



Theatre Enters! The Play within the Play as a Means of Disruption

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Abstract

This artistic research analyses a specific dramaturgical phenomenon defined as “the play within the play”, which introduces a second story inside the main drama. Traditionally the play within the play has been understood as a paradigm of *theatrum mundi* (17th century) and of postmodern self-reflexivity (20th century).

Starting from this recognition the research questions how the “nature” of this device has changed so drastically, and explores if it is possible to point out continuity in this device throughout the different historical periods. Probably something more crucial and therefore more compromising is at stake when this device is applied, in the act of re-telling a story, of being redundant, of placing actors behaving like spectators in front of the audience. For when an inside play begins, it is not simply new characters that enter the stage presenting another story, but it is theatre itself that enters!

This research offers a different reading of the play within the play by referring to Samuel Weber’s deconstructivist approach to theatre drama, George Forestier’s formalistic analysis of the play with the play, Denis Guénoun’s political interpretation of theatre and Luigi Pirandello’s work, and comparing these theoretical examinations with two practical works focusing on this device. It explores a political interpretation of this device and suggests that the play within the play can be a tool that intrudes into the authoritarian discourse from within the authoritarian discourse. It is therefore a means that disrupts power playfully, from within.

In addition to the content of the research, the text also proposes a stimulating insight: that in fact the artistic research is not something happening outside this text, in a rehearsal room or in a studio. This thesis is not a silent witness to the process, on the contrary, it is part of the process; it has ignited the whole work. Chapter after chapter it is possible to notice the concretization of an intuition into a rousing concept: a theoretical question leading to practical work, which in return opened a new horizon and thus led to a new question. Therefore the thesis can also be read not so much as a report of an artistic research but as *the becoming* of an artistic research.

Introduction

The play within the play and personal background

This artistic research analyses a specific dramaturgical phenomenon, defined as “the play within the play”, which introduces a second story (or second play) inside the main drama. A theatrical event, or a show already displays a level of representation¹ in which the performers (or the fictional characters) are evolving in front of (or with) the audience. The implicit question then is: what happens when a playwright introduces a second level of representation? What happens when, within a play, some actors start performing for other actors? What happens when another level of illusion is added to the first one? Even from these few questions, it is clear that the act of introducing a play within a play is a complex phenomenon that uncovers deeper meanings related to theatre (as the act of showing something to someone else).

At the same time, contemporary theatre seems to refute the artifice of creating an “illusion” of reality; both theatre directors and playwrights seem to deny it. However, while analysing the structure of some contemporary performances refuting illusion, I noticed that many of them reuse strategies of the play within the play. It seems then to be a paradox in which performances attempting to “destroy” illusion actually employ models used for “squaring” illusion. Therefore I concluded that something essential to the nature of theatre and thus of theatricality² must be present in this particular device, something that cannot be simply ignored (or dismissed) when it comes to theatre.

1 In this research I am not entering into the debate about “representation” as “*Vorstellung*” (creating an image) in contrast with “presentation” as “*Darstellung*” (presenting in front). I simply use it as a technical term, as a synonym for “show”.

2 The concept of “theatricality” brings forward several issues, which can even be in contrast. The fourth chapter of this thesis discusses largely this subject, especially from the point of view of Samuel Weber. However, this research remains in the domain of theatre and therefore I am not taking into consideration the sociological aspect of theatricality, nor do I enter into the debate to distinguish it from “performativity”. “Theatricality” here needs to be considered in a strict relation

Usually the play within the play is perceived as a device addressing issues of representation and introducing a meta-theatrical discourse. Although these approaches to the play within the play are fascinating and inspiring, this research, instead, aims to propose an alternative reading of the play within the play, which explores a political interpretation of this device. In fact I want to suggest that the play within the play can be a tool that intrudes into the authoritarian discourse from within the authoritarian discourse. It is therefore a means that disrupts power from within.

Examining two performances I directed, and referring to Samuel Weber's deconstructivist approach to theatre drama, to George Forestier's formalistic analysis of the play with the play and to Denis Guénoun's political interpretation of theatre, I have developed an analysis that hopefully offers a different vision of the play within the play and thus helps to further the debate about theatre and its relation to power.

The idea of this inquiry sprang from my Master's study, *Unveiling Illusion*, written at the Theatre Academy of Helsinki in 2006. During that period I was concerned with the actor's capability to "generate" illusion on the stage. My basic question was: does illusion happen in the head of the spectators or does it emerge from the stage?³ This investigation led me to design a series of exercises for the actors that were dealing either with a fictional world or dealing with concrete actions happening here and now. As a result, I was often investigating with the actors the threshold dividing performers from actors. In order to grasp the motivations that led me to undertake this artistic doctoral research, I need to describe here one of the exercises carried out with actors during my master's thesis research. This exercise was inspired by an article by Michael Kirby, *On Acting and Not-Acting*, from the book *Acting (Re)Considered* by Philip Zarrilli (Zarrilli, 2002, 40). In his article, Kirby tries to define all the different steps that lead not-acting to acting. He basically draws a line between not-acting and acting and places the different attitudes of performing and acting on it. He concludes that acting starts when pretending is involved. When the person pretends to be somewhere else,

to the theatre event and its repercussion on the drama itself.

- 3 This inquiry was stimulated by a provocative book written by David Mamet, *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor*, where he claims that the rehearsal period is a waste of time. He claims that actors should not be concerned to understand the psychological reasons motivating the character because anyway it is the spectators who model everything in their mind. So actors should simply limit themselves to uttering the lines clearly and forgetting about "acting".

someone else, or mimes objects, it is then possible to speak of acting. When the person is doing an action, but without the intention of giving the illusion of being somewhere else or someone else, it is defined as a performance.

I explored this shift from doing to pretending with actors employing an exercise that I will define as simple action/complex action (terminology used by Michael Kirby).

- 1) I asked the actors to bring an object and perform an action with it. Basically the task was to present the object to the others. (Simple action)
- 2) I asked an actress to repeat exactly what the first actor did, the same action with the same object. (Miming simple action)
- 3) The actress repeated the same action and I asked her to change her quality of moving. I proposed to use one of the elements that we had worked on, for instance, wind. (Not so simple action)
- 4) Then the actress had to repeat what she did before and changed the *moteur*⁴ of her movements. The *moteur* could be located in the knees, in the pelvis, in the chest, in the head. (Medium action)
- 5) Then the actress had to repeat what she did before, while imagining herself to be in another place; in front of the sea, in a forest, or in a dark room. (Almost complex action)
- 6) Then the actress had to add an emotion when she was presenting the object.
- 7) Finally the object was removed, and the actress repeated the action with everything except the object. At this point we could say that the actress was embodying a character, in a specific space, with particular emotions and relating to something. (Complex action)

I wanted to compare the quality of each action (simple and complex) in order to evaluate the difference between acting and performing so I finished the exercise by juxtaposing the two performers: one doing the simple action and the other one the complex one in parallel. And something unexpected happened: the performer of the simple action left the object on stage before going off. She just had the impulse to leave it on the stage. The actor doing the complex action noticed the object left behind. It was a surprise to see a strange bridge appearing between the two different actions, when the actress still had the mimed object in her hands and noticed the real one; the story was brought to another

4 *Moteur (motor)* is a term from the Lecoq's pedagogy and it defines the source generating the movement. In the first chapter I discuss more about my background in the Lecoq pedagogy.

level. When the actor was presenting the mimed object, the audience took it as a real object. But when at the end the character is faced with the real object, he is faced with the dilemma between reality and illusion, between fantasy and crude materiality. At the moment when a bridge was established between the two actions, the presence of the simple action supported the complex action. The complex action gained interest, I think, for two main reasons: firstly because the character was emotionally committed to the action, and secondly, because the object that generated the whole story was missing, requiring more attention to the quality of the movements that create the illusion of having something in the hands. It is probably related to the mystery of not showing everything and letting the imagination of the audience fill the gaps⁵. In doing so, the audience becomes active and participates in the creative process, enjoying a kind of pleasure in seeing what is not there. But in the case of the juxtaposition of the two exercises (simple action with complex action), the status of the character with the mimed object changed with the presence of the real object. When the actor was acting the scene alone, I was touched by the character and I was “seeing” the invisible object. When the scene was coupled with the simple action and the real object was left on the stage, the juxtaposition of these two realities thrilled me completely. What was happening? The character suddenly found herself in two different spaces, here and there, with the invisible object in the hands and the presence of the real one. The existence of these two spaces cannot be justified, it is not possible to explain or to provide a rational motivation that could lead to such a situation, even if what was happening was extremely interesting. The illusion created by the complex action was somehow negated by the presence of the simple action, however, the simple action, rather than destroying the complex action, made it even more powerful and mysterious. What happened there? I could not understand it. I was amazed.

It became clear that the play within the play, which exactly deals with the implementation of one or more worlds (the stories inside) within a larger world (the frame story), would have been the ideal subject for further exploration of this amazement, for it is a dramaturgical device that allows the application of “bridges”.

5 This notion of “imagination” is a recurrent term present in different forms in every chapter of this research.

The subject, even if it focuses on a very specific dramaturgical device, is vast; I needed to set limits for the investigation. Moreover, in the context of an artistic research, what are the right questions that makes the investigation meaningful?

I realized that my interest in the play within the play was not so much driven by the options of telling various stories within a frame story but rather in the passage from one story to another and then coming back. Somehow I recognized that I was fascinated by the structure of this device and how this structure affects a story. Therefore I decided to restrict my area of research to examining how the act of introducing a second story affects the main story, and what kind of tensions are established or released. In fact the introduction of inside stories carries the notion of fragmentation and, as I point out in Chapters 1 and 3, the juxtaposition of fragments is interrelated with the notion of unity. And it is exactly in the analysis of the dichotomy of unity versus fragmentation that the most interesting questions can be raised. Similarly, if this device permits multiple narratives, it implies a notion of main narrative, which leads, as I discuss it in Chapter 5, to a distinction between dominating discourse and resistance. What I came to realize during this artistic research is that the play within the play is a device that, on the one hand, unveils the limits of the medium and on the other, contests them. This device, rather than being a mere repetition of the medium - a second story repeated inside a main story - becomes an implement challenging the very nature of theatre. In fact, as I conclude this thesis, the actual strength of this device is that it can negate itself. This is why I define the play within the play as a device for disruption.

This research has also made me aware that my previous work as a painter already contained the notion of superimposing realities and disruption on each another. In fact, before starting my work in theatre, I earned my living as a painter. My paintings were figurative and, as a support, I used paper that I took from books. From these printed pages I chose some words that for some reason raised my interest and covered them with tape. After that, I made my painting on the page and when the painting was finished I took off the pieces of tape. The selected words printed on the page were visible again and they resonated with the painted image. The reality of the support emerged, or entered, and there happened a dialogue with (or disruption of) the “fictional” painted image. A shift of discourse took place as well: a shift from printed text to painted image⁶.

6 I would like to add that my work as a theatre practitioner is not only influenced by my background as a painter, but also by mathematics. In fact, before beginning the Fine Art School in Geneva, I

Subjects of the chapters

Resolving to explore the play within the play with this specific approach, I started searching for playwrights using this device. My attention was immediately drawn to the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), whose work shattered the traditional concept of drama. The strength of Pirandello lies in the perturbation of the traditional vision of theatre, without trying to deny this traditional vision. For him, there is not a single “reality” in which the protagonist evolves; reality is fragmented by many different experiences and all these fragments of reality are “truthful”, therefore, on the same level. Even the experience of a performance is as significant and as real as what happens in the streets.

Pirandello’s unique vision of theatre is presented in more detail in the first chapter of this thesis, where I examine how behind the mask of melodramatic or bourgeois theatre, Pirandello presented his ground-breaking ideas which disputed the concept of unity of identity and space. I particularly dwell on his last play, *The Mountain Giants*, in order to expose the questions that have triggered my first practical work: *Pirandello Project, On the Edge of Silence*. Three concepts arise from this chapter: the concept of mental stage, the idea of representing a role and the idea of playfulness, in the sense of playing with style (or with the dominating narrative). The idea of “playing” and disrupting then becomes a central topic of my inquiry.

Chapter 2, which corresponds to my second practical work, *The Invisible Stage*, explores the notion of separation between actors and spectators. The question of separation is then applied to the emblematic relationship between actor and fictional character. Following George Forestier’s idea about *dénégation*,⁷ I wonder if eventually spectators are more focused on observing other spectators placed on the stage (the actor-spectator), than looking at the character performing “actions”. I develop this latter supposition further and then link it with the concept of recognition or, in other words, of *observing oneself*, which is finally applied to analyse two contemporary plays. I conclude the chapter by presenting the script of *The Invisible Stage*.

In the third chapter I come back to Pirandello’s idea of subverting the structure and playing with it. I explore how contemporary performances, which tend to refute any type of illusion and any dependence on a written text, still adopt

attended a scientific high school and applied to the mathematics department at the University of Geneva. In Chapter 4 I actually refer to mathematics in order to elucidate a problematic aspect of the play within the play.

7 The denial effect

the mechanism that is typical of the play within the play, but with the slight difference that it “plays” with the play. Rather than building an intricate system of mirrors and stories within stories, contemporary performances tend *to play with* the play instead. Contemporary theatre uses the “text” as a source, as an inspiration, as rough material, and then the drama becomes “present” (as a reference) without being staged. This establishes a playful relationship and a critical distance between the written text (or the traditional drama) and the theatre event. Contemporary theatre is often defined as a fusion of media, fragmenting the linearity of the text by employing shifts of discourse or language. However, I intend to point out that these shifts of language and these juxtapositions of media and this disrupting desire *to play with* the play is not something totally new, not a distinctive attitude of the postmodern condition, but it can be traced back to the actual traditional structure of the play within the play. What I intend to propose in this chapter is that the notion of “playing” is actually something inherent to the structure of the play within the play. I elaborate on this last remark in the last two chapters.

In the last two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5, which contain the major theoretical contribution to the discussion of the play within the play, I develop the core idea of disruption and I link it to the notion of contesting the limits (Chapter 4) and of unravelling power (Chapter 5). This probably is the most valuable aspect of this research: in fact, I eventually propose a theoretical model for studying the device of the play within the play, which stresses the notion of disruption and resistance. Moreover, in the final chapter, something important happens in the development of the thesis, which brings the investigation to a larger horizon.

I conclude the thesis by suggesting that the play within the play can be understood as a disruption pointing out what theatre has left out. In this model, the term “disruption” is linked to the notion of disorder and break or split. I, however, stress more the notion of disrupting as interrupting the progress of something. This connects to the idea of “suspension” rather than destruction or invasion. In this sense, disruption becomes a “bubble” within the system. This latter idea is then examined by referring to Weber’s concept of *theatricality*⁸ and to Genet’s concept of the performativity of “power”.

8 Weber presents a particular interpretation of “theatricality”. In order to distinguish between the use of the term as I defined it earlier, and Weber’s definition, I use italics to refer to Weber’s.

Methodology

My method of work consists of the close reading of dramas in order to extract patterns, which I then develop into hypotheses or investigations; following my close reading, I apply these patterns to my practical works. My method tries to be as faithful as possible to the text and to point out the tensions occurring in the juxtaposition of two (or more) levels of “illusion” or “reality” in them. I try to unravel the mechanisms inherent in the plays and examine their effect on the way the story is told.

I consider any creative process, be it artwork or research, as a form of dialogue. Even if the work is done by one person only, it is a form of dialogue that the person establishes between him or her and the surroundings, or with a writer, a book, a concept, or an emotion.

In this case I consider the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello as my main interlocutor. Pirandello, in his work, has raised crucial questions related to issues of representation, performing and identity; it would not be an overstatement to say that he was one of the forerunners of the major theatrical revolutions of the 20th century. Pirandello is then, in my research, a matrix that opens a horizon of investigations. The first chapter of my thesis is dedicated mainly to his work. In this chapter I develop some of the basic arguments and then go on to analyse them in the following chapter, also discussing other philosophers. I consider three scholars as my key interlocutors: Georges Forestier, Denis Guénoun and Samuel Weber. In Chapter 2, I discuss Georges Forestier’s concept of *dénégation* and Denis Guénoun’s concept of theatre as a gathering. In Chapter 4 I discuss Weber’s definition of *theatricality*.

Since the theme of my research is the play within the play, evidently I also examine various theatre plays implementing this device. It would have been an enormous task to consider all the plays related to this specific device, therefore I had to make a selection. Most of the examined plays are from the 17th, the 20th and the 21st century. Since the core argument of my research is the idea of the play within the play as a means of disruption, most of the chosen plays relate to this notion. The selection I made, since it covers several centuries, could be considered as non-rigorous. I have been interested in uncovering the continuity of this device throughout different historical eras. Thus it was necessary to examine plays from different centuries. As I explain in the last paragraph of this introduction, the play within the play has received different connotations in different centuries. My desire was then to explore this element of continuity present behind these different definitions of the play within the play.

The reader may well be surprised by the use of diverse reference material ranging from theatre analysis to philosophy to mathematics. From that aspect I could be criticized for being eclectic, trying to cover too many disciplines. However, recent studies in theatre tend to open up this field more and more and begin to consider numerous aspects of human knowledge in theatre analysis. The recent foundation of the worldwide group Performance Philosophy bringing together philosophers and theatre practitioners, which discusses the co-presence of philosophy in performance and vice versa, clearly demonstrates that the lines dividing disciplines are not so clearly defined and can be constantly re-negotiated. Moreover, while I consider various materials, I always keep my viewpoint. I look in different directions, which I relate to my practical work.

Artistic research

It is important to clarify that this is not a scholarly examination of Pirandello's work. As I stated previously, my approach is practical and my focus is oriented towards the stage. I examine some of his plays and concepts and then I transpose them to the stage and examine them practically. As it is evident in this thesis, what I cherish is the interaction between theory and practice: how theory can stimulate new practical questioning and how practice can lead to new theoretical investigations.

In this thesis it is possible to distinguish between two narratives. The first one consists of five chapters exploring five considerations upon the subject of the play within the play. In Chapter 1 the play within the play is understood as a means *to fragment* the self and reality. In Chapter 2 the play within the play is understood as a means to point out the issues of *separation* and *observation*. In Chapter 3 the play within the play is understood as playing with *discourses*, *media* and *conventions*. In Chapter 4 the play within the play is understood as a means to contest the *limits of theatre* and in Chapter 5 to *subvert* them. There is also a second narrative, which, rather than considering the five chapters as independent, stresses the transitions from one chapter to the next in order to follow the development of a thought. The particular aspect of the emergence of this thought is that it consists of a fusion of theory and practice. Therefore the thesis can also be read not so much as a report of an artistic research but as *the becoming* of an artistic research.

In this research I presented some theoretical questions, tried to apply them in practice and afterwards, facing the difficulties, I furthered the thinking about the subject. The attempts to transform the theoretical text into practice permitted

me to identify the wrong subjects of research and helped to redirect my inquiry. To clarify the major difference between a standard artwork and an artistic research: a standard artwork usually ends with a final outcome, for instance with a public performance. In the case of an artistic research, the public performance is only one step among many others: it also includes readings, writing, workshop, publishing articles, etc. The artistic research therefore continues long after the public performance. Therefore a difficulty, or even a failure is not a negative thing, in the sense that it can help to foster an awareness and to spot new domains of inquiry. As a provocation, it could be said that any artistic research should produce “failures”: it should not comfort the student but push them into crisis. Therefore, the artistic research should be the report of “trouble”.

At the end of this research I reach a conclusion that parallels my own journey. I started this research because I was astonished by the play within the play. In it, I saw a jubilatory glorification of the theatre event, of “theatricality”. From this point of view, my first practical work unconsciously followed this vision. However, while furthering the examination, I realized that the most interesting results or elements were the ones that questioned the very nature of theatre. I became intrigued when theatre was put into “crisis”. My attention then shifted from the use of the play within the play as a way of praising theatre to it being a device that challenges theatre itself. In fact my second practical work integrated this idea of “scratching” the limits and made a performance out of it. I realized that the play within the play can obviously adhere completely to a theatrical form, but it can as well be a subtle, disrupting tool questioning tradition, fiction, written drama, and the dominant discourse from the inside. Similarly to the traditional play within the play, which, through the use of fiction, displays various “realities” on stage, contemporary theatre recreates these different “realities” through different expedients (different kinds of discourse or medium), which are in dialogue and/or contesting each other. Here may be an answer to the intricate relationship I have established with the notion of the plot throughout this research. My struggles reported in Chapter 1 and my attempt to escape from the “oppression of the plot”, have led me to a point that permits both of these opposite attitudes: the wish to evade it and the constant referring to it. I come back to this notion in the conclusion of the thesis.

The artistic research is not something happening outside this text, in a rehearsal room or in a studio. This text is not a silent witness to the process, on the contrary, it is part of the process; I could even say that it has ignited the whole work. Chapter after chapter it is possible to notice the concretization of

an intuition into a rousing concept: a theoretical question leading to practical work, which in return opened a new horizon and thus led to a new question. Therefore it is good to pay attention to the introduction and conclusions of each chapter, for they testify to the various phases, struggles, development, and the new directions undertaken in this artistic research. As a writer, I place myself in the position of interlocutor with the reader, where I expose my thoughts, my intuition and my doubts.

Each part has the capacity to arouse a mental stage in the head of the reader. However, this text is also the support for the “disruption” to happen. As I explain later, while I was developing a discourse about “observation” and “division”, another discourse concerning “the limits” emerged. The significant aspect is that this emergence is exactly the subject of the text. Therefore the text became the stage on which the disruption happens, which simultaneously, during the process of reading, is projected onto the mental stage of the reader. Hence, two stages are floating: one in the text and one above the text, and the sense oscillates between the two of them.

The context of the play within the play; the 17th century and 20th century

In this last paragraph of the introduction there is a short historical description of the play within the play to better understand the different approaches and visions of this particular device.

Tadeusz Kozwan, in his extensive research, *Théâtre Miroir; Métathéâtre de l'Antiquité au XXIe siècle*, explains that the device of the play within the play can be traced back to the ancient Greek tragedies (Kowzan, 2006, 15). The golden age, as he describes, is the 17th century. After that, this device is somewhat neglected before being “rediscovered” during the 20th century. Kowzan states that the play within the play is like placing two mirrors on the stage: if one mirror is enough to observe one's face, two mirrors are necessary to observe the neck. If theatre is a mirror placed on the stage showing to the spectators themselves, then, according to Kowzan, the play within the play is the second mirror permitting the spectators to see the invisible (Kowzan, 2006, 11). Kowzan then wonders if the introduction of the second play, the inside play, would “break the illusion”, but concludes that if the illusion of the first story is dissipated, immediately another illusion emerges on another level: for, as he claims, the illusion remains in place (Kowzan, 2006, 138). Why then, if the play within the play has the power to display the “invisible”, as Kowzan suggests, is this device,

in the Western theatre history, mainly present only in two historical periods and not the whole time?

During the 17th century, the play within the play is usually identified as the glorification of the baroque *theatrum mundi*. George Forestier, in his book, *Le Théâtre dans le Théâtre*, investigated the presence of this device specifically during this limited period of time. For him, it represents a reflection on the dialectic being versus appearing:

L'homme contemple dans le miroir une image de lui-même, dont il ne sait si elle est plus vraie que la réalité ; on a plaisir, dans ce monde où il n'y a d'authenticité qu'en Dieu, à prendre le faux pour le vrai, l'image pour la réalité, l'apparence pour l'être, et, bien sûr, le théâtre pour la vie (Forestier, 1996, 45).

Forestier suggests that theatre, especially through the device of the play within the play, transforms the doubtfulness of the human being, who has to face the continuous game of illusions, into an internal certitude. The play within the play, according to him, offers the possibility to become conscious of the “comedy” that humans are bound to play; only those who are conscious of it, can take part in it and assume their role properly (Forestier, 1996, 305). In this perspective it becomes clear that theatre does not aim to express something or reflect about itself, but simply uses the play within the play as a way of showing itself and valuing itself (Forestier, 1996, 39). In fact Forestier concludes his research by asserting:

Etant la transposition scénique de la thématique du *theatrum mundi*, la technique du théâtre dans théâtre met tout particulièrement en valeur les thèmes de la confusion entre *être* et *paraître*, entre vivre et tenir un rôle, entre la réalité et le jeu (Forestier, 1996, 345).

Forestier explains that the play within the play highlights the confusion between “being” and “appearing”, between living and performing a role, and between reality and playing.

The 20th century instead seems to adopt this device especially for its possibility to unveil and to “surpass” theatre itself. The play within the play is seen as a paradigm of self-reflexivity; for it alludes to itself, to its own medium. For instance in the book *The Play within the Play, The Performance of Meta-Theatre and Self-Reflection*, edited by Gerard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner, the play within

the play is defined as the expression of the post-modern condition (Fischer and Greiner, 2007, xiii). Along with Fischer and Greiner, Lada Cale Feldman criticizes when the play within the play is “reduced” to the catch phrase “interplay between illusion and reality” (Fischer and Greiner, 1996, 288). On the contrary, she claims that this device surpasses the limit of traditional drama and encompasses what is “outside of theatre”:

...[T]hat is, out of the culturally and historically determined conventions of what is considered to be a “proper” theatrical performance: the enactment of a previously written text, occurring in a specialized building and markedly, institutionally detached from its extra-theatrical context. (Fischer and Greiner, 1996, 289)

It is possible to infer from the various articles in the book by Fischer and Greiner that in the post-modern perspective, the play within the play is a malleable device permitting to step “outside” of the theatre medium, to juxtapose materials that are not necessarily linked together, to shift in time, and to change perception or discourse towards the world (Fischer and Greiner, 1996, xii). The play within the play is therefore employed as a means to contest traditional theatre. However, the implications of repeating a story, of introducing another discourse, of juxtaposing different historical times, all elements acknowledged by the authors as typical post-modern attributes, cannot be simply confined to the category of having a mere self-reflexive quality. Moreover, how is it possible that this particular dramaturgical device has flourished at two extremely different moments in the history of theatre? During the 17th century the play within the play is seen as the glorification of *theatrum mundi*, while in the 20th century it is seen as a self-reflexive instrument. How is it possible that it changed so drastically? Or is there something that would mean some kind of continuity in this device throughout the different historical periods? Probably something more crucial and therefore compromising in the act of re-telling a story, of being redundant, is at stake when this device is applied, for when an inside play begins, it is not simply new characters who enter the stage presenting another story, but it is theatre itself that enters! This research, beside its aim to propose an alternative model for reading the play within the play, is also an attempt to uncover this compromising aspect and thus identifies the continuity in this device.

Chapter 1:

Pirandello Project, a practical and theoretical exploration of the kaleidoscopic quality of reality and the self



Pirandello Project, *On the Edge of Silence*, performer: Elina Putkinen, Johanna Kultala, photo: Pirita Särmä

This chapter is an analysis of the process and a report of my first practical work, called *Pirandello Project, On the Edge of Silence*. The performance was inspired by the last play of the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello and had its premiere in August 2009 at Korjaamo, Helsinki, during the Helsinki Juhlaviikot festival.

In this first phase of my artistic research I still had in mind to explore my work as a mask theatre practitioner and the mechanism of the play within the play. My practice in mask theatre and in theatre in general had been deeply marked by two important experiences. The first one is the Lecoq pedagogy that I studied in 1999-2001. Lecoq gives an important focus on the ability of the actor to transform her/himself and to create a “poetic world”. In fact he used to say that when an actor is completely transformed and reaches the level of “blending”⁹ with the mask, she/he is able to transform the space around her/himself and *le silence s'impose* (the silence falls upon the spectators). Lecoq stressed the actor's ability for transformation, but had little interest in the development of dramaturgy and how to place these masked characters in a longer arc. In fact, after finishing the school, most of my theatre projects were made of collage; fragments of scenes put somehow together. I did not have the dramaturgical tools to develop a longer arc. The second influence was Carlo Boso, with whom I worked for 3 years, between 2005 and 2007. Carlo Boso, on the contrary, stressed the dramaturgy and paid little attention to the technique of mask acting. His main interest was the commedia dell'arte scenarios. It was therefore my aspiration to bring these two approaches together, and this artistic research has been the right platform for such an objective.

Since Pirandello's work serves as a reference point for this research, I decided to parallel his method of “disrupting” drama and similarly, I disrupted my training in mask theatre. My aim then was to explore the “limits” of mask theatre and to experiment what normally would break the illusion of the “mask alive” and still keep the sense of the story, of a dramaturgical arc¹⁰.

In this chapter I first study Pirandello's work and how he transformed the traditional drama. I place special focus on two of his plays, *Così è* and *The Mountain Giants*. The latter one was given special attention because it was used as a reference text for the practical work. After this first theoretical part, I examine the practical work, and how I implemented the ideas developed in the theoretical part of my practical work; the process period and the making of the show. In this chapter, some paragraphs seem long and sometimes even deviating from the

9 Meaning that the spectators do not notice that the actor has something on her/his face, the mask and the body fuse and the mask is suddenly “alive”.

10 The desire to “disrupt” my mask training is linked to the work of Pirandello but also to the pedagogy of Lecoq. In fact, in my experience, Jacques Lecoq was never satisfied with easy answers and kept researching and questioning what he was doing and teaching. His curiosity and critical attitude led him to develop his unique theatre pedagogy constantly. I wanted to pursue this approach and therefore I never took for granted what I have learned or done.

subject of research, especially when I describe some of the exercises. However, I felt necessary to introduce these parts because I wanted to disclose the peregrinations of a thought. In the conclusion I show how this peripatetic drifting led me to narrow my research and sharpen my study.

Luigi Pirandello: reality as theatrical or theatre as real?

There is an anecdote saying that one evening after watching a show performed by the theatre group of Pirandello, Einstein went on stage, put his arms around the Italian dramaturge and said: “We are saying the same thing”. And if Einstein is one of the fathers of quantum mechanics, whose revolutionary intuitions changed the perception of the world, probably it is possible to draw a similar parallel with Pirandello and the theatre world. Pirandello’s theatre conception was in total contrast with the traditional idea of the drama of his epoch. A traditional theatre text, a so-called “well done” play imposes itself upon the institution of the drama, with a linear plot where a protagonist undertakes a transformation. The traditional approach is that theatre lies in the distinction of fiction and reality in order to establish an illusive “world” on the stage. Pirandello wanted to challenge the assumption of theatre (the stage) as a place of deception and reality (everyday life) as a place of certainty. He attacked the very core of the “well done” play’s foundation by denying the distinction between fictional and authentic. To some extent Pirandello initiated the destruction of the drama institution, which then shattered in the massive attack of the ideas of illusion, representation, fiction, and of embodying characters, which characterize many contemporary plays. Pirandello however, didn’t destroy the configuration of the play. On the contrary, he used the theatre of his time in order to present his ground-breaking ideas. In fact behind the veil of a melodrama, of a “well done” bourgeois play, he ignites the assumption that reality is one, that our personality is a whole. Of course Pirandello didn’t invent this scheme, he could see it in Machiavelli who already advocated the operation of using the external outlines in order to change the internal content. Not only did Machiavelli explain this concept in his book *Il Principe*, but he also integrated it into a dramatic context. The play *The Mandrake* (*Mandragola*, 1518) uses the traditional features of a comedy. A young man, Callimaco, loves a beautiful woman, Lucrezia, who is married to Nicia, a rich and impotent old man. Nicia is desperate because Lucrezia doesn’t get pregnant and thus they don’t have children. Callimaco, with the assistance of a clever servant, Ligurio, will “help” Nicia and make sure that his wife gets pregnant. In the last scene, Nicia, satisfied with the resolution, gives the key of his

house to Callimaco, disguised as a doctor, so he can come whenever he wants to visit them. The traditional ending of a comedy would set the maximum authority of the play, usually the father, accepting and blessing the marriage between the two lovers. Here the celebration of the union is symbolized by the husband (the old man) giving the key of the house (the wedding rings) to the “young couple”. Machiavelli clearly used the scheme of the comedy but changed its content. At first glance it seems Machiavelli wanted to parody the structure of the comedy, but further analysis demonstrates that this text recommends to Lorenzo de Medici (a young ambitious prince) who wanted to take over Florence, not to change the appearance of the city’s institutions, but just to change them from the inside. Looking at it through this political lens, the character of the play acquires a new meaning: Lucrezia symbolizes Florence, Nicia is the old government, while Callimaco is the young prince who wants to rule Florence. Machiavelli argues that if Lorenzo De Medici wants to lead the town without provoking trouble, he should give the impression of not changing the institutions, while behind the appearance he can do what he wants. Machiavelli uses the comedy to present his philosophical vision about politics, but why? He has already published the famous treatise *Il Principe*, which presents his thoughts about the matter. But the text remained unnoticed. Machiavelli therefore was afraid to linger in anonymity, without recognition for his services. So he decided to present his thinking under the cover of a comedy, a popular medium, in order to reach a broader audience, and especially the rulers. However, Machiavelli didn’t challenge the concept of drama, he merely used theatre (and comedy) for his purpose, while Pirandello had another plan. In fact he gives the impression of presenting traditional dramas but behind the appearance of the “well done play” he attacks the foundation of it. If we consider one of his most known plays, *Six Characters Looking for a Director* (*Sei personaggi in cerca di un autore*, 1921), the story that the six characters are “telling”¹¹ is a drama of incest, but the focus is not directed to the tragedy of incest (that is repeated every night) but rather to the surprise of these characters popping up during a rehearsal and to the confrontation between “actors” (real persons) and “characters” (fictional persons). Similarly, in the plays *Enrico IV* and in *Berretto a Sonagli*, the stories sustaining the plays describe love affairs, themes of adultery, etc. Pirandello succeeds in using these themes, familiar to and accepted by the theatre goers of his time, to introduce new concepts and to

11 During a rehearsal, six characters appear and interrupt the work. The actors and the director are puzzled by the appearance of these creatures who request someone who could stage their story.

challenge the threshold between illusion and truth, between madness and normality, between theatre and reality. But as a support for his project, Pirandello keeps the attention of the audience with the subterfuge of a conventional plot, typical of his epoch. By doing so he develops two parallel narratives: one related to the “bourgeois” plot (that justifies the theatrical show), and one related to his plan (the relativity of the world, of human identity). Sometimes the two narratives are clearly divided, as in *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, and sometimes they are more intertwined, like in *Enrico IV* (1921), where it starts as a classical drama, then suddenly the philosophical plan is unveiled and Pirandello, through the mouth of the main character, presents his ideas about pretence and authenticity. However, at the very end, a “coup de theatre” surprises the audience again and the story somehow falls back into the first dimension (the traditional drama), confusing the parameters he placed previously.

The play *So it is* (*Così è*, 1917), is a clear manifesto of the impossibility to grasp reality; the play starts as mere gossip about the “maniacal” jealousy of a husband but Pirandello, playing with the convention of a “mad” person, introduces an ending that is disturbing for the audience: there is no resolution (truth), for it depends on the way you want to perceive it.

The life of a peaceful town is disturbed by the arrival of a new employee, Mr. Ponza and his mother-in-law, Mme Frola, living in two different houses. There are rumours that his wife arrived as well, though nobody has seen her. So they become the topic of gossip that depicts Mr Ponza as a monster preventing the mother-in-law to meet her daughter because he keeps her locked at home. The superior of Mr Ponza, Agazzi, wants to clarify the matter, which amuses his own brother-in-law greatly, for Laudisi affirms the impossibility of knowing others, and more generally, “the truth”.

Mme Frola is then interrogated about the family and she accuses her son-in-law of exaggerated possessiveness. Mr Ponza is questioned as well and he says that his mother-in-law has gone mad. He explains that she became crazy after the death of her daughter Lina, who was his first wife, and she convinced herself that Giulia, his second wife, is in reality her daughter, who is still alive. This is why he and his wife had to take such measures that arouse suspicions among the inhabitants of the town.

Shocked by the revelation, the people present are nevertheless reassured by Ponza's words. Subsequently Mme Frola comes back and, having understood that she is being treated as a crazy person, she throws the same accusation back at her son-in-law: he is crazy, at least in considering Giulia as his second wife. She

states that after a long absence of the wife in a clinic, he couldn't recognize her and he wouldn't have accepted her unless they organized a second marriage presenting her as a second woman. Everybody is amazed, except Laudisi who bursts into laughter. The inquiry to determine the truth is in reality the motive for Laudisi to unveil the meaning of this play: he contests the belief given to the "facts" and he claims equal reality for the "ghost" of subjective construction, asserting therefore the impossibility to solve this case. However, Agazzi wants to elucidate it and he organizes a reunion between mother-in-law and son-in-law. This generates extremely violent scenes where Mr Ponza confronts the mother-in-law while screaming to her face the "truth". Afterwards he excuses his behaviour explaining that it is necessary that he "plays" the madman in order to keep Mme Frola's illusion intact. In the last act, the wife is interrogated, the only one who can at last elucidate the situation by revealing the truth. The woman, with her face covered, affirms to be at the same time the daughter of Mme Frola and the second wife of Mr Ponza: "I am she whom you believe me to be".

Theatre is often regarded as a mirror of society, something that reproduces events from everyday life. This approach subordinates the theatrical event to reality: theatre is at the service of reality. It doesn't deny its moral importance or social impact but it confines it to being just one phenomenon on a larger horizon. It maintains a hierarchy: theatre at the service of truth. Pirandello's achievement is to have shattered this vision. For him there is not one "truth" or "main" reality with the echoes below it; for all these realities are "truth" and therefore on the same level. This implies that theatre, as a dimension of reality, is as important and as valuable as reality. The experience of a performance is therefore as significant and as real as what happens in the streets.

At this point we need to question the status of the stage since it is considered to be the unique space where theatre event meets the world, thus the stage is the space that legitimizes the performance as such and differentiates it from reality. The spectators come with the clear expectation to see a performance and therefore are anticipating it and the presence of the stage fulfils this request, even before the performance has started, for whatever is presented in that space it will be perceived as performance and therefore as fictional. Pirandello subtly questions the status of the stage as the only place where theatre (place of fiction, roles) exists. He uses the assumption that on stage whatever happens is fictional (although he insists on the "aliveness" of the fictional characters), but actually he questions the supremacy of the stage as the only place for "the theatrical fiction". Here lies the destabilizing idea: if there is no division between the stage and the

world, does this imply that what happens on stage is real or that what happens in reality is fictional? Does Pirandello provide an answer to this confusing question? On the one hand Pirandello uses the theatrical event to point out the theatricality of everyday life, and on the other hand, he uses theatre to show the “reality” of fiction. This ambiguity leads to confusion, for Pirandello blends two different ideas: theatre as a place where real emotions are lived and humans perform roles in their everyday life (or reality). Pirandello complicates this debate even more by adding a third aspect: the question of madness¹², which, as I described in the above-mentioned play, *Così è*, situates itself as a bridge between “reality” (or let us say: “normality”) and theatricality.

Nowadays Pirandello is often quoted, whenever there is a juxtaposition of reality with fiction. It is true that these two aspects in his work are contrasting and blending but it is not possible to reduce the “Pirandellian” to just that. For instance the play *The Art of Comedy* (*L'arte della commedia*, 1964), by the Italian playwright Eduardo de Filippo presents a situation where reality and fiction are blurred, but it cannot be related to Pirandello's work. In this play the leader of a theatre company is begging a newly arrived prefect to support his company financially. The prefect acknowledges the pleasure that a theatre performance can bring but has doubts about its necessity for society and claims that actors are deficient copies of reality. The theatre leader then challenges the prefect to tell fictional characters from real persons. Later in the afternoon, while the prefect is expecting the visits of important local persons (still unknown to him), he desperately tries to find out if the persons entering his office are “true” or “pretending”. The play reaches its paroxysm when suddenly one person claims to die, and the prefect is hesitant whether to help or not. Even though the play subtly confuses the division and places the audience in the same position as the prefect, trying to guess if the person who has just arrived is “real” or an actor of the company; it nevertheless maintains the division between reality and theatre, for it makes theatre a tool to understand reality. The theatre company asserts that if something happens on stage, it means that it is happening in reality. But then, in this case, theatre is “at the service” of reality. Probably it is one of the best tools to understand, explore, or even experiment with reality. But reality is there, as a “truth”, as the final resolution of the drama, as the goal to seek and reach. Pirandello didn't want to limit himself to that simplistic conception of theatre.

12 Note that, towards the end of her life, Pirandello's wife spent many years in a mental clinic.

Naked Masks: *fragmenting the self*

“There is somebody who is living my life and I know nothing about him” remarked Pirandello before he died.

Convention generally opposes theatre to life as illusion to reality, but Pirandello reverses this assumption of theatre versus reality and fiction versus truth. For him humans, in order to stay alive, have to perform a role in society. A person has to adapt to what it is asked of her/him “to be”. By doing so, she/he accepts the hypocrisy of wearing a mask and not only one mask, but many masks. In fact, according to Pirandello, a person could not be reduced to only one identity. This is the first trauma, the attempt to squeeze oneself into one dimension assumed as a whole, as logically coherent. Pirandello points out that we have many facets: for him, the way one relates to their mother is different from the way one relates to their daughter, their wife or their colleagues. These relations can even be contradictory but all of them are true. One person considers the uniqueness of another for what they present of themselves to him or her. In all situations the presence of another person places one into a role, obliging one to wear a mask. The mask, because of its rigid nature, is a fixed form that cannot change, then again, life is made of movement and is constantly in transformation. Using the metaphor of the mask, it emphasizes the tension between the attempt to block the movement (in a defined identity and therefore reduced) and its natural impulse to change (the totality of a person with all the potential of being). It is then impossible to present oneself “naked”, but always only under the cover of a mask.

Richard Weihe in his book, *The Paradox of the Mask*, references the short story *The Metamorphosis* by Kafka, to explain the ambiguous situation of someone wearing a mask. Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of Kafka’s short story, wakes up transformed into an insect. He still sees the world with his own eyes, with his own perception and experiences of Gregor Samsa, but the others, his family, don’t see him as Gregor Samsa anymore. First they stop talking about him using his name, instead they simply use the third person: he. And later they use “one”, replacing “he” with it. Gregor Samsa is not a human being anymore to the others, only a living object. A double position is superimposed: Gregor Samsa sees the world through his own eyes and at the same time perceives the world as a monstrous insect. He is aware that he is “trapped” in an insect. However, others perceive him only as an insect and not as Gregor Samsa transformed into an insect. Similarly, someone wearing a mask sees the world through their own eyes (under the mask) and at the same time perceives the world with the face of

the mask, while others see them only as someone with that particular face. The person is then having a double level of perception.

Pirandello uncovers the dramatic tension inside each human that resides in being categorized, by being subjected to a predetermined “casting” (the mask that the situation places on us) and the drive to escape from it (which is impossible to fulfil). “There is somebody who is living my life and I know nothing about him”. This person is the mask that everybody sees and it defines them in the eyes of others. This matter haunts his work constantly. In his novel *The Late Mattia Pascal* (*Il Fu Mattia Pascal*, 1904) a man fakes his own death and flees his native village. He realizes that he never fulfilled his true dream, so he changes his identity trying to reach a more profound truth about himself. But after various fruitless experiences he comes back to his village.

Pirandello, with his ironic title, *Naked Masks* (*Maschere Nude*)¹³, underlines this tragic condition of humans: we are striving to break away from the mask but at the same time it is impossible to live without it. Humanity, from this point of view, is irreversibly destined to lie in “theatricality”.

Heiner Muller, fifty years later reprocesses this thought in his play *Quartet*:

What? Are we still performing?

Performing? And what else could we do?

The wisdom therefore consists of both accepting this destiny and coping with the existence of several persons in one.

Similarly in the play *Cap and Bells* (*Il Beretto a Sonagli* 1916), the protagonist explains that there are three “strings” maneuvering in us: the serious one, the civil one, and the crazy one. The civil string moderates our behaviour; otherwise we would devour each other. The serious string permits us to understand an entangled situation. And the crazy one lets everything explode. It is a skill to pull the right string at the right moment.

Often Pirandello’s theatre is judged cerebral and emotionless, devoted to endless ruminations about identity. This approach to Pirandello’s theatre would underline the dichotomized vision of emotion versus intellect (typical of melodramatic theatre), which considers theatre as an arena to display passion, where humans are represented as embodied emotions. Pirandello instead used the theatre of his time, in fact the melodrama, which can be easily considered as a

13 Pirandello named all his literary production: *Naked Masks* (*Maschere Nude*).

form of theatre emphasizing emotions without philosophical implications, exactly to convey philosophical ideas about humanity (Gilman, 1999, 160). And this is the brilliance of Pirandello: he uses the limitation of a theatre style to convey what lacks in it.

The Mountain Giants: the failure of poetry

His last and unfinished play, *The Mountain Giants* (*I Giganti della montagna*, 1933), is Pirandello's dreamlike work, which can be considered a theatrical testament to his vision of Art and especially of Poetry in the modern world.

The play portrays a traveling theatre company that arrives in a villa called "Villa della Scalogna" (the house of misfortune). In this house live some strange characters that have left society and among them there is Cotrone, a charismatic magician-like figure. The two communities are facing each other: the theatre makers, the ones that create images (giving their bodies over to the "ghosts" of a poet) and the strange people of the villa that live in their own visions (giving their bodies to their own ghosts). As in *Six Characters Looking for a Director*, where "real" actors are meeting "fictional" characters, Pirandello displays two worlds that are meeting, but avoids creating a conflict. Otherwise he would fall back into the traditional drama with opposition and resolution. These two realities are facing each other, they are debating and they coexist. They are even the projections of each other: Cotrone in fact states that the two groups are alike, and they share the same "world".

The theatre company is lead by Ilse and it performs only one play, *The Fable of the Transformed Son* (*La Favola del figlio cambiato*)¹⁴, a tragedy that a young poet wrote for Ilse. Unfortunately the show has been unsuccessful and the company has lost most of the cast. Cotrone proposes to Ilse and her company to remain in the villa, which has the astonishing power to materialize dreams. Here, as Cotrone says, the play will live in eternity. Ilse and the actors, in the following act, experience the fabulous power of the villa and magically, the play is performed; in fact dummies are coming alive and utter the lines of the missing actors. But for Ilse this is not enough, she wants the play to be alive among humans. Even though both characters, Ilse and Cotrone consider art as a fundamental activity, they have opposite aspirations; Ilse considers art as a dialogue with society, while Cotrone regards art as a product detached from the world. In order to

14 Another play written by Pirandello in 1932. By introducing an earlier play, Pirandello develops an ironical metadiscourse about his own work.

satisfy Ilse's request, Cotrone proposes to present the play to the giants of the mountain, a society known for their power and dominating nature. The last and missing act¹⁵ tells that the play is not performed in front of the giants, only their servants. During the performance they get furious and kill Ilse.

