

**Disinhibition of the public through happening-
performance (III.)
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**

Laurenţiu BELDEAN¹, Ciprian ȚUȚU²

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 scepticism to modern rationalism, from judgment of taste to critical judgment and social activism. Further, in the psychological key, the consequences of the dual division of the show space, the sociological markers in theatre architecture and the pattern of the Wagnerian scenic space were studied, allowing insights into the history of mentalities and into the pattern of art reception.*

Key-words: scepticism, Aristotle, catharsis, chorus, protagonist, René Descartes, dubito, Eugène Ionescu, Augusto Boal, oppression.

1. Transgression through attitude sequences for Re-identification. Disinhibiting the spectator through the unconventional show

To place him on a site surrounded by images, by ceremonies that are directed in order to be dedicated to art, by an environment that circulates habits, within a

¹ *Transilvania* University of Braşov, laurentiubeldeanu@yahoo.com

² *Transilvania* University of Braşov, tutuciprian@yahoo.com

climate of consecrated, handmade-like' re-formulations of others – which need to be dusted so they can be admired again –, integrate him into the endless prose of cultural convention, and constantly walking him through a museum of representations, biographies (exposed objects, pictures), the spectator shall get documented on compositions without any metabolism, which will become familiar to him, but which, gradually, will become contentless in his mind. He will religiously observe the authority of this museum culture, and will perpetually get documented within its perimeter, so as not to make it disappear; the social group he belongs to as a member – *documented audience* – admires the intelligence and skill results others have attained (people of letters, playwrights, composers, painters etc.). This culture walks the spectator through all kinds of halls: to concerts that offer him a known repertoire (and which he can hum...), to festivals, opera, exhibitions, through creation workshops (museums). Following the same recipe for documentation, for acquiring knowledge about the past (myths) –, he and his social group will be 'laid into the world' (Noica) onto a position of passiveness; he will only seldom be reactive – since he will breathe in a world *parallel* to the one in which he lives. His behaviour will breathe the *elegance of the portrait* from the picture he has just contemplated, but his being – inhibited *ab initio* by his own limitation – will be sunk into an existential uniformity. Living as an epigone, beside others, he aspires to spiritual ascension, but he has in mind the ascension through the *others*, that is, an experience he wishes to borrow – and for which he pays a ticket. However, feeding himself with sweet and scented food does not allow him too much; the starting point is from a *false* lead.

The reform that should question the typology we have referred to further above is a *lesson-reform*, a 'work in progress', which includes a set of fascicules (read: steps!), capable to surrender a possible direction for finding an authentic, performative pathway for intellectual and spiritual elevation for both the spectator or the protagonist, as well as for the author. This reform, or *avantgarde* (downloading a direction of breakage, negation, opposition, and fury on its display), was highly attentive to the starting point, to the compass. It revives the *uninhibition* process as a cognitive act, but it also attaches another energy to it: "who says „avantgarde” actually thinks and says: attack, polemic, fight, assaulting obsolete, sclerosis-stricken positions, violent and radical upturning of the obstacles met" (Marino 1973, 180). From the reform lesson, a first basic idea stands out: the spiritual *ascension* –seen as a liberation state of the being –shall have to start from the <zero> inhibition level, that is, from a *tabula rasa* (as meant by Plato), and it is not built by a 'progress', understood as a snob contemplation attitude; it is not attained by accrual of agglomeration information on the Self, that is, not by the

succession of the moments which count the bits (shaping accumulation deposits), but exclusively by renouncing, non-affiliation (compare Marino, 1973, 181). How could we interpret and assimilate the information presented by the surrealist painter Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) through the object *Fountain (Fontaine)* 1917, representing that WC – an object of the highest triviality by its function – and which was exposed at the Independent Artists Exhibition in New-York in the same year, 1917? Only by cleansing the preconceptions (*tabula rasa*), by attaining the state of understanding the insurrection as an opportunity for grounded exhibition. How can we absorb that experiential explosion in the aftermath of Filippo Marinetti's Futurist Manifest theses (1909) or of André Breton's Surrealist Manifest (1924) through phenomenological experience? Do we manifest openness to understand *shock* and violence as moments of awakening, of escaping the loop of our one-dimensional relating with the sometimes convex, sometimes concave, existential landscape? Or for regenerating the I through the *beauty of fighting* (Marinetti) – a reflex of chivalrous dynamism and attitude –, or the *absurd* as a regaining of the *opposition* reflex? *The theatre of the absurd* at Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994) forces through that power of opposition that annihilates any forecast, any accent of a *deja vu*. Knowing that the unfertile lead of *commemoration*, linked to the effect of documentation, winds itself through the masks that hide the "real" in various forms, like "derision, anguish, disorder in its pure state, fear – that is, the essentially tragical human reality, which some doctrine, some belief succeeds in masking out every now and then" (Pappu 2015, 15) shall only be contested by an aesthetic project with an unrestricting, rebellious attitude, by an unconventional show, by a *there* from where one can go up to the "[...] common root of all asymmetries and deformations, understood [...] as "absurd", which the human condition is subjected to, and [where it might try] to cancel the statement through experimental "dislocation", involuntarily retaking [Leopold von] Ranke's thesis regarding the mission of historiography to proceed to granting a significance, as well as the permanent signification of the life fact, but from a different level, namely in the dimension of theatricality" (Pappu 2015, 15).

