca 1976: 56.



her/his early age does not come as a matter of course to the animal itself, but as a troubling emergence of abilities and a succession of questions that challenge those abilities. He lays before us the fact that an infant encounters the world first *as it is*, it comes to her/him as it happens, becomes, or appears. But as soon as the child begins to make associations, to form connections and patterns between phenomena, the situation changes radically. Thenceforth, the human animal encounters sensory experiences as phenomena full of references and complex meanings beyond the acute experience itself — i.e., as Heidegger tells us, s/he is closer to the encountered things themselves than the sensations those things bring about (or *perform*): s/he begins to hear “the storm whistling in the chimney, ... the three-motored plane, ...the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen.”<sup>84</sup> Becoming (self-)conscious means being in closer proximity to the life-world beyond our immediate reach, to be able to problematise and question what we encounter, or have encountered, to also perceive the precarious and *illusional* aspects that take part in constructing our experience of the world.

As these aspects relate us not only to the very appearance of things, but also to the possibility of their *inauthenticity*, *disappearance* and *reappearance*, they bring us in touch with the questions of re-emerging, re-producing, re-enacting, re-presenting and, eventually (or from the outset), *mimesis*.

Within Western philosophy, the last of these terms has of course since Plato often been translated as imitation, as signification of secondary nature, a distraction or an obstacle on the way to ideas and truth. It remains an undisclosed problem, but also a context for speaking of the world in a language that does not correspond to the *world as world* (of ideas) — it appears to articulate something that is *not quite of, or about* the world. Thus, it has always also been an organic part of the theatrical discourse, as a context and a structural determinant, a harbour for theatrical ontology, narratives, and even ethics — and this goes for the modernist and post-modernist projects of re-evaluating the identity of theatre

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<sup>84</sup> Heidegger 2002: 151-152, brackets mine.

as well.<sup>85</sup> From a philosophical point of view the situation is not at all surprising, for the essence of the term, or its 'referent' and offering for the intellect seem to be as old as philosophy itself, if not older. For Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *tragedy*, the oldest canonised form of Western theatre, provides the field of questions at which Plato's philosophy aims by establishing itself against (and out of) tragedy<sup>86</sup> — and it is thus that mimesis is already a key player on the original (or *ur-*)stage of philosophy.<sup>87</sup>

Drawing partly on Lacoue-Labarthe, Timo Heinonen remarks that all discussions on the (theatrical) stage *are* philosophical, to begin with, because the conceptual aspects concerning its relation to metaphysics and ontology can be returned to the question of mimesis, "[which] is not only interesting from theatre's viewpoint; it is impassable and founding."<sup>88</sup> Moreover, he considers that even "when basic philosophical questions are being asked, mimesis is at least concerned in, if not indeed the denominator of the given problems. It does this in a way that denies any possessive hold, immediate thematisation and unambiguous definition. Instead of interpreting mimesis as an object or a concept, it is more appropriate to think of it as something of a transcendental logic that forever escapes the closure of meaning..."<sup>89</sup> Thus, it not only exceeds all forms of analysis concerning it, but encircles and captures those projects, transforming them into elements of its own operation, an operation that "articulates a *stagely* [or *scenic*] *difference*," an inevitable and 'unblemished' incommensurability between all that is represented and all that represents. Inscribed but unattainable in mimesis is its ability to produce an image without

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<sup>85</sup> Birringer (1997: 130) reminds us that "[w]henver modern theatre itself questioned its identity, its apparatus and its conventions, whether in the drama of Strindberg, Pirandello, Genet or Beckett, or in the radical quest for unmediated spectacle (Artaud) or 'poor theatre' (Grotowski, Brook), or in the revolutionary struggle for social transformation (Brecht's 'epic theatre', Boal's 'theatre of the oppressed'), *the radicalism of subversion is indebted to a persistent classical and modern paradigm of mimesis on which it depends even as the emphasis is shifted from text (dramatic fiction) to the performance event or experience as such.*" (Italics mine.)

<sup>86</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe 1993: 22; Heinonen 2005: 42.

<sup>87</sup> Heinonen 2005: 40.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.: 39, translation mine.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.: 40, translation mine.

resemblance, its independence or escape from the truth of being as the source of representation. It thus surpasses the question of presence, as well as any signifying relation between truth and its image, offering the (theatrical) stage its inimitable (sic) structure, an undecided textual dimension that obscures all ontological laws and questions concerning being and non-being.<sup>90</sup>

The words *closure*, *meaning*, *truth*, *escape* and *textual* may already give us a hint that Heinonen's arguments are influenced and guided by Jacques Derrida, whose work on the relations between text, interpretation and presence has informed much of our thought since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. We are then confronted with an ongoing and open debate, which not only contains further questions for theatrical representation, its structure and (preservation of) truth, but *which already seems to colour our experience of the theatrical stage*, without any explicit agreement. And it is thus that even our age of withdrawn, suspended and layered identities, or communication through virtual technology does not offer us anything genuinely new regarding the relations between mimesis, truth and presence. Matthew Causey points out that “[t]here is nothing in cyberspace and the screened technologies of the virtual that has not been already performed on the stage. The theatre has always been virtual, a space of illusory immediacy.”<sup>91</sup>

Thus, to approach the *gesture of theatre* from a viewpoint that strives to understand the functioning of this seemingly paradoxical *illusory immediacy*, the virtual and layered space (or stage) of our experiencing and conceptualisation that constructs our relation to the world, it is necessary to look deeper into some transcendental issues that regulate it. In his article ‘Näyttämön ilmiö’ [The phenomenon of the stage]<sup>92</sup> (2005), the Finnish theatre theorist and practitioner

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.: 41.

<sup>91</sup> Causey 1999: 383. Causey also refers here to Herbert Blau's *Eye of Prey* (1987: 164-165): “There is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated. It can be a very powerful illusion in the theater, but it *is* theater, and it is *theater*, the truth of illusion, which haunts all performance whether or not it occurs in the theater, where it is more than doubled over.” (Quoted in Causey 1999: 394, n. 3)

<sup>92</sup> The title could also be translated as ‘The stage phenomenon,’ but because Kirkkopelto refers throughout (and with) his article to the limits and conditions of *experiencing* the ‘staged’ or ‘staging’ features of existence, I find this wider and ‘spectator-friendly’ context

Esa Kirkkopelto speaks attentively of what it means for a human animal to become an active part of the world perceived and experienced in (and as) its stage-like features, part of the *'stageliness'*<sup>93</sup> of our experience of other beings, the world, and even being itself. He draws our attention to the fact that to encounter phenomena is indeed far from merely transfixing them with our consciousness, or proceeding towards them as ready-made and qualified *'conceptualising machines'* — a theme and a problem essential for phenomenological questioning, or even Kant.

Like the speaker in Handke's *Sprechstück* above, Kirkkopelto emphasises the importance of our *'stagely understanding'* of the world, which we seem acquire at certain (early) age.<sup>94</sup> In *Self-Accusation*, the speaking subject moves from seeing to *recognising* (self-)consciously, from gesturing to questioning (of gesturing), from imitating, following an example and playing to *failing to do these things*. These developments are all part of the process in which we begin to outline our own existence, or the spatio-temporal becoming of our subjectivity, to problematise the concepts of appearance (or indeed *aesthetics*), mimesis, and performing; i.e., our stagely understanding of the world concerns already the very *modes and forms of our own experience* and the *transcendental conditions* that establish our experiencing — and with that understanding we are eventually able to differentiate, for example, reality from theatre.<sup>95</sup>

However, as these insights are concerned with the *differentiating* and *delimiting* aspects of our experience, a brief and elementary digression is in order,

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more appropriate. Many terms and expressions have been difficult to translate, for Kirkkopelto makes full use of the flexibility of the Finnish language.

<sup>93</sup> In a later unpublished (on 21 April 2008) essay in English, Kirkkopelto speaks of the *'scenic'* features of human experiences and encounters, whereas I use the term *'stagely'* to discuss the same issues. I chose the latter word for reasons related to the inflection of the term. In addition, I do not wish to confuse the reader by using the words *'stage'* and *'scenic'* in the same sentence while referring to the same issue. However, one can use the terms *'scenic'* and *'scenicity'* in place of *'stagely'* and *'stageliness.'*

<sup>94</sup> Kirkkopelto 2005: 15.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* Kirkkopelto reminds us not to confuse the term *'transcendental'* (that, which surmounts but thus regulates the fact of our experiencing) with *'transcendent'* (that, which is beyond our experiencing). One of the most innovative discussions on the conditions of human experience in Western philosophy is of course found in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (e.g. 1993). On his definition of transcendental philosophy, see e.g. *ibid.*: 43.

namely one that concerns the *aesthetic distance* with and through which our relation to works of art and the world has often been discussed. Since Kant's contemplation on the general features of our judgement (of taste) — indeed the “contemplativity” of his *Critique of Judgement* — there has been a firm (and constantly rediscovered) basis for thinking of the relation between the experiencing subject and the experience itself as something both contemplated in its immediacy and a phenomenon coloured by the experience of contemplating itself.

In Gérard Genette's *The Aesthetic Relation* (1999), Kant's thought is used to explain why there is a distinction between contemplating an object, and an *appreciation* invoked by that contemplation (Genette chooses to call the former act “attention”).<sup>96</sup> There appears then to be an *inherent distance* (between attention and appreciation) in the experience itself, whether that of a natural object, or a work of art. Without delving much deeper into the complex logic engaged in this issue, it is of importance to ask what kind of aesthetic distance we should examine regarding the theatrical experience.

When Genette goes on to discuss Edward Bullough's idea of “psychical distance” as something that defines our aesthetic relation (or distance) to the world and art,<sup>97</sup> we are approaching the *question of stageliness* from an epistemological and even rather practical direction. To use Bullough's example, the spectator of *Othello* may ‘underdistance’ her/himself from the tragedy, relating Shakespeare's story to her/his own life, or examine it ‘overdistanced,’ observing the composition of the performance only in its technical details. Lastly, the spectator may maintain the aesthetically “right” distance, attending to the action onstage as such, which, according to Genette, means that the action is viewed as *fictitious*.<sup>98</sup> As a rather gruesome example of underdistancing, Genette then offers us a quote from Stendhal's (aka Marie-Henri Beyle) *Racine and Shakespeare* (1823/1962):

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<sup>96</sup> Genette 1999: 16-17.

<sup>97</sup> Genette refers here to Bullough's “Psychical distance’ as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle” in *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Criticism* (1963: 233-254). Ed. M. Levich. Random House: New York. See also Reiss 1971.

<sup>98</sup> Genette 1999: 17.

Last year (August 1822) a soldier who was standing guard in the theatre in Baltimore, upon seeing Othello, in the fifth act of the tragedy of that name, about to kill Desdemona, cried out: “It will never be said that in my presence a damned nigger killed a white woman.” At the same moment the soldier shot at the actor who was playing Othello and broke his arm...<sup>99</sup>

Though hopefully more enlightened and considerate than the soldier in question, the (post-)modern spectator is still very much involved with an inherent distance of her/his own experience regarding the play between reality and theatre (and the play of theatre itself) — i.e., with encountering the layers of one’s experience and the subjective concerns those differing but interacting layers evoke. Genette mentions how in Bullough’s view our aesthetic distancing in real life “consists in *acting as if* one were not concerned [‘the world’s the stage where I act my life’]; in art, it consists in *understanding* that one is not.”<sup>100</sup> Although quite sound — just try running your errands as a fully fictional character, and you get a good idea of psychosis —, the notion remains problematic. Genette thus reassesses Bullough’s opinion by suggesting that regarding art (and theatre especially, it should be mentioned), experiencing the aesthetic distance and relation is indeed not to establish a distance or a difference between ourselves and some *full or perfect illusion* (“which one never goes to the theater looking for,” Genette adds<sup>101</sup>), but, in fact, it is to be confronted by *non-totalisable illusions* — an experience of a work of art may engender all kinds of meanings and reactions, considered both as fictional and non-fictional, which are not guided or separated *first* by a dichotomy between reality and art (or truth and non-truth, for that matter).

The illusion of theatre — or of art in general — takes place, undeniably, but in a non-totalisable way concerning its illusionary status; it is still an object and a phenomenon to be dealt with, but in a different way, even in a way that *differs inherently*, because it escapes the closure and logic of representation and knowledge. Kirkkopelto approaches this *stagely difference* and its departure

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Genette 1999: 17.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.: 18, brackets mine.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

from the alleged totality of illusions by reversing our viewpoint: any given action or phenomenon can be observed at any given moment as a play of ‘as if,’ “in its sheer (or pure) experientiality and possibility — detached from its knowable, technical or moral definitions. Thus acts a dog that misinterprets its master’s commands, or a child that interferes with adults’ work by imitating them, or, finally, a theatre artist... who examines human activity around her precisely in this manner in order to repeat and depict it in her own work.”<sup>102</sup> To provide a personal account, the same interest may affect a researcher taking a coffee break from these matters on a busy Dublin street, where the experience of the street’s sheer ‘as if,’ or the pure potential of its stageliness starts to unravel a global conspiracy thriller or an absurd farce à la Monty Python. Here, the stage contract is signed unilaterally, the situation is (firstly) examined in isolation from its meaning, as happening and taking place — as the pure potential inherent in *gesturing*. It is only after this that the observed activity adopts some pattern, narrative, plot, or goal.

Forced Entertainment’s *Nights in This City* got a hilarious hold of this gestural facet by offering its spectator-participants, e.g., a mischievously ‘Parisian’ version of Sheffield and Rotterdam, giving the perhaps stale attitudes towards the milieu a new, more colourful direction. The coach tour’s blithe nonchalance in regard to geographical and cultural facts enacted a stage contract, which opened a familiar environment to a pure play of meanings, introducing the spectators to the joy of discovering the stageliness of their surroundings.<sup>103</sup> The life-world would then remain a presupposition for (its representation and observation through) its stageliness, but freed from any truth of figurative or non-figurative likeness, and from the logic of right and wrong. Instead, the stagely encounters described with Dublin, Sheffield or Rotterdam bear an organic resemblance to the stageliness of the structure of any experience — as experiences, they are still *representations of something to someone, like my experience to myself*.<sup>104</sup> For Kirkkopelto, then, “the stage *is* when we have an

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<sup>102</sup> Kirkkopelto 2005: 18, translation mine.

<sup>103</sup> Etchells 2001: 61, 80-81, 100.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Kirkkopelto 2005: 19.

*experience of the stage.*”<sup>105</sup> (In this sense, Shakespeare’s phrase claiming that ‘all the world’s a stage’ acquires a meaning according to which men and women are not ‘merely players’ but ‘also players’ and the world may present itself, emblematically, ‘as you like it.’)

It seems that we approach here the **fourth**, and perhaps the most troublesome hypothesis concerning spectatorship, as well as the reason for the simultaneous conventionality and innovativeness regarding theatrical representation and the operation of mimesis in projects like *Orgien Mysterien Theater*, *Nights in This City* and *Call Cutta*. If the experience of the stage (or theatre) bears an organic likeness to the structure of experiencing itself, the spectators’ inclusion and participation in the performance would be also, and essentially, excursions into the psycho-physical process involved in all our experiencing. Pushing the limits of the stage to the auditorium or making the audience guide the course of events appear to be acts still haunted by the *inherent differing and estrangement of the self-evidence of theatre*, which, in itself, questions and reassesses the *stageliness of it all* — it is a phenomenon to which an audience *always* bears witness.

A brief incursion into Nitsch’s work may elucidate this matter somewhat more. Reaching its first full realisation in Prinzendorf in 1998, the still performed 6-day *Orgien Mysterien Theater Project* remains an innovative exploration of the scope of audience participation. Consisting of “350 participants, including 90 actors, 2 large classical orchestras, a group of percussionists, two brass bands, traditional tavern musicians, a choir and a string quartet,” as well as numerous people working in the kitchens and administration,<sup>106</sup> the project suggests all kinds of activities for its audience. These range from walks through vineyards and fields, communal meals, tame intoxication and merry singing to an ‘orgiastic downfall,’ which “transforms the orgy of the liveliest rapture into sado-masochistic destruction [including ‘the rending of the lamb,]” a process of “extinction” and “re-blossoming,” where “genesis and decay are one.”<sup>107</sup> Acknowledging the multisensory (or

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.: 18, translation and italics mine.

<sup>106</sup> Green 1999: 176-177.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.: 171-172; 174. Stefan Beyst (2002/2006) criticizes the alleged ‘totalness’ of Nitsch’s ‘Gesamtkunstwerke’ as follows: “Whatever Nitsch’s intention may have been, his ‘primeval



“synaesthetic”<sup>108</sup>) supply and engagement the event provides for its participants, it is of importance to take a further look at a couple of Nitsch’s ‘Declarations and descriptions of the Orgien Mysterien Theater Project’ from 1978 that give us an idea of its aims:

84. the [Orgien Mysterien] theatre is not a theatre of representation, it has no stage, no actors, no comedians. the participants themselves are the heroes of the drama, *their ability to experience, the development of their potential to experience, is the content of the play and corresponds to the events*, which is to say the storyline. 85. life itself is staged by the o.m. theatre.<sup>109</sup>

Obviously, Nitsch’s keywords for the project and its theatrical essence here are *experience* and *life*. Furthermore, he announces that to bring about a development in the participants’ potential to experience is to give the play its very content and purpose. Here lies also his contribution to our transcendental questioning of the theatrical experience, which has emphasised the correspondence between the theatrical event and the ability to experience, or indeed the ability to problematise the ability to experience. *Orgien Mysterien Theater’s* very offering for our understanding of theatre, its radical straining of the limits of stage, play and representation seems inevitably to bear witness to a return to the ‘experience of experiencing’ — i.e., to life in its essential but undisclosed stageliness, or to the way we represent it to ourselves. Nitsch’s declaration of staging “life itself” in his reformative move (back) to the limits of our experience of theatre and theatricality is in fact nailed to the doors of all theatres and spaces of performance, but mostly as an invisible — and frequently

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ritual’ is no more than a spectacle - sheer ‘Darstellungstheater’ – not at all a real ritual, merely a mere performance of it. What is performed here on the borderline between ‘faking’ and ‘playing’ – not otherwise than in a strip-tease or an sm-session - is in no way the ‘primeval drama’, suppose such a thing would be interesting at all. The alleged primal ritual staged in the ‘Orgien Mysterien Theater’ rather reminds of children playing priest, which, just like playing school, used to be the favourite business of children obliged to attend the church. And with playing doctor or blowing up frogs it has in common that such ‘playing ritual’ is the dreamt of alibi to indulge in the scorned sado-masochistic pleasures, mistakenly interpreted as sexual...”

<sup>108</sup> Green 1999: 172.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.: 175, italics and brackets mine.

forgotten — suggestion. The mesmerising stagely difference mimesis enacts in its constant *escape from known representation* appears to be alive and well in Nitsch's theatre, as a ghost that will probably outlive all its refurbishers and cross-examiners, becoming thus, perhaps, a theatre for the history of those developments itself. In other words, the journey on which *Orgien Mysterien Theater* takes its participants leads right back to the incommensurability and radicality of the mimetic operation that seems (sic) to eclipse all subversive theatrical or anti-theatrical acts challenging it.

Moreover, its constant surpassing of ontological questions, the undecidability — which from a Derridean point of view would be both an ethical invitation and an imperative<sup>110</sup> (as a surplus) —, also speaks through the Barthesian gesture, the gesture whose 'proper' meaning is forever postponed. It is preserved precisely by this undecidability, by exceeding the intentionality of gestures (whether those of a performer or a spectator), without returning to the actual abilities and limits of those gestures. As an observer of this extreme activity and distance, the audience appears then to be an even greater ethical surplus (and a risk?) concerning its originary duty as a site of response and judgements. While it tries to conduct or give meanings to the infinite departure of mimesis, it is always already a source of and a partaker in that operation, fuelling its 'nonterminal velocity.' Without commenting here the question as to which came first, the spectator or the performer, it is still appropriate to suggest that the audience's performance as an audience leans towards this potentiality of always possessing and making higher (and more uncertain) demands for the mimetic operation theatre offers it.

A modern audience seems then to become *the* audience by a complex act of withdrawal and reconstitution: a patient withdrawal of its identity, which leads to an uncertainty regarding the status and function of its audiencing, and thus *to the birth of its ethical gesture*, the surplus of its minimal act of being-there — or, to borrow from Alain Badiou's terminology, to the reconstitution of the "fabric of our patience."<sup>111</sup> However, this seems to be enabled only by another —

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<sup>110</sup> Heinonen 2005: 52-53.

<sup>111</sup> Badiou 2003a: 77.

passionate? — phenomenon, namely the operation of mimesis the audience inevitably takes part in, the constant withdrawal from the transference of truth and representation or the accurate naming of meaning to the experience of stageliness, the phenomenon of the theatrical stage itself.

Keeping Plato's suspicions in mind, Adrian Kear notes that "what is troublesome in mimesis is not just its slipperiness as a concept [...], but its *transmutation of ethics* from the domain of known qualities to a sphere of *pure potentiality*. Mimesis thereby puts the ethical into suspension — making it possibility rather than actuality..."<sup>112</sup> It is then worth considering whether the most fundamental ethical gesture of the audience (or even its 'stem fantasy') is its very *concern* for the uncertainty of the becoming of the stage and itself, the *necessary willingness* to reassess the pure potentiality of theatre. Without this concern, it would be hard to imagine either the analytic persistence of the theoretical viewpoints discussed so far, or Handke's theatre in the first place.

But since the focus of our investigation has already shifted far upon the stage itself, there is more at stake. Although retaining a place in the auditorium, the following discussion will take an even closer look at the operation of the stage and its relation to questions of performing and gesturing in the present configuration.

### 2.2.1 *On the enigma of happening (onstage)*

If the suggestions regarding the question of stageliness are pursued somewhat further, they begin to problematise the very *concept of the stage*. They start to question where theatre (or theatricality) begins or ends, whether (and where) it actually *takes place*. Kirkkopelto points out that even though we can agree in a situation that 'this is theatre, here and now, where we are,' i.e., we can decide and choose its spatio-temporal appearing through a stage-contract between the supposed public and performers, it still means that *the phenomenon of the stage itself must disappear* from view — it draws aside, evincing things other than itself: the play, the actors, the action onstage, the interaction with the audience.

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<sup>112</sup> Kear 2005: 31, italics mine.

This also happens with all imaginable definitions of the stage, whether historical, cultural, etymological, practical, or metaphorical: if they are all accepted, the stage itself is lost to view.<sup>113</sup> The main question here is that this *disappearance* of the stage seems to offer something very fundamental regarding the potential of theatre, or, perhaps, even the possibility of theatre in the first place. Its drawing aside, withdrawing to the theatre experience itself seems indeed to speak of the self-evidence of theatre, the stageliness of its existence and becoming — or of the phenomenon of the stage — as something immediately recognised, which can be connected to the world. At the risk of being repetitive, this

[s]elf-evidence is... possible only when stageliness is understood through its immediate connection with the transcendental features [or outlines] of our experience. The question of the phenomenon of the stage seems to become a question of how to make experience itself recognise its own stageliness, of how to produce an *experience of the stage*. The experience of the stage is [then] an experience of the stageliness of experiencing itself.<sup>114</sup>

Although challenging, Kirkkopelto's configuration is not intended to divert attention away from theatre in its actuality, i.e., in its manifestation and performativity. On the contrary, it can be considered as a *transcendental confirmation* of the stage. It also reminds us that to analyse the concept or the phenomenon of the stage in general terms does not suggest that they become (mere) meta-concepts, something divorced from the artistic work or the mimetic operation onstage.<sup>115</sup> If we choose to follow the guidelines of the stageliness of our experience as Kirkkopelto does, it seems to help to focus more properly on the stage as a locus of performance, or on the actual performance. As the inherent difference the performance articulates is related to the stage and, inevitably, the world, in a way that communicates with them but still exceeds them — or, moreover, our conception of them — *by being non-totalisable*, it

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<sup>113</sup> Kirkkopelto 2005: 12-14.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.: 16, translation and brackets mine.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.: 14-15.

appears to draw us even closer to the radical import of the question of mimesis and the performance itself as human (inter-)activity.

This would be due to the fact that, as noted, the experience of the stage in/qua its stageliness does not exclude the world, or things *absent from* or *unfamiliar to* that experience. Instead, it introduces both the recognisable and uncanny features of all phenomena in and as a unity. In the experience of the stage, the world as ‘strangeness and familiarity’ sets itself to a ‘world at hand,’ to a ‘world to be aware of;’ something that becomes perceptible, knowable, *onstage*.<sup>116</sup> It thus has its own peculiar and inimitable approach to truth, reality and presence — the very questions Western metaphysics and ontology have kept within reach, but undisclosed. Or as Timo Heinonen has it, speaking of the stage as something that “articulates... the conflict between truth and presence as an aporia [as an impasse, undecidability]:”<sup>117</sup>

Theatre has the possibility of producing a projection of metaphysics without any guarantee of correctness, correspondence, or uniformity what comes to the alleged truth. All in all, theatre has not committed itself to the principle of reality. The stage is [then] able to produce a virtual space, a space, where contradictory and refuting elements can be simultaneously present... [...] The stage, in itself, does not hide or reveal anything. Theatre lays before us the possibility of blurring the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, between the self and the other — or at least makes their questioning possible.<sup>118</sup>

This ‘over-sufficiency’ with which the stage measures and enacts the (infinite) distance between mimesis, presence and the closure of truth (as meaning), again bears evidence to its refusal to be faithful to any systematic analysis or logic. Moreover, if one contemplates this enactment through what seems most evident in the performer-spectator interaction, i.e., reflection, the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.: 16. Félix Guattari (1995: 90), for one, notes how “[p]erformance art delivers the instant to the vertigo of the emergence of Universes that are simultaneously strange and familiar. It has the advantage of drawing out the full implications of this extraction of intensive, a-temporal, a-spatial, a-signifying dimensions from the semiotic net of quotidianity.”

<sup>117</sup> Heinonen 2005: 42, translation and brackets mine.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.: 43, translation and brackets mine.

distortion of the 'world-image' that necessarily takes place onstage would never be inaccurate or wrong. Even though it may be felt to be so, it is never either more nor less than what it is, but just the (situated) 'appearing to be,' a tension that does not call for an idea in its assistance, or a judgement to make it acceptable.

Furthermore, even though the recognition of this stagely difference in encountering phenomena demonstrates that the stage 'roams where it will,' comes and goes by letting go and taking hold of the logic of true and false, it still seems to be most at home in the theatre. For it is in the theatre that mimesis most distinctively exceeds its definitions and itself in yet another way: it is not only where we recognise the impossibility of totalising the possibilities or scope of an illusion, but where further illusions are constantly summoned, upheld (by other illusions) and created, *as if ex nihilo*. It is where the activity of the human animal becomes an illusionary generator, and where the relation of one illusion to another becomes blurred in a way that eludes our grasp, however aware we are of the structure of our own experience of them. To be a human being (or human doing) onstage, to be a 'human being appearing to be' is to be a site of illusions, and thus an intriguing and problematic gesture in regard to human encounters. As Kirkkopelto suggests,

[a] gesture is always a gesture towards the world. It aspires to grasp, to comprehend, [and] it is conceptual and comprehensible. But at the same time, it is a gesture towards myself, as a being and an operator [or an actor] in that world. Through my activity, I try to reach something that I constantly generate with that activity.<sup>119</sup> [...] Everything I do bears meaning, that which I give to it myself and express to others; on the other hand, it bears meaning given to it [only] by others' interpretation. But there is still something that exists in relation to these possible interpretations, something that happens and appears only to others, ... but not to myself, namely the manner, tone and rhythm of the unique happening of my meaningful action... All this... remains beyond the reach of

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<sup>119</sup> Not surprisingly, this also seems to concern all scientific analyses of art and theatre, which constantly expand their exegetic possibilities through the process of their own structuring.

my intentional aims, [...] existing [however] only as a consequence of my conscious gesture, detaching [or distancing] me from myself.<sup>120</sup>

This 'non-conscious surplus' human activity (and thus also our our stagely existence) enacts, already emerging in Schiller's work in 1793,<sup>121</sup> is then an important factor in analysing the very happening of a gesture in a performance. Producing a loud Barthesian echo with its undecidability, it also refers (back) to both the problem of the gesture's *actual meaning* and its relation to any possible ethical consequences. If there is an impassable mimetic tension in encountering human gestures, in the very becoming of meaningful signs and references, it requires us to assume certain attention and responsibility in deciphering them, both as gestures towards the world and ourselves. Thus, instead of running aground with clauses like 'theatre postpones theatre/meaning/the world/being' — and even if we accept these claims to be the essential or grounding conditions of our investigation —, we might want to look into them more as assignments than as conclusive statements. The unique happening that departs a conscious expression and becomes a 'fleeting possession' of the world is not only independent of any interpretation, but also a signal for the system(s) of communication that surround us — in order to signify, it has to appear-for-, to acquire a language.

The problematic nature of this situation and its ethical weight on a gesturing/observing subject is also a central theme for Handke's *Self-Accusation* and *Kaspar*. As most of his early plays, they question the language of theatre, or its grounding illusionary gesture, but they also strive to renew its options by using this language as their very *modus operandi*. Although both texts are more concerned with linguistic issues, they still stress the relation between an utterance and the conditions that make it possible, i.e., the relation between a gesturing subject and its environment both as a source of and an audience for its gesturing. The speaking subject of *Self-Accusation*, the bigendered but unidentified 'I' (the piece was written for one female and one male actor), discusses her/his/its relation to the increasing number of illusionary and

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<sup>120</sup> Kirkkopelto 2005: 20, translation and brackets mine.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.: 36, n. 8.

linguistic challenges it encounters — in the development of its subjectivity — by questioning its own responsibility in regard to those challenges. What seems to make the play's thematisation of individual growth and responsibility perceptibly ethical is the way in which it deals with the impossibility of creating a correspondence or a reconciliation between a gesture and a tenable deduction or judgement preceding (or emerging from) that gesture.

This impossibility is already evinced by the very need and tendency to enact judgements and sets of values that, paradoxically, cause friction between themselves and the acts (or gestures) such standards are designed for, and Handke certainly takes note of this issue. After adopting the means of language and self-expression, the 'I' of *Self-Accusation* has to move on to question whether it has actually done that, since the possibility to express oneself, or the subject's mere 'showing up,' seems already to bring about some kind of intervention or question in the existing matrix of communication:

... I expressed myself. I expressed myself through ideas. I expressed myself through expressions. *I expressed myself before myself. I expressed myself before myself and others.* I expressed myself before the impersonal power of the law and of good conduct [...] I expressed myself in movements. I expressed myself in actions. I expressed myself in motionlessness. I expressed myself in inaction... I signified. I signified with each of my expressions. *With each of my expressions I signified the fulfilment or disregard of rules.*<sup>122</sup>

Clearly, the first two sentences I have emphasised seem to respond to Kirkkoppelto's view of self-expression as something that is always a gesture towards both myself and the world (or its interpretation of my gesturing). This would signify the (partly illusory) process of generating meaning in human communication. However, the sentence that follows — and especially my latter emphasis — refer to something even more crucial: namely to the act of attaching oneself to a pre-existing system of communication by an expression, which is 1) not only perceivable to others, and 2) not fully under my control, but 3) also an

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<sup>122</sup> Handke 1997: 39, italics mine.



act measured (or seen) against some common but constantly transforming set of rules.

This problematic relation between an expression and communication (as a system), the former's constant danger of falling short of or surpassing the perhaps impossible demands of the latter, the demands of sociability, is where Handke finds also the occurrence of the confusion that concerns both our moral arrogance and vulnerability:

I expressed approval in places where the expression of approval was prohibited. I expressed disapproval at times when the expression of disapproval was not desired. I expressed disapproval and approval in places and at times when the expression of disapproval and the expression of approval were intolerable...<sup>123</sup>

The main problem of the speaking subject is that it has to learn communication through a process of trial and error, by realising that its expressions will never actually meet the expectations and judgments the manifestation of those expressions engender and answer to in the world outside it. At one point, the 'I' poses itself and the audience — as well as 'itself as an audience' and the 'audience as itself' — certain relevant questions concerning this issue: "Did I violate the rules, plans, ideas, postulates, basic principles, etiquettes, general propositions, opinions and formulas of the whole world?" (Earlier, the 'I' has even wondered "[w]hich laws of the theatre did I violate?") The answer to these questions is: "I did. I failed to do. I let do. I expressed myself..."<sup>124</sup> Schlueter thus considers that "in this piece [Handke] combines a negative attitude toward society's restrictions with his opposition to the deadening effects that language, and particularly public language, can have."<sup>125</sup>

*Self-Accusation* then notes one important aspect concerning not only the question of responsibility that speaks through gesturing, but its relation to the audience as well. Handke's instructions for the play suggest that the stage should remain empty (or bare) throughout the performance, while the stage and the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.: 40.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.: 39, brackets mine.

<sup>125</sup> Schlueter 1981: 33, brackets mine.

auditorium are both fully lit and the actors use microphones and loudspeakers to present the text.<sup>126</sup> Where then would be the 'point of gesturing' here, apart from the speakers? It seems that Handke's aim is to situate the 'I' in each individual spectator, creating an awareness that the problematisation of gesturing is always something embedded in our very existence and corporeality, whether as performers or spectators. The only actual(ised) site for pondering gesturing — especially, in the case of the spectators, the gestures of *approval* and *disapproval* — is, ultimately, one's own existence.

Even though my expression detaches itself from me and becomes a common sign, or a trace of a sign, whether approved or disapproved, it is still something that bears an originary (subjective) responsibility, which always colours my being as a social entity. For Handke, this responsibility is tied to an inevitable guilt, a questioning of the self, which leads the 'I' to a cycle of self-accusations that still try to hold on to a certain subjective right to express oneself. They do this, principally, by taking the form of a statement, which, as we know, can be seen either as a confession or just a simple remark, but also both at the same time (a matter characteristic of legal procedures as well):

I walked. I walked purposelessly. I walked purposefully. [...] I walked on paths on which it was sinful to walk purposelessly. I walked purposefully when it was imperative to walk purposelessly. [...] I spoke. I spoke out. [...] I gave expression to public opinion. I falsified public opinion. [...] I remained silent at times when silence was a disgrace. I spoke as a public speaker when it was imperative to speak as a private person. I spoke with persons with whom it was dishonourable to speak. I greeted people whom it was a betrayal of principle to greet. [...] I used words thoughtlessly. I blindly attributed qualities to the objects in the world. [...] I called ultimate questions unanswerable... I called freedom inalienable... I called the doctrine salutary... I called morality hypocritical. I called lines of demarcation vague... I called opinion subjective... I called being true. I called truth profound...<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Handke 1997: 34.

<sup>127</sup> Handke 1997: 41-43. See also Schlueter 1981: 34-35.

The bodily, verbal and conceptual acts the speaking (meta-)subject refers to take shape against a cultural and social 'background process,' which needs singular expressions to exist, but seems to determine the nature of those expressions by steering them in a more generalised or non-subversive direction, by challenging their right to be and transforming them into elements of its own operation. The initial (social) sharedness of these issues comes out also in Schlueter's remark that "[t]he speaker's confession of thoughtless, blind use of language is a general complaint of which every [*singular*] member of the audience is surely guilty."<sup>128</sup> There remains a tension not only between an expression and the way it is described (retrospectively) by means of language, but also between the uniqueness or spontaneity of that expression and the prevailing (and pre-existing) landscape of communication.

Thus although "[u]sing the theatre as a moral institution" got on Handke's nerves, he saw that if it was able to create an awareness that "the authority that one person wields over another can operate in ways ... which people [have] accepted as customary... if these suddenly appear to people as artificial, as not at all natural... *by means of the theatre*, by means of linguistic disclosure... which suddenly show people that the way domination is effected is neither divine nor statutory, then the theatre can be a moral institution."<sup>129</sup> (Probably not least because the stage's authority and its means of disclosing language bear always the question of artificiality, to a degree.)

This appears then to be one of the most significant ethical motifs behind the *Sprechstücke* (that still 'speak Brecht' in our ears) — the abrupt revelation of the illusionary and artificial aspects of meanings and signifying, both in theatre and society. It seems that for Handke the 'theatrical intervention' (by a performer or

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<sup>128</sup> Schlueter 1981: 34, brackets and italics mine. It has to be mentioned here that Schlueter is more concerned here with the linguistic issues that connect Handke's text to Ludwig Wittgenstein's thinking, to the way complex phenomena are designated by a singular sign: "In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein objects to the proposition that "mein Besen steht in der Ecke" ("my broom is in the corner"), explaining that this actually means "der Stiel sei dort und die Bürste, und der Stiel stecke in der Bürste" ("the broomstick is there, and so is the brush, and the broomstick is fixed in the brush"). He concludes that it is illogical to designate a complex object by a single sign, for this causes the proposition to have an indeterminate sense." (Ibid.)

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Hern 1971: 48-49, brackets and italics mine.

a performance) in the pre-existing system of communication should manifest itself in a peculiar way; as a 'suddenness' in the appearing of a bodily, verbal or conceptual gesture and as a hermeneutic (ethical) process of problematising or reflecting on that very phenomenon. But what sort of context or environment would this intervention refer to, as a phenomenon of *human activity*? In the following paragraphs, I will propose some ways of grasping this question while keeping its ethical connotations in mind.

In Handke's work, the sudden disclosure of the functioning of the power relations between the subject and the world (of sociability), and thus also the examination of the very problems that pertain to the uniqueness of a theatrical gesture and its adherence to a larger field of communication, seem to address not only the question of *presence* (whether that of an actor or a spectator), but also their *co-presence*, which would be a grounding condition for appearing-for. Even though it is not my purpose to analyse either of these questions thoroughly here, it is still useful to take a brief look at a couple of treatments concerning their operation in theatrical interaction.

Firstly, we might need to assess the very appearance of the (co-)presence of a theatrical gesture and its contribution to ethical thought. Drawing (adaptively) on the work of Hans-Thies Lehmann, theatre seems to be "ethically overdetermined" by co-presence, a "mutual challenge," without which the "virtual mode of being of presence" onstage would not retain its significance for the spectators.<sup>130</sup> In the 'present gesture' of an actor the audience encounters not only its self-evident presence, but also

a co-presence referring to ourselves. Hence it is no longer clear whether the presence is given to us or whether we, the spectators produce it in the first place. The presence of the actor is not an object, an objectifiable present but a co-presence in the sense of an unavoidable implication of the spectator. The aesthetic experience of theatre — and the presence of the actor is the paradigmatic case here because *as the presence of a living human being it contains all the confusions and ambiguities related to the limit of the aesthetic*

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<sup>130</sup> Lehmann 2006: 141.

*as such* — this aesthetic experience is only in a secondary [although quite important] manner reflection.<sup>131</sup>

Lehmann continues by saying that “[t]he latter rather takes place *ex post* and would not even have a motivation had it not been for the prior experience of an event that cannot be ‘thought’ or ‘reflected’ and which, in this sense, has the character of a *shock*.”<sup>132</sup> There is then an element of ‘living uncertainty’ — the very suddenness of (the becoming of) life itself — not only in the co-presence between the actors onstage, but between the stage and the audience as well. The simultaneity of human presences allows for a pure — and fundamentally mimetic — possibility of surprise and/or deception, which precedes and conditions a theatrical gesture and which, I argue, still addresses our ability to problematise the very ability of experiencing itself.

Understood from one of our earlier viewpoints that stressed the mimetic unity of the familiar and uncanny features of life onstage, or their simultaneous being at hand, it would also be an apprehension of the very complexity of the theatrical situation, the startling co-presence of the stage’s ‘here’ and ‘not-here’ (the latter often providing the possibility of the former) as an explicitly temporal matter — *all that is now (or going on), present or not*. The suddenness, or the ‘sheer impressiveness’ of the phenomenon of the stage is breathing on “affective temporalisation,”<sup>133</sup> to borrow Adrian Kear’s expression, an act (and a condition) of making present the very process of bringing-into-co-presence, concerning not only the ‘then’ and ‘now’ as the then-as-now, but also all the ‘meanwhiles,’ ‘so fars’ and perhaps even ‘from now ons’ — the very becoming of the stage in its temporal and spatial uniqueness and perplexity; a process that Tadeusz Kantor, for one, seemed to master while re-writing personal and national histories.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.: 142, brackets and italics mine.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., italics mine.

<sup>133</sup> Kear 2005: 34. Kear refers here to Theodor Adorno’s view according to which art works bear “the immanent character of being an act” and this “endows them with the quality of being momentary and sudden”. (Quoted in Kear 2005: 33.) Kear goes on to say that “[a]s such they [artworks] provide a jolt to consciousness — an interruption — whose intervention facilitates the surprise ‘appearance of an other’.” (Ibid.: 33-34.)

While describing his work in an interview for the Finnish Broadcasting Company, the actor Antti Litja suggested that the presence of an actor onstage, or her/his very 'stagely presence' with all its captivating and unifying potential, depends on the ability to be "in a situation," to be unforeseeable or incalculable. By this he wanted to emphasise the actor's capacity to enact (affective) theatrical temporalisation between the actor and the spectator, the capacity to keep the audience on its toes while it observes (the becoming of) the actor's gesture: if the spectator is 'ahead' of the actor in the story or the performance — or in the staged situation in general —, the situation itself is lost, resulting in boredom.<sup>134</sup> Although his suggestion appears to refer to the way the actor manipulates the situation with her/his intentions behind a gesture, creating an (incomplete) illusion, there is more at stake: namely the synchronisation of time between the audience and the performer that manifests itself in *the becoming of the actor's gesture*, in the very effort of articulating the mentioned affective temporalisation.

Consequently, experiencing and reflecting on the *relation* between the performing self and its socio-symbolic environment (which operates behind every gesture that 'departs me') — and also implies the co-presence of the performer and the spectator — would be a central factor in the temporalisation of *theatre as an event*, introducing us the peculiar and oftentimes contradictory unity of time, space and action 'in the *on-stage*,' in that which consists of its evident presence and the *possibility of absence* it thus, and inevitably, bears.

At least partly because of this intense problematique, Lehmann's theatrical interpretation of Karl Heinz Bohrer's thoughts on the "aesthetics of fright," or the "'mimetic' experience of getting frightened" by the enigmatic intensity of "'sudden appearance' and 'self-referential epiphany'"<sup>135</sup> finally arrives at some fundamental terms defining contemporary ideas of experiencing art and theatre: "the idea of the 'shock' (Benjamin), of 'suddenness' (Bohrer)<sup>136</sup>, of 'being assailed' (Adorno), of 'being horrified'... *that is 'necessary for cognition'*

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<sup>134</sup> *Taiteilijaelämä*, The Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle TV1, 14 June 2007.

<sup>135</sup> Lehmann 2006: 142.

<sup>136</sup> See e.g. Bohrer's *Suddenness: On the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance* (Columbia University Press: New York, NY, 1994).

(Brecht), the idea of fright... as the 'first appearance of the new' (Müller), the 'threat that nothing happens' (Lyotard)."<sup>137</sup>

What Lehmann is after here is *not* an actual experience of being frightened (by a gesture or a human animal onstage), but an experience of being touched or *affected* by a sense of *possibly missing something* in what we see and experience — an assignment of *attentiveness* that would make the theatrical experience itself possible. Although he separates the "experience of being *startled*" by this "not-having or not-knowing" from any psychological interpretation, he still sees it as something *entering* our consciousness "as an experience of emptiness — a signal we cannot interpret but that nevertheless affects us. *The present, which in this way is an experience that is not suspended or suspendable, is the experience of a lack or of having missed something.*"<sup>138</sup>

Behind Lehmann's suggestions seems to lie the (essentially Beckettian?) argument that the stage itself already serves as an 'empty signal,' which temporalises the theatre event. The empty signal Lehmann describes seems to be the ace up the sleeve of Beckett's *Godot*, whose essence (or 'postponed suddenness') as 'not-had and not-known' is probably the most illuminating theatrical example of the phenomenon one can find. What lies beneath the threat of 'lacking (the possibilities of) the stage in its presence' would be the uncertainty and confusion organic to the *human phenomenon* the stage consists of. The problematique of this free territory — or, in a certain sense, the stage's 'other' — that emerges as a startling (pre-conceptual) possibility behind or beyond the actualisation of the stage, appears to be an important theme for Kirkkopelto, too, who considers that *as* the stage always already relates itself to the phenomenon of human activity, it contains a shadow of that activity even when it is absent: "[t]here is actually no such thing as an "empty" stage. [It] can only be "emptied out," in which case the stagely phenomena are hidden, concealed, actively absent, ... like ... *Godot*, who never arrives, but who still exists [stagewise] precisely because of the unfulfilled anticipation aroused by

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<sup>137</sup> Lehmann 2006: 143, italics mine.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, italics mine.

[her/his/its] absence.”<sup>139</sup> (In addition, it should be noted that this ‘fear of not-knowing’ would be a constitutive factor of any theorisation or analysis of the stage as well — like the present one —, reaching towards undecidable artistic and academic sources for novel horizons or even consolation, towards an ‘on-stage,’ a way of observing, knowing and having at hand.)

The horror, affection and attentiveness — the fear of being haunted has many names — activated by the appearing of a theatrical gesture, or the tension between the stagely presence and the shadow of its absence, can also be described as a form or an act of *sacrifice* — as ‘appearing-for/instead of,’ as negation out of *groundlessness*, a movement from the weightlessness of mere appearance towards a structural gravity. From a specifically Hegelian (and Agambenian) viewpoint, explained by Matthew Causey in his *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture* (2006), the very process of being on stage would address the self’s ability to manifest (its) situational being — “a *structured presentation* of the *situation* of be-ing, a corporeal metaphysics” — precisely as a possibility of (its) negation.<sup>140</sup> Regarding the cognitive processes of both the performers and the audience — and not forgetting how we previously saw the latter also as a form of negation —, the stage, as a phenomenon of this “negative logic,”<sup>141</sup> invites one to follow Causey as he interprets Hegel:

The negative logic of the stage is the redoubled reflection of the subject, which firstly presupposes the world of appearance as mere appearance, what Hegel calls... the *positing reflection*. The second stage of Hegel’s perceptual system of reflection is the presupposition of the thing itself as aware of itself, as otherness or *external reflection*. Finally the thing presupposes itself as positing, or the subject for whom consciousness considers itself considering, *the determinate*

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<sup>139</sup> Kirkkoppelto 2005: 18, brackets and translation mine.

<sup>140</sup> Causey 2006: 188. “Hegel’s notion... that the human always appears as one ‘who is that which he is not and not that which he is’..., sets up a subtractive logic whose remains seem very close to the landscape of Beckett. This model of identity suggests the need for a performative gesture or act, a theatre or an art, a happening, which can redouble the negative of the human, to turn the *that is* toward a that which *is not*, an epistemological modality of momentary freedom that allows the *other* and the self to be.” (The quote from Hegel in Agamben 1991: xii.)

<sup>141</sup> Causey 2006: 188.



*reflection* of the subject. The process is one of a *no there there*. The redoubling begins as ‘I’ sees ‘it’ as mere appearance, then ‘I’ sees ‘I’ as part of the mere appearance, and then ‘I’ sees ‘I’ seeing ‘I’ as mere appearance, thus staging a negation of ‘I’.<sup>142</sup>

One of the main teachings of this negating theorisation would be that for the subject (of the happening of theatre), the ‘internal staging of the stage situation’ is a complex, largely foreign and startling experience by its very nature, demanding a sacrifice, a surrendering of some of our subjectivity for a novel foundation of being. The originary *shock* or *being assailed* in this situation calls for a sacrificial ground, a ritual or a stage — as history has shown (presumably in this order) — to become an actual process and an object or an environment for theatrical — and, consequently, ethical — thought.

Thus, even as Lehmann’s concept of shock deals with something that precedes cognition, the aesthetics of fright or suddenness would be more like an affective precondition for reflection that by no means denies the latter, but constitutes our originary “involvement” in the theatrical event. Unsurprisingly, what is ethically decisive for Lehmann is the fact that the “*aesthetic of startling* in theatre would be another name for an *aesthetic of responsibility*. The performance addresses itself *fundamentally to my involvement* [both onstage and in the audience]: my personal responsibility to realise the mental synthesis of the event; my attention having to remain open to what does not become an object of understanding; my sense of participation in what is happening around me...”<sup>143</sup>

It remains problematic whether we can actually see this involvement as a responsibility *truly ante cogito*, as the theatrical event is an ‘already contextualised intervention,’ mostly flooded with pre-existing social and cultural

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.: 188-189. Without becoming too absorbed in the study of consciousness, Causey’s interpretation of Hegel seems to investigate and question the way the subject assumes itself to be ‘rooted’ in the world somehow, through a relation to the mentioned ‘mere appearance’ (a precondition for our ability to function in the world in the first place, most probably). Behind this assumption would lie however a *doubt*, a background process, for which a ritual or a theatre stage provides — and has provided — an essential platform, a ‘cultural virus scan,’ as it were.

<sup>143</sup> Lehmann 2006: 143, brackets and italics mine.

meanings, but the emphasis would be on our *responsibility* towards gesturing. The point to be taken here is then that the ‘impressiveness’ of theatrical gesturing (anticipated or not) is largely based on an uncertainty that not only colours human co-presence, but also founds it as an essentially natural condition and phenomenon — to put it in a somewhat cryptic way, it would be the call of the (pure?) *enigma of happening* in and as the mentioned ‘affective temporalisation.’

But what about reflection, then, apart from the Hegelian version witnessed above? Although I have treated the very happening of theatre mostly (and perhaps surprisingly) as a precondition for any theatrical thought, there is no escaping the fact that it also affects our intellect. For is not the very purpose of appearing-for to touch an addressee in a way that produces ‘consequences,’ to get a message or an apprehension through, whatever it may be? While “being horrified” was “necessary for cognition” for Brecht, the actual thought process — or theatre as a conscious experience — takes a hermeneutic turn towards the relation between a gesture and the world as a natural and social phenomenon (thus opening up the possibility for self-assessment or ‘self-accusations’). Even though theatre ‘happens to us’ mainly through cultural and institutional mediation and agreements, it appears to manifest itself also as a negotiation between the very naturality — or the *human condition* it bears — and the moral considerations that conceptualise that naturality, forcing the ‘sheer impressiveness’ of a human animal to return to a social context, a community.

There would then be ‘greater forces’ at work, manifest already by the very happening of theatre *as* an enigmatic (ethical) phenomenon — something not only questioning its own operation, but also whether this operation is indeed its own. It is worth noticing how theatre, *as human activity*, has at least so far fundamentally depended on the natural corporeality of being onstage and in the audience, on the very essence and work of nature as a precondition for the existence of the theatrical situation in the first place. The Cartesian coordinates imposed on nature by cultural proceedings imply a strange and suspicious phenomenon lurking behind our cultural understanding, which would be, perhaps paradoxically, the very naturality-of-our-being-as-beings-of-nature, a process of being in and with the world. For is there anything stranger (or more ‘assailing’) than a contextualised uncertainty, the appearing of an ‘agreed pure possibility,’ a

true monster-on-stage? As a part and a factor of that phenomenon, one human animal would appear to another not only as a recognisable fellow being, but also (and *firstly*) as a natural — and thus in a salient way uncanny — form of being in the world. Thus, we should not bypass Slavoj Žižek’s remark that “[u]pon a closer look, there is nothing normal in our universe — everything, every small thing that is, is a miraculous exception; view from a proper perspective, every normal thing is a monstrosity.”<sup>144</sup>

But how would these aspects affect the actor-actor or actor-spectator interaction, which are both natural and cultural phenomena? What would be the ‘proper, miraculous perspective’ in (and for) the theatre? As impossible as solving these questions in the present context is, I proceed to present a couple of ways to approach and think of them, or at least the ‘threshold’ of their occurrence.

Firstly, if we follow Derrida’s reading of Kant’s views on the relation between nature and the moral ‘intervention’ of thought in our encounters with nature, the process of observing a theatrical gesture seems to take on (yet another) intriguing feature, a *moral interest* in the beautiful — or the monstrous, which in a Kantian reading would also approach the concept of the *sublime*. (It is important to acknowledge here that, in regard to Kant, such terms as *moral* and *beautiful* are closely connected to a more general system investigating the relations between thought and natural phenomena, as such.) Nature — and the human animal as a natural phenomenon — appear to us firstly as *forms*, as natural beings serving a purpose unforeseen by the observer (in a conceptual or moral sense). This means that nature does not necessarily allow itself to be grasped or categorised by cultural proceedings or contextualisation, even when it is observed as a scientific project or staged phenomenon.

Derrida finds that for Kant, “the in-significant non-language of forms which have no purpose or end and make no sense, this silence is a language between nature and man.”<sup>145</sup> However, Derrida has noted before this that “[b]eautiful forms, which signify nothing and have no determined purpose are therefore *also*,

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<sup>144</sup> Žižek 2007.

<sup>145</sup> Derrida 1998: 281, brackets mine.

and by that very fact, encrypted signs, a figural writing set down in nature's production."<sup>146</sup> Being with nature and beings of nature is, in a fundamental sense, being exposed or "disposed" to their appearing and their very sincerity, to meanings that "are not posited as objective truths."<sup>147</sup> This 'exposure to the sincerity of forms' would then open up the environment or habitat for our *interest* and perception, which, in turn, would take refuge in moral (and therefore social) considerations in order to become conceivable and communicable:

The moral interest that we take in beauty... presupposes that the trace and the wink of nature do not have to be objectively regulated by conceptual science. We interpret colors like natural language and it is this hermeneutic *interest* that matters: it is not a matter of knowing whether nature speaks to us and means to tell us this or that, but rather of our interest in its doing so, in involving it necessarily, and of the intervention of this *moral* interest in aesthetic disinterestedness.<sup>148</sup>

Elsewhere in Derrida's work, in *Dissemination* (1972/1981), there is a quote from Hegel: "In regard to Nature, it is agreed that philosophy ought to know her as she is, that if the philosophers' stone (*der Stein der Weisen*) is hidden anywhere, it must at any rate be within Nature herself, that she contains her own reason within her.... The ethical world (*die sittliche Welt*), on the other hand, the State..." And next: "Innocence, therefore, is merely nonaction, like the mere being of a stone (*das Sein eines Steines*), not even that of a child."<sup>149</sup>

Taking into consideration the possible teatro-ethical import of these thoughts, we might want to ask whether the encounter with the groundlessness of mere appearance, as described above, contains a similar hermeneutical and moral structure, inevitably, as if there were no way for us to lean too carelessly or ignorantly on Heidegger's profound configuration of art and truth (as unconcealment, or *alētheia*). According to the Derridean/Hegelian/Kantian problematique above (although this issue is evidently of far older origin), no

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. (Cf. Heidegger 2002.)

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Derrida 1981: 172.

stone — or human form — would remain ‘morally unturned’ in the fact of our experience, where even a stone bears, in its *innocent* nonaction, an ethical status as a being. Apropos theatre, the ‘peremptory nature’ of the situation is already of central — and, consequently, ‘mise-en-abymic’ — concern to Hamlet, as he instructs the players of ‘Mousetrap:’

... let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature: for any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.<sup>150</sup>

Yet, secondly (and quite compellingly), Kirkkopelto considers that

[d]ue to the stageliness of the human experience, I observe another human being from the very beginning in a different manner than any other being in this world. I do this automatically, because I am, myself, part of the same stagely difference, whose impressiveness I immediately recognise in the other. [And] through this self-evidence [or self-evident condition] I also observe all other beings in the world. I may animate them, make potatoes dance, turn a mitten into a rabbit, etc., because all that I encounter bears, fundamentally, the *face of experience*.<sup>151</sup>

The peculiar and binding relation between the concepts of *face* and *experience* (discussed later more closely with regard to Levinas) announces not only the particular nature of encountering and experiencing a human being — the “infinite reflection [of the human face], which gives the world to me in its illusory and present form, and which [creates] my own experience of the world” —, but also the nature of our being with the *illusionary non-totality* of the world: “We have a relation to an illusion. We are, ourselves, that relation, *we are not under [the control of] an illusion*. We are a site of illusions and the world reveals

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<sup>150</sup> Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* at The Complete Works of William Shakespeare web site (<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/hamlet/hamlet.3.2.html>, 22 January 2008).

<sup>151</sup> Kirkkopelto 2005: 25, translation, brackets and italics mine.

itself to us accordingly. Our relation to an illusion is, at the same time, the *stagely difference*.”<sup>152</sup>

Acknowledging the compelling nature of these insights would then lead us even closer to the ethical import of the questions we have examined in regard to the audience, the stage and theatrical gestures/representation so far. If we maintain, on the basis of the aspects given, that the stageliness of our experience (and existence) embodies a threshold for moral and ethical considerations, a binding relation — introducing the human animal and even other beings as always containing (further) moral interest, as ethically compelling phenomena —, there is no denying the fact that theatre, in itself, offers us a very distinct but yet problematic platform for discussing ethicality.

The following chapter will therefore revert to some of the questions raised with social and political emphases, in order to enable a more appropriate consideration of ethics in the overall context. Many phenomenological and epistemological questions will remain unanswered or marginalised, but the aim is to provide some further perspectives on the ethical operation and requirements of theatre. Although many of the works I refer to pursue rather different goals and projects, their insights are nevertheless important and relevant for the present topic.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.: 24, translation, brackets and italics mine.

### 3. Otherwise-than-politics? — Approaching the ethical gesture with Guénoun, Heidegger and Kant

#### 3.1 On the socio-political gesture and commitment of theatre

That was, and still is, the ambiguity of presence — understood as instantly realized utopia — and therefore without future, therefore without present: in suspension as if to open time to a beyond of its usual determinations. Presence of the *people*?

Maurice Blanchot: *The Unavowable Community*<sup>153</sup>

As our investigation has become increasingly complex in a transcendental and ontological sense, it is time to lead the discussion in a more socio-ethically-oriented direction. We have noted that ethical questioning has already stepped in, but somewhat unannounced — not as a proper historical analysis of the normative social or moral contracts we make *qua* theatre, but as a configuration that strives to understand our perception of what it means for a human animal to become an element of an audience or the phenomenon of the stage, i.e., in the latter case, to appear as a ‘human doing’ in the pure form of appearing (to be), *to be* as s/he ‘appears to be.’

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<sup>153</sup> Blanchot 2010: 31. See also Blanchot 2004: 54. Although Blanchot describes the events of May 1968 in France in this text, I cannot help detecting certain theatrical implications in his words, implications that will become clearer later on.

It is then useful to elaborate some of our viewpoints in nearly the same order to get a better grip on the fundamental status of social and ethical aspects in this configuration. After all, as Tobin Nellhaus suggests,

[t]heatrical performance occurs as a specific collective formation and activity within [the] overall dynamic [of performance strategies]. It functions as a social agent possessing its own unique stratified ontology, one that closely parallels society's. Its theatrical level consists of the conventions, relationships, and spatial arrangements governing the interactions between performers and audience members. This is comparable to a social structure. [...] The homology between theatrical performance and society makes theater a kind of image of social ontology—an organ of social reflexivity. Moreover, by carrying out social reflexivity, it operates as a model of social agency.<sup>154</sup>

But what sort of “specific collective formation and activity” should we examine in regard to the present context (to arrive at some ethical assessments), given the earlier observations? Perhaps the most useful way is to add a political dimension — “a kind of image of social ontology” itself — to the discussion, to assess further the complexity of the social relations that cut across not only the confines of the stage, but also the real or imaginary walls of the performance space.

The series of fantasies regarding the audience in the preceding chapter was concerned with such words as *dispersion*, *sharedness*, *judgement*, *uncertainty*, *insecurity*, *utopia*, *promise*, *unity*, *possibility* and *concern*. All these are no doubt terms that colour our discussions on and conception of ethical questions, whether examined in the theatre or elsewhere. However, we do not have to look very far for yet another social environment where making use of and performing with these words has become its essential language: *politics*, Aristotle's *ta politika*, affairs of state (*polis*), the sphere of social reciprocity and governing — or, acknowledging the various present uses of the term, the sphere of negotiating the preconditions and possibilities of social order and disorder, thus implicating also the ‘state of our affairs.’

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<sup>154</sup> Nellhaus 2006: 67, brackets mine.



But what sort of political interest or activity would an audience or a performance govern, and how, or would this rather be a question of how they are governed, and by whom or what? Instead of grasping the difficult terrain of these questions simply by establishing a clear normative or moral hierarchy or correlation between them, it is perhaps more to the point to understand politics as a certain mediator between theatre and ethics, or as a context of sociability, of ‘social animals,’ which strives to pave way for the latter two, allowing them to breathe — or problematise each other — concurrently. Theatre has no doubt always been a communal art form (as also seen in Nellhaus’ configuration), one that presumes some sort of social interaction to be its fuel, obstacle, or a problem, whether operating in the margins of accepted norms or as a platform for enhancing some shared values.

Therefore, I find that Denis Guénoun’s means of organising the relations between theatre and politics in *Näyttämön filosofia* [*Philosophy of the stage*] (2007)<sup>155</sup> may clarify and outline our discussion at this point. He considers that

[t]heatre takes place in the space of politics. Its place is branded, populated and organised by a (real or imagined) possibility to maintain political discussion and make political decisions. Does this mean that theatre makes politics? On no account. Theatre takes place in the space of politics, but what happens there [in the theatre] is something that politics itself would not do. There is theatre in place of politics (in the place of politics, but also instead of it — occupying its place). What is generated in a theatrical performance is... other speech, other signs, other sensibilities [organised and defined in a specific manner]. [...] ...theatre takes place in the space of politics and generates there [something] other (than politics).<sup>156</sup>

Being a scholar as well as a theatre practitioner, Guénoun takes note of several theoretical and practical issues supporting these claims. First of all, he emphasises that even when a performance takes place in a private environment

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<sup>155</sup> This text is a Finnish translation of Guénoun’s works *Actions et acteurs. Raisons du drame sur scène* (Belin: Paris, 2005) and *L’Exhibition des mots et autres idées du théâtre et de la philosophie* (Circé: Paris, 1998).

