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POETIC IMAGES, PRESENCE, AND THE THEATER OF KENOTIC RITUALS

Enikő Sepsi

Poetic Images, Presence, and the Theater of Kenotic Rituals

This book explores the interrelation of contemporary French theater and poetry.

Using the pictorial turn in the various branches of art and science, its observable features, and the theoretical framework of the conceptual metaphor, this study seeks to gather together the divergent manners in which French poetry and theater address this turn. Poetry in space and theatricality of poetry are studied alongside theater, especially the performative aspect of the originally theological concept of "kenosis." In doing so the author attempts to make use of the theological concept of kenosis, of central importance in Novarina's oeuvre, for theatrical and dramatological purposes. Within poetic rituals, kenotic rituals are also examined in the book in a few theatrical practices—János Pilinszky and Robert Wilson, Jerży Grotowski and Eugenio Barba—facilitating a better understanding of Novarina's works.

Accompanied by new English translations in the appendices, this is the first English language monograph related to the French essayist, dramaturg, and director Valère Novarina's theater, and will be of great interest to students and scholars in theater and literature studies.

Enikő Sepsi is Full Professor and Director of the Institute of Arts Studies and General Humanities at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.

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Enikő Sepsi

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2022
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Extended and modified edition

Translated from Hungarian and French by Peter V. Czipott and Enikő Sepsi

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Sepsi, Enikő, author. | Czipott, Peter V. translator.
Title: Poetic images, presence, and the theater of kenotic rituals / Enikő Sepsi. Other titles: Kép, jelenlét, kenózis a kortárs francia költészetben és Valère Novarina szinházában. English.
Description: Extended and modified edition. | Abingdon, Oxon ; New York : Routledge, 2022. |
Series: Advances in theatre and performance | "Translated from Hungarian and French by Peter V. Czipott and Enikő Sepsi"--Title page verso. | Includes bibliographical references and index. |
Identifiers: LCCN 2021015642 (print) | LCCN 2021015643 (ebook) | ISBN 9780367757694 (hardback) | ISBN 9780367757717 (paperback) | ISBN 9781003163930 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Novarina, Valère--Criticism and interpretation. | French drama--21st century--History and criticism. | Theater--France--History--21st century. | Theater--Philosophy.
Classification: LCC PQ2674.O896 Z8713 2022 (print) | LCC PQ2674.O896 (ebook) | DDC 842/.914--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021015642
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021015643

ISBN: 978-0-367-75769-4 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-75771-7 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-16393-0 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930

Typeset in Times New Roman
by MPS Limited, Dehradun

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Acknowledgments

Writing this book would not have been possible without Valère Novarina, whose professional and personal support I will always be deeply grateful for. Very special thanks to his assistant Pauline Clermidy, whose help was also indispensable.

I am grateful to Peter V. Czipott who translated those parts of the book which were not originally written in English. Hélène Brunerie and Paul Currah were the proofreaders of my text. I am thankful for this contribution too.

I also want to acknowledge Séverine Péan (Plato Production), who made some of Novarina's performance recordings available to me.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to P.O.L, Gallimard, Mercure de France, László Lajtai (Ráció), Ádám Gyenes (L'Harmattan), Péter Kovács, Anna Dávid (Magvető), Júlia Sebestyén (Nap Kiadó), László Kúnos (Corvina), and Peter Jay for their permission to include previously published texts, and to Ryan Chamberlain (translator of Novarina's *Theory of People*).

I am also immensely thankful to photographers Monika Rittershaus, Zsolt Eöri Szabó, András Máthé, and Pascal Victor for granting me permission to include their photos in this book. Simone Dragone (Odin Teatret — Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, Odin Teatret Archives), Clifford Allen (Director of Archives, The Watermill Center, Robert Wilson), Attila Mispál (film director), and Péter Gemza (director of the Csokonai Theater) also generously provided me with captions and photos which I am very grateful for.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, and the Musée de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, for the reproductions of paintings from their collections and HUNGART for granting copyright permission.

Introduction (theoretical framework)

Using the pictorial turn in the various branches of art and science, its observable features, and the theoretical framework of the conceptual metaphor, this introductory study seeks to introduce and gather, as a matter of fact, what we have experienced in French poetry after surrealism; and what has fundamentally preoccupied its contemporary theater from the middle of the twentieth century—earlier in western Europe and America, and only from the 1970s onward in Hungary—namely, representation, imagistics, presence, and spiritual path-seeking beyond dichotomies, as well as anamorphism in interpretation—can all be brought into relation with the pictorial turn.