It, the Theatre of the Absurd, boldly presents its self-portrait. The dislocations engaged by its reactionary authority, by its negativity, launched through its phantasy-like madness and categorised as "absurd", spread a heretic heart over the space of the scene, where several hearts are beating simultaneously; it is a source-heart pumping energy and responding to any

oppression, together with “[...] our mind’s action, never stopped from its burst, [which] cannot end [and through which] the domain that includes the ultimate essence of things, being untouched, the mind continues its quests through infinite comebacks and new bursts (Papu 2002, 63).

2. The Portal of the Happening

We do not intend to *completely* precipitate the spectator; we will only insist in drawing the attention to the fact that *the spectator* reacts within different degrees (levels) of connecting to the Self according to the lead on which he is moving, as “[his] silence is “quiet” and speaks at the same time” (Marino 1973, 143). By being silent, he is maybe working on his own fiction, attempting to find an outlet towards the real for it...; so that it should not get resorbed...; or perhaps he has decided to take over already, and not to be *held* in check. Expressing art when it reaches the encounter with the *real* is discovered as a <pole-counterpole> movement; it is a movement to overturn the reception experience, aesthetically prepared when the eye meets the object, but especially to suppress the paternity of the emitter (artist); by denying any vanity, this art (“New Concrete Art”) will take for granted any gesture – even an involuntary one, any barbaric touch; on one hand, it will be able to record demiurgic, but utterly de-mythised qualities (starting from the readymade/pop-art patent up to aesthetic conformations of the industrial design type); on the other, it will germinate from an absolute void (as an “accident”, a happening) and it will be mixed with the on-site experience of the protagonist/spectator, with the currently lived experience; its iconic significance (that of the caprices of an imaginary, bohemian world) will interest no one. The author shall be either the one, or the other of the two participants in the act.

Allan Kaprow (1927-2006) shows that the intensity of living a moment is more striking than the gesticulating show that can be transmitted in a conformist, consecrated manner between stage and audience. Pointing out the intention of this line, of vibrating through the dynamism of living, of *the lived*, through Happening (1958), he incited the receiver to an experiential, non-disguised exploration voyage that un-occupies the space projected by the ramifications of canonical aesthetics. His fantasy-like demonstrations follow the autotrophic ensemble *Action painting* (1958), associated with the “olfactive” drawings (oils splashed onto the canvas, which make up the bait for a fine nose), yet without a stylised rhythm, of Jackson Pollock (1912-1956). Instability, concentrated through

what Kaprow understands to be *participatory art* (see the composition *Yard* (1961)), which tends to a state of fluctuating pulsation, “*more verb-like than noun-like*”, relies upon the crude, diffident experience of the artist. He dismantles the hegemony of the closed, matured unity of the object, and during this time he amplifies the bedrock of the experiment, of the quasi art (as compensation); in fact, the happening is not an intact product, nor a formula for a result. The loose register, the concession to its incomplete achievement with a tint of dispersal, the overbid for surplus, and the useless, which keeps adding itself by brutally entering the object, represent some of the alloys retained by the rough, completely open reverberation of the happening. Ignoring the preconception according to which art only trains experts opens the path of the happening by penetrating the object and then turning it over, so as not to torture it with artistic determinations; the happening is discovered as a foreplay to polish, to tame for a creative principle that *cannot* be discerned. Kaprow removes the line of “pedigree” art from the visual field, a languid art, meant for a diminished relevance, the art “which puts to sleep” by bearing with it the objects cast in a frame – those that lack the courage to set their foot outside the frame. Identifying himself with the non-censure regime of avantgarde, with the show of impermanence and the promoting of the non-reproducible, the American artist does not agglomerate the object of the happening with intellectualist ambitions, realizing that its “salvation” by expression is due to the un-learned emotional, to the sensorial, to the instinct oriented towards the object, to the compromise which glides from non-art to art, and which the artist is trading. Overturning the masks of ritualic pomp, the happening opens gaps, resuscitates impurities of the artistic renewal.