<sup>156</sup> Guénoun 2007: 32, translation from Finnish and brackets mine.

(like someone's home), it bears a residue of the public nature of theatre by being an inverted articulation of its reliance on publicity<sup>157</sup> — and, as will be seen with Žižek's problematisation later on, there seems to be a question of 'public spectatorship' present in every performance, one that also echoes the meaning of Lehmann's ethically overdetermining co-presence as a precondition for a performance.

Thus, secondly, Guénoun's teatro-political viewpoints strive to show how appearing and/or acting in (and for a) public, or, on the other hand, showing *public interest* in the matter simply by showing up (whatever the private reason), are ways of enacting a performance or a demonstration of politics (and I ask the reader to bear in mind that this issue would be closely related to my earlier conception of theatre as appearing-for). For Guénoun, *what sets up the political space of theatre is the fact of co-presence in public appearance*, which is never free from the constraining force of (private) opinions, but which, in effect, provides a basis and a forum for articulating those opinions in the first place:

[The act of] assembling [a crowd] with public invitation and gathering together in one place, whatever its purpose, is a political act. What makes it political is this gathering [together] (an assembly already contains all the seeds of politics in a more or less developed form) and the public nature of that gathering... [...] In other words, theatre is essentially political. Not because of what is shown or argued about in there — which affects the matter, however — but, in a much more originary manner, devoid of all content, because of the fact and the nature of [its] gathering together. [...] The reason for the gathering is decisive, of course, but politics is involved even before setting any goal, immediately, by the fact that individual people are gathered together, with each other, close to each other, publicly and openly, and because gathering together is a political matter — like traffic, taxation, propaganda or maintenance of order [or policing].<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.: 14.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.: 14-15, translation and brackets mine. Guénoun adds that although the above definition can be seen as constitutive of theatre, it is very easily forgotten. He finds it stunning that theatre history, for example, relies so heavily on theatre content, on what it chooses to represent. (Ibid.: 15.)

Acknowledging Guénoun's emphasis on theatre's originary (political) act of setting up a public space (or even the 'fact of publicity' itself), it might prove useful to also consider Kirkkopelto's reading of the relations between theatrical representation (in tragedy) and politics in his essay 'Athenen ääni: tragedia, demokratia, dekonstruktio' [The voice of Athene: tragedy, democracy, deconstruction] (2004). He states that in "[d]emocracies the sovereign power belongs to a collective will, which is brought about [or carried out] in elections. The most sovereign act is then that which establishes the practice of voting itself, which gives birth to a fundamental moment of unanimity and renders it possible to make a "social contract". To the extent that the moment of birth of such a political community is mythical, it can be represented [or acted out] by certain artistic means."<sup>159</sup> Assuming that the concept *will* is a central factor here, we need to consider whether Guénoun's view of theatre as a public political gathering must also rely on this kind of 'willed' (albeit partly mythical) act of sovereignty, which is needed to establish the "social contract" of theatre, or, consequently, the specific politics of a theatrical event. (Paradoxically enough, in modern auditoriums this sovereignty seems also to be emphasised by the fact of *anonymity*, as if acting out the — social democratic? — ideal of 'sovereign anonymity'.)

As a practical issue, even though Guénoun does not take a deliberately historical position, certain traditions in theatre architecture — those concerning the auditorium in particular — are of interest to him, as they produce a sense of communality simply by shaping out the political space in (and in relation to) which the theatre event takes place. For Guénoun, the Greco-Roman, Elizabethan and "Italian" auditoriums offered an ideal structure for the political 'economy' of theatre to appear, as they were/are often lit and circular in shape, thus providing the spectators with the opportunity to observe not only the performance, but also each others' (communal) presence, to acknowledge the socio-political nature and cohesion of the event. He criticises the later, more rectangular auditoriums for not encouraging the spectators to acknowledge each others' *communal presence and position* in the auditorium, for "frigidity." This

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<sup>159</sup> Kirkkopelto 2004: 209, translation and brackets mine.

opinion is strengthened by the observation that forward-oriented (and often darkened) auditoriums seem to grant the stage the position/status of an (essentially uncontrollable?) authority and a socially dominant agent — a position not unlike that of the speaker's chair in many parliament buildings.

It appears then that this has driven theatre in the direction of modern, somewhat authoritarily administrated democracy, which is distinct from the earlier sense of being in the political (and perhaps more equal) space of a public meeting. As the focus of the 'ideal architecture' of theatre has shifted to the stage in many practical and theoretical ways, the political economy of theatre has been problematised in a fundamental manner.<sup>160</sup>

At first glance, my earlier observations regarding the modern audience seem to be at odds with Guénoun's emphases. I suggested that the withdrawal of the audience's identity to the darkened auditorium would be the fact which constitutes its 'audienceness' (and thus also its ethico-political status) in the first place, creating a dispersed terrain, which is held together or shaped by an ethical responsibility arising from that dispersion as a surplus, a gesture — the acute direction of this responsibility being the stage, although it is constantly fuelled by the latter. However, I contend that this difference in emphasis is not decisively contrasting.

Firstly, my main purpose was to examine the particular atmosphere of modern auditoriums, not to present them as ideal sites for the socio-political gesture of an audience to appear. Some of my remarks may indicate so, but the

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<sup>160</sup> Guénoun 2007: 17-21. However, regarding the relations between theatre and questions of authority during the emergence of modernism, it is of importance to acknowledge Nellhaus' (2006: 74) comments on certain developments in that context. He states that "[t]he Farnese-style theater promoted an objectivist gaze in part because the perspective scenery could only line up properly if viewed from one special position, which is where the ruler sat. Not only did the rest of the audience have distorted perspectives, but its U-shaped seating arrangement paid at least as much tribute to the ruler as it did to the stage. Keeping the house lit was part of that relationship. Thus the ruler, sitting literally at the Archimedean vantage point, alone had the true perspective. The objective position was the ruler's view; the ruler's subjects had, well, subjective views. On this much [Bruce] McConachie and I concur, and also that dimming the house lights discouraged experiencing theater collectively and promoted a privatized experience instead." (See thus also McConachie's 'Doing Things with Image Schemas: The Cognitive Turn in Theatre Studies and the Problem of Experience for Historians' in *Theatre Journal* 53 (2001): 569-594.)

essential aim was to evoke the problematique concerning the spectators' relation to both that specific environment and the stage.

Secondly, while Guénoun emphasises the ideal socio-political features of the early Western auditoriums, this is far from being his conclusion on the matter, as he also seems to consider the subsequent developments more as a challenge than an irreversible form of degeneration. My reading of his project, if correct, suggests that the modern auditoriums still carry a residue (or a ghost) of that ideal form of public meeting, as will be seen in the discussion of the audience's relation to the stage.

Thirdly — and this is quite important — the historical process of giving the stage a power position in the theatre appears not to have abolished its status as an *empty signal* (of potentiality), which allows its stageliness to operate in a specific (theatrical) way. As a 'pre-contentual' site of signalling and appearing-for, it still assumes some communally meaningful signification system to be its addressee and counterpoint.

Guénoun's insights are then quite helpful for my consideration of how the stage, the auditorium and the overall ethico-political environment of the theatre meet in the present context. Even though the early spatial arrangements in Western theatre offer us very concrete prototypes of the operation of the theatre in a communal sense, we may think that the modern auditoriums — while shaped by various technical and artistic motives (or 'authorities') — are still occupied by a public which bears and often acknowledges the history of its need and privilege to gather together in this way, *qua* theatre. (Even ignoring this history seems to be a mode of acknowledging its original weight and importance). The political shift from the audience to the stage no doubt problematises the idea of spectatorship in a definitive way, but I contend that the socio-political origin of this manoeuvre persists in the theatre of today, although more as an ideal rem(a)inder. If this footing is accepted, some of Guénoun's insights — which still concern mainly the Greco-Roman architectural arrangement, *circularity* — begin to inform our understanding of the interaction between the *question of stageliness* (described in the preceding chapter) and its teatro-political surroundings. Taken as a socio-political and ethical *ur*-gesture of Western theatre, the circular arrangement compels the later developments not

only to reflect on the reasons why they have chosen to problematise and challenge that arrangement, but also on the fact that it does offer us an illuminating template for considering the act of appearing-for.

One is tempted to suggest that even if the (real or ideal) shape of the modern auditorium conflicts with or is even incompatible with the position of the stage, the latter's 'authority' still seems to co-operate with the overall composition of a theatre event *by involving itself necessarily in the communality of the event* through a certain circular schematisation. Guénoun claims that

[t]he act of performing, and the establishment of a circle which arranges [or organises] that [act of performing,] integrate the authority and its discourse as a part of the community that has gathered together and position it [the authority] as a fragment separated from the circle, not as an outside invader, celestial intervener or the hand of gods. The stage is [positioned] in the theatre in the same manner as Olympus in Greece: with a dominating presence, but within the limits of a circle. This is how Greece presents itself with an *outside*, at least here: *not as something essentially other, but as otherness separated from itself*. The stage is — an architectonic and poetic — image of externality thus positioned within a public gathering. *The stage is the communal sign of [other/stranger/guest]*.<sup>161</sup>

As we can see, I have encountered something of a nodal point translating the last word of the quotation, *vieras*. However, it happens to be a somewhat fortunate problem for our present enquiry. In Finnish, the word *vieras* refers not only to a thing or a matter that is strange, foreign, or 'other,' but also to a guest, a visitor (the original French word being probably *étranger* [-ère], strange, stranger). Thus, if we choose to follow my translation from Finnish at this point, the stage seems to present itself as a sign that not only performs or generates the 'otherly aspect' of the communal nature of the theatrical event, but also operates as a 'visiting agent,' which opens up the possibility for Guénoun's "[something] other (than politics)," an activity that does not abandon or deny politics but strives to articulate it 'otherwise.' Even though the stage can be seen as a rather

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<sup>161</sup> Guénoun 2007: 26-27, translation, italics and brackets mine.

fixed and insular element and ‘authority’ of the modern theatre, its constant transformation and pure possibility, i.e., the potential of its stageliness, seems to offer us *visitations of otherness*, which are acknowledged precisely as such, but which always bear communal or general significance, even when they fail to move or provoke us — and this would be a central ontological problem (and possibility) concerning the ethical gesture of the stage, or perhaps even the *very ethical postulate the stage must present itself*. While a separated fragment of the real or conceptual circle of (a) community, the stage appears to be able to articulate — or at least indicate — an idea of otherness within the community’s (theatro-)political context, able to “turn the *that is* toward a that which *is not*, an epistemological modality of momentary freedom that allows the *other* and the self to be[,]” as Matthew Causey suggests.<sup>162</sup> Earlier in his work, while discussing the import of circularity for the politics and architecture of Western theatre (and using the Globe as one example), Guénoun offers us significant (and somewhat practical) observations supporting this formulation:

[T]he actors are a part of the [theatro-political] circle’s sphere, they complete it, close it up; they act at the end of this accomplished circularity. What is interesting is not, however, the purity of the pattern, but its immediate consequence: *the actors are [or become] members of the assembled community, the stage is in the auditorium*. What is represented [or performed] onstage and what is aroused in the audience dovetail. Onstage we find a small piece of the community, and it is chosen [or elected] there — from the start — as a consequence of certain delegation, or we can also use the term “election” here (and let it echo with both of its meanings, as affinity and politics).<sup>163</sup>

As Guénoun’s remarks suggest that the actors have been ‘chosen’ or ‘elected’ for this task of completing (or complementing) the community by the originary political act (or even *will*) of theatre, they revisit the performative strategy that was already present in the early stages of Western theatre, when actors were often itinerant outsiders of the community, but still established members of the specific theatrical event.

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<sup>162</sup> Causey 2006: 188.

<sup>163</sup> Guénoun 2007: 22, translation, brackets and italics mine.

By the same token, they still refer to the stage as *the* site of mimetic operations, to the questions of authority and influence that derive from the function of the stage as the focal point of our attention. It is thus useful to assess further how the mechanics of mimesis would interact with the idea/question of otherness the stage strives to offer to the teatro-political community. Following Göran Sorbom's *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an Aesthetic Vocabulary* (1966), Petri Tervo explains how "[i]n mimetic interpretation mimesis is divided into a family of concepts. *Mimos* is the imitator [or the performer of imitation]. *Mimeisthai* is to imitate. *Mimema* is the image generated by imitation; *Mimesis* is the act of imitation; *Mimetikos* is something exposed to imitation, that which can be made into an imitation, an image, something that is the object of making an image."<sup>164</sup> Acknowledging the relation of these terms to the problematique of Plato's anti-mimetic politics as regards image-making, he goes on to say that

I understand *mimetikos* as the spectator, who is "stolen" by the representer [or performer] of *mimema* [and transported] outside the spectator's [own] mastery of the artistic composition in question. The meaning of a theatrical gesture is then to offer the spectator's own specific biography certain foreign [work-of-art-ness], sense of participation, to represent [or perform] the spectator in[to] various different situations, spaces, communities, complicities. The theatrical gesture offers us another [or an *other*] kind of memory, [and] a different, foreign, strange future — virtuality."<sup>165</sup>

Although I have translated mimesis here as *imitation*, Tervo's remarks refer to a more comprehensive understanding of its operation. If we understand the mentioned 'foreign work-of-art-ness' (or even 'oeuvreic identity') offered to the spectator as emerging from the stage's (foreign) sign of other/stranger/guest, it would refer to the very *imaginary* potentiality and problematique in which both

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<sup>164</sup> Tervo 2006: 51.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid: 51-52, translation and brackets mine. Tervo establishes his conception of mimesis on the "mimic techniques of the body." (Ibid.: 51, translation mine.) I find that these techniques are an essential element of the performative strategies, which operate within (and generate) the concept of stageliness. So even though he is after fairly different aims in his project, the above formulation is useful for our present questioning.



the spectators and the operation of the stage — or the whole teatro-political community — invest, thus also revealing one of the reasons for Plato’s grave concerns about the matter. Lacoue-Labarthe discusses the problematique of “mimetism” in Plato as “a problematic that is not... principally a problematic of the lie, but instead a problematic of the subject (one can scarcely see what other word to use), and of the subject in its relation to language.”<sup>166</sup> According to Adrian Kear’s reading of mimesis this means that

[s]peaking ‘under the name of another’ is troublesome to Plato in that it offers a change of perspective at the expense of moral certitude, proliferating subjective possibilities — *ways of being otherwise* — in a manner that exceeds the limitations imposed by his unitary conception of *ēthos*. Nonetheless, this structural constraint on mimesis as a creative activity does not prevent him from seeing... the value of mimetic products as ethical guides for human behaviour and useful representations of good ‘character’.<sup>167</sup>

It is thus appropriate to observe how this *imaginary* potentiality and problematique would be one of the most exemplary dimensions where the theatrical stage shares the fate of the village idiot, who ‘*makes a difference*’ by articulating or performing the state of (the community’s) affairs through her/his otherness, a constantly transforming stagely presence, i.e., an inherent difference resonating with the community. Nor should we forget here that the way prehistoric societies used masks and costumes *to perform social questions otherwise*, to reach a different, disguised level of communication, already implied a human need to reinvent and redevelop existing concepts and modes of being through mimetic operations. The human infant today is still dependent on

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<sup>166</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe 1989: 125. See Kear 2005: 30-31.

<sup>167</sup> Kear 2005: 30, first italics mine. Kear refers here to Plato’s *Republic* (III 401a-d). Citing Lacoue-Labarthe, he (Kear) also notes that “[t]he emphasis placed by Plato on the question of ‘fabrication’ serves to confirm, in fact, that ‘the essence of mimesis is not imitation, but production’... and that the trouble he [Plato] has with it is with the very work put into the ‘work of art’ as such” (2005: 31, brackets mine). Lacoue-Labarthe (1989: 80) speaks, in this context, of *production* “in its broadest sense” and mentions that *mimesis* “can be circumscribed, in the *Republic*, only in Book X: that is, from the moment when it is explicitly determined as production, fabrication, *demiurgy*.”

the mimetic phase of development,<sup>168</sup> which not only teaches us the (socio-political) principles of behaviour and expression, but also the way to manipulate those principles: it seems that no political agenda or agent would survive the game without some sort of linguistic or gestural camouflage.

Even as these observations appear to question Guénoun's view according to which what happens in the theatre is "something politics itself would not do," they signal of a way of living and thinking through the present tense in the future tense, of a practice vivified by both determination and unforeseen risk, which also seems to serve as a transition from the actual to the potential. These would then be central and compelling *ethical* issues for the teatro-political community. Strategies of *mise en scène* are provided not only with an abundance of means, but also with a mimetic uncertainty (or virtuality) that threatens to shatter, or, moreover, fundamentally transform any performative calculation as regards politics or its ethical implications. What the stage articulates, *as a stage* (or as an empty signal of potentiality), would not be merely a different or antithetical version of politics, but, at least primarily, a 'pure' (stagely) possibility which can never be reduced to politics, as such — instead, it could be seen as a means of problematising our conception of 'politics as such.'

Considering the overall argumentation of Guénoun's work, it could even be stated that by "[something] other (than politics)" he seems to refer to the capability of theatre to establish a state (sic) of *otherwise-than-politics*<sup>169</sup>, where the political space would be present (or at least implicated in) the actual performance precisely because of its immediate or 'im-mediated' absence, impelling it to activate somehow.

Some of our earlier concerns return to colour the discussion here: Allison Lincoln articulates one (critical) nuance attached to the word politics by saying that "[t]here have been attempts—before and since [Thomas] More coined the term—to posit 'utopian' societies with no politics. The implication is usually ('*Utopia*' means *nowhere*) that such a society is conceivable, but not practically

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<sup>168</sup> See e.g. Zarrilli 2006: 5.

<sup>169</sup> This term is a quite flagrant modification of Levinas' expression 'otherwise than being.' Thus, my formulation refers to a very different context here. See Levinas 1981.

possible.”<sup>170</sup> If we consider the stageliness of the stage as that which is needed for the utopian second of impossible sharedness to (mis-)reveal itself in the theatrical event — or, moreover, if it is considered as that which enacts or allows the *otherwise-than-politics* in the sovereign but ‘willed’ political act of gathering to/for a performance —, then it could be seen as theatre’s endeavour to articulate a pre- or non-political ‘nowhere,’ the passing of the mimetic operation qua some kind of ‘pure potentiality of politics,’ which, while experienced, remains “conceivable, but not practically possible.” For even though it is made possible — or conceived — by practice and politics (or practical politics), it appears that it cannot be thoroughly measured or pinpointed by them. In *Utopia in Performance* (2005), Jill Dolan claims that if utopia is understood as this kind of indefinable but auspicious *opening*, it may serve as an acute *gesture* towards the future, towards “imaginative territories that map themselves over the real. The utopia for which I yearn takes place now, in the interstices of present interactions, in glancing moments of possibly better ways to be together as human beings.”<sup>171</sup>

In addition, as if offering us a commentary on the (non-)specific theatropolitical context that emerges here, Paul Ricoeur discusses the rapports between utopia and language (as political ideology) in the following manner:

Every society... possesses, or is part of, a socio-political *imaginaire*, that is, an ensemble of symbolic discourses. This *imaginaire* can function as a rupture or a reaffirmation. As reaffirmation, the *imaginaire* operates as an ‘ideology’ which can positively repeat and represent the founding discourse of a society, what I call its ‘foundational symbols’, thus preserving its sense of identity. After all, cultures create themselves by telling stories of their own past. The danger is of course that this reaffirmation can be perverted, usually by monopolistic elites, into a mystificatory discourse which serves to uncritically vindicate or glorify the established political powers. In such instances, the symbols of a community become fixed and fetishized; they serve as lies. Over against this, there exists the

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<sup>170</sup> Lincoln 2003/2007, brackets and italics mine.

<sup>171</sup> Dolan 2005: 38.

*imaginaire* of a rupture, a discourse of *utopia* which remains critical of the powers that be out of fidelity to an 'elsewhere', to a society that is 'not yet'.<sup>172</sup>

But where would be the actual ethical challenge of this utopian landscape that a theatre performance may briefly unveil? Perhaps in the (Guénounian) fact that the 'otherly aspect' of the theatrical (or stagely) image must also merge itself with the political, eventually, as the sign of other/stranger/guest becomes subsumed into the realm of shared and 'governed' images, into the familiar idea of *being together for (a) reason* — i.e., as it becomes the *communal* sign of other/stranger/guest.<sup>173</sup> While being what it is, a strange guest of the community, a welcome outsider, it is still described and deciphered as a *sign*, with its roots and aims embraced by *systems* of communication and politics.

Thus, it remains truly problematic whether this conception of the stageliness of the stage and/or the performance's 'present, contradictory unity' can be considered as that which allows a *virtual question(ing) of politics* for the performers and the audience. And yet, if politics itself, as a mode of acting out (the state of) affairs can never be described as being genuinely 'pure' or 'potential' — since it provides us with distinct and differing opinions of the affairs of the state and the state of our affairs — the stage would need to present itself *otherwise* than politics in order to be or become a question(ing) of politics. It was noted earlier how the stage itself should draw 'aside' — or within the possibility of gesturing it provides — in order to evince other things than itself, i.e., the *onstage*. It appears then that this (spontaneous) reverse movement 'otherwise' is at least one central factor which permits the activation of the political in the performing agents. According to this logic, anything or anyone appearing onstage becomes a political matter as soon as it/s/he does so, but this

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<sup>172</sup> Ricoeur in Kearney 1984: 29.

<sup>173</sup> The idea of theatre as an "image of social ontology" that Nellhaus suggested becomes even more interesting here: metaphorically speaking — and this is perhaps what the avantgardists were concerned with — there would be no clear image of man, for he is already the image of *God, justice, or some political reconciliation*, all of which constantly 'postpone their appointment with us.' To bear the situation we need not only the fact of politics, but a site (or stage) for otherwise-than-politics, which presents us precisely with an utopian impossibility that is explainable only through interpretative (dystopic) politics.

would be possible only because the stage itself serves as (Lehmann's) empty signal (of potentiality) in 'affective temporalisation,' allowing phenomena to seek their direction, whatever it may be — and allowing us to examine them in the same manner.

While a society is never free from demands, or conflicts between demands, the non-totalisable (or empty) status of the stage would allow for a space that does not appear to have the words *need* or *gain* inscribed on it. How we choose to utilise and interpret this virtual (or virginal) landscape is a quite different matter, of course. Here, the *wit* of witnessing announces itself.

It appears, then, that Aeschylus' Watchman is not worrying over nothing: the strange political economy of the stage seems to demand an observant (and perhaps even *circumspect*) spectator in order to 'become itself,' a space or an *emptiness*, which turns us immediately to the questions of *awareness* and *doubt*, or even to the 'dystopic memory of the shocking utopian second,' which I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to observing the phenomenon of the stage. Even though several viewpoints have become rather problematic along the way, it still seems that the most fundamental ethical gesture of an audience or a single spectator in regard to the stage would be the *concern for the otherness of the stage's 'becoming,' as it implies a spectator* — i.e., the concern for the fact that it is a phenomenon that does so, as a question of appearing-for.

But insofar as we do not come to the theatre merely to share and transform our (private) opinions, values, or ways of being in the world — all of these practices being also preconditions for the emergence of every totalitarian system or society, it should be added — there would be a more uncertain, 'doubtful' and even somewhat theological issue involved; one that seems to fundamentally condition the ways in which human expression and consciousness are incorporated into the teatro-political environment.

Slavoj Žižek offers a treatment of this issue, which derives from the psychoanalytic tradition of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. According to this, one of the essential aspects supporting the stage's specific authority in the theatrical event and its relation to the spectators is the fact that it expresses a yet more 'common' condition of being in/with the world. This condition is the human animal's constitutive mode of *being exposed* in a socio-symbolic sense

(which, ultimately, also involves a sense of shame or embarrassment), a subjective (and 'subjecting') 'nudity' relating the subject to its social and natural context. Drawing on Lacan's views on the *reflexivity* of the Freudian drives and discussing the 'visual drive' as the "drive to *make oneself seen*," Žižek deliberates if this refers to "the most elementary *theatricality* of the human condition[:]"<sup>174</sup>

Our fundamental striving is not to observe, but *to be part of a staged scene*, to expose oneself to a gaze—not a determinate gaze of a person in reality, but of the nonexistent pure gaze of the big Other. This is the gaze for which the ancient Romans carved the details in the reliefs at the top of their viaducts, details invisible to the eye of any human standing below; the gaze for which the ancient Incas made their gigantic drawings out of stones whose form could be perceived only from high up in the air; the gaze for which the Stalinists organised their gigantic public spectacles. To specify this gaze as "divine" is already to "gentrify" its status, to obfuscate the fact that it is a gaze of no one, a gaze freely floating around, with no bearer. The two correlative positions, that of the actor on the stage and that of the spectator, are not ontologically equivalent or contemporary: we are originally not observers of the play-stage of reality, but part of the tableau staged for the void of a nonexistent gaze, and it is only in a secondary time that we can assume the position of those who look at the stage. The unbearable "impossible" position is not that of the actor, but that of the observer, of the public.<sup>175</sup>

While my aim is not to fathom out Lacan's vast project here, Žižek's interpretation of his concept of the *big Other* and its teatro-political consequences offer important aspects for the present elaboration.

If we follow the latter's line of thought, one of the central definitions of the concept is that it is "the [symbolic] "substance" of our social existence, the

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<sup>174</sup> Žižek 2005: 177. George Baker (2001: 13) notes how "Lacan locates the gaze not in the subject but in the world. "We are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world," Lacan insists." (The quote from Lacan in 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a.*' *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. W.W. Norton: New York, 1978: 67-119.)

<sup>175</sup> Žižek 2005: 177-178. I assume that by Incas Žižek means here the Nazca, predecessors of the Incas. For a brief treatment of the relations between *performance* and Lacanian theory, see also e.g. Howell 2006: 44-45, 47.

impersonal set of rules that coordinate our coexistence[.]” rendering it, in itself, ‘nonexistent’ but still evidently ‘there, prevailing.’<sup>176</sup> Describing the public’s position (both in reality and theatre) as “impossible” and “unbearable”, Žižek seems to suggest that the audience is always already drawn to the theatrical event to the extent that its judgemental authority and the performative authority of the stage are subordinate to the same *structure of social exposure*, although they are “not ontologically equivalent or contemporary.” On the other hand, referring to Gerard Wajcman’s essay ‘The Birth of the Intimate,’<sup>177</sup> Žižek says that the emergence of (Western) modernity and the modern subject marks the “emergence of the space of *intimacy*,” which seems to differ from the medieval subject’s condition of being — constantly and primarily — subjected to the Other’s gaze (that is, in that particular culturo-historical context, the gaze of God). The modern “subject asserts itself as the subject of a gaze who masters the world by first seeing it from a safe distance, from a dark place beyond the Other’s gaze.”<sup>178</sup> But this would be only an illusion, for the gaze the subject holds in its intimacy comes with an apprehension of being the one who gazes.<sup>179</sup> The gaze, deprived of the content it strives to master, is also an (empty) awareness of itself that indicates to some *scenic arrangement* in which the gazer her/himself is included, even if that were the ‘scene of darkness.’ In other words, one needs to be posited *somewhere* in order to master that *somewhere* — or its ‘elsewhere’ — with a gaze.

It is then worth considering whether the *surplus* of the modern audience’s intimate presence in the darkened auditorium I discussed earlier would derive, at least mostly, from this understanding of being under observation precisely because one is able to observe. Furthermore, as a rather speculative move, if the audience’s position in the darkness is defined as a *moral* position, the withdrawal (or the overflow) of the scene far behind the spectators’ backs would be a

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.: 143, brackets mine. See also e.g. Riitta Pohjola’s *Georg Büchner ja Dantonin kuolema* [*Georg Büchner and Danton’s Death*] (2004: 154-155, 198), where Žižek’s understanding of the big Other is employed to describe some of the central themes of Büchner’s play.

<sup>177</sup> In *Lacanian Ink* 23 (2004).

<sup>178</sup> Žižek 2005: 178.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

reminder of the *ethical excess* of that position. One might even suggest that this is the main (socio-political) import of the stage's empty signal for an audience that cherishes its dark intimacy. In addition, as the modern auditorium is described to have such firm intimacy, we may assume that the ethical excess it engenders is greater than that of the earlier arrangements, where the spectators were more visibly part of the performative socio-political *(f)act*.

Thus, as the ontological status of the audience seems to be preordained here by the self-articulated status of the stage, or the mode of being exposed, the audience's function as an observing entity would be dominated already by a *responsibility to the non-existent presence* of the big Other through its own exposure in the socio-symbolic and socio-political essence of the event. (The public cannot be positioned in the theatre as *the* public, because it is, itself, already *in* public.) The division between the two positions, the audience and the stage, would then be articulated by the fact that they seem to represent the proximity and interaction of two *ostensibly* different aspects (or even fantasies) of the same socio-political 'injunction,' that of being exposed to the authority of sociability. In other words, the teatro-political context (or community) we are observing — that which encompasses both the performers and the audience —, would be permeated by the very fabric (or "substance") of sociability that 'enforces its theatricality' as an intangible structure or law, of which we get fleeting a glimpse in "the public nature of that gathering," or in the (f)act of 'publishing (and thus eventually politicizing) nature' that emerges from this very context.

Consequently, the (f)act of sociability itself, that which 'looks on,' would always already condition the becoming of Nellhaus' "image of social ontology" in the theatre, transforming the spectators too — and primarily — into performers of that (f)act. Insofar as this image is considered a sum of different but interacting strategies of cultural production and consumption, it seems to be one that also assumes some sort of pre-existing but essentially uncontrollable process that 'unveils' the public (socially), rendering it a part of the same image. Although the stage's sign of other/stranger/guest must become (or already be) a communal and political one, its observers should be (pre-)situated in the event not as some 'community proper,' but as a part of a production cast before the



gaze of social existence. In this respect, it does not seem at all surprising that theatre practitioners turn to various 'fantasies of a public' while striving to decide how (and for whom) to articulate ethical questions in/through their work — it remains a fundamental (dystopic) political matter that, once again, seems to cause us to question both the effectiveness and suspiciousness of theatre's *innate pure possibility*, or the prospect of moving from the actual to the potential.

All in all, tracking down this problematic socio-political logic has led us to quite a difficult situation: 1) If it is indeed the case that the stageliness of the stage needs to withdraw to the staged situation in order to let its (political) agents extend the scene or image they compose to the auditorium, it also suggests that this movement is not from the actual to the potential, but quite the opposite (as an 'actualisation of the potential of the stage'); 2) if the audience is already 'greeting them halfway,' pushed to the very same scene by the (f)act of sociability (and thus also demonstrating its ethical gesture or *surplus*), the situation always entails a predestined socio-political field of problems — not least because the act of gathering together *qua* theatre is an intended but sovereign political act in itself, as seen with Guénoun.

Here is an *imbroglio*, where two pre-existing (and sovereign) socio-political (f)acts surround or govern the ordeal of performing politics otherwise, but which would not survive, or, moreover, *come into being* without that very phenomenon. As this appears to give rise to simultaneous teatro-political polarities, contradictions and tautologies, the outcome seems, once again, to retreat into the *self-evidence of theatre* — almost as a kind of theoretical embarrassment.

However, as I stressed before, while speaking of our responsibility of/in deciphering theatrical gesturing and representation, the situation could be seen more as an *opening* or an assignment than a conclusive statement regarding the 'condition of postponement' in the theatre, whether ethical or theoretical — even if that would eventually be the only 'possible horizon of possibility and potentiality' in this investigation. I will therefore go on to consider a couple of ways of thinking through the situation in somewhat productive terms.

### 3.2. The third(ness) dimension

In a series of lectures entitled ‘Kieli, ruumis, subjekti, esittäjä’ [Language, body, subject, performer] (Autumn 2007, The Theatre Academy, Finland), Kirkkopelto offered his listeners a reading of Heidegger’s ‘A Dialogue on Language’ in *On the way to language* (1982), where he approached the question of experiencing a gesture from a point of view that acknowledged a simultaneous resonance of such terms as *openness* (or even *aperture, opening*), *emptiness*, *gathering* and *bearing* for the thought that strives to comprehend a gesture or its own operation in that very process.<sup>180</sup> I ask the reader to bear in mind that the following thoughts on Kirkkopelto’s conjectural configuration are largely based on my own notes of his lecture and are thus necessarily interpretative and somewhat simplified.<sup>181</sup>

Heidegger’s work, which presents us with a dialogue “between a Japanese and an Inquirer”<sup>182</sup> (the Inquirer being, presumably, Heidegger himself), pursues a field of questioning that would bring us closer to the problems of communication and gesturing that concern not only cultural and individual differences, but also certain ontological and transcendental issues that seem to stem from a fundamental (and also ethically compelling) ‘involvement’ in being through aesthetic experience; a prevailing condition offered or ‘borne’ to the fact of human experience by gestural and linguistic activity. The dialogue lays significant stress on the relation between a gesture and communication as an essentially unspecified system (or a prevailing ‘linguistic condition of experiencing’), thus also inducing some important observations regarding the potential of the *emptiness* — or the *empty signal* — by/through which we saw the theatrical stage opening up to the audience as a socio-political (f)act.

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<sup>180</sup> Kirkkopelto (6.11.) 2007.

<sup>181</sup> Although tentative and ongoing, Kirkkopelto’s musings may help to contextualise certain aspects of theatrical gesturing as well as its linguistic and socio-political import.

<sup>182</sup> Heidegger 1982: 1.

Although covering a vast array of issues, the Japanese and the Inquirer arrive at certain descriptions of Japanese *nō* theatre<sup>183</sup> that are of interest. Providing the spectators with an empty stage and a certain subtlety of gestures, a *nō* play seems to reveal some quite significant issues for the Western way of examining aesthetic problems. To avoid certain conceptual confusions, I present here a lengthy quotation from Heidegger's text:

*J[apanese]:* [...] To allow you to see, even if only from afar, something of what the *No*-play defines, I would assist you with one remark. You know that the Japanese stage is empty.

*I[nquirer]:* That emptiness demands uncommon concentration. [The original German term here for *concentration* is *Sammlung*, which also means *gathering*.]

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*J:* Thanks to that concentration, only a slight additional gesture on the actor's part is required to cause mighty [*Gewaltiges*, also *forceful*] things to appear [*erscheinen*, cf. *scheinen*, *to shine*] out of a strange stillness.

[...]

For instance, if a mountain landscape, is to appear, the actor slowly raises his open hand and holds it quietly above his eyes at eyebrow level. May I show you?

*I:* Please do.

*(The Japanese raises and holds his hand as described.)*

*I:* That is indeed a gesture [*Gebärde*] with which a European will hardly be content.

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<sup>183</sup> See e.g. Miettinen 1987: 210-222, (further reading) 254; De Bary 2001: 364-383; (contemporary viewpoints) Brandon 1997; (gestic acting) Zarrilli 2006: 139, 144-146. We can presume that here Heidegger means the *sublime*, i.e., the *nō* form of the *nōgaku* performance, the *vulgar* form of the latter being *kyōgen*. (Miettinen 1987: 210.)

<sup>184</sup> This and the following bracketed comments on Peter D. Hertz's translation from German were disclosed and contemplated by Kirkkopelto in his lecture to clarify Heidegger's reasoning.

*J*: With it all, the gesture subsists less in the visible movement of the hand, nor primarily in the stance of the body. The essence of what your language calls “gesture” is hard to say.

*I*: And yet, the word “gesture” helps us experience truly what is here to be said.

[...]

Gesture is the gathering of a bearing [*Tragen*, the verb *tragen* meaning *to bear*].

*J*: No doubt you intentionally avoid saying: *our* bearing.

*I*: Because what truly bears, only bears itself *toward* us...

*J*: ... though we bear only our share to its encounter.

*I*: While that which bears itself toward us has already borne our counterbearing into the gift it bears for us.

*J*: Thus you call bearing or gesture: the gathering which originally unites within itself what we bear to it and what it bears to us.<sup>185</sup>

In his reading, Kirkkopelto emphasised the questions of and relations between gesturing and linguistic issues<sup>186</sup> emerging from Heidegger’s text. The term *gesture* was approached by stressing its meaning as “the gathering of a bearing” which “originarily unites within itself what we bear to it and what it bears to us,” as something that is composed of gestural activity itself and the “counterbearing” of our own concern for that phenomenon. The Japanese and the Inquirer seem to suggest that it is, in itself, the *’process* of gathering of a bearing,<sup>’</sup> where the bearing would not refer strictly or simply to the meaning we give to a gesture or it strives to engender. Instead, “the [verb] gathering of a

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<sup>185</sup> Heidegger 1982: 18-19, brackets mine.

<sup>186</sup> At this point, it might prove useful to note one remark by Kirkkopelto in an introductory lecture to the seminars. He discussed the possibility of whether the language-body relation concerns performativity *before/without* the human phenomenon. The act of performing, the performance, does not explain this relation, but correlates with its two aspects. Iterability and performativity can, however, return the language-body relation to view.

bearing” would be the process that discloses “the gathering [noun] which originally unites” the observing entity with a gesture.

According to Heidegger, there seems to be a linguistic and gestural origin — or even a ‘background process’ — that constantly springs from gestural activity almost as a self-explanatory phenomenon. Strangely enough, while this process of ‘unfolding’ constantly demands us to concern ourselves with or to return to an individual gesture, it does not seem to refer to any conceptual regeneration of the gesture in question: our concern would be inherent in the gesture itself. Thus, Heidegger’s dialogue goes on:

*I: ... with this formulation we still run the risk that we understand the gathering as a subsequent union...*

*J: ... instead of experiencing that all bearing, in giving and encounter, springs first and only from the gathering.*

*I: If we were to succeed in thinking of gesture in this sense, where would you then look for the essence of that gesture which you showed me?*

*J: In a beholding that is itself invisible, and that, *so gathered, bears itself to encounter emptiness* in such a way that in and through it the mountains appear.*

*I: That emptiness then is the same as nothingness, that essential being which we attempt to add in our thinking, *as the other, to all that is present and absent.**

*J: [...] To us [the Japanese], emptiness is the loftiest name for what you mean to say with the word “Being”...<sup>187</sup>*

According to my interpretation of Kirkkoppelto’s conjectures, the *emptiness* or *void* (*Leere*) that Heidegger’s dialogue speaks of could be approached here as an ‘opening’ or *open space* (*Lichtung*) that the gesture reveals to us almost as an aura that upholds and thus ‘gesturalises’ the gesture. It is as if a gesture were in the care of an emptiness that it in itself produces, in the care of that which allows it to appear (*erscheinen*), to shine through “that essential being which we attempt

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<sup>187</sup> Heidegger 1982: 19, brackets and italics mine.

to add in our thinking.”<sup>188</sup> This “other” (*das Andere*) added to “all that is present and absent,” the apprehended *Being* that for the Japanese is the most sublime definition of the essence of being, seems then to be related to the empty signal deciphered from Lehmann’s thought — the very *being* of the stage *in proportion to* who/whatever it brings into focus. Kirkkopelto thus reflected on the possibility of whether a gesture, in itself, was not a sign for that which is absent, but rather the difference or differentiation between being and a being, something fundamental that we confront in empirical experiencing. An entity ‘stands out’ onstage, becomes *a gesture* or *an entity-on-stage*, if it is related to an essential emptiness that ‘cares for it,’ i.e., if it is *related to Being* in its most sublime and *unseen quiddity*.<sup>189</sup>

In a linguistic sense, Heidegger’s dialogue anchors this questioning to the problematique that pertains to the relation between an utterance and the act of uttering; to how language, *by being language*, has always welcomed our ‘counterbearing’ and thus would epitomise the originary (linguistic) nature of ‘bearing’ and ‘counterbearing’ in gesturing. In his reading, Kirkkopelto pointed out how this seems to suggest that the mentioned relation would also mark the relation between *a human being* and *being itself*, preceding all communication. It would even suggest that a complex linguistic edifice like *concept* is a “compacted or compressed gesture.”<sup>190</sup>

Kirkkopelto then discussed the possibility of whether to observe a gesture or an entity onstage as part of a *play* (of language), as *Schauspiel*, is to *participate*, to take part in ‘reflection of (a) play’ through its ‘attraction,’ which implies that theatre is in an essential sense *playing the gathering of a bearing of language, and thus also observing this ‘attractive’ or ‘attracting’ phenomenon*. For the spectator, it would be experiencing the attraction of the process of this play, not

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<sup>188</sup> Kirkkopelto used street theatre as an example, where gesturing seems to stand out from the background activity by forming an ‘empty gestural space’ around itself.

<sup>189</sup> Kirkkopelto 2007.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

precisely because of the import of the play itself (which affects the matter, however), but *because of the fact that it attracts us*.<sup>191</sup>

Remembering that one of the main issues in the current investigation has been to consider the *way in which the empty signal of the stage affects us*, one can see that rather different templates and approaches for examining theatrical gesturing may still resonate with quite similar socio-ethical concerns. The above observations support, for their part, the suggestion that the phenomenon of the stage does not remain a mere obstacle or a suspicious agent/agenda between the two described — overlapping — socio-political (f)acts of theatre, that of establishing a singular political act of gathering together and that of being exposed to (the sanctions of) sociability to begin with. Instead, it could be seen

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid. As Heidegger (e.g. 1982: 3-5, 12-13) also problematises the essence of *dialogue* while approaching in his linguistic questioning a “presence that springs from the mutual calling of origin and future” (Ibid.: 12), Kirkkopelto further contemplated whether the dialogue of a play text, in its own peculiar way, engaged the problematic concerning a gesture and the emptiness (of Being) the former gathers around it but simultaneously ‘lives on.’ It seems to do this by utilising the reciprocity between *speaking* (or the act of uttering) and *silence*. Each individual *line* (*Replik* in German, *repliikki* in Finnish) that follows another (or, indeed, *replies* to another) appears to derive much of its weight and function from the Latin term *replicare*, ‘to fold back.’ According to this etymological observation and the logic that follows it, every line would be surrounded by an emptiness that even seems to assume the form of a stage direction, where the lines are required to ‘fold back’ to the silences (and thus also to the lines) that precede them, laying before us the structure of the dialogue not as a proper continuum but as a series of breaks, couplings and *re*-couplings. For Kirkkopelto, the silence in question would, in itself, speak of language by “remaining silent about it,” by speaking about it with/through its silence. The Heideggerian investigation seems to suggest that while language itself cannot properly ‘speak of itself,’ or of (its) “presence that springs from the mutual calling of origin and future,” we can only discuss the very ‘happening’ of language by ‘being silent,’ by expressing the actual force, disturbance and intervention characteristic of language itself. In a dialogue, the delivery of the lines (cf. *replicare*), i.e., the way the lines react to one another and remain reciprocal, would comprise the differences between the lines. It is even as if there would be two different lines in (delivering) each line, expressing more the function of (conceptual) differences, couplings and *re*-couplings than the influence of one character over another. A play text would thus emphasise the way in which thought strives to return to a space of ‘linguistic exposure,’ to an *opening* between utterances that differ from one another. The task of the actor would then be to speak *of language* by being silent (about it), by expressing that her/his art is more about *silence* than *speech*. As this phenomenon seems to demand for a listener/spectator in order to take place, the listener/spectator for her/his part would have to ‘remain silent’ about this act of ‘being silent.’ (Kirkkopelto 2007 and my own notes of his lecture.)

as an aesthetic and, consequently, ethical opening that operates in regard to this fundamentally 'charged' situation that the complex socio-political nature of theatre, in itself, brings forth.

### 3.2.1 Zeami ↔ Žižek ↔ Heidegger

The situation itself requires one to take the investigation further. As mentioned earlier, while nō-theatre offers a very specific and refined case regarding the art of gesturing, it speaks of certain noteworthy issues that also pertain to the modern Western aesthetic questioning and its ethical and political correlates in the theatre.

In the latter excerpt from Heidegger's text, the Japanese described how the essence of the gesture s/he performed to the Inquirer resided in "a beholding that is itself invisible, and that, so gathered, bears itself to encounter emptiness in such a way that in and through it the mountains appear." Taking cognisance of certain theoretical questions in the coming chapters, this "beholding that is itself invisible" becomes of importance here. However, as the formulation is in itself quite enigmatic, it might prove useful to assess its contribution to the context so far by looking into the possibility of relating some of Žižek's earlier remarks to the thought of Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443 CE),<sup>192</sup> an influential theorist of nō-theatre. Although this will be only a brief glance at a vast array of theoretical issues, certain emerging observations are compelling for the present task.

Zeami's views on improving and upholding aesthetic subtlety and piquancy in a nō performance and in the work of an individual actor give us a glimpse of something that does not appear to be very far from the problematique concerning the 'enigma of happening' approached in the previous chapter (2.2.1). His work, which concentrates largely on the development of acting skills and their indispensable contribution to the overall composition on stage, uses several metaphorical approaches to express the way in which a gesture or an expression should reach the audience and, eventually, offer the theatrical event its essential *significance* and structure.

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<sup>192</sup> Miettinen 1987: 210. For Zeami's treatises, see e.g. Yamazaki 1984.



Jukka O. Miettinen explains that while the word *nō* “means literally “art [or skill]”; “talent [or giftedness]” or “accomplishment[,]” Zeami defines the art of *nō* theatre as “elegant imitation.” A vital factor in reaching the mentioned elegance would be, in turn, the concept of “*hana*” (or *flower*), which denotes “a perfect artistic performance, the radiance of art [cf. Heidegger’s *erscheinen* above], etc.” Referring to an old saying, Zeami mentions that “[w]hen there are secrets, then there is *hana*, without secrets there is no *hana*.”<sup>193</sup> His theory also describes how

[h]ana, interest [or *concern*] and uniqueness are one and the same thing. No flower flourishes forever. A flower gives pleasure to the eyes, because it has been long awaited for. The uniqueness and the freshness of [its] flourishing make it interesting. The same principle goes for *Nō*-theatre. Most of all, an actor must be aware of the fact that *hana* changes continuously. At each respective moment, s/he must act in a way suitable for the spectator. An actor au fait with all types of plays is like a person supplied with all kinds of flower seeds according to season.<sup>194</sup>

It appears then that with Zeami’s views we are quite close to the gestural enigma discussed earlier through Western aesthetics, by utilising expressions such as the “first appearance of the new” (Müller) or “aesthetic of startling” (Lehmann) — while trying to bear in mind the history and the developments which enable such ‘uniqueness’ and ‘freshness’ in the theatre. Moreover, as Zeami stresses that the freshness of the “interesting” (or attracting) enigma (or “secrets”) in gesturing should be expressed in a way “suitable for the spectator,” this suggests that he is not ignorant of the question of *co-presence* or of the *socio-symbolic* and, consequently, *ethico-political* structure (our ‘moral interest in the beautiful’) of a performance.

It is therefore not surprising that he acknowledges how a *nō* actor should create and uphold the enigma of gesturing by bearing in mind and intertwining these aspects — the enigma itself and the socio-symbolic essence of/in co-

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.: 211, translation from Finnish and brackets mine.

<sup>194</sup> Zeami quoted in *ibid.*: 213, translation from Finnish and brackets mine. Original translation from Japanese into Finnish Keiko Yoshizaki.

presence — in order to produce an event that is unequalled but bears general or communal significance. And this would be achieved by a specific performative mindset. According to Zeami,

[t]he physical field of vision [of an actor] is restricted to the left, the right and the fore[ground]. However, an actor must have an eye for seeing her/himself from behind; for looking at her/himself with the eyes and hearts of the spectators. This is a difficult thing [or task]. It requires cold, objective self-observation. As an outgrowth we have a three-dimensional connection between the artist and the spectators. These principles are the seeds of all high art. They give birth to the bond between the subject and the object.<sup>195</sup>

The formulation gives rise to an abundance of questions, but if we posit that “the bond between the [spectating] subject and the [performed/performing] object” Zeami speaks of would be — at least on an abstract, didactic level — the result of an in-depth objectification of the (performed/performing) object by the object itself, of a process of setting up a *third* — or an (aesth)ethico-politically ‘three-dimensionalising’ — viewpoint that acknowledges a *surplus presence* in addition to that of the actor and that of the spectators (or their co-presence), a ‘socially prevailing *thirdness*’, it would suggest that the actor should try to reach at least an oblique (aesthetic) awareness of the profound socio-political nature of the event.

While this is not to claim that the performer her/himself creates the socio-political *essence* of the performance situation, Zeami appears to be concerned with somewhat similar issues that operate behind Žižek’s “elementary *theatricality* of the human condition,” the condition of being exposed to the prevailing gaze of the big Other that leaves us no options but to accept the fundamental responsibility (or subjection) that comes with the “substance of our social existence” — even if the latter’s configuration refers more to that which renders us sociable, and not precisely to the fact sociability itself.

The Žižekian complement here would suggest that even though Zeami demands that the actor perform “in a way suitable for the spectator” and to look

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<sup>195</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*: 213, translation from Finnish and brackets mine.

at “her/himself with the eyes and hearts of the spectators,” the latter position should still be considered as a ‘staged’ element of the situation and not simply as an addressee who allows the performance to adopt some political substance. When the eyes and hearts of the spectators are employed *by the performing object* to assess its position and function in the performance, it should not mean that it deprives the audience of its specific status. Instead, Zeami’s ‘directive’ would permit us to think of the situation as including a multifaceted demand for political and ethical awareness and responsibility. Moreover, one of Guénoun’s experimental theatre hypotheses from the 1970s seems to interact with (but also to problematise) this issue: “the actor is within the audience in the same way s/he is within her /his own life. S/he must thus act [or perform] simultaneously *to all directions*. The performance is a matter of the whole body and of *all of its directions*. There are spectating and listening spectators everywhere. There is thus no stage, because it cannot exist without a direction and certainly not without delimiting all possible directions.”<sup>196</sup>

Added to this, even the Heideggerian “beholding that is itself invisible” as the “essence” of a gesture begins, perhaps, to resonate with the acute nature of the performance situation in a more demystified way. Although his contemplation tracks the profound issues underlying the relation between a gesture and the “unseen,” the most subtle sense of Being, it too seems to require us to withdraw from, or, rather, to transcend the thought that situates the essence of gestural activity *merely* within the questions of (performative) presence and co-presence.

The way Zeami, Žižek and Heidegger understand the fundamental condition of *being exposed* in gesturing would thus allow (if not impel) us to recognise (and make use of) the *thirdness* that transilluminates the situation, the socio-political ‘backlight’ reached for by the actor and frequently falsely assumed by the audience to be its legitimised property. Although the actor cannot be considered the sole producer of the ‘gaze with no bearer’ or the ‘invisible beholding’ — as an organism confined to its corporeality and social position — or, moreover, as the fundamental source of such performative strategy, what

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<sup>196</sup> Guénoun 2007: 59, translation and brackets mine.

Zeami suggests with his aesthetic demand shows us that the bond between the performer and the observer is indeed ‘of higher origin,’ staged already by the spontaneous need and willingness to gather together for a peculiar reason — to demonstrate and witness how mountains may appear when an actor “slowly raises his open hand and holds it quietly above his eyes at eyebrow level.” To make sense of it all, we are then tempted (or perhaps even forced?) to name this pursuit the socio-political or symbolic activity of theatre. Here, if not before, the strange ethical surplus of the audience’s mere existence I proposed earlier would also begin to reveal its compelling nature.

All in all, viewed from any of these perspectives, the *essence* of gesturing remains a compelling question, which shows that its observer is always ‘concerned with it,’ either in a moral or *amoral* sense, in a way that is *non-indifferent* — which, as will be shown later with Kant and Levinas, would already be a focal *ethical* issue. Consequently, we might need to consider whether this problematique also has to do with the fact that flaws in gesturing are such a central issue for our modern understanding of performative professionalism in the theatre. While a trained eye is often proficient in spotting one’s own or others’ mistakes on stage, for the audience, gestural or linguistic inelegance or clumsiness are sometimes quite hard to decipher or distinguish from the strategies and intentions employed to perform a gesture. And yet, all apprehended flaws and anomalies contribute to a performance in their own, frequently unexpected but connotative ways. (Nicholas Ridout, for his part, has discussed these issues widely and perceptively in his work.<sup>197</sup>)

On the other hand, as Kirkkopelto mentioned in his lecture, it remains problematic what the Heideggerian reading of gesturing above has to offer for the modern context and its historical templates through which we tend to construct (Western) theatrical meanings. It is, in itself, highly complex and yet presumes some sort of mutual linguistic origin that does not (primarily) give rise to this or that interpretation, but instead strives to shape the questions that concern precisely the need and possibility of interpreting and maintaining reciprocity in human communication.

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<sup>197</sup> See Ridout 2006.

There is then a further need to investigate what ethical challenges a gesture may contain. Even though at first glance faults in gesturing, for example, can hardly be considered as fundamental ethical problems for the theatre, our concern for the import of gestural activity speaks, in itself, of an essential 'instability' affecting any framework built to keep this activity within the boundaries of human reason. Is there then an ethical risk in the configuration followed? What could be the underlying motivation for the ideas of *doubt* and *concern* that constantly surface in the present enquiry?

### 3.3. Enter evil: gesturing almost within the boundaries of Kantian ethics

The rent in the universe is a measure of the gap between man's knowledge and the order of existence. Ultimately, we are all as blind as Oedipus. Ritual must replace reason; prophesy, deliberation. If the ritual fails—as it always will—all that is left is the horror.

Paul W. Kahn: *Out of Eden: Adam and Eve and the Problem of Evil*<sup>198</sup>

Just as the juridical state of nature is a state of war of every human being against every other, so too is the ethical state of nature one in which the good principle, which resides in each human being, is incessantly attacked by the evil which is found in him and in every other as well. Human beings... mutually corrupt one another's moral predisposition and, even with the good will of each individual, because of the lack of a principle which unites them, they deviate through their dissensions from the common goal of goodness, as though they were *instruments of evil*...

Immanuel Kant: *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason And Other Writings*<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Kahn 2007: 33.

<sup>199</sup> Kant 1793/2006: 108 (6:96-97).

### 3.3.1 *The gap that Kaspar and Oedipus share*

In Handke's *Kaspar* (1967), the title character<sup>200</sup> enters the stage — and the realm of conceptual operations — as an entity whose relation to the props (various artefacts and pieces of furniture) onstage is devoid of the possibility to link these things to their generally accepted purposes and therefore to their purpose of use (being thus reminiscent of certain opening themes of *Self-Accusation*). The only conceptual tool Kaspar has to approach his environment is the sentence: “I want to be a person like somebody else was once.” However, according to Handke's instructions, the sentence should initially be uttered so that it is clear that Kaspar has no conception of what it means. He repeats it several times at regular intervals, and in various ways.<sup>201</sup> With the sentence, Kaspar strives to deal with the world he enters, to grasp the linguistic nexus of meanings that would (allegedly) allow him to control and make use of his surroundings.

The gap between Kaspar's acute experience of the stage and the conceptual possibilities residing in that milieu then demands linguistic education, which would build a bridge between him and the abstract strain the environment engenders. This education is provided by “prompters,” invisible voices that represent a sociolinguistic authority and strive to cultivate Kaspar into an orderly element of a pre-existing conceptual and linguistic system and its power relations. In Linda Hill's reading, the prompters “advertise language as a tool for organizing experience and adapting oneself to society without being inhibited by

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<sup>200</sup> The play is loosely based on the case of Kaspar Hauser (1812-1833), a young man who was found wandering the streets of Nuremberg, Germany in 1828. He was only able to utter two sentences and write his own name. The facts of Hauser's earlier life and were and are still unclear. However, it has to be emphasised that the connections between Handke's character and the real life Kaspar Hauser are more thematic than historical. In his directions for the play Handke (2000: 60) also describes Kaspar as follows: “Kaspar (Kasper means clown in German) does not resemble any other comedian; rather, when he comes on stage he resembles Frankenstein's monster (or King Kong).” Peymann (1972: 51) mentions that “[t]he play itself does not present the history of Kaspar Hauser, only the concept behind the historical figure—that of making a free and harmless symbol of nature freer by teaching him how to comprehend society through learning the language and all other necessary norms of conduct.”

<sup>201</sup> Handke 2000: 65.

facts[,]” but thus also set up “a contest between an individual and an order which is its own purpose[.]”<sup>202</sup>

Kaspar’s training process is long and in many ways contradictory, leading from the illusion of *mere* appearance to the illusion that concepts and terms are able to explain the world and one’s position in it fully and legitimately. Along the way, the sentence with which Kaspar begins his journey is ‘exorcised’ out of him, and the connections between him and his newly found sociolinguistic environment are presented as confusing but compelling injunctions. Kaspar thus grows into a linguistic agent and generator of subjective meanings, but finds himself in various painful positions between self-expression and its legitimacy or conceptual extrapolation. He absorbs the prompters’ lessons, rebels against the linguistic authority and the system they represent, and finally fades away by turning into several different Kaspars and losing his voice under the growing clamour of ambiguous voices and meanings.

With this play, Handke wishes to turn us again to examine the theatrical dimensions of the relationships we maintain with the world, as well as the language of theatre itself. Theatrical means or the illusion of theatre are not directly addressed in the play text, but in his opening directions Handke provides that

the audience does not see the stage as a representation of a room that exists somewhere, but as a representation of a stage. The stage represents the stage. [...] The objects, although genuine..., are instantly recognizable as props. They are play objects. They have no history. The audience cannot imagine that, before they came in and saw the stage, some tale had already taken place on it. [...] Nor should the audience be able to imagine that the props on stage will be part of a play that pretends to take place anywhere except on stage: they should recognize

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<sup>202</sup> Hill 1977: 304, 314. See also Peymann 1972: 51-52; Schlueter 1981: 41-50; Weber 1972: 55. For connections between Jacques Lacan’s thinking and Werner Herzog’s film *Every Man for Himself and God Against All* (1974) which retells Kaspar Hauser’s story, see Kaja Silverman’s ‘Kaspar Hauser’s “Terrible Fall” into Narrative’ in *New German Critique*, No. 24/25, Special Double Issue on New German Cinema (Autumn, 1981 – Winter, 1982): 73-93. Silverman’s analysis may greatly benefit one’s reading of Handke’s play.

at once that they will witness an event that plays only on stage and not in some other reality. They will not experience a story but watch a theatrical event.<sup>203</sup>

The instructions also describe Kaspar's character as a visual phenomenon that refers to a certain rupture between him and his surroundings. His conspicuous (and clownish) appearance — masked face, "colourful jacket," "wide pants," "clumsy shoes," untied shoelaces — is incongruous with the plainness of the props. ("The colors of his outfit clash with the colors of the stage.")<sup>204</sup> Moreover, as noted, the actual function (or usability) of the props should not be altogether clear to the audience. The opening conditions are then designed to draw our attention to the very 'phenotype' of the event, making us focus on the tensions and dynamics between (and within) Kaspar, the props and the stage.

With this emphasis on the manner/code of representation, Handke seems again to approach in his analytic way the fact that the problematique pertaining to our encounters with our surroundings is particularly visible in (and important for) the theatre, where gestural activity — as physical, linguistic and abstract conceptual operation — serves both as an interfering and reinforcing factor regarding our understanding of our subjective (dis)positions in the world. We can only speculate to what extent and in what way Handke's dictates above may manifest themselves in the staging of the play or in the spectator's mind, but if we think of the informational (and ethical) facets of his approach, it is clear that in *Kaspar* he is still concerned with various aspects of the *linguistic disclosure*, through which, in his opinion, theatre could operate as an instructive and moral institution.

It is thus of importance to note how there appears to be one gap the prompters are not able to bridge during Kaspar's linguistic education; namely *the gap between one's (understanding of one's) personal purposes/motives and the (dis)order of existence*, which, in itself, informs us that we are never fully aware of (or in touch with) the reasons and consequences of our acts, choices, expressions and impressions. The manner in which we relate existing phenomena

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<sup>203</sup> Handke 2000: 60.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.: 63.



to our experience and actions — through ‘inner representation’ — bears witness to such a gap. Halfway through the play, Kaspar and the prompters reflect the epistemological grounds of this situation in unison:

[Kaspar]

[prompters]

It is not true that the conditions are as they are represented; on the contrary, it is true that the conditions are different from their representation.

It is untrue that the representation of the conditions is the only possible representation of the conditions: on the contrary, it is true that there exist other possibilities of the representation of the conditions.

It is untrue that the representation of the conditions is the only possible representation of the conditions: on the contrary, it is true that there exist other possibilities of the representation of the conditions. It does not correspond to the facts to represent the conditions at all; on the contrary, it corresponds to the facts not to represent them at all. That the conditions correspond to the facts is untrue.<sup>205</sup>

With the complex logic of these lines, one may observe how there is a wider problematique than conceptual illiteracy at stake. One does not need to be an untrained — that is, conceptually virginal or naïve — agent to bear the radical instability and ignorance that comes with the non-uniformity between subjective consciousness and the state of things. As Paul W. Kahn suggests in the opening quotation, Oedipus, a theatrical archetype of fallibility, embodies in his own deterministic way the tragic horror that arises from the failure to master

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<sup>205</sup> Handke 2000: 96, brackets mine.

existence with symbolic (or ritualistic) procedures or the assumptions, ideas and hopes they engender. Moreover, although Kahn speaks up for “reason” and “deliberation,” it seems that they too fall short of the world’s ‘unexpected expectations,’ since they must depend on certain conceptual or symbolic mediation.

