

**Disinhibition of the public through happening-
performance (I.)**
**Steps to overcome the prejudicial condition of canonical
art-reception: immobilism in traditional spectatorship,
evicted from his part to be played in the poietic of the
art-work and convicted to a “dead angle”- aesthetic-
perspective**

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Abstract: *The paper tackles the impact of the stage performance upon the public, the algorithm through which the theatrical event entered in the captivity of mass-manipulation and the development of the dramatic concepts, aiming to decode the implied power-relationship between scene and audience, thanks to the evolution of philosophical thinking from genuine skepticism to modern rationalism, from judgment of taste to critical judgment and social activism. Further, there was studied in psychological key the consequences of the dual division of the show-space, the sociological markers in theater architecture and the pattern of Wagnerian scenic space, allowing insights in the history of mentalities and in the pattern of art-reception.*

Keywords: *skepticism, Aristotle, catharsis, Chorus, protagonist, René Descartes, dubito, Eugène Ionescu, Augusto Boal, oppression.*

1. Introduction

Since the earliest times in human knowledge, the idea of contesting preconceived judgments and searching for the truth in the presence of evidence made its way in a line of thinkers, followers of the school of skepticism, beginning with Pyrrho of

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Elis (c. 360-c. 270 BC) and Sextus Empiricus (c. 160 – c. 210 CE), followed by Al-Ghazali, (c. 1058 –1111), Montaigne (1533 – 1592) and, finally, by René Descartes (1596 –1650), whose basic work "Discourse on the Method..." (1637) gave birth to the modern rationalism; here is to be found the famous Cartesian statement „Cogito ergo sum” (*I think, therefore I am*), which conceives the „doubt” (lat. *dubito*) as the first consequence of a free and self-contained account, a trend of mind, involving a space of reflection and attitudinal assumption. The forms in which it was expressed fluctuated from seeming immobility to those transitional circumstances -meaning the measure of controlled flexibility - to arrive at extreme reformulations ("heresies") that surfaced out of the nonconformism of problem-solving. The emphasis on the significance of the *dubito* - principle, put in with diminished (or more pronounced) stress and traced in its manifestations, "*reflects a profound [...] spiritual attitude, a cyclical vision of historical time, whose deployment seems to know an archetypal rehearsal*" (Marino 1973, 149) and appears as effect of altering the usual power ratio linking psychological needs to social framework, besides the ensuing revolt caused by discarding the initially balance maintained between critical approach and canonic thinking. The attempt to restrict the freedom of attitude, the abduction of this freedom through the extension of religious, ethical and aesthetic conventions, namely the unconscious absorption of the external (cultural) thinking systems that threaten to confuse the average man - starting with radical thesis of a canonic type or with those precepts meant to fasten and test the relations between power and opposition -, is gradually being perceived as perversion, as social tricks, as concepts of pretended humanity. Enthusiastically and widely spread during the theocentric and the andric European ages and explicit in the evolution of styles, perceived both in philosophy, literature, visual or performing arts, this subduing attitude remained and continues to be flammable today. Incorporating the full scale of social strata and assimilated as a natural faculty, it provides food to the consumer of museums - be it spectator or protagonist (citizen of the show) - and influences in a negative way spiritual expansiveness, attitudinal articulations, bans the dive into "madness", the "profound unconformist, devotee to the vanguard movement" (Marino 1973, 448), and perverts the nature of the human being, originally able to face the most dangerous challenges (like Hercules 'wrestle with the Nemean Lion).



Yaroslav Radeckiy – *Hercules fight with the nemean lion*

In order not to breath any more the same fantasies of cultural eagerness, their frigid alibi, embedded in the ambiguity and associated to ideas that lead the audience to muteness, pouring a spirit of conformism in the human mind that gradually became "lyrical", nonreactive, deluded by the proximity of *cogito ergo sum*, but immersed in the flow of imagination, a 180-degree turn is an absolutely must, a mental thaw, a shift of meaning, attacking with *another* answer the irony that corrodes the flanks of subjective idiosyncrasies; it is practically a "two-stroke, contraction-and-expansion movement, out on a historical level, where a continuous evolution from dogmatization to liberalization, from law to challenge and individualization makes her way" (Marino, 1973, 448). We will further put into light the very transient dimension of the lyrical receiver (the stationary type) who "selects [the happenings sensed from the environment] by grouping the data recognized as familiar or consubstantial, removing those that come out of its sphere of cognitive interest and preparing a reply to those denied or endangering his own way of life" (Pappu 2015, 65). The same receiver, in order to acquire a "dramatic" sense of life, to become "authentic", must meet the Lion face to face, meaning he must