By shaping a wild cosmos, the happening rivals the theatre, yet without being too hospitable on its unfolding platform; open, unconventional, its form pertains to momentary improvisation. The happening breaks the image of the stationary dramatism through dichotomic, divagating highlights, its vitality oozes out force precisely because it gets through the nature of the experience and, obviously, since it can be received as a combat gesture, as an antidote to any mental, spiritual erosion. By eliminating any doctrine conservativeness, the happening follows the spectator, stuck in *dubitatio*, and sets non-whole, unsure representations before his eyes, thus retouching his contact with the stage line; moreover, the heredity of the happening is not defined through repetition (in a work like the one signed by George Banu envisaging the “Rehearsals and the Renewed Theatre. The Century of Stage Directing” Nemira, 2009, the division of the space in the project of the rehearsal as a show genre is mentioned precisely); in

theatre, only the *rehearsal* is the one setting the life duration of the performance into a discourse.

Repeating the same functional unwinding through paraphrasing (see Kaprow) – that is, the rapport with the improvisation, which “injures” the idolatrised canon of traditional reception –, the *Vienna Actionism* group (1960) intervenes and also provokes “zero degree” encounters with the spectator. His representatives, Günter Brus (1938), Hermann Nitsch (1938), Otto Muhl (1925-2013), Rudolf Schwarzkogler (1940-1969), are interested in the eccentric performative presence in their <happening> illustrations, by repercussing it incandescently onto the spectator. Interested in ridding the repertoire of habits that gravitate in a loop for the “documented” audience, catechised with myths – audience which gets older together with the taste it cuddles –, these artists appeal to new formulations, obviously confounding, transported by the <Avantgarde> vehicle from the artist’s experience – authentic – towards an art of opposites; here we enumerate the Actionism exhibited by the *Fluxus* platform (1960) and the means advanced through *Body Art* (1965) – which protest against the unendingly repeated siege of documentary culture – a culture unable to offer solutions as an attitude towards life, society, power structures for an audience that allows itself to be “gnawed on the inside” by its monumentality.

Culture, conveyed as a document, deforms, undermines, and sends the spectator onto a ground where he may experience his own shipwreck. Nitsch, Muhl, Schwarzkogler, Brus interact “body to body” with the receiver, intensifying the protest against the shipwreck scheme, drawing the attention to the stressed despair, to the state of depression, maintained through direct life as a brutality programme, through the social and historic challenges of the 20th Century, but especially by the atrocities involved in World War II; nothing was stopping Hitler (the control department of the *Wehrmacht*) to subject his fellow men to torture and suffering in Auschwitz, Dachau, Treblinka, Buchenwald, and in parallel to relish without any resentment in the cultural convention – the one with which he pulled the ideologic strings. Like puppets organising the propaganda of national-socialist documentation mechanism, the acolytes of the system applauded the force over the imaginative generated in Wagner’s *music drama* they were drawn to, and which took their minds as their highest delight; but even higher, they confirmed hereby a modality to revalidate racist ideologies and the colonialism they maintained and disseminated in the Reich.

3. Other interventions in broadening the Primary Aesthetic Vision of the spectator. Responses to oppression

Once with the performance *Vienna Walk* (1965) as a double perspective experience, which separates the lived real from any convention (institution) motivated through the exclusivist museum-like feature (= that is, through an argumentative cliché from which an “educated” person parts with difficulty...), a vast psychological experience is also conjugating immediately. Günter Brus mutilates his face, dresses extravagantly, creates a new image of the artist, far from the sugar-coated imitation, from the morgue of a public figure recognised and adulated as such. He advances a radical conclusion between the lines: namely, that an ideology, an artistic representation may manifest pronounced weakness in its argument, and he pleads for extracting the dogmatised representative (= the individual that inhabitant the “documented audience” campus) from the opaque intellectual dressage he is subjected to. By de-classing and removing the tunnel masonry, the stone frame of the consolidated, “mouth-feeding” attitude of the *documented audience*, the artist of the happening is up to his own spontaneous updating (“up to date” - relief of beliefs) through his very portrait, which is moving. Thus, he reveals to the spectator a face of the reconfigured internal psychological and intellectual architecture, to subtly warn him that he is leaning on the ground of constraint that he is shipwrecked in a tunnel and he moves into the illusory. The *Vienna Walk* performance of Brus starts with a private walk. His shocking apparition as to his attire, behaviour, spontaneously attracts an audience of the street, who acts pre-logically, non-conformist, outside of reasoning. It is the innocent audience, reactive to what it is shown: a non-artificial mirage, a happening. Brus gets off a Volkswagen automobile (see the “ladybug” car models of the 1960-’70es) – emblem of the German civilising spirit – and goes in a charlatan manner towards the centre of Vienna (passing on the highly populated road that leads to the imperial gate to the old town - Hofburg). Like in an absurd show, with a caricature face, slashed by a black stripe that runs down the middle of his forehead, with a white coat, also slashed, but hurriedly and loosely sewn together, with a derailed, sleepwalking look in his eyes (a Pierrot Lunaire who hates being associated with any cultural source), Brus is up to cutting apart – in the audience that gathers around him – any mechanism that is responsible for the documented audience, the dogma, the aesthetic heredities, for “phantom” semantic messages born together with these. In this epic fragment, born in the