If we think of this situation as the very *ontological condition* of the tragic hero/heroine, the *hamartic* — and at the same time *anagnoristic* — import of the tragic figure would be to depict a fundamental uncertainty organic to the human animal’s relation to being, or to any extensive conceptual and symbolic ‘mapping’ of being. The confusion characteristic of this condition leads the hero/heroine to repetition; to repetition of one’s assumed hypotheses, mental images and beliefs (and thus also errors), since they provide him/her with certain conceptual tools, even though they do not explain the nature of his/her position in the order of existence in an all-inclusive manner. Gilles Deleuze states in *Difference and Repetition* (1968/2004) how “[i]n the theatre, the hero repeats precisely because he is separated from an essential, infinite knowledge. This knowledge is in him, it is immersed in him and acts in him, but acts like something hidden, like a blocked representation.”<sup>206</sup> The “infinite knowledge” hidden from (but borne by) the character is thus an inherent but incomprehensible form of ‘wisdom,’ which sketches out the subject’s informational limits unbeknown to him/her.

Deleuze sees, however, that this conception of repetition can also be considered an essential element of comedy. Employing common sense, one may assume that the tragic figure is doomed to repetition to the point of (commonly recognisable) traumatisation, whereas the comic effect of repetition shows it in a rather sympathetic light, in order to prevent such traumatisation (both in the

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<sup>206</sup> Deleuze 2004: 17. Tuomas Nevanlinna (2004: 110) offers an interesting accretion (or a twist) to this standpoint by saying that “the paradigmatic figure of forced choice is Oedipus. Oedipus is a *subject of fate* in that twofold sense that this expression offers us. He is subjugated by fate, but he subjectivises, “absorbs” this fate, as it were. And only thus did the fate come true. It seemed that fate was conditioning the subject, but, in the end, the subject is revealed as the condition of fate. Fate is a “forced choice” where there is only one option, but which we choose nonetheless. This way we subjectivise necessity and become responsible for it.” (Translation and italics mine.)

narrative it constitutes, and its observer). But Deleuze enhances this understanding by describing how

[t]he difference between the comic and the tragic pertains to two elements: first, the nature of the repressed knowledge—in the one case immediate natural knowledge, a simple given of common sense, in the other terrible esoteric knowledge; second, as a result, the manner in which the character is excluded from this knowledge, the manner in which “he does not know that he knows”. In general the practical problem consists in this: this unknown knowledge must be represented as bathing the whole scene, impregnating all the elements of the play and comprising in itself all the powers of mind and nature, but at the same time the hero cannot represent it to *himself*—on the contrary, he must enact it, play it and repeat it until the acute moment that Aristotle called “recognition”.<sup>207</sup>

Playing with differing degrees of knowledge — and thus, in fact, offering us one basic description of dramatic suspense —, these thoughts suggest that the spectator has, in the last analysis, the perspective from which the “unknown knowledge” is able to impregnate “all the elements of the play” (although s/he, too, is bound to a rather limited perspective). It is thus of importance to note how in Deleuze’s view the Aristotelian “recognition” allows *repetition* and *representation* to merge, “without, however, confusing their two levels, the one reflecting itself in and being sustained by the other, the knowledge as it is represented on stage and as repeated by the actor then being recognised as the same.”<sup>208</sup>

Insofar as this means that attention is drawn to the manifestation and occurrence of the “unknown knowledge” — in the very operation of the character/actor — in order to elucidate something general of our existence, we may say that the spectators are offered a more fundamental *epistemological anagnorisis* here, one that touches our intellectual positions themselves. It unveils the fact that the means of dealing with the imperfect (and possibly traumatising) relation between subjective existence and the state of things are one’s *free will* and the *readiness to act*, the very *capability to choose and employ*

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<sup>207</sup> Deleuze 2004: 17.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

*modes of operation that would clarify the condition of ignorance* one finds (or rather, does not find) oneself in. In short, one is somewhat *autonomous* in regard to it. There remains a risk of error (e.g. in repetition), however, for the condition itself is not fully overcome or dispelled. In this sense, any act designed to clarify, affect or modify one's surroundings or social relations is always a gesture towards being an omniscient and omnipotent God. But the gesture is doomed to fail, to run up against the limits of one's subjective resources.

Nor is this condition of ignorance free of moral and/or ethical consequences, which is evident if it is approached as a 'natural' relation and phenomenon between the human animal and the world. The moral interest in appearances that intrigued Derrida, Kant and Hegel in Chapter 2.2.1 hinted at the fact that the ethico-moral schemes we adopt and apply are not trouble-free regarding the 'natural state of things.' They necessitate hermeneutical processes that may call into question the legitimacy of the schemes themselves. It seems that nature and Being bind us ethically, but do not offer us any clear or infallible ways of thought or action concerning this commitment. In her reading of Immanuel Kant and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (and the *modern conception of evil* that arises with them), Susan Neiman intensifies this problematique by saying that "[e]ither we or the world should have been made less vulnerable: we to moral corruption, or the world to being damaged by it. Arranged as they are, human beings and the natural world hardly seem to have been made for each other." Analysing the situation further, she explains how

[t]he resistance of nature that we experience daily, in matters great and small, is not the work of angry antropomorphic deities but simply part of the arbitrary stuff of the universe. Natural evils are neither just punishment for something despicable nor unjust punishment for something heroic, but framework of the human condition. That condition is structured by mortality and, even more generally, by finitude. Being limited is being who we are.<sup>209</sup>

According to Neiman, this caused Kant to assume that there is no structural resolution to the problem of evil. Although it feels that there is "a systematic

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<sup>209</sup> Neiman 2004: 60.

connection between happiness and virtue, or, conversely, between natural and moral evil... the world seems to show no such connection at all.”<sup>210</sup> Kant thus united *virtue* with “the domain of human reason... the faculty of purposes[,]” and *happiness* with “the natural world[,]” understanding “[t]he difference between reason and nature” as “the difference on which the world turns”<sup>211</sup> — and this affects, fundamentally, the way we see ourselves as both moral and natural agents. Neiman also unveils the tragi-comic import of this moral-existentialist problematic that causes friction between human action/freedom and the world. She considers that

[a]s there is no limit to our lack of power, so there is no limit to the number of things that can go wrong. Meditating on them can be a recipe for comedy, or for paralyzing sorts of neurosis, but they are no less numerous for the fact that living successfully requires us to forget them. [...] Tragedy is about the ways that virtue and happiness fail to rhyme, for the want, or the excess, of some inconsiderable piece of the world which happens to be the only thing that mattered. Kant’s work was written in increasing awareness of it. [...] The tragedy is real. Kant’s understanding of the ways that the wish to be God fuels most of our mistakes is as deep as his understanding of the ways that only being God would really help. The wish to be God isn’t simply pathological; its alternative is blind trust in the world to work as it should. [...] The gap between our purposes and a nature that is indifferent to them leaves the world with an almost unacceptable structure.<sup>212</sup>

But Kant’s thought also suggests that the human animal represents (and is subject to) two worlds, the *noumenal reality* and the *phenomenal reality*. Simon Blackburn offers a basic description of Kant’s noumenal reality by explaining that it denotes “things as they are in themselves,” whereas phenomenal reality means “things as they are for us, knowable by the senses.”<sup>213</sup> According to Kant,

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.: 60-61.

<sup>212</sup> Neiman 2004: 74-75.

<sup>213</sup> Blackburn 2005: 255-256. For one articulation of the grounds of this division, see e.g. Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787/1986: 11-13). See also e.g. Adams 2006: ix-x; Kannisto 2008. Adams (2006: ix) presents us with “a gross oversimplification” of this issue

our moral predisposition and responsibility arise from the *noumenal sphere*, outside of experiential (and spatio-temporal) situations and continuum.<sup>214</sup> This means that our obligation to seek for the just — i.e. moral — modes of operation is passed down to the human subject *a priori*, independent of and preceding experience and empirical evidence. Yet, as noted, we are bound by *causality* (another *a priori* principle)<sup>215</sup>, by our necessary relations to the flow of *natural phenomena*. As largely autonomous entities, we are thus placed in a difficult situation where *the free will of an individual* should reach an understanding of how to act successfully in accordance with both of these spheres.<sup>216</sup>

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in the following summation: “[Kant] argues that any experience that is possible for us must be structured by certain fundamental concepts such as those of substance and cause, and by space and time as “forms of intuition” within which objects of sensation can be represented. On this basis he argues, on the one hand, that we can know that any world that we can experience must necessarily conform to certain principles of mathematics and natural philosophy, connected with these forms and concepts; and on the other hand, that since our knowledge of the experienced world is so profoundly shaped by the needs of our cognitive faculties, we cannot reasonably take it as knowledge of things as they are in themselves, but only of things as they must and do appear to us.”

<sup>214</sup> Lehtinen 2004: 15. Kant maintains in the preface of *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785/2002: 5 [Ak 4: 389]) that “it is of the utmost necessity to work out once a pure moral philosophy which is fully cleansed of everything that might be in any way empirical and belong to anthropology; for that there must be such is self-evident from the common idea of duty and of moral laws. Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to be valid morally, i.e., as the ground of an obligation, has to carry absolute necessity with it; that the command ‘You ought not to lie’ is valid not merely for human beings, as though other rational beings did not have to heed it; and likewise all the other genuinely moral laws; hence that the ground of obligation here is to be sought not in the nature of the human being or the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but *a priori* solely in concepts of pure reason, and that every other precept grounded on principles of mere experience, and even a precept that is universal in a certain aspect, insofar as it is supported in the smallest part on empirical grounds, perhaps only as to its motive, can be called a practical rule, but never a moral law.” See also e.g. Schneewind 1998: 510-513.

<sup>215</sup> See e.g. Lindsay 1986: xviii-xix.

<sup>216</sup> Kant (1986: 10-11) says that “[r]eason must approach nature with the view, indeed, of receiving information from it, not, however, in the character of a pupil, who listens to all that his master chooses to tell him, but in that of a judge, who compels the witnesses to reply to those questions which he himself thinks fit to propose.” In Kant’s works *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787/1986/1993) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) we observe an endeavour to map out the terms of this problematic. See also Kahn 2007: 57.

But we may say that in Kant's thinking the moral obligation remains primary. It constitutes our *worth as rational beings*<sup>217</sup>, our very meaningfulness as largely autonomous actors in this world. He considers that one's freedom serves as a precondition for morality, for it is that capacity within the human subject which may enact the highest principle of freedom, the *moral law*, the principle according to which the subject should act — although the moral law itself must still be independent of the subject's willpower. In his reading of Kant, Robert Merrihew Adams states that “[a]s a phenomenon the self is causally determined, but as a noumenon the self of the same person can still be the free agent that morality requires.” He understands that Kant's theoretical philosophy “leaves open at least a formal possibility that we are indeterministically free as we are in ourselves. And since morality requires such noumenal freedom, ... our moral, practical reason (though not our theoretical reason) warrants us in believing in it.”<sup>218</sup> The human subject thus bears and ‘puts into effect’ a *transcendental idea of freedom*, which Derk Pereboom says consists “in the power of agents to produce actions without being causally determined by antecedent conditions, nor by their natures, in exercising this power.”<sup>219</sup> Markku Lehtinen, in turn, crystallises the Kantian deliberation on the relation between autonomous will, transcendental freedom and morality as follows:

The foundation of Kant's moral philosophy is the idea of transcendental freedom of the human being. The peremptory nature of the moral law and the human being's responsibility for her/his actions cannot be explained otherwise than by assuming free will: a human being is always held responsible, obliged to respect the peremptory injunction of the moral law. Yet human freedom is located outside of the phenomenal world governed by the law of cause and effect. Described as transcendental, freedom is not a matter of knowledge, and the only

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<sup>217</sup> One may assume, in line with Robert N. Johnson (2008), that by rational beings Kant means the contractual category of “normal, sane, adult” human beings (whatever abnormal, insane and infantile — some would say real — individuals that category may ultimately contain).

<sup>218</sup> Adams 2006: x, italics mine.

<sup>219</sup> Pereboom 2006: 537. See also e.g. Guyer 2005: 120-122.

thing that signals of the possibility of freedom is the sense of respect for the moral law.<sup>220</sup>

Moral commitment thus makes one's individual freedom substantial; it gives the fundamental reason to act according to our autonomous position. So, in Allen W. Wood's reading, Kant's understanding of morality entails "that our primary commitment should be to directing our own lives according to our own best rational judgment, and he [Kant] accordingly reconceived the principle of morality itself as a principle of *rational autonomy*."<sup>221</sup> Moreover, Kant saw this as a *universal* principle. In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785/2002) he explains that

[m]orality is... the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will, that is, to the *possible universal legislation through its maxims*. That action which can subsist with the autonomy of the will is *permitted*; that which does not agree with it is *impermissible*. [...] Autonomy of the will is the property of the will through which it is a law to itself (independently of all properties of the objects of volition).<sup>222</sup>

All in all, we may assume that if the moral groundwork affecting our relation to things and phenomena on this general level bears such a problematic opening, the abstract conceptual challenges that face us in the sphere of social and political operations do not make our subjective positions any more comfortable. With the *universality* that Kant integrates into (individual) moral rationality, he takes, indeed, cognisance of the human community. "The common goal of goodness" he mentions in the opening quotation of this chapter entails that *an individual should understand morality as a worthy end in its own right*, as a personally compelling principle that we all share and must aim at (as rational human beings). For Kant's philosophy, surviving — and justifying the meaning of — this difficult terrain both rationally and morally is a focal issue.

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<sup>220</sup> Lehtinen 2004: 15, translation mine.

<sup>221</sup> Wood 2002: 159, brackets mine.

<sup>222</sup> Kant 2002: 57-58 (Ak 4:439-440), first italics mine. See also e.g. Häyry 2005: 646.



### 3.3.2 *The evil import of gesturing*

While I do not wish to present here an exhaustive treatment of Kantian ethics and/or its effect on theatre,<sup>223</sup> it is of use to turn to certain aspects that concern

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<sup>223</sup> A more comprehensive investigation of the relations between theatre, expression, art, aesthetic questioning and Kantian moral theory would require us also to reflect on e.g. Kant's conception of *presentation* (*die Darstellung*) and the *sublime* (*das Erhabene*), but with the present configuration I strive merely to provide the reader with a *radical ethico-moral opening* — in a strictly philosophical context — which both Levinas and Badiou address or question farther ahead. However, for the former term, see e.g. Kant 2008: 27-29, 142-147, 178-182; for the *sublime*, see e.g. *ibid.*: 26-27, 75-164 (§23-§54). For the relation between beauty and the sublime in tragedy, see *ibid.*: 154-155. For the role of *taste* and *judgement* in the context of morality and aesthetic experience, see e.g. *ibid.*: 62-66, 154, 163, 183. Kant (*ibid.*: 66) sees, for example, that “[t]he visible expression of moral ideas that govern the human being inwardly can, of course, only be drawn from experience; but their combination with all that our reason connects with the morally good in the idea of the highest purposiveness—benevolence, purity, strength, or equanimity, etc.— may be made, as it were, visible in bodily manifestation (as effect of what is internal), and this embodiment involves a union of pure ideas of reason and great imaginative power, in one who would even form a judgement of it, not to speak of being the author of its presentation.” He also names taste as “a faculty that judges of the rendering of moral ideas in terms of the senses (through the intervention of a certain analogy in our reflection on both); and it is this rendering also, and the increased receptivity, founded upon it, for the feeling which these ideas evoke (termed moral sense), that are the origin of that pleasure which taste declares valid for mankind in general and not merely for the private feeling of each individual.” (*Ibid.*: 183.) See also Deleuze 2008: 39-56. While describing Kant's views on *art* (as distinguished from *nature*), Rodolphe Gasche (2003: 181) explains that in Kant's aesthetic theory artistic activity is a form of *doing* (*facere*) with an aim such as a particular (artificial) instance of *beauty*, which also means that art is “concept-driven”; it bears a conceptual goal that names or ‘completes’ a particular artistic intention (or conception) and may manifest itself in the result of a creation process. In a manner that supposedly takes into account beauty's general (aesthetic) relevance in Kant's work, Gasche (*ibid.*: 180) also mentions that “[a]rtificial beauty does not hold any aesthetic privilege in Kant's aesthetics, and nor does it enjoy any special privilege with respect to morality.” Yet, in the broader context of human thought and activity (including their natural, scientific and cultural reaches), Kant (2008: 29-32 [IX]) understands that aesthetic judgement does indeed contribute to the wider concept of *judgement*, which serves as a *bridging element between nature and freedom*. In addition, as mentioned, he links aesthetic questioning to morality at several points in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790/2008), claiming, for example, that aesthetic experience may provide preparatory guidance for morality (*ibid.*: 96-98) and that there is an analogous relationship between experiencing beauty and moral feeling, even so that beauty may be understood as a symbol of morality (*ibid.*: §59). Moreover, in his theory judgements of (and humility in the face of) the *sublime* bear a connection to or are fundamentally based on a shared assumption

the concept of *gesture* and its relation to Kant's understanding of the *moral law* and the *problem of evil*. With this move we are, as above, *almost* within the boundaries of Kantian ethics, but it is nevertheless of consequence to relate the largely unforeseeable import of gesturing to his pietistic adherence to moral diligence. If a gesture is defined, on the basis of Barthes, *as that element of an action which produces the latter's surprising and inadvertent effects, and therefore provokes modifications and deviations in the gesturing subject her-/himself*, it is by no means a trouble-free idea regarding one's responsibility towards the Kantian moral duty.

Kant, whom Wood calls "the most influential moral theorist of modern times"<sup>224</sup> and Ari Hirvonen and Toomas Kotkas as "*the* thinker who opens the modern discussion on evil"<sup>225</sup> is, of course, a historically and ideologically determined figure. The moral 'regime' he is after is thus largely a product of his time. Looming behind Kant's moral outlook we may observe not only the general atmosphere of the Enlightenment and the challenge it poses to the human subject,<sup>226</sup> but also the socio-ethical schemes of Prussian society and their connections to the austerity of Martin Luther's Protestant conviction.<sup>227</sup> Christianity — as a (subjectively) binding moral precept — remains then one central thrust in Kant's understanding of our moral status(es), insofar as it provides the human individual and community with certain generally acceptable (and divinely inaugurated) thoughts on how to pursue the *good*.

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of a moral template and feeling (ibid.: 95-96 [265-266]). See also e.g. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy web site (Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology, Ch. 2.8 Aesthetics and Morality), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-aesthetics/#2.8>, 5 January 2010.

<sup>224</sup> Wood 2002: 157.

<sup>225</sup> Hirvonen & Kotkas 2004: 8, translation mine.

<sup>226</sup> In an essay titled 'What is Enlightenment?' (1784), Kant famously describes it as follows: "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another." Source: The Internet Modern History Sourcebook, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kant-what.html>, 24 October 2008.

<sup>227</sup> Kant was raised in the ethos of Pietism, a branch of Lutheranism which emphasised religious humility.

Yet, we have to understand that with Kant, questions of morality and ethics based on the philosophy of religion come to concern the human individual in an unforeseen manner. We move from the problematique of theodicy (the problematique concerning God's righteousness) to a rather different — but certainly not less compelling — moral issue; namely to one's *unquestionable responsibility to always consider ethical conduct as an overriding end in itself* — which, because of its perplexing manoeuvre of combining universality and particularity, would ultimately require an omniscient (or divine) perspective to become possible or *real*. To put it roughly, in the Kantian project the ethical strain fit only for an all-seeing and all-knowing entity is bundled into the human subject.<sup>228</sup>

This does not mean, however, that Kant is unsympathetic to our subjective limitations. It is rather that he wants to show the irreducible distance between our faculties and the all-inclusive moral standard in order to arouse a humble sense of respect for the horizon of ethicality.<sup>229</sup> The immensity of the moral obligation is bearable only for a subject who understands that by assuming her/his position in regard to the moral law s/he not only takes full responsibility for that position, but also accepts the diligence that comes with integrating it into the law itself. In other words, the autonomous subject should comprehend that although s/he is capable of constructing a repertoire of moral *maxims* by virtue of its free will,

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<sup>228</sup> Schneewind 1998: 509-513. "To be good is... to be willed by a will governed by the moral law. Our will is such a will, and so is God's. Kant transposes onto human practical reason the relation he tried to work out... between God and the goodness of the outcomes of his choices. His astonishing claim is that God and we can share membership in a single moral community only if we all equally legislate the law we are to obey. The mature Kant does not hesitate to make an explicit comparison between human agents and God. When we try to bring about a harmonious totality of all ends, a totality made possible and governed by the moral law, we may think of ourselves "as analogous to the divinity." (Ibid.: 512.)

<sup>229</sup> Lehtinen (2004: 22) says that "the [moral law's] coercive demand for categorical respect and allegiance humiliates the human being's self-love and conceit, and is inevitably at variance with her/his selfish desires. The inevitable and irrefutable conflict between selfish desires and the sense of respect for the moral law does not make morality impossible, but morality can be attained only by controlling and subduing sensory [or sensuous] desires and needs. According to Kant's austere ethics of responsibility, we do not act morally because we are ready to do so, but because we are compelled by the sense of respect for the moral law, a sensation which we feel as positive and elevating precisely because it is tinged by displeasure." (Translation and brackets mine.)

those maxims should always withstand the pressure of becoming generally binding. The most famous and demanding Kantian moral maxim — and a clear articulation of his *moral law* — is, of course, the *categorical imperative*,<sup>230</sup> whose foundational form goes as follows: “Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”<sup>231</sup>

Kant’s thought has therefore been criticised for appearing to ignore the concrete situations in which the ethical subject finds her/himself, encasing the human condition(s) in the unconditional injunction of moral responsibility. But we may say that this kind of criticism fails to appreciate Kant’s ultimate aims. Žižek defends the hollow moral horizon of Kantian ethics by saying that its

unique strength... lies in this very formal indeterminacy: moral Law does not tell me *what* my duty is, it merely tells me *that* I should accomplish my duty. That is to say, it is not possible to derive the concrete norms I have to follow in my specific situation from the moral Law itself — *which means that the subject himself has to assume the responsibility of ‘translating’ the abstract injunction of the moral Law into a series of concrete obligations*. In this precise sense, the point of Kant’s ethics is (to paraphrase Hegel) ‘to conceive the moral Absolute not only as Substance, but also as Subject’: the ethical subject bears full responsibility for the concrete universal norms he follows — that is to say, the only guarantor of the universality of positive moral norms is the subject’s own contingent act of performatively assuming these norms.<sup>232</sup>

But as the *contingent act of performatively assuming* the right (or just) ideas and modes of action — as well as the act of taking responsibility for them — takes place in the very ‘theatre of operations’ that includes both our personal

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<sup>230</sup> See Kant 2002: 33-37. “[T]here is one imperative that, without being grounded on any other aim to be achieved through a certain course of conduct as its condition, commands this conduct immediately. This imperative is **categorical**. It has to do not with the matter of the action and what is to result from it, but with the form and the principle from which it results; and what is essentially good about it consists in the disposition, whatever the result may be. This imperative may be called that **of morality**.” (Ibid.: 33 [Ak 4:416], bold face in the original.)

<sup>231</sup> Kant 2002: 37 (Ak 4:421). See also e.g. Blackburn 2005: 227; Walker 2000: 40-55.

<sup>232</sup> Žižek 1997: 221.

moral position and our various egocentric desires, there remains a possibility that ethico-morally dubious (or even malignant) elements and motives take part in these acts themselves.

The act of assuming and following the moral law — and thus the objective of good as such — opens up, in itself, the problem of *radical evil*, the problem pertaining to our various deviations from the law. However, radical evil does not denote this or that deviation in itself, but the very possibility of departing or (self-)corrupting the moral injunction one is subject to. It signifies the human propensity to choose from *modi operandi* and principles that are disproportionate to her/his moral responsibility — i.e., in the last analysis, to the moral law and its terms.

In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793/2006), Kant explains that good and evil are indeed characteristic of us, and thus we also have a “propensity to evil[:]”<sup>233</sup>

By *propensity* (*propensio*) I understand the subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination (habitual desire, *concupiscentia*), insofar as this possibility is contingent for humanity in general. It is distinguished from a predisposition in that a propensity can indeed be innate yet *may* be represented as not being such: it can rather be thought of (if it is good) as *acquired*, or (if evil) as *brought* by the human being *upon* himself. – Here, however, we are only talking of a propensity to genuine evil, i.e. moral evil, which, since it is only possible as the determination of a free power of choice and this power for its part can be judged good or evil only on the basis of its maxims, must reside in the subjective ground of the possibility of the deviation of the maxims from the moral law.<sup>234</sup>

Despite this scrupulous explanation it is, of course, quite difficult to determine when and how our acts or maxims are at odds with the moral law. Kant thus categorises the ‘modes of deviation’ in the following manner:

1) the subject may act in contravention to the moral law out of human frailty, by succumbing to “the general weakness of the human heart” (or, in Žižek’s

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<sup>233</sup> Kant 2006: 52-55 ( 6:29-6:32); Adams 2006: xii-xiv; Lehtinen 2004: 16-17.

<sup>234</sup> Kant 2006: 52-53 (6:29).

reading, to “pathological”<sup>235</sup> temptations) despite acknowledging the situation; 2) the subject may consider and announce that s/he is acting out of moral motivation, although her/his motives are impure with regard to the law (“actions conforming to duty are not done purely from duty”); 3) the subject may reverse “the ethical order as regards the incentives of a free power of choice[,]” “subordinate the incentives of the moral law to others (not moral ones)”<sup>236</sup> — i.e., as Žižek says, s/he may “totally lose... the inner relationship toward duty qua specific moral agency, and to perceive morality as a simple external set of rules, of obstacles that society puts up in order to restrain the pursuit of egotistical “pathological” interests.”<sup>237</sup> In this option, the concepts of right and wrong lose their meaning, for the subject obeys moral norms only to avoid sanctions, and ‘bends the law,’ whenever possible, to suit her/his personal well-being.<sup>238</sup>

To this list Žižek adds the hypothesis of *diabolical evil*, which Kant excludes. Interpretations of this hypothesis vary, but to put it shortly, by diabolical evil we can understand “evil as an ethical principle[,]” evil that bears the same (moral) prerequisites as benevolent morality, the commitment to ‘doing evil for the sake of pure (evil) duty,’ which would be, within the Kantian parameters, “indistinguishable from the Good[.]”<sup>239</sup>

Projected onto Kant’s moral system and the concepts of radical and diabolical evil, the theatrical gesture — a non-totalisable and reverting surplus of an act à la Barthes —, with all its aesthetic, linguistic, conceptual and bodily import, is already a *responsible phenomenon* that imposes the responsibility it bears on its psycho-physical manifester and the observer who complements its manifestation. Kaspar, as an apprentice of conceptual autonomy (in “an order

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<sup>235</sup> Žižek (1997: 235) defines the term pathological (in this Kantian context) as “any positive, ultimately contingent content which supplements ethical formalism and permits us momentarily to suspend the universal ethical commandments[.]”

<sup>236</sup> This Kant (2006: 54) calls “the *perversity (perversitas)* of the human heart[.]”

<sup>237</sup> Žižek 1993: 100.

<sup>238</sup> Kant 2006: 53-54 (6:29-30); Žižek 1993: 99-100.

<sup>239</sup> Žižek 1993: 101; see also e.g. Nevanlinna 2004: 117-118. Žižek (1997: 229) says that “[w]hat is so unbearable about the notion of diabolical Evil is that, far from phenomenizing Evil, it makes the ethical Good and Evil *indistinguishable* — the problem with diabolical Evil is that it meets all the criteria of the transcendental definition of a morally good act.”

which is its own purpose”), and Oedipus, as a pawn for the tragic scheme of things, gesture in their own distinct manners towards the Kantian moral problematique that encircles both the gesturing subject and its observer as an injunction that does not tell them *what* their ethico-moral duty is, but merely tells them *that* they should accomplish this duty.

The irreducible distance between the modes of thought/action utilised to accomplish this duty and the duty itself remains then an uncertain territory, which is prone to raise serious doubts about the ethico-moral motives of gestural activity or its evaluation. These doubts reveal, without question, an ethical surplus that theatre itself cannot ‘sketch out’ in a trouble-free manner. Insofar as a theatrical gesture is considered a natural and morally defined — but effectively indefinite — medium between its originator and observer (both morally obliged) — or, on a larger scale, between the socio-political impetuses of *gathering together by will* and *being exposed to sociability* — it no doubt provokes difficult Kantian questions concerning its (reinforcing or undermining) status as regards the “common goal of goodness.” As a *morally charged* but naturally and causally ambiguous phenomenon, a gesture is always *ethically challenged*, in all senses of the expression.

From an epistemological (and also practical) point of view, which takes cognisance of the various socio-political and artistic motives a *gesture* depends on, it appears to serve as an exemplary test ground of the Kantian moral code. As an expression of the world’s “almost unacceptable structure,” and as a phenomenon that by its very exposure is either a premeditated act in regard to some moral maxim, or a deviation from this maxim, it lays before us the discordant nature of the *autonomous will* itself. Moreover, as if returning us to reflect on the potential of theatre as a site of ‘willed gestures/acts’ — and even a theatre performance itself as a ‘willed gesture/act of being together’ —, James Kirwan notes how

Kant’s formula presupposes that the will and the reason are inevitably in conflict in any situation where morality comes into play. Not, that is, because an action cannot be good if it is motivated by inclination as well as duty, but because any

action is only exemplary of a good will [sic] *insofar as* it is motivated by duty, and duty only emerges as such by its contrast with inclination or self-interest.<sup>240</sup>

In other words, when the Kantian assessment of a gesture takes place in the *willed* (physical) space of being together, the space of community, the ethical problematique concerning its relation to the moral law or the common goal of goodness is most clearly manifest in the questions that concern its very phenomenality (on stage and in the audience): not least because we have seen how theatre's (performative) gesture — the 'suggestive bearing' of an expression itself — is by default a contextualized pure possibility, operating if not precisely *qua* mimesis, then at least through its non-totality, a stageliness that differs from the 'apparent illusion of actual meaning.'

This also means that appearing on stage as an autonomous but *indefinite* articulation of (causally determined) nature and (culturally determined) morality, human activity brings into focus (and imposes on us) the risk of radical or even diabolical evil — and this risk extends itself to concern the very operation of the stage and the performative and interpretative strategies the stage makes possible. As a truly performative act of assuming the problematic that comes with norms and their relation to agency and phenomenality, a theatrical gesture generates, in accordance with its socio-political context, an *atmosphere branded by the possibility of evil*, an ambiguous atmosphere what comes to the Kantian concepts of good and evil. In a Heideggerian sense, we would always need to know/decide whether the "bearing" and the "counterbearing" of gestural activity are radically evil by nature (or *by propensity*).

This viewpoint can be reversed, of course: as such an ethical (and 'possibly radically evil') challenge concerning its relation to the moral law, one may say that theatre and its gestural potential are able to reveal to the morally obliged subject a landscape with which to meditate on the personal responsibility of guaranteeing the universality of one's positive moral norms (and of taking responsibility *for* that responsibility). Insofar as the gesturality of theatre draws its impact from the fact that it appears to us 'for the sake of appearing alone'

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<sup>240</sup> Kirwan 2006: 80.



(i.e., from its mode of appearing-for), thus transcending in its own peculiar way the commensurability of norms and actions, it highlights somewhat insistently the humility and respect with which we should encounter the excessive quiddity of ethical responsibility. This way, it causes us to reflect on the Žižekian observation according to which “the Kantian moral act is ultimately *impossible* to accomplish; one can never be certain of excluding all pathological motivations — that is, one becomes effectively aware of one’s duty only through one’s awareness of one’s failure to carry it out in full.”<sup>241</sup>

Thus, the uncertain (and often backfiring) sphere of possibilities and obligations that Handke’s *Kaspar* spreads out between subjective action/expression and the (dis)order of concepts and existence becomes via the Barthesian-Kantian reading of a gesture a blank but strictly (yet invisibly) delineated ethical map, which neither shows us our precise location, nor tells us when we are in danger of falling off the map. Such a prerequisite is prone to make a gesture an inexhaustible source of ethico-moral questions and suspicions. It can even be seen as the *unkown ethical knowledge* of theatrical activity. A subject engaged in theatre’s operations bodily, sensorily and conceptually, is impregnated by its ethical challenge, but is unable to determine without qualification what the right or just way to approach this challenge would be. The challenge remains, in the last analysis, a *blocked representation of our ethical obligation*.

Thus we need to consider whether there would be a more acute and ‘morally emancipated’ way to approach this problematique, yet one that still sees the phenomenal world and its peculiarities as the very substance and challenge of its problematisation, as a corporeal and socio-political focal point impregnated by a preceding ethical commitment and commandment. Since the history of Western philosophy has rarely elaborated such an approach as insightfully and disconcertingly as Emmanuel Levinas, I proceed to examine the relations

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<sup>241</sup> Žižek 1997: 229-230. Žižek even goes to the extent of saying that “*the very formal structure of an act is ‘diabolically’ evil...* the obverse of Kant’s insistence of how the pure moral act is impossible, of how one can never be sure that one is acting solely out of consideration for duty, is the far more uncanny fact that the moral act, precisely as *impossible*, is simultaneously *unavoidable*, that which is in a way impossible to transgress. One can transgress only positive moral prescriptions and norms...” (Ibid.: 230.)

between theatre and his thought to present the developing configuration with certain fundamental questions (and even 'exigencies') concerning its socio-political scope. Levinas and Kant share, among other things,<sup>242</sup> the conviction that ethical responsibility is laid on the subject *a priori*, with no egological strings attached, but they deal with this issue in rather different manners.

Although one may say that after Kant the concrete validity of ethics or the moral law still stems from the (subjectively binding) assumption that one's fellow mortal is the true motivator and addressee of one's moral duty, in Levinas' ethical project the neighbour encountered in social interaction, *the Other with an anterior, undefinable and overriding ethical (non-)status*, becomes the very source and denominator of the subject's ethical worth, responsibility and even existence.

This kind of approach to ethics that subordinates the (Self's) subjective position to its social counterpart and lets the preceding ethical significance of the latter reign the situation sovereignly cannot but challenge and widen our conception of an art form like theatre, whose function is, among other things, to stir up social reciprocity and meaning by various (self-)expressions, propositions and dialogic operations. Due to the theoretically challenging and practically compelling ethical import of Levinas' philosophy for the present context, the next chapter constitutes both the most intensive and extensive portion of this work.

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<sup>242</sup> For similarities and differences between Kant and Levinas, see e.g. Freyberg 2005: 153-154 (n. 25), 166 (n.3); Llewelyn 2000; Chalier 2002; Atterton 2001/2008.

## 4. On theatrical thematisation, representation and the Other: Levinasian challenges

As problematic as it may sound, the aim of this chapter is to discuss theatrical thematics and representation by acknowledging and stressing a point of view that seems to fundamentally question any possibility to form a fecund relationship between theatrical activity and the origins (or essentials) of our ethical responsibility. While this premise may suggest that the following pages are committed either to some form of rhetorical dissipation or to artificial merging of ill-assorted elements, I contend that the questions Emmanuel Levinas' unique and in-depth ethical thought poses to our understanding of the operation, content and function of theatre need to be put to use (or at least exhibited in some way), if we want to proceed to assess in the present work whether there is some fundamental ethical justification or rationale for the theatre's status as a site of ethical discussion and judgements.

The main problem of such questioning is that it needs to distinguish between certain specific philosophical formulation of questions and the socio-political and aesthetic *modi operandi* characteristic of theatre (deliberated to a degree in the preceding chapters), and the way in which it strives to engender a dialogue between these two elements must remain cautious and critical even when taking certain rhetorical liberties. When Levinas' thought situates the living human subject — with all its performative and expressive possibilities and intentions — in the world as something *always already* called into question by its responsibility to the unlimited ethical demand that *the Other* (the living and breathing neighbour) and the intangible concept of *the other* (the other as alterity

or otherness) poses to it,<sup>243</sup> it also strives to articulate the very source of the human animal's ethical existence, a conception of ethics that not only constitutes the subject, but at the same time leaves any deliberate ethical intention without reassurance concerning its justification. Moreover, as many of Levinas' views on aesthetic experience and phenomena or the problem of representation present them as issues "in which responsibility is suspended[,]"<sup>244</sup> it means that forming a stable artistic (or theatrical) framework for discussing this particular ethical problematic remains a suspect endeavour.<sup>245</sup>

Thus, while the divergence between these two lines of questioning — Levinas' quest for ethicality and the present quest for the ethicality of theatre — will become clearer along the way, it has to be mentioned at this point that the aim is not to establish a specifically Levinasian theory of the theatre or vice versa, but to compare theatrical thematisation and interaction to Levinas' thought and to let both issues inform each other in a way that acknowledges their fundamental differences. The following pages strive therefore *not* to offer a novel, 'more ethical' way of looking at theatrical activity and representation, but to present topics that may serve as certain points of reference for artistic or theoretical work within or concerning the theatre. Furthermore, as these topics are presented as parallel but not truly compatible elements of the overall discussion, their concurrent informative impact should be considered as a somewhat speculative but at the same time critical issue. Levinas' complex ethical thinking will be discussed rather briefly, for forming a sustainable theoretical framework in regard to theatre here would require a vast battery of

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<sup>243</sup> Hereafter, the concrete fellow mortal will be designated with a capital O and the concept of the other (as otherness) with a lower case letter. Levinas himself is not always consistent in this matter, but as Adriaan T. Peperzak (1996: xiv) mentions, "[a]mong Levinas scholars it has become a convention to reserve "the Other" with a capital for all places where Levinas means the human other[.]" In the present work, the same convention applies to the terms *Self* and *self* as well.

<sup>244</sup> Llewelyn 2000: 170; See Levinas' 'Reality and its shadow' in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (1987a: 1-13).

<sup>245</sup> Again, for an introduction to Levinas' thought, see e.g. his *Existence and Existents* (1947/1978), *Time and the Other* (1947/1987b), *Discovering Existence with Husserl* (1949/1998), *Totality and Infinity* (1961/2005), *Otherwise than Being: or, Beyond Essence* (1974/1981) and *Collected Philosophical Papers* (1987a).

investigations concentrating solely on that issue, and the thematic questions I present later in the text (for example with Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*) focus on certain specific issues, whose ethical significance becomes, perhaps, more salient if we adhere to Levinas' viewpoints.

Although Levinas' work has aroused interest among theatre scholars and practitioners during the past few decades, the difficulty of employing his thoughts to examine theatrical encounters and interaction has, quite naturally, led the discussions to take a more political and aesthetic stance in assessing the ethical framework with which theatre could operate in regard to his views. Nicholas Ridout, for one, brings out some central problems facing the Levinasian approach in his *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (2006) by saying that

[t]he problem with Levinas... is that without some grounding in the concrete, his ethics would seem either to forbid anything (on the basis that any action relative to any potential other might be a violation of the relation of alterity), or to permit everything (on the basis that a rejection of any discursive act on the part of an other would be a violation of the relation of alterity). An ethics that does not permit the theatre-maker or spectator to make meaningful distinctions between, say, a performance by Guillermo Gómez-Peña and a piece of racist propaganda would seem not to be an ethics at all. Or to offer a less clear-cut example, an ethics that does not allow me to experience intense physical and political discomfort in the predicaments generated for audiences by the work of Societàs Raffaello Sanzio is an ethics that is too far removed from concrete actualities to be of much daily use.<sup>246</sup>

Although these comments present a rather simplified notion of Levinasian theory (and Ridout appears to be aware of this), the concerns underlying them are understandable. Levinas' ethical (non- or un-)reasoning privileges the

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<sup>246</sup> Ridout 2006: 30-31. Gómez-Peña is a performance artist whose interdisciplinary work explores the ethical and political perspectives of cross-cultural issues (mainly between the USA and Mexico). Societàs Raffaello Sanzio is known for its thought-provoking performances where the human figure — in all its uniqueness, complexity and frailty — becomes the performative locus of ethical meaning. For information on the latter, see e.g. *The Theatre of Societàs Raffaello Sanzio* (Routledge: London, 2007) by Castellucci & al.

unquestionable ethical demand of alterity over material — or, moreover, somehow mediated — human encounters in a way that seems to leave any subject pursuing an ethical goal via art to operate with ideas and practices, whose ethical content remains ‘hazardous’ in the Levinasian sense, as they contain the possibility of being violations of the subject’s unconditional and ungraspable responsibility towards the Other, or distortions of the uncanny *face-to-face* relationship through which the Other impugnes the ethical sovereignty of the subject. Giving one’s ethical pursuits a meaning — a name or a purpose — also means to harness our original responsibility to serve a *project* (however pious), which cannot be fused with the compelling nature of the responsibility itself.

Any thematisation of this responsibility by means of artistic representation, or, moreover, any analysis of art that strives to provide its readers with an exegesis of the responsibility in question (like the present one), should then be considered remote and somewhat insufficient attempts to catch a glimpse of its original weight. But what would be the actual source of the difficulties facing these endeavours? According to Robert Eaglestone,

Levinas’ suspicion of art comes from two complementary and profoundly interlinked directions. First, Levinas wishes to reject ontological claims for art as something which can give us knowledge of the absolute... or which claim for art a transcendent role beyond ethics and truth... Perhaps more significantly, he also rejects Heideggerian claims for art which argue that art as poetry is ‘founding’ or an ‘origin’. In this he reflects both a Platonic and, perhaps, a Jewish tradition. ... Levinas assigns art a secondary status, at the same level as straightforward materiality... [He] sets himself against the modern truisms of art’s status. Second, Levinas’s work is troubled by the problem of representation. In [his] work, up to and including *Totality and Infinity*, ethics stem from the face-to-face relationship, guaranteed by an assumption of presence. To suggest that presence is only re-presented in material forms, to confuse the issue of presence with the issue of how presence is represented, is to challenge the actual face-to-face relationship with the Other... It is because of this that Levinas is suspicious of

the idea of representation, in art and otherwise, and either ignores representation or attempts to circumvent it.<sup>247</sup>

What is more, Levinas' ethics presents itself as preceding ontological questioning: it puts all being — whether thought of as singular and individual existence or as 'general' and anonymous being (the *being of being*) — to an ethical test before we can state that it has reached (or is able to claim) an ontological status; it questions the reaches of both *a* being and Being itself by claiming that ethics establishes all reasons and possibilities for ontological questioning to appear. If we pursue a certain genealogical reading of Levinas' work, we may notice how his thought moves from questions of existence and being to those of ethics only to illustrate that the latter problematic has guided the former all along, in a fundamental manner.

It is therefore challenging to even think of such questioning; one that cannot be coherently settled within the boundaries of philosophical or conceptual systems, or, which does not — depending on the given viewpoint — constantly name its surroundings as meaningful. But this, according to Levinas, would be the very *disposition* of our *ethicality* — originality without a defined origin, actualisation without conceptual confirmation, appearing of the weight of the metaphysical without any ontological intermediary derived from it. When speaking of the *general economy of being*, Levinas considers that a *conscious being* — and thus also our *subjective ethical existence* —, 'comes to be' in a *hypostasis*<sup>248</sup>, where the subject qua an ethically challenged substantive, the

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<sup>247</sup> Eaglestone 1997: 99, brackets mine. Although both Eaglestone's *Ethical criticism: reading after Levinas* (1997) and Jill Robbins' *Altered reading. Levinas and literature* (1999) concentrate mainly on the specific relations between literature and Levinasian ethics, they have proven to be irreplaceable sources for the present study, not least because of their observant references to various works by Levinas.

<sup>248</sup> See Levinas 1987b: 51-54. "Consciousness is a rupture of the anonymous vigilance of the *there is* [or the being of being, discussed in more detail below]; it is already hypostasis; it refers to a situation where an existent is put in touch with its existing. Obviously I will not be able to explain *why* this takes place. There is no physics in metaphysics. I can simply show what the significance of hypostasis is. [...] In order for there to be an existent in... anonymous existing, it is necessary that a departure from self and a return to self—that is,

responsible *I* (or the *Self*), 'takes up being' or is born to being in its most anonymous sense (*as a verb*). The subject's existence is delivered, or derives from beyond the possibilities of subjective thought, from time immemorial that antedates the essential lifespan and habitat of selfhood. Thus, it is something that establishes the ethicality of a subject, and gives it its present tense, its meaningfulness and the very reaches (or dimension) of its being and self-construction.

But this dimension is something that we have to constantly let go of; we are required to surrender it to the world as ethical responsibility. Renouncing one's own existence in favour of responsibility seems then to reveal — but thus also to problematise — an apprehension (or shadow) of a certain solace, which, in the Levinasian sense, would be to acknowledge ethical responsibility as the foundation of humanity. Despite its unpredictability, the future contains an ethical potential (or demand), which reaches the complex politicality of life prior to the burden of constant categorising. For Levinas, it would be confessionality and acceptance before recognition, 'being towards' or 'being for,' being devoid of an individual destination separate from the horizons of humanity. Therefore, its purpose would not be to lighten the workload of living, but to grant it its initial significance ahead of our own tendency to attach meaning to phenomena. And yet, our relation to this ethical responsibility should *not* be considered as any kind of *symmetry* or *reciprocity*, which, as ideas, would eventually allow 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' It should be accepted as a *pre-existing* (or even '*pre-original*') responsibility passed down on the subject — by *alterity*.

But what should we do with this stigma of ethics stamped on us, if we wish to discuss it in relation to a socially oriented art like theatre (where *oriented* would also predict (sic) an *alteration* of established political and ethical meanings within occidental theatre, yet not referring necessarily to anything oriental)? At which Other or what alterity should the overwhelming responsibility be directed in such a context? Or can we even ask such questions? These vast issues will remain largely untreated in the present work due to its

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that the very work of identity—become possible. Through its identification the existent is already closed up upon itself; it is a monad and a solitude." (Ibid.: 51-52, brackets mine.)



limitations, but some aspects of their compelling nature will be assessed more closely later on.

Prior to that, to provide an introductory detour to some of Levinas' ontological concerns that pave the way for his later thoughts on ethics, and to link these concerns to questions central to theatrical thematisation, I shall proceed to discuss briefly how certain themes in drama and theatre have informed Levinas' early thought, and what he, in turn, has had to contribute to our understanding of the *tragic form*. At this point I also wish to warn the reader of lengthy citations ahead, for Levinas' argumentation is exceedingly subtle and therefore includes numerous risks of partial and unjust interpretation.

## 4.1. The there is and the shadow of reality — with and in friction with the theatre

### 4.1.1 Levinasian views on insomnia, *Macbeth*, the horror of being and *Phaedra*

In one of his early works, *Existence and Existents* (1947/1978), Levinas speaks of our relation to *being in general*, or the *there is* (*il y a*), by repeatedly referring to it as an experience of *insomnia*.<sup>249</sup> He depicts the former as a dreadful presence that evokes a sensation of ceaselessness and separation (or 'rivetedness'). It is separation in a world of obscurity without distinct subjects and objects, where the need to understand differences, forms and their intrinsic relevance is unattainably riveted to this inexorable presence.<sup>250</sup> The subject is 'chained' to the flux of being, where it is "*held to be*. One is detached from any

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<sup>249</sup> Peperzak (1996: ix) says that "*il y a* translates the German *es gibt* (there is), but it receives a very different interpretation from Heidegger's: rather than the generosity of a radical Giving, *il y a* is the name of a dark and chaotic indeterminacy that precedes all creativity and goodness." See Levinas 1978: 57-67.

<sup>250</sup> Levinas finds the word *insomnia* appropriate here for the reason that "we can never envision speaking of an *insomnia-over* [insomnie-à]!" (Levinas 2000: 209.)

object, any content, yet there is presence. This presence which arises behind nothingness is neither *a being*, nor consciousness functioning in a void, but the universal fact of the *there is*, which encompasses things and consciousness.”<sup>251</sup> Subjective existence is constantly overwhelmed by the fact that within and beyond the realm of awareness and participation there is anonymous, unrecognisable and disturbing being that *is* — we are constantly harassed by the fact that *there is*. In its ‘unfounded originality,’ it surpasses even pure negation and death, and thus it cannot be opposed to nothingness. It endures and survives (us and death) by the fact that even nothingness *is*. On the experiential level, as mentioned, it exposes itself as a dread of *remaining*; remaining bound to a flux of shapeless and timeless being — separate from all actualisation in comprehension that would interrupt the state of insomnia as an escape, an evasion of the fatiguing process of being.

For the present enquiry, it is noteworthy that the problematique pertaining to *il y a* (the *there is*) is a theme not unfamiliar to theatre or drama,<sup>252</sup> and Levinas uses certain citations from play texts to illustrate his reasoning. Besides, referring to *Existence and Existents*, Seán Hand notes that “[w]hat is important about the notion of *there is* is not just its effect on philosophical language (Levinas’s references are to Shakespeare rather than to Plato and Hegel, and the poetic nature of a piece dealing with insomnia, sleep and horror can be read as a similar, and entirely logical, challenge)[.]”<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Levinas 1978: 65, first italics mine.

<sup>252</sup> It is necessary to mention at this point that although one is tempted to assimilate the concept of *il y a* with the darkness of the modern auditorium (discussed in the preceding chapters), I consider that the latter is more closely connected to (and a consequence of) the elusive social substance the human animal engages in and lives on, and therefore succeeds Levinas’ understanding of the fact that *there is*. One may find certain similarities in the ways both issues are described, but the ‘receptive non-position’ of the darkened auditorium requires us to assume that it is conditioned by a (communicative and informational) rupture and existence *enabled by the anonymity of being*, a *hypostasis qua consciousness* (or vice versa). At most, we may conjecture here that if the darkened presence of the auditorium is the consequence of a certain communicative motivation, *il y a* denotes the initial stage for all possible motivations in (and as) existence, the very fact by which all being and beings may assume existence and the motivation to exist.

<sup>253</sup> Hand 1989: 29.

The *there is* becomes via Levinas' thought an essential element of tragedy, one of the most significant issues (if not the most significant) affecting the human condition that the tragic form responds to or deals with. He points out how for Macbeth the impossibility of closure (or freedom) in death or murder is grimly evident, and hence all the more troubling: "The times has been / That, when the brains were out, the man would die, / And there an end. But now they rise again / With twenty mortal murders on their crowns, / And push us from our stools. This is more strange / Than such a murder is."<sup>254</sup>

The anti-hero comes to realise that human consciousness and existence, or our subjective *thing-ness* and the possibility of *no-thing-ness* in death therewith, are genuinely and (in)definitely haunted by this relentless nature of being. What truly permeates Macbeth in his distress is not a fear of an opposing *force* or an antagonist. These would represent mere obstacles to subjective existence and not reveal the ultimate challenge of being that denies the human animal any departure from its perpetuity. In his guilt, Macbeth encounters something much more terrifying. Banquo's ghost is not an apparition of what is beyond existence, but of *that-which-is*; that which *is*, within and despite of all that exists, the obscure shadow of pure being that all actualisation (and all beings) must take on and drag along: "What man dare, I dare. / Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear, / The armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger, / Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves / Shall never tremble. Or be alive again, / And dare me to the desert with thy sword: / If trembling I inhabit then, protest me / The baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow! / Unreal mockery, hence!"<sup>255</sup>

Macbeth's horror springs from the fact that the "unreal mockery" the ghost embodies is the 'most real real,' the real beyond realisation, the 'core being of the real,' which, elusively, shadows and outlives the being of all beings and all representations of being. The horror of the subject guilty of murder emanates from the apprehension that we are existentially nourished and withered by this being that has deprived us of our right to finality and closure, and yet this

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<sup>254</sup> Shakespeare 2005: 51; see Levinas 1978: 61. For other views on the relations between the concept of *il y a* and tragedy, see e.g. Nat Leach's 'Historical bodies in a "mental theatre": Byron's ethics of history' (2007/2008).

<sup>255</sup> Shakespeare 2005: 120; see Levinas 1978: 62.

seemingly paradoxical mode of 'being in being' signifies (and retains) both our specific and personal dwelling(s) in existence and the initial and constant dwelling of the *there is*; "the profile of being takes form [even] in nothingness."<sup>256</sup> For Levinas, then, Macbeth's tragic ordeal is to enact and thus to problematise the fact that

[t]o kill, like to die, is to seek an escape from being, to go where freedom and negation operate. Horror is the event of being which returns in the heart of this negation, as though nothing had happened. [...] *This return of presence in negation, this impossibility of escaping from an anonymous and uncorruptible existence constitutes the final depths of Shakespearean tragedy. The fatality of the tragedy of antiquity becomes the fatality of irremissible being.*<sup>257</sup>

Into this discussion Levinas introduces Jean Racine's *Phaedra* (1677), in which the horror and the tragic fate of its heroine are most clearly articulated in her realisation that she cannot hide or free herself from *being*, which proclaims its ceaselessness and severity not only in her unlawful desire for Hippolytus (inherited through the bloodline) or in the Sungod's all-seeing presence, but also, and fundamentally, in the appalling fact that she cannot turn away from being or escape or evade its undetermined course.

Simon Critchley states that Phaedra is an "insomniac of the day,"<sup>258</sup> who, under the omnipresent eyes of her grandfather Helios, the burning sun, experiences still (and, perhaps, even more fiercely) the relentless nocturnal nature of the *il y a*. She hates her life and wants to die, but is irrevocably bound to existence and the *weariness* it lays on her — to a state of "malaise" that most distinctly emerges from the relation between her existence and her "horror at herself[.]" for she is possessed by herself, "by her consciousness of sinfulness."

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<sup>256</sup> Levinas 1978: 62, brackets mine.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.: 61, italics mine. Levinas seems to offer a very apt description of certain scenes in *Macbeth* by mentioning that "[t]he night gives a spectral allure to the objects that occupy it still. It is the "hour of crime," "hour of vice," which also bear[s] the mark of a supernatural reality. *Evil-doers are disturbing to themselves like phantoms.*" (Ibid., brackets and italics mine.) See also Robbins 1999: 95-96.

<sup>258</sup> Critchley 2003: 26. Here Critchley borrows Maurice Blanchot's definition of the artist in *L'écriture du désastre* (Gallimard: Paris, 1980: 185).

(Critchley calls this *malaise* “a dynamic state, even a dramatic state, that arises as a refusal to remain in existence.”)<sup>259</sup>

The figure of Phaedra then shows us existence in the light of a dynamic and dramatic need to *be towards an outside of being*, in the light of certain ‘existendency’ or ‘existence,’ a model of thought adopted by the human subject in order to allow it to escape the there is, which, however, remains ultimately an illusion that can never escape being or even become a sustainable projection that departs being *as being* somehow.<sup>260</sup> She is watched and compelled, in the words of Levinas, by a “nocturnal space” which is “full of the nothingness of everything.” There is “no perspective[.]”<sup>261</sup> Levinas says that “night is the very experience of the there is... When the forms of things are dissolved in the night, the darkness of the night, which is neither an object nor the quality of an object, invades like a presence... [But] it is not the dialectical counterpart of absence, and we do not grasp it through a thought. It is immediately there. There is no discourse.”<sup>262</sup> And later:

Horror carries out the condemnation to perpetual reality, to existence with “no exists”<sup>263</sup> [or exits].

The sky, the whole world’s full of my forefathers.

Where may I hide? Flee to infernal night.

How? There my father holds the urn of doom ...

Phaedra discovers the impossibility of death, the eternal responsibility of her being, in a full universe in which her existence is bound by an unbreakable

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<sup>259</sup> Critchley 2003: 27.

<sup>260</sup> One ontologically (and theatrically) interesting way of looking at the tragic nature of Phaedra’s need to escape or evade being would be to acknowledge Kirkkopelto’s (2005: 22) following phrasing: “Existence” is etymologically certain “unfolding” or “standing outside of oneself”. It is manifesting oneself, the emerging or coming out of the human being. At the same time something of the structure of all manifestation erupts at the site of the human phenomenon. When I exist, when I act, I direct myself elsewhere, I beckon [or refer to] elsewhere, I am “thrown off my stride” — irrevocably.” (Translation and brackets mine.) Racine’s Phaedra is notably *off her stride* and also, regarding the *there is*, somewhat ‘out of bounds.’

<sup>261</sup> Levinas 1978: 58-59.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.: 58, brackets mine.

<sup>263</sup> This might be a misspelling in the translation (by Alphonso Lingis). In Seán Hand’s (1989: 34) adaptation of *Existence and Existents* the expression is translated as “‘no exits.’”

commitment, an existence no longer in any way private. We are opposing, then, the horror of the night, “the silence and horror of the shades,” to Heideggerian anxiety, the fear of being to the fear of nothingness. While anxiety, in Heidegger, brings about “being toward death,” grasped and somehow understood, the horror of the night “with no exits” which “does not answer” is an irremissible existence.<sup>264</sup>

In Critchley’s perceptive and gripping reading of *Phaedra*, the play is linked to “the enabling motif” of Levinas’ work, to the motif “that existence is not the experience of freedom profited in rapture, ecstasy, or affirmation, but rather it is that which we seek to evade in a movement of flight that simply reveals—paradoxically—how deeply riveted we are to the fact of existence.”<sup>265</sup>

Thus although Phaedra’s refusal to live in the world or her turning away from being is an illusionary procedure, Critchley considers that she thus “lives in the truth.”<sup>266</sup> The truth that she lives in (and on?) is “the truth of subjectivity [that] has to be lived apart from the world.”<sup>267</sup> But it is an *impossible truth* qua the impossibility of a *truly sovereign but finite subjectivity*, it is lived (only) in her reflection on her own condition and its relation to the fact of perpetuity, which allows no exceptions either to the royalty or the populace. “The true life is absent[,] but we are in the world[,]”<sup>268</sup> says Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*. Phaedra strives to turn to a true life ‘elsewhere’ only to realise that the absence in question can only be observed *in thought*, from the point of view of one riveted

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<sup>264</sup> Levinas 1978: 62-63, brackets mine. In the version of *Phaedra* in *A Treasury of the Theatre. From Aeschylus to Ostrovsky* (1967: 413-429), edited by John Gassner, Phaedra’s lines (on p. 425) read as follows: “Hypocrisy and incest breathe at once / Through all I do. My hands are ripe for murder, / To spill the guiltless blood of innocence. / Do I still live, a wretch, and dare to face / The holy Sun, from whom I have my being? / My father’s father was the king of gods; / My race is spread through all the universe.— / Where can I hide? In the dark realms of Pluto? / But there my father holds the fatal urn.”

<sup>265</sup> Critchley 2003: 17.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*: 37.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*: 38, brackets mine.

<sup>268</sup> Levinas 2005: 33, brackets mine. The original phrasing goes: ““The true life is absent.” But we are in the world.” For further Levinasian considerations on *escape* and *evasion* in regard to the fact of being, see e.g. his *On Escape. De l’évasion* ([1935/1982]/2003, Stanford University Press: Stanford, Ca.) and John Llewelyn’s *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* (1995, Routledge: Florence, KY): 11-14.

to the 'present and ongoing presence' of being — to which death offers no resolution. To use the words of Lucrece in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*: "Yea, though I die, the scandal will survive..."<sup>269</sup> If we wish to emphasise the overpowering status of the *there is* here, the innermost scandal in Lucrece's situation is perhaps not the act of violence she had to suffer, but the relation of that act to the scandal of being that soils all its participants by its irreversibility and leaves us no refuge.

*Phaedra's* truth seems then to reside in the weight of a paradox. As Critchley perceptively puts it: "[W]e are ineluctably *in* the world, but we are not *of* the world. That is, *we are not what we are in*. Such is the curse of reflection. We are confronted with a world of things, but we are not at one with those things, and that experience of not-at-one-ness with the world *is* the experience of thinking. In other words, the human being is an eccentric creature, an oddity in the universe."<sup>270</sup> What the landscape of these Levinasian considerations and interpretations then has to offer to tragedy is an understanding of the human condition according to which a tragic fate is not necessarily one with a beginning, a predetermined lifespan (like that of Oedipus) and an end in a disaster, a catastrophe (wherein would lie *evasion*). Rather, the tragedy of the human animal is to be momentarily nourished by the unknown fate of being qua being that will neither come to a halt nor truly let off passengers (*through acquittal in death*), no matter what noble, individual sufferings it gives birth to. And these individual sufferings would be, in essence, sufferings of subjectivity, of a *thinking* individual riveted in existence. Critchley thus mentions that Racine's play

gives a very intriguing twist to the Aristotelian conception of tragedy characterized by *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*. Having resolved to die at the beginning of the play, Phaedra becomes persuaded to live in the world. Her recognition at the end of the play is that this is impossible and she revolves to

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<sup>269</sup> Shakespeare 2008b.

<sup>270</sup> Critchley 2003: 38. Unsurprisingly, Gassner (1967: 412) mentions Racine's text to be "a rational demonstration of the irrational."

die once again, only to discover that this is also impossible. Aristotle might understandably have been perplexed.<sup>271</sup>

In *Phaedra*, we are offered a rather different version of doomsday news in anagnorisis; one that does not simply reveal the tragic and sinister state of things, but rather suggests that true tragedy exceeds all forms, themes and closures in which it is revealed to us. The tragedy of being exceeds the tragedy of fatality and catastrophe.

However, Critchley sees that the situation is not necessarily tragic in essence. While discussing the Wooster Group's dramatization of 2002 — emblematically titled “*To you, the Birdie!*”<sup>272</sup>— and Sarah Kane's version of the Phaedra story, *Phaedra's Love* (1996), he says that the tragic eccentricity that breaks its cover in/as human thought “might be even better approached as comic.”<sup>273</sup> The relation between human behaviour and the *there is* can also be observed as an absurd farce, as a futile operation on the body of subjectivity, some sort of surrogate activity that entertains the consciousness instead of allowing it to scream in the face of being.