translate his factual experience into action („to act accordingly”). The action remains the only form of plausible denial, given that *“what we sense about a thing is not its essence, but the essence of its disclosure, namely the essence of the phenomenon, not of the noumenon itself”* (Ionesco 1998 /1993, 137). As the obvious Cartesian doubt requires, we have to start over the endeavor of resettle and adjust the mental (psychological and emotional) taste of the initially innocent, naive receptor, who will succeed through inner reassessment to participate (his anti-dogmatic position being stimulated by the post-dramatic performance-space) to the show (both of life and art) and to recapture his own *catharsis*, exhibited as a psycho-physiological act, with therapeutic value. Recognition and certification of identity gained by the “newly born” receiver along the sensory path gone through by means of dramatic performance, for instance , are becoming acts of political nature, as substantiated by the *“connections between political issues of everyday life and their forms of expression in the theater”* (Lizabeth and de Jay 2000, 1).

2. Dual division of the show-space as a shrewd oppressive get away

The taking up the show-space, viewed as a psychological experience, has become today (when the very rules, shaped up by resilient usage, that dug a trench between the stage society and the public, are been scrutinized from a sociological perspective) a subject of extended debate in order to rehabilitate (reinterpret) the boundaries in which this historically consolidated piece of architecture, meant for domination and severance, – the performance-hall -could be perceived. Adapting these facts to the evolution of styles and art movements until their encounter with the vanguard, one can distinguish formulas that advanced from an initial equality and convergence of the psychic forces showing up during the performance (Plato, for instance, held a balanced underestimation, claiming that the theater means distraction of mind, being able to deal with feelings only) to the preeminence of a single character (after the appearance of the protagonist), who maintained an elastic link to the applauding audience; by this scheme the identity of the hero was moved, by personality transference, into the public, in a tight and elusive manner. The attempt (initially shy) of the protagonist to gain spiritual prevalence over the audience has gradually become obsessive, aiming the goal to transform himself into a “man of expertise”, master of the play and member of the elite. By steady dilution of the willingness to take initiative, carved into the mind of spectatorship, i.e. to participate in decision-making within the theatrical ambit, reserved

exclusively to the scenic aristocracy, the assistance was constantly encouraged to refrain herself, to remain polite in a shadowed corner, to react within the boundaries of the conventional matrix, which meant to deliver the spectator to his own seclusion: an attitude emptied of reflexivity and castrated of any action readiness. The recurrent theme of the audience turning again and again to her own fear, to a passive status – in order to keep collective impulses under control, to the public has been assigned seats in the hall from which to assist only and (eventually) to doze - remains a constant feature while delving into the oppressive trend exercised by the theatrical establishment in public relations, the audience being regarded in distinctly as a flock (see below). The fact of erecting by tradition a hierarchical relationship between the two participating sides to the dramatic act (actors and spectators) bears testimony of a closure, of an exaction, in any case of a coercive mode of manifestation. By those unworthy means has been achieved the goal of polarizing the power lines of the stage. Originally undogmatic, the hybrid show-act will be reshaped in order to put and maintain pressure on the art-receiver, in the form of a subconscious impulse coming from the protagonist. The initial diversity of attitudes / states of mind, produced by the audience during the show, was restricted to an inhibitive behavioral sphere, in brief, reduced to an irradiating stream of judgments of taste, located in the uncritical and elementary black-and-white logical area, imagining a one-way mental outward, the format in question problematizing, in those restrictive terms, inclusive the fundamental ontological interrogation: "What is man?". It was a system conceived to move its markers - or not? - in a compulsory sense in order to admit, value and over-estimate, on a free, uncharted playground, the exhibition of the protagonist and of his "superior" aristocratic part-mask, but the reaction to this dramatic typology gave birth to a counterpart, to a more vivid tabulatur, produced by the new human space of communication.