Pirandello, through the confrontation between Ilse and Cotrone, wonders whom art is for. Is it possible to consider an artistic work alive (or with resonance) if nobody sees it? Does art need to be exposed¹⁶? In 1930 Pirandello wrote in a letter: *The Mountain Giants* is the triumph of fantasy! The triumph of poetry, but at the same time, it is also the tragedy of poetry in this brutal modern world. Giorgio Strehler in his adaptations (1947, 1966, 1993) considered the play as a metaphorical journey allowing to surpass the narrow limitations of "credibility", natural behaviour, and allowing to enter an ethereal dimension where gestures and actions are dilated into some kind of eternity. The subject of his distrust is not poetry, neither theatre, but society that is deaf to spiritual needs and merely devoted to creating an earthly paradise through the miracle of technology. For Strehler the drama of Ilse is the drama of poetry that cannot find its place in society. The villa then becomes the last refuge where it can find its home, among candid creatures thirsty for the infinite. But Ilse refuses this haven, she wants to meet the giants, she wants a word of comprehension. Andrea Bisicchia, in his research dedicated to Pirandello, considers the last desperate action that Ilse undertakes to be a message of faith in humanity. Despite the feeling of distress that permeates the play, in this last action he sees a sign of forgiveness (Bisicchia, 2007, 190).

Many critics and theatre directors have linked the mountain giants in the play to the fascist regime. These powerful figures that rule nature are described by Cotrone as having replaced poetry by strength and mystery by convenience. Fascism, which stressed the subordination of individual interest for the good of the nation, overemphasized the "progress" of the Italian society and Mussolini put a great effort into achieving "the Great Projects" which meant the considerable domestication of natural areas¹⁷.

15 The night before his death, Pirandello informed his son that finally he had an idea for the last act. He summarized it to his son and told him that he would write it the next morning, but he never woke up.

16 This question of exhibiting/exposing art is necessarily related to the issue of purity and contamination: to what extent is a piece of art destroyed by the spectator's observation? Art that seeks ideal purity must probably remain un-exhibited, locked in a precious room, because the very act of exhibiting it contains obscenity: bringing to the scene what should stay out of it (ob-). However, this would lead to another domain of research.

17 "Benedetto Croce saw [the fascist regime] as the emergence of that other Italy, in which egoism

The process: embodying silence and infinity

I found it legitimate to combine my personal interest in mask theatre with the work of Pirandello. Although Pirandello did not write plays in order to be performed with masks, such as *commedia dell'arte* masks or “expressive masks”, he infuses his entire work with the concept of “wearing masks”. Therefore I decided to integrate masks into this project, but not just as props appearing in one scene, as Strehler did, along with many others, but rather as the protagonists, present all the time. The whole play would use masks and deal with their use. However, there are many sorts of masks and each type carries a specific theatrical language. Pirandello uses the term “mask” as a metaphor, an abstract sign, but here the materiality of the mask is important, because it already sends out signals. For instance, the half mask¹⁸, which is the typical mask of *commedia dell'arte*, is a mask that pushes the actor to rely on strong energy, acting with almost bestial force. Another example is the larval mask¹⁹ that, with its plain form, obliges the actor to discover simplicity and precision. Or there are the expressive masks²⁰, which ask for more complex acting. Of course, other masks unfold different characteristics.

I resolved to use the expressive masks. These masks are very demanding because the subtlety of a character must be shown without relying on words; everything must be told through the use of the body. This requires an accurate technique of body articulation, not only for conveying the various aspects of the character’s psychology, but also in order to reach the level of giving the illusion that the mask is alive, and even though it is a fixed form, it expresses different emotions.

I didn’t consider the impossibility of using voices as an obstacle, something that would undermine the project, but rather as the true challenge of this research: how to superimpose several layers of narratives on each other and travel

displaced civic virtue, rhetoric dislodged poetry and truth, and the pretentious gesture replaced authentic action.” Benedetto Croce, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

18 Half mask: a mask covering only half of the face and leaving the mouth free, allowing the actor to speak.

19 Larval mask: a big white mask covering the whole face and based on simple shapes, in between a larva and a human face. This type of mask has been developed by Jacques Lecoq after having seen the masks of the Basel carnival in Switzerland.

20 Expressive masks: full masks covering the whole face and thus impeding the actor’s use of voice that would have a clear human expression. This doesn’t mean that the mask has a clear visible emotion (happy, sad, fearful) but rather communicates generic information about the personality: high status or low status, timid, heroic, earthy, lyrical etc.

from one level to another without relying on words but just by using the actors' body?

Moreover, the history of silence in Western theatre is a history of resistance, because it has been the result of a confrontation with censorship and the authorities. According to Marjaana Kurkinen, the spread of forms of speechless theatre in Europe during the 1930s is tied to the raise of totalitarianism (Kurkinen, 2000, 17). As if the only way to respond to the rhetoric language of such tyranny would be to escape from the use of words, showing distrust in the possibility of telling the truth with speech and to take refuge in the beauty of the gesture, which I interpreted as the visible and audible expression of the failure of poetry.²¹

Therefore my project aimed to explore the possibility to express a story and to change space or dimension without using words. Mime is terribly powerful in its capacity to stimulate the imagination of the audience. A huge space is open on the stage because the actor is not using words. Speech, which is one of the strongest means of communication²² and differentiates humans from animals, is negated. This generates a sense of uneasiness or even of uncanny feelings and at the same time fascination because the gap opened is left to the spectators who compensate by projecting their own words. Therefore, through the silence of the actor and the "filling of the silence" by the audience, a dialogue is established which composes the narrative of the play; the audience is writing the story.

Thus a "silent" gesture is a double gesture: it is the magical act of creating a silent dialogue with the audience and the political act of resistance. Unfortunately this type of performance is generally limited to only one level of narration. The challenge of this show was to relate to Pirandello's work, superimpose several layers of narratives and then travel from one level to another. I wanted to create the level of "reality" where characters evolve (the basic situation), and the inner space of the protagonist, the division of the self, the level of the play within the play, and the idea that imagination are as real as reality.

21 It is possible to note here a "romantic" heritage from my training in physical theatre. Before undertaking this doctoral research, somehow I idealized the "body" and I conceived of the theatre event as a glorification of the body through physical actions. Murray and Keefe in their book *Physical Theatres*, deal with this concept: "In theatre forms which privilege the performer's body, and in dance, the language of "presence" can become blurred with beliefs that there is something immutably and timelessly authentic about bodies and movement in a way that is less true for language and the spoken word." (Murray and Keefe, 2007, 21). This research didn't agree with my initial idea and demonstrated that the question is more complex.

22 Another important "tool" for interaction is the facial expression which in this project has been removed as well.

Pirandello's theatre is mainly wordy; actions are few, most of his plays circle around verbal confrontations of world visions. They are philosophical inquiries about human existence. I decided then to push this challenge and present this theatre, but silently, to transpose Pirandello's concepts to visual theatre.

The process was deeply marked by a didactic phase; in fact the use of masks and the manipulation of puppets require the mastering of a specific, demanding technique. In order to reach the level of "magic" where the mask comes alive and the puppet is "breathing", the actor needs to learn new skills that often oblige the actor to change their approach to acting. I will not dwell on the specific pedagogy of mask acting and puppet manipulation learnt during the process. I can briefly say that before we started working on the show (in Summer 2009), I organized four workshops (during Fall and Winter 2008) with the actors. The first workshop consisted of making the masks: each actor made their own mask. The second workshop focused on mask acting, where I presented some basic aspects of the Lecoq pedagogy that were applied to mask acting. The third workshop focused on puppet manipulation. For this workshop I invited the British puppet manipulator Rene Backer and the last workshop explored the bridges between dance, mask acting and music. Although a lot of time was dedicated to master mask acting and puppet manipulation technique, I reserved special time for exploring themes that are central to Pirandello's work, through the masked characters and with the puppets, which, as I explained at the beginning of the chapter, meant to challenge my own mask training. Wearing a mask or manipulating a puppet obliges the actor to accept a condition of absence. Masks and puppets exist "partially", their essence is incompleteness: a puppet lacks motion and a mask breathes through what it denies. They are both anchored to the theatrical being thanks to the human body (which made itself absent). Their identities are thus based on otherness. The mask, for instance, becomes the "otherness"²³ breathing kaleidoscopic realities into its wearer. The mask or puppet allows the acceptance of the conversion from the outside reality (shared with others) to the inner reality. Brunella Eruli, in her article *Masque, Acteur, Marionnettes, object "transitionnels"*, quoting D.W. Winnicott²⁴, proposes

23 In the sense that something that stands outside the subject, that is alien to her/him. (It can also be linked to sociology and be understood as different from a norm, or identity.)

24 "D.W. Winnicott in *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena*, 1953, calls a material object having a particular value for infants "transitional". This object allows the child to endure the transition from relating to the mother to forming a relationship to objects. This process, however, is not limited to childhood. Between subjective and objective, this transitional object belongs to the domain of illusion. This middle area of experience that doesn't have to be necessarily linked to

to consider these artefacts as transitional objects permitting the audience to observe in reality its own “internal theatre”. This is why, concludes Brunella Eruli, there are no privileged entities, and it is not necessary for the actor to expose his or her flesh to touch the unfathomable emotional zones of the watcher. Moreover Pirandello questions the possibility of really embodying a character: can an actor become someone else? Since this “otherness” is made of countless particles that escape from any rationalization and that a viewer can only grasp a portion of, a person is then not “whole” or unique, but rather infinite. Instead of the actor becoming the character and therefore having an active “domination” over it (would it be possible to “dominate” the infinite?), the actor must “withdraw” themselves and become the screen onto which the character (with its imperfect infinity and contradictions) can be projected. The actor should position her/himself not in the work of active presence but rather in the absence. I realized that working on Pirandello’s play, and especially trying to make a mask/puppet version of it, was extremely challenging. For it is one thing to formulate verbally philosophical concepts about identity, but it is another to transpose them visually. However I was not discouraged, on the contrary, I was extremely thrilled with the idea of bringing my mask acting knowledge to a liminal point, to expose it to concepts that I would have never dared or imagined to do, to enter a territory that was unknown to me. So during these workshops I tried to examine the fragmentation of identity and reality as Pirandello suggests, to explore the actor meeting her/his fictional masked character, and also to explore the masked character meeting her/his own puppet version (that we called alter ego). And especially, since the play within the play is the major subject of my research; I investigated how it was possible to oscillate among the reality of the stage (where masked characters are evolving), the inner reality of Ilse (the puppet performance directed by Ilse, the protagonist of our show) and the materialization of dreams (masked characters meeting their own alter ego).

I am not reporting everything about the work done during these workshops, I limit it to sharing some reflections that emerged during these explorations. The reader might be surprised by the length of some exercise or process descriptions. I decided to involve these descriptions at the risk of getting too far away

external reality nor to the internal reality that constitutes the child’s most important experience. It will prolong itself in the lifetime in the strong experience belonging to the sphere of arts, religion, imaginative life, or scientific research.” (Eruli, 1999, 213).

from the main subject, because they testify to the development of a thought: how from the observation of the interaction between masks and puppets I slowly developed a tool to understand and analyse the concept of the play within the play. In the following pages I describe two exercises: one related to mask acting, the other involving puppets. These exercises lead me to a reflection on the play within the play that is discussed in sections *The invisible observer* and *The double spectator*.

Mask acting workshop

During the mask acting workshop, some themes were taken from Pirandello's play and the participating actors improvised around those themes. I noticed that in the improvisations there was the temptation to provide explanations, justifications to the actions accomplished by the actors. One must be careful because explanations or justifications can "close" the play and create a universe that is sealed, existing only on the level of the characters. While Pirandello's text remains open, the conflicts are left messy. And exactly because it remains open, the play acquires a metaphorical dimension: the defeat of poetry in the modern world. Otherwise it would become the existential drama of Ilse. If the servants of the giants kill Ilse because she has been malevolent towards them (thereby justifying the servants' action) this reduces the play to a problem between Ilse and the servants. But if the barbarian act happens spontaneously, it opens another dimension and this act, which seems gratuitous, offers an extra reading of the text, which is metaphorical and more fitting. I realized that perhaps Pirandello wanted to trap the crushing desire to justify actions. Maybe actions happen not because of a terrible secret that the protagonist carries within her/himself, but simply because a mask is placed on her/his face. I tried the following two situations where masks are shifting from one person to another one and where a character enters into conflict with her/his own costume.

In the first situation three characters were running after each other, in a kind of slapstick setting, where a representative of the established order, which in our show was called Authority, is chasing Ilse and a soldier tries to follow them. Then a gong sounds, they freeze and manipulators²⁵ enter the stage to take the masks off the actors and put them on others: the mask of Authority on Ilse's

25 With the word "manipulator" I refer to a performer whose role is to manipulate or move a puppet, an object or another actor, which is not meant to be noticed, in the sense that her/his presence is "invisible". The manipulator's action can have an impact: the manipulation of an object, puppet, etc., but not her/his physical presence.

body²⁶, Ilse's mask on the soldier's body and the soldier's mask on Authority's body. Then the gong sounds again and the situation continues. After a moment the characters realize that something is wrong, that they have a different mask on. So they begin to chase each other again, but in a new configuration, however, whoever is wearing the Authority mask always has the higher status (no matter on which body and with which dress) and whoever is wearing Ilse's mask is always chased. This was a clear but also funny and almost didactic example of illustrating the concept of the situation defining the identity. A similar case was done with costumes: when a costume slipped away, the character that wore that costume became invisible to the other characters. In the case of Authority, the soldiers took orders from the costumes and not from him. The costume, manipulated as a puppet, started to have its own life and slipped away from the body of Authority, at which moment Authority realizes that the soldiers are cheering for the costume and obeying the costume and not him. Authority then tries to get the costume back, but the costume has other ideas. Authority subsequently submits himself to the will of the costume. I wrote in my notebook:

"It is not about telling simply a story, but to unlock the entrance, the thresholds which allow to apprehend the echoes, the vibrations of different magnitudes of life. Life, or reality, is not only what our senses are perceiving, but is also composed by several strata superimposed going from infinitesimal to infinite. Our bodies, our lives are perforated by other dimensions. I realize while working on Pirandello's play that all the amusement raised by the theatre within the theatre, the entrance and exit of a character in the second story (the inside play) which joins the first story (the main play) are manifestations (maybe unconscious) of this intuition. The performance inside inscribed on a frame (the main story) can probably introduce factors that further the intrigue of the main plot and/or allow to reflect on the very nature of theatre but certainly it allows to open one of those uncanny gates of the soul (or of the unconscious) that make us amazed at the feeling of the mystery (or of life) unveiled in front of our eyes (or unveiled in our selves). This aspect of the play within the play operates rationally in the construction

26 I use the term "body" and not actor in order to underline the fact that when an actor is wearing a mask he or she has to adapt his or her body to the features of the mask. Therefore the actor's body is transformed and becomes "one" with the mask. When the actor wears another mask he or she has to modify his or her body and adapt to the new mask.

of the drama by captivating the mind by sinking it in the abyss of the illusion reflecting another illusion, but it also triggers the unconscious by switching on a kaleidoscope of infinitesimal mass, a vibration of life standing outside our senses. This mystery, this threshold is probably the pillar supporting *Pirandello Project*.”

(December 2008)

Of course this note was only an intuition that came from the workshop. It was a reflection based on the practical work on mask acting, but as I will examine more theoretically in the following chapters, it contains the core that will determine my entire research. In fact after this first project, I decided to abandon the research on mask to focus solely on the co-presence of realities, and how it is displayed on stage.

Puppets and imagination: showing and not showing

During the puppet workshop²⁷ we decided, together with the actors, to investigate puppets and sexuality. After some discussions we chose to explore prostitution and paedophilia. So three puppets were chosen: a man, a woman and a child, and a simple scenario was established: the man abuses the woman, then the woman calls the man and shows him the child and helps him abuse the child. Everything was exposed, shown. The little performance felt clumsy and very close to ridiculous. I thought: how about telling the same story without showing anything? Letting the audience imagine the whole violence?

I established a new scenario: a woman is waiting with a child. The man arrives and looks at both of them. He takes the woman and leaves with her. The child remains alone on the stage. Afterwards, the man comes back with the woman. He looks at the child, then at the woman. The woman nods, the man takes the child and exits. The tragedy is then shown not through the actions (which are happening outside) but in the gaze of the one remaining on the stage. The one

27 The workshop with puppets illustrated clearly the paradox of actors described by Diderot: a puppet (a stick) doesn't have emotions, but it can show them. This exploration with the object culminated in the issue of the emotion, but not so much about how to show the emotion, rather where to place the emotion. The challenge of knowing how to place the emotion, the action, the movement outside oneself, beyond the fingers, inside the manipulated object, obliges the actor (the manipulator) to find calm and to know how to transmit meanings with precision. By manipulating puppets, the actor has to make everything clear, the actor must simplify what the character (the puppet) has to do. And moreover the puppet becomes a puppet (instead of being a doll) when it communicates with the audience by having clear relations and directions.

left, who is not the victim but is witnessing the abuse, is the one that connects the tragedy with the audience²⁸.

This note struck me and put me into a doubt; here it may express the fact that not showing raises the interest, for the audience can imagine what is not seen and empathize with the observer who lets the emotions be projected. In my Master's research all the interest came from the ability of the actor to transform the space. To express what is invisible, inside him, in other words to show what is concealed, hidden. How can I reconcile the two, showing and not showing? In the exercise the tension lies in this coexistence of the seen (the witness on the stage) and the unseen (the sexual abuse). It is similar to the fascination for the broken puppet; unfinished puppets, without an arm, or a leg, with holes, made from various pieces allowing the audience to fill in the "gaps" (the parts that are missing), with their own imagination. If the puppet is taken (manipulated) as broken then the audience sees that the puppet has some missing parts, but if the puppet is used as complete, despite the missing parts, then the audience fixes the holes in their head, in exactly the same way as with the unseen scenes which are "fixed" by the spectators. This relates to our concern: how to present imagination? As Pirandello wrote, *The Mountain Giants* is the triumph of fantasy. One of his key questions is the presence of Poetry in society. I believe Pirandello didn't refer to Poetry in the sense of the literary production of verse but he used the word Poetry as an esthetical (or literary) illustration of a broader concept: the imagination. Naturally Imagination is so vast that everything could be considered as imagination: is it possible to relate to other people without imagination? Does memory exist without imagination? We can even wonder if imagination is mainly a human activity; does nature have the ability to imagine? Is it able to create pictures of itself? Does a bacterium wish to be somewhere else? Something else? It is such a loose concept and, paradoxically, so related to human beings that it is often neglected. Poetry, instead, carries values that provide clear settings. This is why, I think, Pirandello preferred to use the word poetry; as he wrote in a letter, this play is the triumph of fantasy, of poetry and at the same time the failure of poetry ("*il fallimento della poesia*"), as Cotrone says at the end of the first act (Pirandello, 1994, 1248). Through the mouth of Cotrone, Pirandello refers to the human ability to imagine, to create fiction, dreams. But then another question is raised, which concerns the theatrical

28 This last remark challenges the postulate that action is the core of theatre. In fact actors are summoned to act. This apparent contradiction is examined in the next chapter.

transposition of it: how to represent imagination? How would it be possible to materialize it without diminishing it? Imagination indicates the ability to overcome boundaries and obstacles. It surpasses itself since the new seed lies in its result, which will then foster the next barrier and so it is endlessly destined to reach infinity. Is it possible to show it? Is it possible to embody it? Is it better not to show it? Is there a danger of deceiving the expectation raised in the head of the spectators? Which of the two previous options would be better to use? To hide it or to show it?

Pirandello used a clever trick to present the element of fantasy by showing and not showing, as if he had brought together the two exercises previously described. The third act of *The Mountain Giants* is located in a room called “the arsenal of apparitions” (“L’arsenale della apparizioni”). It is a room in the villa filled with dummies, old furniture and big, damaged toys. The act seems to be the continuation of the previous situation, time has passed, it is night, but it seems that there has been continuity to the action. The actors of the company meet again, but there is something strange in their behaviour: one is convinced that they have a needle in their throat, one is wearing the costume of another actor, and another one is hearing a strange melody. Then one of them goes off-stage, and goes back to his room. The two remaining on stage are wondering what is happening. The first one comes back, and joyfully announces that he has understood what is happening; they are not there, they are not themselves, their body is in the other room, sleeping, they are simply witnessing the materialization of their dreams. The two others go out and come back, amazed that they could see themselves in the other room. They are here and there, watching/witnessing the action and participating in it. They become conscious, aware of the precise moment when they extrapolated themselves from the reality of the world, from the chaos of their life. At that moment they watch it, analyse it and can change it. Pirandello starts the scene as “normal” but in the middle we realize that the scene is “reversed”; we are not watching the characters’ bodies but their souls (or the dream of the sleeping characters). The uncanny feeling of the beginning of the scene is then explained and accepted as the materialization of the “dreams”²⁹. The audience has been tricked and Pirandello relies on the imagination of the audience to shift the perception of the scene (from “normal” to dream) to point out the constituents of imagination. At that precise moment

29 This moment of “reversing” the scene and allowing the characters to see themselves is discussed again in the next chapter.

the dummies start being alive and interact with the souls of the characters. Therefore it is by “forcing” the audience to use their imagination that Pirandello succeeds in bringing it onto the stage. But Pirandello pushes the confusion between these two realities, “normality” and dream, even further, by finishing the act as if it went back to “normal” reality, and everybody behaves as if it is not their soul (the materialization of the dream) talking, but their body. (At no time is it noted that the bodies are waking up, therefore we should think that they are still sleeping and it is only their soul finishing the act). Ilse, her husband and Cotrone are joining the group and it is not clear if it is the soul of Ilse or the whole body of Ilse participating in the final dialogue. After having clearly shown the difference between dream and reality in order to demonstrate that dreams have their reality, Pirandello erases the difference and silently suggests that reality and dreams are on the same level, happening simultaneously.

The invisible observer

Before I continue and present the last phase of this project, *Creating the show*, I would like to open a discussion on the concept of witnessing (or the invisible observer). This theoretical excursus is the result of the practical work (which happened during the workshops) and therefore I find it important to place it here, between the process and the making of the show. This excursus, even if it does not have a radical impact on the final outcome of the *Pirandello Project*, it does foster my doctoral research. In fact, many aspects of the second chapter have their roots in the following paragraphs.

In Bunraku, the Japanese puppet theatre style, behind each puppet there are three manipulators, who have the ability to make the audience forget their presence. To some extent they become invisible even though they are perfectly visible on the stage. In order to achieve such “magical” phenomenon they wear a black suit, and two of them are even wearing a black hood. The blackness of the suit deletes the puppeteers’ bodily presence and, doubtlessly, the fact of covering the face is crucial in rendering these manipulators unseen, since the face is the most expressive part of our body that usually captures the spectator’s whole attention. However, there is another Japanese theatre style, Noh theatre, which employs similar invisible assistance, but the manipulators are not wearing a black suit and do not have their face covered. Nevertheless they succeed in being invisible too by a strenuous effort in keeping their face totally emotionless (in order not to draw the attention of the audience on themselves) during the whole show.

Let's see the question from another angle: what would happen if a Bunraku manipulator suddenly started speaking? Let's imagine the following situation: the scene is being performed, and the manipulator executes his "invisible" performance. The puppet (in Bunraku) or the main actor (in a Noh play) has left and only the manipulator remains on stage. Suddenly he looks at the audience and starts speaking. What he says at that moment will become crucial, even more important than anything the main protagonist has done previously. His words will be taken as a comment of what has happened. Surprisingly, the attention does not go to the action performed by the "protagonist" but to what the manipulator says. There is a shift of importance. This could happen because the manipulator has withdrawn from the action for a moment. He became an invisible spectator, observing the situation and not interfering with it. If the "invisible spectator" interferes with the situation where the protagonist evolves, he places himself on the same level, participating in the same story and therefore necessitating that a relationship is established and giving again the importance to the action performed by the protagonist. But if the invisible spectator remains "outside", this creates then two kinds of realities: one where the protagonist is performing and another where the "invisible observer" is watching.

The double spectator

Let's return to the idea of two "realities": the one where the protagonist is performing and another one where the "invisible observer" is watching. A similar situation happens in *Hamlet*, when the prince organizes the inside performance. During the show, the characters: Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude and Polonius all become spectators. Except Claudius, who interferes with the inside performance. Hamlet however just observes and shares his opinion afterwards. A similar formula is used in the play *L'Illusion Comique* by Corneille (1635), where a father summons a magician to help him find his son who has left home ten years before (the frame story). The magician creates prodigious spectacles (the inside performance) and the father can see what has happened during these years. This creates the analogous situation to the one in *Hamlet* where the father and the magician are observing a performance or, more precisely, various fragments of it, tracing the life of the son. After each little performance, the two observers express their opinion and feelings and then they give their focus back to the scene and remain "invisible". Here as well, the most important text is not the son's words (in the inside play) but what the father says. The presence of observers provides continuity to the various fragments. The performance is regarded as

whole (with unity of space, action and time) because the space of the observers (the frame story) is continuous. Similarly in *Hamlet*, it doesn't matter that the inside play is interrupted abruptly (and we don't know how it ends), for the frame story keeps its continuity and Hamlet informs the audience about his conclusion. In both plays, *Hamlet* and *L'Illusion Comique*, the performance is "closed", meaning that there is a beginning, a middle and a conclusion, and both plays represent a whole. The presence of interrupted shows and fragmentary performances does not impede the configuration of the frame story as a whole. If we presented a special version of *L'Illusion Comique* where the father and the magician were removed and we focused only on the scenes of the son, the result would be fragmented and jumping purposelessly from one style to another with no clear intention. Even though the scenes of the son are funny and dynamic, while the moments between the father and the magician are totally lacking in action (nothing happens, only that the father expresses his feelings) they are worthless without the comments of the observer. This strategy of actor-performing confronted with actor-observing can be realized even by the same actor, without having two distinct actors and spaces. The same actor can shift their status from observer to performer and vice versa, and thus create a play within a play that they can comment on. Let us take the following situation: a professor is giving a lecture. She/he is so passionate about the topic that she/he "dives" into what she/he is describing and forgets that an audience is in front of her/him. There are two levels of reality: level A, the classroom, with the students. The other level is level B, the imaginary world. If the teacher's subject is history, maybe the topic of the class can be Napoleon and he is so passionate about it that while he describes the emperor's strategies, he becomes Napoleon. At that moment level A is erased, and the professor incarnates Napoleon. He can even enact a battle where he won. At this moment he is Napoleon and totally forgets about the students, and exposes his true dream of leadership. Then he stops and realizes that he is in a classroom, in front of students. He is ashamed of what he has done, and he is publicly humiliated because he was transported by his inner wish, and he knows that he will never be Napoleon, he is just a teacher in a forgotten school. He puts his jacket back on, silently sits down and mournfully opens the study book. Here level A is the frame story justifying the emergence of level B, the inside story which nourishes (deepens) the personality of the teacher (in level A). When the teacher goes back to level A (after his delirium), he observes what has happened. His gaze, his silence are expressive comments. The actor managed to shift his status (from performer to observer) and to shift

space by directing the gaze: from the level A, the reality of the classroom, the focus went outside the actor, onto the invisible field where Napoleon is fighting. The actor, like a puppeteer, manipulated the focus (level A), managed to place it away from himself (level B) and then to bring it back onto himself (level A) again to observe what has happened.

From these examples it is possible to form the idea that the presence of an observer grants continuity to the observed performance and thus a sense of wholeness. This last remark could then help us understand the dramatic construction of some contemporary plays, which seem to escape any logic of Aristotelian “wholeness”, but on the contrary, emphasize the fragmentary structure and the “collage” of styles.

The play *Hamletmachine* by Heiner Muller (1977) is considered the paradigm of postmodern drama: it abandons the linear plot and deconstructs the play as a whole entity. It presents four monologues, two by Hamlet and two by Ophelia and a short dialogue between the two characters. The monologues and the dialogue don't have an apparent logical connection. The first line of the play is: I was Hamlet. Through this simple sentence Heiner Muller manages to establish a superstructure holding his “fragmented” play. “I was Hamlet”, what does that mean? Is the actor embodying the dead soul of Hamlet? Or has he just performed the Shakespearian Hamlet and now the situation is after that performance in his dressing room? Or does it mean that the character of Hamlet, drawn into the ambivalence but still with the possibility of a choice is gone? In all cases, this sentence immediately establishes a strong link with the Shakespearian text. The play of Heiner Muller places itself inside the world of Shakespeare. It becomes an inside play, whose frame story stands outside the boundaries *Hamletmachine*. The actor directs the focus of the audience towards a ghost that is invisible but strongly present. The play of Hamlet is so well known that it doesn't need to be re-performed in order to create the frame story that would allow the inside story to be presented, it is enough to mention it. The invisible presence of Hamlet is then the observer supporting the fragmentary play. The play by Heiner Muller, even though it refuses the traditional wholeness as a drama, resonates with the “wholeness” while rejecting it. However, despite the attempt to draw parallels, a major shift needs to be pointed out: in the traditional drama with the play within the play, it is the frame story that gives space for the inside performance. The actor-observer directs the focus towards the inside stage, and it is the magician who is allowing the son to appear. In the case of *Hamletmachine* and other dramas using a similar scheme, a shift has occurred: it is the performers of the inside

play who are taking their place. The actor-performer, by observing, justifies the presence of the second story. He remains a distant god-like figure, not implicated in the events, who comments on the manifestations of the other humans. But here it is the son (of the inside play) who is marking his space, his stage. The observer is present through their absence, and the performer manifests his presence. Because the frame story has been called “I was Hamlet”, it is there without being there, the frame story doesn’t need to present a play as a whole, it can stay on the level of fragments, leaving the outside frame story with the task of configuring the wholeness. This task is fulfilled by the audience, who then become “double” spectators: the invisible observers of the frame story (summoned by the reference made on stage and justifying the fragmentary “inside” story) and the concrete audience of the performed show (enjoying the fragments)³⁰. These two levels of narratives, the frame story and the inside story find their paroxysm when they collimate and touch each other. This creates an oscillation between the actor-observer and the performer that deepens the story.

This long digression showed how slowly I departed from mere focus on the mask acting technique and puppet manipulation to a larger inquiry that would touch essential questions about the play within the play. In this part, commenting on the exercises, I presented two themes that are determining the future development of my research: the issue of unity/fragmentation and the concept of the play within the play as a larger device, not necessarily confined to a story told on the stage, but instead as a device for a story to emerge on the stage. These two themes are discussed partly in the next chapter and in Chapter 3, but more thoroughly in Chapter 4 where I examine Weber’s concept of *theatricality*.

30 It would even be possible to wonder if the spectator becomes a new author who is writing the script of the “invisible” frame story. In *Hamletmachine*, at one point, there is the stage direction to tear up the image of the author (meaning Heiner Müller). This could be interpreted as the death of the author, or maybe it is not his death but a replacement: the shift of it, from the stage to the audience. But this opens a new field that I leave for another research.

Creating the show: the Pirandello Project, On the Edge of Silence

I report here the final phase of the work when the show was finally created, in Summer 2009.

Colonizing the imagination

From among the various subjects present in Pirandello's text, I decided to focus particularly on the "failure of poetry". If I can define a situation that materializes this concept on the stage, it would then be easier to develop the conflict in which Ilse struggles. I asked myself what could annihilate individual creativity in our time.

The fact that individuals can express different opinions, behave in various manners and act according to their impulses is certainly valuable. However, it becomes exhausting if any type of relationship, like actions in the world, need to be negotiated, and redefined based on exclusive regulations valid only for that specific event, situation, relationship or necessity. This would lead to endless deliberation obstructing the fulfilment of any plan. Let's consider a situation at the supermarket, where the cashier is checking the groceries I want to purchase. All the items nowadays have a bar code, which makes the process quicker. But sometimes the bar code is missing or not working and the cashier cannot use the laser to "shoot" the price, and she/he has to type (or even search for) the price of the item. This obstruction slows down the line and creates annoyance and irritation among the other customers queuing after me. The situation needs to be solved. Sometimes it is enough just to type in the price printed on the item, but sometimes the price is missing, the cashier is urged to talk to me, an interaction is established, a dialogue starts. But of course this is neither practical, nor efficient. It delays the moment of reaching my objective. Therefore it is not worth it because it is not practical. This situation uncovers the characteristic that technology not only facilitates life, it also models behaviour (and therefore our expectations). Human thinking is therefore reshaped by the technological device: it is not the human using the apparatus but the human adapting to the apparatus³¹. Starting from the observation of this simple anecdote I furthered this notion of "practicality" which debauched the concept of standardization of

31 For further reading: Albert Borgmann, an American philosopher of technology who has developed the concept of "device paradigm" underlying the influence of technological devices reshaping our experience (and thus behavior and thinking) of reality.

life. The standardization of life doesn't happen violently, through a military force, as it may have happened during fascist times. Nowadays it is presented as an advantage, something that makes life easier, something that we long for. This turns out to be a colonization of the imagination.

In the essay *Colonizing the Imagination*, authors Jennifer Cypher and Eric Higgs identify the process of shaping people's experiences and interpretations, which reconfigures the imaginative capacity. It consists of fabricating the real while creating another reality. Places such as Disney's Wilderness Lodge, a gigantic themed resort located in Orlando (Florida) claiming to offer a seamless experience of the wilderness are actually assembling various hints vaguely referring to various "wild" locations.

This layering of themes upon themes [the collage of hints] creates a simulacrum, or a simulation with no true original. In the absence of an original, distinguishing characteristics can be cobbled together to suit the needs of the creators and designers. The honesty that typically accompanies a faithful and coherent original is unnecessary; direct comparison is replaced by vague impression, distant experience, and the imagination. (Cypher, 1997, 117)

For the visitors of such a resort, it becomes a true copy without an original. The problem is that in order to experience "wilderness", efforts are required: tracking in the woods, lighting a camp fire, the danger of meeting wild animals, the unpredictability of the ground. However this park claims to provide a similar experience without the inconvenient mishaps. If "consuming" the wilderness requires little experience, the visitor of the Wilderness Lodge doesn't need to have any prior knowledge to still have a pleasant visit, since "the depth of experience is replaced by myth". (Cypher, 1997, 120) This place clearly doesn't attempt to mimic reality but improve on it; it is reprocessed in order to enhance it. This wouldn't be a problem, but Disney (or similar places), in its attempt to "objectivize" Nature, denies its Wilderness Lodge as a representation, to the contrary, everything is made to believe that it is real. The creative aspect of recreating nature is eclipsed by the efforts to convince of its "realness". It is not the celebration of human imagination (able to invent and create fantasy) but it becomes the admiration of technological ability to (re-) create reality. Disney proclaims to replace reality and to offer an experience that is similar, or even stronger than the real one.

[...] Disney is able to present their version of things and call it reality, blurring the lines between the real and hyperreal. The inevitable conclusion is that Disney has created referents for their simulacra through the repeated telling of the Disney version, thereby creating reality out of myth. At what point does the hyperreal become the real, where does the commodity become a focal thing, rather than a device, and begin to have a telling continuity? (Cypher, 1997, 123-124)

The boundaries between real and artificial are consciously vague with the peril that the artificial will eventually become the centre of moral value: the Disney version of nature becomes the reference for experiences in real nature, not the other way around.

This consideration led me to redefine the place (the basic situation) of the play. In the Pirandello text, the protagonists live in a world dominated by the giants of the mountain (the only place where poetry could exist freely was Villa della Scalogna, a place outside society), so I envisioned that for the project the basic situation would be a place where imagination has been prohibited. The proscription of imagination is due to practical reasons, not political or ideological ones. It is a simple fact that if people follow regulations, life is easier for everybody. And if life is practical, people are less stressed. Since society seeks to increase the wealth of its members, whatever prevents them from reaching happiness, has to be removed.

In this project, Ilse's theatre company has been replaced by a company of puppeteers who are fighting against this "order". They perform a show that presents the danger of a society where imagination is eradicated. They are outlaws and perform a forbidden show, for even the puppets (the symbols of imagination) are banished. The puppet company is like illegal sellers in the street: coming to present their items but ready at any moment to run away if the police arrive.

However, eradicating imagination also means eradicating identity, for it is related to the act of consciousness. For instance, I see myself present in this moment, and I picture my body, my thoughts, my identity in this place surrounding me facing these other individuals and objects. I see myself seeing and feeling and thinking. The confrontation of myself with the "present" moment generates the "becoming conscious" that happens through the "objectification" of myself. I make an image of myself and place it in the present moment that I perceive. The juxtaposition of these two elements generates consciousness.

I am not pursuing a discussion about what kind of picture I make of myself. We would be entering into another realm that I am not interested in developing for this investigation. What interests me is the process of “seeing”, perceiving oneself, which is also directly linked to the “division of self” and which will be at the core of the next chapter.

The story (or the tyranny of the plot)

First of all, in Pirandello’s text, the giants are never on stage and the main interaction is between Ilse and Cotrone. In my version, the giants were represented by a powerful figure named Authority. However, the presence of Ilse-Cotrone-Authority on stage, with their respective “worlds” made it difficult to handle the transition from one world to another. Going from the reality of the stage (where masked characters are evolving and which is dominated by Authority) to the inner reality of Ilse (the puppet performance directed by Ilse, the protagonist of the show) and to the materialization of the dreams (made possible by the presence of Cotrone) was problematic. Moreover, the tension between Ilse and Authority was so strong, that it undermined the entrance and presence of Cotrone. Therefore I decided to focus on the contrast between Ilse and Authority and to transform Cotrone and his world into a branch of Ilse’s inner world. I did not like this decision because it was a way to give a rational explanation to something magical. Somehow I felt I was flattening Pirandello’s play. And not only was I flattening the play, but also all the most interesting situations that developed during the workshops could not find a place in the final show. The exploration of actors meeting the masked characters, of masked characters meeting their puppet alter ego, the shift of masks from a theatrical object to a symbolic and social object, etc. All these situations that usually escape a traditional mask theatre, and which therefore were extremely interesting, had to be cut. I could only keep one aspect of the research, the shifts from “normal reality” to Ilse’s inner world to the materialization of the dreams. I started to consider the “plot” as a living entity, crushing my ambitions. It became my “enemy” forcing me to give a rational explanation for the actions displayed on stage. At the beginning of the work my attempt was to bring together my expertise on mask acting and a reflection on dramaturgy, however at this point I just wanted to evade any desire of telling a story. I wanted to get rid of the plot. I report here what I wrote after a rehearsal:

“During the last run through I noticed that I wanted to break the rules of mask acting too many times. Somehow I wanted to be too clever and show that it is possible to go beyond the first level of mask acting. The result is boring, annoying and especially purposeless. The scenes were very interesting in themselves, but the general tension of the show was gone. It seems that with expressive masks it is impossible to avoid a story; these masks not only request, but also actually force to establish relationships. They need to have a clear relationship which is based on power and status and thus also on a situation which creates a story. Any attempt to step out of this logic created confusion after a while. When I was working on a single scene it was possible to explore and trespass the immediate relationship between masks. But in a longer situation with more characters involved it seems mandatory to define their status, their relationship, and thus their story.

Now I have to reduce my ambitions. It seems that I have to come back to a simpler (more traditional) story, something that the audience can grasp and follow. Inside this clear red thread I can still introduce some elements of the research (but not too many). The third act could present three ideas cherished by Pirandello: the meeting of multiple personalities (through a chorus of Ilse), the meeting of the alter ego (one soldier meets his alter ego, a puppet version of himself), and the uniform as a definition of identity (Authority and his costume).

[...]

After having cut the scenes that included the interesting aspects of exploring the limit of mask acting and “mask illusion”, a new idea came that gently revolutionized the whole concept. Instead of hiding the sides where the actors are waiting and preparing themselves, everything remains visible. It implies that the whole space is divided into two parts: the “outside”, the real space of the stage and the “inside”, which is a square (5 meters by 5 meters) in which the illusion is performed. Moreover, inside the square another level of illusion is performed by the puppeteers, with their puppet performances. Outside, the actor is a performer preparing the show, when she/he jumps inside, she/he becomes an actor in a character, participating in the fiction/illusion. Inside the square we are in a “traditional” use of an “Aristotelian” story (however based on many levels of meta-theatricality). All these levels of meta-theatricality are then put into perspective by the presence of

the actor-performer watching the show and getting ready. At the same time, two spaces with two times are present on the stage. How about dividing them? What transforms the space outside (real) into the space inside (illusion) and apparently more theatrical (related to a traditional drama)? The division is made then by ritualistic elements: preparation, the mask, the ceremony, and trespassing the threshold (the lines of the square).

The ritualistic traits permitted to juxtapose the traditional approach to theatre with a contemporary vision of it".

(August 2009)

In this note, although I point out a solution that apparently helped to solve some of my problems, I implicitly blame myself for succumbing to the tyranny of the plot: *"They (the masked characters) need to have a clear relationship which is based on power and status and thus also on a situation which creates a story. Any attempt to step out of this logic created confusion after a while."* Involuntarily, I stress my torment about the storyline, and this distress will become then key element in continuing this artistic research: the play within the play as a tool to resist the restrictions imposed by the plot. In fact as a response to this frustration I explored ways to evade the tyranny of the plot. At that moment I was not yet aware of it, but a major turning point was happening in my understanding of the inner structure of the play within the play.

The stage and its different spaces

When puppets appear in the first scene of act one, they are presented as a performance of the puppeteers. They remain in a clear and defined space (they have a little box used as a stage): it is a play within a play, which is basically performed at the beginning and at the end. The division between "reality" and puppet performance is clear.

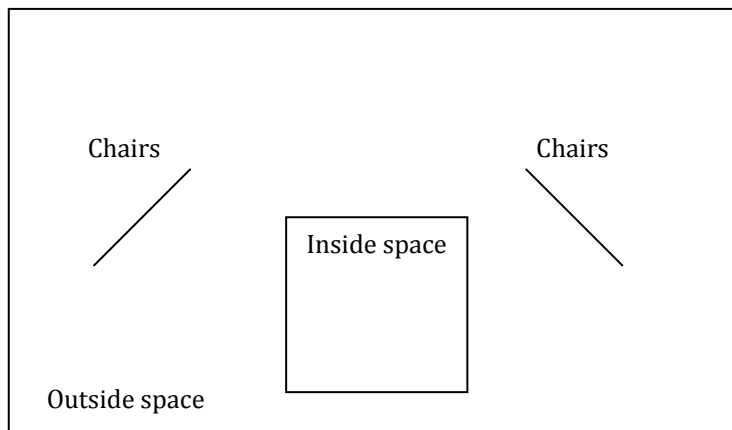
When puppets or objects appear in the second act, they use all the stage and the division is not so clear. Ilse confuses them with reality. In this second act, another space emerges, which is Ilse's mental space. Thus she shifts from the "reality" where the masked characters evolve to her mental space. In the first appearance of the mental space (in the second act of the show), she uses the presence of objects to find a solution and escape from jail (imagination helps to shape reality), but later (in the third act) she obliterates reality with her mental

world and blurs the limits. This confusion will be her loss. Ilse therefore travels in three different spaces:

- The reality of masked characters
- The puppet performance (which is the exteriorization of an artistic form of her imagination)
- Her mental world, where Cotrone symbolizes Imagination and Will

The stage therefore has been conceived with an inside “stage” where fiction happens and an outside “stage” where the audience can see the actors watching the performance and getting ready for their entrance. I wanted to play with the double aspect of creating an illusion and also revealing it. The audience can see the preparation, the putting on of costumes and masks, the building of the characters. Then in the inside space, the story is carried on.

The inside space is a square of 5 meters by 5 meters. All characters respect this square, in the sense that they are “alive” only inside the square, (outside the actor would “drop the mask acting and take off the mask”) except Cotrone, who breaks the rule and goes indifferently from one space to the other (which happens three times). In the outside space, the actors are without masks, and witness the show, while inside the box they are always wearing a mask, being in character, playing a role. Even when they manipulate a puppet, they do it wearing a mask: either as one of the puppeteers (in acts 1 and 4) or as Ilse’s “chorus” displaying her show in the mental space (in act 3).



This characterized the show consisting of a first part (act 1 and 2) which was more “straightforward” and a second part (act 3 and 4) which was more obscure but intriguing. The following scheme presents the structure of the show:

	Masked characters	Puppet/object	Dramaturgical element
Act 1	Ilse and her puppeteers perform their forbidden show	Puppets are used for a didactic performance (see description of the puppet show below)	The conflict between Authority and Ilse is set.
Act 2	First appearance of Cotrone	Objects are used as puppets. Magical use of them (instead of rational use as in act 1)	We enter Ilse's mental world for the first time.
Act 3	Characters are meeting their own alter egos. Cotrone shows to Ilse that imagination is everywhere.	Objects and puppets come alive.	Division of the self: In Ilse's mental world, she meets her chorus and they display an impressive puppet performance where a military character encounters his own alter ego and faces the fact that he is defined by the uniform and not his own identity. Ilse gets entangled in her own imagination and is caught by Authority.

The play within the play in the Pirandello Project

It is possible to identify three types of play within the play in this show. The first one is the easiest to recognize and it consists of the two puppet shows made by the puppeteers at the beginning and at the end of the play. The second type is Ilse's mental world, which appears briefly in Act 2 and extensively in Act 3. In all the above-mentioned situations, the inside play has repercussions in the frame play. The third category of play within the play is more formal and affects the performance itself, not the story. By placing the actors without masks looking at the "inside stage" where the story is told by the masked characters and the puppets, two levels of "actors' presence" are displayed on the stage: the actors witnessing and the actors playing with masks on. This architectural solution

allows to show visually the concept of “Naked Mask” cherished by Pirandello: without the mask the person is an inactive and distant witness, but when the person puts on a mask he or she is drawn into the stream of the events. In order words: you need to wear a mask if you want to participate in the turmoil of life.

The two puppet scenes carried a special meaning because they both placed the story (the frame story, which by virtue of the play within the play is perceived as the “reality”³²) into a mythical context. In fact, in the first puppet performance a military puppet appears, who is curious about an egg locked in a cage. He opens the cage and takes out the egg, which transforms itself into a bird and takes off. The soldier shoots the bird but each time the bird is shot, it becomes another creature. Eventually it comes back towards the soldier and pulls off his jacket along with his arms, his legs and “wears them”. So the bird becomes the new “soldier” while the soldier is reduced to a “trunk, armless and legless”, similar to an egg. Even though the soldier puppet, let us call it Order, tries to defeat the bird, let us define it as the imaginative impulse, it is sucked in and the new “Order”, like the eternal wheel of fortune, continues to reign. Analogously in the play, one of the puppeteers will leave the company, join the military and become the new “Authority”. The puppet performance then foretells what actually will happen later, leaving the question open whether it is the puppets that somehow made this happen or if it is part of the natural cycle of transformations.

The last puppet performance has a different purpose and tells of something else. It is not about “Order” as the first puppet performance, but about Art and Eternity. Like in *Hamlet*, where the play ends with Horatio beginning to tell Hamlet’s story to Fortinbras. Hamlet is dead, as he just died in the previous scene. However, through the recounting of the events, his memory will be alive. Through Horatio’s words he reaches eternity because this turns into an endless loop. Whenever Horatio describes the last scene where Hamlet dies, in which Hamlet urges him to tell the whole story to Fortinbras, Horatio will have to begin again and again.