According to these views we are constantly turning away from the fact of being in a way that insinuates that the very machinery with which we enact this relation (between ourselves and being), namely *thought*, already lets us choose between the genres of comedy and tragedy. Is it (with a Beckettian echo): ‘There is, and that's it!’ Or, in the words of another play by Kane, *4.48 Psychosis* (discussed in more detail later on): “I need to become who I already am and will bellow / forever at this incongruity which has committed me to / hell[.]”<sup>274</sup> To be sure, choosing both genres in the situation, and observing it as a tragicomedy, would mean retracing the meta-genre commonly designated as *life*.

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid.: 37-38.

<sup>272</sup> Critchley describes how in this production Phaedra's malaise was accompanied by “violent and noisome enemas” as well as “noises reminiscent of some anachronistic video game or an imagined soundtrack to a silent movie.” The other characters illustrated the absurdity of the world around Phaedra by playing badminton abstractedly. (Ibid.: 28, 35.)

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.: 38.

<sup>274</sup> Kane 2001: 212.



#### 4.1.2 *Questioning the seriousness and ontological status of theatrical representation*

There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague.

Levinas: 'Reality and Its Shadow'<sup>275</sup>

Regardless of the fairly instructive observations above, the same early work that draws on tragedy to discuss and describe the problematique of being (to which much of Levinas' later thought relates) appears to grant the ontological position of theatrical representation (or *presentation*, the German *Vorstellung*) a secondary status in regard to the weight of existing we are subjected to in the face of being.<sup>276</sup>

For what is at stake for Levinas here is the *fatigue* and "*indolence*" (discussed to a degree earlier with Phaedra) that the fact of being lays on a subject, *prior to reflection*<sup>277</sup> — and these terms are inextricably linked to (or bound up with) a "*weariness*" that regards being and the act of *taking up being*. He explains how there is a "*weariness [that] concerns existence itself. [...] ... in weariness existence is like the reminder of a commitment to exist, with all the seriousness and harshness of an unrevokable contract.*"<sup>278</sup> (It has to be noted then that Phaedra's experience of weariness would be of more profound origin than her own reflection, although, as will be seen later on, this weariness *would not concern her as a fictional character or a theatrical image.*)

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<sup>275</sup> Levinas 1987a: 12.

<sup>276</sup> I also recommend Denis Guénoun's article 'Le temple ou le théâtre' in *Cahiers philosophiques* (No. 113, avril 2008: 40-51), which was written in collaboration with Thomas Newman and deals with the relations between Levinas and theatre. I became aware of the article at too late a stage to include it properly in this work, but wish to thank Professor Esa Kirkkopelto for making me aware of it.

<sup>277</sup> Levinas 1978: 23-26. He mentions that "[t]he attitudes involved in meditation on the "meaning of life," pessimism or optimism, suicide or love of life, however deeply they may be bound up with the operation by which a being is born into existence, take place over and beyond that birth." (Ibid.: 24.)

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.: 24.

Levinas' argumentation is not easily approachable at this point, but it seems that he strives to describe how the essence of fatigue and indolence — bound up in weariness of “everything and everyone, and above all a weariness of oneself” — should be understood both as a grounding relation to being and as an *impossible* existential ‘reaction’ to that relation. Our experience of weariness is based on this (tragic?) condition, it is the fact that makes the fact of one’s personal fatigue possible. *Being, by being being*, says: “one must.” “One has to do something, one has to aspire after and undertake[:]”<sup>279</sup>

Weariness is the impossible refusal of this ultimate obligation. In weariness we want to escape existence itself, and not only one of its landscapes, in a longing for more beautiful skies. An evasion without an itinerary and without an end, it is not trying to come ashore somewhere. Like for Baudelaire’s true travellers, it is a matter of parting for the sake of parting. [...] Weariness does not occur as a judgment about the pain of being... Prior to every judgment, to be tired of everything and everyone is to abdicate from existence. The refusal is *in weariness*.<sup>280</sup>

But what would challenge the act of theatrical representation or the imagery it displays to us in such a context? Mainly the effect Levinas’ understanding of weariness, fatigue and indolence would have on our conception of the ontological status of the theatrical image and its lifeline in mimesis. For when talking about the *indolence* related to our need to abdicate from existence, Levinas sees that it is (unsurprisingly) “essentially tied up with the beginning of an action: the stirring, the getting up.” It “concerns beginning, as though existence were not there right off, but preexisted the beginning in an inhibition.” If my reading of this problematique is correct, it would be more like a reaction — *as a relation* — to the *impossibility of beginning* (which only later takes place in *hesitation*), a relation to the question whether setting off something would

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<sup>279</sup> Levinas 1978: 24-25.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.: 25. Levinas elaborates his point here by saying that “[w]eariness by all its being effects this refusal to exist; it is only in the refusal to exist. It is, we might say, the very way the phenomenon of the refusal to exist can come about, just as in the order of experience, vision alone is the apprehension of light and hearing alone the perception of sound.” (Ibid.)

already be 'rejoining being' regardless of the spontaneity of the effort, coiling back to (and also ahead of) the moment of any initiative or decision — it would be, in itself, the problematique pertaining to the concept of *instant* and its relation to being. Indolence would thus not only precede (and beget) the experience of indecisiveness, but also shadow the realisation of an act: "[i]t may inhere in the act that is being realised, in which case the performance rolls on as on a ill-paved road, jolted about by instants each of which is a beginning all over again. The job does not flow, does not catch on, is discontinuous — a discontinuousness which is perhaps the very nature of "a job."”<sup>281</sup> Effectively, the concepts of weariness and indolence embrace a certain *seriousness* in Levinas' ontological questioning, they concern the very complexity through which an existent has to take up (its) existence, or, perhaps, through which existence takes over the existent.

What becomes challenging from a theatrical point of view in this context is the fact that Levinas mentions how “theatre has always been interpreted as a game[,]” and this interpretation derives, according to him, from theatre's quality as a game *whose beginning lacks seriousness*.<sup>282</sup> Without discussing here whether it has *always* been interpreted as a game, or what such interpretations actually and ultimately contain, we need to observe what Levinas makes of the issue. To him, games begin like jobs or actions, but as their “beginnings lack seriousness[,]” they are “levity itself [:] One can drop them at any moment. A game is made up of gestures, movements, decisions and feelings — [like] so many acts which begin, but its reality qua game is enacted above that basis, and is essentially made of unreality.”<sup>283</sup> This would make theatre and the imagery it produces

a reality that leaves no traces; the nothingness that preceded it is equal to that which follows it. Its events do not have real time. A game has no history. It is a paradoxical kind of existence which is not prolonged into a having. In a game an

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.: 26.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., brackets mine.

instant is, but does not hold on to itself, does not sustain a relationship of possession with itself.”<sup>284</sup>

Theatre would thus never “leave anything behind after it vanishes[,]” because it never “really began for good.” Although Phaedra’s thematic relevance for the issues concerning our existential weariness became evident above, her status as a theatrical image, as a product of a *game*, or, moreover, her paradoxical existence in theatrical co-presence, as an element of a game, would make her a phenomenon that *never really begins for good*. Her appearing and existence as a contractual (and thus ‘*contra-actual*’) entity can never be extended into “a having” by which the effort of taking on reality is coloured.<sup>285</sup> The situation is further described by Levinas when he explains how

[a]n abandoned temple is still inhabited by its god, an old house falling into disrepair is still haunted by the ghosts of those who lived there, but an empty theater is terribly deserted. We can still sense the presence of Sarah Bernhardt or Coquelin who acted in it, but Phedre or Cyrano de Bergerac have left nothing of their despair or their sorrow. They have dissipated like pale clouds intermingling, affected by that nothingness which constitutes the essential atmosphere of a theater after a performance.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> According to Levinas (1978: 27) taking on reality is like being “on a trip where one always has to look after one’s baggage, baggage left behind or baggage one is waiting for. An act is not pure activity; its being is doubled up with a having which both is possessed and possesses. The beginning of an act is already a belongingness and a concern for what it belongs to and for what belongs to it. Inasmuch as it belongs to itself it conserves itself, and itself becomes a substantive, a being... It is concerned with itself.” As these views also seem to draw a distinction between actual existence and game-like existence (i.e., the status Levinas grants to theatrical representation), I strongly recommend comparing them to Heidegger’s views on *nō* theatre in Chapter 3.1 in this work (and in Heidegger 1982: 18-19), as well as to Kirkkopelto’s conception of a gesture in Chapter 2.2.1 (and in Kirkkopelto 2005: 20). Strangely enough, Levinas’s description of taking on reality seems to attract quite similar meanings that the latter two find in performative activity that deals with the possibilities of creating illusionary (but non-totalisable) landscapes, figures and images.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.: 26-27.

Levinas' point here appears to be that Sarah Bernhardt (whose famous performance as Phaedra took place in 1874<sup>287</sup>) is an agent subject to the "one must" in being and thus to the weariness that precedes any conscious experience (of indolence and fatigue) or effort, and that the ontological position of Phaedra as a theatrical image is not comparable to Bernhardt's act of taking up that very image. We might even ask whether Bernhardt is a more tragic figure than Phaedra here, for she participates in *taking up a game*, in an existentially impossible or incommensurable task in the Levinasian sense. Although Levinas does not address this issue directly here, Bernhardt's *job of keeping up a game* seems to make her a doubly suspect phenomenon in regard to the seriousness of being. Phaedra's existence as an image is certainly made up "of gestures, movements, decisions and feelings[.]" but the job of constituting the possibility of such an image would be, quite naturally, Bernhardt's ordeal, as an existent whose *act of taking up acting* — insofar as this act somehow concerns the prolongation of her own existence — is riveted to the problematic that makes any beginning in regard to existence a 'serious business.' Thus although we can say that Bernhardt's performance 'caught on' (in contrast to Levinas' description of the nature of a "job"), her effort of performing Phaedra was — if we follow Levinas —, both something quite distinct from the paradoxical existence of the phenomenon of Phaedra and something suspicious in regard to any 'real job' whose beginning would not lack seriousness. However serious Phaedra's existential message may be, her position as a theatrical figure remains, in the Levinasian reading, one whose contra-actual or 'game-like' nature leaves her/(it) devoid of any sustainable existential relation to the weariness of being, or, moreover, to the horror we encounter in facing the unseen face of the there is. Situating a theatrical image or a poetic figure in the same problematic (and serious) relation as that which we find between an existent and existence — or, moreover, harnessing one to problematise that relation — would be, in my interpretation, to confuse the *fatigue prior to reflection* with *reflection on fatigue*, because the theatrical image demands taht a conscious experience and a 'game-

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<sup>287</sup> Information obtained from the Sarah Bernhardt Pages web site, listing of plays (<http://www.templeresearch.eclipse.co.uk/sarah/plays.htm>, 1 December 2008). According to Banham (2000: 99) Bernhardt's first famous performance as Phaedra took place in 1877.

like contract' appear. Thus, even though it might seem that we have discovered nothing new with this line of thought, that we have just observed how the essence of *unreality* is not the same as that of *reality*, the Levinasian lesson here would be that the *imagery* created for *reflecting on* (or *responding to*) the weight of existence — *laid on the subject prior to cognition* — does not match up to its target, it remains a *shadow* of the phenomenon it strives to comprehend, even *an obscure shadow in an ontological sense*.

But should this situation trouble us? Is there a further problematique involved, one with some substantial ethical consequences? To examine these questions I need to turn to another essay by Levinas from roughly the same time, namely 'Reality and its shadow,' which is the most intensive analysis of art in his early work regarding its aesthetic and ontological nature. It is there that Levinas pays close attention to the shadow-like ontological quality of art works, and to the consequences of this quality for their relation to being and thought.<sup>288</sup>

In Chapter 2.2., I discussed the *relation* between theatrical representation and its enactment through the operation of mimesis as an issue that refers to an infinite, inherent and immediate distance inaugurated by the stageliness (or the 'stagely possibility') of phenomena, as something that appears to exceed (and antecede) the closure of truth in representation. As a gestural phenomenon, it was described as a *situated appearing-to-be* that still allows for a 'pure possibility' in that situation and its appearance; something that in Kirkkopelto's terms became an activity that constantly strives towards something it, in itself, creates — *as* activity. Furthermore, its problematique was approached by acknowledging how in the theatre, where it is staged, where it is *onstage*, it becomes something *knowable* and *at hand*, something that allows for the co-existence of presence and absence, "an epistemological modality of momentary freedom that allows the *other* and the self to be[.]"<sup>289</sup> in the words of Causey. Regarding moral and ethical considerations, it was assessed as a *threshold* of further (but constantly postponed) interest, something that relates to Adrian Kear's view on the operation of mimesis according to which its very essence (or

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<sup>288</sup> See also Eaglestone 1997: 104-111; Rapaport 1997: 49-54; Robbins 51-54.

<sup>289</sup> Causey 2006: 188.

signature) “puts the ethical into suspension — making it possibility rather than actuality” as it transmutes “ethics from the domain of known qualities to a sphere of pure potentiality.”<sup>290</sup> The potentiality was then reexamined via Guénoun’s, Žižek’s and Heidegger’s insights, compressed between the socio-political motivations on which it lives and for which it offers itself in the first place; that is, the specific problematic pertaining to *potentiality* and *actuality* became more involved with the aspects that view theatre as an ethically intriguing human phenomenon.

However, all this assumes a peculiar and challenging set of meanings when read in light of ‘Reality and its shadow.’ There Levinas discusses art by asking whether it bears an essential relation to the “*non-truth* of being,” to “what is left over after *understanding*,” and whether its function “in not understanding” is dependent on an *obscurity* which provides it “with its very element and a completion sui generis, foreign to dialectics and the life of ideas.” And next: “Does not the commerce with the obscure, as a totally independent ontological event, describe categories irreducible to those of cognition?”<sup>291</sup> These questions largely arise from his reading of the *dogmatic understanding of art* according to which art puts us in touch with certain knowledge, offers us something unforeseen in being and reality or shows us reality in a specific light (remember the romantic understanding of mimesis as a form of *creation*) — and this activity is always coloured by a sense of *completion*. There is a final touch, a gesture of departure in every art work that gives it its specific nature, an *atmosphere* or an *emphasis* the aesthetic experience then encounters.

Yet, maintaining, as above, that a *theatrical gesture* is an act which strives to reach that which it constantly generates, *as* activity, it may be assumed that the atmosphere of completion it bears would be, according to this very logic, the irreducible relation between the process of its realisation and its status as *a* realisation —i.e., it would offer the (somewhat tragic) form of ‘completion in *incompletion*,’ exhibiting the minimal but inevitable mimetic distance intrinsic to all ‘carrying out appearing,’ of which the human animal cannot rid itself. And

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<sup>290</sup> Kear 2005: 31.

<sup>291</sup> Levinas 1987a: 3.

yet, in the Levinasian reading, such an interpretation would also suggest that the obscurity of art — its essence as *non-truth*, as a surplus to truth and conceptual activity — is an even more fundamental and problematic issue in/for the theatre. Unfolding the questions of creation and completion by challenging their elementary status, Levinas claims that

[a]rt does not know a particular type of reality; it contrasts with knowledge. It is the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow. To put it in theological terms, which will enable us to delimit however roughly our ideas by comparison with contemporary notions: art does not belong to the order of revelation. Nor does it belong to that of creation, which moves in just the opposite direction.<sup>292</sup>

This fairly radical insight — contentious already at the time of its introduction in 1948<sup>293</sup> — is due to Levinas' view according to which “[t]he most elementary procedure of art consists in substituting for the object its *image*. Its image, and *not its concept*.”<sup>294</sup> Our relation to the image, in turn, is not one in which we grasp or conceive it like a real object while maintaining “a living relationship” with it. Instead, the image “neutralizes” such a relationship, it expresses the “disinterestedness of artistic vision” which “signifies above all a blindness to concepts.” By its disinterestedness, it excludes the notions of “freedom” and “bondage,” it “does not engender a conception, as do scientific cognition and truth... An image marks *a hold* over us rather than our initiative, a fundamental passivity.”<sup>295</sup> Levinas mentions that we are gripped by the imaginary surplus of art to truth and reality — by its very ‘magic’ or its ‘spell’ — for several reasons, some of which seem to address the assumed origin of theatre in religious rituals, in the captivating and creative potential of their

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<sup>292</sup> Levinas 1987a: 3.

<sup>293</sup> Eaglestone (1997: 100): “As Seán Hand argues..., [Reality and Its Shadow] is in no small part a reaction to the work of Sartre, and indeed, the ‘Sartrean objections’ offered by the editorial board of *Les Temps Modernes* [in which the essay was first published] confirm this.” (Brackets mine.) There have also been suggestions that Levinas’ text is a response to Heidegger’s ‘On the Origin of the Work of Art.’ (See Eaglestone 1997: 126, n. 11 & 12.)

<sup>294</sup> Levinas 1987a: 3, italics mine.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, italics mine.



performative structure. From music Levinas draws the idea of *rhythm*, which for him

designates not so much an inner law of the poetic order as the way the poetic order [or artistic creation as obscurity which fascinates, as ‘covering up’ and opacity, as the non-truth of being] affects us, closed wholes whose elements call for one another like the syllables of a verse, but do so only insofar as they impose themselves on us, disengaging themselves from reality. *But they impose themselves on us without our assuming them.* Or rather, our consenting to them is inverted into a participation. Their entry into us is one with our entry into them. Rhythm represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it. The subject is part of its own representation.<sup>296</sup>

The same kind of quality of fascination and ‘entanglement’ rhythm generates — the “passage from oneself to anonymity... the captivation or incantation of poetry and music” — also emerges in Levinas’ discussion on images, which “are interesting, without the slightest sense of utility, interesting in the sense of *involving*, in the etymological sense<sup>297</sup> — to be *among* things which should have had only the status of objects.” He detaches the terms rhythm and musical “from the arts of sound where they are ordinarily envisioned [sic] exclusively,” and places them “into a general aesthetic category.” In an image we may thus witness the very quality of sound, which “resounds impersonally. Even its timbre, a trace of its belonging to an object, is submerged in its quality, and does not retain the structure of a relation.”<sup>298</sup> In turn, the *interest* an image bears follows its own etymological origin by being ‘in between,’ it exhibits its own suspicious *inter-*

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<sup>296</sup> Levinas 1987a: 4, brackets mine. Here note must be taken of the hold the operation of mimesis would have on a spectating/listening subject (discussed in Ch. 3), as it introduces the latter into various foreign and peculiar positions, situations and relationships.

<sup>297</sup> “From L. *involvere* “entangle, envelop,” lit. “roll into,” from *in-* “in” + *volvere* “to roll.”” (*Online Etymology Dictionary* web site, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=involve&searchmode=none>, 12 May 2008.)

<sup>298</sup> Levinas 1987a: 4-5, brackets mine.

*esse* (of artistic disinterestedness),<sup>299</sup> it does not extend itself in between reality and that which it brings forth as an image (its very quality as an image), but between *what is* and the observer of an image as a relation whose sides are precisely the *observer* and the *image*, they *involve* each other in a way that cannot be extended into a “living relationship” — this contract (or ‘contra-act,’ as it induces a certain passivity<sup>300</sup> in the observer) is not primarily motivated by a conception of truth that drives one to cope with the world: instead, it operates as ‘bewitchment.’ An image, in its very *imagining* nature, relies, like poetry and music, on “a mode of being to which applies neither the form of consciousness, since the I is there stripped of its prerogative to assume... nor the form of unconsciousness, since the whole situation and all its articulations are in a dark light, *present*. Such is a waking dream. Neither habits, reflexes, nor instinct operate in this light.”<sup>301</sup> We experience in it the very work of the work of art, but not as the work of truth. Like a sound, it is perceptible, but devoid of any ‘conceptual immediacy’ in its very structure, *as it is*. While it still seems, in this way, to bear the structure of a *reference*, this reference would be to its own operation (to its emergence as an image), to the peculiar space and time it occupies. If an image borrows its irreversible detachment from any object from

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<sup>299</sup> Llewelyn (2000: 170): “According to Levinas the disinterestedness of art is a consequence of its inter-est-edness, its *intér-esse-ment*. Art is disengaged because it is ontological. Art suspends finality and does not go beyond the confines of being.”

<sup>300</sup> Levinas 1987a: 3. “An image is musical. Its passivity is *directly visible* in magic, song, music, and poetry. The exceptional structure of aesthetic existence invokes this singular term magic, which will enable us to make the somewhat worn-out notion of passivity precise and concrete.” (Italics mine.) As the abovementioned terms (magic, song, etc.) describe the multifaceted possibilities of expression in the theatre, we may need to ask whether the present *problematique* concerns theatre *par excellence*.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*: 4. Eaglestone (1997: 105) sums up Levinas’ treatment of images by saying that “[w]e become involved — fallen into — images and thus the world, our world, is deconceptualised. Reality is disincarnated by the simple action of supplying an image for an object: the actual world is left behind. For Heidegger, art ‘worlds’ the world, it brings us into closer ontological contact with a more real reality. For Levinas, art bewitches us into involvement, but specifically not with the world as reality, but with something else, with *non-being*. “ (Italics mine.) Considering some further arguments in Levinas’ essay it seems, however, that art bewitches us rather into involvement with the *non-truth of being* (as distinct from *non-being*), as our aesthetic experience is still bound up with the (corporeal) “density of being” but distracted by the ‘disincarnation’ of art in regard to that density.

the realm of music and sound, and if it shows itself to us as an independent — but *involving* — projection without that which is being projected, it also seems to dissolve any true *conception* of the “world it represents,” the very possibility of the transparency of the image, by referring only to its own complexity and obscurity that supersedes a “living relationship.” With art,

the subject is among things not only by virtue of its density of being, requiring a “here,” a “somewhere,” and retaining its freedom; it is among things as a thing, as part of the spectacle. It is exterior to itself, but with an exteriority which is not that of a body, since the pain of the I-actor is felt by the I-spectator, and not through compassion. Here we have really an exteriority of the inward.<sup>302</sup>

While these claims seem to invoke certain Žižekian and Hegelian aspects regarding the role of the spectator in a performance situation — where the spectator is an integral element of the *mise-en-scène* or where “‘I’ sees ‘I’ seeing ‘I’ as mere appearance, thus staging a negation of ‘I’”<sup>303</sup> — they (the claims) are more concerned with the way in which an image (as image) distinguishes itself from an object (or from *a symbol, a sign, and a word*), namely with *resemblance*. Instead of assuming that resemblance simply stops thought on the image, Levinas mentions that “we take resemblance not as the result of a comparison between an image and the original, but as the very movement that engenders the image.” It seems thus to refer directly to the way we have discussed the *problematique* of mimesis so far. The congruence becomes more evident and binding when Levinas proceeds to say that with resemblance

[r]eality would not be only what it is, what it is disclosed to be in truth, but would be also its double, its shadow, its image. Being is not only itself, it escapes itself [as it seemed to do with the figure of Phaedra]. Here is a person who is what he is; but he does not make us forget, does not absorb, cover over entirely the objects he holds and the way he holds them, his gestures, limbs, gaze, thought, skin, which escape from under the identity of his substance, which like a torn sack is unable to contain them. Thus a person bears on his face,

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<sup>302</sup> Levinas 1987a: 5, 4.

<sup>303</sup> Causey 2006: 189.

alongside of its being with which he coincides, its own caricature, its picturesqueness. [...] We will say the thing is itself and is its image. And that this relationship between the thing and its image is resemblance.<sup>304</sup>

This means for Levinas that “[a]n image... is an allegory of being.” An image, like allegory, engenders “an ambiguous commerce with reality in which reality does not refer to itself but to its reflection, its shadow.” Whereas truth is achieved in cognition, artistic creation introduces allegory (and thus the *non-truth of being*) into the world. This way, art falls within (and even beyond?) its own obscurity, to operate with/as this very obscurity, *to function through that which in non-truth addresses the sensible nature of being*. There are “two contemporary possibilities of being. [...] Non-truth is not an obscure residue of being, but is its sensible character itself, by which there is resemblance and images in the world.” The sensible character of non-truth means that the *absolute* (or *unconditional Being*) exposes itself not only to reason, but also to an “erosion... outside of all causality.” The *simultaneity of being and its disclosure* allows for a “simultaneity of a being and its reflection.” Through resemblance and imitation, participation creates “shadows, distinct from the participation of the Ideas in one another which is revealed to the understanding. The discussion over the primacy of art or of nature — does art imitate nature or does natural beauty imitate art? — fails to recognise the simultaneity of truth and image.”<sup>305</sup> The economy of resemblance then resides within the general economy of being, it opens up as the *structure of the sensible as such*. It is being that reveals something other than the essence emitted by truth. It is, in itself, a phantom-like and shadow-like essence, which in an image neutralizes any active position that we might take in regard to it.

Although the above configuration exposes the fact that we are still observing the specific essence of art from a certain metaphorical perspective, from a distance that does not truly ‘put resemblance into words or the world,’ Levinas explains that the image is precisely the caricature, the allegory and the picturesque element that reality covers itself with, that which it “bears on its own

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<sup>304</sup> Levinas 1987a: 6, brackets mine.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.: 6-7.

face.” Consequently, the “unreality” of an image bears a peculiar ontological significance, since the “semblance of existing” it lives on ‘works away’ just as being does, but as phenomenality away from any occurrence, instant, beginning or ending that marks the pace of reality — it takes (its) place in a “*meanwhile*,” which is due to the fact that the caricaturing nature of the image presents it as an idol and, moreover, reveals its “stupidness as an idol.”<sup>306</sup> To accept this approach is then to say that “every image is in the last analysis plastic, and that every artwork is in the end a statue[,]” which, qua statue, “realises the paradox of an instant that endures without a future. [...] ... it has in its own way a quasi-eternal duration.” A statue lives “a lifeless life, a derisory life which is not master of itself, a caricature of life.” Moreover, as some earlier remarks imply, “[e]very image is already a caricature[,]” and a somewhat tragic one for Levinas, as it always bears a tragi-comic “ambiguity” that “constitutes the particular magic of poets like Gogol, Dickens, Tchekov — and Molière, Cervantes, and above all, Shakespeare.”<sup>307</sup>

Even as art forms such as theatre — or music, cinema and literature — introduce the concept of *time* into the images they exhibit, it seems that they cannot shatter the abovementioned fixity.<sup>308</sup> We might even say that insofar as theatrical activity strives to link the (the creation of) figural *meanwhiles* to *duration* and the acuteness of being, it faces an impossible task or configuration. For example, in traditional representational theatre — that is, theatre that invests in (acts of) representation and thus in different narratives that strive to reshape the manifestation of truth in being —, its *characters qua images* (like Phaedra) remain in the Levinasian reading beings whose being

*resembles* itself, doubles itself and immobilizes. Such a fixity is wholly different from that of concepts, which initiates life, offers reality to our powers, to truth, opens a dialectic. By its reflection in a narrative, being has a non-dialectical fixity, stops dialectics and time. [...] Something somehow completed arises in it

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<sup>306</sup> Levinas 1987a: 7-8, italics mine.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.: 8-9.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.: 10.

[a literary work],<sup>309</sup> as though a whole set of facts were immobilized and formed a series... The events related form a *situation* — akin to plastic ideal. That is what myth is: the plasticity of history. What we call the artist's choice is the natural selection of facts and traits which are fixed in a rhythm, and transform time into images.<sup>310</sup>

The lifeless life of an instant that has petrified and prolongs itself as a situation, as a plastic ideal, constitutes already a relationship with death in which the latter is not a true interruption but is overtaken by the duration of the 'fate' of the artwork, the fate that is not towards death but towards its own 'remaining' (as if in an interval), towards the remaining of the *meanwhile* that separates art from being as a sphere "which a being is able to traverse, but in which its shadow is immobilized." This "eternal duration of the interval" differs radically from the eternity the human animal turns to by utilising concepts that relate to the truth of being. Instead, the interval, the meanwhile of artistic creation, is "never finished, still enduring — something inhuman and monstrous."<sup>311</sup>

This appears to be the main reason why Levinas relates art to paganism and idols, or to the feature in human nature that strives to prolong existence beyond the idea of death by offering it a permanent dwelling *elsewhere*. It is also interesting to note that although certain objections ("plus optimiste") to Levinas' conception of art ("plus pessimiste")<sup>312</sup> were particularly Sartrean in nature, Sartre himself seems to have been fascinated by different 'meanwhiles' as a playwright, as we may find them in some of his philosophically charged works; like the drawing room in *No Exit* (1944) or Franz's room in *The Condemned of Altona* (1960).<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Levinas speaks mainly of prose here, but taking into account the overall argumentation of his essay and its references to various theatrical means of expression, I find it justifiable to include traditional theatrical ways of narration (or representation) in this very context. See also e.g. James A. Knapp's 'Visual and Ethical Truth in *The Winter's Tale*' (2004: 266). Knapp employs Levinas' conception of art in 'Reality and Its Shadow' to discuss, among other things, the representational features of art in Shakespeare's play.

<sup>310</sup> Levinas 1987a: 10.

<sup>311</sup> Levinas 1987a: 11.

<sup>312</sup> See Eaglestone 1997: 100, 126 n. 11.

<sup>313</sup> E.g. Sartre 1976: 1-47; Sartre 1965.

Echoing also some aspects of Beckett’s metaphysical term the *inexplicable*<sup>314</sup> in Ch. 2.1.2 (presenting darkness and light, at the same time), the above understanding of art — which perceives its “dark light,” its “lifeless life” and its “eternal interval” — seems to suggest that an objective or ‘life-like’ stance towards artistic creations qua images (with a fascination comparable to that of incantation and rhythm) runs, to begin with, into a complex ontological problematique which threatens to disengage its analytic tools from its very material. One may thus also notice that the description of the theatrical event as a *shocking utopian second* I presented earlier takes on a quite challenging meaning here. Although many thinkers of the theatre have been informed by the *temporary distance* (or distancing) between reality and theatrical imagery, by the way this (mimetic) distance *re-creates* and reassesses the possibilities of the identity of life itself, the Levinasian reading of art teaches us that this movement — qua artistic creation — remains an *evasion* of reality and being, where, in the end, “myth takes the place of [being’s] mystery.”<sup>315</sup> A decisive *ethical challenge* in this configuration would be the fact that art, by overrunning the mystery of being with its ‘fixated’ mythicity, is then “essentially disengaged,” it “constitutes, in a world of *initiative and responsibility*, a dimension of *evasion*.”<sup>316</sup>

However, perhaps precisely because of this observation (and in accordance with some conclusive statements in Levinas’ essay), one may say that to adopt

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<sup>314</sup> Again, the etymological origin of the term (*in-* “not” + *ex-* “out” + *plicare* “to fold”) may inform us (and theatre) here if we wish to bring the Heideggerian conception of art (as unfolding) into play with Levinas’ suspicions. The fascinating nature of the co-presence of darkness and light and its theatrical derivative as the ‘*inexplicable*’ appears to articulate, in itself, a situation which ‘cannot be folded out’ of its problematic ontological position in order to grasp truth, being or reality — i.e., the ‘truth’ it contains or presents us with would be only ‘true to itself,’ true to the relation it maintains with itself and its own operation by *involving*. Levinas’ concern is precisely the fact that art *involves* and does not *explicate*.

<sup>315</sup> Levinas 1987a: 12, brackets mine.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, italics mine. “We find appeasement when, beyond the invitations to comprehend and act, we throw ourselves into the rhythm of a reality which solicits only its admission into a book or a painting... The world to be built is replaced by the essential completion of its shadow. *This is not the disinterestedness of contemplation but of irresponsibility*. The poet exiles himself from the city. From this point of view, the value of the beautiful is relative.” (*Ibid.*, italics mine.)

an analytic (i.e., a more engaged and committed) attitude towards artworks — e.g. through criticism or scientific contemplation — is to move through (or even beyond) the spell and magic of art's non-truth, back to reality, understanding and truth. In Levinas' own words, it would be “to say when everything has been said,” to “say about the work something else than the work.”<sup>317</sup> He even goes to the extent of offering us a way to return the questions concerning the non-truth of art works to ontological contemplation as a resource of developing the latter's conceptual possibilities. As the philosophical aspects of criticism and scientific analysis are able to move (conceptually) between the meanwhile and the work of being by interpreting and uncovering the reaches of truth in the dimension of evasion an artist gives birth to, they reintroduce the mythical world of images and idols to the “intelligible world,” the world wrapped up in the mystery of being. This would be the very reason why

the artwork can and must be treated as a myth: the immobile statue has to be put in movement and made to speak. Such an enterprise is not the same as a simple reconstruction of the original from the copy. Philosophical exegesis will measure the distance that separates myth from real being, and will become conscious of the creative event itself, an event which eludes cognition, which goes from being to being by skipping over the intervals of the meanwhile. Myth is then at the same time untruth and the source of philosophical truth, if indeed philosophical truth involves a dimension of intelligibility proper to it, not content with laws and causes which connect beings to one another, but searching for the work of being itself.<sup>318</sup>

To be sure, such a quest entails theoretical and ethico-politically coloured choices and limitations. But that appears to be one of the main reasons why the non-dialectically operating meanwhile should enter into a dialogue with the opinions struggling to solve the mystery of being, informing those opinions. Although this observation — familiar within the field of aesthetic research by now — does not necessarily revise the way we think of art works, it is much concerned about the ethical dimensions of the process with which the artist

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid.: 2.

<sup>318</sup> Levinas 1987a: 13.



employs the mythical substance, the imposing (and involving) non-truth of being, about the *responsibility* that comes with such an evasive move.

It is in this context that we need to examine whether theatre is somehow able to surpass or enhance the above problematique in an ethical sense, as an artform that — at least from the viewpoint that stresses its temporal and physical aspects and thus its nature as a dynamic occurrence of human (co-)presences — relies heavily on constant (dialectical) movement between various images and the events of creation that reveal those images to us as *apparent gestures of being*; that is, as it not only strives to ‘sketch out’ and redefine the reaches of being, but makes us encounter, in the words of Michel Foucault, “without any trace of representation (copying or imitating)... the cries of bodies, and the gesturing of hands and fingers.”<sup>319</sup>

I wish to add here a third Levinasian line of questioning that deals with the *imaginary* problematic above, one that he presents in *Difficult Freedom* (1963/1997). There he utilises theatrical terminology to examine and criticise Paul Claudel’s *figural* reading (or “personal exegesis”<sup>320</sup>) of the Old Testament in *Emmaüs*. While we are still quite far from any concrete understanding of theatrical manifestation with this analysis of Claudel’s text, it makes certain observations that can be connected to the fundamental (socio-symbolic) understanding of theatricality glimpsed with Žižek above. Referring to the imaginative (and mythical) connections between the Old Testament and Christian thought created by Claudel in his work, the essay entitled ‘Persons or Figures (On *Emmaüs*, by Paul Claudel)’ turns attention to the way in which Judaic tradition expresses in its narratives the problematique of life — the ‘hither side’ of being, reality — in order to describe the ethical import of concrete situations the human animal encounters. It thus reveals several efforts to understand the human conscience, instead of casting these descriptions or narratives into metaphorical and mythical fixity as some Christian exegeses (like Claudel’s) have done in their creative interpretations:

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<sup>319</sup> Foucault’s ‘Theatrum Philosophicum’ in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, NY, 1977: 220) quoted in Puchner 2002b: 525.

<sup>320</sup> Levinas 1997: 119.

If every pure character in the Old Testament announces the Messiah, if every unworthy person is his torturer and every woman his Mother, does not the Book of Books lose all life with this obsessive theme and endless repetition of the same stereotyped gestures? Does the spiritual dignity of these men and women come to them through reference to a drama operating on a miraculous level, in some mythological and sacred realm, rather than from the meaning that this life, which is conscience, gives itself?<sup>321</sup>

In her study on the ethical relations between Levinas' thought and literature, Jill Robbins pays close attention to the problematic concerning the figurative reaches of theatre that emerges in this analysis of Claudel's work. She considers (in line with Levinas) that the problem of "prefiguration"<sup>322</sup> revealed in it, the figural reading of the Old Testament that 'double casts' its characters (to suit the messianic purposes of Christian thought) "covers up "freedom," that is, the heteronomous freedom in responsibility that a Judaic reading of the same testament could reveal."<sup>323</sup>

It thus speaks of an ethical loss in a situation where man 'begins to figure.' Referring to Levinas' later mature works, where the ethical demand for responsibility precedes all forms and figures through which its position is constantly re-negotiated, Robbins proceeds to describe the ethical problems the traditional theatrical apparatus would have to face as a 'figural generator:'

To take on a character (*une figure*) is to risk *becoming* a figure, and thereby to lose what is human, to be turned into a statue, to be turned into stone. To take up a character is said to render one incapable of distinguishing illusion from reality, "stage" from "world," a directorial command from a divine one. In short, it is not just the figures of figural interpretation that are said to cover up the ethical. It

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<sup>321</sup> Levinas 1997: 121.

<sup>322</sup> Although noted earlier how in Levinas' eyes scientific analyses of art should be able "say about the work something else than the work[.]" this would, in many cases at least, involve a certain process (and problem) of prefiguration. For example, historiographic approaches to theatre sometimes utilise titles wherein a certain play, performance or artist is *named as* a representative of some ideological or socio-political movement or situation. Moreover, for an acute example of prefiguration, one only needs to look into this work, which is, undeniably, filled with 'prefigurative transitions.'

<sup>323</sup> Robbins 1999: 49.

is as if figures themselves were unethical, as if anything that *plays* were ethically suspect.<sup>324</sup>

The friction between the figures of the Old Testament and their Christian double casting in “a Passion that is always already a passion play”<sup>325</sup> leads Levinas to ask the following questions: “Are we on the stage, or are we in the world? Does obeying God involve receiving a role from Him or receiving an order?” The theatrical dimensions of this situation are then considered further as he states that “[w]e distrust theatre, the petrification of our faces, the figure that our person weds. We distrust poetry, which scans and bewitches our gestures; we distrust everything which, in spite of us, throws up a deceptive illusion in our lucid lives.”<sup>326</sup> Robbins thus observes how Levinas’ text bears a relation to the “anti-theatrical prejudice” discussed by Jonas Barish in his work of the same name. This attitude is reinforced in Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity* (1961/2005), where he states (again in a theological context) that

[t]he ethical relation is defined, in contrast with every relation with the sacred, by excluding every signification it would take on *unknown* to him who maintains that relation. When I maintain an ethical relation I refuse to recognise the role I would play in a drama of which I would not be the author or whose outcome another would know before me; I refuse to figure in a drama of salvation or of damnation that would be enacted in spite of me and that would make game of me. This is not equivalent to a diabolical pride, for it does not exclude obedience. But obedience precisely is to be distinguished from an involuntary participation in mysterious [or, what comes to artworks, mythical] designs in which one figures or which one prefigures. Everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion.<sup>327</sup>

All in all, the problematic theoretical situation that emerges here seems to bear an organic relation to Levinas’ (ethical) suspicions regarding the various

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.: 50.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.: 48.

<sup>326</sup> Levinas 1997: 121.

<sup>327</sup> Levinas 2005: 79, brackets mine; Robbins 1999: 51.

dimensions of the aesthetic category (or the problems of *representation* and *presentation*),<sup>328</sup> complicating the issue even further. It seems to confront the operation of mimesis and thus the (non-totalisable) figural potentiality of theatre in a way that renders them obstacles to any actual ethical relation within (or without) the theatre. But there is no denying that the relations between the actors on stage or the relations between them and the audience *are* interhuman relations, or that despite of what these relations strive to *depict*, they can be reduced (or expanded) to pertain to an *interhuman situation*. There is then a need to discuss further the fact that the phenomenon of theatre is a *human phenomenon* and, as such, an encounter, an activity that bears the enigmatic and acute nature of human co-presence(s), even as a mediated event (that is, as an event that constantly reassesses and re-invents the possibilities of human encounters with its mimetic complexion and the *imagination* needed for such processes).

If we still follow the Levinasian project, the ethical problems that concern theatrical activity as an acute human encounter arise from his view according to which the very phenomenality inherent in human interaction (or the phenomenal world itself) is fundamentally in friction with our (pre-original) ethical responsibility, which, despite being an *irreplaceable fact*, is also an *incomprehensible fact*. Involved with both the mystery of being and its mythical derivatives, the theatrical apparatus thus appears to be a unique platform for discussing the issue of human encounters.

## 4.2. Scarcely more than theatre?

Like Hegel, Levinas writes a drama of the education of the psyche.

John Llewelyn: *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics*<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Again, see e.g. Eaglestone 1997: 99.

<sup>329</sup> Llewelyn 1995: 3.

In *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance* (1995), Alan Read notes how theatre,

through the corporeality of the body and its objects, the fact that it is a living instant open to the possibility of becoming something else, makes different demands on [the] shadow world [of art than other artforms]... The transparency that Levinas sees as the characteristic property of the image is substituted in theatre by a renewed and deepened presence, which separated from the arts in general locates theatre in a unique cultural realm. [...] Theatre is both the shadow and the echo of the everyday. It is not a reflection and does not complete this realm but distorts it while remaining intimately linked to, and inseparable from it.<sup>330</sup>

He thus lays significant stress on the way acute interhuman relations affect theatrical activity and on the fact that the latter lives on their 'ontological echo,' even when problematising, renewing and reinventing them. However, the challenge Levinas' ethical theory poses for theatre and its *modi operandi* arises from the fact that it denies ontological and phenomenological questioning (or phenomenality itself) any direct or 'legitimised' access to the problem of ethics.

If one lets his thought speak through its gradual development, starting from the puzzling existential explications in *Existence and Existents* and *Time and the Other* (1947/ 1987b) and proceeding to questions of sociability, society and language and in *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974/1981), one begins to realise how the existents' indistinct relationship with being in general — the paradoxical seclusion (in thought) induced by the incomprehensibility of being — is related to an authentic separation in the world of sociability and shared reasoning. It is a 'confinement' which *transitivity*, in itself, brings about. Levinas states that our existence as solitude is enunciated in the relationships we maintain with the world. For him

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<sup>330</sup> Read 1995: 86, brackets mine. On the basis of some earlier observations, one may say, however, that the *transparency* of the image that Levinas speaks of is not a transparency that allows us to see 'something else,' but rather a transparency that allows us to see the transparency itself (as 'something else'). Therefore I argue that the "renewed and deepened presence" Read discusses here could, indeed, signify the Levinasian transparency (or even *semblance*).

“[a]ll these relationships are transitive: I touch an object, I see the other. But I *am* not the other. I am all alone. It is thus the being in me, the fact that I exist, my *existing*, that constitutes the absolutely intransitive element, something without intentionality or relationship. One can exchange everything between beings except existing.”<sup>331</sup> The situation makes Macbeth’s confusion above even more frightening, as a realisation of this essential seclusion, and his words so important to Levinas.

This definite closure in subjective existence seems also to interfere with the possibility to form objective or ethically ‘justified’ syllogisms in human interaction. For among all experienced phenomena, we are subjectively chained to an existence where they are not embraced by sharing *their existence*, but where they are merely observed by negotiating their essence through thought (and language). Accordingly, the dread of remaining separate seems to impose itself on human communication in particular. The situation becomes evident when one observes the measures we seem to be ready to take to ‘share the world.’ Our need to comprehend — or share the existence of — other beings transforms into constant evaluation and re-evaluation of the difficulties (or even the pain) we should endure in the effort to come to terms with them. This also adduces the fact that while doing this, we have to face our *ethical vulnerability*. The fear caused by (or in) human proximity brings out the full extent of our ethical sensitivity. The violence tolerated by those willing to turn the other cheek to the cruelty or disrespect their fellow beings express forces us to observe the ‘self-sacrificial panorama’ of our desperate need to understand and deal with differences; beings and phenomena that differ from us and our expressed needs. Thus, the fear of remaining separate could also be examined here as a need for *sameness*, as an ‘advent of the *Same*,’ a need for a shared dimension that would bring all differences finally under a predetermined ‘categorical imperative,’ which, in all its imaginary benevolence and objectivity, would still stem from the point of view of the *Self*. It assumes the form of a *grasp*, in which the world is ‘held captive’ by subjective definitions and terms — terms the *Self* also (erroneously) believes would no longer be subject to *insomnia* or the *there is*.

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<sup>331</sup> Levinas 1987b: 42.

Despite these auspicious aims, it actually becomes an *affirmation* of the separation that returns the Self to ponder on its own seclusion. In this sense, all acts that commence as (ethical) projects of martyrdom or tolerance end up in a void between ethical opinions and their justification.

Yet, according to Levinas, there needs to be a certain self-sacrifice — or an offering, a surrender — of the Self present in this (interhuman) situation, in the birth of ethical interaction. To him, exploring the world and its ethical possibilities on purely *egological* terms is an effort doomed to an ‘ethical rebound’ to the Self to begin with. The impossibility of reaching a perspective through which one could observe the ‘one ethical self’ of oneself from outside — one’s individual ethicality in relation to the world — seems to hinder all attempts to define ethics or its postulates by oneself. The essential transitivity of/in sociability (or of one’s ‘being with the world’) — that which tells me I cannot share my existence — makes all personal definitions of ethics always fragmentary and insufficient.

Thus, for Levinas, the ethical criteria and responsibility we are to welcome and accept, come to us as an epiphany from the unforeseen future and untouchable history of *otherness*; as something that never becomes a structure of thought beginning from the Self and proceeding to the world as an extension of the Self. From the Levinasian point of view, it is as if we were constantly ‘reborn to ethicality’ when we face the world, its being and its beings. This would mean that we are ethical, only and unconditionally, in (or as a) relation to our living and breathing neighbour, the *Other*, and to the conceptually inconceivable concept of the *other*.

#### *4.2.1 On the face of the Other...*

If the ethicality that establishes human interaction and responsibility (imprinted on us) is defined as *the very basis (and affirmation) of our being*, as *the most fundamental human condition*, as Levinas suggests, one should pay attention to

the ways his ethical philosophy (or his “Ethics of Ethics”<sup>332</sup>) understands the relation between the *self* and *alterity*. Levinas speaks of this *pre-original orientation* as an encounter with *ethics itself*, and as the (pre-)origin of ontological questions, as something that is rooted in both the ethical confession that consists in the welcoming of the Other and the anterior responsibility in sociability. Sociability is primarily formed in/by conceding the primacy of the Other: ethical responsibility and the demand for responsiveness in communication precede subjective consciousness and its active appropriation of (its) existence. In fact, they determine the conditions for subjective existence, instead of the active process of *totalisation* thought uses to bring order and sense to the world. The Other interrupts — or has always already interrupted — our very being, our existential orientation and our ‘standing forth’ in being, as a *face* that shatters and alters the totality of our existence irrevocably.<sup>333</sup> This is the Other’s demand. We are summoned to ethicality in an encounter with the Other, which, for Levinas, is in its profoundest sense a *face to face* encounter.<sup>334</sup> But it should be strongly emphasised that the face of the Other is a face *without any tangible definition or concept*; it cannot be reached or grasped *thematically*. Levinas notes that

[t]he face is a fundamental event. Among the many modes of approach and diverse ways of relating to being, the action of the face is special and, for this reason it is very difficult to give it an exact phenomenological description. The phenomenology of the face is very often negative. What seems essential to me is, for example, the manner in which Heidegger understood the *zeug*—that which comes to hand, the instrument, the thing. He understood it as irreducible proto-type. The face is similar in that it is not at all a representation, it is not a given of knowledge, nor is it a thing which comes to hand. It is an irreducible means of access, and it is in ethical terms that it can be spoken of.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> A definition used by Derrida (1978c: 111).

<sup>333</sup> E.g. Levinas 2005: 197-204, 213-216, 297.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*: 13, 79-81, 202-203, 206-207, 291.

<sup>335</sup> Levinas in Wright, Hughes & Ainley 1988: 168-169.



*The face penetrates all form and thematisation* — as well as all (subjective) exercise of conceptual power — by interfering with the totality of our being and thought, by issuing an indisputable order, the biblical commandment behind all commandments: ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ As Levinas himself puts it,

[t]he face resists possession, resists my powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total resistance to the grasp. This mutation can occur only by the opening of a new dimension. For the resistance to the grasp is not produced as an insurmountable resistance, like the hardness of the rock against which the effort of the hand comes to naught, like the remoteness of a star in the immensity of space. The expression the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers, but my ability for power. The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge.<sup>336</sup>

This interference then brings with it a responsibility, which is initially confessed by the subject in welcoming the concrete and living Other, the neighbour, and responding to her/him. It is the unconditional subjection (*sujétion*)<sup>337</sup> of the subject, where our original ethical responsibility is welcomed by the I or the Self as a questioning of the realm of the *Same* it inhabits — via a desire (*désir*) for an encounter with the demands and the sovereignty of the Other. An ethical encounter is “delivered up” to the Other without a regression to the ‘synthetic thinking-of-the-self.’<sup>338</sup> This desire, or the *longing* for the Other is not a need (*besoin*)<sup>339</sup> for a merging, where the I (in all its materiality) would compulsively approach the Other to satisfy this need:

The desire for the Other... originates from a full and independent existent, who doesn’t want anything for itself. It is a need belonging to the one who has no more needs. It can be recognised as a need for the Other – the Other, who is not

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<sup>336</sup> Levinas 2005: 197-198.

<sup>337</sup> Levinas 1996a: 80; See also Levinas 1981: 14-15.

<sup>338</sup> Levinas 1996b: 104, 107; Jokinen 1997: 94.

<sup>339</sup> See Levinas 1996b: 106-107.

my enemy... nor my complement [complément]. [...] This desire, or this longing for the Other, which is our sociability in itself, is not a simple relation with being, where... the Other becomes the Same.<sup>340</sup>

This quite perplexing longing, the subject's *being for* (or, why not, appearing-for) the Other is an ethical condition for being<sup>341</sup> that both gives birth to and is committed to sociability, but it is not formed on account of social practices or experienced identities. It subsists qua sociability, in itself; it has to be seen as a communicative responsibility, as an admittance of the Other's anterior worth by (and in) subjection — even before naming the individual other as the Other, before the original act of naming. This confession of responsibility, or what I would choose to call the 'pre-originary orthopraxis of life,'<sup>342</sup> cannot be seen as a self-referring *ethical project*. Such binding and enigmatic origin for our ethicality poses then an enormous challenge to the Western concept of humanity, the concept that seems to continually vacillate between (social or corporeal) rewards and punishments: according to Levinas we are — initially and ultimately — obliged to carry our unlimited individual responsibility in a world already sovereignly reigned by the Other.<sup>343</sup>

But our ethical longing for alterity has to settle itself within social (and ontological) transitivity as we do, because its original 'compliance' consists in us. Therefore it also positions itself within the *politico-temporal context of our sociability* (or to the very politics that concerns it). This means that to try to reach and encounter the Other through social procedures and linguistic (self-)expressions are, in the end, somewhat violent and recursive processes of *representation*. They attempt to unravel the ethical commandment that obligates being by expressing meanings that cannot be decoded back to the challenges of

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid.: 107, translation mine.

<sup>341</sup> Here we should actually speak of a certain condition for 'otherwise than being', using Levinas' own expression, because such a formulation strives to surpass the thematisation and the synthetisation of being as the basis of subjective existence. (See e.g. Levinas 1981: 17-18.)

<sup>342</sup> Levinas does not use this term, but I think it depicts the way his philosophy is constantly moving back and forth between theorisation and practicality, or rather, how he brings out the ethical possibilities and conditions of our everyday sociability.

<sup>343</sup> Levinas 1996b: 111.

ethicity without adopting a 'subjective language'. But this language is the one we are stuck with, the one we use to make ethical interpretations. So how should we understand this 'spiral exegesis' of ethical living and being? To assess this, we have to take a closer look at the way Levinas' ethics is tied to language and communication (in his later works).

The *Saying (le Dire)* and the *Said (le Dit)* are central concepts for this approach. (I use capital initials here to emphasise the conceptual nature of the terms.) To offer a somewhat broad and simple explanation, the Said defines and expresses the linguistic and conceptual hierarchies of communication (even if there is no 'receiving end'). The Saying, in turn, is the very orientation of the Said, the initial call and the response in facing the Other. It is thus understandable that Levinas' thought emphasises the primacy of the Saying, instead of the Said.<sup>344</sup> The Saying is the ethical possibility to communicate, preceding all linguistic meaning. It (inevitably) consists in language, but fundamentally allows the Other to respond, even when propositional statements are declared.<sup>345</sup> In this sense, all manifestations and manifesters of the Said — including all mimetically and textually engendered or defined subjects and expressions — are then constantly forced to return to a state of self-assessment, to question their own position.<sup>346</sup>

The Saying is inexhaustible as an idea. It does not come to any conclusions as an ethical concept, and its essence — or rather, its (non-)presence — never becomes the Said, as such.<sup>347</sup> The ethical themes of the Said are thus, in themselves, always *betrayed in advance* or *hopelessly late*, they do not support ethicity as independent projects. What they do is to settle themselves to the ethical encounter in the possibility of Saying. In this possibility "the Said should be said, denied and 'made unsaid' over and over again, so that the trace of the Saying could emerge from (and in) the Said."<sup>348</sup> The Saying would then be, in fact, a fracture, or moreover an 'apprehension of the trace of the fracture' in the

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<sup>344</sup> Levinas 1985: 42.

<sup>345</sup> Levinas 1981: 45-47.

<sup>346</sup> See e.g. Korhonen 2000: 285.

<sup>347</sup> Jokinen 1997: 29.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, translation mine.

‘metamorphicality’ of linguistic structures and applications. It is there to make the un-Saying (*dedire*)<sup>349</sup> of the Said possible. This un-Saying cannot be described as (yet another) linguistic variation, somehow capable of uncovering or expressing the primacy or the bearing of otherness. Instead, it would be the very potential that offers us the *ethical condition of variability* itself; by its very ‘non-essence,’ it seems to bring out the (essential) frailty of language, the possibility to interrupt and uncover the totality of the ontological order of the Said.

On account of these formulations, we can also find a difference between an *unjustified* and a *justified* Said in Levinas’s thought.<sup>350</sup> The unjustified Said signifies the process of establishing a paradigmatic and inevitable word order, a return to the totality and the violence of the Said’s own ontology. The justified Said, in its vital turn, aspires to question this ontological order as constant un-Saying, thus bringing out our original responsibility to the *indefinable* Other.<sup>351</sup> However, a ‘justifiably critical’ approach to these two notions remains a considerable task. Language itself seems to retain the primary authority in this metalinguistic discourse, the discourse that concerns itself. In usage, language often tends to withhold, for example, the interruptive capacity of irony as its ‘very own, public knowledge;’ to be found, if it is to be found at all. May we therefore assume that a critical approach to language would represent the possibility of un-Saying in itself, to begin with? We may, but one major problem remains: it only manages to *represent* this possibility. We are still dealing with something that defies our understanding and interpretations; something, with which we live without governing its (non-)presence and which we approve of with no explicit agreement. Are we then able to build, say, a “poetics of encountering,”<sup>352</sup> a frame of interpretation, with which to observe and clarify the ethical nature of expression or representation? As a system it probably remains impossible. But the *trace of otherness*, the trace of the other that interrupts,

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<sup>349</sup> Levinas’ *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* discusses this subject widely and thoroughly. See also Korhonen 2000: 285.

<sup>350</sup> See Critchley 1992: 229.

<sup>351</sup> Jokinen 1997: 125.

<sup>352</sup> Korhonen 2000: 291. See *ibid.*: 286-287, 291-292.

fractures and penetrates the Said as (and in) constant un-Saying would be a turn towards *encountering* and 'interpretativeness,' in itself; it would be an ever receding attempt to Say through the 'settlements' of texts and speech, through all representational authority or experience — and finally, through the existential weight of responsibility adopted by the subject.

These are themes that make me reconsider whether theatrical communication — considered as an acute 'act of encountering' between the subjects onstage or between the audience and the stage — is really able to approach the *disposition* needed for an ethical encounter (as Levinas sees it), as our desire and response for the Other. (And this is, once again, a move that makes one enter a truly phantasmatic landscape.) If we consider, for example, that the (mal-)formal adjusting to a certain mode of being qua acting and performing, the submission to the preceding potentiality of gestures, movements, decisions and feelings, is also subjection to an unbound otherness that comes with (or, in fact, prior to) the mystery of being, we are already questioning which direction theatre is really taking, the direction of ontological investigations or the direction that questions the primacy of ontology. This would mean that the self-conscious avoidance of the directness of the Self, the process of trying to merge with the obscurity of (being's) otherness (anterior to acute being) is — in a very loose metaphysical sense — a serious business (thus contradicting Levinas' earlier conception of theatre as a game).

As a figure that lives on both the potentiality of being and imagination, Phaedra would be deadly serious, but not precisely because the curtain kills her over and over again. Instead, her seriousness would arise from the fact that, as an *acute figure*, she is the one genuinely haunting the theatre, its work and its 'workers of unattainable otherness.' She enters and walks the stage as a ceaseless potentiality of being that never really touches, but rather penetrates and 'possesses' the essential solitude of the actor's being.<sup>353</sup> The very transitivity of the stage appears then to be a field of forces that leaves the actors all alone in the light of 'taking up acting,' in the light of 'sketching out reality,' to exist with the

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<sup>353</sup> By this I mean that the potentiality of otherness is not *embraced by* or *merged into* the acting subject, but that it is 'called upon' without a possibility to form a comprehensive insight of its true extent.

weight of their own being along with the weight of the potentiality of otherness: the very weight that comes with *the act of representation*. But such speculations would also remain riveted to a questioning that tries to solve what being, in itself, means.

There is thus more at stake. When Levinas establishes the criteria for ethical contemplation (or indeed for the whole of philosophy) by understanding the *otherness of the Other* as something that precedes and transcends the conceptual (and violating) totality of ideas and ideals, the totality negotiated within the realm of the Same, it means that the Other is, for him, fundamentally unattainable for the subject (or the Self). The compelling ethical demand of responsibility, the commandment the living and concrete Other presents to a subject is, as seen before, the very initiation of the subject's existence. (This also makes the subject's relationship with alterity an *a-symmetrical* relationship, where one is responsible not only *for* the Other, but also *on behalf of* the Other [to the point of *substitution*].) From this understanding emerges Levinas's dedication to the *face of the Other* as the very founder of an ethical relationship, as a concept that transcends form and is always "beyond manifestation: it represents itself without representing itself, it has access to infinity."<sup>354</sup>

This means that "[t]o manifest oneself as a face is to *impose oneself* above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenal form, to present oneself in a mode irreducible to manifestation, the very straightforwardness of the face to face, without the intermediary of any image, in one's nudity..."<sup>355</sup> Thus, as Eaglestone mentions, Levinas' work almost entirely abandons the possibility of an ethical encounter qua representation, up to and including *Totality and Infinity*. Therefore, it also presents somewhat harsh demands for the intrinsic materialisation and manifestation of theatre. The Levinasian project understands the representational mode of being — or the totality of concepts, categories and the ways in which they are expressed and assessed — as something that fundamentally interferes with the possibility to communicate truly ethically: in

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<sup>354</sup> Eaglestone 1997: 114.

<sup>355</sup> Levinas 2005: 200; Eaglestone 1997: 114.

his opinion “[t]he face [of the Other]... is a demand; a demand, not a question.”<sup>356</sup>

#### 4.2.2 ... and encountering the Other

Another essential field of problems considering the acute human nature of theatrical interaction emerges from Levinas’s thoughts on the irreversible *diachrony* of the Other and the Self (or the Same *as totality*). In his opinion, we are always ‘late’ from an ethical encounter. The Other comes to our (ethical) field of perception, or rather, field of apprehension — only and unconditionally — as a *trace*, a trace that sustains the Other’s transcendence and otherness. The questions of presence and authentic appearing that often mark our (ethical) understanding of theatre, become increasingly problematic if we accept, e.g., Marika Enwald’s interpretation of Levinas announcing that

[t]he irreducible Other can never be present as such, but rather it can always show afterwards in the form of a trace. Thus, what is outside the knowing subject signifies as a trace; but as a trace it does not bring transcendence into the immanent order and abolish it, but preserves the transcendence as always already *past*.<sup>357</sup>

Liisa Veenkivi and Juha Varto, in turn, discuss Levinas’ concept of the trace as a relation to a “maybe” in a sign or a signal that one deciphers (through one’s intelligible totality), as a necessary foreignness in a phenomenon one tries to understand, an overwhelming reminder that tells me the world view I am constructing is always insufficient in regard to the possibilities and obligations the world offers to me.<sup>358</sup> So although this “maybe” seems to imply a question that one’s intellect needs to answer, it is instead — and primarily — a demand that comes from the undefinable direction of ethical responsibility and calls the intellect itself into question.

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<sup>356</sup> Wright, Hughes & Ainley 1988: 169.

<sup>357</sup> Enwald 2004: 95, italics mine.

<sup>358</sup> Varto & Veenkivi 1993: 142-143.

Thus, when Alan Read speaks of “the actuality of theatre, the face to face encounter that distinguishes theatre” and claims that “[t]his conception of ethics being centered in the ‘face to face’ relation is particularly appropriate to theatre”,<sup>359</sup> he both describes something emblematic of theatre and brings forth its problematic nature with regard to Levinas’ ethical thought. Levinas’ definitions of the ethical meaning of the face appear to be far too complex to be adjusted to the transitivity of the stage or to the relation between a performer and her/his audience, as such. The means of communication, the thematisation and the often self-defining and self-assuring ways of expression and thought a performance or its audience use to stabilise their ‘right to be’, are far too violent procedures to be considered as exemplifications of the face to face. The bond between responsibility and the initial epiphany of ethicality goes far beyond the possibilities of a gesture, a voice, an utterance or a *look*: “Inasmuch as the access to beings concerns vision, it dominates those beings, exercises a power over them. A thing is *given*, offers itself to me. In gaining access to it I maintain myself within the same.”<sup>360</sup> This dominating feature in grasping the world or its representations conceals (or neglects) the original responsibility we are to confess in an ethical encounter. Michael Goldman seems to (Self-)assure this problematic situation in theatrical interaction: “We identify with actors because the self longs for clarification, because it longs to possess the present and possess itself in the present, in a way that ordinary space, time and selfhood do not allow.”<sup>361</sup> The self, be it ordinary or ‘extraordinary,’ remains here the point of (self-)reference and departure.