In the opening chapters of the book, we analyze two trends in contemporary French poetry whose relationship to the image, while differing from each other, is determinative. One trend looks on it with suspicion (that of Yves Bonnefoy, poet of presence), while the other luxuriates in it (that of Jean-Michel Maulpoix, representative of the new lyricism); but each of them considers the image to be a credible example of reality, as understood by each in its own way. The two parts are preceded by a preliminary study that describes the intellectual community of French poets depicted by the writings published in the pages of *Nyugat* [Occident] and the *Nouvelle Revue Française* between 1909 and 1937. Two fundamental disputes were taking place within that community and in the pages of the two journals during that period: one concerning the relationship between surrealism, poetry, and reality, and the other—partly connected to the first—about poetry and will, poetry and action: in summary, about the responsibilities of writers. I append the work because those controversies can be seen, with the priority accorded by surrealism to the image, as the immediate precursors to the way in which the generation of Yves Bonnefoy relates to the image. The mentality of the earlier era would long determine the responses of the later poets to these issues.

The issue of presence has always come up more pointedly in the theater, since theater is the locale where reality and imagination change places. The concrete world (that we see on the stage) and the imaginary one (that we see

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-101

and get to know in the presentation on the stage) connect in the here-and-now of the action (Pavis). The second part of the book presents a few theatrical practices that attempt the destruction and reconstruction of the human "idol" (Grotowski, Kantor, Barba, Novarina, and the poet János Pilinszky), and that make use of the tool of poetry in this process in the construction of meanings and time relations: outer reality, the accidental act becomes a universal and timeless action (*perpetuum continuum*), and the materiality of language becomes visible in poetic theaters. The common feature of these theatrical practices, among which we focus on Valère Novarina's oeuvre, is that they repeat the process of self-emptying not only in their dramaturgy but also, fundamentally, in their directing of actors. Part II, therefore, and without denying various inspirations for his theatrical practice (e.g., Taoism), attempts to make use of the theological concept of kenosis, of central importance in Novarina's oeuvre, for theatrical and dramatological purposes. In this effort it relies particularly on the theological esthetics of H.U. von Balthasar, the works of Xavier Tilliette, the theatrical and kenotic concepts of Simone Weil, as well as on the theological writings of Calvin, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Kitamori Kazoh. In a preliminary summary, we can emphasize that *imitatio (imago) Christi* also means the repeatability of kenosis: the Christlike face goes together with His descent, destruction of the human idol(ous face), and with glorification. Aside from the references to Balthasar's, Tilliette's, and Kitamori's works, the scholarly literature does not deal extensively with the possible connections between kenosis and literature, or kenosis and theater, even though it also forms part of the experiential reality of *imitatio Christi*.[1]

In Part II, the topics focus on creating a system of terms which will help to explore the depths of the extraordinarily unique visionary of theater and highly original poet Valère Novarina. A very useful analysis of the subject seeks to initiate the reader into the main trends of contemporary French poetry first, through the lens of Novarina's poetic theater. The aim of Part II is to introduce Valère Novarina's profoundly complex and inspiring art to international readers and academics, and create the contexts which can attract attention to a not well enough known artist, in this way offering the excitement of discovering a contemporary author and performer through performance analyses as well as close textual reading, with translations added in the Appendices. This part also offers new perspectives to the theater of the classic triangle of Grotowski–Barba–Schechner, especially when turning our attention to the theater of the uttered word. Another important objective of Part II is to further highlight the major poetry and theater of the Hungarian János Pilinszky (translated into English by Ted Hughes and Peter Jay), an inadequately known Central European turning point in facing and interpreting the Holocaust. The chapter on the relationship between (contemporary) theater and rituality is of central importance in the book, as Part II goes beyond the anthropological (Schechner, Turner, etc.) approach of the subject by valuing the terms of

"poetic" and "kenotic" rituality. That perspective opens the interest toward the subject known thus far almost exclusively in the German-language-speaking area (Wolfgang Braungart and Saskia Fischer).