I wanted to have a similar resolution by re-telling Ilse’s story to the audience. The puppeteers re-enact scenes of the previous event with an Ilse puppet. The audience sees the repetition of the story (but on a smaller scale). Reality has been transformed into a tale and thus remains eternally alive. Pirandello used to say: humans are real and they die, but fictional characters are always there, eternally alive. I could open *Hamlet* thousands of times and Hamlet is there,

32 For further explanation see Chapter 2, especially the “denial effect” described by Forestier.

questioning himself. With the last puppet performance, Ilse becomes something like Hamlet, an eternally alive fictional character. From this ending two statements characterize the show:

- 1) The act of imagining turns out to be a rebellious act re-appropriating someone's life (I can be the hero of my life)
- 2) The act of extracting meanings (an artistic gesture) out of nothing (for instance the empty stage) binds the temporal together with the eternal (it mythicizes the material)

Conclusion

In this investigation I followed two themes: one that comes from my practical work and another one generated by analytical observations. The first one was the continuation of my training in physical theatre and my wish to widen my expertise in mask theatre. In fact my wish was to challenge my knowledge in this field with supplementary inputs that would problematize what I have learned (often as paradigms) in my theatre education. The second theme was the extension of the reflection on illusion and theatricality initiated in my Master's thesis. I thought I could bring together these two interests in a research on Pirandello and especially on the emergence of the play within the play. A decision needed to be made otherwise I would struggle between these two themes. A lot could be explored in the field of mask theatre, and especially, if I would like to stay close to the theme of juxtaposing realities, in the very space between the mask and the face of the actor: in this liminal space where the actor becomes the spectator of his or her own performance. During the workshop period I was extremely thrilled by the discoveries made during the exercises related to mask acting. I really felt that I was encountering new dimensions in the relationship between the human (face) and the mask. Usually, in mask theatre, masks are tools of transformation and the magic consists of giving the illusion that the mask (a fixed form) is alive (a moving form). But in this case, the masks gained another layer of meaning and were also used for their symbolic aspect: the (social) mask that humans have to wear in society versus the "naked face" of the actor. However, I realized that it was difficult to carry out two explorations at the same time. In the long run, I would only get confused. I hoped that the theoretical research on the play within the play could have fed my practical work on the mask, but instead I was only getting frustrated. I realized that most of the difficulties I encountered in this phase were due not so much to the practical research and exploration but

mainly to their concretisation into a coherent narrative. So I chose where I could find the most challenging aspects that would help me foster my practical work. Therefore I opted to stress the analysis of the structures of the play within the play and leave the mask work out. Something unfathomable came to my attention: while researching Pirandello's work I noticed that the play within the play permits to disclose major ideas about life, still displaying them with playfulness and humour³³. Even though I was not completely aware of this yet, I liked it and I wanted to continue the investigation in this direction. As mentioned earlier, during this phase of the research, I intuitively covered the bases that conducted me to develop the analytical approach of this artistic research. These aspects of "playfulness" and of "disruption" that I emphasize in Pirandello's work are key issues respectively in Chapters 3 and 4. The excursion on Colonizing Imagination, is a theme that is brought back in the last chapter, when I discuss *The Balcony* (*Le Balcon*, 1956) by Jean Genet. Pirandello has a special understanding of the representational situation, which is discernible in the way he plays with the play. Pirandello eventually intends to push the audience to build a mental stage in their heads. His goal is that after the performance the concrete and material stages are rebuilt by the audience in their own heads in order to change their perception of reality and notice the "theatricality" of everyday life. The person in front of them is not just relating to them, but because he or she is performing on their mental stage, it unveils the fact that he or she is playing a role. The stage, therefore, is not only the concrete space in a theatre building, but it can be a mental space: by changing the way of perception and by considering the fact that what is happening is theatre (and therefore by transforming in the head the reality into a stage), it is possible to perceive how people perform a role in their everyday life. This thought of the play within the play as a mental stage and especially the point that the structure of the play within the play is not necessarily confined to the area of a story but can be extended to a larger field became then the next step of my research.

33 This aspect of playfulness of the play within the play will be explored mainly in Chapter 3 where I present the idea of "playing with the play"

Chapter 2:

The Invisible Stage, a practical and theoretical study about division and observation

“The stratagem to overcome the division is to redirect the gaze of the audience, from the story that is told to the act of observation itself.”³⁴



The Invisible Stage, performer: Juha Sääski, photo by Aliisa Hautavita at the Dostoievsky museum, St.Petersburg

The incubation of the second phase of the research lasted more than two years, undergoing several modifications that reflected the continuous progress of this study. When I concluded the *Pirandello Project*, as I explained in the previous chapter, I decided to focus mainly on the dramaturgical question and put my work with masks on hold. This decision of withdrawing the mask aspect left a void in my research for it was not clear then what kind of practical application I could then undertake. Earlier I could rely on the Lecoq training and my personal experience in physical theatre, but now I was facing new territory. In this new area, the sole exploration of the dramaturgical aspects of the device actually became my practical work, which meant a major turning point in my study. Usually such development is the result of an ongoing process that can hardly be reduced to a single event, however I can point out two moments that turned out to be crucial for the progress of my practical work.

The first episode is related to CARPA 2³⁵, where, due to a misunderstanding, I conceived the lecture-performance *The Invisible Stage*, which is the subject of this chapter. The second episode is a circus performance I directed in the summer of 2011 as part of the city of Turku's European Culture Capital 2011 program. This dazzling project aimed to convey the principles of quantum physics through circus disciplines. The confrontation and the juxtaposition of "classical" mechanics with "atomic" reality (studied in quantum mechanics³⁶) unveiled the idea that actually all my work concerns this elemental confrontation: the microscopic world inscribed on the macroscopic. This goes back to my childhood; the hours spent in front of the window looking down at the street and trying to know, from a distance, what it would feel like to be in the streets. Leaning with my forehead pressed against the cold glass, I remained immobile whilst watching the commotion outside. I felt that I was outside as well, in the street with the passing people, and still, I knew I was inside the apartment. The sensation of cold on my forehead reminded me of my body behind the glass, while my eyes saw the show of the street. From my flat, I was watching something through a "hole"

35 CARPA 2, Colloquium for Artistic Research in Action; an international seminar about artistic research held at Teatterikorkeakoulu, Helsinki, in January 2011.

36 "Classical" mechanics has to be understood as the reality of the human scale, governed by gravity. It is the reality that appears to us and in which we live. This "reality" can be studied and observed by our own senses. By contrast, the quantum, or atomic, world is so infinitesimal that it is extremely difficult to observe and understand. It can only be imagined. Moreover, this world—and this is one of the most fascinating aspects—is governed by laws that are beyond human understanding; atoms behave in ways that surpass our comprehension. The Catch-22 we operate under is that we can only imagine what can happen on the atomic level, but our imagination is modeled by our experience in the "classical" world, so we end up having to imagine something that we cannot imagine.

and even though I remained “here”, I felt that I was “there”. Afterwards, when I was in the street, I remembered myself watching the street; I saw myself being watched by an invisible me at the window. This episode made me aware of the double level of consciousness for each action, for I am conscious of the action I am doing and at the same time I am conscious that this action is watched. It was as though I had two realities: the street, and the street from the apartment; the outside, and the outside “reflected” on the inside. This “division”, delineated by the windowpane, fascinated me: something transparent (that is not possible to see) created a separation between worlds. I didn’t see these two “realities” as contradictory; for me it was not a question of the choice of one reality (or world, dimension) above the other one. These two realities existed in juxtaposition, in the conflicting relationship where they tended to obliterate each other. My interest lay—and still lies—exactly in the space between these two entities, in this invisible structure where humans come into existence and use one dimension to resist the other one. When I directed the *Quantum Circus*³⁷, I had to face the problem of staging another reality: the atomic world. Everyday life experience may be imbued with classical mechanics, but simultaneously the reality we live in is made up by atoms therefore inside classical mechanics there is quantum mechanics. It was then necessary to find a way to permit the audience to “dive” into this atomic world. Here I used one of the stratagems of the play within the play. I displayed on stage two kinds of realities: the classical one – our reality – and the atomic one. Since the atomic reality is not visible and it is basically based on supposition – or let’s say: imagination – I had to find a way to “ground” such a fantastic world. Here again I used the strategies unveiled during the research made during the *Pirandello Project*, where one reality justifies the existence of the other.

The research on the play within the play is thus an aspect of this tension between two “worlds”. However, the play within the play should not be reduced

37 The show was presented at Logomo, Turku, in collaboration with Turku 2011, European Capital of Culture, the Future Circus Festival and the Turku Music Festival. *Quantum Circus* was a visual circus and theatre experience and a joint production of different fields of science and art that opened up the laws of quantum physics by the means of circus. On stage the theories and formulas of physics became visible by the hands of researchers and circus performers alike. The show spoke about a reality that is hard to understand, a reality beyond our imagination, a reality that amazes our common sense. But it is this strange reality that upholds the world in which we live. It is the foundation of the universe. Usually physics is seen as a dry, technical and boring discipline, but in fact it shares with circus the joy of discovery, surprise and amazement. It is especially this last aspect that I wanted to express in the show: the playfulness of humans in front of reality, and the desire to understand that reality.

to a mere juxtaposition of two worlds: it also incorporates a reflection on theatre as a medium, as it is a meta-theatrical device. It is not a simple emergence of another world, but it involves the recreation and repetition of the first world; and because it repeats the first world, it also questions and challenges the integrity of it. Daniel K. Jernigan, by quoting Brian McHale's book *Postmodernist Fiction*, uses his definition of postmodern text in order to highlight the meta-theatrical dimension of the play within the play device:

What is a world? What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world it projects? How is a projected world structured? (Jernigan, 2008, 160)

McHale suggests that the inquiry does not concern the content directly (or the story, the play) but instead it explores the frame that allows the content to appear.

This chapter is divided into three parts: the first part examines a specific aspect of the structure of the play within the play which exceeds the content of the story but focuses our attention on the impacts of the interaction between actors and spectators³⁸, which concentrates on the issue of observation (or recognition). For this study, I rely mainly on Forestier's analysis of this device and on Guénoun's understanding of theatre, but I also discuss Mannoni's psychoanalytical interpretation of the stage. In the second part, I use the notions developed in the first part in order to analyse two contemporary plays, *A Spanish Play (Une pièce espagnole)*, 2004 by Yasmina Reza and *The Author* (2009) by Tim Crouch. Both deconstruct the concepts of division and develop it into the issue of the superimposition between actors and the fictional characters still by relying on elements of the play within the play. The analysis of these two dramas permitted me to develop my second practical work, *The Invisible Stage*, which is discussed in the third part of this chapter.

38 It is not necessary to reiterate the importance of this interaction. Peter Brook, in his book *The Empty Stage* underlines that an event can only become theatre if there are some spectators observing the action and similarly Grotowski, in the introduction of his book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, implies that theatre exists only when there is an actor and a spectator.

First part: The separation between the spectators and the actors and the attempt to overcome this division

In the conclusion of the previous chapter I emphasized my need to uncover the dramaturgical structures of the play within the play. As demonstrated with Pirandello's work, I saw the possibility in this device to challenge the fulfilment of a plot and still keep the traditional theatre structure intact. This chapter, especially this first part, is an attempt to identify the construction and especially the effects of the play within the play. The thought that sustained this examination was that if I am able to single out these aspects of this device then I would be able to re-appropriate it for myself and remodel it according to my wish.

This first part is divided further into four parts that somehow respond to each other. In the first part, entitled *The Gathering*, I discuss Guénoun's idea of theatre as the echo of a congregation and I employ Guénoun's metaphor of the broken circle. The second part, entitled *Are Spectators Watching the Actors or Themselves?* is a direct response to this idea of the broken circle and employs the concept of the play within the play to answer it and to "restore" the broken circle. The third part, entitled *The "Mystified" Spectator*, delves further into the issue of closing the circle by discussing a particular feature of the play within the play that proposes a subtle solution for the spectator's "suspension of disbelief". The last part, entitled *Recognition*, changes the perspective and comes back to the stage. It discusses the question of recognition from the (fictional) character's point of view, however it is implicit from previous parts that the notion of recognition involves the spectators as well.

The gathering

Denis Guénoun, in his book *Actions et Acteurs*, tries to identify the constituting elements of theatre. Among others, he examines a text written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which contains a critique on theatre. In 1758 Rousseau wrote a letter, known as *Lettre à d'Alembert*, where he replied to an article that Alembert composed for the *Encyclopédie*, dedicated to the city of Geneva in Switzerland. In his article, Alembert praises the city, which at that time was not part of Switzerland but a free, independent republic. According to Alembert, the city was free, and the citizens enjoyed this freedom. However, he notes a lack in the city: there were no theatres. Rousseau felt the urge to answer d'Alembert and inform him that the city and its citizens were free because there were no theatres. He analyses the negative impact of theatre on the audience, borrowing most of his arguments from Socrates' condemnation of mimesis. He condemns tragedy for depicting

humans as slaves, and comedy for transforming virtues into flaws. But above all, and perhaps Rousseau's innovative argument lies in this, theatre maintains the inequality of society, firstly through the economic division of the audience, and secondly through the division of actors and spectators.

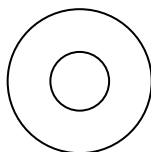
“Mais n'adoptons point ces Spectacles exclusifs qui renferment tristement un petit nombre de gens dans un antre obscur; qui les tiennent craintifs et immobiles dans le silence et l'inaction; qui n'offrent aux yeux que cloisons, qui pointes de fer, que soldats, qu'affligeantes images de la servitudes et de l'inégalité.” (Rousseau, 1758, 62)

For Rousseau the division between actors and spectators is at the foundation of theatre, and it is also its problem. Theatre will never overcome its state of slavery if it doesn't erase this division. After saying that, Rousseau surprisingly concludes that indeed a republic needs shows - actually a lot of them. Then what could be the objective of these shows? What will be presented? Nothing - says Rousseau. The shows will consist of the joyful gathering of the citizens in an open space; by erasing the division, the theatre will instead show the spectators. Rousseau declares that spectators should now become the actors; in this blissful reunion they will simply display themselves all around each other and see themselves. As Denis Guénoun pointed out, Rousseau's condition for a virtuous performance is the withdrawal of the object. It is a show of nothing, which reorients the gaze of the spectators from the object towards the other spectators who are the content of the show³⁹. It is important to stress the aspect that Rousseau replaces the object of the performance with the action of the spectators who are watching themselves; “watching and being watched while watching” makes them conscious of being together, of being part of a community. Notice that the frontal relationship is abolished, since the displacement is perfectly circular. In Rousseau's perception, the subjected relation to an object is the root of all our sorrows. Rousseau not only withdraws the object of the show but also erases the nature of the stage. Because, according to Rousseau, its purpose is to attract the gaze: the stage announces that something is or will be shown, and it is something we must watch. The presence of the stage prevents the pleasure of

39 These ideas are based on my notes from the lecture that Guénoun gave at the university of Helsinki in 2007. As far as I know Guénoun does not mention them in his books but they can be traced in his book *L'exhibition des mots*.

togetherness and brings us back to the condition of slavery. Representation is therefore a loss of freedom.

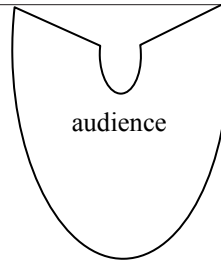
The circle is in fact the most democratic way to gather, where no hierarchy is shown. When someone starts telling something, listeners tend intuitively to assemble in a circle to listen. The group can listen, watch the speaker, watch the reactions of other listeners and express their own reactions all at the same time; the purpose of the circle is the gathering.⁴⁰



If the shape of the gathering is modified, the very nature of the gathering is changed. In fact in a frontal relationship it is not possible to experience the same feeling of gathering, of watching while being watched, and of listening and watching the reactions of others. If I give orders I don't need a circle, for the best way to impart commands is in a line. Soldiers don't gather around a superior officer, but wait in rows to receive their orders. Guénoun stresses that Rousseau has touched upon one of the key elements of theatre: the notion of gathering. Theatre, before it involved a stage and a hierarchal structure in the space, has been an act of gathering. This is why, according to Guénoun, theatre kept the structure of the circle for so long. But, as Guénoun writes, it is a broken circle, a memory of the circle⁴¹.

40 Denis Guénoun furthered Rousseau's thought by commenting that perhaps we might think outside this frontal relationship, this dichotomy subject versus object that forces us to be spectators of a world of images, of a spectacular world, which we constantly dispute, crave for and struggle against.

41 The circle, being a perfect shape, is a natural situation where people can express themselves freely and equally. From this point of view, one could ask: when this perfect situation is broken, when there is a "here" (audience) and a "there" (stage) with unequal status, how can we trust the feelings expressed there? However, it is worth noting that in totalitarian regimes, where the citizens have to control their emotional expressions constantly, the stage paradoxically usually acquires the status of free space. The next paragraph, "The stage as an extension of the spectator", may offer some answers to this enigma.



In such a situation, as Rousseau pointed out, a clear division is marked between spectators and actors. The gaze of the spectators is directed towards the stage, where the actors are performing. The actors present themselves and execute their actions. No concrete dialogue is intended between actors and spectators⁴², the audience is simply receiving what is shown on the stage. The actors enter onto the stage and act out the story, utter their lines out towards the audience, and exit. The circle of the gathering is broken. However in the next paragraph I refer to Forestier's analysis in order to answer Guénoun's concept of the broken circle.

Are the spectators watching the actors or themselves?

George Forestier in his book *Le théâtre dans le théâtre* stresses the gap between the audience and the actors, but as he continues this gap is subtly erased during the performance. If we consider the space of the audience (Level A) and the space of the actors on the stage (Level B), the distinction remains clear and Level A is taken by the audience as the place of reality (where they are), while Level B is considered to be the space of illusion (of the situation performed on the stage). This division is reinforced by the presence of the stage, which usually clearly demarcates these two levels. Between these two levels interaction is not possible: the gap divides them. This gap is described by Forestier as *la dénégation* (the denial effect):

“On sait que ce qui fait l'originalité de la communication théâtrale, c'est le double statut du message reçu par le spectateur: d'une part, il y a sur scène des personnes et des objets qui sont réels; en outre, jusqu'aux révolutions théâtrales du XXe siècle, le théâtre était fondé sur “l'effet d'illusion”, c'est-à-dire sur la volonté de donner à la représentation

42 Of course it would be possible to argue that even though the audience doesn't answer back to the actors, the actors are (or should be) listening to the silent audience. A silent dialogue is always established between the two spaces. But it is not the exact point of my text.

les apparences du vrai pour amener les spectateurs à s'identifier à ce semblant de réalité qu'on leur présentait. D'autre part, quel que soit le degré de réalisme auquel peut parvenir un spectacle, tout ce qui figure sur scène est perçu comme non-réel, parce que le spectateur n'y a pas accès. Tel est le phénomène de la dénégation. (...) Tout change quand commence l'action enchâssée, car celle-ci, étant le plus souvent explicitement désignée comme théâtre, devient à son tour l'objet de la dénégation. (...) Pour peu que le contenu de la pièce-cadre vise à reproduire le plus exactement possible la réalité, l'introduction d'une action dramatique présentée comme « théâtrale » et, partant, entachée de négativité, confère au reste de l'œuvre les caractères du vrai. Par contrecoup, la pièce-cadre prend une nouvelle épaisseur, celle de la vie. (Forestier, 196, 138-139)

Forestier explains that even if there is a division between actors and spectators, this gap can be affected and somehow erased. In fact when Level B is split again, in the sense that another story is performed on the stage, another play, a play within a play, this creates a change in Level B. This new stage structure can be described as follows: there is a frame story (the first story) and an inside story (the second story). Usually, when an inside play is performed, not all the actors belonging to the frame story participate in it. Sometimes they are totally separated, like in *L'Illusion Comique* (the actor of the frame story and the actors of the inside story never meet), sometimes they are present in the frame story and in the inside story, or like in *Hamlet* (all the actors meet in the frame story but then some of them are performing the inside story while the others are watching it). And when the inside story is performed, as Forestier describes, the actor-observer who is not taking part in the inside story but simply watches it, becomes a spectator (or actor-spectator). The gap between actors and spectators is "erased", for it is moved between the frame story and the inside story. The stage then recreates the space of the theatre, which is based on a division between spectators and actors. The actor-spectators are now divided from the actors of the inside story exactly like the audience was previously divided from the actors. During this shift the actor-spectators find themselves on the same level with the audience. The gap is erased because they share the same experience. The emergence of the inside play fractures the stage. The stage is supposed to be the space of illusion (as opposed to the space of the audience taken as the space of "reality") and it is divided into two parts: one that acquires a second

dimension of illusion (the play within the play) and the other one, which still support the frame story (first level of illusion). Because the actor-spectators of the frame story are now directly linked with the audience, unconsciously the “illusion” dimension of the frame story is erased as well. According to Forestier, the previous opposition between the audience’s space (reality) versus the stage (illusion) is now transferred to the frame story (taken as “reality”) versus inside story (illusion).

What does this denial effect and its transfer on the stage entail? The focus of the spectators goes towards other spectators (displayed on the stage). What I mean is that the interest of the spectators is not oriented anymore towards the execution of some staged actions (performed by the actors of the inside story) but towards the reactions that the inside story provokes in the actor-spectators; therefore the main attention of the audience goes to the actor-spectators executing the “action” of observing. We could say that the audience at this point is, while the inside story is performed, watching other “spectators” (the actor-spectators) who are watching and reacting. The stage then becomes the place where they observe themselves, and how they react. From this point of view, the “broken circle” described by Guénoun is somehow restored. I would like to suggest the following idea: the actor-spectators, placed on the stage, who behave like the spectators, placed on the seats, symbolically closes the circle and thus brings forward the original notion of theatre: the idea of gathering. The idea of Rousseau is then brought back: the interest does not lie anymore in the content of the show, but in observing the spectators placed on the stage. With this last comment, would it be possible to state that the device of the play within the play brings Rousseau and D’Alembert together on the stage? This question, which seems merely a joke, anticipates some of the aspects I discuss in the following chapters. In fact, one of the features of the play within the play permits to juxtapose elements that would have no reason to appear simultaneously on the stage. As I discuss later, the play within the play allows us to fuse different historical moments and different discourses with different media and still keep a sense of unity.

The singularity of “observing spectators on the stage” may let me say that the broken circle is restored, that the audience is watching the audience. However, at the same time, it is correct to ask if the audience is really gullible and ready to accept “the illusion” that an actor on stage is exactly like a spectator, one of them and therefore that the circle is restored. With this thought I enter an area that is delicate for it touches the realm of belief versus disbelief. Nevertheless, in the next paragraph, I rely on Mannoni’s psychoanalytical interpretation in order

to point out that dramaturgy found a way to solve the problem of disbelief and placed a special character between the spectators and the actors who functions as a “bridge” and facilitates the restoration of this “circle”.

The “mystified” spectator

Octave Mannoni, in his book *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire ou L'Autre Scène*, relates that ethnographers use amazing words to describe religions and especially the faith in those religions of some tribes. They write astonishing text about their informers who assured them that their ancestors believed in the power of the masks. But this remains in an unclear past, so when was this time the ancestors “believed” in the mask? When did they stop believing? They don't say what caused the change of this belief as if it could have happened by some kind of intellectual progress. We can question why this belief has then been placed in an undefined “past”.

Octave Mannoni uncovers this transition from a “mythical past” where people believed in the masks to the current situation where people don't believe completely but anyway remember that in the past those masks were powerful⁴³. He recounts a tradition of the Hopi tribe. In this tribe there are masks called *Katcina*. At one specific moment of the year the *Katcina* come and, like the western Santa Claus, they are very interested in children. Another similarity with our Santa Claus: there is a connivance between the parents and the *Katcina* in order to mystify the children. The mystification is strongly established and nobody dares to break it. However the *Katcina*, unlike Santa Claus, are terrifying creatures that want to eat the children. The mothers then have to buy back the children by offering some meat to these menacing creatures.

At a later point of their life the children are initiated and the secret of the *Katcina* is revealed to them: the *Katcina* are not the gods coming down to Earth but simply adults, maybe their own parents, wearing masks. How do the children react to this revelation? Of course they are disappointed, even angry for having been tricked. The amazing paradox of this moment of demystification constitutes the institutional foundation of the new belief in the *Katcina*, which is the essence of Hopi religion. From now on, the adults tell the initiated children that the real *Katcina* are not coming to the village to dance as in the past. They are coming

43 This ambiguity of not believing but still remembering that these masks were believed in (of thus wanting them to be believed) is the subject of the article “*Je sais bien, mais quand meme...*” (I know it, but still...) from *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire ou L'Autre Scène*, where the author investigates the thin threshold dividing distance and belief. It shows how astonishing a belief can be constructed upon distance.

in an invisibly, and they mystically dwell in the masks during the days of the ceremony. The Hopis distinguish the mystification with which they trick the children from the mystic truth of the revelation moment. The Hopi can openly say: I know that the Katsina are not spirits, they are my fathers and uncles, but still the Katsina are present when my fathers and uncles are dancing with the masks.

After this painful experience when the infantile belief is shattered, it can still continue to exist in an adult form: something went, as we could say, to the other side (which is the definition of the initiation). The initiated will afterwards participate in the mystification, therefore we can say that the children are the support of the adult belief. (Mannoni, 1969, 16)

That a young Hopi is mystified is the problem of the adult, not his or hers; she/he is objectively mystified, her/his subjectivity is not yet involved. It is clear that the magic can emerge only after the moment when the belief in the Katsina has necessitated a transformation, which will take the form of a mystical and invisible presence of the true Katsina. It is a presence despite the fact that reality shows that the Katsina are not present. Through the negation of reality emerges the magic. This young Hopi, when she/he realizes the true nature of the Katsina, is horrified by the idea that the existence of the Katsina can be destroyed by reality. However, she/he can restore and maintain the belief by a transformation, and she/he will be helped in this process by the community's institution: religion.

The "magic" belief of the adult necessitates the credulous belief of the child; the revelation becomes "magic" and it can perpetrate itself because the new "credulous" will believe in it totally, which allows the initiated to believe in it "magically". In fact, the initiated person will then come and dance wearing the mask and scare the children the same way it happened to him when he was a child. Because children completely believe in the presence of the Katsina, by transfer he can continue to believe in them magically (Mannoni, 1969, 18)⁴⁴.

Theatre works on the basis of similar acceptance where spectators know it is not "for real" but want to believe it is. Martin Esslin, in his book *Anatomie de l'art dramatique*, explains that basically theatre depends on a tacit agreement between spectators and actors; he demonstrates this idea by quoting an anecdote where apparently an actor playing Richard III was screaming: "A horse, my kingdom for a horse." And from the audience someone would have answered: 'I'll bring you mine'.

44 Mannoni insists: believing in the masks would have no meaning if we believe in the masks as something real or something true, for instance that we consider them as true faces. It would result in that there would be no masks at all. The mask does not present itself for something else than what it is, but it has the power to evoke the images of fantasy.

The actor then said: 'Don't worry and come here, a donkey is enough.'” (Esslim, 1979, 106) And the whole audience burst into laughter. According to the author, the spectator didn't understand it was fiction and being convinced that the poor king was really in danger, he wanted to help him. The other spectators were laughing because he took an illusion for real. However Mannoni insists that this story is improbable. But then what does this mean? Why such a story of a naïve, gullible person taking what is performed on stage for real is so relentlessly told? It points to the desire to be true! (Mannoni, 1969,163)

In theatre, the spectator positions her/himself as perfectly credulous in front of any kind of illusion performed on stage, but she/he demands that the illusion is perfect, so that she/he can believe in the presence (or action, behaviour) of that specific character. In order to reinforce such a phenomenon of “belief”, dramaturges have introduced scenes of “induction”, like in *The Taming of the Shrew* by Shakespeare, presenting a “spectator” (actor-spectator) taking for real whatever is happening on the stage.

The play is supposed to be performed for the pleasure of a drunkard, Sly, who becomes a spectator of a comedy which he mistakes for reality. In the first scene Sly falls asleep totally drunk. At that point arrives a Lord who decides to trick him, place the poor drunkard in his own bed, in his own garments. When Sly wakes up, the servants manage to convince him that he is really the Lord and that a comedy will be performed for him⁴⁵.

”Si nous sommes pas victime d'une illusion devant le théâtre ou devant les masques, il semble que nous ayons cependant besoin de quelqu'un qui lui, pour notre satisfaction à nous, soit en proie à cette illusion” (Mannoni, 1969, 164).

45 In the production of this play performed at the National Theatre of Latvia in 2007, Sly was sitting in the same space as the audience. He was on the balcony, which was basically next to the stage. The gap between actors and spectators was then totally abolished and the audience could watch the show performed on the stage and enjoy the reactions of Sly.

This digression about the inducing scene helps us to understand better, for instance, why in the play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Pirandello, the fictional characters meet the actors and the director. The presence of the actors and the director is necessary to justify the manifestation of the fictional characters. This is what makes it possible for the audience to accept the impossible appearance of the six fictional characters. The actor-spectator, as examined previously, acquires a double status: on the one hand it is the spectator's alter ego magnetizing the attention of the audience and on the other hand it is the guardian allowing the spectators to "believe" in the fiction performed on the stage, or in other words: it allows to accept the "irrational" emerging on the stage.

Recognition

In the previous paragraph I have discussed the aspect of "recognition" from the point of view of the spectators: the spectators recognizing themselves on the stage. I would like to shift this concept and see how dramaturges implemented this idea of recognition inside a drama.

Roberto Tessari in his book *Teatro e Antropologia*, comments on an extract from Plutarch's text, *Parallel Lives* (end of 1st century), which mentions the "birth" of the first character. According to the anecdote, Solon, intrigued by the poet Thespis' "innovations" in the genre of tragedy, wanted to attend one of his performances. Solon, after the performance, talks to Thespis and warns him about the danger of mimesis.

"Dopo lo spettacolo lo (Tespi) chiamò e gli chiese se non aveva vergogna a dire le bugie così grosse davanti a tanta gente. Alla risposta di Tespi, che non c'era alcun male a dire e fare ciò per scherzo, Solone batté violentemente il bastone per terra e replicò: "Pero se elogiame e onoriamo in questo modo lo scherzo, presto lo ritroveremo nei contratti". Poi Pisistrato se ferì da solo, scese in piazza facendosi portare su un carro e cercò di esasperare il popolo, dicendo che i suoi nemici avevano attentato alla sua vita per motivi politici. Molti si sdegnarono e rumoreggiarono in suo favore, ma Solone gli si avvicinò e gli disse in un orecchio: "O figlio di Ippocrate, tu reciti la parte dell'Odisseo omerico, con la differenza che i tagli ch'egli si fece per ingannare i nemici, tu li adoperei per truffare i concittadini". Ma la massa era pronta a lottare per Pisistrato." (Tessari, 2004, 50-51)

Tessari comments that this anecdote dated to the 6th century BC is unlikely to have happened. However, he continues, according to the Greek, Thespis is probably the first one who has offered the original show of the embodiment of a tragic hero speaking in the first person to an audience. Thespis had the idea to let a person emerge from the dancing chorus. This “person”, the proto-character, stepped out of the group and started replying to the chorus. The mould of the first “theatrical” dialogue was forged. We could then presume that theatre finds its birth in the dialogue, in the uttered word. But if we look carefully, the moment of the birth of the proto-character happens at the exact moment when the actor exits the chorus; stepping out of the continuous movement of the ecstatic dancers, in other words: it happens with the act of stopping. In the action of pausing, we place ourselves outside the incessant flux of life and we can observe it. Would this imply that the theatrical act verges on the act of observing? Contemplating? And that the theatrical “dialogue” lodges between one that observes (the proto-character) and one that acts (the dancers of the chorus)?

What should the “actor” observe? Let’s suppose that when Thespis, the proto-character left the dancing chorus, a gap was created among the dancers. I could hypothesize he saw the “absence” inside the chorus. By comparing the actions executed by the chorus with the hole left (the absence of his body in the group), he could as well “see himself” moving with the others and comment on it. Would it be then possible to propose that the ultimate action of the character is to observe her/himself among the other humans?

However, this statement seems to be in total contradiction with the general assumption of theatre, and of actors’ activity. Actors are summoned to act, to move, to exteriorize, to express the internal change in motion. If there is someone who is observing, it is the audience, but for sure not the actor.

The novel *Sputnik Sweetheart* by Haruki Murakami follows the adventure of a young woman, Sumire, who falls in love with an older woman, Miu. Although Miu is not refusing Sumire’s attentions, she has a secret that impedes her from any emotional bounds and therefore from making love. She doesn’t even have any sexual relations with her husband. The story is narrated by a third, unnamed male character who loves Sumire. The novel reaches its climax when Sumire disappears and the narrator tries to find her. Sumire has vanished and she has only left a letter behind. In the letter the narrator and thus the reader discovers the terrible secret of Miu⁴⁶. Miu once took a trip to Switzerland, where she

46 Murakami unveils the terrible secret by constructing a second narration inside the main novel. He

was approached by a man who tried to seduce her. She refused him. The man didn't insist although in the following days Miu had the impression that he was following her. Miu didn't like anymore the Swiss city where she was but although she sensed a growing feeling to run away from that place, she swept away this sentiment and decided to remain longer. One day she went to the fun fair and took a ride on a Ferris wheel. It was the last turn, and the machine stopped while she was inside at the top. Everybody left the fun fair and she remained locked inside the cabin, hanging in the air. Being stranded there, in the middle of the night, she started to observe the city and tried to find the apartment where she stayed. Surprisingly she noticed that the light was on, and that actually there was someone inside. The surprise grew bigger when she discovered that the man who tried to seduce her was in her apartment, and that he was not alone. He was there with a woman. And the woman was she, Miu herself. She saw herself making love with this man. She saw herself letting the man touch her, without any resistance. That vision, when she saw herself languidly allowing the man to abuse her, was a shock that changed her life radically. The cruellest and the most intensive scene of the novel is when she finally observes herself, when she recognizes herself as passive, letting herself be abused⁴⁷. This cruel revelation wounded her; and even though she was young, her hair became suddenly totally white and she couldn't let her body be touched anymore. During that night she died, as she repeats in the novel.

King Oedipus by Sophocles, which Aristotle considered to be the most exemplary tragedy for its climax structure, presents a similar situation as the above-mentioned. In the pivotal scene, in which the king is still terrorized by the prophecy (that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother), he is relieved when a messenger tells him the good news that he has become the king of Corinth. Oedipus believed that the old king of Corinth was his father and the news that the king has died of natural death refutes the terrible prophecy. But the messenger accidentally reveals that the old king of Corinth was not Oedipus's the real father. In the same scene Oedipus goes from exultation to panic, he goes from ignorance to knowledge. He learns who his real parents are and that the

manages to raise the climax of the story even more by operating a stylistic shift which creates a similar condition as in the theatrical structure of the play within the play.

47 In this scene it is possible to combine what has been discussed in the previous chapter: in the paragraph *Puppets and Imagination*, and the reverted scene in Pirandello's play *The Mountain Giants*. Like the sexual humiliation of the puppet exercise, the invisible is reversed, and thus becomes visible. Likewise, Miu witnesses her own "rape".

prophecy has been accomplished. Indeed he has killed his father and slept with his mother. In the pivotal scene, Oedipus, through the words of the messenger, in the story told by the peasant (in this case, an inside play), sees himself. For the first time in the tragedy, Oedipus sees who he is. As Freddie Rokem pointed out in his book *Philosophers and Thespians*, Oedipus manages to solve the riddle of the Sphinx, which promised to define the essence of humanity. The human in the Sphinx's riddle is described only through the legs: four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening. During the whole time, paradoxically, Oedipus⁴⁸ was not able to see his own legs, to see the wounds that were patent marks of his origin. Oedipus may know what the essence of humanity is, but he is unable to see himself. When the recognition scene happens, when Oedipus sees himself and understands, the vision is so strong that he needs to blind himself. (Rokem, 2010, 51)

In both stories mentioned, it is striking that the protagonist sees her/himself and the recognition happens immediately. The discovery (or recognition) takes away the protagonist from the situation. Suddenly she/he sees her/his condition, he or she sees her/himself from a distance (like the audience who sees the whole arc of destiny), and the vision of oneself generates consciousness instantly. There is no doubt, the characters are not wondering if it is they themselves there or not. The acknowledgment of the self is immediate. When Claudius sees "himself" portrayed in the play within the play, his reaction is sudden; he leaves the room.

I would like to connect these last arguments with Aristotle's concept of *agnorisis* (recognition) and propose an idea. Aristotle in his treatise about tragedy identifies two types of plot: simple and complex. Simple plots describe a linear evolution, they are one and continuous and, according to him, not interesting. Complex plots, which are praised by Aristotle, are marked by reversal and recognition. They describe a character's change from ignorance to knowledge. The scene showing the shift from ignorance to knowledge is a pivotal scene for it provides a transformation in the protagonist's consciousness. In all the above-mentioned cases, it happens thanks to a more or less visible inside play. Is it possible therefore to draw the conclusion that the transformation of the protagonist's consciousness is generated by the presence of an inside play which induces the

48 Oedipus (meaning swollen-foot) was named after the wound he has on his feet for having been attached to a tree when he was an infant.

action of watching her/himself? Would it then mean that the strongest action on stage is the action of observing oneself?⁴⁹

I don't think it is necessary to answer these questions, for the answer may lead to a subject other than what I have proposed to follow. I think it is more interesting to further explore this tension of recognition, of co-presence of the same individual in two realities, and the repercussions of it. Here it is possible to point out a striking parallel: the character recognizes her/himself on the stage and the spectators recognize themselves on the stage as well: a strange mirroring of actions is established. Before going further into this inquiry, it may be important to notice that the examples I have used to develop this study are mainly from classics (Sophocles, Shakespeare, Corneille). It would be important then to wonder if the contemporary spectator is willing to accept the same principles (of distance and recognition) or if modern spectators are more sceptic and less ready to give in. This is why next I analyse two contemporary plays and uncover surprising dramaturgical solutions that the playwrights have used to reach a similar effect.

Second part: A Spanish Play and The Author

In this second part of the chapter I study two contemporary plays, which helped me to advance in the deconstruction and thus in the understanding of this dramaturgical device. The discoveries made in this second part became the starting point for my second practical work (which is presented in the last part of this chapter).

The split between actor and character

A Spanish Play (Une pièce espagnole), written in 2004 by Yasmina Reza, presents an interesting structure borrowing features from the play within the play. This drama of five characters focuses on the relationship of a mother, Pilar, with her

49 I wonder if it is possible to draw a parallel between this statement with the experience that the astronauts of Apollo 8 had when they saw the first earthrise in the history of humankind. It was the first manned spacecraft that exited the Earth orbit and all the attention was directed towards the Moon. In the documentary *Overview*, the astronauts declared that during the whole flight they were mainly concerned with the Moon, but suddenly, they saw the Earth appearing behind them. The recognition of the Earth and the sudden awareness of the Earth as a planet hanging in space struck them. The astronauts stress the serendipity of the discovery: one astronaut was "playing" with a camera and then flipped back, as a joke, and then they all look back, at the Earth. This recognition became one of the most important experiences of that trip, all the astronauts declared that they were haunted by this vision, and realized that Earth is something there, on which they live, floating in space, alone and fragile. By extension, they might have seen themselves hovering in space, lost and lonely.

two daughters, Aurelia and Nuria. Moreno, Aurelia's husband, and the mother's fiancé, Fernan, are also present on the stage. During the play the audience learns that there is a third sister, Cristal, but she never appears on the stage. The play does not set any concrete action, and actually there is no "initiating accident" that generates a "story"; instead it presents eight dialogues disclosing a series of "mini-dramas" portraying the complicated relationship between the women. It would be possible to identify the mother's new romance with Fernan as the "initial conflict" since the daughters don't accept Fernan, especially because of his desire for purity and uncompromising honesty. However, as we understand from the dialogues, this conflict has already been happening for many years. Therefore the old mother's new love story cannot be considered as a major conflict. The play then resembles a picture, a slice of family life. The play is interesting because the dialogues are interspersed by the actors' monologues. The attractive aspect is that it is the actors who are talking to the audience. These monologues are defined as an interview or a confession by the author, Yasmina Reza. The actors inform the audience that they are rehearsing a play called "The Spanish Play" written by a fictional Spanish author, Olmo Panero. They express their impressions of the character they have to play, the costumes they have to wear, and their relationship with the director or Olmo Panero. These monologues directly addressed to the audience generate a second level of narrative that recreates the situation of the play within the play, where the monologues are the "frame" story and the Spanish play is the "inside" story. The actors, when they comment on the play or on their profession, are, in a certain sense, the observers. The actor-spectators are watching the performance (the inside play) and comment on it. Yasmina Reza relates to the traditional scheme of the actor-spectator commenting on (or reacting to) the inside play, but innovatively twists it by keeping the same person doing the action and observing the action. However, in order to achieve this "fusion" of the actor-spectator and actor-actor, a shift is still necessary, one that tells the audience which level of narrative is expressed: if it is the confession or the Spanish play. The shift is made clear primarily by the fact that in the Spanish play there are no monologues but only dialogues, so when the actor or the actress suddenly speaks alone, it becomes clear that something else is unveiled. There is also a change of tone: it is (or is supposed to be) a sincere and personal expression of feelings (from the actor and not from the fictional character) that reinforces the connection with the audience⁵⁰. Therefore the play

50 It is possible to argue that the sincere confession of the actors during the monologues is a simulation

presents “actor-performing-a-role” (in the Spanish play) and “actor-confessing”. It is almost as if there were two characters: the everyday life “character” and the stage character. In a traditional drama, actors embody or “become” fictional characters. They will do as much as possible to make the audience forget their own body and let the “body” of the fictional character emerge from them. But behind the shield of the fictional character, the real actor is present, with her/his body, memory and temperament. The traditional play simply erased the presence of the actor: the actor had to submit him/herself to the character totally. However, this “erasure” is not without problems because the fictional character is supported and nourished by the actor’s body and memory. The result is that while the fictional character has to “kill” (or take over) the real actor in order to exist (on stage), it is also “fed” by the real actor. Yasmina Reza, in her play, manages to expose this tension. Both the fictional character and the actor are on stage and both facets are presented. The audience can enjoy both sides of the “acting” process: the appearance of a fictional character and the “struggle” of the actor in order to let the fictional character emerge.

During the monologues the actors, as stated previously, comment on their characters, their difficulties etc. All these comments are strictly related to the Spanish play, and they are related to the action, but not only those happening inside the Spanish play, but also the ones surrounding it. But what are the actors observing? They observe the fictional characters and their own relationship to these characters. We may deduce that actor and character are two different entities, and that the actors have the ability to look at things in an objective way. However some revelations made during the play seem to reveal that Yasmina Reza has another point of view on that matter. In fact at one moment, in Nuria’s second confession (scene 9) she asserts that, “the characters are what we are”. She implies that there is no distinction between the actor and the character they embody. This assumption is reinforced subtly by the manner in which the other actors confess and especially by the topics they speak about. Slowly it is possible to perceive a parallel between the psychology of the fictional character and the interests of the actors. This reaches its paroxysm when in the last confession (scene 27), the actor doesn’t speak for himself but for the character he

of the same order as the “performing a role” in the Spanish play. When the actor is doing her/his confession, is she/he really confessing something? Or is she/he pretending to play the role of a character like when she/he plays one of the characters in the Spanish play? Although this last argument is debatable, what is anyway attractive in these “confessions” is the emergence of the second level of acting which transforms the relationship with the audience.

plays, as if it was the fictional character doing the confession: the actor embodying Moreno seems to be taken over by the character Moreno who is talking to his wife, Aurelia. The boundaries between fiction and “reality” here are totally blurred. The very last scene, which follows the last confession, is totally striking. The two daughters, Aurelia and Nuria are both actresses. Aurelia is preparing a new play called a Bulgarian play, while Nuria has recently finished a movie with a famous Hollywood actor and she is about to receive an award for it. The fact that the daughters of the Spanish play (which can be considered the inside play) are actresses adds a third layer of narrative. In fact, in addition to having the actor confessions in the Spanish play, we also have the fictional characters discussing about theatre and cinema. In this situation the mother and Fernan represent the voice of the spectators, and they form a kind of chorus expressing their opinion about performing arts. They don’t pretend to have an intellectual or artistic approach but speak using common sense, what “people” like. Here Yasmina Reza plays with the contrast between the aesthetic expectation of the artistic elite and what “people” like to watch. Aurelia and Nuria instead provide insight about their art: they are talking about theatre as if this was happening somewhere else, far from the room where they are in that moment. This evocation of theatre allows for making indirect allusions to the concrete performance happening at the very moment (the play by Yasmina Reza), because the fictional characters are in a theatre, performing in front of concrete spectators but discussing it as if it was something not happening at that moment, as if it was something that is off stage, not present.

The play doesn’t have many particular actions, instead the characters are talking almost all the time. Besides the talking we can identify three actions:

1. In scene 24, during the climax dialogue the mother slaps Aurelia.
2. In scene 15, Nuria has to decide between two dresses, she tries on both. She somehow rehearses the parade she will do in two days for the award ceremony.
3. In scene 10, 20 Aurelia with the help of her husband rehearses the Bulgarian play. In scene 28 it is not clear if she actually performs the Bulgarian play or if she is still rehearsing it.

We can remark that most of the action (beside the fact of talking) consists of rehearsing a part: Nuria for the role of the movie star, and Aurelia for her new theatre role. This component of rehearsing a role, which is at the core of the play,

explodes in the last scene. Yasmina Reza sets the convention that the dialogues belong to the Spanish play and the monologue to the confession. However, the last scene, which is part of the Spanish play, is a monologue that Aurelia does, embodying the fictional character, Miss Wurtz, from the Bulgarian play. This last monologue resembles a confession, the confession of Miss Wurtz, which sounds terribly close to Aurelia's character's mood whose attitude towards life and love is analogous. The similarity between Aurelia and Miss Wurtz is very strong, to the point that it is not clear if it is Aurelia or Miss Wurtz talking. The parallel can easily be traced: if Aurelia is like Miss Wurtz, what would keep us from thinking that actually all the actors are the characters they embody (as it happens in scene 27 where the actor is "taken over" in his confession by the character he plays)? This last hypothesis is not without heavy implications. One could argue that this cannot happen because there is a major difference between an actor and a character. An actor is present while the character is something absent that needs to be materialized. Therefore something that is absent cannot replace or become something that is present. In order to answer this statement I would like to come back again to Yasmina Reza's play. There is another character that does not appear but is mentioned several times: Aurelia and Moreno's daughter Lola. We don't know much about her, but we know that she is a child, too young to have a cell phone (scene 8), that she likes to clean the house, to vacuum (scene 13) and that at the playground she hits a little boy with her toy rake (scene 4). I would like to propose a second hypothesis in order to continue my argument: what is absent (or invisible) enhances (or reveals) what is present. Following this idea, Lola, the invisible child, is more than a funny figure, she is the exteriorization of Aurelia's psychology. Lola is not presented as an "individual" person with a personal will. She is mentioned in only three scenes and she is referred to in relation to the parents and especially to her mother, Aurelia. Lola becomes then the extension of Aurelia, the manifestation of her. Yasmina Reza, instead of describing Aurelia's figure through words, invented Lola, who, through physical actions, reveals who the mother is. And even the "invisible" sister, Cristal, has the function to disclose the madness of the women present. Cristal, who is defined as the only normal sister, emphasizes the petty games, the paranoia and the lies of the other two sisters (who are both actresses). Behind the portrait of a zany family meeting, Yasmina Reza presents a terrible meditation upon actors. She especially ponders their relationship with a fictional character, the act of embodying, where she perhaps suggests that the actor's humanity is made visible by what is absent, the fictional character. If we look at the only monologue of the actress embodying

Aurelia (scene 14), we can notice that she doesn't say almost anything personal. She provides general information about the character she has to perform. The only thing that we know is that the actress likes comedy but thinks that drama has a deeper impact on the audience. She concludes the play by performing a melancholic monologue about love and the absence of love, which is the exact dramatized expression of her "cold", emotionless monologue in scene 14. In scene 25, during the monologue of the actress embodying Nuria, she quotes one of Chekhov's letters to his wife: "you are horribly cold, as actually an actress should be". The themes of absence, persons, emotion, or reality, are not only a leitmotif of Nuria's actress (scene 9 and 25) but they are also the foundation of Yasmina Reza's play. The last sentence "I don't want to live love for real" is an echo of the opening scene, where the actor embodying Fernan, in his monologue, asserts that when you leave a character and its surroundings, you are more nostalgic than when you leave a real place, meaning that emptiness following the "death" of a fictional character is stronger than an event in everyday life. And this could be the terrible conclusion of the author: that only through an invented persona can the actor express his or her own personality. This last conclusion brings us back to the point that the actors, during their monologues, are simply looking at themselves and making comments about themselves.