Regarding theatre, a straightforward way to approach this problem could thus be the following:

When Levinas states that the face utterly surpasses all conceptualisation and thematisation, he also seems to say that the ungraspable *presence* of otherness indeed transcends all *represence*, the dimension(s) accessible to sight or definition. Thus if we (are able to) look at a theatrical performance as a situation where all transitivity in human co-existence is originally affirmed by its very

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<sup>359</sup> Read 1993: 90-91.

<sup>360</sup> Levinas 2005: 194.

<sup>361</sup> Goldman’s *The Actor’s Freedom* quoted in Fuchs 2003: 110.



presence (that is, the obligating presence of otherness), the face to face in theatre would become possible as a situation where the pre-originary bond to responsibility cannot be breached by the Self longing (acutely) for its own clarification. On the contrary, the present but unattainable ethical demand of the Other would be the one that breaches all attempts to maintain the situation within the sameness of the Self. Thus, even though the proportions of this work still do not allow me to delve deeper into the question of presence here (so thoroughly examined by Jacques Derrida, for example),<sup>362</sup> we are still obliged to return to some observations Levinas makes of it and the problem of (its) representation. It is the weight he gives to language and expression (of otherness, transcending form) in his later works that gives a certain vantage point to observe the essence (or presence) of *theatrical ethicality*. While speaking of separation and discourse in *Totality and Infinity*, he says that “[t]he face is a living presence; it is expression. The life of expression consists in undoing the form in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated. The face speaks.”<sup>363</sup> He also stresses that

[t]o give meaning to one’s presence is an event irreducible to evidence. It does not enter into an intuition; it is a presence more direct than visible manifestation, and at the same time a remote presence – that of the other. This presence dominates him who welcomes it, comes from the heights, unforeseen, and consequently teaches its very novelty.<sup>364</sup>

Thus, we are not rigidly bound to temporal or otherwise tangible definitions or evidence of *ethical presence* here. The arrival of ethicality in its very epiphany is

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<sup>362</sup> “To Derrida, there is no primordial or self-same present that is not already infiltrated by the trace – an opening of the “inside” of the moment to the “outside” of the interval.” (Fuchs 2003: 111.) “That the present in general is not primal but, rather, reconstituted, that it is not the absolute, wholly living form which constitutes experience, that there is no purity of the living present – such is the theme, formidable for metaphysics, which Freud, in a conceptual scheme unequal to the thing itself, would have us pursue. This pursuit is doubtless the only one which is exhausted neither within metaphysics nor within science.” (Derrida 1978a: 212.)

<sup>363</sup> Levinas 2005: 66.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*

not *primarily* subjected to temporal or illustrative 'features of the face.' Somewhat paradoxically and problematically, the only precondition would be that there be some medium of communication and an awareness of being in (and between) the beings encountering each other: and by this awareness we should understand first of all an awareness of *responsibility*. So if we would agree that the Other is always the creator (or revealer) of the ethically obligating nature of the present where intersubjectivity, language and sociability operate (even if it does this as the absence of all representation), we would also be tempted to affirm the status of theatre as an *art of ethical longing*, where the Self and the Other are "bound by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust nor unravel."<sup>365</sup> If the situation is permeated by a longing that cannot stop at or be defined by representation, it is once again leaning towards the concept and condition of *possibility*, which relates not only to the acts of gesturing and performing, but also to their ethical prerequisites and consequences. Read states that "[b]oth ethics and theatre are concerned with possibility. On the contrary representation is the reflection of an 'existing' proposition as though it were fact, and this is never what theatre achieves. *The theatre image unlike any other is always a possibility without closure, like the ethical relation which awaits creation.*"<sup>366</sup> Thus, even if all the gestural significance we attach to the ethical essence of theatrical representation would fall short of the Levinasian demands of ethicality, or the possibility of their becoming *real*, it would remain, somewhat paradoxically, valid in relation to those demands, as a *process of validation which concerns itself*.

But even this speculation is a rather suspect way to approach the situation. The weight of representation and the constant reverting to ontology in the means of theatre to convey ethicality still remain something of a mystery (of being and its representation), insofar as it operates with processes of sketching out being, the processes that generate non-totalities. This means that it also tries to outline and confirm the theatrical *right to be* through certain definitions and claims that concern both the performers and their audience; something is always *theatrically*

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<sup>365</sup> Levinas 1987a: 116.

<sup>366</sup> Read 1995: 83, italics mine.

*Said*, organised into a procedure that involves expressions and impressions, intentions and emotions.

It is then perhaps of use to consider whether this constant turning to the *problematique* of being — the act of gathering together to observe how mountains appear with a subtle human motion — would be where theatrical activity reveals its ethical potential or ‘energy’ most explicitly. As a *Schauspiel* that attracts us with its capacity to play with the mystery of being and its mythical derivatives, theatrical activity seems to *insult* (the primacy of) the ethics of responsibility in a way that draws its import very near the problem whether we can ever experience responsibility *for real*.

### 4.3. On the possibility of Saying and the theatrically Said with Ricoeur & Levinas

As stated earlier, defining the relations between the Saying and the Said or the ethical difference between a justified and an unjustified Said are somewhat perilous tasks. Language and communication appear to be games that give us ‘access to ethical accessibility’, but leave us with words and thoughts that are subject to endless redefinitions. In this sense, an ethical approach to the *theatrically Said* seems merely to guarantee us ‘the playing field, but not the gear’. Moreover, if we agree, very roughly, that the theatrically Said is a *non-totalisable construction* that consists of certain mimetic and textual reaches, as well as certain performative choices and certain reactions from audiences, we are still dealing with an abundance of voices, meanings and possibilities that defies coherent interpretations.

Even if we choose something as simple as the staging of a play as our point of departure, we are still in a situation where, in the words of Marvin Carlson, “audiences [and performers are left with] the realisation, potentially saddening but in fact filled with excitement and promise, that not all that this play has to say has been said, that other different but equally rich experiences with it are

always possible.”<sup>367</sup> The Said shows itself as a locality that enforces us to accept its terms to some degree, but simultaneously encourages us to rebel against them, and to find *other* ways of looking at its given paradigmatic order. In this sense, the ethical potentiality of the (theatrically) Said would consist in its capability to remain open to its *own alterity*, open to the very possibility of Saying.

But if we want to reach and ensure an opening for ethical Saying in the theatrically Said, we would also need to define a certain conceptual environment in theatrical communication where this opening would thrive. If we assume that a performance and its mimetic and textual basis are, both initially and finally, merely able to *represent* the potentiality of Saying through the Said, they only manage to define their own rhetorical possibilities in relation to ethical questioning — and, as noted, in Levinasian thought ethics precedes rhetorical reflection. If we also agree that the actors, when expressing the thematic elements of a text, for example, have a certain face to face situation with the spectators, between them the possibility for an ethical encounter, we also have to recognise a certain (ethical) *resistance* in this situation. If the actors are considered as some sort of *code of otherness* in the dialectical self-assessment theatre often claims to call forth, the original terms of ethicality are already essentially violated.

But the ethical condition or potential open to the other still appears, in spite of all, to be something that distinguishes — or at least challenges — theatre, as Read declared earlier. The collective mimet(h)ic apprehension, or the open-ended *metasubject* of theatre that may turn us to the ethical relations between, e.g., the text, the stage and the spectator, would seem to respond to at least some of the demands of Levinasian ethics. It would do so by being capable of un-Saying even itself. The mimetic possibility of un-Saying theatre’s ethical ‘defaults’ would be something that interferes with the functional aims of speech and performance, the (onto)logical structure of the theatrically Said, but it would thus also manage to validate the ethical importance of the whole situation.

According to this logic, the theatrical *right to be* would be verified by denying the feasibility of its means to convey *legitimised ethical meaning*. This

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<sup>367</sup> Carlson 2003: 85, brackets mine.

would make its Saying inviolable (by any thematisation). To speculate a little further with this idea, the desire for (or the exposure to) the Other would withdraw itself beyond the ethical themes or experiences theatre tries to offer us, whether we like it or not. Otherness does not readily anchor itself to the characteristics of theatrical narratives or the ways we read and understand them. As our ethical coexistence in the theatre and *as* theatre is inevitably thrown under the immediate but multilayered and mostly self-conscious structure of the theatrically Said (or comprehended), it obscures the Saying by its very theatricality, by its own context. This means that it would be questionable to assume that the desire for the 'Other of theatre' consists anywhere else than in our search for a fracture or an opening in its Said, or a trace of the Saying that tries to appeal to us in the essential ethical incongruity of theatre; in the way things appear to be (Said) but are not (Saying) — and yet they are (as the concrete possibility of Saying). To be sure, such a conclusion is annoying, obscure, and absurd; but so also seems to be the very essence of Levinasian ethics *qua* theatre.

Nevertheless, the mentioned absurdity does not refer to sheer irrationality, but to something that is simply beyond theatre's own reasoning; to something that turns us to the possibility of un-Saying (as our desire for an ethical encounter beyond the outlines of representation). Yet, more importantly, we would not need to resort to Antonin Artaud's demands for 'glossopoetic' expression, as Derrida chooses to describe it,<sup>368</sup> where the Saying would constantly reverberate between articulation and discourse. Instead, the constant search for the Saying in the Said would be constitutive of the 'alluring ethics' of theatre: as the Said thickens with every signifying factor and layer of a performance, it is perhaps the case that our mimetic awareness becomes more and more sensible, even of its own instrumental value. But it is still important not to confuse the (inscrutable and transcendental) *disillusion* in our exposure to (and response to) the Other even with the mimetic possibility theatre offers us.

There is nothing essentially suspicious with John Freeman's statement that the "continued existence" of performance (or theatre) "is valuable because, and

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<sup>368</sup> See Derrida 1978b: 240.

only because, it seeks attention and we attend... it seeks interpretation and we interpret.”<sup>369</sup> However, in the Levinasian reading, an attentive and instrumental approach to the situation would in fact turn us away from it rather than enable us to encounter it. Participating in theatrical interaction while striving to respect the grounds of Levinasian ethics becomes a paradoxical practice, without a doubt. According to the logic of the latter, we are to search for the Saying mainly through *passivity*, *confessionality* and *longing* — not through active reflection or engagement. Regarding the communicative contexts of theatre, this would mean to passively and sensibly long for a breach in the theatrically Said that would shatter the representational structures of the ethical thematics of theatre: and the initial sensibility that enables such a longing calls for *proximity*.

#### 4.3.1 *In the proximity of theatrical proximity*

For Levinas, proximity is where the intentional becomes ethical (or, moreover, where ethicality is preserved in spite of intentionality). It is, as already noted, where “the one weighs or concerns or is meaningful to the other, where they are bound by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust nor unravel.”<sup>370</sup> Proximity sustains the Other by the *radical intimacy* it entails, its *distant immediacy*: it is, essentially, the situation where we are obliged to acknowledge — or *confess* — our initial difference, and thus, our ethical sensibility in and *as* this proximity:

Proximity is not a simple coexistence, but a restlessness. Something passes from one to the other and from the other to the one... Is something said, then, or learned, in the contact? Is something thematised? Nothing — but the contact, by the contact itself.<sup>371</sup>

This contact, purified of all actual (or solid) interpretations, brings us to re-examine the particular role of an audience in theatrical interaction, and Alice

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<sup>369</sup> Freeman 2001.

<sup>370</sup> Levinas 1987a: 116.

<sup>371</sup> Levinas 1987a: 121.

Rayner's insightful remarks on the position(s) and composition(s) of audiences may help us to understand this 'proximal' situation a bit further.

She considers that "[t]he proximity of the Other as opposed to identification with it opens up to "non-definitive possibilities" that releases a future for meanings that are yet to be known."<sup>372</sup> This exposure to *future meanings* seems then to be closely related to observing the mimetic dimension *in action*, as an awareness of its non-definitiveness that is *not essentially Said* and thus open to prospective possibilities. Even though Rayner talks about "meanings" here, from the Levinasian point of view we may not assume that she is aiming at something that theatre practitioners or audiences could mutually understand and confirm at some point.

Moreover, when she understands the willingness to hear<sup>373</sup> as the most important capacity of an audience, she seems to refer to the willingness to hear *the Saying* as something that characterises our original desire for the Other. In the Levinasian reading (or hearing), it would be the willingness to hear an interruption in the flow of signification. This would be an observation that makes us reconsider the chances to see the ethical encounters between performers and their audiences *primarily* as dialectical situations. The main problem is that a dialectical discourse already (understandably) supposes certain 'Said' and standpoints to participate in this communication as extensions and variations of the Same qua the *Theme* (or, to a degree, of the Self). The questions, answers and re-definitions that enable dialectical processes always tend to aim at a certain 'Self-preservation', to begin with. Thus, they seem to impede the original ethical relation (of trying to hear the Saying). Rayner notes that

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<sup>372</sup> Rayner 2003: 256.

<sup>373</sup> Here we must remember Levinas' antipathy towards seeing and looking as ways of domination where the 'I' maintains itself within the same. Rayner brings out the importance of hearing by saying that "[t]he idea of audience suggests specific capacities to hear meaning in both the spoken and the unspoken: to hear the *vouloir dire* [the willingness to Say] as much as the utterance." (Ibid.: 262, brackets mine.) She also points out that "[the act of listening] is invoked not by the framework of drive or desire but by the obligation of listening to another: by trying to hear the *vouloir dire* within the stated, not as a referential intention but as a desire to be heard as meaningful or as meaningfully breaking the conventional frames. The emphasis here is on the attempt and effort, not success or failure." (Ibid.: 263, brackets mine.)

[t]he difficulty in dialectic[s]... is to recognise the coercive force of questions and to remain open to an “impossible” answer that would constitute not-yet-determined possibilities, rather than only to reconstruct an already completed meaning. The obligation is to allow that the frames — or frequencies, in acoustical terms — of one’s own questions may need adjustment in order to hear. Such adjustment allows for the possibility of learning something genuinely new [through the Saying], not just what one already knows [about the Said].<sup>374</sup>

This encounter with an insurmountable and open difference *in (and as) proximity* affects us on a much larger scale, too. Proximity is to also bring out *my own alterity*, an understanding of the Other as someone who is capable of caring for me. The encounter with the Other’s ungraspable vulnerability, and with the care that sensibility demands from the subject, is also concern for the Self itself and *all the other others* as constitutive elements of our social and ethico-political surroundings — the humanity of a community.

To Levinas the ethical encounter with the Other “steps out to the public realm” through the Other’s *illeity*<sup>375</sup>, its infinite *her/himness*: the presence of illeity in ethical relationships calls thus also forth the *Third*.<sup>376</sup> And this would be where the social and the political grounds — whose origin is the compelling nature of ethical contemplation — that turn the ethical encounter into a more concrete question, announce themselves:

Justice can now be provided with a firm foundation, in which the entry of the human third person standing in the trace of illeity brings something new to the relationship. [...] With the entry of the third I also become other for the other and my responsibility for the other now comes to include care of myself. It is with the entry of the third that I am established therefore in community. The third is also the face of the world, language and culture, in whose womb I am formed as a social being.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.: 264, brackets mine.

<sup>375</sup> E.g. Levinas 1987a: 69-72.

<sup>376</sup> See e.g. Levinas 2005: 212-214.

<sup>377</sup> Casey 1999.



If we thus roughly consider the audience and the performers as a gathering of Selves and their Others *in (and as) the presence of the Third* — which appeared to be one of Zeami's main concerns above —, as an apprehension of a certain communality that strives to sustain the complex demands of the *ethical politics* summoned by the awareness of theatre's social meaning in its thirdness, we can assume that it also tries to return to some shared (and responsible) anonymity around and within it in its search for the Saying.

Yet, according to the logic of the *trace*, the Saying has always passed; it is only traceable back to its situational but unregainable epiphany, to the very moment of its passing. This also means that the relation with the Other's (infinite) her-/himness, and thus with the apprehended humanity that 'fosters' us, is fundamentally a relation with the absolute past. The meaning of illeity opens eventually (and only) in its *trace*, a trace sustaining that which has absolutely passed — it is as unattainable as the not-yet-determined future.<sup>378</sup> Therefore, the ethical responsibility of our being (*as* our being) would be finally to proceed towards an unknown future that simultaneously demands us to search and follow the traces of the departed illeity.

From the viewpoint of our present enquiry, this would also refer to the ethical enigma of the Other that we so often try to solve and call forth for examination by *solidarity*. This means that the Saying would pass through the stage and the audience always *non-in-differently*. It seems to penetrate the very being and temporality of 'theatrical subjects' by severing the lines of thought and expression as the possibility of un-Saying, and by healing the very same procedures with the solidarity that consists in the socio-political apprehension that emerges with the Third — it prevails in the confessional sensibility of the shared, anonymous darkness audiences cherish; in the proximity of theatrical proximity. From this viewpoint, the possible clamoring against a performance or walking out of one never change this situation, they are 'obsolete' acts in themselves; the Saying has passed.

Is there then any other 'way of conduct,' some kind of *theatrical orthopraxis*, with which Levinasian ethics could manifest itself more explicitly in the theatre?

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<sup>378</sup> Levinas 1996b: 119-120.

To approach this question again in a straightforward manner, one of the answers might lie in theatre's essential *novelty* — in the 'shock' of affective temporalisation —, in its puzzling ethico-phenomenal nature that I briefly tried to unravel with Lehmann and others above (in Ch. 2.2.).

There is no denying that the immediate and yet enigmatic social elements of theatre have to pass through the problematique of being. The Said and the ontology it presents to (or *as*) us comprise, as mentioned, a dense and endless cobweb obscured by a plenitude of voices. But one might challenge (and quote) Levinas here and state that in this unforeseeable horizon of ontological possibilities, of simultaneous presence(s) and absence(s), “[I]language is not limited to the maieutic awakening of thoughts common to beings. It does not accelerate the inward maturation of a reason common to all; it teaches and introduces the new into a thought. The introduction of the new into a thought, the idea of infinity, is the very work of reason. *The absolutely new is the Other.*”<sup>379</sup> (Idealistically speaking, the mimetic openness of humanity, or its openness for an ethical encounter, is not necessarily something that we should try to thematise — instead, it may thematise us.)

Yet one might also argue that these remarks have merely added needless theoretical formulations to something that we are all constantly in touch with. This kind of remark would be legitimate, but I also believe that the effort to understand the pre-ontological basis of theatrical ethics is justified (and consequently un-Said) by Levinas himself, when he states that “[t]he explosion of the human in being... the crisis of being, the otherwise than being, are indeed marked by the fact that what is most natural becomes the most problematic. Do I have the right to be? Is being in the world not taking the place of someone? The naïve and natural perseverance in being is put into question!”<sup>380</sup>

We are still dealing here with matters that surpass the morality that authorises our own being or the grounds of subjectivity, identity, politics, and institutional operations. Therefore, as an institution, theatre may not necessarily reach “the absolutely new.” But the fact that its continued existence demands human

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<sup>379</sup> Levinas 2005: 219, italics mine.

<sup>380</sup> Levinas 1985: 121.

coexistence and participation brings us within proximity of its ethical enigma — *the relations between those who are related by their uniqueness*. Here might be one of the reasons why Levinas wonders in *Time and the Other* if “the whole of philosophy is only a meditation of Shakespeare.”<sup>381</sup>

However, as these speculations need more stable theoretical views to support them, I proceed to examine a reading of Levinas by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), with which we may more properly approach the validity of theatre as regards the ethics of otherness (and responsibility), and even see both Levinas and theatre configuring an ontology that is *post-ethical*.

#### 4.3.2 *From being to otherwise than being and back (to theatre)*<sup>382</sup>

As noted above, one of the main topics of Levinas’ *Otherwise than Being* is the ethical nature of human communication. Ricoeur notes, however, that with this work “[o]ne plunges immediately *in medias res*,”<sup>383</sup> we are faced with terms and thoughts that derive from a long line of deliberation. All interpretations of this text are governed by Levinas’ earlier works, and it is thus important to acknowledge the way in which it discusses further the problems evinced in e.g. *Totality and Infinity*, some of which could be (rather broadly) redefined as follows:

1. Ethical responsibility precedes ontology, but we have to ‘live through’ it concretely, by *living*. It is an *inconceivable fact*.
2. It is a fact that we have to live through *as* a relation to the Other, the neighbour. We live through it in an encounter with the face of the Other, where the Other’s concrete face bears a preceding ethical responsibility which cannot be derived from its concrete manifestation — instead, the concrete meaning of the face derives from this

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<sup>381</sup> Levinas 1987b: 72.

<sup>382</sup> This chapter is largely based on my presentation entitled ‘The Saying and the Said — the ethics of responsibility, the problematique of being (and its Other)’ in the Language, body, subject, performer seminar series (Theatre Academy of Finland, 8 April 2008).

<sup>383</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 83.

responsibility. In an encounter with the face I thus come face to face with the ethical commandment 'thou shalt not kill' even before I am consciously able to perceive or process the face.

3. The responsibility within which this relation is built (and which it thus builds within me), is unlimited, unquestionable and intangible. Defining and outlining this responsibility means then to violate the responsibility itself; that is, defining it means to compromise its unquestionable nature.<sup>384</sup>

These are then some of the compelling issues *Otherwise than Being* contemplates and reformulates with the terminology of the Saying and the Said, in order to describe the very core of ethical communication.

On the basis of what has been discussed above, one may say that the Said, the *language of ontology*, subsumes such words as *knowledge, control, definition* (and its *refutation*), *truth, non-truth, relevance* and *irrelevance* — in short, the conceptual possibilities, demands and criteria concerning being and non-being. This means that the Said would, in itself, define the conditions of truth and of the essence of being within language and expression. It takes (its) shape in sentences such as “‘S is P’ (Subject is Predicate)[,]”<sup>385</sup> involving thus the operation(s) of *thematization, comprehension* and *conceptualisation*. The Saying, the *language of ethics* signifies, as mentioned, constant turning to the Other, an effort of maintaining a contact before anything is said, before anything becomes Said. It presents us with an *exposure* (or “*ex-position*”<sup>386</sup>) before (or to) the manifestation of the Said, a vulnerability and a responsibility, a way of *being at hand* in order to make the Said possible. It is thus profoundly concerned with such terms as *proximity, sensibility* and *corporeality*. It cannot be discussed *as such*, and its ethical basis never becomes Said. Instead, it tells us that when we enter language and live through language, we are always already responsible for that language and for our ‘being in that language.’

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<sup>384</sup> See Lingis 1981: xii-xiv; see also Levinas 1996a: 73-82.

<sup>385</sup> Pönni 1996: 22.

<sup>386</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 83.

In his reading of *Otherwise than Being*, Ricoeur then finds two central themes that define the work. He claims that it asks 1) whether ethics can avoid a direct confrontation with ontology (or its questioning) and 2) whether we can find a *form of Said for the Saying*, a linguistic approach that would break the constraints of ontological questioning. It thus also has to consider whether there is a possibility for *otherwise than being* or, moreover, for *otherwise than Said* (which would not be *Said otherwise*, or ‘Said in *other* words,’ where the *other* [as *otherness*] would remain a *figure* of/for the questioning that concerns being).<sup>387</sup> Ricoeur:

These difficulties are inseparable and are condensed in the word, the adverb *otherwise, otherwise than...* It is, indeed, always necessary to tear oneself away, through the *otherwise than...*, from the very thing whose reign one attempts to suspend or interrupt; but at the same time, some linguistic articulation must be ventured for that *in the name of which* one is conscripted and assured of being able, of having, to pronounce the anteriority of the ethics of responsibility with respect to the “rhythm [*train*] of being, the rhythm of essence”...<sup>388</sup>

Levinas’ work also asks where this kind of questioning leads, considers whether the possibility of *otherwise than being* necessitates that the Said be somehow *replaced* (in *substitution*, in “substitution as the *otherwise than being* at the basis of proximity[.]”<sup>389</sup>) and whether this would affect all *thematization*, insofar as all thinking involves the latter. This substitution is thus considered here a problem that moves simultaneously in two directions. On the one hand there is the question how the *one* (or the Subject) is in-the-place-of-the-Other (as the Said and in the Said), how its being or its way of defining being covers up ethics, or pushes it aside. Appearing on stage seems to highlight this situation. A performing Subject *onstage* emphasises the fact that its ‘taking its place:’ and this would not refer to taking the place of a perceived character or another performing Subject, but to the fact that being in a situation or in a continuum of situations means to *make one’s way through being*.

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid.: 82.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 83; Levinas 1981: 19.

However, in light of Levinas' overall project, it seems that the whole situation has already been problematised *otherwise*: If the (conceptual) subject has taken the place of the other (in being and language), simply by being, it has to be in that position so that the position itself is defined by a pre-original and constitutive ethical surplus, which cannot be reduced to the subject's *being as a subject*. This ethical surplus would thus show that by taking the other's place the subject is already the other's *hostage*, surrounded by otherness and the accompanying responsibility — it is *held captive* by the responsibility necessitated by its very position in being. This also means that the violence the subject — or a sentence, a proposition — utilises when it *takes its place*, is needed to trace the fact that its place had already been taken by the other. The subject has already been substituted by the other.<sup>390</sup> (Although Ricoeur has it that the concepts of the *third party* and *justice* are important for this line of thought, they will be discussed only later.)

One may then say that Levinas' project is aiming here at the possibility —of otherwise than being and otherwise than Said — through which one could think about un-Saying the constant return to problematic of being, about un-Saying the violence of all linguistic definitions and explications in such a way that one would find a new form of Said, which answers to the demands of ethical Saying as otherwise than Said. This also means that his conception of *otherwise than being* would have to be something completely *other* than the other's *figures* in ontological deliberation, where being *recovers* or "recuperates"<sup>391</sup> (back to itself, to its own being) from all challenges otherness imposes on it, where being seizes the other to be a component of its own operation, where it 'recycles' the other within its processes. It would do this as a sort of *self-sufficient* or *self-fulfilling* system, which we continue to 'feed from outside' without knowing whether this *outside* would ever really be an *outside of being*. And here we encounter directly the problematic relation between being and the *other as non-being*, pondering

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<sup>390</sup> See Ricoeur 2004: 83; Levinas 1981: 1-20. Regarding the themes of Levinas' work, Ricoeur claims that "there is no noticeable progression in Levinas' argument; the successive chapters are not added one to the other; everything is said in the section "The Argument" [pp. 1-20] and, in a way, repeated in the brief final pages, which bear a title of particular interest for us here: "Otherwise Said." (Ricoeur 2004: 83, brackets mine.)

<sup>391</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 84-86; Levinas 1981: 3-4.

which, in turn, quite easily leads us to a situation where the other is observed as an *interval* of being, as a *distance to* and a *difference from* being, as a relation (with being) whose differentiating nature comes out *only and precisely in this distance it takes in regard to being*. To say that the other is an interval of being is to explicitly express its ‘being with being,’ a reciprocal form of *being*, a mutual interest which is ultimately the interest (“inter-esse” or “intér-essement”)<sup>392</sup> of *being*. (Here we may also apprehend a recurrence of the term *il y a*, the there is, in which even nothingness *is* and which cannot be surpassed — Macbeth, Phaedra, death, murder and all expiration of being belong to the sphere of being.) And it is mainly from this problematique that Levinas’ *otherwise than being* wishes to depart.

But how does all this concern the Saying and the Said? Following Ricoeur, the Saying *as responsibility*, as responsibility for the Said in *proximity* (“proximity of the one to the other”), is disinterestedness (*désintéressement*)<sup>393</sup> — or, perhaps, ‘not-yet-interest’ — which antecedes all interest and reciprocity and (pre-)obligates the fact that being *has an interest* (in “intér-essement”), the fact that being correlates even with non-being.<sup>394</sup> But it seems that this problematique can be expressed only by letting (or forcing) it pass through the Said, by making the Saying *correlate* with the Said. We thus keep reverting to a proposition concerning being (with a truth value), to a categorical statement, an “apophansis”<sup>395</sup> (as described by Aristotle), which, in turn, can be subdivided into kataphatic (positive) propositions and apophatic (negative) propositions.<sup>396</sup> (Considering some prospective issues, it may prove useful to note here how according to apophatic [negative] theology we cannot describe what God *is*, only what S/He *is not*. Thus, we would not be able to *name* God’s attributes, only the attributes that do not concern Her/Him. God would thus *be in the very position* where we cannot name or ‘say’ Her/Him, which would also mean, ultimately, that the questions concerning God’s essence belong to the problematique of

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<sup>392</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 84.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.; see Levinas 1981: 5-9.

<sup>395</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 84.

<sup>396</sup> See e.g. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy website (entry: Mysticism, Ch. 2.4), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mysticism/>, 5 August 2008.

*being*, not least because of the *problem of naming*.) What is at issue is then also a ‘game’ within being and its *systematisation*, within its apophantic nature that “tends towards *nominalization, the name-making of all the resources of meaning in language[:]*”<sup>397</sup> it would be a game of the correlation and recuperation of being, which also means that the Saying constantly reverts to (or is included in) the Said.

It is no wonder that Levinas wants to depart such a prerequisite in his ethical project, given the overall nature of his work. For if, as Ricoeur notes, we understand the relation between the Saying and the Said as a correlative relation (on the basis of the above formulations), they bear *no philosophical interest* in the Levinasian project precisely because they bear an *interest*, not only a mutual interest but also an external interest which is, in the end, an interest in the Said.<sup>398</sup> On the other hand, if the correlation between the Saying and the Said is considered as a correlation between the act of uttering and the utterance, we are still dealing with the (semiotic) problematique of signification. Therefore, the analytic interest imposed on them (the Saying and the Said) — whether coming from a linguistic or phenomenological direction — cannot concern or come to concern Levinas’ radical attempts towards otherwise than being. For him, the most important issue here is *not* the dialectical or correlative relation between those terms (as a process occurring within the ontological problematique). Any claim that seeks knowledge through a linguistic approach and any analysis of such a claim — as a process that returns to the question of being and to the *recuperation* of being — is a process (of the Said) that leads to the relation noun-verb, or Subject-Predicate.<sup>399</sup> When exposed to/in the Said, any quest for otherwise than being would then be subjected to this relation. (Here, Ricoeur also elicits the polarity “*onoma-rhēma*” in Plato’s *Cratylus* and “*noesis-noema*” in phenomenology. Linguistic theory, in turn, has often problematised “the assignation of verbs to events and actions[.]” Although these approaches seem to open up “the possibility of a pragmatics of Saying that, at first glance, might

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<sup>397</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 85, italics mine.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.: 84-85.

<sup>399</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 85.



justify a dialectics of Saying and the Said... for Levinas, this could be nothing more than a correlation that annuls alterity...”<sup>400</sup>

From my point of view, one central ethical concern here is the fact that the dialectic between a verb and a noun that would *ostensibly* express the dialectic between the Saying and the Said — or the surface/interface between the act of Saying and the Said — is *not*, for Levinas, the factor that distinguishes the Saying from the Said regarding the ethics of responsibility, inasmuch as the verb constantly ‘returns’ to the noun (qua *Subject* or *event*). The problematique concerning conditions of truth in the form “A is A” or “A is B”<sup>401</sup> (or the difference between these claims) is not the most significant problem from an ethical point of view, but the fact that, for example, ‘A loves B’ comes to mean ‘A *as* a lover of B.’ Here A does not remain open to B, but B becomes an object of A’s intentions (or being). In this sense, predication seems to reassert A’s identity as A in much the same way as being does as a phenomenon that constantly returns itself to itself, to its own being. In such a process, even a figure of otherness (B) becomes inevitably thematised (by A’s being), it is ‘emptied out’ of its otherness. It also seems that the Levinasian concept of *un-Saying* strives to respond to this problem, but under the thematic of “betrayal,” as a betrayal of betrayal, as a betrayal of the betrayal of ethics in language (or in the Said) — making it an “accusation” or a “denunciation” of this betrayal.<sup>402</sup> If the Said deceives the possibility of Saying, it has to be accused of this deception by (an act of) unsaying, which, in turn, also has to be unsaid: the inevitable process where all Saying becomes Said has to be interrupted and called into question. Thus, the constant betrayal of otherwise than being in the Said makes us ask whether there is a specific (and ‘undeceitful’) Said for it. (This is, without a doubt, one of the most difficult issues of *Otherwise than Being*.)

Ricoeur thus proceeds to discuss the conditions and possibilities of unsaying, and in this process we return to the concepts of *proximity*, *responsibility*,

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.: 86.

*corporeality* and *sensibility*. At stake is a *pre*-originality and an “an-archy”<sup>403</sup> that come from the Other and precede all (apophantic) Said and thus the fact that the Subject would be the sole origin of Saying, language or expression. For Levinas the initiative comes from the Other, which means that the mentioned *pre*-originality is not a move towards an initiative of Saying (coming from the Subject). This, in turn, seems to mean that the Other’s *pre*-originality does not signify a temporal anteriority, which, simply by being temporal, could be restored to the sphere of ontology. The prefixes *pre*- and *an*- do not signify, in Levinas’ thought, a process by which the imperfect, the perfect and the pluperfect tenses could ‘recuperate’ or ‘be invigorated’ in the present tense *as re-presentation(s)*, as acts of *making present*. Instead, they (the prefixes) signify a *responsibility for the present*: this is the responsibility that comes with the present tense, a responsibility in (human) proximity, where proximity tells us that we are *already* responsible for/in this proximity, where we are bound, not by temporality but by ethics. Although Levinas speaks here of a *dia-chrony* between the Other and the Subject (or between *infinity* and *essence*), we must not understand it as a temporal difference qua a relation, but *as an impossibility of producing a syn-chronic relation between them* (which would be, due to this *syn-chronic impossibility*, always already a relation that involves responsibility, a responsible relation).<sup>404</sup>

If temporality returns all difference to the “ontico-ontological”<sup>405</sup> system as *remembrance, keeping in mind* and *history*, the insurmountable difference between the Other and the the Subject loses sight of the responsibility that founds it — “[t]ime is essence and monstration of essence.”<sup>406</sup> In being as temporalisation, in the sphere of being, nothing is lost forever, which means, in the final analysis, that nothing truly obligates and that there is nothing to answer for. Temporal restoration as re-presentation annuls the ultimate demand of responsibility. The past as memorability, as a reminder, tells us that matters can

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<sup>403</sup> “The an-archy of ethical Saying eludes the *archē*, the origin [*archie*] of utterance, reduced to a simple outgrowth of the apophantic said.” (Ibid.)

<sup>404</sup> See Levinas 1981: 9-11; Ricoeur 2004: 87.

<sup>405</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 87.

<sup>406</sup> Levinas 1981: 9.

be replaced or compensated for, replaced *as re-presentation* — as a ‘restoration’ of being from which the past has never departed — and *not as substitution*. What Levinas is after, however, is a responsibility that antecedes, *non-temporally*, all situations that should be compensated for. The pre-original relationship with the Other is much more important for him, the relationship where it is difficult *to be*, where the Subject (or the Self) differs from but is in friction with the Other (or otherness); this relationship and its pre-original difficulty cannot be replaced (as re-presentation) without an ethical loss. The relationship with the Other cannot be remembered or recalled to mind in such a way that the responsibility to (and for) the Other would not suffer significantly, in such a way that the responsibility would not become a memory, a mental image, a certain *figure or trace of the Other*. (At this point Ricoeur asks whether remembrance or memorability would serve, in themselves, as ways of recognising the “temporal distance that is irrecoverable in re-presentation.” He adds, however, that “this would require freeing memory itself of any hold that re-presentation has on it.”<sup>407</sup> In any case, this suggestion speaks of a certain irreplaceability, where memory reminds us of its own *incompetence* and thus of the responsibility that comes with the acts of remembering [and thus also memorising].) All in all, the mentioned *dia-chrony*, *an-archy* and *pre-originality*, as well as *their impossibility as a temporal question*, show that the very difficulty or ‘uncomfortability’ of human proximity puts my present being or being-in-the-present — and all past remembered in that present — into question, for it cannot truly correlate (ethically) with anything that was before or is yet to be *qua temporality*.<sup>408</sup>

Next, Ricoeur proceeds to examine the problem whether the Saying is a certain activity of the Said, an ‘activation of the Said.’ Levinas emphasises that in *Otherwise than being* being means first of all *essence* — “*being* different from *beings*, the German *Sein* distinguished from *Seindes*, the Latin *esse* distinguished from the Scholastic *ens...*”<sup>409</sup> — but that with this understanding we also encounter a suggestion that

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<sup>407</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 88.

<sup>408</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 86-88.

<sup>409</sup> Levinas 1981: xli.

[t]ime and the *essence* it unfolds by manifesting *entities*, identified in the themes of statements or narratives, resound as a silence without becoming themes themselves. They can, to be sure, be named in a theme, but this naming does not reduce to definitive silence the mute resonance, the murmur of silence, in which essence is identified as an entity. [...] In a predicative proposition, an apophansis, an entity can make itself be understood verbally, as a “way” of essence, as the *fruitio essendi* itself, as a *how*, a modality of this essence or this temporalisation. [...] A is A is to be understood also as “the sound resounds” or the “red reddens” — or as “A As.”<sup>410</sup>

We encounter here an intense problematique, but one way of linking it to the questions of the Saying and the Said would be to ask whether the ‘Said Saiddens’ if it is considered as a “way” of essence, if it shows us statements and figures as entities capable of affecting and determining being as a *verb*. Quoting Levinas, Ricoeur notes that “[i]f I should say “red reddens” (this brings to mind the Heideggerian expression “time temporalises”), under the appearance of Saying, the verb remains caught up in the net of denomination: “The Said, as a verb, is the essence of essence”<sup>411</sup>. *Essence* is the very fact that there is theme, ostension, *doxa* or *logos*, and thus truth... The verbality of the verb does not create a true gap relative to the substantiality of the noun... One must admit that being, as verb, does not extract us from the said of the nominalized participle.”<sup>412</sup> The Said, even considered as a verb is, in this context, some sort of underlying form (the “essence of essence”) that dominates its content, i.e., that which *moves* within the Said. The issue is extremely challenging, without a doubt, but one central point to catch in regard to the present work is the fact that essence and the Said qua essence do remain within the problematique that concerns being.

But Levinas then offers the Saying to us as an “ethical interruption of essence”,<sup>413</sup> since it is “both an affirmation and a retraction of the said”, where the interruption (or the intervention) “energizes the reduction. [...] The said, contesting the abdication of the saying that everywhere occurs in this said, thus

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid.: 38.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.: 39.

<sup>412</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 89.

<sup>413</sup> Levinas 1981: 44; Ricoeur 2004: 89.

maintains the diachrony in which, holding its breath, the spirit hears the echo of the *otherwise*.”<sup>414</sup> The interruption of the Said can only take place on the basis of the Said. The way to the Saying opens up, eventually, in the very *congealing* of the Said, in the fact that the solidity of the Said contains, in itself, a question concerning itself — by its ‘dogmatism,’ it is open to questioning.<sup>415</sup> The possibility of Saying can thus echo in the Said, *suggest itself* in the questionable essence of logocentrism. The questionable tyranny of the Said thought in the terms of ethics would thus allow the interruptive possibility of the Saying to thrive. And this interruption of the Said would be, first of all, a challenge occurring in the sphere where one approaches human *proximity, responsibility* and *substitution*.<sup>416</sup>

Proximity is then described by Levinas (and Ricoeur) as “obsession” through which the *difference* between the Subject (or here, the Same) and the Other changes into *non-in-difference*.<sup>417</sup> Although this is a very difficult theme in Levinas, one might say, broadly, that the term obsession refers here to ‘non-contentual meaning,’ to an interest that interests because of the interest itself, to the peremptory nature of the relation between the Subject and the Other, the fact that it is an obsessive relation. Since it seems to echo the meaning of Lehmann’s “empty signal” as the initial or *affecting* and *temporalising* signal of the stage, it is important to note that it also offers the thought an effortless shift towards the violence imposed on the Other, a shift from obsession to *fetishism*, to the figure of the Other which obsession would concern *as content*. A fetishism concerning the Other would be a form of *reverse obsession*, or obsession ‘drained of the Other,’ a fixation on the fact that the Other appears *explicitly to me*. The neighbour *as* a neighbour does not appear as a figure or a form, but as proximity (and in proximity), as a weighty obligation which disturbs the continuum of my temporal being and its relation to memory, history and narration (the Other cannot be remembered, and one cannot temporalise the Other).<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Levinas 1981: 44, brackets mine.

<sup>415</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 89-90.

<sup>416</sup> See Levinas 1987a: 109-126. (‘Language and proximity.’)

<sup>417</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 90.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*: 91.

Against this set-up we may observe the accusations and questions the Saying (as un-Saying) imposes on the Said. Levinas' un-Saying is, perhaps shockingly, inevitably violent towards the Said. It strives to unveil and expose the Said, to wound and 'traumatise' it. But more important than this violent move is the fact that it betrays the (ethical) betrayal of the Said, reveals this betrayal; the fact that the Said is an obligation towards the Saying — in proximity, in 'being against.' (The skin can be used here as a sort of metaphor: by touching, by being against something or someone, it tells me that I am against something which does not precede me temporally — of that I cannot say anything, I do not know if it was there before my touch —, but which encounters me by setting itself against me, by making me answer, by making me answerable.)<sup>419</sup>

However, according to Levinas, this movement cannot stop at the level of proximity. The demand of otherwise than being as (ethically obligating) infinity that does not return to being or essence, requires a further move towards *substitution*, where the self is emptied out of itself, where it has to suffer *for* the Other, to be its hostage (by being) without having chosen to do so. (In this context Ricoeur wonders "whether Levinas's readers have assessed the enormity of the paradox that consists in having malice say the extreme degree of passivity in the ethical condition.")<sup>420</sup> Accordingly, the process of (un-)Saying should cut through — or even 'disembowel' — the Said which pushes otherness aside in its constant movement towards being.) The situation speaks thus, above all, of the way the Other moves towards the Self (or the "ego"), of the pre-original demand of the Other and of the Self's compensation for its being, where it strives to compensate for its very being *by being for the Other*. A compensation is a compensation and an expiation is an expiation only insofar as these precede the ego's initiative and will.<sup>421</sup> Repentance through re-presentation can only acquire a secondary or a belated meaning. (Ricoeur states that Levinas does not want forgiveness at that price.)<sup>422</sup> An apology — as an *apo*-logy, where the prefix

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<sup>419</sup> See Levinas 1981: 110.

<sup>420</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 92.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.: 93; Levinas 1981: 113-118.

<sup>422</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 93. Apropos theatrical representation, according to Elisabeth Angel-Perez (2006: 141) Howard Barker's theatrical vision "insists on the necessity for a stage language

‘apo-’ means *off* or *away* and ‘-logy’ comes from the Greek *logos*, meaning *reason* or *word* — becomes a rather interesting concept in this context: it would not mean in the Levinasian sense any form of *un-Saying*, but rather a statement ‘saying away (or speaking aside of) the (pre-)original responsibility’ as a belated excuse.<sup>423</sup>

But Ricoeur is clearly troubled by the “malice” with which the Saying should interrupt the Said. A demand for wounding and exposure as an ethical interruption of/within language reveals a situation where the forms and figures that concern the problem of essence, the forms and figures that comprise the content of the questions that concern the latter, are cut open in such a way that threatens to undo the responsibility of Saying precisely *as responsibility*. This also means that the subjective ‘skin’ that sets itself against its responsibility is cut open with a *new definition* of the violence of the Said. Ricoeur chooses to call this threat “verbal terrorism,” where the Saying is in danger of being engulfed in a vortex of linguistic violence.<sup>424</sup> (It seems that Artaud, describing his Theatre of Cruelty, was after this kind of ‘terrorism’ as he said that “[e]verything that acts is a cruelty” and that “[i]t is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that the theatre must be rebuilt[,]” as he wanted “the poetry that occurs on the stage” to ‘superheat’ symbols. But such a process was to reveal, according to him, precisely “a battle of symbols[,]” which would throw theatrical thematisation deeper into the *imaginary* realm of myth and magic.<sup>425</sup> Moreover, as Derrida has shown, Artaud’s understanding of theatre was/is not able to escape the closure of re-presentation.)<sup>426</sup>

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that would be drastically new so as to disorient the audience. The audience must be at a ‘loss’ and only this experience of being at a loss can open the way to the ethical encounter.” Read Levinas-wise, one’s ‘being at a loss’ could refer here to witnessing the *loss of responsibility in representation and in recognition of representation* (which, in turn, would not refer to recognition of [this or that] representation *as representation*, but to the very moment of its appearing as a representation.)

<sup>423</sup> Levinas (2005: 252) also describes an apology as “the positive act of the one justifying himself in his freedom before the other...”

<sup>424</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 93.

<sup>425</sup> Artaud’s *The Theatre and its Double* (Grove Press: New York, 1958): 85, quoted in Esslin 1985: 383.

<sup>426</sup> Derrida 1978b: 232-250.

As a sort of demonstration of the difficulty that comes with responding to the above problematique, Ricoeur brings out the Levinasian concepts of the *third party* and *justice*, which seem to settle themselves in the 'grey area' between the other and the problematique of being, in the area where their irreconcilable relationship is negotiated thematically. He asks if the obligating (and infinite) ethical weight of the abovementioned verbal terrorism unfolds or emerges only afterwards, as a sort of *trace* (of Infinity's *illeity*, the her-/himness of Infinity<sup>427</sup>) in language. The third party should enter language in order to render the wounding of language (qua the Said) generally meaningful and thus even more binding, 'without exception.' It refers to a "disinterestedness,"<sup>428</sup> where the human animal, as a Subject, is with the Other in the presence of (and with) the third party, in the presence of the Other's *illeity*, against our own egological and subjective being:

In the indirect ways of *illeity*, in the anarchical provocation which ordains me to the other, is imposed the way which leads to thematization, and to an act of consciousness. The act of consciousness is motivated by the presence of a third party alongside of the neighbor approached. A third party is also approached; and the relationship between the neighbor and the third party cannot be indifferent to me when I approach. There must be a justice among incomparable ones. There must then be a comparison between incomparables and a synopsis, a togetherness and contemporaneity; there must be thematization, thought, history and inscription. But being must be understood on the basis of *being's other*. To be on the ground of the signification of an approach is to be *with another* for or against a third party, with the other and the third party against oneself, in justice. [...] Reason, to which the virtue of arresting violence is ascribed, issuing in the order of peace, presupposes disinterestedness, passivity or patience. In this disinterestedness, when, as a responsibility for the other, it is

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<sup>427</sup> See e.g. Levinas 1981: 147-148. "The detachment of the Infinite from the thought that seeks to thematize it and the language that tries to hold it in the said is... *illeity*." (Ibid.: 147.) "The exteriority of *illeity*, refractory to disclosure and manifestation, is a having-to-be in the face of another." (Ibid.: 193, n. 35.) See also Levinas 1996a: 83-84.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.: 94.



also a responsibility for the third party, the justice that compares, assembles and conceives, the synchrony of being and peace, take form.<sup>429</sup>

Ricoeur then proceeds to mention how for Levinas it seems that the very *humanity of humanity*, its “homogeneity”<sup>430</sup> as humanity, does not allow us to speak of proximity without referring to the question of justice — “the “demand for justice” allows itself to be woven into the reverse side of the fabric [or skin] of proximity”,<sup>431</sup> as Ricoeur says. This prompts the question whether there is justice or a demand for justice even *before* the situation where human individuals *differ* from one another when *being* with one another, before the difficult (or *un*-comfortable) situation of proximity. It seems then that the concepts of justice and the third party cover up or obscure *substitution*, the *asymmetry* between the Self and the Other and the Self’s infinite responsibility for the Other. (However, one has to understand that, according to Levinas, one can think of these concepts only on the basis of the infinite and compelling ethical obligation.)

What conclusive assessments could one formulate after this exhausting process, where one term is added to another to both widen and deepen the ethical reaches of the discussion, where the terms inform but at the same time problematise one another? In the last few pages of his essay, Ricoeur notes that there is strong and continuous thematic movement (back) towards the ontological problematique in Levinas’ work. He detects in it a “quasi-ontology that might be called post-ethical[,]” saying that “one wonders whether *Otherwise than Being* contains the beginnings of a post-ethics that would be a way of re-saying the tradition.”<sup>432</sup> Thus, he also draws up a list of themes and thematisations in the work which, according to him, exceeds the ethics of responsibility, a list which passes through questions of responsibility, Infinity, illeity, thirdness and “culminates with the *Name* of God.” Examining the last item on the list, Ricoeur finds that Levinas’ intense ethical problematic still has to correlate with “denomination,” as a configuration that has a theme and is

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<sup>429</sup> Levinas 1981: 16.

<sup>430</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 94; Levinas 1981: 81.

<sup>431</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 94, brackets mine.

<sup>432</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 97.

included in a theme. Levinas himself mentions in his work how “the name outside of essence or beyond essence, the individual prior individuality, is named God. It precedes all divinity, that is, the divine essence which the false gods, individuals sheltered in their concept, lay claim to.”<sup>433</sup> He also states that “[i]n the play activating the cultural keyboard of language, sincerity or witness signifies by the very ambiguity of every said, where, in the midst of the information communicated to another there signifies also the sign that is given to him of this giving of signs. That is the resonance of every language “in the name of God,” *the inspiration or prophecy of all language*.”<sup>434</sup> Ricoeur thus claims that this *sign of all signs*, “this exceptional *Name* signals the revenge of the name over the initial condemnation of denomination, which served as a weapon in the war against ontology.”<sup>435</sup> In addition, insofar as Lacan’s and Žižek’s notion of the big Other and its theatrical aspects can be linked to Levinas’ understanding of the Name of God — in whose name all names are given —, the theatrical situation, the (f)act of gesturing and its interpretation as an organic element of that same ‘staging,’ would be in a fundamental sense an event of offering signs to the ‘giver of signs,’ to the symbolic substance which cannot be named but which, in itself, compels to name and to make names and signs meaningful.

In any case, in the Name of God (or the *ur*-position of denomination) we may observe a sort of exception to the pre-original signification of Saying, insofar as it would signify as a certain Said before the problem of Saying, or before any dialectical or non-dialectical problematisation of the Saying and the Said. God would reveal her/him/itself as a revenge of the name, as a revelation where she/he/it cannot be described (or named) by different names or attributes. (And we see here a return to the question of apophatic theology: The Name of God, in itself, as the *Name*, would name the processes of apophatic theology, the processes with which we say what God is *not*. These processes would then be named and defined by what God *is*, her/his/its Name as the Name of God, as a God without theology. [If my reading of Ricoeur and Levinas is correct at this point, theology itself is only one illusion of this Name — the other option being,

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<sup>433</sup> Levinas 1981: 190, n. 38; Ricoeur 2004: 98.

<sup>434</sup> Levinas 1981: 152, italics mine.

<sup>435</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 97.

of course, that this Name, without theology, is an illusion.])<sup>436</sup> All in all, Ricoeur considers that “[i]t is under the aegis of this Name that the “infinite” may fall into ethics, whereas “totality” falls back into ontology.”<sup>437</sup> It then seems that the ‘ethical war against ontology’ above is also named by the Name of God, that it is a process supported by the derivatives of this original Name, a line of thought held up by the progeny of this *sign of signs*. The name of an entity would thus be, *precisely as a name*, the very place where it is exposed and vulnerable to the possibility of Saying. The name — as an heir of the Name of God — does not thematise (as such), but it is still meaningful. I am a *who?*, *to whom* one must address the question *to whom?*, before asking the questions *how?* and *why?*<sup>438</sup> As a name I am already meaningful, an address, even if I would be an illegible address. Levinas has it that understanding this ambivalence of the name, its meaning without thematisation or despite thematisation, its position as a theme but at the same time as something much more significant than the theme, is one of the main tasks of philosophy.

However, following certain conclusive observations by Ricoeur, I see that the overarching *theme* of the significance of the Name under which the confrontation between ethics and ontology, justice, the Saying and the Said, being-for-the-Other and being a hostage of the Other are situated *as a question of meaning and signification*, appears to ‘repatriate’ the radicality of the above ethical problematic back to the question of the *meaning of being*. We may observe in the discussion a certain neutralisation back to being (even to the *there is, il y a*), which would also mean that one has to ask whether there is no meaning (in being).<sup>439</sup> It is even as if the radical *being-in-proximity* as being with one another, the constant ‘translation’ of the Saying into the Said it requires and homogeneity as a question of shared humanity are processes that neutralise any radical effort to interrupt the recuperation of being, telling us that being *is* radical by its very essence (sic), radical enough to engulf all departures from it.

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<sup>436</sup> Cf. Ricoeur 2004: 98; Levinas 1981: 94.

<sup>437</sup> Ricoeur 2004: 98.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.: 98; Levinas 1981: 176.

But what could possibly be the theatrical relevance or import of these overwhelming themes and configurations? One way of looking into that issue would be to understand that the *modus operandi* of theatre is precisely to utilise the problematic of being and all its thematic derivatives, the ethical obstacles (or obstacles to ethics) we keep returning to in this discussion. Being (or *essence*, in this context), language, signification, naming, the Saying and the Said as a dialectical movement and narration as re-presentation (or remembrance, recollection) are not allergens to theatre, but the very instruments with which it may operate on the infinite and indecipherable ethical obligation. It has a history and it is involved in history, and yet it does not recoil from questions of infinity or *asymmetry* that concern ethical responsibility but strives to embrace them through the non-totalising operation of mimesis. In this respect, theatrical activity may, in a quite determined manner, approach Derrida's statement according to which "[h]istory can be neither a decidable object nor a totality capable of being mastered, precisely because it is tied to responsibility..."<sup>440</sup> Moreover, it does not shy away from the difficult situation of being with one another or from the fact that this situation *means* something, but presents acute interhuman relations to us as the surface/interface where these invisible and essentially uncontrollable themes are released because something (rather than nothing) has to be expressed and (S)aid. In this sense, it also tests the ontological and aesthetic credibility of ethics. If it remains ignorant of ethics, it is because ethics, in itself, has no voice or language to (S)ay so (and neither does ignorance). To make this situation visible (both concretely and theoretically), theatre has to make the assumption that its means are valid, that the actors and the stage indeed close up the circle of community as a *sign* of other/stranger/guest, that it may function as a test ground of ethics. And there it 'remains to be seen.'

Drawing on the problematic and binding relation between language and expression, Guénoun states in his essay 'Sanojen näyttely' [Exhibition of

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<sup>440</sup> Derrida's *The Gift of Death* (1994:5) quoted in Ortiz 2005: 132.

words]<sup>441</sup> that theatre “does not use visibility as a metaphor — as thought does when it claims to see, if only with the analogous eye of *logos*[:]”<sup>442</sup> “[t]heatre does not bring forth the traces, record[ing]s or substitutes of (a) speech that has departed. Theatre requires a body and a voice. It wants [or desires] speech itself in the act of its articulation. And it wants to see speech.”<sup>443</sup>

In the process where words and expressions open up towards intelligibility they articulate how they are *doubly invisible* — as voices and meanings —, and theatre wants to show us the very impressiveness of the situation where they encounter visibility and corporeality:

Theatre wants the body and matters [or issues] to be revealed before its eyes. A view as a sensation. And also as an aesthetic. The body that theatre wants to look at and scrutinise, the visible matter that it wishes to turn into its theatrical object, is the body and matter of words. Words, in turn, consist of voices and ideas and are therefore [non-exhibitable or invisible] in essence. Theatre wants to see the invisible. To this peculiar impossibility it sacrifices — and has sacrificed for at least twentyfive centuries in Europe, elsewhere even longer — the resourcefulness of its artistic crew, all its actors, painters, costume designers, scenic artists, musicians, dancers, directors, employees — the whole skillfulness of its *mise en scène*. [...] Theatre... generates something visible starting from words [or from words onwards]. This is precisely what *mise en scène* is. *Mise en scène* is an art — or skill — that pursues two goals, a linguistic one and a visual one. This art is generated in a space delimited by the two mentioned supporters, it is an art of moving from one [supporter] to the other, an art of joining [or throwing] together a text and a body that has been laid out.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Guénoun 2007: 13-56, translation from Finnish mine. Originally published as *L'exhibition des mots. Une idée (politique) du théâtre* in Guénoun's *L'exhibition des mots et autres idées du théâtre et de la philosophie* (Circé, 2005).

<sup>442</sup> Guénoun 2007: 37, translation mine.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*: 35-36, brackets mine.

<sup>444</sup> Guénoun 2007: 37-38, translation and brackets mine.

Adding the art of drama to this discussion, he later states that “theatre is encountered by a twofold temptation to deny itself: as literature and spectacle<sup>445</sup>. Between them is where theatre truly is. It is between invisible words and the dimension of the stage [or the scene], in a constitutive conflict where the text is denatured by being brought forth, the eye is deceived by the fact that words are offered to it, and this conflict of exhibition is constantly and persistently made visible.”<sup>446</sup> Although it appears that with these views we are still moving on the dimension on which the dialectics and pragmatics of the Saying and the Said reveal themselves (and which Levinas’ wishes to depart from), they speak of the fact that theatre does not avoid it as a problem, but strives to utilise it as a means of showing how the Said, in its congealing, always contains (or bears on its face) a question *qua demand*.

Guénoun also finds a specifically Levinasian aspect for examining theatrical thematisation in his essay, when he discusses the dimension and essence of *dialogue*. Choosing Levinas’ (and some of Peter Szondi’s) thoughts as an informative baseline for his understanding of this modus of interaction (and also following Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and Gabriel Marcel), he states that the role of drama (as a *dia*-logical form) in the context of theatre text is to be “the genre of interpersonality[,]” it is “*the genre of the other.*”<sup>447</sup> Here, for Guénoun, what is at issue is the fact of *addressing*: the fact of “opening to the other, to that You, which was born in language and from which language was born. Dialogicality is that transcendence of addressing, which exceeds all objective hold” as a process of “listening, opening, sharing and giving oneself in presence and listening.”<sup>448</sup> Guénoun thus seems to acknowledge here the significance of the Levinasian non-totalisation (and also that of *asymmetry*) for

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<sup>445</sup> Guénoun (2007: 39) claims that “[s]pectacle is theatre’s disconnected body[,]” which means that it “is a scene [or a view] devoid of the invisible text that calls it forth. And because text — even in a *spectacle* — always already *is*, a *spectacle* is a scene for that which exists without speech, without a linguistic origin, without a writing that establishes [it]. It is not [a corpus], but an ideology of corporality, an illusion, which enshrouds and covers up the origin of theatre in language and in that which is non-exhibitible in words.” (Translation, brackets and italics mine.)

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., translation and brackets mine.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.: 85.

<sup>448</sup> Guénoun 2007: 85-86.

an interhuman relation, at least in this particular context. Although we are moving in an area where otherness bears a textual characteristic and a threat of becoming a thematised “You,” Guénoun seems, thus, to acknowledge the fact that thematisation — in dialogicality — is an operation compelled by an *exteriority*, which both needs to be thematised and cannot be thematised; it remains a question (performed) in/to a (re-presented) theme: “the kernel, element, special characteristic” of a dialogue would be, in this context, “an address[ing] (that awaits an answer).”<sup>449</sup> (*Action*, in its turn, would be “a decision before/in front of something[.]”<sup>450</sup> a decision performed and “accomplished under the influence of one or many gazes and thoughts”, “before one or many other human beings.” And so, “a decision before something awaits an answer, [and] because of this it has to answer for itself before the answer it has presumed.”)<sup>451</sup> As a certain *exposure*, *answerability* and even *proximity* appear still to colour the context, we may assume that theatrical thematisation (or denomination) would bear an even closer (or more familiar) relation to the unfamiliar terrain of *ethical ontology*.

Kirkkopelto, for his part, considers the relation between the problem of being (with one another) and theatrical thematisation by saying that we might even ask whether there needs to be “a certain theatrical mediation” when we move (or transfer) from the *one* to the *other*. (He continues to state that at any rate, “there is something in these transitions that does not cease to interest or bind us.”<sup>452</sup>)

[With what is] onstage we witness (*testis, tersis*)... time and again how language returns to the body, not to merge back into it, but to show us how it ceaselessly disengages itself from the body, so that the body’s original linguisticity, the signifying [or significant] body, existence, the fact that something *is* would appear [or come up]. So things have been seen and have to be seen in the theatre: onstage everything signifies. By the same token, we cannot draw a line between the ethical and the political on the level where theatre takes place [or happens]. Rather, what happens in this dimension is the fluctuation, dispute and

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid.: 82, brackets mine.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.: 83, “décision devant” in French.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Kirkkopelto 2006: 266, translation mine.

demarcation between these viewpoints, an encounter between two human beings, which leads to the third and, from there, back between you and me.<sup>453</sup>

These views are actually some conclusive assessments of an essay that employs (in part) Levinas' thought to examine the dynamics of a scenic (or stagely) encounter. Describing it, Kirkkoppelto acknowledges Levinas' antipathy towards images and their insufficient mediating role in his thought, but notes that our experience of the *miraculous* nature of existence may take place "*precisely on the level of language itself* (its corporality), in which case everything both signifies [or 'bears curiousness'] and is without significance, in a word, is a *curiosity*."<sup>454</sup>

Thus we approach here the Levinasian aspect according to which all phenomena bear an excess meaning (as a demand), meaning which cannot be mediated, which cannot be thematised or deduced from the figures and forms available. In this context, *the third party* and the infinite absence of *illeity* (manifest only in its trace) are always already *next to* or *alongside of* the phenomenon encountered, they tell us that being is compelled to take on meaning because *there is a need to experience and communicate even when there is no actual meaning to convey*. Accordingly, the Other *at hand* is not only a sign or a meaning to be deciphered, but also, and in a fundamental manner, a bearer of a meaning that is infinitely absent, namely the demand to apprehend that the Other is meaningful prior to any act of signification.<sup>455</sup>

Following the Levinasian configuration, this could be considered as an overarching, shared or even universal obligation regarding the fact of our experience, or the way our experience is thematised through figures and forms — an obligation that comes with the *third party*, the concept of the *Third*. As an obligation that concerns theatrical interaction, it can be seen also as a certain *privilege*, a privilege to say and reveal something generic but specific of our experience of the world, something that survives and 'tolerates' the localised,

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid., translation, brackets and latter italics mine.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid.: 265, translation and brackets mine.