street, a society of the “stage type” and another of the “audience type” cannot be marked out precisely; we attend a mix in the unfolding of the individual happening pictures, of the spectator, and of the actor (protagonist). Nothing is too much or too little in this “show”; its growth ritual is annihilated *ab initio*. The public police officer who was following the scenes with utmost attention and wanted to “classify them according to the law” asks Günter Brus to show him his ID papers; thus, the policeman gets involved in the show; initially he starts as audience, then he will take over the protagonist’s part, yet without becoming aware of it. Perhaps, had he become aware of his part, he would not have gotten involved in the polemic, precisely in order to maintain untouched the walls of the servile pudicity as to the rapport with the social he was hosting, he was serving, but which was also choking him. Here, in *Vienna Walk*, there is a collective situation bridge, capable to connect attitudes and actions like “enactment, contestation, and individualisation” (Marino 1973, 729).

Recognising the dynamic of the happening as a volatile ferment and a range of psycho-somatic reactions unforeseen by the spectator, and (up to a certain point) not even by the protagonist, the approach of directed theatre, solipsistic, calibrated under the sign of the “undried fountains of aristocratic vanity” prototype, which will behave canonically within an institutional citadel like the “limit-space”, can be reinterpreted from a point which is more on the inside. The show signed by authors of methods, competency, and connoisseurs, only communicating from one side, places an exhibition of “charm and thrill” products in the public space, or – as they use to say: *aesthetic emotion*, it is a circular, conciliating routine (and hence somehow deprecating...), both for the spectator’s condition, as well as for that of the protagonist.

The spectator’s distancing from the part that gives him an imported imaginative universe to manage, from the crutch-support of *re-presentation* as a form to suspend his own moving direction – support which is usually connected to an ideologic training (that is working like the substitutes (placebo) in order to attenuate the authentic living) – and to other, multiple portals of aesthetic experience as a cemetery-, museum-like art, which anchors the protagonist in a space manifested through attachments of external contents (see the classical playwright + the entire convoy of the employed authors, responsible for the staging), needs to be constantly stimulated. The traditional theatre device (for instance) is centered on the author, on his insistence in gaining an area of influence, a perimeter for action and coercion, to make himself known.

However, conformed to his elementary aspiration, the eye of the spectator does not have to be subjected to the framework outlined by the author (and by the associated team) of the dramaturgies that whiten his eye pupils; but, so as to stop his tears from flowing, he needs to come back toward the inside, to turn within as towards an exit lane. As an organ of *Seeing*, and not necessarily of *Sight*, this will naturally offer an output profile when, on his moving direction, he yearns to identify with himself, to be more *ecologic* in the space of his lucidity, to be able to respond in a self-critical, self-reflexive manner; of course, if he decides to ask himself on the way: "what is life, after all?" The result of self-*communication* will accustom him to rely on the action initiated exclusively by him, on the decisions he makes beyond any monastery, hot- or cold-headed, on the performance (happening) which pervades into the pores of the being by opening a new stage – as his self-organisation -, which is spontaneous, and not like the part learned with the acting book on one's knees. Cherishing the potential of the human collective as an experience and expression, as a live and responsible attitude before his fellow man and culture, as interrelating the social and political scene through the very perfecting of the dynamics of the performance as a communication phenomenon, of the "risky", total entrance, maintains he who practices this in an energetic and spiritual fitness, and makes his sensory and physical acuity more elastic. Therefore, the performance leitmotif is the verb <to risk>. By absolutizing the technique of *immediately going into action* as a form of self-defence against the erosion of the being, the performance hardens the psychical biology, markedly expanding the living time of the person who lives (protagonist or spectator).

References

- Boal, Augusto. 1993. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.
- Butcher, Samuel Henry (trans). 1895. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*. New York: Macmillan and Company.
- Goodman Lizbeth, De Gay Jane. 2000. *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*. London: Routledge.
- Ionesco, Eugène. 1998. *Present Past Past Present: A Personal Memoir*. N.Y.: Da Capo Press.
- Marino, Adrian. 1973. *Dictionar de idei literare*. Bucuresti: Eminescu.

- Papu, Edgar. 2002. "Giordano Bruno. His Life and Work." In *Bruno Giordano, Italian Works I*, ed. by Smaranda Bratu Elian (transl.). Bucuresti: Eminescu.
- Pappu, Vlad-Ion. 2015. "Ionescu vs. Papu: The Chronicle of an Eroded Empathy." *RITL*, IX (1-4), 65.