Yasmina Reza's play is often labeled as "Pirandellian" and indeed it offers analogies especially with *Six Characters Looking for a Director*, where during a theatre rehearsal fictional characters magically appear and start discussing things with the actors and the director. There is a confrontation in Pirandello's play as well between actors and characters (between those "acting" and "observing"). The fictional characters, by interrupting the actors and the director during their rehearsal, explain the story that binds them together. But the essence of the play, or the conflict lies in the opposition of reality and fiction. This is expressed in the confrontation between the actors and the characters. Yasmina Reza's play dwells on the integrity and morality of the actors. In fact the fourth sentence of the play states: the usual human qualities of the normal world are opposite to the actor's wellbeing. In Pirandello's play instead when one of the actors accuses the fictional characters of not being real, the father, the leading figure of these fictional characters answers that probably they are less real, but for sure they are more alive.

The stage, as claimed by Mannoni, could be perceived as the extension of the spectator's self with all her/his possibilities. From this point of view, the debate concerning the "veracity" of the life opposed to the "delusion" of the stage is

devoid of any interest. The theatrical stage, the space of irrationality, nourishes the identity of the every day life, and therefore it is not a question of truth versus illusion, but a possibility of a window showing other worlds within the audience. Therefore Yasmina Reza's actor, supplied by her/his immaterial character is the theatrical expression of the human attitude of processing irrational thoughts. Thus the provocative line in the play "*the usual human qualities of the normal world are opposite to the actor's well-being*" is totally in contradiction with what follows. Or maybe we should change it to: "*the usual human qualities of the normal world are opposite to a person's well-being*". But this brings the debate to another domain, which I don't want to enter in the course of this examination.

The withdrawal of the stage

In 2009 Tim Crouch wrote and directed a play called *The Author*, which presents the surprising element that the stage is absent. Usually the theatre event takes place in this particular space where the fictional world meets the "real" world: the stage. This means that one of the elements that generates and legitimizes the show is eliminated. In Tim Crouch's performance the audience is sitting in two groups facing each other. Almost all spectators can see everybody else too and among the spectators are seated four performers. This setting provides a strong sense of intimacy. The performers rarely talk to each other (as it would be in a traditional play) but instead talk directly to the audience as if they were sharing a personal experience. They tell the audience about the experience of a play and slowly we understand that the four performers are linked together: one of them is the author who wrote and directed that play, one embodies one of the characters of that play: the father, one the daughter and the fourth one is a spectator who has subscribed for the entire season and therefore saw as well that particular show. During the show the performers are called by their real names: the performer playing the author is Tim⁵¹, the actor embodying the Father is Vic, the daughter is Esther and the "spectator" is Chris. It turns out that the performers are using their own names.

Quite quickly it becomes clear that the present show is the recounting of a previous show. The audience is attending a performance, which is about another

51 Since the Author of the play and the performer embodying the author-director are the same person: Tim Crouch, in order to avoid confusion between the two I refer to the author of the play when I write "Tim Crouch" and I refer to the performer (author-director of the unnamed play) with "Tim".

performance. Esther, Tim, Vic and Chris participated in the previous show (which remains unnamed) and share their experience. It is almost a similar situation as in the *Spanish Play* but without the “*Spanish play*” (the inside play); where only the monologues-confessions are kept. Therefore the four performers become the actor-observers observing themselves when they were “acting” (similarly to the *Spanish Play*). The previous performance (that in our play within the play schema can be considered as the inside play) displays only two characters, a father and a daughter and their incest⁵².

However, what happens in this unnamed play is actually never told. The four performers only tell us elements sustaining the creation of the play and its representation; they express only their point of view, their perception and experience of that play. But nothing is said of what happens exactly on the stage, about the incest. The audience understands, through shards of information, that the play is violent and shocking, that gory effects were used to impress the spectators, and that the process of making it has been difficult, especially for the actor embodying the father. He says that the director, Tim has “pushed” him to discover terrible parts in himself. The two actors tell us how they managed to become the characters they have to embody. The four performers don’t deliver the pieces of information randomly. There is a specific dramaturgy, which follows the chronological development of the project. The first actor who speaks is the “spectator”, who talks about his passion and joy of going to the theatre and his expectations. After him the other actors comment on the rehearsal process, the direction that Tim gave about “addressing” the audience by looking straight into their eyes (which is what they all do during this show). They talk about how the selection of the actors happened, the casting. At the same time, Tim explains his motivations as an artist to explore the domain of violence. One element that is questioned all the time is what we do with violence, especially with the images of violence that surrounds our existence. Do we deny them? Do we accept them and, as Tim Crouch says, do we show them in order to reflect upon them? The comments continue to inform us how the audience reacted to the show, how some “special” effects were used to impress the audience. They talk about the reception from the critics. The “spectator”, Chris tells us that he fainted at the end of the show. Vic, Esther and Tim recollect the moment after the last show,

52 Tim Crouch reinterprets the structure of the Pirandellian play, *Six Characters Looking for a Director*, which is also constructed around the theme of incest.

when they exit the theatre, and then it ends with the party that Tim organized some time later in order to close the production.

The ingenious dramaturgical solution adopted by Tim Crouch allows the spectators to recreate the “phantom play” mentally; in fact they collect the pieces of information and like a puzzle they recreate the whole play about the incest mentally. This device works so strongly to the point that when I attended the performance I started to wonder if the unnamed show has actually been really performed and whether I was attending a kind of lecture-performance-discussion about that production.

What is striking here is that Tim Crouch wants to question the violence, the production of images of violence and their impact on us. He claims that, as an artist, he is summoned to show the violence. However, nothing violent happens concretely. The actors just inform us that they performed “violent” actions. These “images” of violence that Tim insists on showing are however never shown. They only appear in our head, on an imaginary stage. We are so much immersed and surrounded by such images, that it is very easy to “see” again the rape of a woman, the beheading of a prisoner. If the play between the father and the daughter had been really performed, the audience would have started judging the play, the acting, the credibility of the story, the set and so on. But by removing the fictional play and displaying it on an invisible stage, these thoughts are also removed and this allows to present another dimension, which does not lead to judging if the acting is believable or not but to questioning the audience about violence and violent images⁵³. In fact one of the recurrent elements during the show is the concrete questioning of the audience if they are OK, if the actors can continue or if they should stop. Incessantly they ask the audience, is it correct to continue? Or shall we stop? Do you feel OK? The intent is to shift the focus onto the spectators; they become the protagonists of the play. Their decision about whether to continue or not is the core question of the show. The important element is not whether the show should be interrupted or not, but the right to say no in everyday life.

During the show, quite at the beginning a spectator left the room. I was surprised. After the show, I discovered that this “exit” was staged. Tim Crouch wanted to subtly show that you could refuse. That it is OK to say no. Daily life is bombarded by many kinds of images, and it is difficult not to see them, as

53 Again, it is possible to link this last remark to the question of imagining discussed in the paragraph *Puppets and Imagination*.

Tim informs us. But the status of these images remains unclear, as if they were unreal. Tim Crouch, instead, wants to bring back their “reality” to these images:

Vic: We spent a lot of time on the computer – watching reports, understanding the situation. Looking at images. Some people said that the things that happened in the play were too extreme, but they’re nothing to what we looked at. (Crouch, 2009, 38)

By playing with the general assumption that sometimes reality is far more shocking than any fiction humans can imagine, Tim Crouch nudges us to accept that even if this unnamed show is repulsive, it is not as horrendous as reality can be. Therefore the audience tends to consider this unnamed show as something that has really happened, even though the spectators have no idea what was happening on the stage.

Esther: And it happened there, in a room in Chelsea. That beheading. With us gathered around the lap-top. On a coffee break while we were working on Act Two. That’s where it happened. (Crouch, 2009, 52)

As Esther explains, the killing happened, concretely. From the moment they were looking at it, it was real. The “distance” that the computer, and Internet provides doesn’t take away the reality of that action. Whenever they look at the video, the man is killed, and the physicality of that video is inflicted on the watchers, on their bodies, which absorbs such images. And here lies the strongest point of the show. Vic and Esther share their process as actors with the audience: they have to embody a victim and a perpetrator. Vic says that he has been cast as the father probably because he looks like an “evil” man, but in reality he is very gentle. Through the show we understand, however, that this “violence” has affected him. Vic explains in the rehearsal process, that with Tim they have observed people from wars and especially how their body moved, how the brutality “abstracted” their body. Vic shows some examples how the body attitude changed. As the war has “abstracted” the bodies of these soldiers and victims, Vic has been damaged by this enormous absorption of violence. His transformation finds its climax when, after the last show, he brutally kicks a spectator. Esther also suffered from this absorption of images to the point that she superimposes images from the

internet on reality: “*Or when the supermarket delivery comes and I open the front door, I see the delivery-man with blood spurting from his throat.*” (Crouch, 2009, 55) The actors, Vic and Esther, are observing the process of “abstraction”, change and distress happening to them. Even the spectator, Chris is affected by the show, the flashing lights makes him faint. Finally the author, Tim, is also affected by the show, or by the easiness of seeing terrible images and his incapacity to stop. At the end the audience understands that he is going to commit suicide after the project.

A performance, the staging of a text or any kind of story necessitates and generates a structure, a process, a content that has to disappear in order to let the staged show appear: the visible discourse of the text. The process of rehearsal usually consists of the actors “entering” (or becoming or manifesting) the fictional character and of the director establishing a theatrical language. This contributes to the emergence of the visible show. Subsequently the show also generates a series of events that remain invisible, such as the reception of the show by the spectators, the discussion they have, the writing of the critics, and so on. All these events, which are necessary to make the show visible, linger unseen in a blind spot of the stage. In fact, usually in a performance, what is given to see to the audience is the result of this process, of this “text”. Only what has become visible and what is addressed to the audience appears. The confrontation of the actors with the fictional characters, the transformation of written words into sensitive features vanishes on the stage. Tim Crouch deconstructs this process and deprives the performance of its two main factors: the making visible and the encounter of the fictional character with the bodies of the actors. Instead he shows the hidden (invisible) structure upholding the “stage visibility”, the dynamics that allows the show to emerge.⁵⁴ Traditionally the story is conveyed

54 One could claim that Tim Crouch, by removing the incest from the stage, doesn't present the hidden structure upholding the show but wants to show the “invisibility” of the incest. Meaning that incest, like domestic violence, is happening constantly but society seems unwilling to face the fact and prefers not to see it. This could be linked with the play *Blasted* (1995) by Sarah Kane. In *Blasted* there are two rapes: one in the first part, done by a man (Ian) to a woman (Cate) and the second in the second part done by a soldier to Ian. The first rape happens off stage, while the second is performed on stage. Generally critics have seen the second rape as a punishment for what Ian has done to Cate. But Kim Solga (in *Blasted's hysteria: Rape, Realism, and the threshold of the Visible*, Modern Drama, Volume L, Number 3, Fall 2007) provides another interpretation. She claims that Cate is not sick because she is abused, but because nobody notices that she is abused. According to Solga, Sarah Kane wanted to show the invisibility of domestic violence (as if it has become a normal standard, an everyday routine that society refuses to deal with), while the shocking rape of a soldier is visible. Similarly it would be possible to read Tim Crouch's decision not to show the incest as a statement of the deliberately not recognizing it, the desire to make it invisible. This interpretation however

by actors who embody fictional characters and, in front of the audience, accomplish actions on the stage. The sum of the actions corresponds to the drama, which is made visible (or “materialized”) in a concrete space called stage. This emblematic superimposition of a fictional story on the concrete stage (and the tension created by it) and of fictional characters on concrete actors’ bodies is the key point with which contemporary theatre struggles. Tim Crouch responded to this clash by separating the concreteness of body and stage from the fictional characters and space: he “removed” the story (the fictional dimension) and dislocated it to an “invisible” stage. Tim Crouch shows the discourse that doesn’t appear: the structure sustaining the visible show, what is not exposed on the stage, what remains outside, the obscene⁵⁵. He wants to show what a show is made of. He doesn’t present what is made to see, the show, but rather what allows for a show to become visible. By removing what is usually visible (the show) and by showing what upholds it, he displays (or stimulates) a mental stage on which the “visible” is exhibited.

He “reversed” the process allowing the corporeal presence of the actors and their intimacy to be exposed⁵⁶. In fact, for instance, the fictional character of the father is removed from the body of Vic and he is projected, he is “alive” on the imaginary stage that the audience creates. This is also valid for all the other characters. Surprisingly the esthetical judgment is removed and is replaced by a mental activity stimulating the imagination. The spectators become the critic of their own imaginary performance. One wonders if this strategy could not be assimilated into the practice of storytellers. At first glance it may seem similar. However in Tim Crouch’s play, even the performers resemble storytellers because they speak about their points of view in the first person. While the storyteller tells a story in the third person and is an omniscient narrator, the performers in Tim Crouch’s play simply look at their own character and process, they look at themselves in that situation and tell the audience what they have perceived and experienced. On that level they are like the actor-observers where the “inside” play has been removed from the stage. This remark leads me to propose that there is an inverted connection between the distance, or better to say, proximity

doesn’t explain why then Tim commits suicide at the end.

55 One of the possible origins of the word obscene comes from the Latin *obscena* meaning “cannot be shown on stage”, i.e. off-scene. This sense relates to Tim Crouch’s decision to bring the obscene onto the stage.

56 Similarly to *A Spanish Play* for the confession monologues, we could argue about the veracity of these “sharing experiences”, these moments of intimacy. Here as well, what I am interested in is the possibility to create two levels of narratives which permits bonding with the audience.

that the actors establish with the audience and their relation to the fictional character or the story. The closer the actors come to the audience, the farther they have to place their own characters from themselves. The ultimate example is Crouch's show where the actors place their fictional characters on such a remote stage that it becomes invisible. A similar effect is obtained at the very end of *Hamlet*. When Horatio invites Fortinbras off stage to listen to Hamlet's terrible tragedy, it is as if Hamlet's fictional character suddenly found himself on a remote stage, giving corporeal materiality and thus proximity to the last deadly scene.

Third part: the practical work

In this last part I present the passage from the theoretical inquiry to the practical work. First I explain what initiated the transformation of the analytical study into a practical one and how I developed the practical research. After this I present the script of the lecture-performance and the text ends with a general conclusion that discusses the development of the artistic research undertaken in this second phase of the work.

The unexpected event

By December 2010 I had completed a first draft of the theoretical argument (which corresponds to the first and second part of this chapter) and submitted it as a paper for a talk at CARPA 2.

I was informed that I was accepted at the colloquium, but that there was a problem because I had submitted a theoretical paper, while the colloquium aimed to present "artistic research in action". I was confused. How was I to transform an academic text into a practical work, an artistic research in action? After meditating on the situation it occurred to me that I could perhaps circumvent the problem by implementing the subject of my research as the form of it: since the topic of the paper was the play within the play, and since I intended to deliver a lecture, my presentation could then be a lecture about a lecture (a kind of lecture within the lecture). Since initially I intended to talk primarily about *The Author*, I thought I should also eliminate the stage. Therefore I called this project: *The Invisible Stage*. Excited by this idea, and taking Tim Crouch's show as a template, I started dramatizing the theoretical paper. But here I faced the first of many problems. In order to "dramatize" the theoretical text I needed to turn the paper into a theatrical situation. But what kind of situation should it

be? I didn't want to fall back on traditional⁵⁷ theatre drama, with a linear plot. That was exactly the starting point of this chapter, to understand the structures that allow one to evade the fulfilment of a plot. No, it must be me (and not a fictional character) talking to the audience and it has to remain on the level of a lecture, which is happening now and here. I decided that I would construct my lecture within the lecture by using Tim Crouch's system; parallel monologues with several narratives. But in order to display parallel narratives I needed at least a second performer, so I asked the actor Juha Sääski to join this project.

I was not completely new to this genre of lecture-performance. When I was teaching theatre theory in the Teatro Scuola Dimitri in 2007-2008 I did two experiments with the students, which were based on a similar idea: the transformation of an analytical research into a performance. The first experiment explored Henri Bergson's book, *The Laughter* (*Le rire*, 1900) and the second one William Willeford's book *The Fool and his Sceptre* (1969). I had always been fascinated by this genre, especially by its simplicity, minimalism and its direct relationship with the audience.

But how was this lecture-performance to differ from a normal lecture? In other words, what was the audience supposed to experience? And how was I supposed to convey all the theoretical concepts?

In the beginning I placed the audience into a similar setting as Crouch's show; sitting in two groups facing each other, so close that there was only a narrow corridor between the two sections – literally leaving no space for the traditional concept of the stage. The performers, Juha and myself, were seated amongst the spectators. But this was not enough. There was something missing in the experience of the space. The main subjects of *The Invisible Stage* are "division" and "observation". How could the audience not only listen to words about these ideas, but live them as well? With Juha, we decided that we must explore the stage not only conceptually but also physically. So we simply started playing with the placement of chairs, increasing and diminishing the space between the two spectator sections, and tried to understand how this change in the architecture of the stage/space could affect the spectators' perception. When the chairs were distant, creating a kind of empty space between the two sections, the audience felt allowed to observe the empty space, which was assumed to be "the stage", and the other spectators. When the chairs were close, the proximity made it

57 Traditional theatre in the sense of a well-made drama with a self-contained story, with its own space and time and characters.

somehow unbearable to look at the other spectators. At that moment the spectators started to put more effort into listening and the gaze was often directed towards the floor or somewhere away from the other spectators. I realized that, by modifying the architecture of the space, in our case of the audience's chairs, the experience of the audience can be altered, that there were ways to make the audience not only understand conceptually but physically experience the abstract concepts of the text. So, at that point, there were two different situations: the chairs far from each other and then close. But this was not enough. I wanted to make more changes in the architecture. I was wondering, what would happen if, after bringing the spectators closer together, we separated them? So, with Juha, we tried to place a black sheet between the chairs. The sensation of something preventing you from watching increased the desire to imagine even more what was happening on the other side. This was going exactly in the direction I wanted to explore: the idea of an invisible stage. Then, by exploring other possible space organizations, I noticed that if I let the audience close to each other, while Juha and I placed our chairs behind them, it was possible to reach a state that is somehow the opposite of the initial situation: the audience is now in the centre and Juha and I are behind the audience. I noticed that in this situation it is as if the audience is put on the stage as actors. With Juha, we decided that we wanted to finish the show using this last setup where the audience can enjoy this ambivalent position of being spectators and somehow actors.

I finally opted for four different organizations of the space, which would follow one another within the same performance.

The show started with the audience placed on two rows of chairs facing each other:

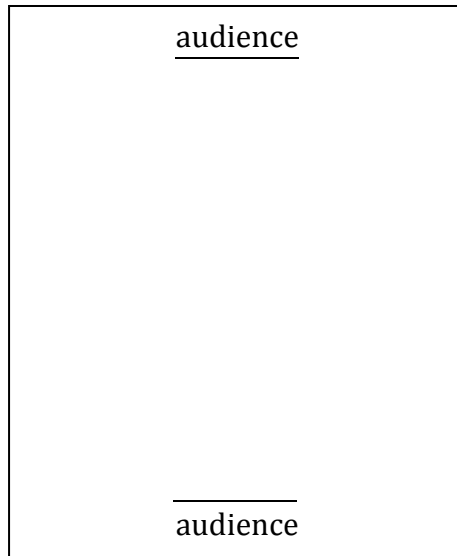


Figure 1

Then the two rows of chairs were brought closer:

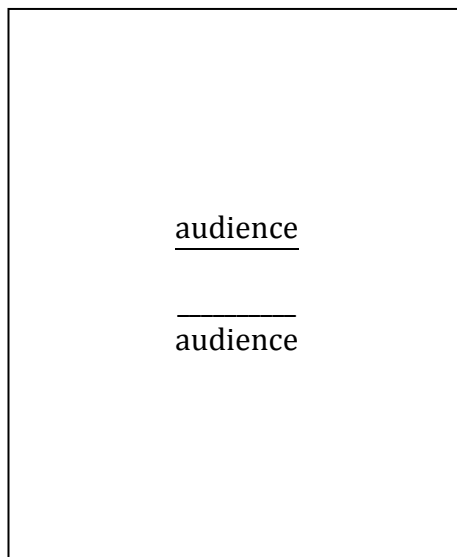


Figure 2

Then the spectators were divided by a black screen placed between the two rows of chairs:

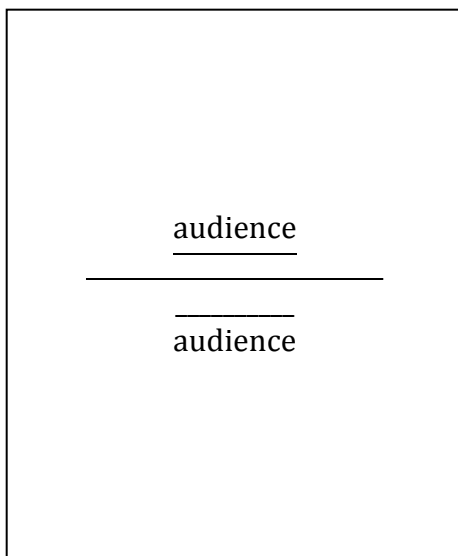


Figure 3

And finally Juha and I were seated behind the spectators:

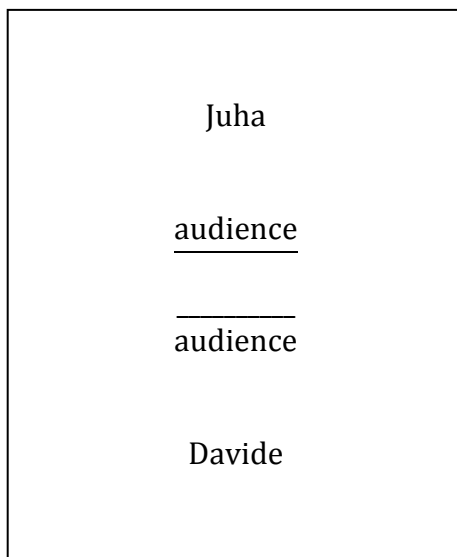


Figure 4

I understood that by simple modifications (moving of chairs, then taking in and out a black fabric, then Juha and me moving our chairs) it was possible to make the audience's position shift and therefore to stimulate a different kind of attention towards the show. At first the spectators were observers, then they became "listeners", then it is the imagination that was excited, and finally they found themselves in an uncertain situation: who are the performers and who are the spectators? The doubt that accompanied the last setup was a powerful moment where the audience had the possibility to reprocess the whole performance and thus re-evaluate the experience of the performance. These changes in the setting helped the lecture become a performance and thus a practical demonstration of ideas presented in the theoretical paper. I realized that if in the previous practical work, *Pirandello Project*, I focused mainly on the actors, in this second work, *The Invisible Stage*, the space became my focus: how the changes in space can allow a different experience for the audience and how the elements of the play within the play can become physically concrete by transforming the setting. It seems a paradox that in a project where the stage is supposed to be absent, preoccupations with the space are primordial. This demonstrated a significant characteristic of the play within the play that slowly I was becoming aware of. The play within the play actually contests its own limits; it points out what is not present (or visible). This later claim is an important shift in my understanding of this device and it is the result of the turning point I was mentioning in the introduction of this chapter. The following chapters of my research discuss this concept extensively.

Since I wanted to develop my lecture on the play by Tim Crouch, I decided to use his play's structure as an inspiration in order to construct my lecture-performance. Crouch's play proposes three levels of narratives; the situation here and now where the actors are talking to the audience, the rehearsal period and the show itself. None of these elements was brought to an end but somehow all were interrupted and lingered unfinished. I also invented a story where I was invited to the University of Lausanne, in Switzerland, to give a lecture about a fictional playwright who wrote a play where there is no stage. In this way, I could display a double narrative unravelling the theory behind the construction of the play within the play and its direct application.

During the sessions, I presented my ideas to my fellow actor Juha and together we examined the possibilities to stage them. However, I remember one session, quite at the beginning of this work, where we had an intense and exhausting argument about the concept of "broken circle and closing the circle" (see the

first part of this chapter). We were both tired of this discussion and somehow, without saying it, we were wondering if we really wanted to continue this project together. But then, we looked at each other and we both realized simultaneously that what has happened was exactly our lecture-performance; that we don't have to agree, we can display our disagreement and let the audience be the judge. This reminded me of a work I did in Italy, in 2008, with Jean-Claude Penchenat, the co-founder of *Le Théâtre du Soleil* with Arianne Mnouchkine. During this work he took an initial situation that I proposed, the interconnection of banks and public spheres in the Swiss context, and he dramatized it. In order to do so, he asked two actors to improvise as if they were in a courtroom and each of them had to defend an argument. During this improvisation I saw the close connection between courtroom, agonistic debate and tragedy: the opposition of two different world values. Penchenat used this improvisation as the base for developing a more complicated scenario afterwards. So Juha became a kind of alter ego-“nemesis”; a person responding to my inquiry and debating it. He refuted my ideas by proposing other solutions, but he never discarded the inquiry itself. So, to the two levels of narratives, I added a third one which permitted to define a fictional relationship between Juha and me: we both were in Switzerland for a residency working on a solo performance for Juha. Then I decided that the fictional author of whom I must give a lecture at the university of Lausanne must be based on a real figure, so I choose Jacques Chessex, (but renamed him Felix Segantini), who was a controversial Swiss writer, and died during one of his lectures. I decided to use this real event and implement it as a frame story in my “lecture within the lecture”: so it would have been a lecture where the lecturer dies at the end of it. This added two other layers to the previous three. Moreover I wanted to show two of “his plays”, one that would be inspired by Tim Crouch's play and that I renamed: *Les Joueurs Observants* (*The Observant Players*) and one that would be based on the debate between Rousseau and Voltaire about theatre which I called: Geneva. During the animated debates, Juha and I, in order to express our different opinions, often refer to Shakespeare and especially to *Hamlet*. This generates two additional layers where scenes from *Hamlet* are discussed and surprisingly re-enacted by two extra comedians.

So with all these narratives, instead of trying to solve all of them, I decided to do the opposite: to deceive the spectators in need of a story by triggering the expectation for one. This time, in order not to feel crushed by “the need of a story” (as I felt during the *Pirandello Project*), I decided to “anticipate” the expectation of it by pushing the project of a narrative ad absurdum: like a Russian matry-

oshka doll, the performance displayed many plays within the play, which were constructed upon each other. In fact eight “stories” were intertwined:

- 1) The lecture in Switzerland (the frame story)
- 2) The relationship Juha-Davide
- 3) The meeting with Felix Segantini
- 4) The plays of Felix Segantini, *Les Joueurs Observants* and *Geneva*
- 5) *Hamlet*
- 6) The comments on *Hamlet*
- 7) Juha and Davide mimicking *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*
- 8) The architecture (the spectators “becoming” actors)

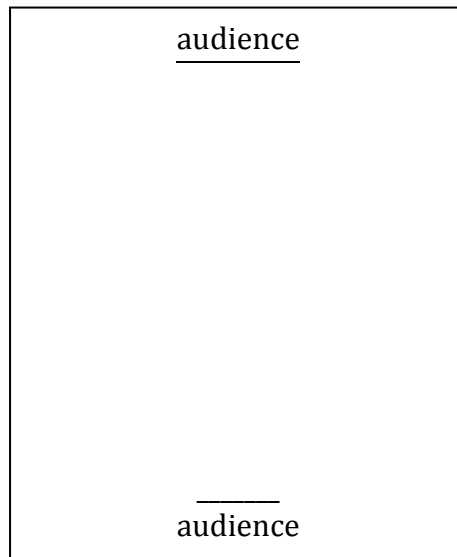
The basic idea was to disrupt each narrative by bringing in a new one, or by jumping back to a previous one. Instead of providing a resolution for the story and situations, the narrative is redirected towards another story. The “crisis” that each story develops is then not resolved, but simply remains unsolved, hanging in the air; and it is the audience who must answer it. These constant shifts never let the audience rest, in fact it surprises the spectator who has to keep (re-) negotiating their relationship to the story. This does not happen only on the textual level but there is also a narrative of the architecture; the audience changes the space by moving the chairs and therefore changes the experience of perceiving the story.

The performance does not come together from the single scenes of each story but from the jumps from one narrative to another, so it is the juxtaposition or jumps that create the melody of the show. As if the eight narratives were the keyboard that the notes were placed on. I realized that these jumps, these playful shifts became the technique of my practical work. The work I did with Juha focused on how it is possible to change, how to bring in a new narrative and how to relate to a previous one. The acting work, following the nature of the script, mainly concerned jumps or breaks: sometimes Juha and I talked to the audience as Juha and Davide, at other moments Juha embodied Felix Segantini, then Juha and I became the actors performing Felix Segantini’s play, and later Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and so on.

So the performance is composed of continuous disruptions: the stories are left unfinished, and it is the audience who can project a resolution in their mind (or on “the invisible stage”). From this point of view each story ends with a deficiency and the show could be defined as the show of “lacking”. Even the final

scene, which concludes the show and frames it, is based on a disruption: it is the sudden death of the main character, Felix Segantini. It is an unexpected event, which interrupts the lecture that concludes the whole performance. The story of the lecture remains unfinished, like many others. However the juxtaposition of these “lacking moments”, of these interruptions, generates a meaning that questions the very nature of the theatre event. Theatre in this case is examined through a kind of “via negativa”: exploring what is theatre if there would be no stage and consequently what would a theatrical action be without a stage, or an action not in front of the eyes of the audience, but projected on a mental or imaginary stage.

The script of The Invisible Stage



Davide: Welcome

Today I would like to talk about observation and division.

I remember once I read a note in the program of a play performed in Geneva. It was in 1994, I was still living in Switzerland. The director of the play wrote: “Is theatre really based on a division? A division between actors and spectators? And what does this act of “separation” suggest? The possibility that something can be observed? Does this

separation really constitute theatre? But if there is a division, then there is the danger that actors and spectators aren't in a dialogue. So how to overcome the separation?" After the play I met the director, Andrea Novicov, who afterwards became a friend.

I asked him: maybe you can overcome the separation by bringing the actors and spectators closer together?

Like here now?

Or could one solution be to place actors and spectators next to each other, sitting in the same space? [Davide sits down next to one spectator]

Andrea Novicov answered: "The stratagem to overcome the division is to redirect the gaze of the audience, from the story that is told to the act of observation itself." His answer has haunted me since.

Juha: Davide has told me this anecdote many times. I have worked together with him for some years in many projects. And recently he asked me to help him with this lecture performance about division and observation. Actually we work a lot with the concept of "observing". For instance once we did an exercise like that:

[Juha snaps rhythmically his fingers, then stops, stands up, look at the empty chair, look at the audience and then takes back his place and continue the action].

I asked, Davide, what is the point of this?

Davide: I replied: Daniel Paul Schreber, in the beginning of the 20th century while he was hospitalized in a clinic, wrote a book about his insanity. Indeed the book is a book of a mad man, however by publishing the book Schreber transformed the problem in a radical way: by enclosing his subjection towards the delirium with the "external" point of view of a writer, he changed the perception of his situation. If he would have had the same discourse towards his delirium as a subject, he would have lost himself, but by observing it from the outside (as a writer), there is nothing crazy about it. This change of position, from subject to object, allowed Schreber to project his insanity somewhere away at an "observable" distance.

Juha: Is this a metaphor for theatre? That we project something outside of us, something that is too hard to deal with? And then we observe the projection?

Davide encouraged me to ask open questions to the audience, because it summons the audience to think about it.

Davide: We were in Switzerland with Juha, in the fall of 2009. We were in a residence working on a solo performance for Juha, when Andrea Novicov called me and asked me to deliver a lecture at the University of Lausanne about a Swiss play writer: Felix Segantini.

Juha: I was not very happy about this lecture thing. Davide was supposed to help me with my solo performance and now I feared that he would be totally occupied with preparing the lecture instead of working with me. I knew his difficulty in living in Finland, and he jumped on every occasion to renew contacts with his country.

Davide: It is true. I accepted without knowing exactly the purpose and the context.

Juha: He was delighted to give a lecture at the university of...what was the name?

Davide: Lausanne.

Juha: Yes. There. And he said that this should be considered as a chance for me too. I could make an intervention during the lecture, a kind of performance based on what we were working on.

Davide: I still think it was a marvelous idea.

Juha: We were working with the idea of collapsed realities. We wanted to do something where a single gesture would simultaneously result in several meanings, sort of collapse into several realities instead of just one.

I introduced Davide this exercise, where, let's say, you and me are sitting here, and let's just observe for a while what we see..ok, is there

something specific that draws your attention? aha, hmm, that's good. That makes me think of..what about that. let's say we do this for an hour and move in the space. The point here is that we are negotiating meanings together, we know they might be different and change, so in a way we become aware of more than one reality.

Davide: I never really understood this exercise. I mean Juha, was there a division between you and him/her (referring to the spectator with whom Juha conversed).

Juha: Well was there? (Davide remains silent). Was there? (addresses to the same previous spectator).

Davide: You were directing the exercise, so there was.

Juha: Here, yes, of course. But if you do it for a longer time it would turn in a equal relationship. But then is it theatre anymore?...I would say yes.

Davide: I would say no.
(silence)

Juha: During our talks it became quite clear that Davide wanted to uncover the division from the inside of classical theatre whereas I was more eager to explore the outer lines of it, where theatre almost ends being theatre. We couldn't quite understand each other, so I decided to get closer to his point of view and think about my next move.

Davide: Who was Felix Segantini⁵⁸? I had no idea. I have heard of him, but I didn't read or see anything of him. Andrea gave me his last play: "*Les joueurs observants*" published in 2009 and which could be trans-

58 The name Felix Segantini is obviously an invented name. It comes from the fusion of Felix Vallotton and of Giovanni Segantini. Both are Swiss painters, although nearly opposite in their artistic styles. Felix Vallotton is mainly famous for his plane graphical prints depicting urban scenes, while Giovanni Segantini, whose painting is extremely dense in color and materiality, portrays the impressive spectacle of the mountains. The fictional Felix Segantini is loosely based on texts written by Swiss writer Jacques Chessex, describing events that had happened to him.

lated into “*The Observing Players*” or into “*The Obsequious Players*” depending on how you want to perceive it. His plays were rarely performed. Only an extremely tiny circle praised his work. But the general opinion basically castigated completely the work of Felix Segantini as mere perversities.. In an interview in La Tribune de Genève, he said:

“I had to face the scandal very young. I was 22 years old when my father committed suicide. In Lausanne, in the 50’s, in a rigorous country, strongly Protestant, where everything is masked, my father was a shock. He was an excellent teacher and headmaster but inhabited by the Casanova’s demon. He had affairs with the mothers of his pupils. He broke down. I have been for long time the guilty son of a guilty father. This is why the general opinion sees me as a bastard, an impostor, and this won’t change.

He was right and in fact, during the affair of Roman Polanski...I don’t know if you remember but in 2009 Polanski was invited in a film festival in Zurich to receive an award for his work but when he arrived the Swiss police immediately arrested him at the airport because there was still this 20 years old demand for his extradition from the US government for sexual crime. Felix Segantini, like many other artists, actively defended the film director, accusing the Swiss police of having prepared a trap for Roman Polanski. Anyway, after this episode his sentence was definitive: an impostor, a bastard and a pervert. Even after the accident, the general opinion didn’t change.

Juha: We were wondering: what is more important? The gesture or the observation of the gesture?

[repeats the same action as previously]

Davide: But nobody seemed to pay attention to the inventive form of his plays.

Juha: In Hamlet, when the play within the play is performed. The gaze of the spectator is not directed towards the actors performing the inside play: The Murder of Gonzago, but toward Claudius watching the play.

- Davide: And to Hamlet, who is watching Claudius, watching the play.
[Juha sits]
I realized that giving a lecture at the university of Lausanne about Felix Segantini was problematic. I couldn't just present the work of Felix Segantini, I had either to defend or to attack him. Andrea Novicov knew my research here in Finland, consisting on the phenomenon of the play within the play. He said: Segantini is an atomic bomb, he is offering fresh models for the play within the play. This will throw a new light on your thesis! He wanted me to defend his position. He used me. I felt being in a kind of trap, a mouse trap.
- Juha: Davide was irritated.
- Davide: I think I managed to hide my irritation towards Juha. He didn't want me to accept. I told him that it was important. I accepted it but afterward I had regrets.
- Juha: I was getting optimistic. Maybe he would cancel the lecture. But it was too late.
- Davide: Andrea Novicov told me: Do you remember the text that you liked, and my answer when we met: the stratagem to overcome the division is to redirect the gaze of the audience, from the story that is told to the act of observation itself".
- Juha: Here we have it again. Let me tell you: Davide's friendship with Andrea Novicov is based in this one sentence.
- Davide: It is not mine. Felix wrote it.
- Juha: My "intervention" was supposed to happen in the second part of the lecture. Davide would have spoken about the last play of Felix Segantini and after that before the end I would have interrupted the lecture. But the accident changed everything.

Davide : One week before the lecture I met Felix Segantini. We were in Lausanne, in café Metropole. I explained the subject of my thesis to him, the research on the play within the play. He asked:

Juha: What do you think of *The Murder of Gonzago*?

Davide: I replied something like this: it is the strongest dramaturgical example of the play within the play: when Claudius sees himself portrayed in *The Murder of Gonzago*, he reacts. It is a demonstration of the fact that art has an impact on reality.

Juha: But what about the dumb show?

Davide: In Hamlet, before the inside play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, is performed, a silent pantomime summarizes the play that follows.

Juha: Claudius already sees himself in the pantomime, he sees himself pouring the poison in the ear of the king.

Davide: But he doesn't react yet.

Juha: Exactly. What do you say about that?

Davide: I haven't thought about it.

Maybe he is distracted and he doesn't pay attention to the dumb show. This is why afterwards he asks what is the content of the play.

Juha: Maybe. But your argument sounds lame. Why would Claudius all of a sudden be a distracted person?

Davide: And then Felix Segantini continued: if in your thesis you refer to Hamlet, this might shatter your theory about the play within the play.

Juha: Davide was perplexed.

Davide: If you are researching on the idea of observing, like an actor observing another actor...meaning a character recognizing him or herself, you should pay more attention to the end of the first act, when Hamlet meets the ghost. For he doesn't see a ghost, but himself: Hamlet!

Juha: We decided to take a closer look at the following hypothesis. The most natural way to gather is the circle. But in the theatre there is a division between actors and spectators, therefore we can say that the circle is broken. The stage is considered to be the space where the fiction is performed, therefore the space of "non-reality". The audience considers its own space as the space of reality. Now, when a play is performed inside a play, like *The Murder of Gonzago*, the stage is divided in two parts. The similar dichotomy actor-spectator is reproduced on the stage where some actors are watching other actors perform. Like Claudius and Hamlet watching the actors performing *The Murder of Gonzago*. Now the space of the actors performing becomes the space of fiction and the space of the actors watching, or actors observing becomes the space of reality.

Davide: This is intriguing.

Juha: Isn't it?

Davide: I mean by reproducing on the stage the situation that the spectator is experiencing, which is people doing and people watching, the division that usually separates actors from spectators is removed and displayed between the actors. The actors who are observing the other actors find themselves on the same level with the spectators. It is as if the circle is restored. As if we place the spectators on the stage. As if the audience is watching the audience.

Juha: I disagreed with that idea. I told to Davide that maybe a division is displayed on the stage. But the main division between actors and spectators remains! It can perhaps soften, and the actors-observers are maybe closer to the audience but still the division remains.

Davide: I replied: but as you said they become closer, the division is softened.

Juha: I didn't want to let it go that easily. I really admire Davide's enthusiasm and his hands-on approach to the problem, but he also likes to combine various ideas that are not clear and push them quite far. So I insisted: Yes. But it does not disappear! (If we want to examine the removal of division between actors and spectators, we should focus on the very relationship between actor and spectator, for example like I did in the beginning. I didn't say this, but I could have.)

Davide: I like Juha, although sometimes I don't know if he is trying to develop an argument or simply testing me. I said: the "division" among actors and spectators is as well a distance created by the esthetical judgment. The strategy of the play within the play is that it removes the esthetical judgment. When the play of *The Murder of Gonzago* is performed nobody pays attention on how it is performed, because it is the reaction of Claudius that matters. And this false complicity of sharing the same experience, brings unconsciously the spectators on the stage with the actors. Or vice versa, it propels the actors among the spectators.

Juha: I was almost satisfied with his last answer.
[silence]
But I tried a last fire: Don't you realize that we just observe theatre but theatre doesn't care about our observations? It just continues being theatre, it doesn't change.

Davide: Now I hate Juha when he brings in such arguments. I replied: do you want me to feel like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: two extras who believe to be the heroes of the situation?

Juha: I was hitting the right point. I exulted. Yes, I really think we are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern observing theatre and the stage which by the way is empty because the real players are somewhere else where the drama happens. So now just wait until Hamlet and Horatio walk in and discuss the play that will be performed for Claudius.

Two actors dressed with Renaissance costumes enter; one plays Hamlet and the other Horatio.

Hamlet: There is a play tonight before the King:
 One scene of it comes near circumstance
 Which I have told thee of my father's death.
 I prethee, when thou seest that act soul
 Observe my uncle. If his occulted guilt
 Do no itself unkennel in one speech,
 It is a damned ghost that we have seen, (...)
 Give him heedful note,
 For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
 And after we will both our judgements join⁵⁹

They both exit.

Juha: what was that? Davide, did you invite them?

Davide: (smiles)

Juha: Now look where you put us. We are stuck in this role from now on. How do you expect the audience to take us seriously anymore. Anything you say from now on will be part of your Guildenstern character.

Davide: Rosencrantz.

Juha: Guildenstern.

Davide: Rosencrantz.

Juha: Guildenstern.

Davide: Now, we are facing the emblematic problem of: in what level of "reality" are we? Am I talking to you as Davide? As Rosencrantz? Is this still part of my story that has happened in Switzerland? Is this a new version of Hamlet? Or is it part of this very lecture performance?

59 *Hamlet*, III, 2, vv. 74-85.

Whenever a second “reality” or level of illusion is introduced the borders between the staged realities can easily blurry, and therefore the audience might get lost. Shakespeare in order to avoid such confusion used the strategy of announcing what will happen next.

But why to tell to the audience what will happen next? Does this kill the suspense?

Juha: An action can generate many possible reactions. I can slap Davide, what will be his reaction? Will he slap me back? Will he go away silently and stop talking to me? Will he kiss me? These are all possible solution. All of them can be true. But among all of these, which reaction is theatrically speaking “believable”? Which one the audience will accept as normal for the character? Once in Switzerland I was so angry at Davide that I slap him. He kissed me. I was shocked. Maybe you don’t believe me, but it is true, I was shocked. I left the room.

Davide: When Hamlet informs the audience; this is what will happen and I will act like this to make this happen, the audience is not questioning anymore if the action is believable or not. It is accepted as a fact. The focus is then shifted to see how it is accomplished. How the action is performed. The audience is not anymore discovering the story but enjoying the unfolding of the plan and travels from one reality to the other one without troubles, without confusion.

Juha: The spectators instead of being behind the story, watching the story and judging it, they are placed ahead in time, they become somehow the complices of the author. They are watching the story from the end.

Davide: Now for instance, I can tell you that Juha is very sensitive and, as he has just told you, it is so easy to offend him. So as I did in Switzerland, I will make him leave the room.

Juha.

Juha: (pause)
Yes, Davide

Davide: No! call me Rosencrantz.

Juha: Guildenstern.

Davide: Whatever. Do you really think that Hamlet is messed up by the death of his father? And actually do you really think that there is a Hamlet in this story? Maybe we are all Hamlets here? We are all the expression of the same doubt.

Juha: Listen. You are not Hamlet holding a mirror to the audience. And actually if there is a Hamlet, it is Felix Segantini, and we are only trying to understand if he is truly insane or by craft. Don't worry, I will tell you now: he will die at the end.

[Davide touches his nose]

What... did you see that?

Davide: [is puzzled]

Juha: Ok. Let's repeat that. Look at what Davide does, but pay attention to my reaction! Go!

[Juha starts again and Davide touches his nose]

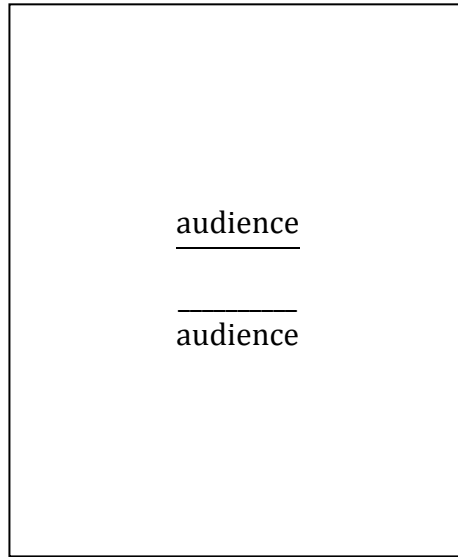
Davide! You see! You did that in Switzerland and you are doing it now! ..tu pidä itte luentos!.[Juha leaves]

Davide: I didn't matters how I was scratching my nose, the reaction of Juha was the most important element and the fact that he left. My strata-gem was maybe weak; you were expecting me to kiss him but I simply wanted to trigger your expectation. Thank you Juha.

[Juha comes back]

Davide: Actually the discussions I had with Juha, helped me a lot to structure my lecture. And for doing so, I invite you to re-structure the space.

[Davide invites all the spectators to stand up, take their own chair and to place it forward]



Davide: Imagine, what would happen if during Hamlet the stage would be removed? Where would Hamlet go? And where would the actor embodying Hamlet go?

In Segantini's last play, *The Observing Player*, there is the surprising element that the stage is absent.

Juha: Usually the theatre event takes place in this particular space, the stage, where the fictional world meets the "real world".

Davide: In this play, the audience is sitting in two banks facing each others. Almost all spectators can see everybody and among the spectators are seated 2 performers. Like here.