<sup>455</sup> See *ibid.*



phenomenal and singular nature of a gesture or an impression. I wish thus to quote here in length a hypothesis with which Kirkkopelto opens his essay:

In the theatre one does not encounter another person, an actor, as her/himself or as a character, but as something through which may emerge something of our way of encountering the world in general. The scenic encounter — between spectator and performer, performer and performer, spectator and spectator — turns aside from the grounding empirical and objective space and situation where it takes place, without necessarily referring to anywhere else. The nexus between experience and world becomes momentarily recognisable and encounterable in the dimension of the stage. But that experience is no state of oneness [or undividedness], mystical fusion or personal enlightenment. On the contrary, in it, all those paradoxes, aporiae, and chiasmatic routes to which our logical and linguistic [or logocentric] description of the world is so movingly and often unknowingly devoted, may be disclosed. We are encountered by the complex structure and dynamics of our experience.<sup>456</sup>

However, with these issues we still seem to be moving on the ‘outer and inner surface’ of thematisation and denomination (or of the effort to thematise and denominate phenomena, to *make sense* of sensing), as if there always needs to be some theme (or a process of naming), so that the subjects that exist bearing a relation to one another and the world would not disappear to (or become) those relations altogether, so that there remains a point of view, an identity, a whole (and sane) vision of the self with regard to the world.

In such a context, the need to transform theatrical meanings and imagery into shared (or common) meanings and images would be a way of alleviating this situation, a way of providing individual consciousnesses a background against which they can both lean and stand out. Without some shared or communicable purpose — a theme, language, interaction (or dialogue) between identities — the problematic relation between the inherent complexity of being (which we encounter, inevitably) and the Levinasian ethical demand shows itself as an overwhelming landscape for the individual consciousness that wishes to *mean* something, if only by being.

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<sup>456</sup> Kirkkopelto 2006: 262, translation and brackets mine.

Not only is the subject required to make sense of the world; it is also required to apprehend an ethical question in *all that makes sense*, in all that makes it purpose-oriented and purposeful in the first place. Here, its intentions and identity are truly called into question. It seems to confront, in a very direct manner, Levinas' disconcerting view according to which "[t]he psyche, the-one-for-the-other, can be a possession and a *psychosis*; the soul is already a seed of folly."<sup>457</sup>

I wish thus to proceed to discuss the "possession" or the "psychosis" Levinas mentions through a theatrical thematisation, which acknowledges the fact that the Self, as an individual consciousness and a communicative unit (or factor), desires themes, names and meanings in order to preserve itself and its capability to communicate, the capability to *be-in-proximity*. In addition, these themes, names and meanings need to be *focused* somehow, either in a collective or individual sense, so that the exuberant and ambiguous nature of meaning, in its turn, does not become "a seed of folly," or, ultimately, a seed of *evil*, evil as the very *incomprehensibility of being*.

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<sup>457</sup> Levinas 1981: 191, n. 3, italics mine. "The psyche is the form of a peculiar dephasing, a loosening up or unclamping of identity: the same prevented from coinciding with itself, at odds, torn up from its rest, between sleep and insomnia, panting, shivering. It is not an abdication of the same, now alienated and slave to the other, but an abnegation of oneself fully responsible for the other. This identity is brought out by responsibility and is at the service of the other. In the form of responsibility, the psyche in the soul is the other in me, a malady of identity, both accused and *self*, the same for the other, the same by the other. Qui pro quo, it is a substitution, extraordinary." (Ibid.: 68-69)

#### 4.4. Reaching out through evil (being and identity) — Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*<sup>458</sup>

I need to become who I already am and will bellow  
forever at this incongruity which has committed me to hell

Sarah Kane: *4.48 Psychosis*<sup>459</sup>

In light of the above observations, it is no surprise that the complex relations between meaning, language and consciousness continue to provoke animated discussions within the field of art research. The need to recognise and internalise meaning remains an undeniable problem, no matter what point of departure or approach we choose to satisfy it. In this respect, it seems that understanding is indeed the most demanding of all human 'senses.'

A text that approaches and depicts — i.e., communicates — psychosis, a serious and acute state of mental illness, can thus be considered a model example of an interpretational challenge which breaks the boundaries of meaning and questions its 'integration' in the Self, a textual dimension where the structural and thematic substance appears to be out of proportion with any aim that strives to crystallise and convey something of its meaning(s). *4.48 Psychosis*, the

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<sup>458</sup> This chapter is for the most part based on my article 'Sarah Kanen särkynyt dialektiikka,' originally published in 2004 in *Arvoituksellisia tulkintoja — Draama-analyysejä* ['Sarah Kane's shattered dialectics' in *Enigmatic interpretations — Analyses of drama.*]: 181-211. Eds. Pia Houni & Tiia Kurkela. Univ. of Tampere, Dept. of Literature and the Arts: Tampere. Translation from Finnish mine.

<sup>459</sup> Kane 2001 (hereafter P): 212. All citations from the play are from Kane's *Complete plays*. In them, I mostly use the structure of the original text in order to emphasise the relations between form and content the author has intended. Extractions and clarifications will be presented in brackets.

posthumously premiered and published play by the English playwright Sarah Kane (1971-1999), thus poses several demands for its interpretation, not least because its structure is essentially fragmentary and (thus) exceptionally transparent to different dramatisations. On the other hand (or precisely because of this), its thematic analysis cannot concentrate solely on its linguistic means or on any 'hypothetically objective' meaning produced by those means. Instead, we should try to reach here (at least an elliptical) understanding of the complex network between depth psychology, narrativity and the human intellect; that is, of the human need and ability to generate meaning by employing certain experiential outlines and mythical substance. In other words, we need to analyse the *means with which we tie ourselves to the world*. When those means become obscure, or seem to disappear altogether, their original significance becomes all the more relevant. Therefore, this chapter deals with the thematic elements and ways of narration in Kane's play as a certain *phenomenological psychopathography in first person*. The aim of this approach is to understand how the text relates, in quite a striking manner, the meaninglessness experienced during psychotic episodes to a certain grounding intentionality that strives to reach some full and definitive understanding (of the mystery of being). At issue is the very impossibility to experience that looms behind the unidentifiable essence of psychosis, and the conceptual chaos that disintegrates any attempt to solve this *evil of inner incomprehensibility*.

Central themes amid this chaos are then the very possibilities and impossibilities organic to human encounters, the disappearance and continuous unidentifiability of experiential meaning and the blurring of the boundaries of external and internal factors in the fact of experiencing itself. Due to their inconsistent nature — which, paradoxically, both disintegrates the experience but at the same time tries to reach some 'organic' meaning —, these themes can be described as some sort of *broken dialectical mirrors*. The endeavour to understand the causality of reality and the linguistic representations of this causality while the very structures of the Self collapse, produces an intriguing dialectical procedure that 'aims at itself' — and by dialectics, I mean here first of all a trajectory of thought and communication that aims at a certain synthesis by reconciling various counterpoints and contradictions. In the present case this

trajectory remains, however, a discussional movement whose topics or aims cannot be recognised in any genuinely logical manner. Instead, it would be a mode of being that can only manifest itself *as an experience of incongruity*, as an experience whose 'authenticity' cannot be confirmed, and whose meaning to the Self threatens to remain obscure.

#### 4.4.1 *Kane's epilogue*

The last play by the gifted *enfant terrible* of the English theatre scene in the 1990s has been acclaimed an exceptionally perceptive text as far as the relations between mental illness and the reality surrounding it are concerned. It has also been considered a suicide note by the author, who killed herself in February 1999 after a long period of depression. Many public assessments of the text have thus concentrated on its biographical meaning and surpassed the structural and rhythmic means with which it expresses, for example, the difficulty of communicating feelings.<sup>460</sup> Those critical approaches that have focused on its artistic value see it as a laudable attempt to understand the collapsing psyche, acknowledging the finesse of its formal experimentation in this process as well as its ability to respond to the challenges the difficult subject matter imposes on it. However, these approaches have often discussed different productions of the play, for the text offers various (different) options for its staging or performance.<sup>461</sup> The play contains no direct instructions concerning its characters or its diegetic spatio-temporal dimension(s). The voices (or rather, utterances) of the text are not named, and thus they do not represent any definite or even clear references to specific storylines. At issue is a fragmentary description and articulation of the experience of psychosis, and so the allusions to spatio-temporal milieux and to the identity/identities of the speaker/speakers have to be extracted from the narration itself. On the other hand, the text thus constitutes an entity (or a totality), where the active subject is the *open psychotic mind*, open to

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<sup>460</sup> See e.g. Billington 2000: 5; Clapp 2000: 9.

<sup>461</sup> See Saunders 2002: 115; Clapp 2000: 9.

interpretations and experiential and mythical comparison precisely because of its structure.<sup>462</sup>

Nor does the play contain any conventional, clearly shaped dialogue. However, one can divide it into intermittent *phases* or *parts*. Drawing on playwright Edward Bond's reflections on the play, Graham Saunders speaks of these phases as "*discourses*," referring to both the linguistic and culturo-theoretical meanings of the term. His definition is based mainly on certain linguistic hierarchies and simultaneous processes of delimitation in experiencing and interpreting the text.<sup>463</sup> A central thematical focus, however, can be found in the interconnectedness of these discourses. The definition *discourse* is in this sense extensive, and aptly depicts the discussion between structurally divergent 'texts' in the play. Their content ranges between the problematique of communication and the desperation caused by an experience of detachment, but thus they are able to express a certain interdependence between these issues. I, however, settle for dividing the text into two separate discourses, named D1 and D2. Nonetheless, one should bear in mind the overlapping nature of these discourses.

D1 contains textual fragments that can function as a monologue, polylogue, or even as a dialogue between two subjects. Their narrative structure, however, is strongly linked to an individual experience of irrationality and anguish. The fragments are bound together as a textual collage, which combines the means of poetic (or lyrical) and naturalistic expression. Several fragments are citation-like, as if referring to a desire to understand the surrounding reality and its ambiguity via an individual but internally divided subject.<sup>464</sup> These 'almost citations' draw their content from, e.g., the themes of the Book of Revelations, medical case records and popular psychology handbooks.<sup>465</sup> Intertextual and mythical *competence* (as a narrative means of a psychopathography, of which later)

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<sup>462</sup> Greig (2001: xvii) mentions that "[t]he mind that is the subject of the play's fragments is the psychotic mind. A mind which is the author, and which is also more than the author. It's a mind that the play's open form allows the audience to enter and recognise themselves within."

<sup>463</sup> Saunders 2002: 112.

<sup>464</sup> Urban 2001.

<sup>465</sup> Saunders 2002: 112.

acquires an interesting connotation in these fragments. In them, the speaker or speakers seem to refer to the ironic concurrence of mythical analysis and disappearance of meaning.

D2 partly follows the structure of a conventional dialogue, but the identities of the speakers and the origin of each statement remain questionable. The discussions can be seen as possible doctor-patient dialogues or, on the other hand, as discussions dealing with the complexity of love affairs. Both themes are possible in regard to the dialogues, but also ambiguous in their referential relations. Thus, the play strives to pass (or rather to break) the constraints of these dialogues, all the way to their thematic outlines.

The text also contains two separate series of numbers (or lists of numbers), the first of which appears to be arbitrary.<sup>466</sup> The other is coherent and contains a subtraction from a hundred to zero by sevens. On the Internet sites discussing Kane's works the latter series has been described as a tool in institutional care for ascertaining the degree or severity of the patient's psychotic state.<sup>467</sup> In other words, with this subtraction one could identify and assess changes in logical thought. This hypothesis is apt in the sense that the first series is situated amid the self-destructive depression at the beginning of the play and the second one to a phase of relative lucidity in the speaking subjects' self-expression.

On the other hand, the light the text sheds on the experience of psychosis is always ambiguous, it avoids making any clear distinctions between severe depression and auspicious discourse. Thus, the thematic content of the play brings out the necessary 'alliance' between desolation and survival. The disintegrating selfhood and the hopeless horizon of reality it observes contain, in themselves, an opportunity for a better future. Here we may detect the *ethics of catastrophe* typical of Kane's plays. Ken Urban has noted that the author often strives to emphasise the renewing and cleansing effect of devastation — and thus also that of catastrophic psychosis or death.<sup>468</sup> For those who have undergone a

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<sup>466</sup> P: 208, 232.

<sup>467</sup> See [http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/disc\\_frm.htm](http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/disc_frm.htm)

<sup>468</sup> Urban 2001. "Kane gives us a world of catastrophe. As with [Howard] Barker, hers is a theatre that offers neither solutions nor redemption. But Kane emerges from calamity with

serious mental illness the thought may seem suspect, but it is an essential observation given the text under discussion. Instead of clear moral premises, Kane sets the buttresses of ethical options onto an unlikely (and unreal) terrain. These options are needed exclusively where they stand no chance of coming true.

#### 4.4.2 *Myth, narration, experience, world*

Describing and analysing the psyche and its experiential contents are somewhat demanding tasks to begin with, but the more so when we are dealing with a psyche in turmoil. The individual and unique nature of a human experience seems to demand culturally and emotionally constructed generalisations and wider definitions to enable conclusions on its structure. In this process, theoretical formulations do not seem to suffice. Carl Gustav Jung, for example, noted that when we examine mental processes, it is more useful to utilise mythological (or even “dramatic”) outlines and terminology than complicated scientific definitions.<sup>469</sup> Myths seem to open up a line of signification that addresses our poetic and transcendental ways of encountering phenomena and leads to both a generic and a subjective experience of the world. They appear to be potent means of binding meaning and being together. This being so, one might claim that the historical driving force of myths consists in their possibility to act as *therapeutic representations*. Instead of presenting us with abstract visions, they sink their teeth into concrete manifestations of mental phenomena and problems, although often through poetic and fictitious processes. This way, they may act as certain *precedents* in the scrutiny of the psyche or our experience of the world.

One might even say that myths, symbols and their narrative representation may generate meaning as psychological *models* or *paradigms*. The endeavours to

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the possibility that an ethics can exist between wounded bodies, that after devastation, good becomes possible.”

<sup>469</sup> *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. Vol. 9, part 2 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1968) quoted in Diamond 1996: 87.



understand selfhood, humanity or the world contain many levels of signification regarding myths and paradigms. In both cases, the question of meaning is based on a synthesis, which consists of a 'storyline' that goes through ambiguous elements, conflicts and solutions, of a line of deductions. Even scientific models of thought can thus be considered to carry mythical meaning.<sup>470</sup> The human ability to create symbols, myths and narratives of experiential significance is an organic element of those processes with which we move from the chaos of consciousness to the modelling of meaning. This understanding forms a clear connection between the means of representation in art and science. For example, psychological art research can draw on Jung's emancipated point of departure, according to which every scientific theory depicts, by containing a hypothesis, the quiddity of something unknown through a mode of *pre-comprehension*. They are thus certain symbols, or at least symbolic models.<sup>471</sup> In this sense, the *mythical substance* is involved in all texts that narrate, analyse, and describe something, in all texts that structure or de-structure our experiences and their meanings. But this requires the precondition that by myths we mean a universal understanding of human phenomena built on experiential interpretations.

Following Roland Barthes' definition, myths appeal to us through their *imperative* nature. They address the individual on individual terms ('just me, right now'), but at the same time they expose their universal nature that is beyond our control.<sup>472</sup> They thus retain their original (human) enigma, which challenges us to experience and understand more. Or, to use the words of Joseph Campbell: "there's a lot *more to experience* than we'll ever *know or narrate*."<sup>473</sup> We would thus expect from (mythical) narratives creation and analysis of initially recognisable meanings, but also certain conceptual black spots that demand solutions. They (the narratives) need to be 'worlds within the world,' modelled images or metaphors of our own experiences that can involve themselves with very dissimilar texts and conceptual connections. For example,

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<sup>470</sup> Diamond 1996: 88.

<sup>471</sup> Jung's *Psychological Types*, Vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ 1971): 475 quoted in Diamond 1996: 89.

<sup>472</sup> Barthes 1978: 124.

<sup>473</sup> Campbell 1996: 21, translation from Finnish and italics mine.

our *pre-comprehension* of the politically-oriented injustice suffered by Prometheus in Greek mythology (the name means ‘thought [of] in advance’), may become recognisable through prior experiences of justice and exercise of power. On the other hand, these same experiences may open up in a new way and acquire new connotations, for example, through the real life figure of Ernesto “Che” Guevara. Delimiting the specific import and implications of myths is then a difficult task. But here lies their transcendent significance for both fact and fiction, and their ability to surpass and communicate cultural, linguistic and experiential differences.

But what happens when a certain narrative, its meaning and mythical substance is an interpretative problem in itself, when all meaning eludes pre-comprehension and is actually a description of an experience in which the consciousness falls to pieces and is rebuilt in a totally unrecognisable form? For a text depicting severe psychosis as an inner process — or rather, anti-process — exemplifies precisely this phenomenon. It justifies the existence of mythical or recognisable meaning by expressing their erosion, but at the same time it questions their experiential nature. An interpretative black spot here would be the fact that it leaves mythical understanding in a state of instability, in which, for example, the meaning (and locus) of irony is hard to identify.<sup>474</sup>

From the point of view of depth psychology and psychoanalytic approaches this would be an interesting challenge. For, as a *portrayal of a mental disorder*, a *psychopathography* seems to structure the linguistic processes with which to communicate, for example, *psychosis as a phenomenon*. In this sense, it also concretises and modifies the ways that its receiver should adopt in interpreting psychosis. At the same time, it appears to demand that a certain *fantastic (or phantasmal) substance* of the receiver’s experiential sphere enter the interpretative processes. Evelyne Keitel, who has studied the

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<sup>474</sup> At this point, it is necessary to mention that although Jacques Lacan’s multifilament theory on the relations between psychosis, language, metaphors, the imaginary and the symbolic order might prove extremely useful for analysing Kane’s play, I confine myself to discussing how the mythical, intertextual and ironic — i.e., traditionally ‘sane’ — delineations of signification are eroded and regained in the text. For Lacan’s views on psychosis, language and expression, see e.g. Lacan 1993; Lacan 2007: 445-488. See also Glowinski, Marks & Murphy 2001: 87-92, 119-121, 148-153, 198-203.

psychopathographies of literature, calls this substance a “virtual dimension,” which forms through free association and largely abandons systematisation. This dimension opens up through emotional recognition, but, problematically, not entirely freely. It is also limited by the reader’s literary competence, by one’s ability to understand intertextual connections and references to one’s own life.<sup>475</sup> This view still binds the mythical substance to an intertextual tradition, but opens up a new *environment* for interpretation. The lacunae, uncertainties and problems of reliability texts initially contain, justify, paradoxically, the possibilities of narration, also in a text that describes the experience of psychosis. They challenge one to interpret through emotional recognition, but do so with the balancing (or mythical) means of the literary tradition. And yet, we need to observe that the *extreme self-encounter* involved in psychosis (on which more later) and the subconscious impulses and ideas it contains, also defy linguistic processes. It means that a psychopathography should be able to transform this experience into linguistic processes that enable narration.<sup>476</sup>

On the basis of this, we may consider a subjective description of a psychotic experience to be a specific and unique *state of narration*. The confusion of the primary and secondary mental processes<sup>477</sup> and the disappearance of the barriers of the minds ‘loci’ are typical of psychotic episodes. Subconscious material pours into consciousness, which means that primary impulses surface in communication. This makes it really hard (or impossible) to outline the surrounding reality or one’s own consciousness.<sup>478</sup> This state, in turn, leads to an experience of isolation, but produces an interesting feature in its communication

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<sup>475</sup> Keitel 1989, 86-89, 107.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.: 32-33.

<sup>477</sup> Keitel 1989: 29; 125. Primary processes encompass the functions of the subconscious, free and without coherent structure. They emerge from the contradictions between various desires and drives, from the tensions between them. Secondary processes (of consciousness), in turn, include, for example, the possibilities of outlining language and one’s surroundings — as processes that are organised, hierarchical and controlled (to a degree).

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.: 29. “[P]sychosis bursts open our habitual and internalized patterns of understanding ourselves and our world, which largely derive from everyday experience. Thus someone confronted with such an experience of inner turmoil will not be able to deal with it adequately. The individual sees himself delivered up helpless to this chaotic state, and feels isolated from his surroundings.”

— insofar as it is possible. The narrative distance between the narrating subject, narration and its material decreases, or even seems to disappear altogether. The narrated substance is assimilated into the 'narrating tempus'.<sup>479</sup> 4.48 *Psychosis* takes this relation even further: the narrating subject and the narrated (or rather, that which is *being narrated*) also converge thematically, which means that the self 'communicates itself' (which is not properly itself) and strives to reach a dialectical connection with itself (which is again not properly itself). Here, the text approaches lyrical means of expression, lyrical images and metaphors that appear to merge with the narrating subject(s) but bear an excess 'mood' (or *modus*) qua meaning.

It is thus interesting to note how the play's undecided references to the surrounding reality are related to the speaking subjects' *inner communication* that analyses the problematic (or even impossible) nature of *selfhood*. However, I consider that this is not a fundamental problem regarding the thematics of the play, for the text seems to use as a narrative instrument the fact that it does not differentiate between an experience and what is being experienced. Or, in the play's own words:

I'm seeing things  
I'm hearing things  
I don't know who I am  
tongue out  
thought stalled

the piecemeal crumple of my mind

Where do I start?  
Where do I stop?  
How do I start?  
(As I mean to go on)<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Cf. *ibid.*: 37.

<sup>480</sup> P: 225-226. (D1)

#### 4.4.3 *To experience, to see and to lose: death?*

As a psychological method, introspective observation has emphasised the immanence of consciousness with reference to experiencing. A conscious experience is based on ‘consciousness of consciousness (or in consciousness).’ Although complex, this idea mainly means that an experience comes to our consciousness along with its meaning. Or, to quote Jean-François Lyotard’s example: “I am afraid, thus I know what fear is, since I have fear.”<sup>481</sup> This notion also requires us to differentiate between objective knowledge and subjective understanding, which, in turn, means that a conscious experience is distinctly subjective in nature. It is bound to a particular individual, in a particular time and place. As already noted with Lyotard (in Ch. 2.1.2), an experience can/should be internalised only in its immediacy, because a later examination of the experience in question is already a *new experience*. This would mean that a linguistic mediation of an experience is a rather problematic phenomenon regarding the latter’s uniqueness and veracity. The act of representing the humane quality of an experience, if only internally, is detached from the experience itself.<sup>482</sup>

But a phenomenological approach to defining an experience may shed quite different light on these views. The claim that a consciousness has a direct relation to its contents is not necessarily confined to ‘immediate understanding.’ Lyotard’s example of this is the following: “It is true that in being afraid I have fear, but still I do not know *what* fear is, I “know” only *that* I have it[.]”<sup>483</sup> Outlining the process of becoming conscious of something would thus demand a line of deduction that goes a little further. The subject’s awareness of itself and thus also of its experiences is built up through indirect processes, through *reflection*. Despite its uniqueness, an experience does not vanish from consciousness, but stays there in a certain sense *identical with itself*. This conception is based on the Husserlian idea of “retention,” according to which an emotion (as an experience), for example, can be returned to consciousness to serve as a point of comparison for a somewhat similar emotion experienced in

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<sup>481</sup> Lyotard 1991: 77.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.: 77-78.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.: 78.

the present. And here we must note that this retention does not coincide with memory, but precedes it — returning the ‘comparable’ emotion to consciousness would be memory’s duty.<sup>484</sup>

Now, if psychosis is taken as a state where the primary impulses surface to serve as means of communication, we may also assume that it does not manifest meanings that are understood through secondary processes. In this case, neither introspective observation nor the comparative phenomenological model are useful for defining this experience and its communication. However, *4.48 Psychosis* seems to combine these views regarding an experience and the fact of experiencing. The process of experiencing it depicts is unique in its very fragmentary nature, but at the same time it remains ‘comparative.’ It has to be comparative in order to make insight into one’s illness, in itself, possible. Or, to modify Lyotard’s latter example: It is true that in a state of psychosis I am ill, but still I do not know *what* this state is, I know only *that* I am ill.

On the other hand, we may say that expressing this experience would justify, in itself, the meaning that psychosis produces, and that assessing this meaning through some discourse or reading is the task of interpretation. The fragmentary statements of the play strive to express — through the experience of psychosis — meanings that are generated only by the loss of their very meaningfulness. At the same time, they open up, by means of a certain irony, a route to ‘read’ mental illness and question those mythical connections we make between meaning and sanity. The text recognises the differences between a severe psychotic episode (D1) and a phase of lucidity (D2), but puts the meaning they produce into the same qualitative category:

Come now, let us reason together  
Sanity is found in the mountain of the Lord’s house on the  
    horizon of the soul that eternally recedes  
The head is sick, the heart’s caul torn  
Tread the ground on which wisdom walks  
Embrace beautiful lies –  
    the chronic insanity of the sane

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid.: 79.

[...]

— At 4.48  
when sanity visits  
for one hour and twelve minutes I am right in my mind.  
When it has passed I shall be gone again,  
a fragmented puppet, a grotesque fool.  
Now I am here I can see myself  
but when I am charmed by vile delusions of happiness,  
the foul magic of this engine of sorcery,  
I cannot touch my essential self.

Why do you believe me then and not now?<sup>485</sup>

The speeches bind the mythical substance (or meaning) both to the state of illness and the moments of relative lucidity. This appears to be a way of expressing the necessary interconnectedness of sick and sound thoughts, which becomes evident by the fact that, as experiences, they are still comparable. The last sentence of the quotation thus crystallises this interpretation into a valid question and a problem. Kane herself tried to justify the existence and meaning of such questioning by referring to one of her theatrical 'role models,' Antonin Artaud, who also suffered from mental problems:

In order to function you have to cut out at least one part of your mind. Otherwise you'd be chronically sane in a society which is chronically insane. I mean, look at Artaud. That's your choice: Go mad and die, or function but be insane.<sup>486</sup>

As pervasive themes of the play, the desires for love and for death bring out this same problem. They both show that renouncing one's thoughts (or consciousness) is an extremely difficult but at the same time necessary act:

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<sup>485</sup> P: 229. Former quotation D1, latter D2.

<sup>486</sup> Nils Tabert's 'Gespräch mit Sarah Kane' in *Playspotting: Die Londoner Theaterszene der 90er* (Rowohlt: Reinbek, 1998): 8-21, quoted in Saunders 2002: 114.

Every act is a symbol  
the weight of which crushes me

A dotted line on the throat  
CUT HERE

DON'T LET THIS KILL ME  
THIS WILL KILL ME AND CRUSH ME AND  
SEND ME TO HELL

I beg you to save me from this madness that eats me  
a sub-intentional death<sup>487</sup>

the only thing that's permanent is destruction  
we're all going to disappear  
trying to leave a mark more permanent than myself

I've not killed myself before so don't look for precedents  
What came before was just the beginning

[...]

Everything I had  
Swallowed  
Slit  
Hung  
It is done<sup>488</sup>

The self-destructiveness the speaking subjects (or the voices) express relates to a desire to be free of a state where selfhood and meaning are unable to find each other; or rather, from a state where the 'real, immediate Self' is not communicable. There are only mythical hints at such a possibility. Through these

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<sup>487</sup> P: 226. (D1)

<sup>488</sup> P: 241-242. (D1)



hints the statements seek finality, a meaning that this finality could restore. The 'release from the Self' that manifests itself in suicide would also mean a release from the impossibility of self-expression. It becomes a paradoxical driving thought that subsumes the possibility of being freed from thinking (and thus also from the unrecognisable meanings of/in mental illness). Simon Critchley, for one, has discussed suicide as a contradictory option regarding the authority the subject wields over itself: "Cruelly and crudely, there is an almost logical contradiction at the heart of suicide, namely that if death is my ownmost possibility, then it is precisely the moment when the 'I' and its possibilities disappear."<sup>489</sup> I consider that Kane uses this "logical contradiction" often as a certain *motivator* for the voices of the text.

However, in the play's thematic architecture, this release from the Self also signifies a release from the desire for love. Love becomes a theme that metaphorically represents the difficulty of communicating and the process of self-assessment whose meaninglessness (as something unfulfilled) may vanish only by suicide, death. As an *extreme state of self-encounter*, unattainable love becomes a point of comparison for psychosis. Losing this state is devastating, but at the same time necessary:

I dread the loss of her I've never touched  
love keeps me a slave in a cage of tears  
I gnaw my tongue with which to her I can never speak  
I miss a woman who was never born  
I kiss a woman across the years that say we shall never meet

Everything passes  
Everything perishes  
Everything palls<sup>490</sup>

I can fill my space  
fill my time  
but nothing can fill this void in my heart

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<sup>489</sup> Critchley 1997: 68.

<sup>490</sup> P: 218. (D1)

The vital need for which I would die

Breakdown<sup>491</sup>

What is at issue then is an experience of freedom that comes with the disappearance of meaning, but also a certain reluctance to give up the process of self-understanding. Upon these thoughts Kane builds her dialectics, which (self-)ironises an ultimate and organic impossibility or deadlock inherent in communication. Between the desire to understand and an understanding of this very desire forms an obsession with death, in which, following Maurice Blanchot, we find the origin of “language and meaning,” and which is thus the prerequisite for the existence of the latter two.<sup>492</sup> Philosophy and literature approach this thought from different directions, understanding their shared objective — death. But for Kane this objective still contains the possibilities of hope and renewal (or regeneration). It becomes a foundation for the ethics of catastrophe her works advocate.

#### *4.4.4 Kane’s shattered dialectics*

The beginning of the play already brings out the parallel features of a mind that is sick and a mind that is sound, and thus, in a way, ‘turns itself and its thematics in:’

a consolidated consciousness resides in a darkened banqueting  
hall near the ceiling of a mind whose floor shifts as ten  
thousand cockroaches when a shaft of light enters as all  
thoughts unite in an instant of accord body no longer expellent  
as the cockroaches comprise a truth which no one ever utters

I had a night in which everything was revealed to me.

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<sup>491</sup> P: 219. (D1)

<sup>492</sup> Alanko 2000: 206.

How can I speak again?<sup>493</sup>

But this is just an opening for a discussion where the interpreter (whether considered as the reader, the spectator or the performer) “enters,” according to David Greig’s definition, a state (or a “mind”) of self-recognition, to recognise through experiential comparison (a) meaning that seems to emerge only in the impossibility of conveying it. At issue is the fact that the psychotic mind, a *metasubject* consisting of the voices of the play, is the mind of anyone at all, an open rhetorical space where the impossibility of communicating engenders a desire to understand something of the uniqueness and frailty of selfhood. The term *rhetorical* means, in this context, a narrative means which does not function as a propagandistic tool, but as a comparative discussion between different ethical aspects<sup>494</sup> (and at the same time between a sick and a sound mind).

The actual *means* of this narrative means is the fact that psychosis is, in a certain sense, comparable to the very *problem of humanity*, to an unresolved discussion whose greatest dilemma is precisely the issue that an absolute form of communication is ‘absolutely impossible.’ (Speaking mainly of literature, Hilary Putnam mentions that this kind of rhetoric concerns all narrative material.<sup>495</sup>) And if all narrative material bears a relation to the mythical, the meaning of myths would be to give us case-specific illustrations of the rhetorical space mentioned. However, note still that here the term mythical means, above all, poetically transmitted and experientially clarified understanding of the world. In addition, I would use the term *dialectics* instead of *rhetoric* here, for I claim that it more clearly depicts the textual synthesis that forms through the play’s utterances and statements, allowing its themes to merge. Although this definition is also fairly problematic as it refers to certain thesis/antithesis positions, I find that it may serve as a tool for interpreting the communication between the sick and the sound episodes in the play’s narrative structure. Moreover, it retains the experiential justification of the play’s statements as a sort of line of deduction

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<sup>493</sup> P: 205. (D1)

<sup>494</sup> See e.g. Putnam 1978: 86-87.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*: 87.

between mental illness and sanity — despite the transparency of the speaking subjects' viewpoints and positions.

But this dialectics is *broken* or *shattered* in nature. It discusses the difficulty, necessity and impossibility of communication with fragmentary voices, through (and against) which the open psychotic mind, the *metasubject* of the play reflects (on) itself and its surroundings. The term metasubject may then serve to encapsulate the play's construction, which consists of separate voices but forms a system that can be considered an independent, functional and thematic whole. It would be a voice between the play's voices, gathering together its thematic material. Again, any interpretation or interpreter should thus be able to 'enter' this shattered discussion (or dialectics), whether signifying a larger thematical idea or a specific situation described by the text:

- No ifs or buts.
- I didn't say if or but, I said no.
- Can't must never have-to always won't should shan't.

The unnegotiables.

Not today.

(*Silence.*)

- Please. Don't switch off my mind by attempting to straighten me out. Listen and understand, and when you feel contempt don't express it, at least not verbally, at least not to me.

(*Silence.*)

- I don't feel contempt.
- No?
- No. It's not your fault.
- It's not your fault, that's all I ever hear, it's not your fault, it's an illness, it's not your fault, I know it's not my fault. You've told me that so often I'm beginning

to think it *is* my fault.

[...]

There's not a drug on earth can make life meaningful.

- You allow this state of desperate absurdity.

[...]

- I won't be able to think. I won't be able to work.

- Nothing will interfere with your work like suicide.

*(Silence.)*

- I dreamt I went to the doctor's and she gave me eight minutes to live. I'd been sitting in the fucking waiting room half an hour.

*(A long silence.)*

Okay, let's do it, let's do the drugs, let's do the chemical lobotomy, let's shut down the higher functions of my brain and perhaps I'll be a bit more fucking capable of living.

Let's do it.<sup>496</sup>

The discussion presented above between a doctor and a patient — or between reality and a mind that is unwell — exposes the play's constitutive thematic aspect regarding the impossibility of communicating. It manifests, again, the demand of psychotic mind for finality and death. Suggesting that meaning can emerge only through/by the finitude (or even death?) of one's thought and mind,

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<sup>496</sup> P: 219-221. (D2)

the text appears to say that an 'ostensible consensus' — or the appalling fact that human communication of meanings is always insufficient — merely produces confusion, to which one may answer only with irony, by returning meaning back to its own, inherent questionability. The same theme also arises in certain inner (psychotic) discussions (or monologues), which strive to outline the speaking subject's surroundings through experiential descriptions:

A room of expressionless faces staring blankly at my pain, so devoid of meaning there must be evil intent.

[...]

Burning in a hot tunnel of dismay, my humiliation complete as I shake without reason and stumble over words and have nothing to say about my 'illness' which anyway amounts only to knowing that there's no point in anything because I'm going to die. And I am deadlocked by that smooth psychiatric voice of reason which tells me there is an objective reality in which my body and mind are one.

[...]

Watching me, judging me, smelling the crippling failure oozing from my skin, my desperation clawing and all-consuming panic drenching me as I gape in horror at the world and wonder why everyone is smiling and looking at me with secret knowledge of my aching shame.

Shame shame shame.

Drown in your fucking shame.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> P: 209. (D1)

The experience of *inner evil* expressed here is due to the ‘infinite of thoughts’ and thus also to the impossibility of expressing them. It becomes a paranoid projection, fuelled by the inability to convey the meanings the psychotic mind produces, and by the unidentifiability the very *infinity* of these meanings evokes. What becomes a dominant means of setting boundaries to these fathomless thoughts, is a right to ironise the situation, a right to an *ironising dialectics* (instead of death). The means to channel this dispute of thoughts are found by understanding their mythical and experiential connections (and thus also by the forming metasubject). This way, the mythical and intertextual identifiability is able to communicate the very absurdity experienced in psychosis, to a degree. Suitable thematic material for this communication of absurdity emerges from medical case records and biblico-apocalyptic preachings:

Fluoxetine hydrochloride, trade name Prozac, 20 mg,  
increased to 40 mg. Insomnia, erratic appetite, (weight loss  
14 kgs,) severe anxiety, unable to reach orgasm, homicidal  
thoughts towards several doctors and drug manufacturers.  
Discontinued.

Mood: Fucking angry.  
Affect: Very angry.

Thorazine, 100 mg. Slept. Calmer.

[...]

100 aspirin and one bottle of Bulgarian Cabernet  
Sauvignon, 1986. Patient woke up in a pool of vomit and said  
‘Sleep with a dog and rise full of fleas.’ Severe stomach  
pain. No other reaction.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> P: 224-225. (D1)

We are anathema  
the pariahs of reason

Why am I stricken?  
I saw visions of God

and it shall come to pass

Gird yourselves:  
for ye shall be broken in pieces  
it shall come to pass

Behold the light of despair  
the glare of anguish  
and ye shall be driven to darkness<sup>499</sup>

The means of mythical recognition and understanding reveal, also in this ironic commentary on the state of extreme self-encountering, a vision that comprehends the fundamental interconnectedness of an unsound mind and the (sound) reality that surrounds it. This vision is situated in a textual sphere, where the open psychotic mind 'exposes' its reflective and comparative dialectics to interpretation. And this sphere — the (psychotic) mind of the text — is precisely the space which David Greig wants us to enter.

The latter quotation also suggests a certain idea and experience of *possession* which resides in the polyphony of the play and weaves its textual metasubject. The voices hold onto their ironic (and dialectical) 'right' ("We are anathema"), which appears to be a direct counterreaction to the devastating and unintelligible nature of psychosis. It is even as if the mind strives to 'share' or divide its responsibility for its chaotic (but 'truth-bound') thinking. It is a means of self-protection, which is directed at the mind itself, but which erupts into surrounding reality:

a dismal whistle that is the cry of heartbreak around the

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<sup>499</sup> P: 228. (D1)



hellish bowl at the ceiling of my mind<sup>500</sup>

- I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the  
Arabs, I fucked small children while they begged for  
mercy, the killing fields are mine, everyone left the  
party because of me, I'll suck your fucking eyes out  
send them to your mother in a box and when I die  
I'm going to be reincarnated as your child only fifty  
times worse and as mad as all fuck I'm going to make  
your life a living fucking hell I REFUSE I REFUSE I  
REFUSE LOOK AWAY FROM ME<sup>501</sup>

The experience of polyphonic, i.e., in a certain sense *daimonic* (but not demonic) possession<sup>502</sup> is also projected on the discourse on the unattainability of love. Although the voices speak of *love* as an opportunity for hope (and for an ethics of catastrophe), the text also suggests that it hinders comprehension, brings on a state of possession, obsession and confusion that is comparable to psychosis. No wonder studies on the generative mechanisms of mental disorders have sometimes compared falling in love with the experience of possession.<sup>503</sup> Both may induce an experience of captivity and disability,<sup>504</sup> telling us that the need (or desire) for love, like psychosis (or as a symptom of psychosis), is an *other* that takes over the mind, compelling and crippling it. Smothering such an experience appears to be necessary for survival — but impossible in the case of

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<sup>500</sup> P: 227. (D1)

<sup>501</sup> P: 227. (D2)

<sup>502</sup> Diamond 1996: 65-72; 111-114. The definition here means *taking possession of* the mind. The voices of the play represent (or are the representatives of) the possession, but, interestingly enough, they also express how it feels to experience it. Here we may find one example of the congruity of an experience and that-which-is-being-experienced (or of narration and that-which-is-being-narrated) in the text.

<sup>503</sup> See Diamond 1996: 126-130.

<sup>504</sup> See Urban 2001. Roland Barthes' thoughts on the congruity of love and captivity have affected the way Kane thematises love in her plays. (See e.g. Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: fragments*, 1979). Both love and captivity are certain "panic situations." Kane speaks in this context of losing oneself (or one's selfhood) and of a state of disability generated by this loss. (Urban 2001.)

psychosis. Thus, the play does not speak of any clear causality between love and psychosis, but of an elementary ambiguity within strong feelings and mental disorders. It expresses this ambiguity by uncoiling the hostility it gives birth to, but also with certain subtle remarks. When speaking of love, its narration refers to a doctor-patient relation, but does not reveal any distinct *objects* of love and leaves their gender unspecified. The possibility of finding meaning through love becomes more important than its objects. However, the impossibility of communicating also seems to prevent this opportunity to find meaning. Love contains here a hope of recovery, but as an unattainable aim it is an even more paralysing thought:

I trusted you, I loved you, and it's not losing you that  
hurts me, but your bare-faced fucking falsehoods that  
masquerade as medical notes.

Your truth, your lies, not mine.

And while I was believing that you were different and  
that you maybe even felt the distress that sometimes  
flickered across your face and threatened to erupt, you  
were covering your arse too. Like every other stupid  
mortal cunt.<sup>505</sup>

At 4.48

when desperation visits

I shall hang myself

to the sound of my lover's breathing<sup>506</sup>

- At 4.48

when sanity visits [!]

for one hour and twelve minutes I am in my right mind.<sup>507</sup>

And I go out at six [!] in the morning and start my search for

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<sup>505</sup> P: 209-210. (D1)

<sup>506</sup> P: 207. (D1)

<sup>507</sup> P: 229, brackets mine. (D2)

you. If I've dreamt a message of a street or a pub or a station I go there. And wait for you.<sup>508</sup>

The experience of mental disorder as unattainable love constantly gravitates in the dialectics of the text towards its own starting point. It becomes a discussion that keeps *turning in on itself*, but at the same time opens up for interpretation as the text's open, psychotic mind ("Built to be lonely / to love the absent / Find me / Free me / from this",<sup>509</sup>). It is a cry for help from the space or state where one *experiences the absurd*, from the space where the voices of the text weave together its (still incomprehensible) thematic aims. This space/state can be 'solved' only with a definitive *catastrophe*, be it suicide (a death that one has chosen), the discovery of a communicative connection (that is, recovery)<sup>510</sup> or a final shutdown of the psyche in the face of chaotic meaning. The interpreter of the text is powerless in the face of the fate of the speaking subjects (or the forming metasubject), but may be able to share some of its *shattered dialectics*, to reach a state of *therapeutic self-assessment* through her/his mythical (and intertextual) recognition. This can be considered one of the main ideas in the thematic structure of the play, an 'offering' that its voices develop, interactively. And herein lurks the ethics of catastrophe (and responsibility) Kane cherishes, an ethics that lays the foundations of hope and humane understanding on the debris of a psychotic mind:

Remember the light and believe the light.  
Nothing matters more.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> P: 214, brackets mine. (D1)

<sup>509</sup> P: 219. (D1)

<sup>510</sup> Catastrophic in this option would be the fact that one has to "cut out at least one part of [one's] mind" and, as noted above, Kane herself pondered this issue in an interview. (Saunders 2002: 114, brackets mine.) 4.48 *Psychosis* depicts psychosis as a state in which some *essential meaning* (on which more later) is able to manifest itself, meaning that is *too essential* and at the same time *too intricate* for the mind to bear or communicate. As paradoxical as it sounds, losing this meaning would be a dire loss for the psyche: "I had a night in which everything was revealed to me." (P: 205. [D1]) "[T]his is the sickness of becoming great / this vital need for which I would die" (P: 242. [D1]).

<sup>511</sup> P: 229. (D2)

in death you hold me  
never free

I have no desire for death  
no suicide ever had

watch me vanish  
watch me

vanish

[...]

It is myself I have never met, whose face is pasted on the  
underside of my mind

please open the curtains<sup>512</sup>

It seems then that the ultimate aim of the voices is not to outline any clear picture of psychosis through their theses, but to let the interpreter mirror her/his mythical and humane understanding in/with their statements. We might even say that this dialectical depiction of psychosis, as an experience, is apt to produce somewhat 'psychotic interpretations.' Or to modify Lyotard's thoughts even further: "It is true that I have encountered the meanings generated by a psychotic mind, but still I do not know *what* they are, I know only *that* I have encountered them."

This would be the starting point for Kane's ethics of catastrophe in *4.48 Psychosis*. As a phenomenological psychopathography in the first person, the text stations itself partly outside of itself when it communicates the incommunicable. By this I mean that the form-theme/content relations it contains do not require its interpretation to adopt any clear or strict paradigm or trajectory. Instead, they form a whole that is multifaceted and appeals to the

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<sup>512</sup> P: 244-245. (D1)

interpreter's assessment. As mentioned, its dialectics is broken or shattered, but in a certain sense intentional. As the play's narration merges with its narrative material, it forms a space for humane encounters and ethics, which bears a history of mythical recognition but causes us to look at an open, post-catastrophic future. The metasubject composed of the text's voices embodies the experience of inner evil and the loss of speech it brings about, but thus is the advocate of communication and self-assessment.

As an epilogue to Kane's life and work, *4.48 Psychosis* conveys us an idea of regeneration and hope as a hidden consequence of and resource in the devastation and loss of meaning. Although the author joked about it as a text that "'killed" her to write,"<sup>513</sup> it is, after all, something much greater than this dismal premonition, a prophecy of the possibilities for human consensus. Its ability to discuss mental illness as an absurd encounter with selfhood and (unreliable) truth makes us adopt an open approach to its interpretation. Thus, we need to see the laconic cynicism and accusatory aggression it contains also as certain tools for self-assessment. The aim of its shattered and ironic dialectics, which approaches the receiver frankly, is not necessarily to question the way things are, but to highlight the chances of what is yet to be.

Some will call this self-indulgence  
(they are lucky not to know its truth)  
Some will know the simple fact of pain<sup>514</sup>

You have no choice  
the choice comes after<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Urban 2001.

<sup>514</sup> P: 208. (D1)

<sup>515</sup> P: 230. (D1)

#### 4.4.5 *Towards the essential — towards an understanding of Being*

So far I have discussed Kane's play as an extreme self-encounter and as a phenomenological psychopathography that tries to trace this very phenomenon (as well as the absurd impossibility of its clear thematisation). I have also mentioned that the voices of the play seem to *desire* and at the same time *recoil from* some *essentiality*, some indecipherable and intolerable meaning psychosis exposes and 'crams' into the psyche. There is thus a need to get closer to the questions that concern the origin of the anxiety and the desire driving the voices and the metasubject they constitute. What would be, in essence, that *incommunicable* it strives to express? For what possibility and experiential wonder does it grope, and what could be the source of the *daimonism* and the *inner evil*, whose possession it constantly dreads but yearns for?

One way to approach these questions would be to compare the themes of the play to the phenomenological reading Levinas applies to examine Maurice Blanchot's brief psychopathography *The Madness of the Day* (1996). The unnamed main character of Blanchot's text speaks of encountering the infinitude of the meanings in the outside world as unbearable clarity or lucidity, and of mental illness as a state of (and an ache for) blindness:

In the end, I became convinced that I saw the madness of the day, face to face. The truth was that the light had gone mad, brightness had lost all reason: it attacked me insanely, without control or purpose. This discovery struck a wound right through my life. [...] Even after I had recovered, I doubted that I was well. I could neither read nor write. A misty North surrounded me. But this was what was strange: I withered away behind curtains and smoke-coloured glass, although it reminded me of the horrific encounter. I wanted to see something in full daylight, but the pleasant and comfortable twilight satisfied me completely: what I wanted from the day was water and air. If seeing was fire, I demanded for

plenitude of fire, and if seeing would infect me with madness, I wanted that madness eagerly.<sup>516</sup>

For Levinas, these thoughts represent a stubborn form of metaphysics that *craves for madness*.<sup>517</sup> It can be seen as discordant thinking that craves for its own craving and tries to gravitate towards an understanding of *pure and limitless being*, which, impossible to objectify, does not offer any refuge for the subject, even though it (like death) should draw limits to the consciousness: this way, encountering the 'full extent' of *being* in psychosis seems to make the impossible come true, it is 'exile with no exile camps'.<sup>518</sup> The only immediate way to experience being without disintegrating, becoming mentally ill, would be to confine oneself to the *present* (or to the *experience of being present*), to the possibility of thinking that occurs within the limits of human reason.

It is then no wonder the breakage of the limits of 'conscious present' and the experience of pure and inconceivable being as severe brightness, depression and craving become issues that cut through the themes (and the metasubject) of 4.48 *Psychosis*:

Hatch opens  
Stark light  
and Nothing  
Nothing  
see Nothing

[...]

still black water  
as deep as forever  
as cold as the sky  
as still as my heart when your voice is gone

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<sup>516</sup> Blanchot 1996: 12, translation from Finnish mine.

<sup>517</sup> Levinas 1996c: 33.

<sup>518</sup> See *ibid.*: 34.

I shall freeze in hell<sup>519</sup>

Hatch opens

Stark light

the rupture begins

I don't know where to look anymore

Tired of crowd searching

Telepathy

and hope<sup>520</sup>

Remember the light and believe the light.

Nothing matters more.<sup>521</sup>

The *inconceivable meaning* of pure being overwhelms the voice(s) as an exhausting and devastating experience. This devastation, and the experience of the presence of *evil* it introduces to the psyche, appear to articulate the incommensurable relation between ephemeral, finite and subjective being and the (infinite) fact of being itself. The finite subject is faced with an unclear apprehension of the meaning of being beyond any reason and logic. This apprehension seems then to lead to the breaking of the loci of the mind, to a cacophony of meanings and to a fear that the world and being 'flow' and 'occur' *regardless of comprehension, but not disregarding it*. This, perhaps, reveals the very extremity of psychosis' extreme self-encounter, and the apprehension of some *ultimate consciousness* it leans on, an ultimate (or infinite) meaning that takes over the psyche daimonically, as exterior being. It appears then that Levinas' view of (the experience of) mental illness, describing it as *thinking of the impossible*, fits the thematics of Kane's play:

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<sup>519</sup> P: 239. (D1)

<sup>520</sup> P: 240. (D1)

<sup>521</sup> P: 229. (D2)



Is madness an exit or exiting madness? Ultimate [or extreme] consciousness would be consciousness of exitlessness, that is, not of exteriority but of the idea of exteriority; thus, it would be an obsession. Exteriority is thought of in the impossibility of exteriority, whereupon thought generates a yearning focused on the impossible exteriority. Now there you have madness or the religious part [or duty] that falls on us. Ultimate consciousness is obsession, tyranny, crushing against a wall. It makes no sense, there is nothing to be done. The infernal moment of madness.<sup>522</sup>

The psychotic mind cannot ‘cut out a part of itself,’ to use Kane’s description, but demands an explanation for (a) meaning that is beyond its reach but at the same time within it. The voices’ wish to escape the possession — which they themselves fuel — is at the same time obsession that turns them back towards this state (through desire for love and death), towards some ultimate consciousness or “the sickness of becoming great,”<sup>523</sup> in the play’s own words. It is living in the indefinable paradox that forms between the desire to understand and an understanding of this desire, in an obsessive state of shock, whose most tangible feature is nausea, an experience of the presence of *evil*.

In an essay entitled ‘Transcendence and evil,’ Levinas mentions that the concept of evil is something that cannot be reduced back to its conception. Phenomenologically (or experientially) speaking, it is an “*excess*” or *exteriority*, which transcends its definitions by its non-integratability (by its non-integratable quality); it is tormenting grievance *of which one is not able to form any general impression (or meaning)*.<sup>524</sup> Simply put, the content and thrust of evil would be (to a large extent) the very *impossibility of defining/diagnosing evil*. Elsewhere, in ‘Useless Suffering,’ Levinas states that

[i]n suffering sensibility is a vulnerability, more passive than receptivity; it is an ordeal more passive than experience. It is precisely an evil. It is not, to tell the truth, through passivity that evil is described, but through evil that suffering is

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<sup>522</sup> Levinas 1996c: 29-30, translation from Finnish mine.

<sup>523</sup> P: 242. (D1)

<sup>524</sup> Levinas 1987a: 180-181. This essay is in part an analysis of Philippe Nemo’s *Job et l’excès du Mal* (Grasset: Paris, 1978), a philosophical exegesis of the Book of Job.

understood. Suffering is a pure undergoing. [...] The evil which rends the humanity of the suffering person, overwhelms his humanity otherwise than non-freedom overwhelms it: violently and cruelly, more irremissibly than the negation which dominates or paralyzes the act in non-freedom. [...] This negativity of evil is, probably, the source or kernel of all apophantic negation. *The not of evil is negative right up to non-sense. All evil refers to suffering. It is the impasse of life and being, their absurdity, where pain does not come, somehow innocently, 'to colour' consciousness with affectivity. The evil of pain, the harm itself, is the explosion and most profound articulation of absurdity.*<sup>525</sup>

But Levinas also speaks of the *intentional nature* of the excess and absurdity of evil, which refers to an experience of its 'pursuing' quality. It is "aiming at me," or it "strikes me," as an excess that seeks one (like Job) out, and in this way also designates the existence of Good. And yet, it does not do this by giving us an ontological indication or a signal, but by making us *hate evil*, making us anticipate an ontological understanding of Good, which does not bear on its face uselessness or unassumability, an evil and impenetrable excess to meaning.<sup>526</sup> The polyphonic metasubject of Kane's play seems to live in this anticipation, which aims at a peace of mind and an equilibrium that the ethics of catastrophe speaks for, as a discussion that would open it up for the outside world:

to communicate, to converse  
to laugh and make jokes  
to win affection of desired Other  
to adhere and remain loyal to Other  
to enjoy sensuous experiences with cathected Other

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<sup>525</sup> Levinas 1988: 157, italics mine. He opens the essay by mentioning that "[s]uffering is surely a *given* in consciousness, a certain 'psychological content', like the lived experience of colour, of sound, of contact, or like any sensation. But in this 'content' itself, it is in-spite-of-consciousness, unassumable. It is unassumable and 'unassumability'. 'Unassumability' does not result from the excessive intensity of a sensation, from some sort of quantitative 'too much', surpassing the measure of our sensibility and our means of grasping and holding. It results from an excess, a 'too much' which is inscribed in a sensorial content, penetrating as suffering the dimensions of meaning which seem to be opened and grafted on to it." (Ibid.: 156.)

<sup>526</sup> Levinas 1987a: 180-183.

to feed, help, protect, comfort, console, support, nurse or  
heal  
to be fed, helped, protected, comforted, consoled,  
supported, nursed or healed  
to form mutually enjoyable, enduring, cooperating and  
reciprocating relationship with Other, with an equal  
to be forgiven  
to be loved  
to be free<sup>527</sup>

Mental illness, the *thinking of the impossible* it contains and the ethics of catastrophe it engages are not themes subordinate to sanity or reason in Kane's text. The open, shattered dialectics of the play leaves behind it the ironic question whether the discovery of 'pure meaning' or an overall understanding of (one's) being does not stem exclusively from the territory of rational and systematic — i.e., sane — thought.<sup>528</sup> For Kane, to enter a discussion (or a dialectics) that sets itself between sanity and insanity does not mean simply to demarcate what social functionality and logical thought are, in essence. Instead, 4.48 *Psychosis* requires its interpreter to confess that it also means to approach some of the most difficult questions that concern the uncertainty of the human animal's existence, the unattainable surplus of its identity and 'being there.' What/who or how am I, and in relation to what? And, eventually: Will I ever understand it and should I ever understand it?

And yet, to avoid falling amid the pure evil of useless suffering manifested by or disguised in the incomprehensibility of being and the dissolution of identity this incomprehensibility entails, the conscious subject needs to bring matters and concepts into focus, to follow, question and transform all given

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<sup>527</sup> P: 235.

<sup>528</sup> Žižek (2005: 160), for one, finds certain Kantian reaches in insanity that seem to address this issue from a slightly different perspective: "[W]hen, in the pre-Kantian universe, a hero goes mad, it means he is deprived of his humanity, in other words, the animal passions or divine madness took over, while with Kant, madness signals the unconstrained explosion of the very core of a human being."

meanings with determination, with an apprehension that those meanings allow us to approach some conceptual equilibrium and perhaps even *truth*.

To better understand the ethical responsibility that pertains to this determination and its relation to theatrical representation, we may finally need to turn to a statement by Kane early in her career. After the polemic that followed the staging of *Blasted*, Kane stated that “[t]here isn’t anything you can’t represent on stage. If you are saying that you can’t represent something, you are saying you can’t talk about it, you are denying its existence. *My responsibility is to the truth, however difficult that truth happens to be.*”<sup>529</sup>

The *truth of psychosis* is not only difficult but impossible, in essence; and yet, the play’s speaking subjects and the metasubject they constitute do not give up on pursuing it. They yearn for an identity or even a worldview that would sustain the limitless truth and meaning of being, the truth that by its very nature shatters all coherent existential visions developed by the human animal. Such yearning leads to a catastrophic situation, a situation which demands subjective ethics to take a stand on an impossible truth and, ultimately, to take responsibility for that act. We may even say that like Racine’s *Phaedra*, 4.48 *Psychosis* is a *tragedy of being*, where a catastrophe does not signify an ending but a new — determined and responsible — beginning.

Inspired by the perseverance Kane advocates, the following chapter will concentrate on a larger theoretical configuration that stresses the importance of such determination and perception, a conceptual structure that differs radically from that of Levinas, but thus informs the present enquiry and its earlier viewpoints in a decisive way.

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<sup>529</sup> Kane quoted in Urban 2001, italics mine.

## 5. The stage between the same and the other: the theatrically Said between Badiou and Levinas

In the preceding chapter I discussed the relations between ethics, otherness and theatrical thematisation/representation in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the problems related to the assessment and (re)production of ethical ideas in theatrical interaction. In the light of what has been said, it still seems relevant to suggest that theatre does have a unique ability, among the arts, to problematise and even process ethics, otherness, sameness and the political osmosis between these concepts — that is, the whole sphere of human encounter, interaction and responsibilities. However, as noted, this ability is organically tied to an ontologically determined supposition according to which ethical responsibility needs to be validated *in the flesh*, or *in the word qua the Said*, as a decision, vision and thematisation before (or at the mercy of) one or many *others*, as a gesture that needs to — or is entitled to — answer for itself.

There is then a further obligation to assess the means and ideas theatre uses to sustain this process of validation. We need to examine, more specifically, its endogenous ethical methods, to consider how its established but polymorphic communication system could respond to the challenges of *alterity* above and still keep its performative, linguistic, textual and socio-political import in balance with a certain meaningful and focused sameness. Thus, the ethico-political environment that both supports and problematises the practices of the stage and its relation to the audience in dealing with questions of responsibility needs somewhat different scrutiny.

Some recent ethico-philosophical discussions and developments in human sciences and art research have opened up novel and perhaps more decisive ways to reassess the ethical legitimacy of the means and approaches these disciplines or their subject matters use. These critical assessments also concern the present work and the theoretical apparatus I have used to discuss the theoretical and practical relations of theatre to the ethics of responsibility. Many of the rather anti-theatrical aspects and questions that I have elaborated above thus need to be brought to confront ways of thinking that seem to originate more distinctly from the actual social and political structures (and struggles) of life, i.e., from the human sphere theatre lives on and sometimes even *transfigures*. In order to do this, I shall approach and utilise certain relatively fresh theoretical views that may be mobilised to analyse the established ethico-political position of theatre, mainly those introduced by the French theorist Alain Badiou.<sup>530</sup> Informed as they are, for example, by mathematical set theory and militant but committed political thought, they are bound to redirect questions of responsibility to a context which understands the ontological and social status(es) of the human subject as the very site where questions of responsibility can be comprehended, ‘performed’ and sometimes even *universalised*. Badiou’s philosophy thus provides the discussion at hand with certain revisory elements, but also with some counterparts for the Levinasian problematisation of theatre, expression and language. Comparing the views of both of these thinkers and their attempts to comprehend human nature may provide us with an opportunity to reconstruct a rather novel view of the socio-political environment of theatre, one that understands it as a creative and thus *evental* site of ethical discussion.

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<sup>530</sup> For an introduction to Badiou’s thought, see e.g. his *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2001), *On Beckett* (2003a), *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (2005a), *Being and Event* (2007a) and *Theoretical Writings* (2006). I also recommend Peter Hallward’s *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (2003) and Andrew Gibson’s *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2006). Badiou has also written six plays, of which one could mention here “the Ahmed tetralogy,” comprising *Ahmed le subtil*, *Ahmed philosophe*, *Ahmed se fâche* and *Les Citrouilles* (1994-1996). (Badiou 2001: 152; Bosteels 2008; Hallward 2003: 390, n. 3.) However, Badiou’s dramatic works will not be discussed in the present study, only his philosophical views on art, truth and ethics.

The purpose of this chapter is then to assess and exemplify how ethical responsibility could be examined as an organic — but thus all the more problematic — element of the socio-political interaction theatrical activity builds between and around performances and audiences. Ominously enough, this setup implies that one has to bear in mind no less than the (infinite) diversity of life and the inevitable political templates of its ethical import — i.e., the whole field of subjective experiences and collective goals we can anticipate to belong to human ethicality.