Contemplated from a historical point of view, the exercise of class domination relationship has found its first utility as appliance in the forms of social involvement characterizing the ancient Greek *polis*. By means of the theater performance, the icon of the social structure (divided in dominant / dominated society bodies) and its multiple reenacting on the stage, induced slowly, in the minds of the attendants, the hierarchical organizational pattern - the few "enlightened spirits" (see Marino 1973, 775) versus the rest, namely the crowd. The caesura between *dominant group and mass* is implicitly existent in the substance of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides or in the aristophanic comedy; the aristocracy imposed its ideology, shaping the public taste

according to its interests, while the *demos* of the *polis* had no way but to embrace this "order of things" without question. Confining the public to "mental experiences of terror and fear" was a primary mode of using a political weapon, generating conflicts - at first undeclared -, but later the oppressive situation degenerates drastically at all levels of the *polis* framework. We will keep under close surveillance this theatrical structure, known as "Aristotle's coercive system of tragedy"

"Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type [on the contrary]Tragedy in so far as it is an imitation in verse of characters of a higher type [...] and is narrative in form."

(Boal 1895, chap. 5)

we learn from the quotation that, by definition, the species of tragedy implies the obligation to take somebody at his word - eventually to believe the say-so of the *dramatis personae*, embodied by the actors called *hypocrites*, meaning "character-builders" -, the receiver having no direct contact with the represented event). Investing the protagonist with the firm authority of an overpower (according to Aristotle, in the ancient theater, Thespis of Icaria, / 534 BC / was the first to play the part of a protagonist, as an individuality detached from the chorus), implies the aristocracy's taste for offensive utterance (we meet again this type of aggression maximized to the point of terror in the dialogue between Hero /main character/ and Chorus / people's voice/). The tragic hero of the Greek Antiquity, recently emerged after separating himself from the collective character, defies the morality, covers any alternative voice, while being accepted by the "laws", inclusively his lust with which he commits parricide, but in spite of that he is followed with relentless obedience, acquiring an infallible status of a model. "[...] *He enters in dialogue not only with the chorus, but also with his pairs [...]*" (Boal 1993, 81). This type of theater aimed also to ensure (constant assurance) an empathy between the ancient chorus and the spectator, a source of solidarity from which was to be heard clearly the voice of the oppressed one's. The clash between the spectator's life experience (which is forced to adopt a passive attitude) and that of the submissive, suppressed collective character on the stage ensures an extra boost of psychophysiology energy to the protagonist who, while exerting authority, becomes an energetic vampire. The essence of this "recovery"- program of the power relationship driven by the protagonist is repeatedly renewed in the course of history, without taking into consideration – with few isolated exceptions – to grasp

new mentalities or modern points of view (see next). To this day, the submission ratio, channeled between the *Aristotelian chorus-type* (we might call it a symphonic orchestra or choir assembly *in tutti*) and *protagonist*, soloist or conductor, in a performance, designed as symphonic concert, will inject especially to the last the same abuse of power. We will follow the trajectory of the protagonist within a psychological space of oppression, characterized by an unidirectional given vector. Through his firmly consolidated setup, the protagonist acts indiscriminate, maintaining an exclusive relationship of solipsist solidarity only to His-Self and to his own Ego. The immersion into his invariant typological structure will allow us to identify that special outline of his features, consisting of a mixture of "lyrical" and "dramatic" peculiarities, able to embody the reactions of the whole category of protagonist characters, depicted by the theater as *imago mundi*. To illustrate this archetypal, dogmatic master-figure we will apply to prominent protagonists, created, for example, during the progression of the Elizabethan Theatre (read Shakespeare), then to the representative heroes consuming the period of classicism, preparing the way to the version of maximal emotional and ideal exaltation, brought by Romanticism (consider that fake, acting superior, infatuated or despotized figure). Ultimately, this prototype, whose glow will gradually fade away (see the behavior of the 19th century theatre as well as of the modern period), becomes in time an uneasy adaptable character, being contested by other categories of *dramatis personae*, unconventional reformers, who are watched even today with undisguised concern. We are talking about new cultural archetypes, about *alternative* ways to make theater (Boal) and about stage-directors handing over "unedibly" vanguard recipes.

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