Juha: So here, where does the fictional world and the "real" world meet?

Davide: The performers rarely talk to each other (as in a traditional play) but rather talk directly to the audience as if they are sharing a personal experience. And here is the attractive aspect; it is the actors who are talking to the audience and not the characters. It is as if, the actors are stepping out from the characters and they simply talk to the audience. These monologues directly addressed to the audience

generates a second level of narrative that recreates the situation of the play within the play,

Juha: They tell the audience about the experience of making a play, the struggling of becoming someone else.

Davide: Slowly we understand that the 2 performers are linked together. one of them played the part of the dead father who committed suicide

Juha: And the other one played the part of his son.

Davide: And it becomes clear that the present show is the recount of a previous show

Juha: At one point, the actor embodying the dead father does this, and then this [Juha repeats the same gesture as previously], and then says: it was very hard for me to embody a dead soul, what kind of body gesture, what kind of voice? Have you ever met a ghost? Something that persecutes you? How to tell to your own child why you committed suicide?
I started thinking in a different way.

Davide: At one point, the actor embodying the son says this: “two weeks before the opening of the show I called my own father. I told him that I am performing in a play where the father of my character committed suicide after he went to see a theatre performance. I wanted to ask him if in his life he felt humiliated, or abused, if he felt he was dying. We spoke about the weather and after some usual awkward silence he wished me good luck and we hung up. I couldn’t ask him my questions.”

Juha: But what about you, Davide?
I am sure you have a close and deep relationship with your father.

Davide: of course, like each son has.

Juha: of course...

Davide: (silence)

Well, it is probably 20 minutes that you have been wondering why are we seated like this? Facing each other?

Juha: Observing what since the stage is removed?

Davide: The ingenious dramaturgical solution adopted by Felix Segantini allows the spectators to recreate mentally the phantomatic play; in fact they collect the bribes of information given by the actors and like a puzzle they recreate mentally the whole play about the meeting between the dead father and the son.

Juha: In this situation the division between actors and spectators is moved even further: the actors when they are commenting on the play or on their profession as actors, are in a certain sense, the observers, the actor-spectators who are watching the performance which consisted of the meeting of the dead father and his son.
Therefore the division lies now between here and before, between here and the invisible stage.

Davide: This is what I said

Juha: This is what you said in Switzerland, in Lausanne?

Davide: Yes, and here.

Juha: No! Here I said it.

Davide: But I wrote it.

Juha: Felix Segantini, who was sitting next to me during the lecture, was nodding. I was all the time scrutinizing the reactions of Felix Segantini.

Davide: I continued: the staging of a performance generates a process, a structure, a content that has to disappear in order to make the show visible.

Like an iceberg whose 90 percent remains invisible in order to let 10 percent be visible. When we see a show we have now idea if the actor had difficulties to become someone else, if he or she had difficulties in dealing with or acting out with issues such as depression, humiliation, abuse, death wishes, suicide. What kind of impact they had on his or her life. And what were the strategies used by the director to related to the actors?

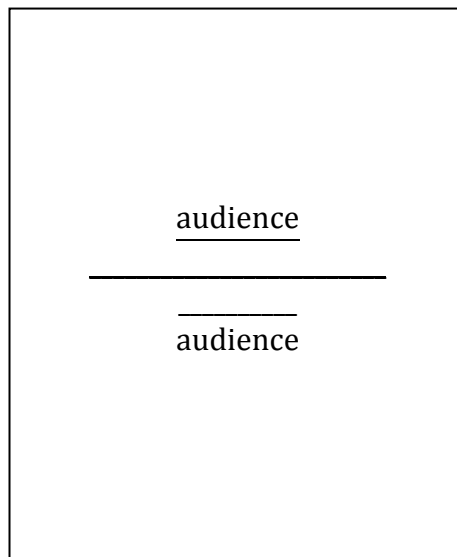
All these events, which are necessary to make the show visible, linger unseen in a blind spot of the stage.

Juha: Felix Segantini deconstructs this process. He shows the hidden, the invisible structure upholding the 10 percent that is visible. He does this by placing the “inside” story, the 10 percent, the play about the meeting of the dead father and his son, away from the gaze of the audience; it has been removed off stage; in an invisible stage: in the head of the spectators.

Davide: The audience can then enjoy both aspect of the performance: the making of the show, described by the 2 performers.

Juha: And the show itself projected in the invisible stage.

Curtain comes between the two spectators bank



Davide: Juha

Juha: Yes, Davide

Davide: What do you make of this?

Juha: Hmm, I don't know. This reminds me vaguely of Theatre of pure imagination.

Davide: What is that?

Juha: Well, nobody knows exactly. On one hand, it is literally what it says: Theatre of pure imagination (not to be confused with theatre of poor imagination, which we have plenty of). It takes place completely in the imagination. On the other hand it is a theoretical concept, a logical end-point of a thought, that theatre really is about imagining. It is partly there all the time, but we can never reach it completely, only approximate it.

Davide: So here I can follow you. You mean that this happens in a kind of invisible stage?

Juha: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Davide: And how does it work?

Juha: Well I know a group of Finnish outcast theatre artist, who did some experiments with it back in 1999 but they never report about it. But recently, a couple of years ago, I experienced a performance, where I was sent a letter with instructions, and then the show took place in the privacy of my bathroom. Just me and the instructions.

Davide: Alright Juha. What you are saying is that in a traditional theatre setting the actor and the character are superposed on the stage. But on the invisible stage by Felix Segantini the actor is present but the character is projected in the invisible stage and in your theatre of pure imagination, the actor and the character are both projected in

an invisible stage. And actually not only the actor and the character but as well the audience and the whole building are projected in an invisible stage. But this is not any more theatre. Could you come up with something that is more theatrical? Please.

Juha: All right, Let us try this. We have here two identical situations on both side of the curtain. We know what is there and they know what is here. There is a symmetry. What happens next, however, is in the realm of possibilities. We don't know what is happening on the other side. Maybe Davide will prepare a scene depicting the ancient Greek chorus, together with all the other people on the other side. Davide is showing written instructions, so that we don't hear them. He asks people to volunteer in an experiment. He explains that the experiment is quite simple, not at all harmful, and that it is an essential part of this lecture. He advises people to work in silence, for as long as possible. He hands out masks and instructs people to put them on. Davide is showing them a series of simple movements, a sort of choreography, which they repeat together, while still sitting in their chairs. They move in unison, they create a unity, just like the tragic chorus. The choreography is quite suggestive, hypnotic, it is setting them to a mild trance-state. They are also making a very low humming voice. You can't probably hear it because it is so low. Only some animals, like goats and deers, can register this frequency, so they are in a way contacting the animal side of their existence. The voice is resonating deep in their bodies and makes the trance state stronger. The movements are getting bigger. Most people are removing their excessive clothing and it is getting hard for them to stay silent. The humming and movement are still keeping them together, like one single organism that is about to explode from it's own, sustained energy. It is a tragic chorus! And from the ecstatic chorus a man emerge. Here is born: The first character. The proto character stepping out from the chorus. He replies to the chorus. He sings. He shouts. It could even be stronger, or wilder. The reality is cracking. Zeus appears answering the proto character. Tragedy! Elements are merging. Davide shouts silently his instructions. Super heroes appears and an atomic bomb and the universe explode. All the material is reorganized, molecule are composed again, atoms appear. The mole-

cule create again human shape. Humanity is born again. Davide gives signs. The people come back. They are forced back in their chairs. The tempest is calming down. The people sit down. They start to breath again. The silence is coming. They put back their cloth. They are back in the same situation as in the beginning.

The curtains is removed,

Davide: Felix Segantini in a previous article declared that the only way to understand the crisis of contemporary theatre is to go back to the primal gesture of the creation of the actor. We need to understand again why Thespis, in the 6th century before Christ, felt the need to step out from the tragic chorus. The moment of birth of the proto-character, consisted in the “exit” from the chorus, in the stepping out from the continuous movement of the ecstatic dancers, in other words; to stop.

Juha: [He repeats the same action previously]
In the action of pausing, we place ourselves outside from the incessant flux of life and we can observe it.

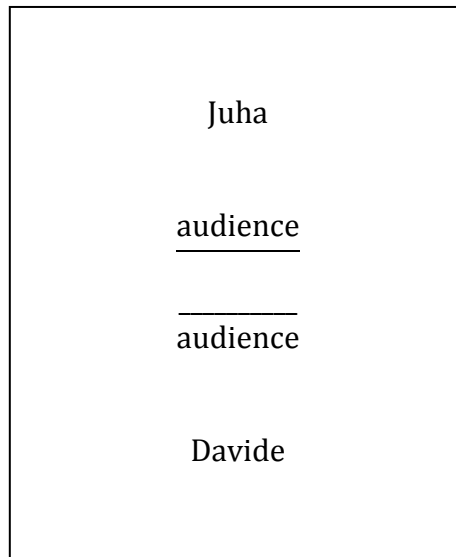
Davide: Does this imply that the theatrical act verges on the act of observing, of contemplating? And what should the “actor” observe? [Juha sits]
At that point I started the second part of the lecture

Juha: where I was supposed to do my “performance”

Davide: but the accident changed everything

Juha: My idea consisted in disrupting the expectation of a narrative form of the lecture.

Change of architecture, Juha sits behind the audience.



Juha: At first, I was not excited about Felix Segantini. After all, he was the symbol of my solo performance being transformed to just decorate Davide's lecture. But since it became unavoidable, I started to study his writings too. Davide seemed to ignore some parts of his work completely. For instance, in an interview in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, soon after his last play was published, he said: "This was the last time I write for theatre. I'm tired with theatre. Theatre is a monster. It eats absolutely everything and makes theatre out of it". This was encouraging and I started to feel excited and optimistic about my "intervention-performance" again.

Davide sits behind the audience.

Davide: Is this why you want to get rid of theatre altogether? Why is it so terrible? What is so frightening about this process? That it kills everything that is alive by making a representation out of it? By creating conventions that are then repeated?

Juha: No. I don't want to get rid of theatre altogether. In fact, I like the monster. It's just important to understand the monstrous nature of it. Theatre tries to make something alive, but maybe it is the very

moment of eating, when it is in the process of digesting, before it is totally processed and thus integrated that theatre is at its liveliest. Yes, the moment of digestion; just before it has become theatre.

Davide: I told Juha that in his performance he should feel free to break off, to upset the monster. To stop his digestion!

Juha: This might go against your presentation. It might go against what you are trying to defend. Are you aware of that?

Davide: Don't worry.
Feel free to explore the threshold of theatre, where the monster is constipating.

Juha: I started to worry when I heard this. First of all, I wasn't sure if he was getting my point. Secondly, when he says feel free to explore, he usually has a surprise waiting.

Davide: I wanted to trick Juha; his interruption, his attempt to dismantle theatre would not have been at all an interruption. Aristotle states that the plot is the unifying element. The story, according to him, brings everything under the lid of absoluteness. However a tragic story, as he states, involves as well a change that generates a learning process. Therefore a story should not be simply linear but should integrate an interruption, an unexpected event: something that breaks! It is the interruption, the break that paradoxically permits the wholeness to emerge.

Juha: Are you saying that a work of art has more to do with interruption than with completeness?

Davide: In a sense.

Juha: Ok. That is a good idea. So it really didn't matter what my intervention would have been like. You just wanted me to be the break that would have validated your idea?⁶⁰

Davide: yes

Juha: you wanted to use me

Davide: yes

Juha: it was a trap. A mousetrap

Davide: yes.

Juha: Davide

Davide: But the accident changed everything.

Juha: Davide finished the first part of the lecture.

Davide: Juha was about to start his interruption when

Juha: when a journalist raised the hand and asked Davide

Davide: (Davide stands up). Could we please discuss the themes of Mister Segantini work rather than the forms. Otherwise I am afraid that this debate will remain sterile and the audience who made the effort to come here tonight will linger in dissatisfaction.

Juha: Davide was mumbling. Felix Segantini sighed.

Davide: Felix Segantini stood up and begged the journalist to let me finish. But then another man immediately vehemently accused Felix Segantini.

60 This concept of the work of art bound to the notion of interruption rather than completeness is further developed in the fourth chapter.

Juha: Felix Segantini had been informed by Andrea Novicov that a performance would interrupted the lecture. He didn't know it was me who was supposed to do it. In the beginning he was smiling, which made the other person even more furious. Then he realized the gravity of the speech. The man presented himself and afterwards he accused Felix Segantini for having defended Roman Polanski and having denounced that the Swiss police had prepared a trap for Polanski:

Davide: Je suis medecin et père de famille. Ce que vous avez déclaré à propos de l'affaire Polanski fait de vous un complice de ses crimes! Je ne veux meme pas entendre votre réponse!

I am a generalist practitioner and a father. What you declared regarding the Polanski case makes of you a partner of his crime! I don't even want to hear your answer.

And the man left. Felix Segantini asked the man to stay and to listen his answer, but the man left. Felix Segantini looked helpless the audience. Then he said, this generalist generalizes. I condemn firmly pedophilia, but if this man wants to activate the guillotine, well then he does so... And then silence

Juha: I looked at Davide

Davide: I looked back at Felix Segantini.

Juha: Something was wrong

Davide: He collapsed

Juha: He was motionless next to me.

Davide: There, on the floor.

Juha: And nobody knew what to do.

Davide: When the ambulance took him away, we still didn't really understand what had happened.

- Juha: His heart had stopped.
- Davide: But what had happened? When he was looking at that angry man. What did he see? Or what did he recognize in that man?
- Juha: Was he the ghost persecuting his father? Or was he the ghost of his father?
Was it himself?
- Davide: Without any action, any gesture, a tragedy happened. There was only the hard gaze of the doctor and the distress of Felix Segantini.
[silence]
- Juha: After the death of Felix Segantini, a notebook containing the plan for an unfinished project was found in his studio.
- Davide: The project was called “*Geneva*” and it was inspired by the article dedicated to the city of Geneva appearing in the first Encyclopedie published in 1751 and by a response to this article by Jean-Jacques Rousseau published in 1758.
In the notebook there were two versions for “*Geneva*”. In the first version there is a dialogue between Rousseau and Voltaire. The scene takes place on the mountains surroundings Geneva, which at that time was not part of Switzerland, but an independent republic. Voltaire stands on the Jura and Rousseau facing him, stands on the Salève.
Voltaire stands up and says
- Juha: Geneva is an opulent city, justice is applied with accuracy, the citizens enjoy their freedom and they are proud of their institutions. However in this city there is a lack, and this lack is theatre. There are no theatres in this magnificent city and therefore the citizens cannot enjoy totally their freedom. Because theatre is the place of observation, the only place where society can reflect itself.
- Davide: Rousseau answers: Geneva is a free city because there are no theatres. Theatre is based on a division, therefore it recreates the sit-

uation of slavery. It cannot promote freedom but on the opposite it places the spectators in the darkness and forces them to submit to manipulation and passivity.

Juha: And that's it.

Davide: There was a longer dialogue, but Felix Segantini crossed it out and nobody could read it.

Juha: And then there was a second version: same characters, same place, same time. But there was no dialogue,

(silence)

Davide: there was only a quote, that was not even meant to be said.

Conclusion

Probably the most interesting discovery for me during this second phase of the research was the fact that I did not propose a theatre language but I let the project develop its own theatrical language. This is new territory for me. Usually, like in the *Pirandello Project*, first I choose the theatrical language, the style, and then I develop the story, the show.

This lecture-performance followed the tradition of Diderot's, or Plato's way of developing a philosophical inquiry through a dialectical debate. However, from a strictly academic point of view, I would not be able to say that I have covered the subject, and even, as I discuss this later, I should ask if I have been researching the wrong questions. But this opens up another problem: is this an academic research? From the point of view of an artistic research, what is then more interesting: covering a specific area of study, or being surprised and letting the research be affected by new territories? Again from an academic point of view this chapter could be criticized, saying that I pull too many strings: I explore the play within the play on the level of actors relating to spectators, on the level of the actors relating to their character and on the level of the text in relation to the stage. And in what sense does it differ from strict drama analysis? I think that the main difference between my approach and drama analysis is that what I have in mind is the practical actualization of the text. My main concern is the result

on the stage and its effect, and its possible use, variations and applications. But probably the answer is neither this nor that. I suspect that the answer unfolds itself on the journey that led me from the *Pirandello Project* to *The Invisible Stage*. The *Pirandello Project* was a big-scale production, which challenged me on many organizing levels, but when it came to the theatrical language of the show, to the style, I repeated what I already knew. The second project was more humble but I dared to exit from my known patterns. I took a risk. I explored something new. And this happened thanks to the artistic research, thanks to the continuing questioning that I had to face when I went through the first phase of this research.

This lecture-performance provoked opposite reactions because of its simplicity and especially its uncompromising style. Some spectators were enchanted, while others suspicious. In fact the script with its multiple layers can actually create the opposite effect: instead of raising the curiosity of the spectators and stimulating their imagination, it can simply repulse them. Some spectators might have felt that it was impossible to follow all the various narratives and simply refused to “enter” in the game. For sure this is a danger. I have even been asked if I consider the audience as enemy. That was a surprising comment for me. After having been trained in the Lecoq pedagogy, whose attention focuses mainly on the actor’s work, I have worked for three years with Carlo Boso, who taught me how to dissect the traditional structure of a *commedia dell’arte* dramaturgy. Thanks to him, I understand and recognize the pillars that hold a drama, either comedy of tragedy. But above all, he taught me where to direct my attention. He noticed that I was mainly concerned with the actors’ work but I forgot to give my attention to the spectator’s point of view. While working with him I learned a new approach to the performance, which helped to clarify my stage work. He taught me not to be afraid of being simple, even banal, especially in the beginning, when the major information concerning the story must be presented. For him, the “grounding”, meaning the level or element that connects the story displayed on the stage with the audience, must be simple, so the audience can grasp easily what is happening. Only after securing the basic connection, the grounding with the audience, is it possible to complicate and open other dimensions of the show. At this point I might criticise Boso’s approach for forgetting to leave space for the audience to project their own imagination, their own fantasies. In my experience, Boso’s concern not to lose the connection with the audience pushes him to provide too much information, as if he didn’t trust the audience to fill in the gaps or blanks. In my opinion, this may unbalance the dialogue that a performance should establish with the audience, with the risk of “flattening”

the show and cutting out the dimension of the “uncanny”, of the mysterious. I remember in my acting training in Lecoq pedagogy hearing the teachers repeating that theatre is an act of communication. Following this statement the focus was mainly put on the actors’ work; I approached the stage by asking myself: what do I want to tell? While Boso approached it by asking: what is the audience supposed to see? Which I transformed into: what is the audience supposed to experience? These questions reveal a delicate balance between observing and communicating: how much should the actor convey or provide and how much space should there be for the audience to “observe”? I could even point out that actually in the act of observing the audience can find the space to project their own story or phantasies: in the act of observing the stage becomes an extension of the spectator’s imagination. Octave Mannoni in his book, *Clef pour l’imaginaire* explains that Freud hasn’t allocated a rightful place for imagination. He suggests that Freud has stamped imagination as hallucination, something removed from the realm of reality. However, Mannoni argues that even though imagination is condemned, it is not removed. The realm of reality is obliged to offer space where the imagination can exist, but as a negation of reality. Imaginary things are confined, like dreams, to “another stage”.

“L’imagination ne fait son entrée que comme hallucination critique au nom du “principe de réalité”; car si le principe de réalité condamne les productions hallucinatoires, elles n’en sont pas supprimées pour autant. Le principe de réalité est obligé de les permettre, à certaines conditions – à conditions qu’elles soient niées. Il (Freud) les cantonne, come rêve, sur une “autre scène”(…). C’est comme si dans le monde extérieur s’ouvrait un autre espace, comparable à la scène théâtrale, au terrain de jeu, à la surface de l’oeuvre littéraire et la fonction de cette autre scène, on peut dire aussi bien que c’est d’échapper au principe de réalité que de lui obéir.” (Mannoni, 1969, 97)

Mannoni’s analysis helps us understand this other facet of theatre. It is not only the mirror held up to reality (as Hamlet would say) but also the space where “such stuff like dreams are made” and can be exposed. Theatre, like dreams, is a window where reality can look at hallucinations without being threatened by them. And the function of “another stage” is to escape from the realm of reality, as much as it is to obey it. It isolates and materializes whatever cannot be erased from reality. In everyday life the individual has to repress a vast array of

possible manifestations of her/his being; reality obliges one to put aside a part of their soul. However, when the curtain is lifted, the repressed existence and imagination are freed. “*On peut dire que la scène du théâtre devient l’extension du Moi avec toutes ses possibilités*” (Mannoni, 1969, 181). The stage, therefore, Mannoni proposes, becomes the extension of the spectator’s self with all her/his unliveable possibilities. Would this last remark imply then that spectators are observing extensions of themselves? I will come back to this later.

At one point, during the process of *The Invisible Stage*, I noticed that I was mainly focusing on the text from an analytical point of view. My concerns were mainly directed towards the content of the script, but I was not considering what the spectator could experience during this show. Even if the script is filled with theoretical anecdotes and comments that address the rational dimension of the spectators it is still possible to have a “bodily” experience of this text. In fact, as I explained earlier, changing the architecture of the space forces the spectators to experience it in a radically different way. These different positions of the spectators in the space is exactly what ensures the conditions to experience the show physically; the ideas are communicated by the dialogue between Juha and me, but then the audience physically “tests” what has been said. Actually these changes of position and these different experiences of the space created a system, and the audience finds itself inside of it.

It might be possible to argue that in this show I was so concerned with the audience that I actually totally forgot the actor. I have a strong background in physical theatre, but in this project the “acting” seemed to be reduced to a mere utterance of text. Compared to the *Pirandello Project*, where the performers were acting, dancing, singing, playing music, *The Invisible Stage* uses a limited spectrum of the actor’s capacity. However, in this “minimalistic” acting, all the physical skills of my background were present: rhythm, presence, and direction. The dialogues were paced with a specific rhythm. The text was not delivered randomly. To the contrary, it always had a precise and clearly defined direction. Even the small scene when the two actors embodying Hamlet and Horatio enter is defined in detail: the stop in the middle is exact, the slow motion of the head discovering the audience is set, the sudden change of rhythm which brings higher energy to the two characters’ behaviour is fixed as well. For each level of narrative there was a specific rhythm, a way to relate to the audience, even small bodily changes. This love of precision and care for details is a heritage from my background in physical theatre. Even if this is not so evident in the acting of *The Invisible Stage*,

the audience can feel that they have a safety net, and that there is a skill, therefore they can merely focus on listening to the dialogue.

However I have to confess that at first this investigation led me to an impasse. In fact, I conclude the theoretical inquiry (see paragraph *Recognition*) by wondering if the ultimate action is the action of observing. This statement threw all my training of physical theatre into question. During all these years I have cherished the actors' ability to master their own body and praised the body through physical actions. I even undertook this doctoral study as a continuation of what I was exploring in my Master's research, which concerned the analysis of the actor's ability to "generate" illusions on the stage. Now, after developing this inquiry I embark on a path that seems to contradict what I professed in the past years. After I finished the theatre school, more than ten years ago, I was enchanted by the celebration of the body through the actions on stage. But this research seemed to tell me that the ultimate theatrical action is to observe. I was puzzled. I started to wonder if I was not reaching some "commonplace". Instead of opening up new questions, tackling different methods of inquiry, I was losing myself in a labyrinth of banalities whose Minotaur was my non-ability to recognize the right objects of investigation.

However, slowly I began to notice that actually, while I was intensively debating the issue of division and observation I was often unconsciously referring to another concept: the notion of break, of interruption. Many times, while insisting on the question of "observing", "recognition" and "division", beneath this struggle, it was possible to notice another problem emerging. After a public demo of *The Invisible Stage* in February I wrote the following text:

But quite soon I got "stuck" with the consideration of observation as the ultimate action. All the pages I have written and the research I have done have been removed in order to follow the thought that the spectators recognizing themselves as "spectators" on the stage (which is different from the idea of the spectators identifying themselves with the protagonist). This subject (the play within the play) is extremely volatile and often it is not easy to grasp its borders. It seems that the theme is interesting not when it is confined within clear limits – meaning when it is well-defined **when the inside story starts and ends - but on the contrary, it is interesting when it manages to blur the thresholds.** In *L'Illusion Comique*, the play assumes another dimension when the last scene of the play within the play is performed, surreptitiously introducing a third play. In *The Author*, the interest lies in the contin-

uous shifts between the actors and their characters etc. It may seem that then this highly theatrical device finds its own interest **when it blends itself with “reality” (meaning with the frame story which by the virtue of the inside story became “non-fictional” and therefore real [Forestier]): it is not at all the inside play itself that carries the attention but its emergence and its echoes on the “outside”**. When I look at the two works, retrospectively, I can note that the *Pirandello Project* was probably a big-scale production but somehow remained in a known pattern. The project was ambitious but I didn’t place myself in a dangerous zone. The second project is definitely smaller, however I took the risk of exploring an unknown zone. On that level, the artistic research really obliged me to exit from my comfortable area to take a risk. **It became a disrupting factor, something that blurred my limits**. And this could happen through the stimulations received from the inquiry that I undertook. In other words I allowed myself to be provoked. (February 2012)

This excerpt points out the aspect of “blurring the limits”, to the extent that not only is the story “disrupted” but even I myself felt “disrupted”, challenged (I have added the emphasis using bold letters later). And here is the main aspect, challenged not from the outside, but from the inside, from within my own research. While developing a discourse about “observation” and “division”, another discourse concerning “the limits” emerged. I was writing and my writing pointed out all the time, without me noticing it, the elements of limits and disruption. Suddenly I realized that maybe the question of “division” and “observation” was misleading and that I should approach my inquiry from another point of view: that maybe the play within the play has more to do with “representation” and “limits”, than with “observation” and “division”. These words might sound similar but they changed the investigation completely. I even realized that this second practical work actually found its birth in an unexpected event: in the disruption of my research.

At first I was shocked: does this mean that my practical work, *The Invisible Stage*, is completely wrong? That all my work is based on the wrong assumption? After this moment of panic I realized that actually it was precisely the practical work, *The Invisible Stage* that allowed me to reach deeper questions that I was not able to formulate before. The practical work pointed out the limits of my theoretical inquiry and thanks to this I could go further with my research. I

noticed that I went through a journey: an intellectual and artistic journey, which shaped a new approach towards my work. The academic research ignited the practical work and the practical work pointed out the limits of the theoretical research: both fed into each other.

I could step away from the initial amazement related to this dramaturgical device and I focused more accurately on its structure. In fact, the staging of a play within a play is not simply a mirror game, a baroque profusion of forms reiterating the clichéd world-is-a-stage, but it entails a question of “resistance”. This seems a strong statement, but in the next chapters I examine how the display of a story on a stage can be associated to a question of authority and thus how the play within the play can challenge this very authority.

Chapter 3:

To play with the play, an examination of the contemporary shift of the play within the play

Before I examine the play within the play from the point of view of limits and resistance as I concluded in the previous chapter, I would like to consider the play within the play in the contemporary theatre context. The notion of “contemporary theatre” is extremely vague and anything that is produced nowadays can fall into this category. Therefore when I use the term contemporary theatre or contemporary performance I refer to a type of theatre defined as “postdramatic”. Hans-Thies Lehman in his book, *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999), made a catalogue of several performances and tried to define the tendencies of contemporary theatre. According to him, theatre rather than a space to tell “stories” becomes more a space for a playful encounters and a platform for displaying processes. In doing so, contemporary theatre (read postdramatic theatre) aims to strip the play from the dependency on the plot and liberates the performers from any need to pretend, to create an illusion. However, it seems there is a dilemma because on one hand Lehmann stresses the evasion of the plot, on the other hand more recently scholars like Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner, rehabilitate the device of the play within the play, which found its birth and apogee during the baroque time, and present it as a “prominent feature of the practice of political and anti-illusionistic theatre” (Fischer-Greiner, 2007, xiii). This device seems to be a major element in understanding contemporary theatre. In their book *The Play within the Play*, Fischer and Greiner write:

“It could also be said that postmodern art in which reflection upon itself appears to be an essential element is very much a feature of our own era. Indeed, the play within the play would seem to be a particular apt device for the expression of the playful self-referentiality of the post-modern condition.” (Fischer-Greiner, 2007, xiii)

So how is it possible to use a device, which is strongly tied to the fabrication of illusion, and at the same time to consider it as a pre-eminent feature of a theatre that escapes any building of illusion? This seems an impossible dilemma.

On a second reading, it is possible to note however that this device is still considered by scholars mainly as a literary device. In the book *The Play within the Play* Fischer and Greiner attempt to rehabilitate this device in the context of contemporary theatre, but they fail to anchor it in practice. Most of the essays in the book still approach the phenomenon of the play within the play as a device embedded in the written text. However, a strong tendency of contemporary theatre, as Lehmann pointed out, challenges the written text, therefore, the “rehabilitation” of such a device must not happen inside the written text, but on another level, in the action displayed on the stage. Nevertheless, Lehmann, Fischer and Greiner all agree that contemporary theatre is essentially marked by an element of *playfulness*. What I suggest therefore is that rather than approaching this device from a literary point of view and building an intricate system of mirrors and stories within stories, the contemporary performances tend instead “*to play with the play*”. I mean that contemporary theatre uses the text as a source, as an inspiration, as rough material. As Ackerman pointed out: “literary comes to be seen less as a fixed text and more as an event.” (Ackerman, 2012, 4) Drama then becomes “present” (as a reference) without being staged. This establishes a playful relationship and a critical distance between the written text (or the traditional well-made drama) and the theatre event. So, on what level, is this device re-employed by contemporary theatre? I don’t want to enter a debate about defining contemporary theatre. I use Lehmann’s definition of postdramatic theatre as a reference, though it is debatable if it is valid to use a book that is more of a catalogue than a thorough investigation on the subject (and at some point during my research I found myself in disagreement with Lehmann’s vision).

I shortly summarize the elements I took into consideration when I had to select performances for my inquiry. As one of the main characteristics, I considered performances that are in contrast with the concept of the linear story, for example shows that are built on fragments, or juxtapose various discourses.

Another aspect that I consider determinant is the implementation of video on stage. The last trait I considered significant is a challenging attitude towards the conventional well-made theatre. In other words, I selected dramas that are questioning (or disrupting) the traditional well-made drama. The examination of these three features hopefully can help to see the connection between contemporary theatre and aspects of the play within the play. The notion of "play" is subtle and carries many meanings: game, representation, display, engage, enjoy, compete, behave, perform, becoming active, etc. The Oxford dictionary defines the origin of this word in Old English as: "leap for joy, dance". It would be possible to dedicate an entire research to that subject, as Johan Huizinga did with his book: *Homo Ludens* (1939). I simply want to remind that "to play" is not considered as being foolish. On the contrary, as Huizinga explains, it can be an extremely serious activity. Playing carries the notion of adhering to a set of rules temporarily. The aim is not the rules themselves but something else, something that stands out from the play (Huizinga, 1955, 2). Therefore, to say: *to play with the play*, is to use the play (the drama, in this case) as a referent, to adhere to its "rule", but for something else. And it is around this "something else" that this phase of my research gravitates⁶¹.

The chapter is divided into three parts: *playing with conventions*, *playing with discourses*, *playing with medium*. In the first part, *playing with conventions*, I examine two dramas: one by Molière and one by Beckett. It might be odd to claim to depart from the written text by analysing two written dramas, and with one of them from the 17th century. However, what I would like to point out is how the play within the play carries within itself, even as a literary device, a ludic dimension. These two dramas, which seem to break with the tradition of their time, are nevertheless strongly anchored to the traditional structure that they try to "subvert". Let me suggest that instead of "breaking" with the tradition, Molière and Beckett reverted the perception of the tradition, which allowed them to propose a different structure for their plays. In the first chapter, I already examined how Pirandello "played with convention". Here it is possible to draw a parallel between his, Molière's and Beckett's work and notice that in all situations the playwrights used this device to challenge the conventions. It seems possible to wonder if perhaps this device has more to do with challenging an authoritarian discourse than being a celebratory or self-reflexive instrument.

61 I come back later on to the distinction between the play within the play and *to play with the play*.

Contemporary theatre, whose pre-eminent feature is evading a linear story, often presents shows that have fragmentary writing. This type of show, rather than developing a straight story, is composed of the juxtaposition of fragments, of various discourses. The second part of the chapter, *Playing with discourses*, examines exactly this specific aspect and tries to determine on which level these “fragmentary constructions” can be associated with the play within the play. Finally the third part, *Playing with medium*, examines performances implementing video. In particular I examine a contemporary German production of Molière’s *Misanthrope*. It is useful to compare Molière’s approach with the contemporary transposition of it and to point out a continuity of the device application. I suggest that as Molière “played” with the structure of the comedy, contemporary theatre “plays” with the text of Molière. The chapter concludes with proposing a new terminology, *shared space/imaginary space*, that I find useful in analysing the contemporary shift of the play within the play more carefully and with re-examining my two practical works.

Playing with conventions

A comedy

The play that I discuss in this section is crucial for this chapter because it permits me to explore the continuity between the baroque conception of the play within the play and its contemporary use. Usually the play within the play is defined as a manifestation of *theatrum mundi* (during the baroque period) and as a tool for self-reflexivity (nowadays). It seems surprising to notice that this device has been used in two historical moments where theatre seems to be very different. What I suggest is that maybe the play within the play, in its inner structure, behind its apparent manifestation of being the theatrical transposition of the *theatrum mundi* or of self-reflection, carries within itself a more powerful element that has been present constantly during various historical times. This chapter tries to uncover this continuity. In the first chapter I pointed out Pirandello’s playful attitude towards the convention of the theatre of his time. Once again, it seems that this “playful” attitude is a key factor in understanding thoroughly the unsettling force of this device.

In 1666 Molière presented the play *The Misanthrope*, which depicts the tribulations of a man that common sense would consider wise. Alceste, the protagonist of the play, vehemently condemns the behaviour of his fellow citizens,

which, according to him, is characterized by insincerities, veiled falsehood and especially hypocrisies of complaisance. Alceste openly attacks the “civilities” of the time, which he calls “crimes” and refuses to participate in this filthy game. He prefers to live far away from society. This noble idealist falls in love with a young woman, Celimène, who is his exact opposite: she never talks about her feelings openly, and skilfully evades demands for straight answers. She enjoys his company, but actually she secretly requests the attention of several men and at the same time she pleads for her independence. Alceste, unaware of her secret correspondence is driven crazier and crazier by Celimène's insincerity, but he cannot stop desiring her. Alceste is then caught between these irreconcilable choices. Alceste desperately tries to convince Celimène to change her habits while Celimène juggles dexterously with seduction, lies and flattery. In this comedy Alceste can be perceived as a positive character. Because of his quest for honesty, he should raise respect and sympathy in the audience. However, Alceste's desire for integrity becomes the target of Molière's play and the supposed virtue in Alceste's behaviour appears ridiculous.

Rousseau, in his *Lettre à d'Alembert*, dedicates a paragraph to the defence of Alceste, arguing that his aspiration is noble and humans should aim for similarly earnest conduct. Rousseau condemns Molière for having mocked such a virtuous wish. He saw in this example the exact reason why theatre should be banished from free society, for the author of comedies is merely inclined to please the spectators and comfort them by scorning virtue⁶². Rousseau, in his book *Les Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire* (1872), identifies himself a misanthrope and describes the joys of walking alone in nature. Not only does Nature provide beauty that charms the eyes, but it also stimulates philosophical insights that rejoice the soul as well. However, there is one surprising element: Rousseau talks repeatedly about his joy of being alone in Nature. In almost each “promenade” he finds a way to assert his preference to be alone in nature: on pages 41, 43, 71, 104, 118, 121, 150 156 and the whole fifth promenade (pages 93-105), are dedicated to convincing the reader that his solitude is far more enjoyable than being among humans. However from another part of the text it is clear that he didn't choose

62 This controversy brings back the opposition between Socrates and Aristophanes. Aristophanes mocked the philosopher in the comedy *The Clouds* (423 BC). The play gained notoriety for its caricature of Socrates. Plato in his *Apology* claims that this comedy was a major factor contributing to Socrates' trial and execution. Molière often drew inspiration from Aristophanes. For instance the scene in the play *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, where M. Jourdain follows the “teaching” of a professor is directly copied from the dialogue between Strepsiade and Socrates in *The Clouds*.

solitude by himself. In fact on pages 104 and 118 he clearly confesses that he has been expelled from society. On page 121 he asserts that his solitary joy is a form of vengeance. On page 156 he admits that he seeks in animals what the humans refuse him. Therefore it is possible to come to the conclusion that his statements are a reaction to what he suffered. After all, his thoughts are always directed nostalgically towards society. The question puzzling me is this: why has he felt the need to repeat something so many times that can be extrapolated clearly from the text? Does Rousseau try to convince the reader about his choice? Does he need to convince himself about his choice to escape from human society? By repeating so many times: “I am happy to be here alone”, he makes us doubt his delight. Rousseau is trapped in his own speech; he condemns human society but he needs it to stage the show of his virtue⁶³. Similarly to Rousseau, Alceste needs to exhibit his contempt, as he is trapped by his own role. Instead of searching for a solution that would appease his soul, he repeatedly complains and exacerbates strife. What Rousseau has neglected in his criticism is that Alceste, even though he professes to stand out from the hypocritical behaviour of his peers, behaves just like they do. Alceste blames other people for not speaking out openly but instead hiding and lying. What he dislikes is the act of pretending something else, which is already the embryonic quality of performing. Through a “performance” humans mask their feelings and secret thoughts and present a pleasant face. Alceste dislikes this attitude and Rousseau does too. However Alceste deliberately decides to expose his disdain, which generates a performance of his emotions. Unconsciously his search for “truth” is wrapped in the necessity to show it. It is a show that is opposite in theme but similar in form. As Oronte “performs” his desire to be flattered (by reciting a poem he wrote), similarly Alceste “performs” his contempt for humans. In the opening scene of the play he states: “*Moi, je veux me fâcher, et ne veux point entendre.*” (Molière, 2000, 46). In English: “*I choose to get angry, and I do not choose to listen.*” He sets his tone: he makes the decision to get angry. He is not surprised by the emotion, as it would happen. In fact in everyday life we usually don’t plan to get angry, or happy, or sad. External events stimulate such reactions in us and we are caught unaware by them. But Alceste decides to be angry, like an actor who chooses which emotion to perform. He inflames his speech with trivial matters and absolutely wants to prove that he

63 For further examination on this subject see Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l’obstacle*.

is right, which leads him to losing a trial and paying a big sum just to have the pleasure of having more proof of people's perfidy.

This play, defined as a comedy, stands out from the panorama of traditional comedies, but actually it is a very unconventional comedy for the time. The protagonist, Alceste, appears more like a modern anti-hero rather than a standard positive character. His love for Celimène is not reciprocated in the end. So this drama of Molière's could be considered an innovative play, which unlocks a new sensitivity closer to our modern conception of comedy. However, I would like to propose another reading of the play, which focuses more on the general structure rather than the psychological approach to the characters.

If we pay more attention to a secondary character, Alceste's friend, Philinte, we notice that he is often present next to Alceste. In fact he tries to calm down Alceste giving furious soliloquies, and he is unsuccessfully struggling to reason with Alceste:

Il faut, parmi le monde, une vertu traitable;
A force de sagesse, on peut être blâmable ;
La parfaite raison fuit toute extrémité,
Et veut que l'on soit sage avec sobriété.
(Molière, 2000, 55)

He is then observing Alceste's outbursts and comments on them. Here shows the interesting construction of the play. The protagonist of the play, or what is considered to be the central protagonist is perhaps not Alceste, but Philinte. When Philinte says: "be wise with moderation", meaning that it is not always fruitful to follow precepts blindly even if they are supposed to be good, he suggests the actual "philosophy" of the play. The wise man is then not Alceste with his excessive aggressiveness and intolerance but Philinte who is able to judge situations and can decide how to act. The answer provided by Philinte's moderation does not suggest an escape from society (as Alceste does) but coping with it. Like the presence of the fool revealing the madness in us, the presence of Philinte highlights Alceste's rage performance. Philinte becomes the silent observer of Alceste's show. He witnesses Alceste's excess. Alceste could be seen therefore as the performer of an inside play and Philinte as the performer of the frame play who is observing the inside play. From this point of view, *Le Misanthrope* belongs with traditional comedies. A traditional comedy would have two lovers whose love is hindered by the interest of an older person, usually a parent. In

the end, after various adventures, the lovers can finally marry each other. In this play, Molière leads the audience believe that the “love conflict” is between Alceste and Celimène. However at the end of the play neither gets what they wish for: love. They both remain alone. Philinte finds love and at the end of the comedy is engaged to Eliante. Eliante is actually the female counterpart of Philinte. Because of her moderation she highlights Celimène’s excessive behaviour. Therefore the two observers, Philinte and Eliante, are the only two characters of the play that become awarded with love. The structure of the play within the play is re-established here by placing a spectator to watch the performance of Alceste and Celimène. These actor-spectators who open and close the show provide the connection to the audience.

However, Molière’s innovation in *Le Misanthrope* is the fact that the “inside play” exceeds the frame play to the point that it becomes the focus of the drama. Molière inflates the inside play, which as described previously, subverts the rules of the traditional drama, and makes it the core of the action. The frame play, which legitimates the inside play, is at the same time reduced to a minimum, to an almost invisible component. And this is the originality of the drama; it somehow subverts the classical construction of the play without negating it. Molière cleverly found a stratagem that allowed him to break the rules of comedy, but still remaining within the rules of a traditional comedy structure. He also used the subversive dimension of the play within the play by masking the frame play. As I outlined in Chapter 1, three centuries later Heiner Müller will follow a similar plan but he will push the idea even further, to the point of projecting the frame play “outside” the drama, into the head of the spectator and focusing only on the fragmentary inside play.⁶⁴

A tragedy

This process of “reverting” the structure of the play in order to shift the focus and point out an alternative protagonist could be applied to Beckett’s *Waiting For Godot* as well. Beckett’s play has often been defined as an absurd play, where the Aristotelian *telos* has been removed. However I would like to refer to the classical reading of this play by Jan Kott and Iom Omesco, who both perceived Beckett’s play as a modern tragedy. This reading of the play as a tragedy will be extremely useful in relation to Forestier’s analysis of the Greek tragedy. In For-

64 See Chapter 1, the discussion on *Helmetmachine* by Heiner Müller, Chapter 2, the discussion on Tim Crouch and in this chapter, the last paragraph: *Playing with medium*.

estier's opinion the function of the chorus can be linked to the "actor-spectators" observing the inside play. It may seem perilous to draw parallels between the chorus of the Greek tragedy, the play within the play and *Waiting for Godot*, but it may offer a different perception of Beckett's play. Omesco considers the hero of the modern tragedy to be a protagonist reduced to a vagabond unable to exit from his human condition and whose only possible action is waiting. Omesco asserts that contemporary tragedy is a tragedy of no choice, where the character reduced to a minimal size or marginal importance is waiting for his or her unavoidable death, which makes everything equal. Knowing this terrible destiny, the character transforms the unbearable waiting into a game, where humour provides a sense of freedom. (Omesco, 1978, 254). In *Waiting for Godot*, instead of having an explosion of levels of behaviour showing different aspects of the human nature, everything that is superfluous is peeled off until the threshold between being and showing, reality and fiction, role and human is unveiled. Instead of having the actor wear the heavy and shiny mask and uniform of a hero, Beckett diminishes the role to a minimum, to an infinitesimal "mask". Similarly the American sculptor Alexander Calder explained in an interview that he refused to use precious material for his sculptures but preferred to employ poor, worthless materials, such as zinc. According to Calder zinc doesn't excite the concupiscence of the eyes, moreover it has never been exalted by literature or by any kind of worship. Therefore by using zinc, the message remains pure without double symbolic meanings. It allows the viewer to focus only on the form and let the poetry of the movement express itself fully. Correspondingly Beckett, by diminishing the magnitude of a role, by replacing gold by zinc, has started his play where Shakespeare has ended *King Lear*.

POZZO: Who are you?

VLADIMIR: We are men

(Beckett, 1965, 82)

Following this interpretation, Estragon and Vladimir could be the reincarnation of Lear and Gloucester. Jan Kott draws strong parallels between the two plays pointing out some continuity between the two texts. However the inebriating mirroring between stage and reality, between fiction and self which is present in *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot*, could be already traced back to the Greek tragedy, where the chorus embodies this vertiginous bridge. The chorus is placed between the audience and the protagonists. Although it is defined as the ideal

spectator it is a marginal character in the plot; like the fool, it doesn't help to move the story forward but it restricts itself to merely commenting on the actions. It is important to point out that the chorus has a lower status compared to that of the protagonist; the protagonists in ancient Greek tragedies are usually kings and princes, while the chorus is composed of men or women of the community, soldiers, sailors, young women, citizens, etc. The audience is then looking at one character (since the chorus has to be understood as one entity) that is looking at the protagonists. We can find the same structure here as in *King Lear*, where a marginal character (the Fool) is looking at the protagonist and comments on his actions. The final words of the play are not uttered by the protagonist but by this "marginal" character that discloses the wisdom, as does the chorus in *King Oedipus*:

"So while we wait to see that final day,
we cannot call a mortal being happy
before he's passed beyond life free from pain."
(Sophocles, 1989, vv.1528-1530)

This last note could raise an eccentric idea: what if the central protagonists (in the sense of characters undergoing transformations), are not Estragon and Vladimir but Pozzo and Lucky? What if similarly to the *Misanthrope*, Beckett wanted to shift the focus? If we take a closer look we notice that between the first and the second act, Pozzo and Lucky are not anymore bound by a master/slave relationship, and that both, like King Lear and Oedipus, have lost their status. What's more, Pozzo became blind and Lucky mute. In such a minimalist play, where actions are reduced to the level of shadows, such "transformations" occurring to Pozzo and Lucky becomes a major event. We could think that maybe they are the central protagonists undergoing a revelation. From this point of view, Vladimir and Estragon are then two mere observers⁶⁵. The main action happens outside the stage and they simply acknowledge it; similarly to the tragic chorus, they observe and comment on the tragic events happening to the protagonists. As Forestier pointed out:

⁶⁵ This may remind us of *Guildestern and Rosencrantz are Dead* by Tom Stoppard, where we follow the endless discussion between Guildenstern and Rosencrantz while, in the next room, outside of the gaze of the spectators, the "real" Shakespearean *Hamlet* is happening.

Le chœur tragique est un lointain ancêtre des spectateurs fictifs que suppose l'introduction d'un spectacle dans un autre spectacle.
(Forestier, 1996,19)

Therefore, according to Forestier, the chorus is the proto actor-observer allowing the inside play to emerge⁶⁶. If we follow that logic, and Estragon and Vladimir are representatives of a tragic chorus then it is absolutely normal that nothing happens to them, they simply observe and comment and assess the theatrical, or better to say: the meta-theatrical dimension of the play. As we noticed in *King Lear* the representational situation is clearly acknowledged by the presence of fools and by the continuous games of pretending, which creates a “palimpsestic” performance. *Waiting for Godot* fosters, as well, the overlap of stage and reality by doing the opposite. Estragon and Vladimir are not masking or covering themselves creating a double nature, as in *King Lear*, but they are wavering between being characters in a situation and letting the reality of the theatre appear.