Yet the problematic nature of this configuration soon emerges. As might be presumed on the basis of Levinas, the values we strive to *universalise* and use to *authorise* our various artistic vocations, seem to constantly descend from the heights where we would like to envisage them. Moreover, this fall from sublime intentions (or outcomes) would not be something simply deducible from the Levinasian antipathy towards the *figurative detachment from world and responsibility* of artistic configurations. Instead, announcing or assuming that artistic activities nurture some inherent and shared ethical value means taking a stand on the level of linguistic and socio-political *realisation*, where the aspiring relationship with the *imagined* ethical import and sameness of those activities seems to be neutralised by the relations and differences between views, situations, terms, definitions, expressions and impressions; that is, by the *intrinsic otherness of being* that both questions and compels all meaning, either as a feature of being or as an attempt to depart from being.

Insofar as the *variable* theatre-political community *understands its being to be both real and a question concerning the real*, this apprehension would oblige the appearing-for of theatre right from the point at which it starts to perform its ethical position(s), where it assumes the task of transforming its ethical import into something *real*; and, as Peggy Phelan suggests, “[w]ithin the history of theatre the real is what theatre defines itself against, even while reduplicating its effects.”<sup>531</sup> In addition, she reminds us that each real, from Plato to Freud and Lacan, “believes itself to be the Real-real.”<sup>532</sup> Among these reals, Real-reals and

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<sup>531</sup> Phelan 1993: 3.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

the beliefs concerning their very real-ness, we are left with a situational and singular examination of teatro-ethical import that appears to *be for real* only when/as it projects itself against the real or defines itself as an articulation or reduplication of the real.

On the basis of this, we may assume that the term *banal* probably acquires its annoying echo from the fact that we are forced, despite of all our efforts, to live on its persistent presence, the very *banality of the banal*, understood not as indifference or triviality, but as the *deployment of differences and relativity qua being*. Here, again, the question of otherness is organically bound to the question of being (or the real) in a way that does not allow it to be named, without qualification, as a self-evident quality of being (or real) or as something that, in its transcendence, defines what we can understand as being (or real).

The ontological and existential points of comparison this situation imposes on religion, art and other reachings towards some immeasurable transcendence return to consciousness as a sort of 'metaphysical hangover.' One may of course encounter a thought, a person, a text, an image or a theatre performance that addresses one in a way that seems to transcend, for example, the means of language and temporality. But such efforts towards some unnameable infinity would also acquire their motivation from the *routine of being*, from the pace the world sets for its own being and becoming, irrespective of the paradoxical (ethical) manoeuvres of subjective freedom (or autonomous will). In this sense, art would not be able to rid itself of the world's *almost unacceptable structure* that Kantian ethics alludes to. This would also mean that analyses concerning the ethical ambitions of artistic activities cannot dispose of the viewpoints whose *primary* purpose is to keep up with the pace of being itself. Insofar as being does not wait to be comprehended or processed 'later' (as some possibility qua actuality), the human animal is challenged by the fact that it has to prioritise between the imports of fact and fiction, to make decisions that often (need to) emphasise the factual (situation) over fictitious or *imagined* possibility. Ethically speaking: Badiou, for one, considers that deciding the right course of (re)action



concerns precisely the factual — but largely opaque — *situation*, and not any imagined possibility as the determinant of the situation.<sup>533</sup>

As regards theatre, these remarks would again suggest that to form a comprehensive understanding of the theatre as a site of *ethical interaction* is neither an easy task, nor an assuring one.

However, as mentioned, many of the schemes concerning the problem of otherness and its ethical enigma have recently been confronted with thoughts that originate more distinctively from the concrete political and social structures of life, the realm of ‘aggregated’ ambitions and demands — the realm of the *same*. They offer us ways of thinking that pursue the problems related to artistic activities as problems that can be grasped by commitment to the acute ontological and socio-political challenges those activities pose on us. The differences between these two configurations — that of the other and that of the same — are considerable, but it is also useful to approach their achievements in a way that understands the questions they pose as shared issues in the search for ethical responsibility, whether in theatre or elsewhere. In his article ‘Toisen ja Saman välissä’ [Between the Other and the Same] (2004), Janne Kurki presents human sciences with rather legitimate questions: If we strive to find a theory of otherness or sameness to explain the ethical nature of, say, cultural practices, then who or what are the others or their ‘sameful’ counterparts in that theorisation? Does the other retain its otherness if we make ‘otherly’ assumptions, and is the other really present (and thus already within the conceptual same) there? Can we find any true justification for these approaches among all the methodological and thematised othernesses, and where would be the meaningful sameness in these discussions?<sup>534</sup>

Such contemplation is also essential for the present enquiry into the ethics of theatre, but it does not necessarily mean that we should try to dispose of the mentioned concepts at this point. Instead, it is worth considering whether theatre, as a specific case of ethically motivated human interaction, offers a stage of discussion whose grounding ethical challenge is to support both standpoints (that

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<sup>533</sup> Yet Oliver Feltham (2006: 227) mentions that in Badiou’s thinking a decisive temporality is “that of the future anterior.”

<sup>534</sup> See Kurki 2004.

of the other and that of the same), or at least their common quest for responsible human (co-)existence.

Thus, in order to approach some further aspects conditioning the relations between theatre and ethics of responsibility, I will return to certain already familiar Levinasian issues, which will be challenged by some rather different views of Badiou. Although his thinking opposes that of Levinas quite radically, it imposes important challenges and questions for the present discussion, in particular concerning the way the Levinasian standpoint understands the use of language and its politics. The purpose is still not to establish any clear dogma concerning the ethicality of theatre — even if some thoughts are presented in the form of a proposition — but rather to assess and exemplify how questions of ethical responsibility could be examined as an *integral element* of the socio-political context theatre builds between and around performances and audiences. The main interest here is thus in the scene of sociability, politics and ethics that consists of the performers and the audience, not primarily the intra-artistic configuration of theatre (insofar as there indeed is such a thing).

## 5.1. From Levinas to Badiou

It is now worth recalling how many of the existing approaches to ethics strive to demarcate propositional territories that divide the possibilities of (ethical) thought into certain oppositions, which either support categorical treatment(s) of ethics, or fundamentally question the justifiability of such proceedings. This demarcation is governed either by the rather Kantian notions of ethical universality, decidedly independent from the diversity of social situations, or by the more Levinasian respect for the elusive uniqueness of alterity that makes the indefinable nature of social diversity the very substance of the ethical problematic. Insofar as ethical contemplation is irrevocably embedded in (its) socio-political contexts, the mentioned division is quite understandable, making the *negotiation* of its conditions inevitably but perplexingly relative, and thus, sometimes even banal or naïve.

I shall not try to escape this state of affairs. In fact, the word *politics* remains coloured here by Levinas' viewpoint according to which politics is "opposed to morality as philosophy to naïveté."<sup>535</sup> By this statement he articulates the fact that a totalising and systematic — i.e., a *reasoning* — politician or political philosopher often ignores the idea of ethical difference and the immensity of one's obligations towards the personal and concrete Other, the neighbour, as somewhat utopian visions, and therefore happens to deny the very responsibility of politics. Simon Critchley claims that "for Levinas, *ethics is ethical for the sake of politics* — that is, for the sake of a new conception of the organisation of political space."<sup>536</sup> This 'novel' understanding of the political space is defined by "a politics of ethical difference, where politics must be mediated ethically[.]"<sup>537</sup> and where ethics, a non-totalisable relationship with the Other, is essentially "the disruption of totalising politics: [such as] anti-semitism, anti-humanism, National Socialism."<sup>538</sup> Yet, my intention is not to ignore the (Kantian) opinions upholding universal ethics, but rather to render the determination of making justified ethical interpretations of the socio-political essence of the theatrical apparatus perhaps more problematic, and thus all the more binding.

The challenge at hand becomes even more visible, if one acknowledges the Badiouan viewpoint, articulated by Peter Hallward, according to which "[n]either... [Kantian] universality nor... [Levinasian] alterity... can be rigorously founded without tacit reference to theology. Either way, the ethical ideology conceives of 'man' as a fundamentally passive, fragile and *mortal* entity..."<sup>539</sup> Instead of reconciling himself to these forms of *submissive ethics*, Badiou offers an intricate system of thought, which can be seen as an active search of *disruptive sameness*, a determination that may prove to be useful if one wants to analyse the *politics* of theatre in mediating such concepts as alterity, meaning, ethics and — most importantly for Badiou — *truth*. His thoughts on subjectivity, the politics of art and the role of ethicality in those contexts are

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<sup>535</sup> Levinas 2005: 21.

<sup>536</sup> Critchley 1992: 223.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.: 220.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.: 221, brackets mine.

<sup>539</sup> Hallward 2001: xiii.

quite informative for an investigation that approaches theatre as a socially and politically committed practice.

In an article applying Badiou's theories to examine the political uproar that followed the critical comments a Texan trio, the Dixie Chicks, made on the belligerent politics of the Bush (Jr) administration, Janelle Reinelt makes several noteworthy remarks in this regard. In Reinelt's opinion, Badiou and theatre do not *necessarily* meet in his discussions on art, but perhaps more conveniently in the context of his overall theory on *truth*, *events* and *ethics*. To her, the possibilities of "a philosophy that separates Being from Event and privileges the power of the latter seems to offer a useful paradigm for an art form like theatre that may lack substance but always takes place. An ethics that does not base itself on rules or moral principles but rather describes a process of fidelity to an event seems well suited to the exigencies of performances."<sup>540</sup>

But she also notes that a theory which, at least as one relating to *truth*, presupposes some notion of *universality* (or *sameness*), does not necessarily fit our prevailing understanding of the meanings theatre is able to produce, or how it produces them. She exemplifies this issue by mentioning how previous ages' universalised formulations of art (and thus also of theatrical meaning) have proven to be limited by certain 'particularities;' that is, by certain convenient schemes that supported particular aims — or the aims of *a particular understanding of universality*.<sup>541</sup>

### 5.1.1 From otherness to sameness

However, when employed to examine theatrical interaction and co-existence (or the performative reciprocity of theatre), Badiou's views do indeed seem to bring the questions concerning the ethico-political aims and functioning of the 'theatrical state of things' back to the realm of the *same*, to embrace certain strategic energies committed to a coherent (prospective) worldview.

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<sup>540</sup> Reinelt 2004: 87.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

This ‘return to determination’ can be seen as one consequence of Badiou’s claim according to which the concept of the *other*, or “[i]nfinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*. Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences. Even the apparently reflexive experience of myself is by no means the intuition of a unity but a labyrinth of differentiations...”<sup>542</sup> The term alterity is thus seen here as an articulation of the diverse, multiple and complex structure of *being as being* itself: it announces both the ambiguity of subjectivity and everything that *is* and relates to it — or, to put it differently, it denotes everything that ‘*is and (thus) relates in the first place*.’ Thus, Badiou also sees that to state that “something is” is to state that it is “a pure multiplicity. [...] Being as such is pure multiplicity. And the thinking of a pure multiplicity is finally mathematics.”<sup>543</sup>

The being of being, or the *there is (il y a)*, is thus not discussed in the Badiouan project as an indistinct murmur or horror that is eventually overcome by a responsible relation to the other (or the personal Other), which, in turn, gives a subject the very extremities of its existence by issuing an ethical demand.

But what would really interest the present context in Badiou’s questioning of being is the way he understands *existence* (as a question distinguished from being as such). When he speaks of existence, or existing, he speaks of “being in a world, being here or, if you want, appearing, really appearing in a concrete situation[,]”<sup>544</sup> and the final emphasis in this line of thought is — somewhat conveniently for our present purposes — on “*happening*.” The term is employed to describe the fact that something that is a pure multiplicity and exists in a world, appears here and now, also includes a possibility for “*a cut in the continuum of the world, something which is new, something also which disappears—which appears, but also which disappears... [h]appening is when*

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<sup>542</sup> Badiou 2001: 25-26, first italics mine. “The truth is that, in the context of a system of thought that is both a-religious and genuinely contemporary with the truths of our time, the whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned. For the real question — and it is an extraordinarily difficult one — is much more that of *recognising the Same*.” (Ibid.: 25.)

<sup>543</sup> Badiou 2005c, italics mine.

<sup>544</sup> Badiou 2005c.

*appearing is the same thing as disappearing.*<sup>545</sup> This cut in the existence and deployment of pure multiplicity (or, indeed, otherness) is then the very instance, the “immanent break” or the “supplement” through which *truth* may emerge.<sup>546</sup>

To outline the interaction between these complex spheres of being and truth, and to set them to work (for *truth*), Badiou sums up his elaboration by establishing an order of thinking through which it is possible to understand being in relation to a concrete situation and a ‘truth-bound’ happening that eventually comes to concern subjectivity:

[W]e have to understand the relation between the three levels, the relation between being qua being (pure multiplicity), existence (multiplicity but in a world, here and now), and happening or *event*... we can see that in a concrete situation we have, finally, two terms: first, a world, a world situation—something where all things exist; and after that, an *event*, sometimes, an event—which is something which happens *for* this world, not *in* this world, but *for* this world. And I call a subject ‘a relation between an event and the world.’ Subject is exactly what happens when as the *consequence of an event* in a world we have a creation, a new process, the event of something. And so we have something like that. It’s something like in a protest...<sup>547</sup>

These ontological statements suggest that for Badiou, neither our ‘coming into being as subjects’ nor our ethicality should be perceived as a direct consequence or a by-product of alterity, or built from an understanding of the other as an unforeseen and immemorable founder of our worldly relations. Instead, he is after resolute lines of thought — or *subjective relations between an event and the world* — that would cut through the tacitly theological or relativistic theories built to uphold equally worthy but always indistinct alterities.

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid, italics mine.

<sup>546</sup> Badiou 2001: 42-43. Truth is described here as being “immanent” because it “proceeds in the situation, and nowhere else — there is no heaven of truths.” It is a “break” because what enables its becoming and following is meaningless “according to the *prevailing language and established knowledge of the situation*.” This means that truth is essentially the “material course traced, within the situation, *by the eventual supplementation*.” (Ibid., italics mine.)

<sup>547</sup> Badiou 2005c. Italics on “*event*” and “*consequence of an event*” are mine to emphasise their subsequent importance.

Consequently, and not to forget our original intentions amid these ontological configurations — as our interests concern theatre as a cultural, ethical and political practice — we also have to take notice of his antipathy towards the continuing theoretical interest in cultural differences and the relativistic notions used to discuss alterity in that context. Referring to the possibilities of his own theory (and without sparing his words), he states that “[i]t is only through a genuine perversion, for which we will pay a terrible historical price, that we have sought to elaborate an ‘ethics’ on the basis of cultural relativism.”<sup>548</sup> This provocative thought is supported by another outspoken claim:

Contemporary ethics kicks up a big fuss about ‘cultural’ differences. Its conception of the ‘other’ is informed mainly by this kind of differences. Its great ideal is the peaceful coexistence of cultural, religious, and national ‘communities’, the refusal of ‘exclusion’. But what we must recognise is that these differences hold no interest for thought, that they amount to nothing more than the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of humankind, as obvious in the difference between me and my cousin from Lyon as it is between the Shi’ite ‘community’ of Iraq and the fat cowboys of Texas.<sup>549</sup>

Despite these views, Badiou’s own ethical thinking cannot be presented as a system or a theory of ethics *per se*. Instead, his understanding of ethics is constructed and analysed as an organic element of our relation to the concept of the *Same* (or, on the other hand, of the subjective relation between an *event* and

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<sup>548</sup> Badiou 2001: 28; Badiou 2007a: xii-xiii. See also Kurki 2004: 45-46.

<sup>549</sup> Badiou 2001: 26. Due to its challenging, exploratory and complex nature, Badiou’s theory has received rather diverse responses. A demonstration of negative criticism can be found, for example, in Edward Skidelsky’s review of *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (1998/2001). Skidelsky (2001: 51-52) writes that “Badiou clearly has ambitions to found his own school and, to this end, has invented an entire vocabulary of “situations”, “events” and “truths”. But these terminological innovations cannot conceal that Badiou has nothing original to say. [...] The only conclusion one can draw from this hodgepodge is that Badiou’s philosophy is entirely at the service of his politics. Indeed, *Ethics* is nothing more than political autobiography dressed up in metaphysical terms. When Badiou defines ethical action as “fidelity to an event”, what he is really talking about is his own fidelity to the events of May 1968.”

the world), a (self-)critical persistence comprehended as *fidelity*<sup>550</sup> to the ample possibilities of (a) *truth*. For Badiou, our ethical orientation is formed in line with what he calls *truth-processes*, the becoming(s) of truths that are “indifferent to differences” and “the [S]ame for all.”<sup>551</sup> He considers that, “[p]hilosophically, if the other doesn’t matter it is indeed because the difficulty lies on the side of the Same. The Same, in effect, is not what is (i.e. the infinite multiplicity of differences) but what *comes to be*.”<sup>552</sup> The ethical grounds for this statement emerge in his opinion according to which “in the context of a system of thought that is both a-religious and genuinely contemporary with the truths of our time, the whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned. For the real question — and it is an extraordinarily difficult one — is much more that of *recognizing the Same*.”<sup>553</sup> (If we choose to pursue these thoughts a little further, it could be stated that for Badiou, the *advent of the Same* as (or in) a truth-process, the very *examination of truth*, is in fact a process of truth in itself.)<sup>554</sup>

In an open lecture delivered to the European Graduate School (EGS) in August 2002, Badiou explicates the concept of a *truth-process* by bringing up truth’s relevance to current debates in critical philosophy. Here Badiou explains how “truth is first of all something new.” Distinguishing it from knowledge, he defines the latter as that which “transmits” or “repeats.”<sup>555</sup> He goes on to ask that “if all truth is something new, what is the essential philosophic[al] problem pertaining to truth? It is the problem of its *appearance and its becoming*. Truth must be submitted to thought not as judgment or proposition but as a *process in the real*. This schema represents the becoming of a truth.”<sup>556</sup> Therefore truth, in

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<sup>550</sup> Badiou 2001: 41-42, 67.

<sup>551</sup> Badiou 2001: 27, brackets mine. Hughes (2007/2008, paragraph 6) explains that “[w]ithin a given situation (and all truths are so situated), there is no one truth for person  $\alpha$  and a different truth for person  $\beta$ . For that matter, within a given situation, there is no one truth for culture  $\gamma$  and a different truth for culture  $\delta$ . And, yet again, there is no objective truth out there in the world, waiting to be discovered by any who would see it.”

<sup>552</sup> Badiou 2001: 27.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*: 25.

<sup>554</sup> See *Ibid.*: 27.

<sup>555</sup> Badiou 2005b.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, brackets and italics mine.



all its newness, should not be derived from the structures of knowledge as a self-adjusting process of extending and condensing the reaches of what is already known, or what already *is*.

As regards ethics, he considers that “[t]he only genuine ethics is of truths in the plural — or, more precisely, the only ethics is of processes of truth, of the labour that brings *some* truths into the world. [...] ... it is impossible to speak of *one* Ethics.”<sup>557</sup> The labour of/for truth(s), in turn, manifests itself most distinctly in walks of life — or, in Badiouan terms, *generic procedures*<sup>558</sup> — that concern our emotional and intellectual needs or abilities, and Badiou names these procedures (or, one might even say vocations) to be *politics, love, science* and *art*.<sup>559</sup> (With the term generic procedure we may also observe how mathematical thinking and *set theory* in particular have informed and continue to inform Badiou’s philosophy.) As noted above, one’s (essentially ethical) commitment to both the fact that the mentioned procedures enable truths to emerge and the truths they may generate, Badiou calls *fidelity*. Peter Hallward thus reasons that

the part played by ‘ethics’ in this [Badiouan] configuration is an essentially regulative one. Understood in terms of a philosophy of truth, ‘ethical’ should simply describe what helps to preserve or *en-courage* a subjective fidelity as such. The ethical prescription can be summarized by the single imperative: ‘Keep going!’ or ‘Continue!’<sup>560</sup>

As noted above, Badiou’s notion of the truths that the human tasks of politics, love, science and art may seek and follow is organically related to an initiating *event*. This event can be described as an emergence of something that

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<sup>557</sup> Badiou 2001: 28.

<sup>558</sup> Badiou (2007a: 510) explains that “[a] procedure of fidelity... is generic if, for any determinant... of the encyclopaedia, it contains at least one enquiry... which avoids... this determinant. – There are four types of generic procedure: artistic, scientific, political, and amorous. These are the four sources of truth[.]” By encyclopaedic determinant he means, in turn, “a part... of the situation... composed of terms that have a property in common which can be formulated in the language of the situation. Such a term is said to ‘fall under the determinant’.” (Ibid.: 506.)

<sup>559</sup> See e.g. Badiou 2001: 28. See also e.g. Hughes 2007/2008, paragraph 6.

<sup>560</sup> Hallward 2001: xi, brackets mine.

is — or in fact *will be* — (S)ame but yet “*undecidable*” by definition for all those participating in the innate otherness and diversity of being: an unattainable and eventual *supplement* that cuts through our fathomable being — as for Badiou was, and *is*, the appearance and abiding importance of theatrical tragedy with Aeschylus.<sup>561</sup> Thus in art (and theatre), this means that an event sometimes gives birth to an “artistic configuration” that

is not an art form, a genre, or an “objective” period in the history of art... Rather, it is an identifiable sequence, initiated by an event, comprising a virtually infinite complex of works, when speaking of which it makes sense to say that it produces—in a rigorous immanence to the art in question—a truth *of this art*, an art-truth. Philosophy will bear the trace of this configuration inasmuch as it will have to show in what sense this configuration lets itself be grasped by the category of truth. [...] In this sense, it is true to say that, more often than not, a configuration is thinkable at the juncture of an effective process within art and of the philosophies that seize this process.<sup>562</sup>

Badiou strengthens his point by exemplifying how the configuration of Greek tragedy has been a continuous source of (and object for) thought in the history of philosophy, from Plato to Nietzsche (and himself). His view presents it as a worthwhile example of ‘configurable cooperation’ between art and philosophy, whose initiating *event* bears Aeschylus’s name, which is, however, “the index of a central *void* in the previous situation of choral poetry.”<sup>563</sup> In the truth-process following this name that designates that which preceded it (or was lacking it) — and at the ‘tragic junctures’ between art and philosophy along the way — the configuration that bears this *particular art-truth* would be the very

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<sup>561</sup> Badiou (2005b) further elaborates the given case by saying that “[k]nowledge as such only gives us repetition, it is concerned only with what already is. For truth to affirm its newness, there must be a supplement. This supplement is committed to chance—it is unpredictable, incalculable, it is beyond what it is. I call it an event. A truth appears in its newness because an eventful supplement interrupts repetition. Examples: The appearance, with Aeschylus, of theatrical tragedy.”

<sup>562</sup> Badiou 2005a: 13.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, italics mine.

saturation of tragedy itself, the process that reaches its ideal in Euripides.<sup>564</sup> However, it should be emphasised that the junctures between tragedy and philosophy are not described in the Badiouan reading of theatre as contracts which synthesise the two, but rather as informational encounters wherein the progressions of one configuration have produced and continue to produce effects in the other. (Mainly so that tragedy informs philosophy.)

It seems then that the Badiouan *event* already requires us, in order to approach it, to define some kind of 'evental site of thought' with which to investigate its possibilities. We need to look for a *subject of the event*, a subject whose fate is to transform from being a mere situation, a happening, a case in history or an ensemble of thinking human animals into a creation, a *process* of (self-)assessment and communication that strives to uphold meaningful (and ethical) lines of thought committed to the event.<sup>565</sup> Badiou's formulation of this commitment links up with his former proposal that a subject is "a relation between an event and the world," a *creation* that is the *consequence of an undecidable event*. A subject of an event can thus never be a single human being named as *the* subject of this or that truth-process, an 'identity qua truth' or a 'truth-identity;' instead, it may be "a singular production" to whose composition a human animal may take part in as a '*some-one*' that may enter it — while the composition always exceeds this 'some-one.'<sup>566</sup> Speaking of artistic processes and situations that may serve as starting points for *art-truths*, Badiou explains that

the subject of an artistic process is not the artist (the 'genius', etc.). In fact, the subject-points of art are works of art. And the artist enters into the composition of these subjects (the works are 'his'), without our being able in any sense to reduce them to 'him' (and besides, which 'him' would this be?). Events are irreducible singularities, the 'beyond-the-law' of situations. Each faithful truth-process is an entirely invented immanent break with the situation. Subjects, which are the local occurrences of the truth-process ('points' of truth), are

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> See e.g. Badiou 2001: 43-44, 60, 132-133.

<sup>566</sup> Badiou 2001: 43, 44-45.

particular and incomparable inductions. It is with respect to subjects of this kind that it is — perhaps — legitimate to speak of an ‘ethic of truths’.<sup>567</sup>

These viewpoints also mean that the subject Badiou is after is constituted by a sentence that takes — in our case — the form of an ‘ethical game of chance,’ or in his words, “the form of a wager: ... 'This has taken place, which I can neither calculate nor demonstrate, but to which I shall be faithful.' A subject begins with what fixes an undecidable event because it takes a chance of deciding it. This begins the infinite procedure of verification of the Truth. It's the *examination within the situation of the consequences of the axiom which decides the Event*. It's the exercise of *fidelity*.”<sup>568</sup> To explain how this subject and its initiation remain open to chance by their very nature, he depicts the subject as “a throw of the dice which *does not abolish chance but accomplishes it as a verification of the axiom which founds it*. What was decided concerning the undecidable event must pass by this term. It is a pure choice: this term, indiscernible, permits the other. Such is the local act of a truth: it consists in a pure choice between indiscernibles.”<sup>569</sup> Exemplifying further how the (inevitably) finite artistic subject relates to a truth-process, Badiou states that “the world of Sophocles is a subject for the artistic truth which is the Greek tragedy. This truth begins with the event of Aeschylus. *This work is a creation, a pure choice in what before it is indiscernible*. However, although this work is finite, tragedy itself as an artistic truth continues into infinity. *The work of Sophocles is a finite subject of this infinite truth*.”<sup>570</sup>

Yet, Badiou also discusses *fidelity* as an individualised commitment. Referring in his *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (2003b) to Paul’s metaphor the “earthen vessel,” the fragile but thus all the more compelling existential — or rather, subjective — situation or frame that should support (*a* some-one’s) fidelity to the truth of the Christian faith, Badiou explains that

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid.: 44.

<sup>568</sup> Badiou 2005b, italics mine.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., italics mine.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., italics mine.

[w]hoever is the subject of a truth (of love, of art, or science, or politics) knows that, in effect, he bears a treasure, that he is traversed by an infinite power. Whether or not this truth, so precarious, continues to deploy itself depends solely on his subjective weakness. Thus, one may justifiably say that he bears it only in an earthen vessel, day after day enduring the imperative—delicacy and subjective thought—to ensure that nothing shatters it. For with the vessel, and with the dissipation into smoke of the treasure it contains, it is he, the subject, the anonymous bearer, the herald, who is equally shattered.<sup>571</sup>

The “treasure,” the “infinite power” of a truth which traverses the earthen vessel of Badiouan subjectivity (and thus also the *some-one*), transforms the mortality of the human situation into immortality; it surveys our life force not as a limited component of (or addition to) that which is or may be, but as fuel for a fidelity that traces something that may transcend any previous or existing understanding and definition of what is or may be.

Regarding ethics in this context, Janne Kurki explains that “[the act of] renouncing truth in its different forms is *evil* (and, in the field of politics, injustice) and turning one’s back on the *Immortal* that resides in us. In other words, Badiou wants to return — but not naïvely, not ignoring all that contemporary philosophy has thought — to classical... thinking of truth and sees that the only non-nihilistic ethics can proceed from truths alone.”<sup>572</sup>

Peter Hallward, for his part, states that “[t]o *keep going*... presumes the ability to identify and resist the various forms of corruption or exhaustion that can beset a fidelity to truth.”<sup>573</sup> Such corruption for Badiou is indeed Evil, with a capital E, and it can manifest itself in three forms. Hallward sums these forms up as follows: “(a) *betrayal*, the renunciation of a difficult fidelity; (b) *delusion*, the confusion of a mere ‘*simulacrum*’ of an event with a genuine event; and (c) *terror*, or the effort to impose the total and unqualified power of a truth [which

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<sup>571</sup> Badiou 2003b: 54.

<sup>572</sup> Kurki 2004: 46, brackets and latter italics mine.

<sup>573</sup> Hallward 2001:xi.

would also push a truth back to some legitimate plenitude as (evil) knowledge].”<sup>574</sup>

The exercise of fidelity is the principal property and quality of the (humane) subject of an event, because it is from the subject’s decision, a “decision to relate henceforth to the situation *from the perspective of its eventual [événementiel] supplement*,” that the (subjectively binding) truth-process stems from.<sup>575</sup> But a subject that examines the consequences of deciding an event with fidelity, a subject that carries that particular fidelity as its very vigour is also, as noted, a consequence of the process of truth; it is induced by this process and its own fidelity.<sup>576</sup>

Thus it would be through this understanding of the previously nonexistent and eventually generated subjectivity that ‘carries on!’ by its fidelity that the situational appearing and disappearing, the happening in being (and sometimes in the theatre), may enact an eventual possibility that requires one to remain faithful (read: ethically committed) to its (art-)truth.

But what is still at stake regarding these insights of art-truths, is the fact that fidelity to an event is, in spite of all (or in fact quite naturally), never “inevitable” or “necessary.” Badiou considers that

what remains undecidable is whether the disinterested-interest that it presumes on the part of the ‘some-one’ who participates in it can, *even if only as part of a fictional representation of self*, count as interest pure and simple. And so, since the sole principle of perseverance is that of interest, the perseverance of some-one in a fidelity... remains uncertain. We know that it is because of this uncertainty that there is a place for an ethic of truths.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid.: xii, brackets and italics mine; Badiou 2001: 72-87.

<sup>575</sup> Badiou 2001: 41; Badiou 2007a: xiii.

<sup>576</sup> See Ibid.: 41-43.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid.: 69, italics mine. In Hughes’ (2007/2008: paragraph 7) reading of Badiou the “event of truth implies an ethics in the way it calls upon the subject whom it befalls to continue to bear witness to this truth by engaging one’s life, one’s decisions, and one’s existence, in a continuing reinterpretation that is through this event and according to its truth.”

## 5.2. Truth(s) and the teatro-ethical context

### 5.2.1 *On Badiou and contemporary/modern theatre: outlines and details*

Regarding fairly recent developments in Western theatre, Badiou sees the development of *the art of mise en scène* as the twentieth century's main contribution to that particular artistic tradition. In *The Century* (2007b) he states that the period in question

transformed the thinking of representation into an art in its own right. Copeau, Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Craig, Appia, Jouvet and Brecht — and then Vilar, Vitez, Wilson and many others — turned what was merely the placement of representation into an independent art. These men [sic] brought to the fore a type of artist whose art belongs neither to that of the writer nor to that of the performer, but who creates instead, in both thought and space, a mediation between the two. The theatre director is something like a thinker of representation as such, who carries out a very complex investigation into the relationships between text, acting, space and public.<sup>578</sup>

To Brecht, in this context, he grants the status of a thinker who was acutely aware of “the contemporariness of the theatre” and “the theatricality of politics.” This awareness was achieved, according to Badiou, by “doubling theoretical reflection with effective experimentation, with an artistic invention[,]” which still meant that Brecht shared “the conviction that a singular bond exists between theatrics and politics.”<sup>579</sup>

The jump here from tragedy of antiquity to the development of theatre in the twentieth century is of course a considerable historical leap. But for the present enquiry and its conception of the (re)presentation, politics, ethics and social functions of theatre, it is of use to examine how Badiou's thoughts have

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<sup>578</sup> Badiou 2007b: 40, brackets mine.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.: 41. For another Badiouan view on the Brechtian bond between ‘theatrics’ and politics, see Badiou 2005a: 5-6.

informed and may inform our understanding of contemporary — or, more generally speaking, modern — occidental theatre.

We can find, for example, an instructive theatrical interpretation of Badiou's theory (of praxis) in Oliver Feltham's essay 'An Explosive Genealogy: theatre, philosophy and the art of presentation' (2006). In this text, Feltham concentrates on the fact that "what goes under the name of 'theatre' today is far more varied than what went under that name in the late nineteenth century[.]" and claims that the theoretical and practical developments of Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) have served as an important *evental* thrust for changes in Western theatre since then, since "the *situation* of theatre at the turn of the twentieth century."<sup>580</sup> He sums up the "constituent elements of the *Meyerhold-event*"<sup>581</sup> as follows:

1. In Meyerhold's work the plasticity of the acting body is liberated from the constraints of mimesis via the exploratory system of exercises called 'biomechanics'.
2. Meyerhold consciously worked to liberate theatrical space from the box-set with its illusional painted scenery and proscenium arch.
3. Meyerhold named the fourth wall as an obstacle to be dismantled insofar as the spectator was to be transformed into a co-creator.
4. The mask is reintroduced as essential to theatre along with clowning, mime and play-acting.<sup>582</sup>

As noted, Feltham calls the synergetic innovation and impact of these elements the Meyerhold-event ("named in polemical writings which then circulate amongst theatre practitioners"), and takes the view that they induce "*a generic truth procedure*" of "*'new theatre'*" — or, in Meyerhold's words, "stylized theatre" — within in the sphere of theatre.<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> Feltham 2006: 227, italics mine.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid: 228, italics mine.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.: 227-228. In the present context, however, it would be rather questionable to speak of the *constraints* of mimesis. Instead, I claim that mimesis' operation is by definition "exploratory" and highly 'biomechanical.'

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.: 228, 226, 232, 228, italics mine.



What becomes the “operator” — or, we might also say the subject or ‘subject-point’ — of *fidelity* in Feltham’s essay is a sentence singled out from Meyerhold’s text ‘The Stylized Theatre,’ which reads as follows: “‘We intend the audience not merely to observe, but to participate in a *corporate creative act*.’”<sup>584</sup> The primary “evental site” of/for this configuration is then “the material space of the auditorium[.]” which “is definitely present in the situation of theatre” and whose “expressive capacities were inexistent according to established canons of theatrical practice” (at the time)<sup>585</sup> — “[t]he material space of the auditorium was absent from the state of theatre at Meyerhold’s time”<sup>586</sup>. Feltham states that “what the Meyerhold-event does is transform *not just* the stage and its objects, but the *entire material space* of the auditorium *including* the audience members *into* the work.”<sup>587</sup> He thus presents us with a sort of *inverted* version or articulation of the formation of the *circle of community* I discussed in Chapter 3. From a Levinasian point of view, it becomes a rather concrete example of the *involvement* (or even the *bewitchment*) an artistic creation process gives rise to.

Furthermore, added to this (corporate creative) act, the *sovereignty of a single performance* (emphasised by Stanislavski, for example), takes on a new kind of socio-political meaning and commitment in Feltham’s reading. He writes how the Meyerhold-event

seeks to transfer [the] singularity [of performing or expressing] *from* the literary work or the actor *to the performance as a material whole* including the participant-audience members. In other words, the task is to create a ‘corporate creative act’, to integrate, however momentarily, an acting collective body that cannot be repeated. The evental site for the Meyerhold-event is thus all the material elements in the auditorium inasmuch as they could become part—however briefly—of a transindividual act.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>584</sup> Meyerhold’s *Meyerhold on Theatre* (Methuen: London, 1969: 60) quoted in Feltham 2006: 228.

<sup>585</sup> Feltham 2006: 229.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*: 230.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*: 229.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, brackets mine.

Certain elements of this generic procedure the Meyerhold-event sets forth are then taken up by such figures as Brecht and Artaud (in rather different manners), and fashioned into various further elaborations and views.

Brecht, according to Feltham, 'performs' fidelity to the Meyerhold-event 1) by investigating what he (Brecht) calls "the social function of theatre[,]" by encouraging the audience "to think about how characters choose to act in social situations[,]" 2) by incorporating "into the language of theatre complicated stage machinery, marionettes, and the projection of titles and pictures onto screens" and 3) by conducting a "critical interrogation of mass media [mainly *radio*] which were rising in prominence in his time." As regards the last item on the list, we may observe how the generic truth-procedure seems to overstep the limits of the 'situation of (new) *theatre*,' and thus to problematise the validity of this particular subject-point for the procedure itself. However, Feltham notes that as Brecht was interested in radio's interactive capacity, he still seemed to retrace the possibilities of a *corporate creative act* within the new medium. But this view would be wholly dependent on an investigation of *what elements or phenomena within that medium can lend themselves to the corporate creative act*.<sup>589</sup>

Artaud, too, responded to the (Meyerhold-)“event of new theatre” in three distinct ways. Feltham notes that he did this 1) by continuing “the enquiry into the plasticity of theatrical space towards a dissolution of the actors-audience distinction[,]” 2) by elaborating further “Meyerhold’s reintroduction of masks and mummery” and 3) by viewing theatre (under the titles ‘Theatre of Cruelty,’ ‘Balinese theatre’ and ‘metaphysical theatre’) “as an immediate act of communication which directly affects the spectator’s sensibilities, a transfiguration of their state of nerves akin to a disaster in its intensity.”<sup>590</sup>

Of course, the immediate social and political aims and effects of theatre that Meyerhold’s views point to were rather foreign to Artaud’s thought. Feltham thus mentions that “[t]he distance that Artaud... places between himself and Meyerhold is commutative insofar as it is the same distance which is normally

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid.: 231-232, italics and brackets mine.

<sup>590</sup> Feltham 2006: 233.

understood to exist between Artaud and Brecht's political theatre."<sup>591</sup> Yet, despite this distance, Artaud returned at the end of his life — and disillusioned with *radio* — to re-embrace the means of theatre, thus renewing his commitment to the *corporate creative act*. The experimentations of Brecht and Artaud differ chronologically and formally, but utilise the transformations Meyerhold's impact on Western theatre made possible (or visible).<sup>592</sup>

To provide a rough description of the rest of the essay, Feltham contends that the generic truth procedure at hand extends its "exploration-transformations"<sup>593</sup> — through Brecht, Artaud, and many other *subject-points* — to concern various additional socially and politically determined domains; education, mass media, music, performance art. As a "hybrid art," theatrical expression is able to influence the mentioned domains in a variety of ways, generating in Feltham's reading a series of descriptions of 'new theatre,' descriptions that emphasise 1) the mobility and plasticity of the performance space (which includes the audience); 2) the impact of non-intentionality and chance; 3) the mechanisation of movement "to the point of blurring the organic-mechanic distinction[;]" 4) the aesthetico-politically problematised *functions* of the actors (the status of *actors qua functions*); 5) the incorporation of "the noise of the modern world" into "theatrical and musical language" and 6) the diversion of mass media into (aesthetically and/or socio-politically relevant) critical enquiries, which also allows theatre "to expand beyond the trap called the 'death of theatre'."<sup>594</sup>

We need to understand, however, that many practices which employ the themes and methods highlighted by these descriptions do not fall into the category of *new theatre*. Hence, the truth procedure that concerns and affects it must be *examined persistently* (and with *fidelity*).

The statements also lead Feltham to suggest that perhaps the truth procedure — and the "explosive genealogy" it articulates for us — here is, after all, that of the "*generic art of presentation[;]*" something that by emphasising the (political and conceptual) effect of the *corporate creative act* has, in fact, *informed*

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.: 234.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.: 238.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.: 237, 235-236, 238.

*Badiou's philosophy itself* under the rubric *new theatre*, as a valid description of any generic truth procedure whatsoever.

Ultimately what is at stake in these multiple enquiries [into theatre and other media] is not so much a new *theatre* but the unfolding of a *generic art of presentation: generic* insofar as it links up... time-based, visual, sonorous, tactile or odorous [arts]... which appear to be distinct to theatre; *indiscernible* insofar as *not all* of the work in these fields (perhaps *very little* of it) belongs to it.<sup>595</sup>

Of course, the philosophical effects of (the truth procedure of) the *art of presentation* do not emerge for the first time with Badiou's theory, but already with Plato.<sup>596</sup> As a sort of 'summarising act of fidelity' to the examination of the truth procedure following the Meyerhold-event, Feltham observes how the procedure itself, which can be seen to influence Badiou's theoretical viewpoints (through *art of presentation*), (re-)establishes a triangular bond between *theatre*, *philosophy* and the *state* (or polis), and thus returns us to reflect on the Platonic concern over mimesis; the ethically charged insight that views an actor-poet as a subject who may occupy every possible position in the polis but at the same time occupies none of them, as s/he does not "maintain a proper relation to knowledge and the Idea..."<sup>597</sup>

The (re-)presentation (or the mimetic mode of being) of the actor-poet is observed in the "Greek dispensation" as an intellectually and ethically unstable and suspicious — read: intrinsically *simulacric* — surface (or even substance)

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<sup>595</sup> Feltham 2006: 238, brackets mine.

<sup>596</sup> I wish to add here a lengthy quotation from Žižek (1998:240), which explicates Badiou's political kinship with Plato: "Badiou is clearly and radically opposed to the postmodern anti-Platonic thrust whose basic dogma is that the era when it was still possible to ground a political movement in a direct reference to some eternal metaphysical or transcendental truth is definitely over, and, the experience of our century having proved that such a reference to some metaphysical a priori leads to catastrophic "totalitarian" social consequences, the only solution is to accept that we live in a new era deprived of metaphysical certainties, an era of contingency and conjectures, and in a "society of risks" that renders politics a matter of *phronesis*, of strategic judgments and dialogue, not of applying fundamental cognitive insights. What Badiou is aiming for, against this postmodern *doxa*, is precisely the resuscitation of the *politics of (universal) Truth* in today's conditions of global contingency."

<sup>597</sup> Feltham 2006: 238.

which not only reinvents the possibilities of the multiple subject-positions of the state, but attempts to (re-)define what the *real*, the *essential but intangible* — or universally applicable but still indefinite — nature of those positions could be. In Hallward’s reading of Badiou and theatre, “[t]he actors’ task is to evacuate themselves of all specificity (however “original” or “unique”) so as to reveal an invariably singular genericity, an ongoing “evaporation of all stable essence. . . . The ethic of acting is that of an escapee.”<sup>598</sup> (We might even suggest that the *escape from all specificity* that intrigues Hallward and Badiou here bears resemblance to the surplus *thirdness*, the non-positioned (performative) viewpoint which Žižek’s, Heidegger’s and Zeami’s views indicated in Chapter 3.2.1.).

All in all, in this configuration theatre remains a rival of philosophy so that both of these distinct ‘arts of *presentation*’ inform (or *educate*) the state.<sup>599</sup> This observation seems to link up with Badiou’s statement according to which “next to the spiritual suspicion that befalls theatre, there is always the vigilant concern of the State, to the point where all theatre has been one of the affairs of the State and remains so to this day[.]”<sup>600</sup>

Regarding the teatro-political context and the Levinasian understanding of the *theatrically Said* structured in this work, it is also of importance to note how in Feltham’s reading

certain enquiries of the ‘new theatre’ are not indifferent to this Greek dispensation: in fact, Brecht’s work transforms it. Already for Plato, thus from this viewpoint of philosophy *the (pseudo) function of theatre is the presentation of society to itself via simulacra*. The Brechtian twist is to argue that in doing so the only way can theatre avoid presenting simulacra is by not presenting society as a stable unity... under Brecht’s directives theatrical presentation necessarily involves an identification of the social body but at the same time an exposure of

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<sup>598</sup> Badiou’s *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre* (Le Spectateur français: Paris, 1990: 94) quoted in Hallward 2003: 205. Hallward also argues that in the Badiouan context “theater is nothing other than a machine for the actual production of generic ideas.” (Hallward 2003: 205.) See also *ibid.*: 390, n. 34-35. In Levinasian terms these statements describe quite clearly the ethical evasion of art which motivated the standpoints of ‘Reality and its shadow.’

<sup>599</sup> Feltham 2006: 238-239.

<sup>600</sup> Badiou 2009.

its disjunctions *even if* only at the place of the gap between the subject of enunciation of the social identity and the enunciated of that social identity. Brecht thus thinks theatrical practice *as* the true installation of the reflexive moment within society. [...] the explosion [of the 'new theatre' truth procedure] has reached philosophy and it has... conditioned the very model of change that we have been using to sketch it.<sup>601</sup>

We may say that with these last few observations, if not before, Feltham's insights surpass the *artistic immanence* and the *generic progress* of a truth-process in the theatre,<sup>602</sup> and thus also the ethical commitment that manifests itself *only* as a *fidelity to the particular emergence of the truth* that exceeded and transformed forever the situation which was devoid (and ignorant) of the possibilities of the "corporate creative act" Meyerhold's writing and stagings suggest. In this context, questions of responsibility have come to concern quite clearly the ethico-political community that has gathered and continues to gather to witness and participate in the 'corporate creative act.'

But to concentrate more properly on the relations between Badiou's ethics of truths, the theatrically Said (of the Levinasian configuration) and ethico-political community articulated in the present study necessitates a return to some of Janelle Reinelt's observations.

### 5.2.2 (Re)turning to the ethico-political context

Among other things, Reinelt concentrates in her essay 'Theatre and Politics: Encountering Badiou' (2004) on the same political implications of theatre that emerged in Badiou's views on Brecht, according to which one of Brecht's central innovations within theatre was to highlight a singular bond between "theatrics and politics."

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<sup>601</sup> Feltham 2006: 239, first italics mine.

<sup>602</sup> In this context, *ethical responsibility* would commit itself to the (generic) artistic procedure *as a fidelity to the process in the art form itself*, as a fidelity of which Feltham's own essay serves as an astute example (or *subject-point*).

Reinelt's reading of Badiou and theatre may then help to re-examine the ethico-political context mainly developed in Chapter 3, the context in which expression and its witnessing formed an already public demonstration of politics, a polymorphic synthesis of public artistic expression and the human animals' 'social substance.' For Reinelt suggests that

[i]n the case of a *theatrical event*, we can treat it as a *hybrid of politics and art*: not only does it involve a collectivity in both its address and its activity, it also pushes formally at the edges of intelligibility in terms of its own aesthetic structures. Performances claiming the status of an event both demonstrate radical fraternity and give rise to novel presentations of reality.<sup>603</sup>

As with Feltham, theatre is described here as a *hybrid art* — of (novel) presentation, involving politics and artistic means — but this time by emphasising its role as an *evental* hybrid of art and politics to a greater extent. Reinelt proposes “to link the theatre to Badiou’s Ethics and Ontology, suggesting that theatre performances take place within a Situation and most often a State, and that to the extent that these performances are performative (in an Austinian sense), they are potential Events that can lead to Truth Processes and constitute Subjects.” Understanding that forming this link forces one to stretch Badiou’s views to a degree, she sees that the above formulations “may prove useful for a theatre *seeking novel ways to intervene in political life*.”<sup>604</sup>

One central issue that connects Reinelt’s standpoint to Badiou is the latter’s view of the audience, according to which the *some-one* who takes part in composing a subject of a (theatrically configurable) truth can be “*this* spectator whose thinking has been set in motion, who has been seized and bewildered by a burst of theatrical fire, and who thus enters into the complex configuration of a moment of art.”<sup>605</sup> But how would this affect the political side of the

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<sup>603</sup> Reinelt 2004: 89.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid.: 88, italics mine.

<sup>605</sup> Badiou 2001: 45; Reinelt 2004: 91. At this point it is also useful to note how Hallward’s (2003: 206) reading of Badiou and theatre emphasises the fact that “[a]s performed... theater is clearly *the most evental of arts*: “No other art captures in this way the intensity of what happens”. The ephemeral passing of the performance clears a space for the unlimited eternity

abovementioned hybrid theatre embodies? By the fact that in Badiou's reading of theatre, "to the extent that [theatre] *thinks*," the public does not — or rather, should not — attend theatre to be cultivated, to be involved in a (fundamentally *evil*) process that reduces the eventality of theatre into a representation of knowledge, but "to be *struck*. Struck by *theater-ideas*. [The public] does not leave the theater cultivated, but stunned, fatigued (thought is tiring), pensive... It has encountered ideas whose existence it hitherto did not suspect."<sup>606</sup> What is more, Badiou considers that "[a] theatrical representation [or the theater-idea 'caught in incompleteness']<sup>607</sup> will never abolish chance. [...] The public is part of what completes the idea. [...] But if the public is part of the chance that is at work in the theater, it must itself be as prey to chance as possible[:]"<sup>608</sup>

We must protest against any conception of the public that would depict it as a community, a substance, or a consistent set. The public represents humanity in its very inconsistency, in its infinite variety. [...] Only a *generic* public, a chance public, is worth anything at all.<sup>609</sup>

Badiou resists the term *community* here, but we may say that the theatropolitical understanding constructed in the present work, which understands the public to be *in public through its very socio-symbolic exposure* (and not through some statistical socio-political context), entails that there is a certain community present, a community that is precisely a *generic public* by being an inconsistent gathering of human animals — a "chance public," maybe, but *a public in public* all the same. Moreover, the terms chance, striking and "theatrical fire" that colour this context (of the possible innovativeness of theatre) lead Reinelt to note that Badiou's view on the function of theatre

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of its characters and themes: "The performance encounters in the instant what the text holds in the eternal", but the intemporal genericity of a character is not constrained by any given performance." (Italics mine, quotes from Badiou's *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre* [1990: 23, 115])

<sup>606</sup> Badiou 2005a: 76-77, brackets and latter italics mine; see Hallward 2003: 205; Reinelt 2004: 88-89.

<sup>607</sup> More of this below.

<sup>608</sup> Badiou 2005a: 74, brackets mine.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, brackets mine.



acknowledges that theatre is an event in which particular demonstrations take place — the audience is struck by theatre ideas. If we understand this striking to be an action which takes place — not a representation of an action but *a true action belonging to the theatre itself* — we understand in what sense a performance may *be* but is not necessarily performative. There is a capacity to strike which belongs to the theatre, but just as often it cultivates instead, [...] and thus represents the state, leaving its spectators unchanged...<sup>610</sup>

She continues by saying that “[t]he possibilities for theatre to strike a blow are infinite, and yet they are rare because, as Badiou says of events, they are unconditioned and unpredictable.” As if commenting on my earlier conception according to which the stage serves as a *communal sign of other/stranger/guest*, Reinelt also understands the rareness of an event within the theatrical configuration to depend on the fact that an event cannot “come from outside [of a situation], like ‘foreign invasion[.]’”<sup>611</sup> To borrow from Žižek, it emerges from “the Nothing” that is “the ontological truth” of a situation, but *must be recognised* (qua fidelity) in order to achieve an evental status.<sup>612</sup> Yet, if the situation is that of the *inconsistent but public life of our social substance*, theatre’s gesture towards something evental would be an ephemeral demonstration, which, in any event, connects with those that witness it. I then argue that the pre-existing/unavoidable communality of a theatrical event (by our socio-symbolic exposure) and the question of otherwise-than-politics are present in Reinelt’s hybrid of Badiou, theatre and politics, as a ‘Nothing-ridden’ *situation* which may serve at least as a background for the transformations which may comprise a truth-process.

Moreover, although she takes note of Hebert Blau’s view according to which to see a theatre event as an immediately social and *communal* happening may be a rather innocent (or naïve) assumption on the part of academics (or even

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<sup>610</sup> Reinelt 2004: 89, italics mine.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid., brackets mine.

<sup>612</sup> Žižek 1998: 240. Yet, he points out that “an Event does not entail any ontological *guarantee*: its status is radically undecidable; it cannot be reduced to (nor deduced or generated from) a (previous) situation, since it emerges “out of Nothing[.]” (Ibid.)

theatre's overriding *illusion*),<sup>613</sup> she claims that there needs to be a 'we' — a *fraternity* — involved in the Badiouan examination of a possible truth-process of a theatrical event (no matter how intangible that fraternity may be in the end). This *we* is *radical, discontinuous* and *incoherent* in nature, *constructing its own intermittent (and truth-bound) time*, it is more a matter of "passion" than ideology — thus echoing many shibboleths of Western theatre.<sup>614</sup> Both Reinelt and Blau are aware that the assumed communality of theatre is a rather "saturated" issue, but as regards the present enquiry, this does not pose an actual problem: the former notes that Badiou's theory offers us a radical *reformulation* of the obligations and possibilities that theatre's assumed (and possibly saturated) communality contains.

Moreover, regarding the Lacanian/Žižekian context (in Ch. 3.), theatre would not need dealing with any specific definition of collective identity here, but with the fact that a theatre performance (or event) gathers before and inside its 'overriding (but radical) illusion' a certain *undefined collection of identities*, no matter what motives those identities have to attend the illusion. Looking back to the Kantian reading of theatre and gesturing, we might even suggest that the "radical fraternity"<sup>615</sup> theatre may momentarily demonstrate (or *set the scene for*), through its *unconditional condition of social exposure* — but may not reduce to *representation* without becoming evil, in Badiouan sense —, is as radical as its aptitude for nonconformity (and evil) regarding the moral constraints laid on human expression. Here lies, perhaps, a decisive difference between the Badiouan and Kantian projects as regards theatrical activity and its radical relation to ethics. While the former's theory looks askance at any (cultivated) reduction to knowledge and representation, Kant's moral thought detects evil to reside precisely in the radicalism that all (situational) acts of

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<sup>613</sup> Ibid.: 90. Reinelt (ibid.) also mentions that "[p]art of the problem with the language of theatre as community has always been the question of efficacy: if a group of performers and spectators come together and are overtaken by the strength of the performance, and forge a community of some sort, what does it mean, amount to, result in? Nothing substantial is often the conclusion drawn by those who would wish it were otherwise — those who wish theatre to have some revolutionary potential of its own."

<sup>614</sup> Reinelt 2004: 90.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid.: 89.

reduction — or emancipation — embody as ethically inadequate or suspect procedures.

Nevertheless, theatre presents itself in this context as momentary and inconsistent fraternity devoid of any true agreement or solidarity. Whether that fraternity is able to contain or produce any novel thoughts on *liberty* and *equality*, for example, is a quite different matter, of course. It depends on the truth-bound fidelity the momentous — but *never monumental* — instance of a radical *we* may create and, more importantly, prolong in/as momentary and heterogeneous demonstrations in the future, as a (truth-)process in the real.<sup>616</sup>

Although Badiou himself addresses the relation between theatre and the operation of its ethico-political context and consequences qua its reality (or real) somewhat differently, he does it in a way that allows Reinelt's views to interact with him. To better understand this connection, we need to return to the actual birthplace of theatrical configurations — that is, we need to re-examine theatre and its gesture, its *theatrically Said*, as an *evental*<sup>617</sup> site or surface of (ethical) fidelity.

Badiou's *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (2005a)<sup>618</sup> defines theatre as “an assemblage of extremely disparate components, both material and ideal, whose only existence lies in the performance, in *the act of theatrical representation*. These components (a text, a place, some bodies, voices, costumes, lights, a public...) are gathered together in an event, the performance [*representation*]<sup>619</sup>,

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<sup>616</sup> Badiou 2005b. Reinelt (2004: 90) explains that “[a]s an artistic project... the subject must not go back on her encounter with the novelty of the event. As a political project, the subject must pursue the collectivity of the *we*, constructed in the event but not inevitably continuing beyond it. This *we* is only present through the set of its demonstrations, and it cannot be represented (as the party, the nation, or any other group).”

<sup>617</sup> Badiou appears to use the word *evental* (*événementiel*) to distinguish his conception of an event from all *eventual* hypotheses, which would return truth back within the concept of knowledge and thus represent the *evil* that subdues the novelty and radical import of a truth.

<sup>618</sup> “By “inaesthetics” I understand a relation of philosophy to art that, maintaining that art is itself a producer of truths, makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy. Against aesthetic speculation, inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art.” (Badiou 2005a: xiv.)

<sup>619</sup> Acknowledging its context of use, it is legitimate to assume that by a *performance* Badiou means here *the act of re-presentation*, the act of expressing or signalling something ‘*per forma*,’ but not necessarily ‘*pro forma*.’

whose repetition... does not in any sense hinder the fact that, each and every time, the performance is evental, that is, singular.”<sup>620</sup>

Furthermore, as implied above, Badiou maintains that a theatrical event, when it “really is theater,” is an “event of thought.” It is then crucial to understand that the ideas the mentioned assemblage produces are “*theater-ideas*,” ideas that cannot be engendered anywhere else than in the theatre. The essential theatricality of these ideas is due to the fact that “none of the components taken separately is capable of producing theater-ideas, not even the text. The idea arises in and by the performance, through the *act* of theatrical representation. The idea is irreducibly theatrical and does not preexist before its arrival “on stage.””<sup>621</sup>

The most challenging feature of this configuration would be the fact that Badiou’s definitions seem to present theatre as a *conceptually and methodically immanent system* that engenders certain representational, singular and temporary statements, manifestations or demonstrations, which are still, and perhaps quite naturally — as creators of (and partakers in) events of *thought* — unable (or even unwilling) to form any actual closure in regard to discussions and configurations whose linguistic and conceptual grammars are formed and presented in wider contexts, their politics and, perhaps, in the end, infinite plurality.

Badiou’s response to this issue — which also seems to problematise some of Levinas’ remarks on the ‘dissipation’ of theatre above — is the following: “The

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<sup>620</sup> Badiou 2005a: 72, italics mine.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., latter italics mine. In “The Invention of “Theatricality””: Rereading Bernard Dort and Roland Barthes, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac calls Badiou’s theater-idea the “idea of theater.” I am not sure whether there has been some confusion about the translation of the term (and in which translation), but Sarrazac comes to the conclusion that Badiou understands the performance to be a “fulfillment” of a text and does not emphasise the acute and (ideally) creative “interplay” between the various elements of the performance. (Sarrazac 2002: 68. He refers to “Dix Thèses sur le Théâtre” in *Comédie Française, Les Cahiers* n°15 POL, printemps 1995.) However, as I see it, this is precisely what Badiou means by “theater-ideas,” ideas produced *only* by this interplay, no matter what specific formal strategies a performance uses to activate it. Badiou’s “theater-ideas” are ideas (or seeds of ideas) generated by the interplay of theatrical means, not primarily ideas *about* the theatre or its manner of employing different means of expression.

ephemeral element within theater is not to be located directly in the fact that a performance begins, ends, and ultimately leaves nothing but obscure traces. Instead, it is to be sought in the following conviction: The theater is an eternal and incomplete idea caught in the instantaneous ordeal of its own completion.”<sup>622</sup> Inasmuch as one still wishes to maintain that the performers close up or complete the circle of a theatre-political community (by validating questions of politics or responsibility through the ‘stagely difference,’ the mimetic operation), i.e., *the community that has gathered together to witness this effort of completion*, the latter would also have to acknowledge its position as an active factor in that very effort. Badiou is not ignorant of such a suggestion. He calls the theatre-idea “a public illumination of history and life” which “emerges only at the apex of art”<sup>623</sup> and considers, as mentioned, that an audience may be struck by it, to the point that it may start to inform the spectators’ mindsets.

This would mean that it is also through the interaction of the *participants* of the negotiations — let us call them ‘potentially subjectivisable some-ones’ — that move around and cross over the multiple discourses that define theatre-ideas (and are sometimes quite irrespective of the particularity of their birthplace), that we should understand theatre as an always already socio-political event. Since the present enquiry is into the political conditions of the ethical responsibility of theatre, the theatrical event and its ideas would still have to be recognised through their relations to a wider cultural and theoretical context — like that presented by Badiou himself: the very *junction of theatre and thought*.

The *ethical uncertainty* that concerns recognising an event and one’s fidelity to a truth that Badiou speaks of, makes us then look for more concrete examples and ‘fidelities’ that would clarify theatre’s relation to his treatment of truth and ethics. As noted, he presents theatre as an immanent albeit complex and (at least socio-politically) incomplete system, built from elements which cannot act independently but give birth to artistic configurations that are, in turn, able to inform other discourses (with somewhat similar interests), other events of thought. The capability of theatre to produce or to participate in a truth-process is

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<sup>622</sup> Badiou 2005a: 74.

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*: 73.

thus presented as a quite possible (and even obvious) issue, but more on a grand, theoretical scale.

It is therefore noteworthy how his thought also leaves the door open for smaller *movements of fidelity* within the theatrical system; for particular decisions and commitments that can be seen as possible entries into truth-processes that precede larger cultural configurations. Badiou himself describes how

beyond the proper names retained as significant illustrations of the configuration or as the “dazzling” subject points of its generic trajectory, there is always a virtually infinite quantity of subject points—minor, ignored, redundant, and so on—that are no less a part of the immanent truth whose being is provided by the artistic configuration. Of course, it can happen that the configuration no longer gives rise to distinctly perceivable works or to decisive inquiries into its own constitution. It can also happen that an incalculable event comes to reveal in retrospect a configuration to be obsolete with respect to the constraints introduced by a new configuration.<sup>624</sup>

Noting the significance of this ‘fieldwork of/for truth’ is important if we wish to apprehend how theatre practitioners (or critics and theorists) enter the *configuration* of its possible truths — as they sometimes undeniably do, but in a way that often goes unnoticed. This side of the discussion is essential if we do not wish to ignore, for example, the fact that every particular decision or *choice* made during a rehearsal or a performance, and every subsequent assessment of one — even (or often precisely) when they differ radically from the announced artistic or political viewpoints of the assembled performance or of those participating it — are possible openings for eventual configurations, possible supplements to the formation of theatre-ideas that are capable of adducing a fidelity that either follows the possibilities inherent in the given performance or, perhaps more importantly, break away from whatever it demonstrates. Perhaps we can say that the *void* that these decisions or choices come to fill is the preceding ‘artistic-axiomatic’ situation, where (or *for* which) a performance, *an*

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<sup>624</sup> Badiou 2005a: 13.

*assemblage of divergent but interdependent elements* suddenly begins to *transfigure* its ‘already configured or configuring Nothing,’ its hallucinatory ontological truth that expands itself *as if* trying to explode in an unexpected or “not-known” direction.<sup>625</sup>

From this point of view a theatrical performance may perform at least an elliptical gesture towards something *evental* every time it takes place — “here and now, when appearing is the same thing as disappearing” — and leaves us to examine it “to its infinite extent;” to follow and re-assess its meanings as a vocation to a truth it possibly conceals, problematises and thus ‘dispatches.’<sup>626</sup> Yet, as noted, even this situation would remain unstable and suspicious by its very nature — *suspicion* being a term that undeniably belongs to the examination of a truth-process.

### 5.2.3 *Betrayal and exposure of the politics of betrayal*

Some of Badiou’s formulations of the *concept of evil* make us then look for a substratum for a *theatrical fidelity* that would sustain ethicality as a part of its “disinterested-interest” in the appearance and examination of truth. As noted above, Badiou talks of the evil of *simulacra*,<sup>627</sup> statements (or *representations*) that are put forward as upholders of truths but always remain fixed to certain situational aims, false truths distorted by axioms (or *vague semblances* of truths) that concern that which already exists within our (assumption of) knowledge and even present it as a *legitimate plenitude*.

These simulacra are then organic elements of all particularly defined interests that are not capable of searching or upholding a truth (or an ethics) that would become ‘the same for all’ — one of the most notorious examples being the

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<sup>625</sup> Badiou (2001: 69) states that “since a situation is composed by the knowledges circulating within it, the event names the void inasmuch as it names the *not-known of the situation*. [...] ... *the fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, to name, the situated void of that for which it is an event.*” (Italics mine.)

<sup>626</sup> See again e.g. Badiou 2001: 67, 69.

<sup>627</sup> Badiou 2001: 72-73; Kurki 2004: 46.

perverse fidelity to the Nazi ideals in the 1930s and 1940s (and thereafter).<sup>628</sup> In Levinasian terms, fidelity to these simulacra would also mean a return to the ontology of the Said, to the hierarchies and power relations that strive to demarcate the possibilities of language and thought, or in the case of the Third Reich, the possibilities invested in such concepts as Blood and Soil.

It is from this *conception of simulacrum* that I wish to proceed to assess how a single performance — or, in fact, the linguistic, conceptual and *theatrically Said* substance of a theatrical event — at least echoes Badiou's understanding of *eventality* by serving as an illusionary and thus implicitly *simulacric* surface or a touchstone for the decision that may engender a subjective investigation of a truth, and thus to consider the possibilities of widening our understanding of the status of a truth in theatrical interaction.

Feltham's analysis of Brecht above showed how for the latter the only way for theatre to be able to avoid the pernicious operation of simulacra in its *demonstrations* of humanity, would be to present the *social substance* of a society as an *unstable* medium and factor (and thus its subject positions as non-given). By acknowledging and examining the "social body" and the "exposure of [its] disjunctions" — an approach which can be seen both as a heritage and a variation of the "Greek dispensation" concerned with *mimesis* — the 'Brechtian dispensation' was able to see the operation of theatre "as the true installation of the reflexive moment within society." At the same time (and, we might even say, by the same token), many theoretical viewpoints in the present work have emphasised that the operation of *mimesis* (or the stagely difference) theatre utilises, the *Schauspiel* with which it attracts us, deals or at least flirts with the possibility of displaying a simulacrum. (Recalling the context of Kantian ethics, it thus even displays its aptitude for *radical evil*.) As the very possibility of imitating and *imagining*, and not as (a product of) imitation itself, the *non-totalisable politics of mimesis* lays before us not only the instability of its means and intentions, but also the fact that its relation to its particular demonstrations is always incomplete and unpredictable: in short, there needs to be a simulacric possibility involved in its operation.

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<sup>628</sup> See e.g. Badiou 2001: 72-73.



Thus, to form a teatro-philosophical hybrid of Feltham's and Levinas' views at this point, I claim that although both philosophy and theatre may educate the state *as arts of presentation*, theatre does this by *involving* the state in its mimetic (and 'possibly simulacric') operation, by *offering the state to itself 'otherwise'* through its theatrically Said, whereas philosophy would need to *explicate the state to itself* — or, in the case of theatre philosophy, *to explicate the 'method of involvement' of theatre to the state*. As in Badiou's suggestion above, theatre remains in this context an 'affair of the State.' If this *involvement* and its transformative (or transgressive) implications are considered as a fundamental political move on the part of theatre (which often fails to affect us), along with the pre-established scene of sociability (its) gathering together generates, the aesthetico-political landscape of the theatrically Said would offer the Badiouan examination of an event or a truth-process a rather challenging but fertile starting point: not least because its addressee/co-creator is a '*radical we*.'

Yet, before proceeding further, I wish to return to the Levinasian conception of politics, which is always dependent on ethics and stresses the fundamental importance of the latter. According to Simon Critchley, in this configuration "the passage from ethics to politics... is not chronological: 'It is not that there first would be the face and then (*ensuite*) the being it manifests or expresses would concern itself with *justice*; the epiphany of the face as face opens humanity.'"<sup>629</sup> For Critchley, the political space would be always already "an open, plural, opaque network of ethical relations which are non-totalisable... Levinasian politics is the enactment of plurality, of multiplicity."<sup>630</sup> This also means that *the ethical relation is never a-political*. One's relation to the face of the Other is already a relation to humanity as a (non-totalisable) whole. If the Other presents her/himself as an *equal*, it is because "[t]he presence of the face, the infinity of the other [*l'Autre*], is... a presence of the *third party* (that is, of the whole of humanity that looks at us)[.]"<sup>631</sup> Levinas also extends this opinion to concern language and expression: "Language as the presence of the face does not invite complicity with the preferred being, the self-sufficient "I-Thou" forgetful of the

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<sup>629</sup> Critchley 1992: 226, latter italics mine.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid.: 225.

<sup>631</sup> Levinas 2005: 213, brackets and italics mine; Critchley 1992: 226.

universe... The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other—*language is justice*.<sup>632</sup>

As noted earlier, this conception of the *Third (le tiers)* can also, but somewhat indirectly,<sup>633</sup> be understood through the Other's *illeity*, the in(de)finite (and infinitely commanding) her/himness of (the irreducible highness of) the face that — ontologically and phenomenologically congealed (and violated) — comes to *represent* all the 'other others,' as well as community, politics, law and ethical plurality; in this context, the ethical encounter with the Other takes its 'immediate step' towards the public realm (of *justice*), and towards the infinitely extended ethical responsibility that *illeity* leaves in (and *manifests only as*) its fleeting trace.

To summon up the views of Heidegger, Zeami and Žižek in Chapter 3.2. (on the *thirdness* of a performance), I would add to this configuration Žižek's "radical anti-Levinasian" interpretation of thirdness, according to which "the true ethical step is the one *beyond* the face of the other, the one of *suspending* the hold of the face, the one choosing *against* the face, for the *third*. This coldness *is* justice at its most elementary. [...] ...the Third ... effectively *uproots* justice, liberating it from the contingent umbilical link that renders it "embedded" in a particular situation."<sup>634</sup> Žižek comes to the conclusion that in order to avoid "the vicious cycle of [subjectively limited] "understanding" [of othernesses]" we need to consider the relationship "to a faceless Third" as "the first relationship to an Other[:]"<sup>635</sup>

The Third is a formal-transcendental fact; it is not that, while, in our empirical lives, the Third is irreducible, we should maintain as a kind of regulative Idea the full grounding of ethics in the relationship to the Other's Face.<sup>636</sup>

Moreover, Chapter 4 of this work concentrated on the fact that the use of language plays an essential part in the simultaneity of ethics and politics, in the

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<sup>632</sup> Levinas 2005: 213, italics mine.

<sup>633</sup> Cf. e.g. Katz & Trout 2005: 51-52.

<sup>634</sup> Žižek 2005: 183-184.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.: 184, brackets mine.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

already established movement from the Other to *the Other as the Third*. In this context the passage from the ethical to the political would be based on “*a doubling of discourse*, whereby the response to the singularity of the Other’s face is, at the same time, a response to the *prophetic word*, to the word that makes the community a commonality.”<sup>637</sup> In the Levinasian context both society and language have a double structure, a structure that approaches *responsibility* through the *asymmetrical* (i.e., non-totalisable and infinitely binding) relationship of one with the Other, and *justice* through the linguistic and conceptual (re-)negotiation of that asymmetry: and this structure would not be intelligible without the aforementioned concepts of the Saying and the Said, or the dialectical relation (of intelligibility) between them which inevitably congeals and *betrays* the ethical infinity.

Again (as in Chapter 4.3.2), theatrical interaction (and proximity) could be described here as the very surface for an effort of speaking of responsibility (as well as its banality), an effort that *remains Said* but bears an ethical question *qua demand* (the effect of the possibility of un-Saying) that also makes it essentially unpredictable, inexhaustible and unbiased — it is ‘effortful’ for the sake of that which it cannot govern or escape: the *weight of (simulacric) meaning in the double structure of ethical politics*.

These are some of the central theoretical issues that still tie theatre to an *ontological and linguistic investigation of the ethical*, that *which allows (or, idealistically speaking, forces) it to ‘brand’ an ethical question on the gestures and meanings it lays before us*, that is, before the community that understands that theatre takes place before its very eyes and ears, before the *Nothing of its situation*, ‘at its mercy.’ It could even be seen as the shameless political move we tolerate from theatre, as we are pushed into the same scene as that which is offered to us, into the same three-dimensional socio-political space as the performance itself.

However (as a still quite phantasmatic assumption), this insight is dependent on the way Jacques Rancière understands the relation between aesthetics and politics, or the “necessary junction between aesthetic practices and political

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<sup>637</sup> Critchley 1992: 227, italics mine. See Levinas 2005: 213.

practices[,]” which may be explained with the key term “*distribution of the sensible*.”<sup>638</sup> To better understand the conception of the theatrically Said qua the Nothing-ridden situation in relation to (or in place of) which a truth-process may emerge, we need to form an organic link between appearing-for and its political effects or constraints. Rancière describes the distribution of the sensible as

the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that *simultaneously* discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution.<sup>639</sup>

Echoing the Brechtian concerns about social unity and its unstable features, Rancière’s configuration addresses the fact that different subject positions in a society have different visibility and capability in regard to “something in common.”<sup>640</sup> participation in common issues and the visible effects or import of this participation are unevenly distributed ‘benefits’ in a community. Rancière considers that “[t]here is... an ‘aesthetics’ at the core of politics that has nothing to do with [Walter] Benjamin’s discussion of the ‘aestheticization of politics’” as “[p]olitics revolves around what is seen and what can be [S]aid about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”<sup>641</sup> This context also embraces a certain articulation of the *otherwise-than-politics* of theatre, or at least a description of something rather similar, as Rancière states that

[a]rtistic practices are ‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general [but uneven] distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility. The

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<sup>638</sup> Rancière 2006: 12.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.: 13, brackets mine.

Platonic proscription of the poets is based on the impossibility of doing two things at once prior to being based on the immoral content of the fables. The question of fiction is first a question regarding the distribution of places. From the Platonic point of view, *the stage*, which is *simultaneously a locus of public activity and the exhibition-space for 'fantasies'*, disturbs the clear partition of identities, activities, and spaces.<sup>642</sup>

In the Platonic reading of art, *writing and the theatre*, “two main models, two major forms of existence and of the sensible effectivity of language... are also structure-giving forms for the regime of the arts in general.” However, Rancière explains that “these forms turn out to be prejudicially linked from the outset to a certain regime of politics, a regime based on *the indetermination of identities, the delegitimation of positions of speech, the deregulation of partitions of space and time.*”<sup>643</sup>

We may then assume, at least as an additional ‘fantasy,’ that the theatrically Said, which allows a stage — a space and duration — for a *three-dimensional* political move that is *otherwise than politics*, reveals us a surface (or *distribution*) of the sensible which may *betray* or distract us, and which may in turn *be betrayed*, as it is a singular occasion of ‘appearing to be.’ As a phantasma-powered projection against the real and as a reduplication of the effects of the real (which intrigued Phelan above), or as an effort to *articulate the real*, theatrical activity is unable to rid itself of the modes of *illusion* and *simulacrum*. To borrow Rancière’s words (which still interpret Plato), it would not be able to rid itself of “the movement of simulacra on the stage that is offered as material for the audience’s identifications...”<sup>644</sup>

On the basis of this, we might ask whether theatre, or rather a theatrical performance (qua *something Said*) entails some inherent possibility regarding

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<sup>642</sup> Rancière 2006: 13, brackets and italics mine.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.: 13-14, italics mine. Later in his essay, Rancière states that “[b]y isolating *mimēsis* in its own proper space and by enclosing tragedy within a logic of genres, Aristotle — even if this was not his intention — redefined its politicacy. Furthermore, in the classical system of representation, the tragic stage would become the stage of visibility for an orderly world governed by a hierarchy of subject matter and the adaptation of situations and manners of speaking to this hierarchy.” (Ibid.: 17-18.)

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.: 14.

both the Levinasian problematic and its Badiouan challenges. Taking note of the above viewpoints, there remains the assumption that theatre could be capable of keeping its Said radically open to the questions (and the 'counter-violence') of Saying by doubling or extending in(de)initely the already (ethico-politically) doubled language, and by always already politicising the possibly simulacric features of human interaction with its very context — in short: by bringing out its supplementary nature in regard to language, expression, visibility, thought, and the politics entangled in all of them.<sup>645</sup> We still do not need to underline theatre's fashion of quoting and extending the real, its manner of situating the 'as if' the real itself allows in the context of experiencing the negotiation of fact and fiction within the real. But it is then important to understand how theatre thus never escapes the *unstable and in(de)finite politics of meaning*, but constantly gives away this politics *as its politics in the use of language*.

Moreover, if we maintain that its (theatre-)ideas, practices and performativity (*per forma*) are organically tied to this particular political 'agenda,' it seems to lean towards Levinas's conception of the Third by attracting its witnesses precisely with a (*possible*) *trace of illeity*, the unattainable but compelling her/himness that marks its activity, versions of which we observed with Zeami, Žižek and Heidegger above. (Here we might find, perhaps surprisingly, an interesting likeness to the 'performances' of the representatives of a parliamentary society as well).

If these views are accepted, theatre seems to have an organic feature — the inevitable *thirdness* of its unevenly and phantasmally distributed ethico-political Said — to discuss the simulacra Badiou mentions precisely as incomplete illusions, or rather, projections. These can, at best, be understood as inverted articulations of truths that may break away from the actual represented (and sometimes evil) simulacra.

This is also an essential precondition for comprehending the movement of ethical questioning (or Saying) within its Said. The already political thematisation of the Nothing of singular (and possibly evil) 'truths' through (and

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<sup>645</sup> As if touching this issue, John Freeman (2001/2005) states that "[i]n telling lies performance tells the truth, because so many of our truths *are* lies."

as) illusionary understanding of language, the *encouragement* to constantly de-thematise theatre's own simulacra, could be understood as a request to constantly search for traces of an ethical question/demand within language and expression. To stretch the limits of Badiou's theory (quite dramatically), this encouraging demand could also be thought of as a substratum (or even a *non-religious* 'gospel of fidelity') for the Badiouan 'some-one in a fidelity' or the subject of the event as regards theatre, and thus, also theatre's innate possibility for motioning towards Levinasian ethics and the question of truth simultaneously.

Of course, this approach requires a truly complex hybrid of theatre, Brecht, Reinelt, Žižek, Rancière, Levinas and Badiou — not least because it emphasises *radical choice* and *subjective limitations* at the same time. Furthermore, as it suggests that a theatrical event operates by utilising the political but supplementary *betrayal of ethics in language and expression*, this would still leave an ethics of (a) performance *undecidable*.

But as a Badiouan throw of dice, it can be seen as a *supplementary effort* that its participants can/need 'henceforth relate to' (even if they rarely do). For Badiou states that

[t]heatrical production, or *mise en scène*, is often a reasoned trial of chances. This is so whether these chances effectively complete the idea or instead mask it. The art of the theater lies in a choice, at once very informed and blind..., between, on the one hand, the chance-laden scenic configurations that complete the (eternal) idea by means of the instant that it lacks, and, on the other, the often very seductive configurations that nevertheless remain external to and aggravate the incompleteness of the idea. Truth must be granted to the following axiom: A theatrical representation will never abolish chance.<sup>646</sup>

To be sure, such an observation is not a groundbreaking one, but acknowledging its simultaneous ethical and truth-related reaches brings us, perhaps, to view the possibilities its binding but eventual nature may offer to theatre itself more comprehensively — possibilities, such as the following response to the unjustified Said of a totalitarian society brings forth.

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<sup>646</sup> Badiou 2005a: 74.

### 5.3. Questioning evil (simulacra) on the ethico-political stage

What Hitler seems to have understood... is the enormous power of the image, the primacy of the sign divorced from its referent.

Evelyn Cobley: *Temptations of Faust*<sup>647</sup>

Under the (partly fictitious) protection of Western democracy and freedom of speech, the above theorisation remains, more often than not, rather insignificant or irrelevant in proportion to any wider ethical discussion within society. Yet, although the suggestion that a certain connection between Levinas and Badiou resides in the responsibility and/or fidelity emerging from the simulacric politics of mimesis and theatre remains somewhat problematic in this sense, it is perhaps useful to let this thought breathe for a while.

To turn attention to the capability of theatre to gesture towards pre-ontological ethics and the philosophy of truth simultaneously, I proceed to present a peculiar example of theatrical interaction, through which we may observe some further aspects of the above configuration.

#### 5.3.1 *Performing in Buchenwald: To each her/his Monday*

The importance of acknowledging the ethical resources inherent in expression and language became (and is) decisively evident in the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald, whose gate still today bears the motto '*Jedem das Seine,*' an inscription mentioned to be "an abbreviated quotation of *Suum cuique per me uti atque frui licet* (As far as I am concerned, every man should be permitted to use and enjoy what is his.)" It is said to be a "comment by Marcus Porcius Cato (234–149 B.C.) appearing as a Roman legal maxim in *Corpus Juris Civilis* (code of civil law), Digestum I, 1: Art. 10. In 1938, the inscription was set into the camp gate in such a way that it could be [easily] read [only] from the muster

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<sup>647</sup> Cobley 2002: 216.



ground [that is, from within the camp].”<sup>648</sup> The text can also mean ‘To each his own,’ or ‘Everyone gets what s/he deserves,’ which makes it a sentence within a sentence, a ‘sentencing sentence.’ This sinister irony the Nazi regime forged in the wrought iron gate (in all senses of the verb), the seemingly irreversible axiom concerning the rights of that particular system as well as its victims, is a disturbing example of the suspicious possibilities of language, the often unjustifiable life of the Said. It brings out ideological and linguistic irresponsibility at least in a couple of ways.

Firstly, as mentioned, the text was welded onto the camp gate in such a way as to be readable only from inside the camp. This means that those responsible for accepting and legislating such an axiom and its consequences, are, to begin with, perversely relieved of the duty of actually understanding the sentence and its effects.

Thus, secondly, they are exempted from the Levinasian demand of un-Saying the ethico-ontological consequences of this proposition for the very reason that, for them, it never really assumes the double structure that allows an ethical question within language — it remains, quite simply, Said. Once the axiom was stated and accepted, it became a fixed but concealed proclamation in order not to contain an ethical (counter-)demand. To its victims, however, the slogan became a constant reminder of the situational aims of National Socialist ideology and its simulacric truths condoning the existence of only one racially and politically defined community. But what the Nazi officials did not comprehend, perhaps, was that for those inside the camp, the axiomatic situation could also become a starting point for a search for a possible ethical supplement in the midst of these atrocious conditions. The inscription, although arising from deranged ingenuity, could not avoid posing an ethical question.

A theatrical form of impugnation can be found from within the camp itself, a performative statement that replies to *Jedem das Seine* in a unique way, even though it was not designed to be a response to the Nazi motto.

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<sup>648</sup> Information obtained from The Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation web site, [http://www.buchenwald.de/index\\_en.html](http://www.buchenwald.de/index_en.html), 28 February 2006; [http://www.buchenwald.de/index\\_nfl\\_cten.html](http://www.buchenwald.de/index_nfl_cten.html), 9 March 2009. (Brackets mine.) See also Stein 2004: 34-35.

The following articulation of the ethico-political problematic organic to human expression was documented by Curt Daniel, whose article ‘Theatre in the Nazi Concentration Camps: Creativity and Resistance in Dachau and Buchenwald’ (1941/2006) describes how artistic activity still played an important part in the lives of the prisoners of these camps.<sup>649</sup> Even though his first-hand account of one of the theatre/cabaret performances in Buchenwald remains an extreme case as regards the preceding theoretical configuration, he still witnessed a theatre event that brings out certain important aspects for the consideration of the ethicality of performing and theatre. Read, or rather projected against the Nazi slogan, the description below becomes a testimony of linguistic totalitarianism and the ethical problematique it generates. I present here a lengthy quotation from Daniel’s article to offer a comprehensive picture of the situation:

In Buchenwald... [e]verything was as disordered as the mind of the drunken S.S. camp commander [possibly Karl Koch]... One day it would be extra rations and the next, a lashing for every fifth man. And so it came about that at *Silvester* (New Year) he commanded a week of humor from the prisoners. [The dates of this “week of humor” are not mentioned, but Michael Patterson states that it took place on New Year’s 1938.<sup>650</sup> The original article was published in 1941, before the world became aware of the full horrors of the Holocaust.] A prisoner was found who had been *Compère* in a large Berlin Music Hall. He was made responsible for finding talent among the prisoners and producing it on a given date. After making a survey of the camp talent (of which there was plenty both professional and amateur) he selected about fifteen turns. Other prisoners were

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<sup>649</sup> Michael Patterson (1995: 158) mentions that “[t]hose theatre practitioners who found themselves in Nazi concentration camps did not abandon their calling. That theatre continued to be pursued so vigorously in the deadening circumstances of the concentration camps is remarkable in itself. In the so-called First World, with its high technology and culture of constant entertainment, serious theatre-going is now the activity of a cultural minority, and so it is easy to forget what a basic need theatre fulfils. But where societies are in a state of crisis or change, theatre remains a vital means of expressing the aspirations and the apprehensions of society. This may occur during a period of revolutionary change... or in times of acute deprivation.” Material for Patterson’s article was also provided by Louise Stafford-Charles.

<sup>650</sup> Patterson 1995: 159.

made responsible for constructing a theatre. The partitions of a long hut were pulled down and a stage with proscenium constructed along the middle of one of the hut's long sides. Overhead lights were set up and a few crudely painted pieces of scenery representing a sylvan glade (*sic*) were built.<sup>651</sup>

At the performance, which ran for a week before, through and after *Silvester*, the audience generally amounting to 500, were grouped in a flat crescent, some sitting and the majority standing. While the performances were extremely good in the vaudeville class, the atmosphere was always strained by the presence of a number of S.S. men. The succession of jugglers, acrobats, dancers, conjurers, monologists, songsters and instrumentalists was held together by the extremely daring *Compère*. With all the *Schmalz* [sentimentality, emotionalism] of the experienced cabareteer he introduced the show as follows:

“My friends, you are lucky to be here this afternoon. Here, in Buchenwald, we have the best art and the best artists in the whole of Germany. Here you can actually laugh out loud at our jokes. Here is the freest theatre in the Reich. In the theatres outside, the actors and the audience are frightened because they fear that they may end up in a Concentration Camp. That’s something we don’t have to worry about.” His comments and continuity patter, in the presence of heavily armed S.S. men, who valued human life at less than a cigarette, kept the prisoner-audience breathless. This is a typical example: “You know, times don’t really change. I remember that when we had the Kaiser, we always had swine pushing us around. Later when we had the Republic, was it any different? No, we still had swine pushing us around. And what of today?” He waited for an answer. The air was electric as the prisoners watched the S.S. men out of the corners of their eyes. No answer. He answered the question himself. “Why, today is Monday.”<sup>652</sup>

To be sure, the performance given does not correspond our ordinary understanding of theatre. In a free society, performances are usually ‘accessible’ for a small sum of money and often designed to guarantee an enjoyable experience for spectators who, in turn, choose the shows they want to see

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<sup>651</sup> Presumably, the scenery was built to resemble the place where the camp itself was.

<sup>652</sup> Daniel 2006/2009 (1941), brackets mine. “The author reflects on the time he spent incarcerated in both Dachau and Buchenwald. Details of his release are unknown.” [http://www.jewish-theatre.com/visitor/article\\_display.aspx?articleID=2635](http://www.jewish-theatre.com/visitor/article_display.aspx?articleID=2635), 9 March 2009.

according to their cultural tastes. Here, the word *access* (or accessibility) comes to mean a forced situation, where the performances are actually witnessed as a consequence of axioms that deny such liberties. It thus refers, above all, to the ethico-political power relations within the camp and the whole of German society at the time.

Nevertheless, the participants of the performances seem to have had the will to question this 'adverse accessibility' by making the effort of utilising its hierarchical structure and purpose.<sup>653</sup> The stage constructed, which by its very appearance symbolises the location of their prison, becomes a site of ethical discussion, whose importance, in turn, arises from the very fact that it takes place under conditions where all such negotiations have presumably been quashed.

The daring compère makes the most of the *situation*, of the 'legitimate knowledge and Nothing' of the Buchenwald situation, which extends beyond the camp gates and permeates through most of Europe. Even though his speeches are quite problematic considering the above theorisation, insofar as they are not integral parts of a conventional framework of theatrical activity (a play or some other 'immanent' theatrical configuration), they accomplish something much more essential: they seem to thematise all the earlier viewpoints. In fact, my formulations undeniably lag behind his *Schmalz*.

The beginning of his introductory speech concentrates on the political possibilities and dangers of theatre in negotiating ethical perspectives. They are most apparent (or audible) in his announcement that the best performers and the best audience as regards theatre's need and ability to utilise and question its simulacric surface — and the simulacra of expression and language — are found among those whose chances to question the (totalitarian) Said have been seriously curtailed. The negotiation of (ideological) freedom conducted outside the camp is not presented as something that is simply overshadowed by fear, but as an affinity where freedom is renamed as fear. The most unfortunate victims of those causing this fear, those with almost nothing to lose, are then the only ones left with something to say. As a tacit and ironic comment on the Nazi

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<sup>653</sup> For other examples of comical criticism of the Nazi regime, see e.g. Rudolph Herzog's documentary *Heil Hitler, das Schwein ist tot!* (2006).

procedures, the camp commander's order to perform, to speak, becomes also an ethical demand to un-Say.

The latter quotation from the compère's speeches takes this demand to its situational limits. While he unwinds his brave version of the historical persecution of the Jewish people (or the Leftists) within German society — as that is arguably what he is referring to — he also presents both the audience and their sadistic ushers with a growing dramatic suspense as he approaches the prevailing situation.

The problem posed to the S.S. men is an inventive one: They do not represent the Kaiser or the Republic, but how about the category of swine? The answer to this question is delayed indefinitely, like the procedure of verification of truth, since it is displaced by a word that happens *for* the situation — a word that becomes a simulacric and opaque (i.e., undecidable) supplement for the situation. As a grande finale in a minor (but comical) key, the cabareteer lets his situational impugnation of freedom of speech fall into a sort of metonymy of banality: Monday.

The weekday that remains the same for all — for the Nazi persecutors as well as their victims — gives us a glimpse of the eventual possibilities of human expression, as it offers the participants of the Buchenwald situation a problematic (subjective) relation between the performance and the prevailing situation, a relation through which the becoming of a possible truth may be generated as a Levinasian investigation of language.

Questions concerning ideological and linguistic freedom (and responsibility) in human coexistence crash into a banality that concerns all human beings, into an expression that — by its very banality — sustains the diachronical impossibility of addressing otherness in the situation, as well as the commonality of the prophetic word, the ethical asymmetry and symmetry of the situation. The speeches become a 'tremendously banal' disruption of totalising politics, which betrays and exposes the linguistic and ethico-political betrayal the Buchenwald situation and its slogan present to those involved with them, the betrayal that presents the situation to itself as *legitimate plenitude*.

It thus also gestures towards the possibility that this situation is inevitably haunted by its *not-known*, an *evental* possibility. The not-had or not-known

(surplus) that the stageliness of each instance of being bears (discussed in Ch. 2.2.1) fuels the compère's Freudian joke, his banal-evental investigation of language, betraying the unambiguous legitimacy of representation. The betrayal becomes even more explicit, if we understand that the *radical we* of the situation consists of both the S.S. men and the prisoners — one can scarcely think of a more radical demography of an audience.

The *question qua ethical demand* the compère extracts from the political congelation (or continuum) represented by Nazi ideology, the ideology condensed in *Jedem das Seine*, remains an undecidable throw of an ethical dice, but its importance still constantly surfaces in the questions concerning the axiomatic causes and the philosophical effects of the Holocaust; in the 'Why did/does this happen?' We cannot answer these questions here, but the compère seems to apprehend, in his own peculiar way, the evental possibilities of the situation as a 'discussion of the Third,' as a prophetic dimension of the situation (or of commonality of the given Monday). One might even suggest that here the Third took place while 'something other than politics' happened, something which one cannot calculate or demonstrate — a contact, whose participants can neither exhaust nor unravel it, who may not have learned anything but the contact, by the contact itself.

However, the *trace* of this contact may thenceforth be manifested as an un-Saying supplement to the preceding axiom *Jedem das Seine*, the void that was lacking an ethical question on the part of its promulgators. Despite its apparently democratic reaches, the statement which assumes that all uneven distribution of whatever is sensible for a community is always already based on a seemingly even and sensible idea, short-circuits, as it remains exposed to the un-Saying radicality the contractual congealment of language, in itself, makes possible. The mimetic/simulacric features of language and human expression leave open the question what the terms *each*, *her/his* and *own* mean in the unattainable horizon the 'plenitude' of the Nazi axiom itself generates.

As an additional consequence, one may say that the inscription cannot rid itself of the trace of the other (or illeity): instead, it bears witness to this trace, the trace it was designed to eradicate. It was to present the Said as a territory capable of both legislating and absolving itself, capable of infusing the very

thematic of freedom out of its axioms: and this is precisely what the given example (and the language of theatre, the mimetic *disclosure* concerning the politics of language) was and is able to answer to: 'To each the language of her/his existence and the ethico-political in(de)finity it poses on us but cannot govern.'

While the Nazi motto suggests that "every [free] man should be permitted to use and enjoy what is *his*," the compère of the Buchenwald performance states that this idea of freedom also entitles its victims to use *the language of their very being* as the locus (or *logos*) where all ideas of freedom actually fall into themselves. It is where the stain of politics borne by all language — as a congealed but historically elastic ideological construction — can also be seen as a trace of otherness that calls us to understand the *supplementary nature of the performance of language*, or its mimetic event of speaking of the Third. This thirdness, and the very performance it relies on, *language and expression missing (the Other) in action*, seems to be precisely where (the) freedom (of ethical speech) is constantly re-negotiated as possible eventuality, where a theorist like Brecht, for example, found his artistic vocation, his neighbours and his demons.

Even if the occurrence of such situations — the fact that they have happened, happen, and are yet to happen — is actually constant recurrence of axiomatic evil in being, thus making them nothing new and integral parts of the Nothing of knowledge and Said, they may be new in the sense that we may encounter the otherness of a theatrical event as a trace that brings forth our indivisible responsibility by demanding the rights of the past illeity. The betrayal theatre 'has in mind' for otherness and knowledge shows us, again, the importance of constant de-thematising and un-Saying, which, in the present context at least, appears to approach both the initial respect for alterity and the truth-bound fidelity that may/needs to depart the Said of a situation.

It is, perhaps, the continuing ethical suggestion (of un-Saying) in the representational obstacles theatre builds for itself as a political system, thus also keeping open the possibility for an event — even if it is a small and undecidable event that we cannot agree on or even notice most of the time. It would still be a demand that issues from an abiding political stain, a 'dubiously posed demand'

for ethical responsibility that may speak of itself (only) as a trace of illeity. Such would be, in theory at least, the potential of theatrical un-Saying — capability to adduce an evental supplement even from the simulacric (and evil) pseudo-event of the Third Reich.

What we finally have to ask is this: Is it not our duty to search for ethical sincerity precisely from the tension between the concessions philosophical or artistic fidelities have to or are able to make to each other, as from that between the other and the same — even if it is where “appearing is the same thing as disappearing?” Conceptual divisions are understandable, but it is also important to seek for an understanding that strives to invest in the most fertile features of both of these worlds, which could well be, in the last analysis, the immeasurable value of ethics that remains external to these worlds.

The teatro-ethical adaptation of Levinas and Badiou I have attempted in this chapter has certainly not come close to creating an evental supplement, but has tried to touch the fidelity that supports both *the ethical trace of expression and language* and the imperative to ‘keep going!’ the trace itself implies: Daniel mentions that “[t]he first item [of the Buchenwald performances] was always the singing of the Buchenwald song by the group,”<sup>654</sup> and Patterson adds that the chorus of the song “translates roughly as ‘Keep going, comrade, don’t lose your [sic!] heart / The will to live is in our blood / And faith, yes faith, is in our soul.’”<sup>655</sup>

### 5.3.2 *Theatre-ideas and the corporeal bond*

Yet, there are a couple of further aspects I wish to investigate as regards the question of responsibility that moves in the background of the above issues. Among other things, the discussion has revolved largely around the relation between theatre and thought, and the ethico-politically oblique and incomplete — but possibly evental — (*theatre-ideas*) theatrical activity may draw on, offer

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<sup>654</sup> Daniel quoted in Patterson 1995: 164, brackets mine.

<sup>655</sup> Patterson 1995: 165, n. 11. Brackets mine.



to and share with (the Nothing of) the pre-established scene of sociability it lives on.

In the case of the Third Reich and its simulacric politics, the commerce conducted with ideas articulates a particular — racist — problematique. It puts us in touch with certain views on *elemental Evil* that arise from the modern definitions of the human subject. Levinas' astonishingly perceptive essay 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism' (1934/1990) claims that "the essential possibility of *elemental Evil*"<sup>656</sup> is a possibility "inscribed within the ontology of a being concerned with being [*de l'être soucieux d'être*]", a possibility which haunts "the subject correlative with being as gathering together and as dominating [*l'être-à-reassembler et à-dominer*], that famous subject of transcendental idealism that before all else wishes to be free and thinks itself free."<sup>657</sup>

Passing through certain aspects of this idealism, Christian salvation, Judaism, modern liberalism and the materialistic determinism of Marxism, Levinas arrives at an understanding of human existence according to which the connection of thought's (or the Self's) freedom and autonomy to the body and its functions and worldly relations bears with it a unique ethical problematique. This adherence proclaims, for Levinas, a "feeling of identity" which is thoroughly coloured by "the fact that [the spirit] is chained to the body."<sup>658</sup> Yet, at the same time, many definitions of the modern (Western) subject claim that one's "spirit" (or autonomous thought) should be able to pass freely through ideas and to choose ideas that correspond one's intellectual interests and needs, able (in the spirit of Christianity) to go back to ideas, to transform or abandon them in the name of different salvations or callings.

Alarmingly, in such a context, the emergence and distribution of theatre-ideas and the philosophy of Hitlerism appear to draw on a shared problematique. Levinas observes how the Germanic ideal relying on certain consanguinity

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<sup>656</sup> Levinas does not specifically address the concept of *elemental Evil* in his essay (only in the introduction), but we may say that the racist problematique emerging in the text evinces this possibility as a precondition for any discriminating ethico-political project.

<sup>657</sup> Levinas 1990: 63.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*: 68, brackets mine.

(among other ‘corporeal bonds’), is a serious (or grave) response to the radical freedom that the commerce with ideas allows for a subject. It attaches itself to the positivistic security of corporeality by following an understanding according to which “[m]an’s essence no longer lies in freedom, but in a kind of bondage [*enchaînement*]. To be truly oneself does not mean taking flight once more above contingent events that always remain foreign to the Self’s freedom; on the contrary, it means becoming aware of the ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all accepting this chaining”<sup>659</sup> — the chaining that may eventually point towards Blood and Soil.

This way, the conviction aroused by Hitlerism attempts to avoid the full challenge of (and the ‘dangers’ of self-impugnation inherent in) “the gap that separates man from the world of ideas,” where “deceit insinuates itself.”<sup>660</sup> For in the very distance of this gap lies not only the difficulty the freedom to choose among ideas poses on the human animal, but also (the severeness of) one’s responsibility towards the fact that those ideas may call into question the nature of any corporeal bond the human animal finds suitable for itself. This conviction then follows the opinion for which

every social structure that announces an emancipation with respect to the body, without being committed to it [*qui ne l’engage pas*], is suspected of being a repudiation or a betrayal. The forms of a modern society founded on the harmony established between free wills will seem not only fragile and inconsistent but false and deceitful.<sup>661</sup>

The structure of truth (as well as thought and ethics) in the Western tradition appears thus to be permeated by a fundamental — and ‘corporeally enforced’ — *distance*, which makes all ideas free game (for autonomous will), but announces that they are, due to this very distance, ungovernable and foreign by nature. The very substance of a free will and any ‘society of free wills’ thus become “inconsistent” to the point of making any formal articulation of a socio-political

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<sup>659</sup> Levinas 1990: 69.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

ideal or system daunting from the start. Yet, and largely by the same token, the human animal

is free and alone in the face of this world. He is free to the point of being able not to cross this distance and not to make a choice. Skepticism is a basic possibility for the Western spirit. But once the distance has been crossed and the truth grasped, man nonetheless retains his freedom. Man can regain control and go back on his choice. Within the affirmation the future negation is already brewing. [...] Thought becomes a game. Man revels in his freedom and does not definitively compromise himself with any truth. He transforms his power to doubt into a lack of conviction.<sup>662</sup>

The subject that encounters this fundamental freedom (or the “lack of conviction” it allows) is threatened by the facts that “[s]incerity becomes impossible” and “[c]ivilization is *invaded by everything that is not authentic, by a substitute* that is put at the service of fashion and of various interests.”<sup>663</sup> For a ‘Hitlerist,’ then, all truths that bear any sort of significance must be *chained to the body*, validated in the flesh (or in Blood and Soil). A truth should not be grasped solely by a free choice made in the world of ideas; it must consist “*in a drama [of corporeal causality] in which man is himself the actor.*”<sup>664</sup>

The racism that Hitlerism (even unwittingly) promotes, emerges then from a certain modification of the idea of *universality*, which understands it as a “force,” an “expansion” that makes the corporeal bond an *affirmation of certain universal truths*, truths which must be legitimised through their corporeal credence and expandability.<sup>665</sup> While ideas may depart their originators and become ‘modifiable commodities,’ disappear among various new masters and propagators, the *universality of a force or expansion remains attached to its physical origin* and spreads the ontological truths of that origin among those who

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<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid.: 70, italics mine.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid., brackets and italics mine.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.: 70-71.

may benefit from them or fall victim to them.<sup>666</sup> (It is thus interesting to note how sayings such as *Jedem das Seine*, which choose to [or have to] divorce the sign from its referent, appear to be at odds with the origin of Hitlerism. Many of its declarations *qua ideas* seem to betray the corporeal-universal bond it originally entails.)

Taking note of the problematique of simulacra discussed above, one may say that the deception in the gap between the human animal and the world of ideas is also something that affects or even motivates the (mimetic) *Schauspiel* of theatre and in which it invests, something that makes theatre-ideas metamorphous but unique by virtue of their 'ideal incompleteness' (and possible deceptiveness). Yet, the instantaneous demonstrations of theatre-ideas have also been described as bearing a certain corporeal bond to their *situation* — as *acts of theatrical representation* or as 'momentary validations of/in the flesh' — which would ground them to being in all its distributed materiality, making them singular articulations of 'human embeddedness' (even as *mediated* occurrences, insofar as they, too, bear at least a shadow of the human phenomenon.) This way, theatre and theatre-ideas do seem to address the very problematique of *being and freedom* which also launches the philosophy of Hitlerism in all its determination, the problematique that the compère of the Buchenwald performance invites us to re-examine in his own peculiar way.

Thus, the 'mission' of the Third Reich and the creation process of theatre-ideas appear to have much in common as regards the aesthetico-ethical negotiation of the human condition and freedom. The *sui generis* combination of thought and (its) embodied demonstration which fuels the *force of theatre-ideas*, that which makes them capable of 'striking the spectator,' appears also to

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<sup>666</sup> Levinas (ibid.: 70) explains how "[t]he idea propagated detaches itself essentially from its point of departure. In spite of the unique accent communicated to it by its creator, it becomes a common heritage. It is fundamentally anonymous. The person who accepts it becomes its master, as does the person who proposes it. The propagation of an idea thus creates a community of "masters"; it is a process of equalization. To convert or persuade is to create peers. The universality of an order in Western society always reflects this universality of truth. But force is characterized by another type of propagation. The person who exerts force does not abandon it. Force does not disappear among those who submit to it. It is attached to the personality or society exerting it, enlarging that person or society while subordinating the rest."

provide Hitlerism with the motivation to suspect all universality that is not based on a uniquely grasped material (or bodily) origin.

Yet, it is perhaps (and hopefully) the case that theatrical activity rather *highlights the problematique* — or ideological *uncertainty* — that may seduce one to follow the alleged *universality* of racial and corporeal expansion or integrity, and does not propagandise or validate the essentials of Hitlerism. One might suggest — in line with the compère of Buchenwald — that theatrical activity may turn our attention to the fact that the soul's relation to the body and the distance it engenders between human beings and ideas (or language, or *theatre-ideas*), bear or generate an uneven and ungovernable ethico-ideological incommensurability.

Although this incommensurability may allow (the *transformativity* of) ideas to question various human persuasions and 'universalities,' it also appears to generate a certain — constantly moving and transforming — *blind spot* between an individual consciousness and the actual (or *real*) being of an individual. Consequently, this blind spot places itself between different individuals as well.

### *5.3.3 The blind spot and the parasitic infinite: A brief Zupančičian remark*

Inasmuch as the capability to move sovereignly in the world of ideas — while bearing the corporeal bond — is pre-eminently a property of a *conscious human being*, the blind spot described implies that there is a certain *inhuman* aspect that pertains to one's *imaginary* and *intellectual* possibilities, the possibilities organically tied also to the ethical evaluation of ideas (corporeally rooted or not).

This inhuman aspect emerges from the fact that that which makes me *human* and *conscious* (or 'humanely conscious') also proclaims the possibility that I am fundamentally detached from 'the full extent of my being,' that not all reaches of my being — or of the being of *others* — are accessible to my thought. The *Real* of my (or their) being cannot be reached in full, as its nature (or essence) remains *a matter of (cognition and) negotiation* between different individuals and communities, all affected by this very blind spot.

The inhuman and incomprehensible *surplus* characteristic of (one's) being appears then to pervade the human, even to be *parasitic* on our finite subjectivity, as it gives rise to the need to communicate that which we cannot fully explain in ourselves and in others, the “unconscious” — *not sub-conscious* — elements which constitute the very need to become conscious of something, or the need to approach the Real. Drawing again on the Freudian-Lacanian project, Žižek observes how

[t]he common ground that allows cultures [or individuals] to talk to each other, to exchange messages, is not some presupposed shared set of universal values, etc., but rather its opposite, some shared *deadlock*; cultures “communicate” insofar as they can recognize in each other a different answer to the same fundamental “antagonism,” deadlock, point of failure.<sup>667</sup>

He explains “[i]n classical Freudian terms” that ““others” [*qua* others] are here only because and insofar as I am not simply identical to myself but have an unconscious, insofar as I am prevented from having direct access to the truth of my own being. It is this truth that I am looking for in others: what propels me to “communicate” with them is the hope that I will receive from them the truth about myself...”<sup>668</sup> To return to the Badiouan project, this would mean that truth, in its very ‘truthfulness,’ must indeed strike the *some-one* from out of nowhere, as from a blind spot, the *not-known* of the worldly situation, and not emerge from a “shared set of [represented] universal values” or from ‘my assumed truth about myself, received from others.’

According to this logic, there appears to be an incommunicable and unknowable problematique at the heart of communication and knowing, and thus at the heart of socio-political operations. As regards ethics, this would mean — ostensibly ‘Levinas-wise,’ but in fact ‘Lacanianly’ — that ethical assessments are also forced to revolve around an enigmatic core that affects but never fully matches the intellectual and socio-political bedrock of human ethicality (or, for that matter, the concepts of good and evil). In her analysis of Sophocles’

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<sup>667</sup> Žižek 1993: 31, brackets mine.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*, brackets mine.

*Antigone* (c. 442 BC) and Paul Claudel's *The Hostage* (1911), the Slovenian philosopher Alenka Zupančič speaks of

a certain notion of ethics which might be called 'the ethics of the Real'. The core of ethics is something which in and of itself is not 'ethical' (nor is it 'non-ethical'), i.e. it is something which does not belong to the register of ethics. In Lacanian theory, this 'something' is conceptualised by what he calls the Real.<sup>669</sup>

She adds that "Kant's notion of the unconditional is quite close to the Lacanian notion of the Real insofar as it does not in any way concern the question of what may or may not be done and as such does not exclude the impossible. [...] Kant evacuates, so to speak, the notion of the good from the order of causes (or fundamentals) of the ethical."<sup>670</sup> When that which empowers ethics is distanced from the imaginary-intellectual possibilities attached to ethical *thought* and the conventional conception of ethicality itself, we are again approaching the *inhuman* aspect of the *need* (or *desire*) of ethics.

Turning to theatre and the *imaginary* problematique its ethicality involves, Zupančič notes how Lacan's (Aristotelian) interpretation of *catharsis* entails that in the *purification* of pity and fear those feelings are "'purified' of everything that belongs to the order of the imaginary[,]" and thus also of everything that serves as a *substitute* (or a 'commodity') for the (*R*)*eal* core of those feelings. This means that by purifying pity and fear catharsis would also enable us to get a bit closer (but not 'close enough') to the 'something' of our being, to the (*R*)*eal* but "strangely inhuman" core that also gives rise to our ethical orientation. The inhuman core, in turn, would then generate a definition of ethics according to

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<sup>669</sup> Zupančič 2003: 276. See also e.g. Zupančič 2000: p. 249 onwards.

<sup>670</sup> Zupančič 2003: 276-277. "We know that Kant, in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, insists on the fact that acting with a view to the well-being of others, out of sympathy for them, already means that we act with a view to our own well-being, thus making the action pathologically determined and non-ethical. This point of Kantian ethics was often criticized: the Kantian moral, the critics charge, is an alienating moral because it forces us to reject what is 'most truly ours' and to subject ourselves to an abstract principle which takes into account neither love nor sympathy. [...] Yet, what is most interesting in Kantian ethics is precisely that he recognizes in this 'inhuman', 'strange' principle that which is 'most truly ours' and founds upon it the subject's autonomy and liberty." (Ibid: 277.)

which the basis of ethics must follow — in Kantian fashion — “an absolute [and in- or superhuman] choice” which is *not* motivated by any personal or communal understanding of the good (or *well-being*).<sup>671</sup> Paradoxically enough, this absolute choice is an *infinitely binding* choice that has to be made *on finite terms*. As such, it appears to speak of the fact that the measures of (our) finitude allow (or even compel) the infinite to ‘colonise’ those measures.

While I do not wish to talk through the complex Lacanian problematic Zupančič elucidates in her essay, it contains certain issues that provide the present discussion with important ethical connotations. Zupančič proceeds to analyse the absolute choices made by Sophocles’ Antigone and Sygne de Coûfontaine, the heroine of Claudel’s *The Hostage*. Both have to make an *absolute but forced choice*, which, although harbouring a certain paradox, is still organically tied to the ethics of the Real.

Antigone’s decision to defy Creon and bury Polynices at the cost of her own life (and of *all that she could have been/done*) takes a step beyond the preconditions of subjective choosing, the measures of life and death, as it extends itself to concern all the inhuman and human consequences that proceed from the decision — the very obligation (or *Cause*) of the decision. The heroine sacrifices her life for the very ‘reason to live,’ or rather, ‘the Reason,’ the ethical commitment — understood here socio-symbolically as *honour* or *dignity* — which cannot be thoroughly weighed in terms of (subjective) life and death or within the limitations of one’s being. By her choice she articulates the fact that “there is something which exceeds life, and it is precisely this something that is the ultimate point of identification for the subject who makes this ‘impossible’ choice. [...] It can appear, for instance, as a ‘point of honour’, but it is always something in which the subject recognises his/her own being — something which determines the subject beyond life and death.”<sup>672</sup> To use Badiouan terminology here, Antigone does not turn her back on the Immortal that resides in her, but rather exposes her being to it, to the infinite power of a truth which may traverse her ‘earthen vessel.’

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid.: 277, brackets mine.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid.: 278.



To be sure, she operates within the *socio-symbolic order* which strives to compensate for the incomprehensibility of being, i.e., the inhuman being that forever manages to escape its symbolic mediation. But she also exceeds the ethical dilemma manifested within the symbolic (and socio-political) order, for she induces from this order a ‘higher principle,’ which she *realises* as a *responsibility* that must follow the incommensurability spread out between being and the symbolic (or agreed and inter-subjective) value of ethics. In the Lacanian tradition, this incommensurability is often approached with the key term *desire*, whereas Kantian readings of the same issue would turn towards the principle of “the highest Good,” the unassumable ethical injunction articulated and problematised in the moral law.<sup>673</sup> Antigone is faced and overwhelmed by “the absolute condition” for which she gives away her “all[:]” “[o]ne realises the absolute condition by sacrificing, in one single gesture, the ‘all’ of what one is ready to sacrifice.”<sup>674</sup> By her choice, she is beyond subjectivity, beyond her death, in the grey area governed by the infinite reaches (or duration) of being. One cannot ‘accomplish the infinite,’ but the infinite announces itself (parasitically) at the kernel of the absolute choice. To understand the full extent of Antigone’s choice one would need to possess an omniscient and all-embracing viewpoint, a viewpoint reserved for God(s) or Being. The latter two, in turn, would be governed only by the possibility of *apocalypse*, by the possibility of “the ‘second death’” or ‘the End of all.’<sup>675</sup> For Zupančič, the figure of Antigone, and the *honourable subjection to subjective non-accomplishment* it embodies, bring out “the co-ordinates of ‘classical ethics’.”<sup>676</sup>

Claudiel’s heroine, Sygne de Coûfontaine, in turn, is forced into a situation in which she must sacrifice the very principle or Cause of her ethical being to the

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<sup>673</sup> See Zupančič 2003: 281. “Desire is this ‘infinite measure’. In this perspective, to realise one’s desire means to realise, to ‘measure’ the incommensurable, infinite measure. This is why Lacan stresses that the question of the realisation of desire can only be formulated from the point of view of a Last Judgment, from the point of view of the End (the ‘second death’). [...] Kant posits as the necessary object of the will determined by the moral law the *realisation of the highest Good*. This implies precisely the realisation of an infinite measure which could be paralleled with what Lacan calls the realisation of desire.” (Ibid.)

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.: 288.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid.: 281.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid.: 288, italics mine.

Cause itself; i.e., she must give away her very *reason to live* to allow the complex *Real* reaches of this reason to live to survive. Yet, even this strategy seems to backfire somehow. While I do not provide here a comprehensive description of Claudel's text, its heroine finds herself and her ethical principle in a situation where the principle itself has to be viewed as something that does not necessarily agree with the absolute choice it entails: "the configuration at stake in the ... figure [of Sygne de Coûfontaine] is the following one: the only way you can choose A is to choose its negation, the non-A: the only way the subject can stay true to his Cause is by betraying it, *by sacrificing to it the very thing which drives him/her to make this sacrifice.*"<sup>677</sup> In short, the ethical principle must be viewed as an exception to the full (but unattainable) extent of the principle.

The existential "injustice" emerging from this situation again proclaims that there are 'greater forces' at work, that our subjective ethical orientation is constantly attacked by an *unknowable* factor (or injunction), by a *point of view of Being* which does not necessarily make any sense for the subject. Here, too, in the figure of Sygne — which for Zupančič represents "*modern ethics*" —, the infinite is "parasitic upon the finite," it has always already included itself in the reaches of the latter for the fact that a singular act or choice 'contaminates' itself with the infinite, that which is *conditioned only by the end of all.*<sup>678</sup>

One can scarcely think of a more compelling ontological formulation as regards ethics of responsibility. According to this, the acting, choosing and gesturing subject fulfills its 'limited ethical destiny,' inevitably, but this means that it also has to serve as an active but finite agent in an infinite plot which is impossible to govern, or even to think of. In such a context, it is hard to imagine that one could ever be able to escape the threat the Kantian radical evil imposes on the subject. As an operator in both the imaginary-intellectual order and the (R)real surplus of being — and as such bearing a *compulsory ethical blind-spot* —, the human animal must eventually entrust its acts to the care of Being (with all its indifferent or pathological tendencies and conditions), no matter what

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<sup>677</sup> Ibid.: 283.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.: 286, 288, 289, italics mine.

noble aims those acts contain or give rise to. Instead, it is only through this very strategy that one may hope to sustain the *unconditional (Real) import* of those aims.

Furthermore, one is tempted to say that the *point of view of the second death* (or of the *end of all*) always already obliges the *observer* of a gesture, act or choice (or theatrical configuration, for that matter), but somewhat elliptically — or, in fact, *'parasitically'* —, through the very confines of those phenomena, which by virtue of their situational limitations are able to stand out from Being. The *ontological aura* that *'gesturalised the gesture'* in Kirkkopelto's reading of Heidegger above could be described here as the (blinding) light of Being in its most subtle form, as the *absolute viewpoint of Being* that looks back at the observing subject — the viewpoint that is governed only by the *possibility of apocalypse*. The limited viewpoint of the subject who observes this light indirectly — as a *'glow'* around (or through) the gesture —, would then not be able to penetrate the gesture, but it *may inform its bearer* that what is offered in a gesture leaves behind it a *binding trace*, a wake that remains unattainable but obligating, no matter how strong the desire of the subject to understand the being of the artistic configuration may be.

Drawing (adaptively) on the standpoints of Zupančič's reading of ethical commitment above (to which I did not exactly do justice), one might say that what makes the unstably or unevenly distributed elements of (sensibly) encountered phenomena to stand out from the most *unseen, subtle* or (*Real*) form or essence of Being, what demands them to take their place as touchstones of ethics of responsibility, would be the fact that the *gaze of the end of all* halts all distinct beings and gestures — as well as all distinctions of beings and gestures — to take a stand on the level of *realising* their responsible status (which is, after *all*, an infinite project). Moreover, by shining through all *imaginary or symbolic substitutes of authenticity*, the end of all would be the (*f*)*act* by which all *substitution* and *authenticity* is unseated, issuing an overpowering form of responsibility impossible to assume.

By the same token, if this *'shining through'* can, indeed, be considered as the *most subtle form of being* — in the care of which every gesture is born and nurtured —, as the Japanese suggested in Heidegger's dialogue (in Ch. 3.2.), it

entails that *no responsible attitude towards a gesture is enough*. It suggests that in the theatre we are definitely dealing with certain *substitutes* and *assumed authenticities*, with the surface of being that by bearing the possibility of betrayal already signals of an ultimate and apocalyptic responsibility beyond our reach.

What can be reached, however, is *the very situation in which the point of view of the end of all places us*. As operators in its landscape, we are responsible for all activities that make e.g. the Holocaust not only a possibility but a probability; responsible for all gestures, expressions and interpretations that by their very ability to gesture, express and interpret remain capable of betraying and blocking the apocalyptic responsibility that still shines through them by making them possible.

## 6. Concluding thoughts

Like many of its themes and theoretical standpoints, this study has been motivated by the fact that something rather than nothing has to be (S)aid.

Yet this fact might well constitute its most extensive (but still unattainable) illusion or simulacrum, the illusionary impetus positing that one may achieve some momentous ethical purpose or object within the activity that is itself designed to generate detectable ethical meaning. According to its logic, the process of withdrawing from all specificity that the Badiouan project saw to motivate the art of theatre<sup>679</sup> can be considered as the constant return of *meaning* to — or its fundamental refusal to depart from — the non-specific moment of its emergence, as a return to the (Guénounian) interpersonal and inter-perceptual space where theatrical signs and meanings ‘remain to be seen.’ Here, in this locus of differing motivations and wills, hypotheses concerning ethics and responsibility then need to encounter, tolerate and question the fact that they lack a *systematic communicative means* independent of conflicting or dissenting interests and their ability to speak.

This is the ‘thematic entity’ embracing the realms of art and human communication that transcendental and modern ethics wish to transcend or at least supervise, and this has been the ontologically, phenomenologically and textually rooted problematique my investigation has not been able to bypass (nor has it primarily tried to).

As such a persistent and ethically disconcerting problem, it conditions the ways in which one observes the linkage between performing arts, ethics and responsibility. However, it also convinces one to believe that if the human animal wishes to undertake the uncanny task of creating theatrical meanings related to ethics, or, moreover, to study this task, it must be an ordeal that ‘makes

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<sup>679</sup> Hallward 2003: p. 205 onwards.

sense' irreducible to any rigid framework or normative specificity that strives to guide ethical endeavours. There are then three recurrent but undecided terms that I wish to invoke here in order to predispose them to later, more thorough analyses.

First, there is *radicality*, which has surfaced in many contexts in this work. In connection with human expression and norms, it was discussed as an organic feature of *gesturing*, or rather, as an ethico-moral tension that gesturing establishes between systematic epithets of communication and the very possibility of communicating. Later, it was observed as an organic feature of *being*, as being's capacity to overcome or engulf all attempts to depart or re-invent it, making it 'being's ethical response' to all transcendental attempts to establish an ethics independent of ontology. Lastly, it was seen as a constitutive element in forming a community within a theatrical event, a temporal and demographically unattainable opening which is not proportional to any linear or historically coherent sense of solidarity, but which may *thus* engender a more committed communal relation to historically grasped and outlined questions.

All these characteristics render radicality a sort of bidirectional movement, wherein all acts which attempt to renew our conceptions of the world — theatrical or not — must, at the same time, return to address the origins of those conceptions.

Second, there is *evasion*, which linked to Simon Critchley's existential reading of *Phaedra*, the ethically suspect *involvement* artistic practices give rise to (in the Levinasian project) and the subjective or communal departure from the infinite multiplicity (or *alterity*) of being that Badiouan ethics promotes.

In the first context, human thought was discussed as activity which must take place *apart from the world*, as reflexive but transcendental (and evasive) movement which strives to control or defy the fact that *there is* (il y a). The second context presented evasion as an organic feature of art's creation processes (inasmuch as they aim at *suspension of finality*), it became their intrinsic ethical manoeuvre, a "disengagement" made possible by the fact that art is ontological but refers only to itself (and its ontological disengagement) when addressing the

question of *truth*.<sup>680</sup> The mode of evasion emerging in the third context can be seen as a decision to resist relativity and infinite alterity as a basis for ethical contemplations. What one tries to 'evade' here is then the uncertainty that all relative and uncritically tolerant versions of ethics give birth to, and evasion becomes truth-process' (ethical) refusal to assimilate into being's relativity unless (or until) that move is necessary from the viewpoint of (that particular) truth.

These observations describe evasion as concept intimately linked with both thought and art, as a necessary cognitive process of *reflexive distancing* which offers the artistically involved and thinking human animal a subjective but communally oriented sphere for (re)considering the import of subjectivity, communality and being.

Third (and consequently), there is *theatre-idea* — or, on the level of subjective and communal representations, *theatrical conception* — which is certainly not an unfamiliar (or seminal) context for theatrical meanings. However, read against the backdrop of subjective or communal *radicality* or *evasion* (as described above), it becomes a concept loaded with conflicting elements; elements which do not allow us to assume, for example, that the *ethical reaches of an art-truth* (or a *generic procedure*) a theatrical event may dispatch would emerge solely from the fact that a performance took place.

As a singular (and possibly communal) locus, where meaning strives to withdraw from all specificity but bears thus an eventual possibility of becoming a subject-point for truth(s) — and their ethics —, a theatre-idea must remain open to investigations which take notice of the 'radical discrepancy' between corporeal situations and the ideas that concern those situations, as well as of the fact that its (theatre-idea's) relation to *responsibility* may be measured only by *infinity* (or its end).

None of these terms has served as an independent guideline in this study, and I do not see why any of them should. Yet, utilised and analysed in different combinations and projected against the practical and theoretical concerns of theatre, they may serve as keywords to more critical approaches to the ethical

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<sup>680</sup> Cf. Llewelyn 2000: 170.

meanings and aims of theatre. Examined simultaneously, they may inform in a decisive way for example those theatrical projects that wish to illuminate some socio-political evil or highlight the rights of some specific minority. In addition, they may provide us with an opportunity to assess more critically the assumption according to which the (mimetic) independence of theatre from all sources of representation makes an uncompromising artistic vision ethically legitimate in itself.

To be sure, each attempt to articulate and discuss an injustice in the state of our affairs may harbour a relevant ethical concern. But insofar as those concerns are subject to the *incommensurability* that the corporeal bond of one's existence and the interchangeability of ideas modern (or transcendental) idealism give rise to, as well as to the fact that theatrical meanings (or theatre-ideas) are empowered by their constant return to the singular-corporeal moment of their emergence, we need to acknowledge that any expression, gesture or cognitive process with an ethical aim is still an act which shares the structural features of *radical* and *elemental evil*. In short, we need to bear in mind that any act aspiring to validate or improve an ethical condition or possibility related to human co-existence, stems from the same origin as the existential philosophy which enabled the horrors of the Holocaust.

I do not believe that the above issues or those that set the scene for them offer us a safe way out of this situation. Nonetheless, as articulations of the complexity of modern (or post-modern) subjectivity and its relations to theatrical activity, they suggest that analyses of the ethical functions of theatre are neither approaching any indisputable solutions nor becoming altogether redundant.



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