VLADIMIR: Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a while? (Beckett, 1965, 12)

We don't know if it is the actor or the character that is asking for an answer.⁶⁷ Later in the play the concrete reality of theatre is shown and again, it is unclear if the characters are on stage or spectators waiting for a coming show:

VLADIMIR: I'll be back. (He hastens towards the wings.)
ESTRAGON: End of the corridor, on the left.
VLADIMIR: Keep my seat.
(Beckett, 1965, 35)

In the second act Beckett plays with the expectation of the spectators in an ironic way, who are assuming that the space where the characters are evolving is not the concrete stage but a fictitious space:

66 For further explanation about the concept of the actor-observer who ensures the emergence of the play within the play, please refer to Chapter 2.

67 In theatre jargon, returning the ball means to say the line. This comes from the traditional theatre, which is basically built on dialogues. Therefore when an actor utters his or her lines, it implies that the other actor will answer and so the text is bouncing between them, like a ball.

POZZO: It isn't by any chance the place known as the Board?
 VLADIMIR: Never heard of it.
 POZZO: What is it like?
 VLADIMIR: (looking round). It's indescribable. It's like nothing.
 There's nothing. There's a tree.
 POZZO: Then it's not the Board.
 (Beckett, 1965, 86-87)

Pozzo and Vladimir are discovering the theatre space, the stage, as if they were new to this space, as if they were not part of the fiction that is taking place, but they entered for the first time. I am not pretending to confute Kott's or Omesco's interpretation of Beckett's play. My aim here is simply to propose another perception of the play. I try to shift the angle of approach and observe it with a different mind-set, and to explore how this can change the reading of the play. I think it is surprising to notice how "contemporary" performances or dramas, which aim to propose radical and new ways to tell stories on the stage, employ methods and structures consciously (or unconsciously) from the so-called traditional theatre. Nowadays artists tend to use the stage as a platform for encounters (rather than a space for "building" a fiction). But maybe this very moment of "encounter" cannot escape the "fictional" world that theatre has built. Whatever is done on a stage refers to the history of theatre. No gesture can be innocent on the stage, no gesture can be perceived as is, everything echoes (blatantly or subtly) back to theatre history. Unlike Peter Brook, I do not think that the stage is empty. To the contrary, I consider the stage as heavily loaded, like a huge marble block. Like Michelangelo described in his poem, the theatre artist must carve in this "block" to extract a form, a meaning. Thus the theatrical investigation concerns not so much what to show, but what not to show. It becomes an act in the negative, in retreat. Instead of showing, exposing everything, it is a question of extracting, carving, evoking, of hinting.⁶⁸ Theatre, the place where we look, is therefore the place where we look at what is "carved". It becomes a place of allusion and stimulation: where we look at what is not shown, what is invisible. To speak about the invisible implies speaking about the visible: how to see what we cannot? Or in other words: how to present what we usually do not show? And do not see?

68 My attention goes exactly to these links, these tensions between "contemporary" gestures and their historical referents.

Playing with discourses

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, contemporary theatre is often defined by fragmentary writing, which characteristically results in a collage of various discourses. In this section I examine a specific interplay of discourse: the juxtaposition of scientific discourse with “fictional drama”. I examine three shows, which display these two languages (scientific and fictional⁶⁹) and I analyse their structures in order to draw a parallel with the structure of the play within the play.

The first example I would like to present is a show that I saw at the Baltic Circle Festival, Helsinki, in 2011: *Reloaded Drama: Yerma*, directed by the Finnish dramatist and director Katarina Numminen. The show was based on Federico Garcia Lorca’s play, *Yerma*. The play, written in 1934, tells the story of a childless woman living in a rural and conservative Spain. Katarina Numminen proposed a radical adaptation of the text. She used the drama composed by Garcia Lorca to give space to various people to reflect and speak about maternity and infertility; the written dialogues were used as material for furthering this debate of our time. Only few scenes from the play were actually staged. The attention was “shifted” towards two women that were not taking part in the performed scenes. These two women didn’t play specific roles, but they were simply present, observing what the actors were doing. These two women had a totally different relationship towards maternity: one desperately wanted to have a baby while the other one decided not to have children. The stage was then divided between the actors performing scenes from Lorca’s play and the two women commenting on the scenes, discussing and sharing their personal stories with the audience. The actors didn’t try to make the audience forget that they were actors. They openly acknowledged that they were “acting”. On the other hand, the two women never pretended to perform, or to act. They simply looked at the actors, commented on their actions and especially discussed the themes raised by the text and told the audience how they felt about it. Even though a strong opposition between “fiction” (or illusion) and “reality” was staged, a kind of bridge between the two dimensions was established. Nevertheless, the main focus was directed towards the two women who were observing and commenting on the actors’ work. The fictional play was then transformed into a catalyst, stimulating the debate. The

69 I have specifically chosen performances that combine scientific discourse with fictional discourse. This is clarified later in the chapter and it is linked with the last chapter, when the question of authoritarian discourse (or power) is furthered.

dialectical debate encouraged the audience to reflect on this issue. From now on, I will call these two women: “experts”. I use the term “experts” in reference to *Rimini Protokoll*. *Rimini Protokoll* is a Swiss-German theatre group that refuses to employ actors, instead they only recruit “normal” people from “normal” life, and they are then called: “experts of everyday life”. *Rimini Protokoll* aims to stage not fictional but personal stories. These experts of everyday life are invited to report to the audience their individual and unique experience on a specific subject defined by the group. The use of the term “expert” implements the idea of scientific research that aims to offer objective conclusions, which is at the opposite end of what is considered fiction. It is a subjective fabrication and therefore considered “unnatural” and “unreliable”. Therefore in Numminen’s performance, the presence of these two “experts” granted the fiction to be performed, although not in its entirety, just fragments of it. In fact, it was the “experts” who determined the time and rules for the actors to perform the scenes. I think it was crucial that the two “experts” were not theatre specialists; they were not actors, directors, playwrights, dramaturges, or critics. This made their approach to the performed scenes very direct. Their response was immediate and emotional, freed from any attempt to contextualize the scenes within a theatrical or theoretical mindset⁷⁰. They simply said what they felt and how they could relate the scenes to their personal experience. The audience, while empathizing with the two “experts”⁷¹, felt free as well to project their personal comments and thoughts. They see that the two “experts” are like them, they don’t have special knowledge about theatre nevertheless they feel entitled to share their comments. This setup brings the performed scene from Lorca’s text closer to the audience as well. Even though they are openly “theatrical”, they don’t remain distant as something “unrealistic” or “unnatural”, for the two “experts” tell to the audience: “These scenes are not here to impress you with some special effects, they are not here to make you feel impotent or stupid. You can tell us what you think of them. They are tools to better understand the complex humanity etched in us.” Therefore the performed scenes are not judged, it is not discussed if they are believable, naturalistic or unnatural, well acted or amateurish, because they are integrated (and thus legitimated) in the frame of the debate developed by the two “experts”. From this point of view, the performed scenes of Lorca’s text can be seen as the inside

70 This spontaneous dimension is what *Rimini Protokoll* claims as a guarantee of “truth” as opposed to a normative system that fiction and therefore actors must endorse in order to create an illusion.

71 On the connivance between actors and spectators, especially in the case of the play within the play, see Chapter 2, especially the notes on Forestier’s work.

play unleashing a debate on the taboo of maternity between the two experts in the frame play.

The second example continues this examination of a “liminal” situation implementing the play within the play through a parallel between “scientific discourse” and fiction. I would like to examine the play, *Mnemonic*, written and produced in 1999 by an English theatre group, Theatre de Complicité, which explores the question of memory extensively. The show displays two stories in parallel. One story is based on a true event, a scientific discovery made in 1991 in the Italian-Austrian Alps: a well-preserved mummy of a man who lived 3,500 years ago was found. The ice froze the body and kept it intact. However this discovery raises many questions: why was he there? Why did he have so few clothes? Was he hunting? Was he running away? Was he fighting? This corpse turns out to be a total mystery. Experts of archaeology debate and hypothesize about its origin and the reason to be found caught by a glacier in the middle of the mountains. This first story displays this intense debate and the scientific search for understanding the origin of this mummy. In the second story a woman, Alice wants to find out about her biological father that she has never met. She leaves London and travels to Eastern Europe, a village in Romania, which is supposed to be the home village of her father. The show shifts from the “scientific” tone set by the archaeologists to a “melodramatic” tone where the woman wants to find out about her origins. The scientific debate, since it is based on a true event, is taken for “real” whereas the second story is taken for fiction. In addition, the fact that the father of Simon McBurney, the director of the theatre company, was an archaeologist himself enhances the veracity of the “scientific” story. Therefore there is a strong clash between the “real” and the “illusion”, like in the previous example, *Reloaded Drama: Yerma*. However what is striking here is to notice that what is considered “scientific” and therefore as unquestionable “truth”⁷² is practically based on conjectures. The “experts” have no idea what has really happened, but they emit hypotheses that they try to prove. Using the little information that the corpse offers, they develop different hypotheses and stories, if not fiction, which they confront. We could suggest that scientific knowledge is based on fiction that is taken for real. In parallel, Alice fails to find her father.

72 Even though contemporary thinking heavily questions the possibility for science to understand and explain reality, we still live under the heritage of the Enlightenment. We still believe that science can penetrate the mysteries of this world. As we often notice, illustrious scientists, like Einstein, are taken for man of wisdom whose integrity cannot be questioned and therefore they become representatives of “truth”: if Einstein said something, then it means that it must be “true”.

However Alice's partner, as a conclusion, suggests to her to invent the meeting with her father. The parallel between the two stories reaches its apex exactly at the end, when the woman, similarly to the scientists, is urged to fabricate a story. There is an objective story, with the archaeologists studying the corpse that might have been the ancestor of any of us, and a subjective story with the personal story of Alice. These stories are intertwined by the act of "creation". As it is said in the prologue of the play: memory is a creative act. In this situation, the second story, Alice's story, is legitimized by the first story. The scientific "discussion" grants the presence of the "fiction".

The third example I wish to examine is a puppet performance *John-Eleanor* directed by the Finnish puppet theatre director Merja Pöyhönen that I saw in Turku in 2011. The play is based on a 14th-century legal document found in 1995, which describes the questioning of a male cross-dressing prostitute. The document is a rare source for the history of transvestism and homosexuality in late medieval England. The document is quite short and doesn't inform of the outcome of the case. It is known that the accused is named John Rykener who dressed up as a woman and called himself Eleanor. Very little is known about this man, however, the show aims to tell his story. But how would that be possible? The device invented by the director is very simple and elegant. It uses the historical document to justify fictional fabrication. Similarly to the previous example, the question of "objective" and "subjective", of facts and fiction is at the centre of this examination. On the stage there are two performers: one who secures the historic authenticity of the "facts" and the second one who embodies and visualizes the story of John. The historian presents himself at the beginning of the show as an academic working at the University of Turku, therefore he is the "expert", marking the perimeters in which events can be considered plausible and therefore "likely to have happened". The second performer is a puppeteer and he represents "fiction". It is possible to identify a similar construction here as well as in previous examples. Here, however a stronger link is established between the "scientific" aspect and the "fictional" one. In fact the second performer, the puppeteer, while he performs the story of John, constantly asks the historian if it is possible to imagine that this event, or accident, or this or that have happened to John. The historian, based on the found documents and on other academic researches on that period,⁷³ answers and sets the limits within which the pup-

73 Tom Linkinen, the historian, said that they used the following academic texts as reference: Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*, Oxford University Press, 1996, and *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, edited by Nicola

peteer can evolve. Thus the play is a delicious intertwining of objective, accurate document and fantasy. But the fantasy is not simply imaginary; the fantasy is legitimized by the scientific document because it is an attempt to explain why such a document exists. The document exists, but it does not provide enough information to know exactly what has happened to John. Similarly, we have the corpse, but the origin of the man found in the Alps remains obscure.

These performances clearly exemplified what I call playing with discourse. The passages from the scientific experts to the fiction and vice versa, instead of creating a chaotic clash, supported both categories. The “experts” of maternity were observing the actors, the archaeologists and Alice were both “creating stories”, and the historian offered the limit within which the puppeteer evolved. These shifts of language, in this case from scientific to fictitious, on the one hand reinforced and openly marked a division between the two categories, on the other hand, through the stratagem of the play within the play, brought the show closer to the audience. This last remark is obvious in the first and third examples, where the “experts” and the historian directly communicate with the actors and the puppeteer. The interchange between the two categories (experts with actors, historian with puppeteer) unveiled and displayed on the stage the continuous hidden negotiation that “fiction” needs to establish with “reality” in order to be accepted as “believable”. In the second example, the co-presence of the archaeologist and Alice creates a similar interchange as in the other two examples. However this exchange is not openly staged and involves a more complex articulation. In order to understand it, let’s recall the concept of “denial” developed by Forestier, discussed in Chapter 2. Traditional drama sets up an opposition between the “real” space where the audience is seated and the “non-real” space (the fiction) displayed on the stage. We could visualize this opposition as a line going from the spectators to the stage and on whose extremities are placed “reality” (the space of the spectators) and “non-reality” (the space of the actors). However, as discussed, the play within the play fragments this linearity and places the actor-observers between the two opposites: the actor-spectators find themselves in this strange situation of being like spectators even though they are actors. It is as if the “reality” of the spectator could invade the “non-reality” of the actor, which generates in-between realities. A “new” reality emerges from non-reality and enters into dialogue with the reality of the spectators and with the non-reality of the stage from which it has extrapolated itself. However this process of

fragmentation of non-reality subtly summons the spectators to feel closer to the new “reality”. Hans-Thies Lehmann, in his book *Post-Dramatic Theatre*, describes the effects of the “irruption of reality on the stage” on the spectator:

Si le réel s'impose devant ce qui est mis en scène sur le plateau, ce sera la même chose, comme par un miroir, dans la salle. Si le spectateur se demande, contraint et forcé, s'il doit réagir à ce qui se passe sur le plateau comme à une fiction (c'est-à-dire, esthétiquement) ou comme réalité (c'est-à-dire, moralement), alors une démarche théâtrale « limite » de ce genre quant au réel fragilise justement cette disposition déterminante du spectateur : l'assurance et la certitude non réfléchies avec lesquelles il vit son état de spectateur en tant que comportement social innocent et non-problématique. (Lehmann, 2002, 164)

Lehmann points out the “fragile” situation in which the spectators find themselves. The manifestation of a “reality” that detaches itself from non-reality puts the spectator in a perilous position. When an actress clearly embodying a character, evolving in an illusionary space, speaks to a member of the audience and tells her/him or her that now she will slap or kiss her/him, the audience don't feel threatened by it. However, if the same actress comes on the stage and does the same without pretending to be someone else, somewhere else, but simply facing the audience, the audience might feel threatened that this can happen for real. This can disorient the spectators, who don't know if they must judge the action aesthetically or morally.

Shared space/Imaginary space

Even if the model real/non-real proposed by Forestier is stimulating, what I find problematic is the choice of using the words “real” and “non-real”. It keeps its discourse within the limits of a specific type of theatre, mainly oriented towards the production of illusion. In fact, the subject of Forestier's research is the play within the play in the 17th-century French drama. When the focus shifts to contemporary theatre, such a distinction between real and non-real may cause more confusion rather than further the analysis. However, it is not possible to simply discard Forestier's model by stating that it cannot be applied to contemporary performances. If this were the case, an important feature of the play within the play would be neglected. In fact, the strong point of Forestier's analysis is the denial effect with its opposites (real/non-real) and it is an important key to under-

standing the structure of the play within the play. Therefore it is necessary not to simply reject Forestier's terminology but to find its contemporary transposition.

Lehmann in his book, *Post-Dramatic Theatre*, dedicates only a short paragraph to the question of space. In the section called PANORAMA (Lehmann, 2002, 196), he describes the work of the theatre company Angelus Novus, insisting on the non-mimetic quality of their performance style. According to him, the interest in the work of this company is not the "building" of a fictional plot but the attempt to break the division between actors and spectators. The audience, free to come and go during the "performances", has more of a feeling of participating in a ritual. Moreover, the space of the theatre event is not divided into stage (for the actors) and seats (for the spectators) but it becomes a space shared by actors and spectators. Lehmann insists on this idea of the shared space by listing a series of companies, which build performances on this concept of participation, where the audience feel close, or even at the same level with the actors. Obviously Lehmann has a clear agenda and he wants to point out the "irruption"⁷⁴ of the real on the stage. His research supports the hypothesis that contemporary theatre has moved away from the Aristotelian principles and therefore any need to build a fictional story could be seen as outdated. When it comes to this point, my artistic research takes distance from Lehmann's vision. Moreover, rather than advocating one type of theatre or another, I am more interested in the inner structures of performances (either Aristotelian or postdramatic) and the element of playfulness. However, I found Lehmann's term "shared space" useful, and much more appropriate for the contemporary context than Forestier's vocabulary: real/non-real. In fact this idea of the "shared space" as an area where actors are in a direct dialogue with the audience is probably the correct term for performances of today. I cannot neglect the fact that the spectators perceive the gestures of the actors and at the same time, they project some associations to these gestures. As discussed in the previous paragraph, no gestures can be "innocent" on the stage. Therefore I want to couple the concept of "shared space" with that of "imaginary space". The imaginary space would then be, in the traditional well-made drama, the space of fiction. If I apply these two terms to the model developed by Forestier, instead of having an opposition real/non-real we would have the opposition: shared space/imaginary space. Shared space would

74 "Irruption", in the sense of an invasion, a forcible or sudden entrance, stressing the fact of coming from the outside, opposed to "disruption" underlining a notion of interruption from within, a suspension from the inside.

then include everything that is not “building” a fictional story. In the previous example, the scientific discourse would fall into this category: the shared space. The spectators perceive the scientific talk as a description of the world in which they live and not as the building of a fictional world. The presence of the “experts” (the archaeologists and the historian whose discourse is rooted in real events) lets these discourses emerge as “real” and therefore detached from the imaginary space in which fiction remains. The audience perceive these “scientific” discourses closer to them and takes them as part of the “shared space” as opposed to the imaginary space in which fiction evolves. The archaeologists, the historian and the “experts of everyday life” are trying to understand the world, they are not building an illusion, therefore the audience perceives them as part of their world, and they share the same space. On the contrary, fiction belongs to the “imaginary space”. This creates a distinction between the two types of spaces: the shared space is considered closer and the imaginary space is placed further away from the audience. We could postulate therefore that each type of language generates a specific space that places itself at a different location on the line “shared space”/“imaginary space”. In the examined cases, the scientific discourse finds itself closer to the audience and grants the “veracity” and thus the connection with the fictional discourse.

The co-presence of the scientific discourse (the “experts”, the archaeologists, the historian) and the fictional world (the scenes from Lorca’s play, the story of Alice and the life of John) has such a strong impact that the interplay between the two discourses becomes the main focus of these performances. The plot, the ending of the fictional story becomes secondary. As I discussed previously and since it is identified as inside play by the scientific discourse (which is then the frame play), it is not even meant to end. However, the scientific discourse doesn’t aim to be “finished” either, as it doesn’t present itself as a story looking for its own ending. The central point of these shows is to explore how science and fiction blend. Hans-Thies Lehman defined post-dramatic theatre as a theatre where the “result” is abandoned in favour of the “process” (Lehmann, 2002, 165). What the spectator can observe is the process of mixing between the two discourses (science and fiction), which are usually considered to belong to different worlds: science is supposed to deliver truths about the world while fiction participates in the construction of lies. However, combining them is not without repercussions. I pondered previously how the “inside play” contests the limits of the “frame play”. Here as well, what happens is that the “fictional discourse” contests the authoritarian scientific discourse and shows how “science” is actually built on

fiction. The performance *Mnemonic* suggests that the imaginary meeting between Alice and her father is as “real” as the scientific discourse about the origin of the frozen corpse⁷⁵.

Playing with mediums

This last paragraph discusses two performances implementing video projections. The first one is a production of *The Misanthrope*, directed by Andreas Kriegenburg, at the Deutsches Theatre of Berlin, in 2009. The second one is a performance by the Finnish theatre group Nya Rampen, entitled *Worship!* produced in 2011. Both plays rely on classical drama; the first one is based on Moliere’s play while the second one is a cocktail of several plays by Shakespeare.

Before going into a detailed discussion about these two productions, I need to explain why in this section, *Playing with medium*, I limit the examination to two shows implementing video. The introduction of the video on stage is problematic and therefore needs to be analysed. Moreover, nowadays it seems that the presence of video, projected images, screens is a sine qua non of a performance to be considered “contemporary”. However, too often, I see performances where the use of video is not carefully thought through, and the introduction of images to the stage creates more problems than it really enriches the show. On this level, the analysis offered by the play within the play and applied to this type of situation (video/stage) can actually provide interesting readings. It could even be justifiable to wonder if actually the presence of the video is a form of play within the play: anytime a video is introduced a similar structure of the play within the play is installed. In fact, it is possible to argue that the co-presence of two-dimensional images (video) and three-dimensional organization of the space (actors) could be already thought as a similar structure frame story/inside story. There are many ways of using video on stage, and some of them are limited to an esthetical background supplying the scenography. Another trend is to use the video when actors are missing. The missing actors appear on the screens and have dialogue with the other actors on the stage. In either of the above-mentioned cases, the video does not change the space of the stage, but it places itself at the service of the “reality” of the stage. Therefore I cannot consider it as a situation of play within the play. There are however other cases where the use of video brings in a new perspective (or reality, or dimension) that establishes a dialogue (or rather, a *fracture*) with the “reality” of the stage. Such a condition that introduces

75 The issue of “resistance” towards an authoritarian discourse is one of the main subjects of Chapter 4.

a different space (or “reality”, or angle) definitely employs the structure of the play within the play, and is discussed here through two examples.

The Deutsches Theatre production is set in a wealthy living room where a party gives rhythm to the play. The walls of the living room are used as screens for the video projections. The videos are simply close-up images of characters of the play. Most of the time, the videos are responding to each other, as if they were in some Skype communication. Even though the videos are surrounding the space of the party, the actions and the actors on the stage are not necessarily interacting with the discussion happening between the characters in the videos. Actors go offstage and then appear in the video, and vice versa. Two levels of narratives are thus established. Since Molière’s play deals with hypocrisy and sincerity⁷⁶, the “party” becomes then the fulcrum where hypocrisy finds its playfulness, and the opposite, the videos express an attempt to find sincerity. Like a Skype conversation, where two or more persons, through the computer screens, share a moment of intimacy. We noticed in the previous paragraph, *Playing with discourses*, that in the examined examples the change from scientific to fictional creates a fracture. In this case, a similar distinction is established between the shifts from the fictional space of the party (on stage) to the sincere moments (on the video). The video here is not meant to decorate or to illustrate the actions on stage, but serves to create a second layer of meaning that resonates with the first one manifested by the actors on the stage. The video projections, with their similarity to the ever-increasing daily experience of video chatting, detach themselves from the space of non-reality of the stage and reach a level of “reality”. Like in the previous section where I discussed the juxtaposition of scientific and fictional discourse, I would like to reuse the vocabulary defined previously: the videos detach themselves from the imaginary space and reach the shared space. However, in this case the tension is not between science and fiction but rather between sincerity and hypocrisy. Andreas Kriegenburg transforms the Molière comedy into a grotesque tragedy: in this game of duplicity everybody loses. Nobody gets what she or he wants. Even Philinte and Eliante, who embodied the wise balance in Molière’s play, lose: they have played with each other too much. Their love is not fulfilled as in the original text. The German director takes freedom from Molière and uses the drama as material to explore the auto destructive hypocrisy and the impossible longing for sincerity. It would be possible to suggest that this production of *The Misanthrope* re-employs the model

76 See the first part of this chapter.

of the play within the play, but instead of building it in the narrative as a literary device it features it through another medium. The surrounding walls, which are used as screen projectors, become visually (and physically) the “frame” story allowing the inside play (in this case, the party/game of hypocrisy) to emerge.

The second example I would like to present continues this discussion. In the play *Worship!* excerpts from several plays by Shakespeare are combined to explore the need to worship something or someone in order to find a reason in life. Although it is debatable if the company succeeded or not in using Shakespeare as a source for this investigation, the setting displayed in this production is extremely interesting. On the stage there are some abstract constructions: a pyramid, a box and other minor structures. There is a large screen above the stage, used for video projections. The scenes taken from various Shakespeare plays (*Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*) were not performed with “naturalistic” acting. The company tried to find strong visual images that expressed the ideas in the text. The most interesting aspect of this production was the box in which a camera was set. The actors could go inside the box (and therefore “escape” from the sight of the spectators) and appear projected on the screen above the stage. These moments of intimacy mimicked reality TV series where participants are supposed to share “true” feelings with TV viewers. Videos and the action didn’t necessarily connect. The actor inside the box could reflect on her/his actions, feelings and thoughts. Perhaps there were some direct parallels with the action on stage, but this was not crucial. What was more interesting was the juxtaposition of video with the staged action, which similarly to the previous example “fractured” the stage and the connection with the audience.

The tension was not directed anymore towards the unfolding of the plot or the excitement of suspense. The story was relegated to a second level; it was used as the lure of expectation. These performances play with the stories written by Shakespeare and Molière. The traditional dramas are thus used to direct the attention somewhere else; the actual aim is not to tell their story, but to use them to establish tension, bordering on conflict. Therefore the plays of Molière and Shakespeare are not performed in front of the spectators but are used as a reference⁷⁷. Instead of materializing on the stage, they hover, as references, over it. The

77 Of course, various scenes from Shakespeare or Molière, or in the previous example, from Lorca, are performed. But if the aim is not to reach the end of these stories which function according to the traditional scheme where the end fulfils the expectations raised during the drama, it means that something else must be the key element. Therefore, the story with its traditional construction and expectations is present and acknowledged, but not fulfilled.

tension is therefore established between the invisible presence of the story and the scenes performed on the stage. This seems to recreate the same distinction as in the previous part: the shared space and the imaginary space. However, the situation is more complicated here because what is performed on the stage can be split further between the video projections and the actions performed by the actors. As I explained earlier, the videos, because of their direct link to everyday life, feel closer to the audience, and thus they belong to the shared space. Then there is the imaginary space where the stories of Molière and Shakespeare are projected. Fiction, with all its illusory construction is removed and placed only in the head of the spectators. The spectators don't see these stories but they are present in their mind. So if the videos belong to the "shared space" and the written drama (as reference) belongs to the "imaginary space", where should the actions performed by the actors be placed? Would they belong to the imaginary space or the shared space? Or would they oscillate between the two spaces? Something like a pulse from shared space to imaginary space? Or, do the two spaces depart from each other? The imaginary space projected in the head of the spectator and the shared space flattened with the video projections, would they leave the stage free? Would this be some kind of a new status, an in-between situation? The "in-between" is maybe the most important dimension that the shows presented. In fact, in these performances, the self-reflexivity aspect was not a preeminent feature: remarks on theatre or on the show itself were put on a second level, and instead what caught all the attention was this "in-between" space. This last suggestion, which emerges as an intuition, is a key element of the last chapter of this research. I will come back extensively to this notion of in-between, which is strongly linked to Weber's interpretation of *theatricality*.

What is possible to conclude, especially from the two last examples, is that the notion of "playfulness" actually brings in an element of disturbance. Both Molière's and Shakespeare's plays, which were the source materials, were disrupted, left unfinished, changed, or even contaminated. In a traditional setting, the drama is the model out of which the fiction should emerge and be "displayed" on the stage. The actors do their best to embody the drama and materialize it on stage. In these cases, on the contrary, what was displayed were not the dramas, but the playing with the dramas. The actors were not so much concerned with embodying the characters as best as they could, but were oscillating between being a character and not being a fictional character, between adhering to the plays and not adhering: in order words, they were playing with the material offered by the drama.

Playing with the limits

I can indicate from the examination made in this chapter that, firstly, the play within the play in the contemporary context is not embedded in the text but is present in the mode of *playing* (on the stage). Secondly that the play within the play should not be considered merely as a self-reflexive device but rather as playful means of uncovering the tensions, the break, the passages from one space to the other one. It is questionable if the insistence on *playing* is relevant or not. It would be possible to suggest that actually the contemporary shift of the play within the play is simply to refer to the play. However, as Huizinga pointed out, the action of “playing” carries an essential notion that becomes meaningful in the theatre field. Huizinga describes someone who “plays” the kangaroo: “*He has taken on the essence of the kangaroo, says the savage; he is playing the kangaroo, say we*”. (Huizinga, 1965, 25). Playing is then more than adhering to something as it involves an element of mimesis, but paradoxically, is not necessarily concerned with the issues of imitation. When children are playing the wolf, they don’t perform the wolves, but they are the wolves. Similarly *to play* with a play means that the performance takes on the essence of the drama, but is not concerned with doing it “right”, rather, simply with connecting with it. Therefore the word “playing” offers a wider range of approaches to the reference play; it opens a myriad of possible transformations.

This study seems to indicate, as I examined the two different interpretations of *The Misanthrope*, that, despite the changes that happened in theatre during the last centuries, it is possible to note a continuity of the impact and effects of the play within the play either on the frame story or on a larger scale, on the performance or even on the theatrical convention of the time. It is possible to infer from this investigation that this device finds its paroxysm not so much in the glorification of the medium or in a self-reflexive attitude, but when it tries to disrupt theatre. This last point is the essential argument of the conclusive chapter, which brings a surprising twist in the methodological approach: the operation of “disruption” is applied to this study, opening up the analysis to a larger context.

Re-examining *Pirandello Project* and *The Invisible Stage* as an interplay of spaces

The theme of shared space/imaginary space seems to evade the main subject of this research, but I feel necessary to make a digression on this idea because I consider it important to comprehend the contemporary shift of the play within the play thoroughly. Forestier and Kowzan both stress the strong correlation between the play within the play and the building of an illusion, of a fictional world. It would be natural therefore to wonder if, from the perspective of contemporary performance, the play within the play with its construction of “illusion”, as Forestier and Kowzan claim, is still valid. This for sure is a legitimate argument. However, what I intend to propose is that if the contemporary shift of the play within the play is *to play with* the play, then when it comes to discussing its effects on the narrative, we should not employ the concepts of real/non-real anymore, but instead we should shift our attention to the idea of shared space/imaginary space⁷⁸. However, the concept shared space/imaginary space should not be understood as an opposition, as the dichotomy real/non-real, but rather as two different and interdependent functions. They are two different notions, which define the actors’ positions and attitudes on stage. This concept of shared space/imaginary space is not an idea that emerges suddenly at this phase of the research, but it is the result of continuous maturation, which is possible to follow in the previous chapters, especially in the discussion of the issue of “direction” in Chapter 1 or the issue of “imagination” (linked to the idea of mental stage) in Chapter 2⁷⁹.

78 It is interesting to use this notion of shared space and imaginary space and apply it to two thinkers who attacked theatre. Rousseau, as it has been discussed in the previous chapter, accuses theatre of preserving the disparity in society (through the division between the stage and the audience and through the display of fiction) and suggests that instead of going to the dark rooms to watch actors, spectators should simply gather in open spaces. Rousseau claims that actually the best of all the shows is when the spectators are not watching a show (in the imaginary space) but simply gathering and watching themselves (in the shared space). Rousseau stresses the action of sharing the space as opposed to the imaginary space which obliges the spectators to be passive. The moment of freedom happens, according to him, in the shared space. Tertullian, like Rousseau, condemns theatre, but using almost opposite arguments. In his text *De Spectaculis* written in the 3rd century, Tertullian identifies theatre not so much with the shows but more with concrete buildings, places. He stresses the “entering” the theatre, the space (the temple of idolatry at the service of the wrong gods), while little is said about the content of the shows. However, at the end he explains that actually the best of all the shows is the final judgement, which is a powerful theatrical scene completely projected in an imaginary space. Are these two thinkers in conflict? These are opposite visions; for Rousseau theatre is a gathering and for Tertullian theatre is made of images, but both are right. Both have disclosed an important aspect of theatre: the gathering (shared space) and the images or projection (the imaginary space).

79 The fact that these two notions, shared and imaginary space are not a simple dichotomy but more like an entangled pair, is discussed in the previous paragraph, *Playing with mediums*.

The suggestion that the tension between the frame story and the inside story can be transferred to an interplay between the spaces (shared and imaginary) is relevant and fruitful and can offer new insight into *The Invisible Stage* and the *Pirandello Project*.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, in the performance *The Invisible Stage* there are eight intertwined narratives:

- 1) The lecture in Switzerland
- 2) The relationship between Juha and Davide
- 3) The meeting with Felix Segantini
- 4) The plays of Felix Segantini, *Les Joueurs Observants* and *Geneva*
- 5) *Hamlet*
- 6) The comments on *Hamlet*
- 7) Juha and Davide mimicking *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*
- 8) The architecture (the spectators “becoming” actors).

The first story, the lecture in Switzerland, is easily identified as the frame story that permits all the other stories to appear. In the light of the concepts of shared space coupled with imaginary space and of scientific discourse coupled with fictional discourse, the frame story can be associated with the notion of “scientific” story. In fact, when I started the performance, I immediately referred to a lecture I gave in Switzerland. Therefore I presented myself as an academic undergoing a doctoral research. I presented myself to the audience as Davide, I was not pretending to be another character, and I was not pretending to be somewhere else. I was openly placing myself in the “shared space” and I simply disclosed to the audience some questions I have about theatre. However the questions that were debated concerned the “imaginary space” that usually a traditional show creates. I use the word “however” because it is exactly in this juxtaposition of content (the imaginary space) with form (the lecture in the shared space) that the performance “fractures” itself. When the performance limited itself to the first narrative, the lecture in Switzerland, the situation was clear: I was debating a particular aspect of theatre and I shared my inquiry with the audience. However, when the other narratives surfaced, gradually the “scientific discourse” (the lecture in Switzerland) lost its clear parameters and became a “fictional discourse” and the “shared space” drifted into the “imaginary space”. Probably here is one of the most seducing aspects of this project; in fact the “scientific” discourse about “the imaginary space” was disrupted from the very inside. At the very beginning of the show I announced: “Today I would like to discuss divi-

sion and observation with you". Thus I immediately declared that I would deal with the questions of shared space (the division between actors and spectators) and of imaginary space (the possibility to observe and to project something on the stage). However, the subjects of the lecture (especially the one related to the observation/projection) invaded the narrative of the lecture and projected it into an imaginary space, into a fictional narrative. It is a very twisted turn where the subject of the show disrupts itself. Moreover this "twist" was reinforced by the change in the architecture of the performance. At the beginning of the performance the two groups of spectators were sitting far from each other (see Figure 1 in Chapter 2). The distance and the fact that Juha and I clearly marked which narrative was being acted out permitted the spectators to shift easily from shared space (the lecture) to imaginary space (when we referred to the other narratives) and vice versa. But when the audience was asked to come closer (see Figure 2) the division between the two types of space was blurred. The distinctions became indistinct. I remember seeing the audience switching quickly from a very focused gaze to a more introspective gaze. I could see the spectators' focus wavering between what was happening in front of their eyes, in the shared space, and what was happening in their head, in the imaginary space, checking both frequently. Finally, when the gaze of the audience was blocked with black fabric (see Figure 3), the imaginary space became the shared space. In this particular situation the only "space" that could exist was the imaginary space, however, Juha in his long monologue continued to talk as if he described what was happening on the other side of the curtain, as if he explained what was happening to the other spectators. Therefore the subject of "imaginary space" (the monologue of Juha) was the "shared space" (the place of the spectators). It was as if the inside stories (the imaginary space) coincided with the frame story (the shared space). Then, at the very end, just after the curtain was removed, the spectators were still wondering in which space they were wandering. A long, sustained silence lingered, but it was not an awkward silence, where the audience would have felt lost and ashamed. Usually it was a moment that the audience enjoyed. In fact during the opening night at Teak, when the show ended, the audience remained silent for a long time and slowly started laughing together. They felt that they participated in the projection (in the imaginary space) of another spectator present in the room. At the same time, they did the same with the other spectators, as they projected them in their own imaginary space.

I believe that with this project, I explored and achieved something very interesting; it was very far from a simple dual opposition "scientific discourse" with

“fictional discourse”. However, it was a very delicate experiment to intertwine eight narratives and at the same time make sure that the audience could still follow the development of the performance, without being confused. I am not certain if it was always successful. But for sure, I have succeeded in bringing together an academic research with an artistic exploration. These two discourses that are usually separated were fused together showing that actually an artistic research is a form of artistic work pointing out the limits of the medium, looking for crisis.

I go back now to my first practical work, the *Pirandello Project*. It was not my aim to perform Pirandello’s last play, but I was interested in some aspects of it because of other aspects of Pirandello’s work in general. The reason why *The Mountain Giants* was chosen as a basic reference play is that it is an unfinished play that offers many angles of approach. If I want to draw a parallel with the previous examples, I can state that Pirandello, like Molière in Kriegenburg’s show or Shakespeare in *Nye Rampen*’s show, hovered over the stage as reference and therefore can be located in the imaginary space. In fact the actions performed on the stage constantly hinted at Pirandello’s work⁸⁰. In Chapter 1 I stated that in the rehearsal process I was thrilled by the improvisations where the actors were exploring their new relationship with the masks. I wrote:

“During the exploration period I was extremely thrilled by the discoveries made during these exercises. I really felt that here I was breaking the threshold expressed by Lecoq and encountering new dimensions in the relation of the human (face) with the mask. Usually, in mask theatre, masks are tools for transformation and the magic lies in giving the illusion that the mask (a fixed form) is alive (a moving form). But in this case the masks were also used for their symbolic aspect: the (social) mask that humans have to wear in society.”

But then I concluded that I went too far in the exploration and this is the reason why I could not introduce these mask-face explorations in the final show. However, at this point, I realized that probably the reason for this failure could be found somewhere else. In the analysis of Kreingenburg’s and Nye Rampen’s shows I link the video projection to the shared space, the reference to Molière

80 When we performed this show in Lugano, Switzerland, in Fall 2010 a Pirandello specialist, Daria Farafonova, who was finishing her doctoral thesis on Pirandello, was extremely delighted to recognize all the main questions on stage that the Sicilian author was concerned with.

and Shakespeare to the imaginary space and then I hypothesize that the stage assumes a special status freed from the shared or imaginary space. I have defined this special status as “in-between”. In the *Pirandello Project* I did not use video projections, but I unconsciously put the masks on the same level as the videos. I thought that the masks, with their magnetic power, would establish a strong link to the audience, therefore they would belong to the shared space. Consequently, I thought that the moments when the actors removed the masks were the “special” moments, the unclassifiable situations that could generate uncanny experiences that would let the “in-between” emerge. I realize now that this was a mistake. It was actually the exact opposite; the moments when the actors took off the masks were the moments when the actors were “closer” to the audience. In these situations, they were in the shared space. In fact, the show started with Tanja, one actress of the company, coming towards the spectators and talking to them directly, without a mask. What I did not understand back then was that I should have reversed everything. I should have considered the moments without masks as a situation of shared space while the scenes where the actors were wearing masks as situations of “in-between”. It is probably one of the reasons why I could not use the material developed during the rehearsal process here; I attributed the wrong status to the different material. When I built the performance, as I described in Chapter 1, I had to cut all the scenes that challenged the traditional use of mask. I thought that when the face of the actors was revealed, it was something strange, unusual. But I understand now that it is the contrary: when the actor is wearing a mask, it is something strange, unusual. Perhaps the physical space that lies between the face of the actor and the mask is an extension of this “in-between” space that I discussed earlier. I assume that now, in the light of this reflection, I would probably be able to handle this layering of “status” much better. Surely the research helped to identify and nominate these various spaces (and statuses) more specifically. It is not enough to juxtapose several stories or realities on the stage, it is important as well to understand to which space they belong.

I would like to come back to the spectators’ position towards the performance to stress the fact that the co-presence of the two or three “spaces” arouses different kinds of attention in the spectator. For instance, spectators observe the shared space and the imaginary space differently. Therefore a kind of fluctuation (or tension) is evoked in the spectators as well: the spectator experiences (consciously or unconsciously) shifts of perception, which leads to different ways of receiving the show and thus different ways of “being a spectator”. This oscillation

of perception experienced by the spectators can be so fast that it can happen almost simultaneously: generating a superimposition of “being spectators”. This, for instance, was clearly visible in *The Invisible Stage*, when the spectators came closer together: they oscillated between two qualities of perception. I would say that in the same spectator there were actually “two spectators”⁸¹. This idea can be associated with the co-presence of actor-spectators (of the frame story observing the actors of the inside story) and spectators (observing the whole action on the stage)⁸². Instead of having a “fracture” on the stage (with the emergence of the inside play) there is a division happening between the shared space and the imaginary space. The co-presence of these two spaces generates the “fracture” within the spectators who become spectators of the show and spectators of themselves watching a show.

It is possible here to understand the close relationship between the fragmentation of the stage operated by the play within the play in a traditional setting and the contemporary counterpart with its fragmented discourse. As Denis Guénoun suggests, both have a role in the process of unmasking theatricality.

L'écriture fragmentaire, c'est l'exhibition du monteur : rien de moins impersonnel, de moins désingularisé qu'un théâtre des bouts et des morceaux. C'est la visibilité avouée de l'opération de faire-théâtre, de mettre en scène des séquences verbales pour les porter au devant d'un concours de voyeurs et d'auditeurs attroupés. (Guénoun, 1998, 141-142)

The “shift” from one fragment to another obliges the audience to shift their attention as well. These shifts remind the audience constantly that they are in front of a performance. It is what Guénoun writes the exhibition of the “editor”, who exposes to the audience the operation of putting together various elements in order to “make a theatre performance”. The spectators are watching a performance and they are reminded that they are watching a performance. It is

81 This notion of “two spectators” is not completely new, for I already mentioned the double nature of the spectator when I discussed *Hamletmachine* in Chapter 1.

82 Another example displaying this shift of perception is present in Murakami's novel *1Q84*, where the two protagonists discover that at one point in their life they have shifted from the normal year 1984 to a slightly different but parallel year named by one of the protagonist: 1Q84. As a reader, I know how life was in 1984, since I was 12 years old. I can remember the period, the music of the time, the political world conflicts, the hopes and fears for the coming millennium. However, there is another reader that is interested to know how it is in the year 1Q84. Therefore I notice that there are two “readers” in myself, one that discovers the story 1Q84 and one that remembers 1984.

therefore not so much the content (the story) that matters but the operation of juxtaposing fragments. Each fragment creates a discourse and the juxtaposition of fragments does not result in a linear development of a story, but in the superimposition of discourses. The meanings (or story) emerge then from the shifts, the echoes, and the tensions between the various layers.

In the 3rd book of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates questions why Homer, at the beginning of the *Iliad*, more precisely in verse 16, changes from the third person singular to the first person singular. At first it is the poet speaking, but when Homer gives voice to the priest Chryseis, he makes the priest say: "release my dear child". In this change of style Socrates sees the arousal of imitation and rewrites the passage avoiding the change of person, by always keeping the indirect discourse. Socrates explains afterwards why this style would be preferable. Plato's condemnation of imitation is well known among theatre professionals, there is no need to retrace it here. However, Guénoun, in his close reading of that passage, points out a paradox in Plato's text:

Platon ne respecte en rien le commandement qu'il fait énoncer à Socrate, et n'écrit jamais en son nom propre, mais toujours derrière le voile de personnages, celui de Socrate en premier lieu. (Guénoun, 1998, 126)

Plato, according to Guénoun, contradicts himself, in fact he does the opposite of what the text proclaims: he uses mimesis to condemn mimesis! Plato uses the character of Socrates to explain why the indirect discourse is preferable. This is a remarkable paradox, an absolutely fantastic tension within the text itself. The amazement emerges not from the content itself but from the juxtaposition of what the text says with the form in which the content is expressed - in other words, from the shifts of discourses. My point here is not to confute Plato's text but to point out that perhaps the interest is exactly in this contradiction, in these shifts. At the moment when Homer switches persons: from the third person singular to the first person singular. At the moment when Plato uses the voice of Socrates to explain why the use the voice of a character is fallacious. These "jumps", even clashes, contradictions, shifts instead of "destroying" the unity of the text, bring (or reveal from the inside) a more complex experience. The philosophical inquiry operated by Plato/Socrates is suddenly jeopardized, put into another light and questioned from within, from its own structure.

Chapter 4:

Theatre Enters!

In this chapter I explore the idea of the play within the play as a medium bringing theatre itself onto the stage. Instead of considering theatre as a limit marking the on-stage and the off-stage, or a division between a fictional world and a real world, I consider it as a place where the totality⁸³ can be included. This last note may seem obscure, however I will explain it by doing an even more perilous action: by bringing in an algebraic study about the laws of form developed by the British mathematician Spencer-Brown. Spencer-Brown developed an interesting model based on the notion of repetition, which he named “re-entry”. The idea of the “re-entry” is simply the inclusion of the distinction within the distinction. In other words it means that “repeating” the distinction (the stage, the play, whatever marks a division) inside the world of the stage, or to introduce a play within a play is a strategy that permits to encompass the totality of the reality: the “on stage” and the “off stage”. This mathematical consideration on repetition allows me to approach Samuel Weber’s definition of *theatricality*. At first Weber describes Antonin Artaud’s vision of theatre, which he links with the notion of “entering”. For him theatre enters as a desperate act, as a disruption of reality. According to Weber, theatre should not be considered as something “imitating” life, but rather as a startling event that dispossesses what is “there” without any goal. The idea is disruption and unleashing hidden, suppressed energies. Subsequently, I further the notion of theatricality as an agent for disruption, by discussing Proust’s concept of art. He regarded the perception of the world and

83 “Totality” as opposed to a place that creates division. Totality meant in the sense of having the experience of the onstage and of the off-stage simultaneously; or similarly, the experience of a fictional world and the real world. The dichotomy instead of remaining in opposition: this or that, is brought together in the same space.

its “representation” not as a connection that goes only in one direction but as a dialogue feeding both constituents: the artwork and the perception of reality.

Then in the last part I come back on the notion of in-between discussed in the previous chapter and I suggest that on the one hand the play within the play allows the secretive experience of life to enter on the stage, on the other hand paradoxically it requires a constriction, a frame story, a plot, something that would prevent the entering of these uncanny moments. The in-between therefore is not a mode of existence but rather a mode of resistance. This permits me to develop the idea of the play within the play as a device staging its own frame. I conclude the chapter by referring to the ideas of Denis Guénoun and I propose that the play within the play not only stages its own frame but cracks it as well. The strength of this device is creating a “circle” and breaking it from the inside.

The re-entry

In an interview, the Lithuanian theatre director Eimuntas Nekrosius wonders why Shakespeare felt the need in *Hamlet* to introduce a second play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, inside the main action. He claims that there is no need to create a second level of representation. That of the main action is enough (Nekrosius, 1999, 135). And in fact he solves the problem by replacing the inside performance with a children’s game. In Nekrosius’s version of *Hamlet*, Hamlet invites Claudius to play a game and during the game, the ghost of the father appears, which scares Claudius. Similarly to the original script, Claudius stops the game abruptly and leaves, confirming Hamlet’s suspicions. When I read this interview 10 years ago I was surprised that the Lithuanian director refused to use this dramaturgical device. I was wondering why he avoided this layering of “representations”. Probably he didn’t want to fall into the trap of celebrating theatre and its ability to create illusions. He saw an indulgent gesture of aestheticism in this, like an empty act finalized just for itself. However, more recently I have considered that he missed perceiving the “rebellious” act in it, that it is an act of autonomy (taking the freedom to counter the main narrative) that challenges the limits of theatre. Nekrosius avoided pointing out who is narrating the story and preferred to keep the continuum of the illusion, without interference. He avoided reminding the audience that behind the characters, there are actors. For sure as a theatre director he had his personal interpretation and interest in Shakespeare, however, I can indicate that in doing so, he missed letting theatre unmask itself. To the contrary, he preserved the idea of theatre as a place of mystification. By avoiding

the glorification of theatre Nekrosius failed to challenge it and to examine its nature and therefore its limits. But how is it possible that the repetition of the medium, the play within the play, permits to examine the “limits” of theatre?

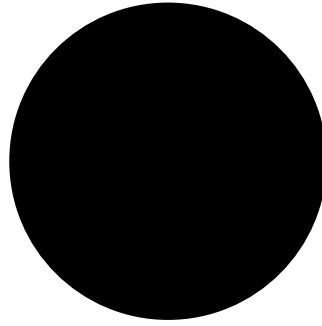
I would like to approach the above-mentioned question by discussing a subject that apparently has nothing to do with theatre: mathematics. This would seem odd, however, taking a deeper look, it is possible to draw some parallels between theatre and mathematics. Mathematics is an attempt to transpose reality into an abstract language made up by numbers, symbols and forms: in other words, it is a way to extract order from the chaotic world surrounding us. In fact, consciously or unconsciously, we are using mathematics all the time. To avoid drowning the reader in sophisticated algorithms, I would like to limit the comparison to geometry and to connect it to theatre: actually it is almost a banality to state that issues related to geometry emerge when we consider the limit separating the stage and the audience. However, it is also possible to parallel some laws of form with a more abstract domain: the structure of the drama. In Chapter 2, while discussing Guénoun and his characterization of theatre as a broken circle, I already drew some parallels between theatre and mathematics. In fact, I linked the structure of the play within the play with the notion of the circle. Let's return to this notion and advance it by referring to the British mathematician George Spencer-Brown, who published the book, *The Laws of Form* in 1969. In his book, Spencer-Brown explains that when a distinction is made, the space is divided between the “marked” and the “unmarked”.

Once a distinction is drawn, the spaces, states, or contents on each side of the boundary, being distinct, can be indicated.

There can be no distinction without motive, and there can be no motive without unless contents are seen to differ in value.

Thus the calling of the name can be identified with the value of the content. (Spencer, 1969, 1)

It will be clearer if we identify the idea of “distinction” with the concept of drawing a circle. When I draw a circle, I define the space in two categories: inside the circle and outside the circle. The circle becomes then a limit, that is to say, the distinction.



What is inside the circle is then identified as “marked” (by the distinction) and everything that is left outside the circle is therefore identified as “unmarked”⁸⁴. In the drawing above, the black area is the “marked” and the white area is the “unmarked”. The circle thus creates a distinction and divides the space. This would suggest that it is impossible to “name” the “everything”, for the very moment I name something, I establish a distinction and therefore I divide the space into two: what falls under the category (the marked) and what is left outside (the unmarked)⁸⁵. If we apply this logic to theatre, it means that any attempt to represent reality⁸⁶ on stage is forced to fail. In fact, the very moment I define the stage on which the performance will take place, I also establish a distinction between the “marked” - what is happening on the stage - and the “unmarked” - what is happening off stage. But the reality in which we live simultaneously contains the “on stage” and the “off stage”, therefore the “reality” of the theatre contained in the world cannot find its expression. It seems that we reach a limit impossible to surpass. But Spencer-Brown continues his argument and asserts his first axiom:

The value of a call made again is the value of the call.

That is to say, if a name is called and then is called again, the value indicated by the two calls taken together is the value indicated by one of them.

That is to say, for any name, to recall is to call. (Spencer, 1969, 1)

84 A distinction is also a manifestation of a “power” which operates such distinction. This issue of the manifestation of power is explored further in the paragraph *The reality of “theatricality”*.

85 The term “unmarked” in the field of performance is nowadays inseparable from the stimulating and controversial book by Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked, The Politics of Performance* (1993). Although Phelan never refers to Spencer-Brown’s idea, it would be possible to draw a parallel between the two texts. But the two writers take different paths, even though they might have a connecting point on the notion of “unmarked” as something that is left outside, that is not included (or visible).

86 For the sake of the argument I equal the concept of “everything” with the concept of reality, as in “everything that surrounds us”.

This seems unclear but this second axiom throws light on it:

The value of a crossing made again is not the value of the crossing.

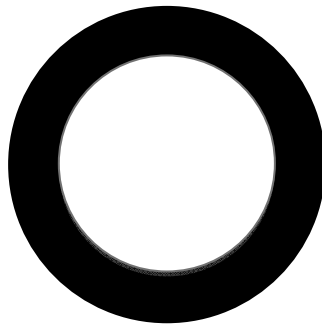
That is to say, if intended to cross a boundary and then it is intended to cross it again, the value indicated by the two intentions taken together is the value indicated by none of them.

That is to say, for any boundary, to recross is not to cross. (Spencer, 1969, 2)

Basically if a distinction is repeated, it does not add anything in value but simply repeats the statement. To cross the line made by a distinction twice cancels the distinction itself. In other words, the “everything” here can find its expression in the repetition of the distinction, what Spencer-Brown calls the “re-entry” (Spencer, 1969, 69). The idea of the “re-entry” simply means the inclusion of the distinction within the distinction. In our case, the circle finds itself inside another circle. Spencer-Brown in his book does not use a circle as an example. He represents the concept of distinction by a symbol that he calls “cross”: \sqcap . And according to what he stated: to repeat twice the distinction does not add in values: $\sqcap \sqcap = \sqcap$

Which can be written as: $\sqcap \sqcap = \sqcap$

I find the image of the circle more visually persuasive, and it also connects this argument with the ideas developed in Chapter 2. Anyway, basically, what Spence-Brown states is that repetition permits to include the “unmarked” within the “marked”.



This notion seems quite abstract, but I try to elucidate it by referring to Yasmina Reza’s play, *A Spanish Play* (*Une pièce espagnole*, 2004), which I already discussed in Chapter 2. The play that is performed in front of the audience, the actual Spanish play, is perceived by the audience as a “world” that stands on its

own. However, the staging of that “world” required a superstructure: rehearsals, technical support, etc., which is not shown during the show. Therefore, there is something that is shown on the stage, which I call: “marked” and something that is left outside the show, which I call: “unmarked”. What is “marked” is the reality of the show performed in front of the audience, in the case of Reza’s play is the three sisters and their mother. What is “unmarked” is the reality of making the show. Therefore the show becomes the distinction dividing what is “marked”; the actual show presented in front of the spectators, and what is “unmarked”; what is left out but was still necessary to make the show happen. In the play by Reza, the monologues of the actors are bringing in the show, what is usually left out, these “unmarked” elements. Reza finds a way to bring the “unmarked” within the “marked”.

It is possible now to understand the parallel with the play within the play: the option of “repeating” the distinction (the stage) inside the stage, or in other words to introduce a play within a play is a strategy that permits to encompass the totality of reality: the “on stage” and the “off stage”. But not only, because it is also a means of postponing the “arrival” of the “plot”, or in this case, the distinction. The story told in the Spanish play, the family reunion, is the basic plot of the show. The tension keeps the attention awake and the audience is curious to know how the family will find a solution to their troubles. However, the monologues given by the actors have nothing to do with the “story”; they represent something else. The “plot” of the play is momentarily suspended. Or in other words: the arrival of the plot is postponed. And what emerges during the postponing of the plot? What enters that space? The monologues about theatre: what enters the stage is nothing else than theatre itself.

The plot, on a meta-theatrical level, defines what is on the stage and what is not. The plot is therefore the distinction, the separating line, delineating a division between the marked and the unmarked. However, Reza found the way to present within the distinction, within the plot what normally should stay outside the plot. The separating line, in the case of Reza’s play, is then stretched, so stretched that instead of merely being an element of division, it becomes the very subject of investigation.

Consequently, this last remark connects the play within the play with the actual notion of disruption, especially when it is compared to the particular definition of *theatricality* as considered by the American philosopher, Samuel Weber.

Theatre exploring its limits

In the article *The Virtual Reality of Theatre*, which is part of the book *Theatricality as Medium*, Samuel Weber discusses the “emergence” of theatre in Antonin Artaud’s text *The Theatre and the Plague*. Weber explains that Artaud gives an allegorical description of the spread of the plague that occurred in Marseille in 1720. It is divided into four steps. During the last step of the spread of the plague theatre installs itself. Theatre is then not (or rather should not be) an act of creation, a meaningful decision, but rather appears like an unexpected event. This example is crucial in Weber’s thinking because it defines theatre not as something “imitating” life, but rather as a startling event that dispossesses what is “there” without any goal. It does not aim to take over reality but rather to disrupt it unleashing hidden and suppressed energies. In fact Weber questions the very nature of “mimesis” and analyses the tension of the play within the paradigm of the traditional concept of theatre. For him, traditional theatre already carries the element of disruption that challenges theatre itself. In other words he opens a fracture inside the traditional theatre that offers a new perspective on it.

I would like to consider Weber’s approach and relate it to the situation of the play within the play. This dramaturgical device is usually associated to a traditional conception of drama, where more or less fictional characters evolving in a more or less fictional world undergo transformations. Usually the play within the play as a tool is not considered disruptive to the Aristotelian concept of the “well-made” story but rather as a device that reinforces it. However, similarly to Weber’s suggestion, this situation of the play within the play displays an enigma that can shatter the very notion of the drama and question its limits. A theatrical action, whether it claims to relate to a fictional space (that is to say, to the fictional story that is told on the stage) or wants to manifest just for itself without claiming to relate to another space, cannot anyway escape from its double nature. This double “nature” is conditioned by the perception of the spectator who takes what is produced on the stage and re-processes it in his or her head in order to project meanings over the actor’s gestures. In other words, there is the manifestation of the gesture and the meaning that the gesture can convey. The process of displaying a second play inside the main play (the frame story) entails that the theatrical “charge” is doubled. So we could say that the illusion is “squared”. The mathematical function of squaring involves a fascinating effect. But before going again into mathematics, and this time arithmetic, let us come back briefly to a disagreement between Plato and Aristotle upon mimesis. Plato associated a negative value with mimesis: being an imitation of an imitation, it

departs even more from the world of Ideas. Aristotle, instead, gave to mimesis a positive value, because it is a source of joy and of learning. Plato linked mimesis to contamination while Aristotle linked it to purification. In mathematics this would be defined as: (-) negative or (+) positive. The interesting fact is that from a mathematical point of view, when a number is squared, it loses its value. If I consider the positive number +3 and I square it, the result is 9: $(3 \times 3 = 9)$. From this point of view, the play within the play cannot be but positive, keeping the “positive” value of mimesis, or of theatre in general. But if I do the same with the negative number -3 and I square it as well, the result is not negative nine, -9, as it would seem logical to expect but positive nine: $((-3) \times (-3) = (+9))$. This can seem strange and obscure, especially when it is applied to theatre: if already mimesis should be considered as negative, then the repetition of it (its squaring, the imitation of a theatre play) cannot be but negative. Still, the mathematical result is not. The result, to be precise is actually ambiguous for it should be written in its extension ± 9 . So the result contains the negative and the positive. Usually the negative is dropped and only the positive is taken into consideration. Which implies that it is a superimposition of values. This last statement may lead into an abyss of intricate contradictions that would only confuse instead of helping. However, as I concluded in the previous chapter, Plato himself relied on mimesis in order to condemn mimesis. Is it possible now to draw a parallel between what seemed to be Plato’s inconsistency and the abyss of intricate contradictions?

The very notion of “theatricality” already bears a paradox within itself. It is commonly assumed that theatre is a space for theatricality while the everyday life should be the place for reality. “Theatrical” usually is understood as “exaggerated”, marked by artificial emotion, even exhibitionism, in other words it refers to a conscious and exposed act of presenting or representing oneself. Weber, while using this word, challenges this assumption. Austin, as Weber explains, highlights the presence of “theatricality”, of “performativity” in everyday life blurring the clear division between “pretending” and “being”. From this point of view, theatre invades the streets (I use here the opposition street/theatre to avoid the complicated and luring opposition reality/fiction and simply focus on the spatial opposition). But it would be important to note that ironically theatre (especially the traditional drama) carries the desire to erase its theatricality. What I mean is that most of the performances aim to make the audience forget that they are attending a theatre event. Anything that would remind the audience that we are in a representational situation is removed. I come back to this later when I speak about the frame. It becomes the reverse action that the street

invades theatre. But if the street is the space of theatricality and theatre the space for reflecting the street filled with theatricality and employing the refusal of theatricality at the same time - what does then theatre present? A theatrical action receding from theatricality? An action negating itself for being staged? An act of mimesis escaping mimesis?

Aristotle claimed that the fact of recognizing the repetition of a known action (the acknowledgement of a mimesis) creates pleasure and this pleasure is the source of knowledge. Therefore mimesis is something subordinated to reality. First we experience reality and afterwards we can enjoy the repetition of it - which implies that the whole work of art is a consequence of reality. However, faithfully to the deconstructive tradition, Weber questions this assumption. In fact he proposes instead another approach to the concept of the mimesis, not so much as consequence of reality, but more as a “medium”; as a factor for the “in between” reality/realities.

Weber assesses his definition of “mimesis” by examining the limitation of translation. He realized that, for instance, the German language has a great variety of describing “being”: *Sein*, *Seiendes*, *Seiend*, which are all translated into English as “being”. However, in order to convey to full meaning of each word, English uses repetition, and through these repetitions, the complexity of “being” can unfold. Weber borrows Heidegger’s terminology and names the complexity of “being”, the “twofold of being”. Repetition acquires then a positive value, and from this point of view Weber claims that mimesis is not simply imitation (and therefore something subordinate to “truth”) but rather “participation”: through and because of the repetition of the action it participates in the unfolding of multiple layers of meanings (it participates in the discovery of the “twofold”).

Weber furthers his discourse and binds the discourse about mimesis to Derrida’s notion of *arrivant* with its desire to arrive but never fully arriving at its destination. However this desire of remaining “suspended”, of arriving without arriving, this continuous “ongoing of the oncoming” must stop at some point; something must be brought forward. The *arrivant* must arrive at one point! The medium allowing such “arrival” and such “bringing forward” is the *mythos*. The *mythos* or what Aristotle defines as the plot is what “brings-to-appearance” and it is a call for receiving, perceiving, discerning. However, while it allows the “arrival”, it arrests the complex and conflicting movement of the twofold, which discloses itself through self-concealment. All the complex facets of an event are shut down and they are concealed in order to let the “plot” be expressed. To “reduce” the emblematic, ambivalent and therefore rich tension

generated by the twofold into a logical and linear whole defined by the plot is the issue that Weber wants to consider. There is a tension between the enigmatic and complex experience of the twofold and the desire to “grasp” reality immediately, to name things, to localize them, which lessens the experience of the twofold. It would seem then that the experience of the plot diminishes the uncanny encounter with the double nature of being, the uncanny experience of being on the stage.

As mentioned above, Aristotle defined a theatre event as a vehicle for the presentation of a coherent, meaningful story. As Aristotle writes, a good tragedy should produce its effect already when it is simply read. Therefore the staging of a show is totally dismissed and relegated to a secondary scale. The experience of a person in front of another person (the actor in front of the spectator) is then taken away. Weber argues that this desire to hold, to grasp the floor of the theatre and thus of theatricality by confining it to a sealed box of thoughts (in this case the plot) has been the trademark of the Western conceptualization of theatre. This is how Debord, Plato, and Austin understood it. According to Weber, this approach, instead of opening the *twofold* and allowing for a deeper experience, reduces it to a mere linear and flat understanding of it.

Weber, in order to demonstrate the tension established between the *telos* and the “twofold of Being”, refers to a scene he has seen at the Peking Opera.

The primary concern of the Peking Opera, according to Weber, is not to present a meaningful action through a coherent plot (which has been the main concern of Western theatre for 2000 years) but rather to use both action and plot to emphasize the significance of the performance itself. Weber depicts one specific scene, called *Autumn River*, which displays a young woman wishing to cross a river in order to join her lover. The elements of the scene: the boat, the water, the rocking of the boat, the waves, the falling and rising are made visible through the pantomime. The contrast of land (the stage) and water (the invisible waves), the sway of the water, going nowhere, yet constantly moving, the going-nowhere-while-moving all constitute, for Weber, much of the magic of the scene, making it an exemplary allegory of *theatricality*.

In fact, according to him, the beauty of the scene is not in the reunion of the two lovers, but in the pursuit of this desire to be reunited. The final action, the encounter is constantly postponed, pushed further by the “accidents” happening on the boat. The *telos*, the goal is then there to justify the action on the boat, but the goal is not the main reason. The central action is the ballet of standing, swaying, almost falling, in which the relationship of land and sea, stability and

precariousness is demonstrated through bodily gestures indicating the fear of losing one's balance. As Weber writes:

This is the true and memorable “drama” of this scene: not the search to be reunited with one's beloved, but the fearful dependence upon support of the “land” and the courage to search for another kind of balance, a balance and movement that is utterly defined in terms of responsiveness, rather than of stability and security...[...] This scene in our context can be read, witnessed, seen, and heard as an allegory of theatricality as medium – not as a medium of representation, but as a medium that balances between activity and passivity, and that makes its peace, if ever provisionally, with separation. (Weber, 2004, 28)

The *theatricality* and therefore “mimesis” is then not an act that arrests or controls by assigning names but rather a movement that suggests the twofold, the duplicity; it is a medium of displacement or dislocation that opens other ways, not bound to arrive at the final destination - or at least, not too soon. As Weber wrote: “Theatre thus emerges as a powerful medium of the *arrivant*.” From this perspective it would be possible to understand that similarly, the introduction of a play inside the main play participates in the same process of postponing the arrival of the frame story. The inside story disrupts, suspends the main story and pushes its limits further. What is presented here is not a human, but theatre itself; it is therefore the uncanny experience of the theatre (the being of theatre) that is unfolded. This is perhaps where Weber's approach finds its paroxysm when it is applied to the phenomenon of the play within the play. Theatre fractures itself from within and allows its own “double” nature to be unfolded. And this “unfolding”, this suspension is not a secondary effect, but it is the pivotal action; it is the medium (theatre) allowing the unfolding of the medium's (theatre's) complexity. I would like to suggest therefore to replace the term *arrivant* borrowed from Derrida with the term of *entrant*⁸⁷, which carries the same concept of pushing the limits but also brings in the concept of entering. With this concept, Artaud and Derrida, as discussed by Weber and Spencer-Brown, are brought

87 As *arrivant* derives from the French verb: *arriver*, the term *entrant* comes also from the French verb *entrer*. However, in English, *entrant* signifies competitor, candidate, and player as well. It carries therefore a meaning of something in transition, in suspense.

together: the theatre event prepares its own entrance: in the space created by the *entrant*, theatre enters!

Theatre as its own frame

Once I was at the Venice Art Biennale and I saw an elderly woman crossing the room and opening a door in a rush. She was probably looking for a restroom, but instead of the toilet door, she opened the staff door. Behind the door, there was a man who was calmly drinking. Before the man could notice her, the elderly woman closed the door and said jokingly to her friend: “there is the performance of a man drinking!” Facetiously, she placed the man onto the performance level. Similarly, as I witnessed her action, I could have said that she made the performance of opening a door and commenting on what she saw. By extension, someone else could have said that I made the performance of witnessing the actions of the woman. And so on. In this case, as Weber pointed out, the Venice Art Biennale is the main “frame” which shifted my mindset, and also the elderly woman’s, and made us perceive everything with different eyes. The performativity of the “drinking man”, the action of the woman, my own “action” of observing, all of them emerged as a performance, as an inside play because the main frame permitted this arrival. Therefore the frame allowed a gesture to become theatrical. The frame is then understood as the device letting the art form become visible, and while the meaning of the piece of art emerges (or enters), the frame disappears. Weber writes:

”Its frame and site are thereby taken for granted, allowing the beholder to ignore the singular position in which it is displayed. Such indifference to place is materialized in the museum or, more commercially, the art gallery, where by virtue of this indifference the work is predisposed to become an object of speculation.” (Weber, 2004, 76)

Consequently Weber affirms that then “theatre”⁸⁸ is the “frame” allowing the theatre play to become visible. Correspondingly, if I apply this notion to the play within the play, this implies that whenever an inside play is performed the main story becomes the frame allowing the inside the story to enter: the art form becomes the frame of itself. The threshold dividing “reality” from the artwork is

88 Theatre here is a volatile notion: it can refer to the concrete building and thus to the stage, but as I discussed in Chapter 2, it can be a mental stage as well.

then uncertain. It is obvious that an art form (the inside story) is displayed, and its “theatricality” is clearly detectable since its “birth” is not hidden but usually shown (*L’Illusion Comique*) and even theorized (*Hamlet*). However, since it uses the same paradigm of the frame, the limit of this “theatricality” finds itself unspecified. Moreover it is not clear anymore if the inside story, the theatricality of whose gestures cannot be questioned, echoes the gestures of the frame story or vice versa. If the theatricality of the inside story is obvious and therefore accepted and since the inside play reuses the paradigm of the frame, this implies that the frame as well gains in “theatricality”. This last remark is nothing new concerning the theatre event, as Weber clearly pointed out in his various texts. However maybe it is helpful to state that “theatre theatricality” is not confined to the stage but it escapes and reaches the “outside”. In fact in the case of the play within the play, the dichotomy reality versus illusion is momentarily displaced. In a traditional theatre setting, the audience consciously or not, considers its own space as the space of “reality” whereas the space of the stage (where the show is performed) is considered the space of non-reality (or the space of fiction, of illusion) (Forestier). Similarly in the play within the play, the frame play becomes the space of reality and the inside play becomes the space of non-reality. Therefore the frame is directly linked to the area of “reality”. This latter remark suggests two considerations: the first one is that, as I mentioned above, theatricality cannot be considered contained within a specific area but tends to extend beyond its boundaries. Which is linked with the second consideration: it is the very “theatricality” that questions the limits of theatricality? In fact, while the inside play does not hide its own representational situation what is at stake is the frame itself. The inside story therefore questions and challenges the limits of the frame.

If we look carefully at the nature of the inside story, it is not usually told until the end. (In *Hamlet* the inside play is interrupted, in *L’Illusion Comique* the inside play is divided into four fragments). This “second” work of art doesn’t reach its own end. The *telos* of the inside play is not fulfilled; it remains suspended. The inside story is then a fragment, an interruption, because the goal of the inside story is not its own goal but its installation inside the main story. It is like a stone in a shoe whose presence makes one aware of their own foot and thus of their own body. The inside story “fractures” the main story; it opens a space where the tale is deferred. So while the inside play is integrated in the frame, it disrupts it. What is even more surprising is that it enters from within. It is not created artificially but rather it appears from inside, out of desperation. It is like an answer to an impasse, the fourth step described by Artaud.

Unfolding “reality”

It becomes evident that in the examination of the play within the play, the relationship between illusion and reality is a major subject that comes back relentlessly. Usually, illusion or any fictional or mimetic construction is considered as something imitating reality, therefore as something coming after the experience of reality. Weber, as I examined above, suggested that rather than conceiving “theatricality” as a mere implement which repeats features of life, it should be considered on the opposite as a tool unwrapping the twofold of reality. *Theatricality*⁸⁹, according to Weber, is therefore not conceived as something imitating reality and therefore subordinated to reality, but rather as a wedge “fissuring” reality.

Weber therefore considers *theatricality* as a tool to interact with reality. His position evacuates the traditional discussion whether “theatre” has a positive value (Aristotle; purgative) or negative value (Plato; contamination). For him, *theatricality* is a means not imitating reality but “interrupting” it or even “postponing” it; theatre does not “follow” reality but interacts with it. Although the suggestion made by Weber about the concept of *theatricality* is already quite seductive and stimulating, I would like to add another concept of the relationship between “theatricality” and reality. Proust in his overwhelming novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* extensively describes how the experience of an art piece precedes the experience of reality. Not only that, but reality becomes understandable through the previous experience of an art piece. For example, when Swann falls in love with Odette, before falling in love with the woman, he “falls” in love with a painting.

Il la regardait: un fragment de la fresque apparaissait dans son visage et dans son corps, que dès lors il chercha toujours à y retrouver, soit qu’il fût auprès d’Odette, soit qu’il pensât seulement à elle, et bien qu’il ne tint sans doute au chef-d’œuvre florentin que parce qu’il le retrouvait en elle, pourtant cette ressemblance lui conférait à elle aussi une beauté, la rendait plus précieuse. (...) Odette trouvât une justification dans sa propre culture esthétique. (Proust, 1988, 220)

89 In order to differentiate the two definitions of “theatricality”, as I mentioned in the beginning of the thesis, I use italics to refer to Weber’s notion of *theatricality* and the quotation marks to refer to the notion of “theatricality” as a condition of relating to the theatre or dramatic performance.

Proust explains here that Swann falls in love with Odette because he suddenly recognizes in her face the features of a painting executed by a Florentine master. When Swann recognizes the similarity between the painting that he admired and the face of Odette, he falls in love immediately and irreparably. But before that experience he was not capable of noticing the beauty of Odette. And similarly, Proust himself, when he realizes that he is in love with Gilberte, he points out that he loved Gilberte because she was close to some models he esteemed:

(...) et comme chacun a besoin de trouver des raisons à sa passion, jusqu'à être heureux de reconnaître dans l'être qu'il aime des qualités que la littérature ou la conversation lui ont appris être de celle qui sont dignes d'exciter l'amour (...).(Proust, 1988, 402)

According to Proust the pleasure of love is excited by the recognition of values encountered first in literature and afterwards in the person.⁹⁰ This inclination to search in literature for the source of understanding and exciting the emotions can be traced not only for love but also for the broader experience of reality. In many occasions, Proust indicates that in front of the sea or of a landscape he “sees” the reflection of paintings or effects suggested by literature: “...de regarder plus loi, de ne voir que la mer, d’y chercher des effets décrits par Baudelaire.” (Proust 1988-2, 262) The appreciation of nature goes then through the acknowledgement of a poem or of a painting. The artist, in the eyes of Proust, is not a mere imitator, trying to render beautifully the encountering with nature, but a demiurge capable of reinventing the experience of nature. “Et l’atelier d’Elstir m’apparut comme un laboratoire d’une sorte de nouvelle création du monde.” (Proust, 1988-2,399). The suggestion that we can extrapolate is that art, instead of repeating the experience of nature, precedes it. The experience of a work of art helps us to encounter nature; it offers a key to extract meaning in front of the chaos. I had a similar experience, once I was walking in the surrounding of Auver-sur-Oise’s village, in a wheat field. Unexpectedly, a flock of ravens emerged from the field. I realized that I was in the same field painted by Van Gogh. This realization was also facilitated by a reproduction of the famous painting of Van Gogh, which was placed in the exact spot where he painted the field. Anyway, at that moment the perception

90 The desire to imitate models extrapolated from literature is a theme that has been extensively examined by René Girard, especially in his theory of the “mimetic desire”. Although his research might be useful for this chapter, I do not refer to his work.

of that field changed completely, and still nowadays, whenever I walk in a wheat field I cannot stop myself from thinking about Van Gogh and his peculiar way to paint light and nature, the sensitivity towards movements: even a still painting is dragged by an irresistible sense of motion, showing that behind the appearance of reality there are waves of light and matter that drives us. Likewise, the comparable experience can be outlined when we hear someone saying: “*Wow, it’s like in a movie!*”: a previous art experience allowed the viewer to establish “relations” with the surroundings, to extract meaning from the encounter with the (chaotic) world. From this point of view, the inside play, therefore is not an imitation. To the contrary, it offers an insight, it allows the viewer to understand “reality”, to unearth a secret. Hamlet needs to stage an inside play, which repeats what Claudius did, in order to unearth the secret concealing his father’s death.

The seeking for a “truth” can be exemplified by the mystery genre, where a detective wants to crack an enigma that usually conceals a crime. Peter Brook, in his book, *Reading the plot*, extensively describes a scene where Sherlock Holmes in order to solve a case, re-enacts a cryptic ritual of a secret society. And while he repeats the actions executed by the members, he sees the solution. Sherlock Holmes needed to stage again the mysterious ceremony in order to understand what has happened (Brook, 1995, 27). Similarly, the detectives in order to solve the cases need to “repeat” either physically or by storytelling the events surrounding the mystery. They bring together the information and supposition they have collected and they build a narrative that hopefully can explain the enigma. We can easily connect this example with the argument developed previously. The re-enactment of Sherlock Holmes, the re-telling of what happened, can be linked to the emergence of the inside play which is used to unveil the mystery.

From this point of view, I would like to suggest that when a second play is introduced, it could be regarded as the “entering” of a work of art on the stage of reality. When I was walking in the wheat field, suddenly Van Gogh’s painting appeared in front of my eyes and it changed my perception of reality. A superimposition happened, on top of the landscape, the painting found its place, and forced me to observe differently. Similarly, on the “stage” of Elsinore, another stage appears, *The Murder of Gonzago*, which changes the perception of the viewers. Therefore the perception of the world and its “representation” is not a connection that happens in only one direction but it is a dialogue feeding both constituents. This dialogue is perhaps the core question of the phenomenon of the play within the play. This might explain why it is so difficult to categorize this dramaturgical device, because rather than an inflexible scheme, it is a constant negotiation be-

tween reality and *theatricality*. This last remark seems to confine the correlation of art and reality defined by Proust under the issue of illusion versus authenticity, however I think that behind this apparent dichotomy, stands a more profound question: the power of the discourse. What surfaces is the surprising effect that the “fictional” discourse is stronger than the “real” one. The work of art, the work of an “illusion”, has the capacity to transform the perception of reality. It is not the wheat field that affects my perception of Van Gogh’s painting, but the other way around. It is not the presence of Claudius that throws a different light on the perception of the *Murder of Gonzago*, but the opposite. This re-entry of a work of art (the “second” work of art) inside a work of art (the frame work of art), like the play within the play or in general like the *ekphrasis*, allows the second work of art to rise above the frame work and to become the fissure in the reality, the in-between, the twofold, generating a new insight.

The “in-between”

In Chapter 3, in the paragraph *Playing with the mediums*, I was examining the contrast between shared space and imaginary space in the context of theatre implementing videos. I ended up noticing that a “third space” emerged between the shared space and the imaginary space, which I called: “in-between”. I observed that the actions performed in this “in-between” space, which in the examined cases was the actual stage, escaped from any attempt of definition: they fused naturalistic behaviour, ritualistic actions, dance movements, abstract actions. Almost anything was permitted and integrated in the show in that space. Almost a kind of space for total performativity, freed from the responsibility to convey a story; it became a space for a continuous interrupting event. It is possible to draw parallels between the “in-between” space and Weber’s argument for the twofold of Being to be unfold. In light of Weber’s argument, I would like to further and define more exactly what this “in-between” space is. Lehmann asserts that any theatre event generates two kinds of connections that can be illustrated with two axes: the “intra-scenic” axis and the “theatron-stage” axis.

Il est possible de différencier au théâtre un axe de communication intra-scénique à la scène d’un axe orthogonal qui représente la communication entre la scène et la localisation, réellement ou structurellement, distincte du spectateur [...] « l’axe-theatron »⁹¹ Les différents mode de

91 I translated this term as “theatron-stage axis”.

monologues, l'apostrophe du public et la performance solo ont en commun *le recul de l'axe intra-scénique au profit de l'axe-theatron*. (Lehmann, 2002, 205)

Lehmann asserts in this passage that the intra-scenic axis represents all the interactions among the actors, while the “theatron-stage” deals with the relationship that the actors establish with the spectators. The intra-scenic axis, according to him, belongs typically to the traditional drama; it builds an illusionary space in which characters are interacting. The other axis, which secures to ascertain a connection between the stage and the audience, is nevertheless “problematic” for the traditional drama because it reminds of the concrete event and therefore grinds the fiction established by the other axis. Lehmann explains that, even though it is possible to identify classical drama elements (*aparté*, monologues, etc.), this axis is more characteristic of postdramatic theatre.

Le théâtre postdramatique a tiré la conséquence : il doit être possible en principe de marginaliser à l'extrême la première dimension (jusqu'à sa disparition) et de forcer la seconde pour l'élever à une nouvelle qualité théâtrale. (Lehmann, 2002, 206)

According to Lehmann, postdramatic theatre focuses on this connection between actors and spectator to the point of discarding the other axis. This definition of the two axes can be applied to the above-mentioned definition of the space. The theatron-stage axis could be identified with the “shared space” and the intra-scenic axis could be linked to the imaginary space. The videos are then granting the connection with the audience, the theatron-stage axis and the “written text” relegated in the imaginary space would be the “story” presented by the intra-scenic axis. These two axes therefore depart from each other and between them emerges the stage which is a space freed from any of the traditional functions: neither intra-scenic, neither theatron-stage. This seems to indicate that even a third nature of space can arouse from the tension established between the two others: a space totally freed from any need to convey a story or to establish a relationship with the audience: the “in-between” space. This “third” space, is actually a major element that I link to Weber's interpretation of *theatricality* as a mode of suspension, as something that gives way to another dimension escaping any rational constriction, allowing for precarious uncertainties to exist: a space that defeats or exceeds meanings. From this point of view, Lehmann's advocacy

for the postmodern theatre against the traditional Aristotelian theatre makes him fail to notice that perhaps it is more productive to confront these two modes of theatre rather than to oppose them. In fact, I think it is more interesting to observe the tensions and conflicts emerging between fragmentation and unity rather than placing one mode against the other, especially in the case of the theatron-stage and intra-scenic axes.

What is possible to imply from the comparison between Weber's *theatricality* and the in-between space is that both exist as a wedge fissuring the other dimensions (the intra-scenic and theatron-stage axes or simply the plot). It is perhaps possible to infer, and here is the link with the play within the play, that the possibility for the twofold of Being to appear, requires a constriction; a frame story, a plot, something that would prevent the entering of these uncanny moments. The in-between, the twofold of Being is not only a mode of existence, rather a mode of resistance.

It is possible to indicate then that the approach of this current study is rather more contra-dramatic (in tension with the plot) than post-dramatic (after the plot). In fact, as I already suggested in the first chapter when I discussed *Hamletmachine*, there is always a narrative, present or alluded against, which the performance enters into tension with, which is why, as I discuss in the next chapter, I intend to consider the play within the play as a mode of resistance.

“Opening” the circle

As I explained in the beginning of this chapter, according to Spencer-Brown a distinction divides the space. However the repetition of the distinction paradoxically reassembles the totality. The “distinction” in the case of my research is the theatre medium. The repetition has then a double effect, on the one hand it allows to cover a broader view of “reality”, meaning reality and the medium contained in the reality, and on the other hand it negates the distinction (in our case the medium). In the sense that, as examined earlier, the inside play cannot reach its completion, therefore its goal as a “story” (with its need to reach an end in order to find its definition) is negated. The play within a play is then a repetition that negates itself. However, this “negation”, this “destruction” of the medium, should not be considered as a qualitative judgment. It is a suspension of the medium. The medium invalidates itself momentarily in order to point out something that otherwise would have been obliterated.

The repetition, therefore, is used to throw a light on the medium itself (theatre etched in reality) but simultaneously it negates the medium itself. We use then

the negation of the medium to understand reality. The re-entry, the repetition of the distinction, can be then perceived as a strategy allowing to grasp through a “negation” the idea of the “everything”. The distinction defined in our case as “illusion”, find its negation through the re-entry, through the repetition of the “illusion”. It becomes clear how the play within the play permits to bring “on stage” the reality of the “off stage” and how it negates itself. Theatre, rather than being a “factory” of illusion, becomes a place of disruption, a place for staging “events”.

To illustrate the Spencer-Brown argument I used a circle instead of the symbol used by the mathematician. This decision was not fortuitous, and in fact I wanted to establish a parallel with Denis Guénoun’s argument about theatre as a gathering and especially with his concept of entering. Denis Guénoun also perceives as the theatre event as something that enters, something that disrupts. Guénoun asserts:

Si un événement arrive à une situation, il vient du dehors de cette situation [...]. Il signe l’irruption d’une altérité. Il dit : il y a un dehors, qui existe, qui agit, puisqu’il agit sur nous, ici, qui l’ignorions, et viens à notre rencontre. D’un coup, nous apprenons que la situation précédente n’était pas le tout [...]. C’est ainsi, même quand l’événement paraît venir du dedans de la situation. (Guénoun, 1998, 115)

Guénoun stresses the emergence of the theatre event as something disrupting the perception of the situation. The entering of the (theatre) event informs that there is something outside this situation and that in this situation there is a lack, that it is not “everything”. The theatre event and especially the play within the play can be therefore paralleled with the concept of the re-entry; it brings inside the distinction operated by theatre itself, what is left outside. In the contemporary theatre panorama, which seeks to dismiss the tyranny of the “story”⁹², the play within the play (or the re-entry, the “repetition” of the medium) does not focus on the emergence of a new story, but simply stresses the interruption of the theatre event, in other words: it stresses the theatre event as a break, a bubble, a suspension, a disruption. Theatre is then understood not so much as a story but as a disruption; a disruption pointing out what is left by the “division”.

92 This aspect of the tyranny of the plot is examined in the following chapter, which brings a political dimension into the debate. The *tyranny of the plot* can be perceived as metaphorical (see chapter one) but as political as well (see the next chapter).

By bringing together Guénoun and Spencer-Brown, I close the circle of my inquiry. But rather than closing the circle, I made possible that the circle is cracked, that the circle “opens up”, that something else can enter. This “something else” is nothing else than theatre itself. The ending point of this thought is that the play within the play operates with a distinction and negates it. In other words: it creates its own frame in order to destroy it. This, however, should not be considered as a mere caprice of forms. In fact, the introduction of a distinction and its fracture from the inside has a profound implication: it implies that theatre “theatricalizes” what is not theatrical and brings it on the stage. As Denis Guénoun in his book, *L'Exhibition des mots*, concludes:

Il faut aimer du théâtre sa capacité à sortir de soi.[...] Ce pourquoi le meilleur du théâtre advient toujours par théâtralisation du non-théâtre, par exhibition de ce qui échappe à la théâtralité, donc par la mise en scène de l'impuissance, de la limite, de la forclusion du théâtre, et jamais par sa célébration de soi, de son essence ou de ses atours. (Guénoun, 1998, 130)

According to Guénoun, theatre finds its strength when it negates itself, when it shows what is not considered theatrical. Equally, as it has been shown in the previous examples, the play within the play and its variations revealed itself to be an important component in this attempt to “exceed” theatre. Through the play within the play, theatre exceeds itself by “entering” on the stage.

Chapter 5:

The Staging of Power

Before I examine the subject of this chapter properly, I would like to relate an event that made me conscious of an aspect of my work. As a normal procedure of the doctoral thesis, I had to send the final version of my text to the experts. One of them, pointed out in his report that in some occasions I used the word “impose” and he was questioning if really a show can “impose” anything on the spectators. At first this seemed a minor issue that would not jeopardize the core concept of my thesis, but on a second consideration, it raised an awareness that threw a new light on my practice. The comment of the expert about “imposition” tackled the issue of whether the spectator is passively receiving the show or participates actively in defining the meanings and content of the show. This is a debate that has been discussed extensively by reception theory, and its origin can be traced back to Rousseau’s condemnation of theatre and even to Plato’s and Aristotle’s discussion about mimesis. I don’t wish to enter this debate. Reception theory gives a lot of space to the spectators and claims that spectators do not only receive the information passively, but they also have an active part in its interpretation. However in this final chapter, I examine a play by Jean Genet, who considers anyway possible to “direct”, or to influence the way the spectator reads the show and thus, possible to “enforce” a content. Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates in his study on television how the media can replace reality by a reality that fulfils the needs of the television (Bourdieu, 2008, 19). The mediatized reality is then taken as “the” reality. The process of translating the reality of the media is dismissed and what is presented in the media is considered to be what is really happening in the world. (Bourdieu, 2008, 20)

I recognize at this point of the study that unconsciously, I have considered the performance-spectator relationship according to a specific tradition. Even if I try to problematize the position of the spectator, as I do in Chapters 2, 3 and

5, I do it within a specific paradigm that I would consider intrinsic to the type of theatre that I have been trained in. Most of the theatre styles or traditions (mask theatre, storytelling, melodrama, mime theatre, ancient Greek tragedy, grotesque, “buffoon”, clown) present in the Lecoq pedagogy refer to this paradigm. I am aware that this last remark opens a major theme that I cannot explore in this research. It would be actually another research in itself. Nevertheless I would like to share some thoughts about the subject.

I realize that the type of theatre that I have been trained in is a genre where the position of the spectator is much more regulated than in other types of theatre. It is not problematized because its position is already integrated in the way the show is constructed. The director of such a type of theatre is aware that the specific organisation of images, rhythms, sounds, space, and the inflections of the actor’s voice can generate responses in the audience. The show therefore integrates an aspect of “seduction” that is supposed to “get” the audience. In this perspective, the position of the spectator is split, like it was discussed in Chapter 2 with the examples described by Mannoni. The spectator is aware of watching the show (and maybe this could be considered as an “active” attitude relating to a critical judgement), nevertheless wishes to be “caught” by the show (the “passive” attitude).

Carlo Boso often insisted: *devi conoscere i trucchi del mestiere* (you must know the “tricks” of this job). Meaning that, as a director, you must be able to pull the right strings in order to “amaze” or to surprise or just to generate the right emotion in the audience. In my second practical project, *The Invisible Stage*, I tried to challenge this performer-spectator relationship, and I discussed the notion of raising expectation in the audience, of creating specific response in the audience. I played with the rules, but I did it within a distinctive model. It would be possible to say, and maybe here I am venturing a bit far, that Pirandello relied strongly on images and thus on this “seductive” aspect of theatre, as somehow Brecht did as well, and definitely Genet also.

I am not dismissing my work here by stating that it follows some models of traditional theatre, or debasing this type of theatre. I don’t find the fact that the spectators let themselves be amazed antiquated. Some would consider this “passive” position of spectators as negative. I don’t think there is anything “negative” in the spectator being “passive”. As I mentioned before, reception theory challenges this notion of being “passive”. Anyway, I consider that it is not a question of positive or negative, but rather what kind of agency is displayed by the performance; what kind of relationship is established with the audience.

In this perspective the theatre performance can be seen as a *dispositif* in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1980, 194-228). This is the main argument of my thesis, the play within the play uses this paradigm (or the theatre *dispositif*) in order to point out its own limit: the position of the spectator is problematized within the “traditional” performer-spectator relationship.⁹³

At this point it is possible to go further into the analysis of this device and to take a closer look at its inner construction. By doing so, I try, in this final chapter to enlarge the methodological approach and to inspect whether the argument I have developed in the previous chapter could be applied to other dramaturgical structures. Moreover, the main argument of this chapter is the conception of the play within the play as a means of resisting the dominant discourse, in other words, as an instrument embedded within power. Thus it would have been limiting to restrict this study solely to plays that propose an obvious structure of the play within the play. Therefore the reader should not be surprised by the two examples I discuss in this chapter: *The Jewish Wife* by Brecht and *The Balcony* by Genet. I consider these examples to be liminal cases of my topic. As discussed in Chapter 2, in both examples we can find the presence of one or more characters that become the observers granting the emergence of the play within the play. Of course, it is possible to question if the simple presence of “an observer” is enough to grant the presence of this phenomenon. This is a legitimate question. I would answer by referring to the elements discussed in the previous chapter. If the presence of an observer points to a specific situation (with one character observing and the other “performing”, namely the inside story) and this situation has an impact on the general story (or frame story) then I would say that it is valid to link it with the structure of the play within the play. Like I did in Chapter 3, I use this device as a lens of investigation. However, in these examples, the investigation goes both ways: not only from the point of view of the play within the play towards the examined play, but the examined play offers a new insight into the subject. It is a circular examination: by using the play within the play I investigate these two plays, which permits to reassess my understanding of the play within the play.

93 From this last consideration it would be possible to suggest that maybe the debate raised by post-dramatic theatre is not so much about the drama itself, but rather about the relationship between actors and spectators. In transforming the relationship, the position of the spectator is problematized; this obviously results in a change in the experience of the show and thus in how a story is told.

Nowadays theatre scholars, like Lehmann or Shevtsova, tend to consider contemporary performances as a process that engages in a dialogue with the audience. For instance Shevtsova strongly defends the idea of the performance as an open platform that engages in the social structures surrounding the rehearsal process to the point that the show summons the spectators in extracting (or projecting) meanings from the displayed show (Shevtsova, 2003, 3). Therefore, Shevtsova advocates that the work of art, and by extension, the work of academics dealing with art, is a process based on dialogue. Jean Genet, as I discuss later, presents a completely opposite idea of the performance. His idea of the performance could be paralleled with Guy Debord's perception of the show; in fact for Debord and Genet, rather than a platform of discussion, the performance is a means to force a point of view of reality on the spectator, and so it strengthens a specific discourse. Guy Debord, in his book: *La Société du Spectacle*, states: "*La vue (est) le sens le plus abstrait, et le plus mystifiable [...] Il est le contraire du dialogue.*" (Debord, 1992, 23). Debord asserts that the sight can be mystified, and therefore it is unlikely, in the situation of spectators facing a show, to have an egalitarian relationship, while, on the contrary, a dialogue offers the possibility of a real encounter. This remark can be associated with Rousseau's condemnation of theatre. Debord goes further by asserting that the strength of theatre (as well as its danger) lies in the display of images: "*(D)ans le spectacle le monde sensible se trouve remplacé par une sélection d'images qui existe au-dessus de lui, et qui en même temps s'est fait reconnaître comme le sensible par excellence.*" (Debord, 1992, 36). According to him, the images presented on the stage are not simply a manifestation of the world, a phenomenon among others, to the contrary, they become the only representatives of the world; they replace the sensible world. The process of identification therefore moves towards the desire of becoming an image. Debord then develops his idea of images as commodities governed by market laws. Instead of discussing Debord's Marxist analysis here, I intend to oppose the two perceptions of performance (dialogue versus imposition) and consider where Genet positions himself. Shevtsova, as I mentioned above, links the work of art with its surrounding context, while Genet, as I point out later, insists on separating his work from whatever attempt to locate it in time or space. Rather than exploring the connections between theatre and reality, Genet is more interested in investigating "the reality of theatre".

I conclude the chapter by analysing how Genet links the seductive power of images as a way of imposing power itself. Eventually Shevtsova and Genet find themselves on opposite sides: for Shevtsova the ongoing process and its

dialogue with social structures give emergence to a sense of resistance in the show (Shevtsova, 2003, 7), while for Genet, the show, even if it aims to display a revolution, succumbs to images that are either produced or referred to. Theatre is then a “machine” used to strengthen a discourse, to legitimize authority, and the “irruption” of a play within a play is an attempt to propose another discourse that counterattacks the dominant one.

From this point of view, the play within the play, rather than a mode associated with the issues of representation, becomes a powerful disrupting component. The first part, *The play within the play within the power* presents the ideas that serve as a basis on which the examination of this chapter is consequently developed: the play within the play as a means of disruption. The second part, *Dialectic and resistance*, discusses this idea in relation to Brecht’s concept of dialectical theatre and the third part, *The reality of theatricality*, extensively studies Genet’s play, *The Balcony*, which infers that power in order to be recognized and acknowledged needs to be “staged”.

The play within the play within the power

Commonly the play within the play is understood as a device embedded in the notion of repetition of the “representation”. What I mean by the notion of “representation” is that not only does the theatre event display a representation on the stage, but everyday life is also subjugated to its own “representation”. Pirandello used the contrast between the actors and fictional characters extensively. The actor-character dichotomy is usually removed from “traditional” plays in order to focus solely on fiction. In a traditional play the actor must disappear behind the fictional character. Pirandello instead unveiled this contrast and displayed it on stage. However, Pirandello’s concern was not related to the mere theatre event but he wanted to show that humans are constantly negotiating their own “representation”. At any moment, whenever I cross a threshold, whenever I enter a new community, I endorse a new role, or a new representation of myself, I also become a new character of myself, showing a new facet of myself. Pirandello in his theatre and in his use of the play within the play shows how the fictional world and the real world are superimposed in the everyday life. How fiction and reality are finding their convergence in the identity of a person. In this modality the play within the play is the blatant exposure of this phenomenon. Through the repetition of the representation (meaning through the display of an inside story) the tension between fictional character and reality (as we have seen in Pirandello)

is unmasked. The spectator becomes aware that true identity doesn't exist and that the situation, the perception of others, the community defines what we are.

This notion could find its complementarity in the duality between story and plot. The story (*fabula*) or even history is understood as the chronological sequence of events, while the plot is the way these events are told. We could say that the plot is something that comes after the story (history) has happened and that provides a meaning (through its reorganization) to the story. However, as Jonathan Culler proposed in his book *Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative*, the relationship between story and plot is not so straightforward and sometimes it is the plot that triggers the story (history) to happen. A story finds its own meaning in its end. The ending offers the possibility to extract a meaning by closing the story. The plot then allows the closure of the story to happen, and it proposes the conclusion and therefore the meaning. Usually events happen and after that there is the process of analysis and extraction of meanings. However a story and even history can happen according to the necessities of the plot: in the quest for meaning events are obliged to happen.

The other modality of the play within the play that I intend to propose entails different implications for the introduction of an inside play, which is linked to the notions of resistance and disruption. In traditional drama, a play, because it tells a story, has clear limits. As mentioned above, the limits offer the meaning to the drama. We could infer therefore that the play has two limits: one defined by the story (which is related to time) and one defined by the architecture of the stage (which is related to time-space). When an inside play is introduced, the limits of the first story are therefore contested. They are pushed further, and they are fragmented. The inside play becomes an element of disturbance and disruption contesting the main story. Instead of it being a comment offering a new perception of the main story, it turns out to be an attempt to escape, to flee forwards from the structure of the main story: it can therefore be considered as an act of emancipation in regard to the limits imposed by the main story. This act of freedom, this "break" is a violent act interrupting, cracking the linearity the main story. But in its attempt to flee, to break, in its wish to establish an alternative "narrative" to the first one (the dominant one, the one that frames the event) the "second" play cannot reach its goal (which is the completion of the story that, as mentioned above, provides the meaning of the story), because the focus is not directed towards the accomplishment of the second narrative but onto the characters witnessing the emergence of the second narrative. In *Hamlet*, when the inside play, the *Murder of Gonzago* is performed, the attention is not directed towards the actors performing the inside show, but towards Claudius

who is watching the show. Would this imply that the inside play is not meant to finish, that it is not meant to find its own meaning?

In this model of the play within the play it is not the author staging the play within the play as we saw before with Pirandello, but it is one of the protagonists of the drama who is organizing the “breaking act”. It is not used by the author anymore, but by one of the fictional characters. It is a trick, as Hamlet says: a mousetrap, with a specific purpose. Brooks in his study, *Reading the Plot*, affirms that stories start with usurpation, with an order that has been violated. This crisis, which has generated the story, is exactly what the protagonist must discover. Hamlet and Oedipus will use all their astuteness to understand what has happened. Therefore the story is initiated by a secret that must be unmasked. The play within the play offers then the option to tear down the surface masking the secret. But this act of revelation is not without danger. The initial usurpation is a violation of an order replaced by an order which again turns out not to be an order but another usurpation. The usurper places her/himself beyond the hierarchy, beyond differences; she/he has disobeyed and done something that she/he was not allowed to do. The usurper covers the crisis she/he has created by a new (unstable) order. Hamlet, in order to unveil the crisis, does exactly the same: he breaks the hierarchy. Through the staging of the play within the play, he places himself above Claudius, the new king. But in this moment of freedom, instead of finding deliverance, Hamlet fails. In fact at the moment of the play within the play the differences are abolished again and Hamlet finds himself equal to the author, therefore even above the king. He is repeating the same usurpation, though on a symbolic level, as Claudius did. Therefore his attempt to “break free” is doomed to fail, because it perpetrates a new crisis.

This is why the play within the play contains its own failure. But the failure is not a failure. It is a failure in the context of “ending a story” permitting the plot to happen. But it is in this case a chance: a bubble, a wedge cracking the dominant discourse. Hamlet, through the staging of the inside play, manages to counteract Claudius’s authority.

Dialectic and resistance

In 1939 Brecht published a short play entitled *The Jewish Wife*⁹⁴, which describes the excruciating decision that a mixed couple (a Jewish woman married to a Christian man) had to endure in Germany during the rise of Nazism. It is a

94 *The Jewish Wife* was first published as *Die jüdische Frau*, one of *Zwei Szenen aus Zyklus "Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches"*.

short play, only one act with two characters, a wife and a husband, and it is set in the couple's house. The situation is critical, the couple are torn apart. The anti-Semitic laws enforced by the Nazi pushes the couple to act and take a decision that will change their lives irreparably. What are the options available in such a situation? What can a Jewish person do? What can a person who is married to a Jewish person do? These are some of the questions that the couple must face. In this dialogue between the man and the woman, even though the husband asserts to be against the Nazi regime, laconically admits he is defenceless and prefers to describe the situation as a "misfortune" that will soon pass. The woman says that it is best for them if she leaves. He describes himself as an intellectual that disturbs the regime: *"In the long run they can't hold us intellectuals down like this, however much they hate us"* (Brecht, 1965, 17). He tries feebly to stop his wife from leaving, but he accepts it quickly. The play ends with her leaving and the husband declaring that this situation will last only a couple of weeks. If the play had only consisted of this dialogue it would have been a traditional play, we would empathize with the woman who has to flee and with the husband whose hands seem to be tied. He is a doctor and he is afraid of losing his position, this is why the wife prefers to leave and this is why he doesn't stop her from leaving. The situation is impossible, nothing can be done: as the husband says: *"a misfortune"*.

Brecht however, ingeniously introduced a prologue that changes the reception of the dialogue completely. In fact the play starts with the woman's monologue. She has decided to leave and she is packing. While packing she is explaining to the absent husband why she leaves; the situation is critical and for everybody's sake she should run away as soon as possible. In this "monologue" the woman says out loud what she wants to tell to her husband. She already knows what his arguments are and she responds to them. Through the "debate" that the wife displays between herself and the imaginary husband, the audience understands how the husband has slowly accepted the discourse of the Nazi regime. Even though, as it is explained by the wife, he said he was against it, didn't dare to stand up openly against it as he professed. On the contrary, he has silently accepted it as something irremediable, inevitable; as fate, as "a misfortune".

During this "rehearsal" the woman deconstructs piece by piece the arguments of the husband and shows that they are merely excuses dictated by fear. Which was the very strength of the Nazi regime: its unspoken acceptance imposed by terror. Even though the play is about the rise of the Nazi regime, the word "Nazi" is never uttered: as a taboo, as something that doesn't exist, as a secret. It is preferred to call it a misfortune, God's punishment, rather than to

say it out loud. And it is exactly this mute submission that irritates the wife. She feels betrayed by her husband.

The text is intense, the woman is energetic and therefore it raises the expectation of the confrontation with the husband. By placing the woman's monologue at the beginning of the play, Brecht shows that a story inevitably hides another story. In fact the husband displays a narrative of power: through his tacit acceptance he represents the average person who let the Nazi regime grow and grasp the power. Ironically the husband, the "intellectual" who "disturbs" the power, embodies in this situation the figure of power, he is the Nazi regime whose wife has to face. Therefore, what are the strategies used by the woman to resist the discourse of the "power"?

Finally the husband arrives. As predicted by the woman, he pronounces the discourse of "resignation", but surprisingly enough, the woman doesn't answer to it. She submits and silently accepts what the husband tells her. She doesn't respond. This change of behaviour in the woman is not a contradiction. If she had fought back, the attention of the spectators would have been directed towards the outcomes of the contrast. And we would have fallen back in a typical Aristotelian drama. But Brecht had something different in mind. Brecht didn't want to display a fight between characters but a fight between "narratives". For in this play we have two "stories".

Even though this play does not present the clear pattern of the play within the play, I use it in order to analyse its structure. The main action is clearly the dialogue between the husband and the wife, therefore we could infer that this is the "frame story". From this point of view, the initial monologue, which can be viewed as a "rehearsing" scene (the wife is rehearsing what she will tell her husband), must be considered as the inside story. In fact, in this scene, the wife contests the discourse dominating the frame story. She tries to counter it and she wants to "escape" the dominant discourse not by physically fleeing but by proposing another narrative. This initial monologue, like many other inside plays, as I discussed earlier, is not meant to be finished (and therefore to find its own meaning) but to disrupt the limits of the "frame play". In fact the monologue is interrupted by the arrival of the husband who puts (involuntarily) an end to this "inside" play. Therefore this initial monologue contests the discourse of the "frame play", it becomes then an act of emancipation.

As Hamlet uses the inside play to "counter" the discourse of his uncle Claudius and to unveil the mystery of his father's death, the wife uses the inside play to resist and to unveil the fallacious discourse of her husband. And as in

Hamlet, where Claudius, for whom the inside play is performed, stops the play, in *The Jewish Wife*, the husband stops the monologue. In *Hamlet*, the play ends with the physical confrontation of the protagonists, while in *The Jewish Wife*, this confrontation is avoided. The wife surprisingly accepts what her husbands says afterwards. Therefore, the audience after having been exposed to the discourse of the wife (the resistance), is now exposed to the discourse of the husband (the power). However, the status of the husband as the “disturbing intellectual” is in this case challenged by the silence of the wife. The wife knows that this discourse is deceitful, the audience knows it as well; this has been proved in the initial monologue. The only one who believes in it is the one who repeats it for himself. He is the one who loses the most, for he must base his identity (a person apparently against the regime) on a lie (because he has accepted the rules imposed by the Nazi regime and therefore he becomes a representative of it).

Paradoxically enough, the wife loses as well. By asserting her initial monologue, her play within the play, the wife confesses her impotence; by preparing her monologue she also announces that she cannot do anything. This is the strength of Brecht, he understood that if he displayed a physical confrontation of the characters, we would have a winner, and therefore a resolution that would have closed the story. But here nobody wins. The audience is left with a tension due to the irresolution of the play. Someone has to win, and Brecht subtly urges the spectator to find a third variant, a third narrative that would offer a resolution.

As I wrote previously, a story always hides another story. Brecht has split these two stories and displayed them in parallel: one after the other one. It is then the audience who can judge both of them and define the outcome of their confrontation. This is a strong dramaturgical solution; in fact Brecht succeeds in changing the perception of the same situation and then lets the audience find their own conclusion. We can consider the dialogue as the “normal”, or let us say, the “traditional” dramatic situation, while the initial monologue can be considered in a certain sense as a different stage: as the mental stage of the wife. If we would have had only the dialogue, the text would have had only one dimension, but because there has been the initial monologue, the lines uttered by the wife during the dialogue have a different weight because the audience knows what she is thinking when her husband talks to her. So at each moment, the audience can “enter” the brain of the wife, and see her thoughts, her real thoughts when she answers to her husband. Brecht, with the initial monologue, managed to show the “invisible stage” of the wife’s brain, he managed to show the alternative narrative, the resistance, hidden behind the dominant discourse. And it is exactly

in the juxtaposition of the “normal” stage (where the dialogue happens) and the “invisible” stage (where the initial monologue was performed and recalled by the silence of the wife during the monologue) that the play acquires intensity.

Freddie Rokem in his study on the interconnection between theatre and philosophy, *Philosophers and Thespians*, dedicates an entire chapter to Walter Benjamin and Bertold Brecht debates. Starting from an analysis of Kafka's short story *The Next Village*, that Benjamin and Brecht discussed together, he points out the different interpretations of the two writers and thus their different “view-points on life and art”. The story goes like this:

My grandfather used to say: “Life is astoundingly short. As I look back over it, life seems to foreshortened to me that I can hardly understand, for instance, how a young man can decide to ride over to the next village without being afraid that, quite apart from accidents, even then span of a normal life that passes happily may be totally insufficient for such a ride. (Rokem, 2009, 123)

Rokem explores the different interpretations and repercussions in the life of the two thinkers in a detailed way. I limit myself to indicate simply that Benjamin considers that the true measure of life is memory. He sees in the journey to the next village “a journey backward through memory to the time/place where the journey began”. Benjamin insists on this super-impression of the past on the present, where the past like a lightning crosses the present. For Brecht instead, the rider cannot reach the other village because it is another rider who arrives at the village. “[T]he man who started out on his journey is different from the man who arrives.” (Rokem, 2009, 127) Rokem, continuing the thought of Brecht, asks: “If it were possible for someone to reach the next village, which changes has this person been forced or chosen to submit himself or herself to?” (Rokem, 2009, 128) Brecht emphasizes the notion of “change”; in fact all his theatre work turns around this concept. What are the changes that a person can control in his or her life? And when it comes to theatre, Brecht's concern is not directed towards the possible changes that the actor is supposed to perform, as it would be in a “traditional theatre approach”, but to convey this paradigm of “change” to the audience. It is what Rokem defines as the dialectical theatre, which aims to offer to the audience the possibility to think and choose. This notion is clearly exemplified in Brecht's play: *The Life of Galileo*. In this play, what is at stake is the confrontation of two different concepts of the universe. On the one hand there is the Ptolemaic

conception of the world, which is world-centered, supported by the church and on the other hand there is the Copernican vision of the world, defended by Galileo, which challenges the assumption of the Earth as the center of the universe. The ideological framework supporting this play is evident: Galileo embodies an attempt to resist the authoritarian discourse and tries to offer another vision of the world as “*a dynamic network of circular movements around an infinite number of different centers.*” (Rokem, 2009, 133) Galileo shows the two different visions of the world by displaying a small theatre. His pupil, Andrea is asked to participate in it. Galileo places the student on a chair, which represents the Earth and shows to the student the two different options: the Ptolemaic universe and the Copernican one. The scientific experiment where both possible understandings of the universe are tested becomes then a little play within the play, where Andrea is the actor (embodying earth) and the spectator observing the two universes. Galileo, like Brecht, offers the two models of understanding the world. It becomes clear that *The Life of Galileo* (as in *The Jewish Wife* play) is a dialectical play where two models are presented. Rokem points out that in *Galileo*, the Copernican model and the Ptolemaic model, which are transformed into “*two models of theatre, are not only perceived on the scientific level of astronomy, but are placed in opposition to each other on the social, ideological, and most important, aesthetic level.*” (Rokem, 2009, 137) Rokem explains that, according to Brecht, the Ptolemaic concept can be related to the Aristotelian theatre, which has a fixed centre aiming at the catharsis. In such a model the spectators can only watch the show mesmerized. It is possible here to notice the similarity with Debord and Rousseau critic. The Copernican model instead, whose centre is constantly redefined and re-identified, enables the spectators to observe, negotiate, and then draw conclusions. This is for Brecht the model he wished for his Epic Theatre. According to Rokem, Brecht wants to offer the two models to the audience so the spectators can choose whichever they think is the most appropriate.

However, I think Rokem in his analysis underestimates the weight of the dominant discourse. It cannot be simply reduced to an opposition of two models, as if the two discourses are placed on two plates in balance and there would be the freedom to choose one instead of the other. In *Galileo* there is the attempt to offer an alternative vision of the world and to spread this idea. The “Ptolemaic universe” dominates the society. The connection is obvious with the Christian Church and its relentless attempt to cover any discovery that would somehow affect its control over the population. Therefore Galileo becomes a symbol of resistance, whose alternative discourse finds its birth within the dominant dis-

course. For sure, there is a dialectical debate in Brecht's play, however the second discourse arouses in a landscape dominated by the first discourse. Similarly in *The Jewish Wife*, the "rehearsing monologue" that the wife does at the beginning of the play, is the alternative discourse, the attempt to resist the dominant discourse embodied by the husband. It is possible to identify therefore the confrontation of discourses. Brecht with his idea of dialectical theatre opened a new horizon, which, as I tried to suggest, transformed the concept of the performance from the confined drama into an open process involving the audience as well.

The Reality of Theatricality

The play *The Balcony* (*Le Balcon*), written in 1955 by the provocative Jean Genet, has a long history of controversies and censorship (either by governments⁹⁵ or by the actors who refused to utter parts of the text, like the actress Marie Bell in Peter Brook's production in 1960). But most of the time, the disputes were between the theatre directors and Jean Genet himself. He often felt betrayed by the theatre directors who, according to him, used his text for other purposes. In fact, the first two stagings of the play (by Peter Zadek and by Peter Brook) were fiercely attacked by Genet. The disagreement often questioned whether the play must be considered purely allegorical or whether it had its roots in historical reality. Peter Zadek, according to Jean Genet, used the text merely to attack the British monarchy, but according to the author he was missing the content of the play. The text itself is extremely dense and rich, and therefore it stimulates different approaches and interpretations. Michel Corvin, in his comments on *The Balcony*, lists various interpretations of the play, for instance, according to Maurice Nadeau it is a modern version of *Life is a Dream*, coloured by Sartre's philosophy. Lucien Goldmann sees a Marxist pamphlet in the text; Lacan is interested in the symbolic image of the order and its desperate wish to be desired; and Strehler, even if he recognised the intense metaphorical atmosphere permeating the whole text, which "digs immense metaphysical and meta-historical emptiness", also felt the need to place it in a defined historical period. (Genet, 2010, 175-191) What is clear is that the text triggered intense debates about whether the "tableaux"⁹⁶ should be taken as rational denunciations of society or irrational projections of sexual phantasies.

95 The play was censored in England for its blasphemous references to Christ, the Virgin, the Immaculate Conception and Saint Theresa along with the castration of a revolutionary near the end of the play.

96 The play is not divided into scenes, but into "tableaux".

However, besides all these clashes, Jean Genet insisted that the play had nothing to do with realism; he actually required that the performance exalted the theatricality of the text. He often insisted on this point: “*Le réalisme est moins proche de la vérité que la vérité des faux-semblants*” (Genet, 2010, 182). Jean Genet was delighted with a Brazilian production, in Sao Paolo, where the theatre company *Ruth Escobar* performed the show in a tunnel made out of steel and plastic. The actors performed inside the cylinder and the spectators were outside it peering through holes made in the cylindrical structure. The impression was to observe a kind of modern urban zoo. This extreme setting matched the disproportionate design that Genet wanted to infuse in his text. It is for this reason that he refused any attempt to make his play realistic (and thus historical); only extreme theatricality can express the “truth” in it. This latter note is probably crucial and I believe it conceals a major aspect of the play. *The Balcony* is, first of all, a play about power⁹⁷. Genet explores how power (or any type of authority) imposes its own discourse. Power manifests itself not through violent repression, but through the *mise en scène* of itself: power must become a show, where the images of power and the language must be staged, but with the subtlety that eventually the image must be a screen where the fantasy can be projected. The ultimate way to impose power is to let people desire it, to let people want to imitate the image of power. Therefore it is not important where the illusion and reality blend, but rather to investigate the reality of the illusion (in this case of the image). Žizek, in a discussion with Badiou about virtual reality, points out:

[It] is a relatively banal idea. It doesn’t give us anything to think. Virtual reality, that means: “look how we can create with our technological toys an appearance that in the end we believe to be reality.” In my view, it is the reality of the virtual which is interesting for thought. (Badiou & Žizek, 2009, 54)

Žizek asserts that the debate opposing the virtual to reality is sterile. For him, it is more crucial to discuss the emergence of the virtual as a new reality, which generates a new world. And similarly, Genet is not interested in theatrical realism; he is concerned with the reality of the theatrical: “*Je pénètre d’emblée*

97 I use the term “power” as a controlling factor, even if it can have some Foucaultian positions. Especially in my interpretation of Genet’s play, *The Balcony*, I don’t connect it to the ideas of production and transformation.

dans la réalité que le jeu nous propose". (Genet, 2010, 85). He explores the power of building illusion, as a place for projecting fantasies. And here lies all the drama of the play: the main concern of the Police Chief is to ensure that his persona, the image of himself, becomes the support for the fantasies of the brothel's customers. If the customers want to imitate him, it means that his image has penetrated the fantasies of the people. This is why in the last tableau the Police Chief "dissolves" himself behind an image of himself. And what could this image be? A gigantic penis!

Flattening the Stage

The play is composed of nine tableaux and almost all of them are set inside a brothel. However, at the end of each tableau we can hear, coming from offstage, gunshots, and the characters often refer to a revolution happening in the streets. This threatening presence of an "outside", which one is constantly reminded of by the gunshots, in opposition to the inside world of the brothel where everything is openly fictional, lets the spectator infer that there are two kinds of worlds: one (visible) that relies on fiction, the whorehouse, and one (invisible) that is "real", the revolution. The first three tableaux depict customers that assume the role of the Bishop, the Judge and the General. These roles are henceforth engraved in the collective imagination about power. As the person embodying the role of the Bishop says: "*C'est que l'évêque me précède*," (Genet, 2002, 27). The image of the Bishop arrives before the physical person has actually appeared. Power is then embedded in the Brothel and therefore in its admitted "fictional world" where everything is staged. Revolution then seems to represent the counterpart of the Brothel, the opposite of the "illusions"; Revolution may symbolize the coveted island of "truth". The fourth tableau displays an old man dressed up as a beggar. This beggar comes back in the eighth tableau, where he represents the Poet, the Voice. The images of power can have a strong impact on people; however, they need the Poet to receive the language. Thus the Poet, the language, becomes the ramp securing the connection with the people. The fifth tableau reflects upon the various fictional situations staged in the brothel. This tableau finds its paroxysm when the Police Chief worries whether his image has been staged as well. The sixth tableau is set "outside" and deals with the revolution. However, the two revolutionaries, Chantal, a prostitute that escaped from the brothel, and Roger, the plumber of the brothel, engage in a dialogue that refers to the brothel. It becomes clear that the "outside" reality follows the same laws

of the “make-believe” exploited in the brothel. The revolution is a “role” as well and therefore needs images:

Roger: Tu connais tous les rôles, n'est-ce pas? Tout à l'heure tu
 me donnais la réplique.

Chantal: Cela s'apprend vite.

(Genet, 2002, 27)

The opposition of illusion and reality represented by the opposition of brothel and revolution vanishes and the figures of the revolution turn out to be similar to the figures of the power. In fact, both “revolutionaries”, Chantal and Roger, will later become the support for the image of power. Chantal will represent the Queen and Roger the Police Chief. In the seventh tableau a new character appears, the Court Envoy, who has all the features of a theatre director; the link between power and staging cannot be more explicit: “*Je vous ai dépeint la situation. Le peuple, dans sa fureur et dans sa joie, est au bord de l'extase: à nous de l'y précipiter.*” (Genet, 2002, 106) Thus the debate focuses on the Queen, who, in order to maintain her status, has to withdraw herself into an “Absence”. Only her image should remain, like a mask, as the Police Chief implies. And the Court Envoy adds: “*Ce qu'il y a de beau sur la terre, c'est aux masques que vous le devez*” (Genet, 2002, 111). In the eighth tableau, the Power stages itself or, let us say, the images of the Power are displayed by the Court Envoy. And in the last tableau the presence of three photographers underlines this dominance of the image. The status of the image is elevated to the altar of “truth”. What is displayed in the images becomes the eternal truth. It is possible here to link Genet's position and the examination on Proust in the previous chapter, where I debated the influence of the “fictional” discourse over “reality”: an artwork has the capacity to impose a specific way to perceive the reality. Along with this statement, Genet asserts: it does not matter how the picture was taken; it must only seem real: “*C'est une image vraie née d'un spectacle faux*” (Genet, 2002, 122), states the Court Envoy. The whole play is then “framed” by the photographers' *camera obscura*. Everything is legitimized by means of the image that will come out of that scene, from the camera. If we go back to Forestier's interpretation of the dichotomy illusion-reality when a play within a play is staged, and if we consider that the presence of the photographers can be assimilated into the actor-spectators of the frame story defined by Forestier, the result is that what is happening in front of the camera belongs to the space of “illusion” and

what comes out of the camera belongs to the space of “reality”. Therefore it is absolutely normal that what is performed in the Brothel is “fictional” and the camera (the image of the show) transforms this illusion into “truth”. This is the core question for Genet: not so much where the “truth” is but where the lies are. Or in other words: how do the “lies” become “truth”? How does fiction become reality? Every power system develops a narrative and every narrative is based on some kind of fiction. Therefore, how can one transform this fiction into a “truth” accepted by everybody, an “accepted truth” that would legitimize the power? The play ends with the fulfilment of the Police Chief’s wish: “*Je saurai que mon image s’échappe de moi et va hanter les hommes*” (Genet, 2002, 133). A person cannot be everywhere, but an image, a figure can haunt all places; it can enter the smallest meanders and gnaws all kinds of thoughts; it can disturb the quietness. That is the ultimate aim of power, to be present and control everything. After this achievement the Police Chief lets himself be killed. Then, in conclusion, Irma, the owner of the Brothel, cleans the house. The next day, the show will be performed again. The “truth” does not lie in the dichotomy of illusion-realism (as we could have imagined at the beginning) but in the show itself, in the act of performing, in the staging of a discourse, or of an image. Genet plays with the spectators’ expectation to “find” a truth. If an illusion is admitted, it means that somewhere else a reality, or a “truth”, must exist. At the beginning, the audience might consider the revolution happening in the streets as the place for “truth”. But in the sixth tableau this idea vanishes. Then in the next two tableaux, the audience might glimpse a sparkle of this intolerably coveted need for “truth” in the presence and in the *mise en scène* organized by the Court Envoy, but it is only in the last tableau that the “truth” will emerge. Genet plays with the expectation of the audience: in fact, he goes from a traditional opposition illusion-reality of the first six tableaux to a staging of a play within a play to the final resolution: it is only the staging and the image that counts. In the end the Police Chief disappears, and what is left behind is the staging of his image. What is left is the show that will continue the next day. However, we must not confuse Genet’s idea with the idea of *theatrum mundi*. Genet is not saying we are all performing a role, but that power needs to stage itself. An “order”, which enforces a discourse, can impose itself only through the staging of its own narrative.

“Theatricality” legitimizing power

The last note brings Genet close to Shakespeare, who dedicated many of his plays to the question of who can embody the power and especially to the question: what legitimates that specific person to embody the power? In *King Lear*, Goneril, Regan and Edgard, similarly to Genet’s play, stage a “show” of their own discourse in order to get the crown. And by reaction, the other “side”: the Fool/Cordelia, Kent and Edgar, mask their identity in order to tell that the others (Goneril, Regan, Edgard) are making a show. They are basically making a show in which they say that the others are making a show. Is this a vanishing point where the performance entangled in its own medium (the show of the show) loses its anchor? In attempt to answer this question, it is perhaps possible to identify the actual failure of the play within the play. As I mentioned above, Hamlet, in order to extract information from the persons surrounding him, starts playing a role. It is a similar strategy that Polonius suggests to Reynaldo in Act II, scene 1. As Greiner pointed out in his essay *The Hamlet Paradigm*:

(...) A method of acquiring relevant information about Laertes’s conduct in Paris. The method employs the negation of negation. Reynaldo should express negative opinions of Laertes, and from the ways in which these are contradicted it will be possible to deduce the truth. (Greiner, 2007, 7)

Since Hamlet can take on a role, this means that actually everybody can decide, as Hamlet does, to play a role. Therefore in such a situation, how is it possible to recognize a “truthful” person from the role that she/he is playing? The play within the play becomes then a means to uncover the “role” that the other is playing, as Polonius suggests to Reynaldo. As Greiner asserts in his essay, the introduction of a second play does not dissolve the performative dimension of the first play, it simply adds another layer of performance which in turn will require another play within the play in order to be uncovered:

So both achievements of the play within the play remain under the spell of this structure. Each launch of a play within the play necessitates further plays. (Greiner, 2007, 11)

It is possible to link this last remark with Plato's surprising use of mimesis in order to condemn mimesis⁹⁸: perhaps the only way to confine mimesis is to use mimesis. And similarly: the only way to uncover a show is to make a show of it, which of course, will generate yet another show. This perpetual re-creation of shows is, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the playful attitude that generates the *entrant*, which lets theatre enter!

But, coming back to *King Lear*: each character is making a show of her/himself or, in other words, since each character is playing a role, King Lear's mistake is not in misreading his daughters' behaviour, but in giving in to his "role". By refusing his title, the role that was cast on him, the King loses what defines his "persona". King Lear does not reach a higher level of humanity, he simply loses everything: we are nothing without our role. Pirandello goes along with this and similarly suggests: there is nothing behind the mask that we must wear. Jean Genet furthers this concept: the person disappears behind the role, and the role dissolves itself behind the image of it.

These last remarks seem to restrict humans to an unbearable situation: we are condemned to live a life that is not ours, we are condemned to endorse a role that is not ours, we are forced to be something that is not us and above all, there is no option to escape from this condition. This leads to the ultimate question: is there someone behind the roles or the masks? I think that the examination of Weber's *theatricality* and the concept of the in-between space may help to offer a possible answer. It is neither a question of "I am the mask that I wear", nor of "I am what is behind the mask". It is not, like Hamlet and Lear, that "I am because I accept the role", nor is it the case of "I am because I refuse the role". I think that the person becomes "present", or let us say "*arrives*"⁹⁹ between the mask and the desire to take it off exactly at these moments of tension. These moments are of being conscious of playing a role and of the desire to resist this role. Not to refuse, but to resist, and to push the mask a little bit further away momentarily, so it is possible to breathe a little bit more.

98 In the third book of *The Republic*, Plato discusses the use of mimesis. In the conclusion of Chapter 3 I examined this paradoxical position of Plato.

99 This note involves a larger issue that is rather difficult to answer without getting caught in the labyrinth of definition of the "self", the person. I use the verb "arriving" in the sense of "being": it is me, not a representation of me (a role or a mask). I am totally aware of the difficult answer I give, which can be easily debateable.

Representation and Seduction

Hamlet, at the end of the second act, wonders about the ability of the “player” to be moved when he utters the monologue about Hecuba. The actor was able to force his soul into his own conceit, comments Hamlet. He could be moved about a fictional character, someone he had no relation to, Hecuba. And then Hamlet compares the actor with himself. If the actor had to be in the same situation as Hamlet, he would flood the castle with his tears, but, on the contrary, Hamlet, as he notices, remains cold. What should the spectators infer from this last remark? That the actor that embodies Hamlet is a bad actor? Incapable of expressing emotions? Shakespeare tricks the audience here by short-circuiting the spectators’ judgement. Hamlet judges himself before the spectators do. But by doing so, he implicitly informs us: “If I don’t let myself be moved, it is because something even bigger is about to happen”. Shakespeare surprises the audience by unveiling the mechanism of theatre and commenting on it in order to create a bigger theatrical effect. Genet applies the same technique, but he is not concerned about theatre *per se*; for him, theatre is a manifestation of power. What concerns Genet is how power manifests itself, and its representation. Jean-Luc Lagarce clearly pointed out what Genet aimed to unveil:

L’œuvre théâtrale n’est alors que la mise en scène, en espace, en images de cette vanité de la lutte. Le pouvoir offre, et cela au sens premier du terme, cette *représentation*: elle est à elle seule, la démonstration efficace et évidente de sa puissance. [...] Il (le théâtre) est donc une arme du pouvoir, un outil, une subtile mise en évidence de sa puissance. (Lagarce, 2000,18)

For Lagarce, theatre is a weapon of power, however, with the slight difference that it is not only the weapon of power, its powerful representation, as Lagarce describes, but it is, as well, the very justification of this weapon. Esa Kirkkopelto, in his essay “*On the Structure of the Scenic Encounter*” discusses the encounter that takes place on the stage. Even though his text is concerned mainly with the different “intersections” manifested on the stage (actors-spectators, text-body), he also analyses the manifestation of the textual structure. In a reference to Weber’s text *Theatricality as Medium* he writes:

“Hence, the staging of a discourse, as Weber seems to suggest, means the revelation of its textual structure from a certain point of view.” (Kirkkopelto, 2010, 74)

Thus it becomes clear that the staging of power is not simply its “representation” as Lagarce suggested, but it is a subtle way to manipulate the spectator’s perception of it. Power instructs, through its performance, how it must be perceived.¹⁰⁰ This is why Genet can claim that the show legitimates the power, for the main point is not power itself but the following question: “Is that specific person authorised to hold power?” The struggle is to convince the spectator-citizen that yes, that person is authorised. The powerful impact that a show can have and its subtle mechanism of stimulating the desire for imitation becomes the strongest way to impose such legitimacy.

However such desire of imitating the image of power is not without danger for the power itself. And perhaps, it is exactly in the imitation of it that a quality of resistance could be found as well. If power needs to stage itself, then the only way to re-appropriate power (or to break free from it) is to make a show of the power, or in other words to show that power is a show.

In the astonishing ethnographical documentary *The Mad Masters (Les Maîtres Fous, 1955)* by Jean Rouch the mimetic desire of a colonized tribe in Ghana re-appropriates the power that has been taken away by the British colonial forces by enacting a ritual named *Hauka*, which blurs the limits between mockery and accurate imitation of the colonial power structure.

Instead of going deep into the anthropological analysis of rituals that re-enact the representation of power, I will tell a simple story about my three-year-old daughter. Sometimes instead of doing what I tell her to do, she does what I do. For instance, one night I was irritated and I angrily told her: “Now you brush your teeth and you go to bed”. Instead of doing what I commanded her to do, she repeated what I said, with the exact tone and same loud voice: “Now you brush your teeth and you go to bed”. She basically imitated my authority, the external expression of the authority. Suddenly the content was gone and she put me in the play. She showed that my intention to impose authority was a performance. By repeating it, she emptied the content and she showed the form of it. My

100 For instance, in recent politics, Berlusconi cleverly staged his first interventions in the Italian media at the end of the ‘90s and specifically decided which image of himself he wanted to present. By doing so he managed to embody a “dream” for the Italian population, especially for the male one.

authority lost power. She made a show of me. Perhaps Genet, in his attempt to show the representation of power, wanted to empty its content, exactly like my daughter did with me.

The play within the play as a process

It is possible at this point to suggest an alternative model for interpreting the play within the play. While examining Brecht's dialectical theatre, I suggested that the introduction of an inside play permits the performance to become an open process inviting the audience to participate in it. Even if the show apparently does not deny the creation of a fictional world, like the interior of a house in *The Jewish Wife*, and thus seems to place itself along with the traditional well-made drama, it does step out of this tradition because the traditional accomplishment of the story (the arrival of the plot) is denied. The inside story is then a counterweight resisting the authoritarian discourse. In relation to Spencer-Brown's concept of the re-entry, the inside play shows what is left out by the main discourse: it shows the discourse of the power (the marked) and what it has left out (the unmarked). More than that, it is an act of emancipation in regard to the limits imposed by the main story. Therefore the play within the play can obviously adhere completely to a theatrical form, but it can as well be a subtle, disrupting tool questioning tradition, fiction, the written drama, and the dominant discourse from the inside. This aspect of emancipation from within the limits of the plot, of theatrical tradition, of the dominant discourse, must be understood with its political dimension. The resistance to the "tyranny" of the plot or to a theatrical tradition is as well a political resistance. However, the political implication finds its expression through the playfulness that this device installs with the authoritarian discourse or tradition.

What Genet suggests is this: what matters is the form, not so much the content. The power in place, represented by the Queen in his play, seems to be threatened by the revolutionaries. However, the revolutionaries participate in the establishment of the power as well. Perhaps the content of their speech has changed but the oppressive structure of power remains. In this sense, the revolutionaries simply feed the power discourse, because they rely on a similar structure of discourse. In fact at the end of play *Chantal*, who was taking part in the revolution ends up replacing the Queen.

This can be exemplified by the Hollywood movie industry supporting the dominant discourse. In fact by proposing movies portraying a Manichaeistic vision of the world: good against bad, it reinforces the discourse pronounced by

American authorities: the world is divided into good guys and bad guys: luckily we are the good ones and sadly they are the bad ones. The content of the stories is not important, and the type of discourse is what counts. Instead of proposing a nuanced vision of the world, which can question the very nature of imposing a discourse, it simply reinforces the one established. On that level, the film industry participates in the establishment of power; for the power, which enforces a discourse, can impose itself only through the staging of its own narrative.

Power therefore needs to stage itself, and the conventional dichotomy illusion-realism is removed, for the authentic act is in the show itself, in the act of performing, in the staging of a discourse, or as in Genet's play, in imposing an image. But if power needs to stage itself, then the only way to re-appropriate power (or to break free from it) is to make a show of the power, or in other words to show that power is a show¹⁰¹. The play within the play is then a playful manoeuvre entering in the established discourse, pointing at the theatrical nature of power. But entering the discourse is an act that repeats what it wants to defeat: its attempt to "free" is doomed to fail, to perpetrate a new crisis. However, this endless call for a new performance, even if on the one hand points to the impossible achievement of the goal of the introduced play, showing that the crisis can only be solved by introducing a new crisis and so on, on the other hand it offers the possibility to transform the traditional self-enclosed play into an open process, into a playful operation, which questions the very nature of imposing a dominant discourse.

101 Like what my daughter did with me.

Conclusion

I can conclude by inferring that the content of my research fosters this concept of disruption and therefore it is possible to point out the fact that I applied the effects of the play within the play onto my own work, as if the content of the research defined the method of analyzing. What I came to realize is that the technique is not simply a technique allowing the mastering of a channel of communication; the technique imposes a distinction as well, therefore a content that cannot be neglected. I started at first to question my own technique, in Chapter 1 with the *Pirandello Project*. Following the results of it, I developed some hypothesis that I investigated theoretically (in Chapter 2). This inquiry led me to a second practical work, *The Invisible Stage*. Then I tried to bring back theoretical observations and practice in Chapter 3 in order to discuss the implementation of the play within the play in contemporary performances. I finished by suggesting a different reading of the device (Chapters 4 and 5).

Out of all the themes developed in these 5 chapters, I think it is possible to identify some recurrent notions. In the *Pirandello Project* I wanted to disrupt the technique of mask acting¹⁰² and in *The Invisible Stage* I wanted to disrupt the expectation of a narrative. As I became aware of this element of disruption and as I theorized it in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, my effort consisted of playing with the rules (mask acting and expectation of narrative): by accepting them and meanwhile contesting them. The disruption could be then perceived as a bubble within the system: it is a chasm, a fissure that does not apparently threaten the enclosed system. However the limits of the system are stretched and thus contested. As

102 In the sense that I wanted to question and problematize what I have learned in my theatre school based on the Lecoq pedagogy. I am aware that this last note is problematic because it infers that in the Lecoq pedagogy there is a codification of a specific type of mask acting, which actually is not really the case. This opens up a debate that I don't want to enter here. I just want to limit myself to the fact that I searched a way to "exceed" my own practice of mask acting, based on Lecoq. However, as I explained, the research itself made me step away from this and led me into new territories.

examined through Pirandello's work, the system seems intact but nevertheless it is questioned.

I can add as well, that also as a director, my position changed, or got disrupted; from the position of the omniscient director who imparts exercises or themes for improvisation to the actors and then lifts a selection out of them in order to construct the show, as it was in the *Pirandello Project*, I went to a position where the theatre event emerged, or "entered" by itself: not as an imposition but rather as a dialogue, where the "actor" (Juha) contested my position as "director". The final outcome, *The Invisible Stage*, is thus the result of this agonistic debate. And when it comes to my work I can affirm that this research also transformed my approach and nowadays I am reassessing my own practice. In short I could say that before I started this research I considered the technique as a tool to tell a story, but now I reversed the process and the story becomes a tool questioning the technique or the medium.

I pointed out in the introduction that often the play within the play, in the contemporary context, is perceived as the ultimate postmodern self-reflexive axiom. I mentioned briefly how many theatre academics used this device as an allegory of the medium discussing itself. However, what I think was lacking in most of these readings, and in this sense I hope that my research is a contribution to this debate, is the notion of the play within the play as a discrepancy, which enters as a playful disturbance. What I tried to suggest, thus, is that this is a device that allows a disruption to challenge the structure, the power, or the fiction. From this perspective it is clear that it is not a simple game of forms but it also carries political implications. Moreover, I claim that the play within the play permitted to bring the notion of open process into the self-enclosed, well-made drama, also cherished by "post-dramatic" critics, such as Lehman and Shvetsova. The dichotomy unity/fragmentation becomes then an opposition where these two concepts are actually not opposite but intertwined: challenged and legitimized by each other. And with this last note, I wish that my research could offer to my colleagues a different vision of the play within the play helping to further the debate about theatre and its relation to power, and especially about the "drama" as a mode of resistance and especially of resistance from within.

This research made me aware that a story (or narrative) is shadowed incessantly by another story (or narrative): either as a secret that needs to be unraveled (in which case it is placed inside the story) or as a "leftover" cut away by the distinction operated through the limits of the medium (in which case it is placed outside the story). And what is more interesting is not to tell merely a

story but to propose a new way to perceive the story (or situation in everyday life). Therefore the focus of my work shifted from the presentation of a story to the attempt to offer alternative perceptions of a story, in other words to question the ways reality is told, which subsequently models the way reality is perceived. My attention is placed not any more on the story, on the main event or narrative that the show wants to convey, but as well, or even especially, on its limits. Limits are actually liminal dimensions opening up a new horizon and allowing a different perception of the same subject. As I examined in the thesis, the play within the play is not necessarily confined to the area of a story but can be extended to a larger field: it permits to “exceed” theatre, to bring theatre itself on the stage. Eventually the play within the play creates its own limit, or frame, and cracks it.

At any moment, for instance in front of a decision, reality can split and several realities are possible for us. And then when the decision is taken all these realities collapse into one reality. But at the following step, at the following situation, at the following decision, reality splits again and new options are available. At any moment I can shift the perception of a situation and observe it from a different point of view, which naturally will provide a different awareness. In this case I come to realize that the stage is not simply a place for magic, for creating life out of nothing, but it is as well a place for potential, a place where assumptions can be torn down; a place for resisting and for freedom. From that point of view, the play within the play becomes a powerful tool allowing to explore and thus to liberate this wish for potential, for resistance and for freedom within the context of a dominant narrative ruling the existence of human beings in everyday life.

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PERFORMANCE EXAMINED IN CHAPTER 1

Pirandello Project, On the Edge of Silence, Teatteri Metamorfoosi. Director: Davide Giovanzana.
 Performers: Tanja Eloranta, Miska Kajanus, Johanna Kultala, Elina Putkinen, Linda Lemmety
 Roosa Hannikainen
 Music: Maija Ruuskanen, Toni Lehtola. Costumes: Henni Siltaniemi
 Première: 23.08.2009 Stage Festival, Korjaamo, Helsinki

PERFORMANCE EXAMINED IN CHAPTER 2

The Author, written and directed by Tim Crouch.
 Performers: Vic Llewellyn, Esther Smith, Chris Goode
 Première: 23.09.2009 Royal Court Theatre, London

The Invisible Stage, Teatteri Metamorfoosi. Concept: Davide Giovanzana.
 Written and performed: Juha Sääski, Davide Giovanzana
 Première: 13.05.2012. Body Words Festival, Dostoyevsky museum, St.Petersburg.

PERFORMANCES EXAMINED IN CHAPTER 3

John-Eleanor. HOX Company. Director: Merja Pöyhönen.
 Performers: Timo Väntsi, Tom Linkinen.
 Première: 18.2.2011. TEHDAS Theatre, Turku.

Misanthrope, based on Moliere. Director: Andreas Kriegenburg.
 Performers: Jörg Pose, Helmut Mooshammer, Alexander Simon, Judith Hofmann,
 Caroline Dietrich, Verena Reichhardt, Claudius Franz, Markwart Müller-Elmau.
 Set design: Anne Ehrlich. Costumes: Marion Münch. Dramaturgy: Anika Steinhoff
 Première: 19.12.2009. Deutsches Theatre, Berlin

Reloaded Drama: Yerma, based on Garcia Lorca. Reality Research Centre.
 Director: Katarina Numminen
 Première: 16.11.2011, Baltic Circle Festival, Q-Teatteri, Helsinki

Worship! Nya Rampen. Director: Jakob Öhrman.
 Performers: Elmer Bäck, Cris Af Enehielm, Joonas Heikkinen, Iida Kuningas, Rasmus Slätis,
 Sara-Marie Soulié, Matthias Leo Weiss, Fabiana Striffler. Music: Andreas Catjar.
 Lights: Jens Leeb-Lundberg.
 Video: Markus Öhrn. Set Design: Lars Idman.
 Costumes: Lisa Martelin, Natalia Mustonen.
 Première: 18.11.2011, Baltic Circle Festival, Helsinki

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2. Annette Arlander: *Esitys tilana*. (1998)
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This artistic research analyses a specific dramaturgical phenomenon, defined as “the play within the play”, which introduces a second story inside the main drama. What happens when a playwright introduces a second level of representation? What happens when some actors start performing for other actors and another level of illusion is added to the first one?

Davide Giovanzana’s doctoral dissertation suggests that something essential to the nature of theatre is present in this particular device. This dramaturgical device can be also perceived as a tool intruding into the authoritarian discourse from within the authoritarian discourse. In other words, it is a means that disrupts “power” playfully, from within. From this perspective it is clear that it is not a simple game of forms but it also carries political implications. The play within the play allows to bring the notion of open process into the self-enclosed, well-made drama. It permits to “exceed” theatre, to bring theatre itself onto the stage. Eventually the play within the play creates its own limit, or frame, and cracks it.

Davide Giovanzana has studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Geneva (Switzerland) and Physical Theatre in Brussel (Belgium) and Padova (Italy). Subsequently he has worked as an actor, theatre director and pedagogue in several countries with different theatres and theatre academies. He is co-founder of the Helsinki-based theatre company Teatteri Metamorfoosi.



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