The introductory review that follows seeks to gather together—using the pictorial turn in the various branches of art and science and its observable features, plus the theoretical framework of the conceptual metaphor—the divergent manners in which French poetry and theater address the issues. As a matter of fact, what we have experienced in French poetry after surrealism, and what has fundamentally preoccupied its contemporary theater from the middle of the twentieth century (earlier in western Europe and America, and only from the 1970s onward in Hungary)—namely, representation, imagistics, presence, and spiritual path-seeking beyond dichotomies—can all be brought into relation with the pictorial turn. The questions lurking behind them can be expressed in a few conceptual metaphors: the soul is the metamorphosis of matter, the *via negativa* leads to presence on the theater stage, and whether we luxuriate in poetic images (Maulpoix) or regard them with suspicion (Bonnefoy), we remain within the paradigms represented by surrealism. Yet Novarina wrote his first serious study about Artaud, who at one point in his life broke with the surrealists.[2] Novarina's theater, according to my analysis, leads precisely from this paradigm by continually and cyclically destroying, then rebuilding the depiction of the human, the human idol in a poetic ritual leading us from the pictorial turn to the changing spatial considerations on theatrical space. Background material supporting this analysis (translations and documents) is found in the appendices.

Two of our primary research and didactic orientations, namely, contemporary French poetry and our interest in types of theater that are in close relation to it, find expression in this volume. In part together with our former students and in part with the dramaturg Zsófia Rideg, we have striven over the past few decades to make a significant portion of these oeuvres accessible to Hungarian culture through translations. We have also tried to introduce them into university education. It also implicates that Hungarian contexts, and Franco-Hungarian optics will be present throughout this book.

The pictorial turn[3]

This volume seeks to introduce and summarize the questions posed concerning representation in its two parts. It does so, using the phenomenon of the pictorial turn (Mitchell)[4] observable in different branches of the arts and sciences, as well as via the theoretical framework of the conceptual metaphor. Suspicion of images beginning in the biblical era (Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image!), persisting through iconoclasm to the worries about visual representation in philosophies of language, reached at least the point of posing the question and gradually inundated different branches of

art. In poetry, János Pilinszky formulates literature's mirror-age that envied the exactitude of the natural sciences. As for the Frankfurt school of thought, the reign of the visual can be tied to mass culture and the threat of fascist culture. The sure sign of the pictorial turn in the latter half of the twentieth century was the sense of discomfort that to this day occupies a wide range of intellectual investigations.

The study of visual art was not left untouched by the trends mentioned above, but it was not in the lead, since Anglo-Saxon art history remains committed to integrating the turn to language (regarding the visual arts as a system of signs and art objects as creations replete with "textuality" and discourse; and for their part, the observers' role poses the same problems as various forms of reading). The renewed interest in Panofsky's iconography was likewise a sign of the pictorial turn.

We can further point the attention paid the masterworks of western painting toward the direction of theater and cinema studies in order to create a fusion of literary and pictorial models. At the same time, today—to emphasize the consequences of the turns upon each other—we also speak of a spatial turn as a contemporary phenomenon, and the theatrical oeuvre subjected to test-tube analysis in this volume (Novarina's) is not without interest from this optical perspective, either.

Cognitive metaphor

Following Lakoff and Johnson's theory,[5] we call it a conceptual metaphor when we understand an abstract concept (e.g., life) by use of a less abstract one (journey: life is a great journey). The source province (travel) assists us to understand the concepts of the destination province (life).

Cognitive linguistics differentiates conceptual metaphor from metaphoric language. The metaphor, "life is a journey," can be expressed with several other words in the thematic sphere of "life" and "journey" (e.g., "I'm at a fork in the road," "I've lost my way"). In other words, conceptual metaphors find their expression in linguistic manifestations.

If, however, the conceptual system directing our thinking and actions is metaphorical, then these conceptual metaphors can appear not only in language but also in different cultural media, as well as in various spheres of human recognition. We call these manifestations the extra-lingual realizations of conceptual metaphors.

Such extra-lingual manifestations of conceptual metaphors can be examined not only in the nonlinguistic mechanisms of film, theater, and literature but also in graphic novels, statues, buildings—even in advertisements, social phenomena, politics, myths, dreams, and even in such abstract phenomena as morality or social customs.

Conceptual metaphors are woven throughout our social, artistic, spiritual–intellectual, and cultural lives. We can discover the metaphors not only in our speech but also in our nonlinguistic reality.

According to George Lakoff, metaphors guide us. But what are these metaphors? From the beginnings of rhetoric, the tendency can be identified that understands metaphor as the meta-form of every word image (trope; see also "pictorial speech," "figurative sense"). In Donald Davidson's apt formulation, metaphor is the dreamwork of language (*What Metaphors Mean*).[6] The artistic examples studied in this book all hint that it is metaphor which renders visible the language or semiotic system (materiality), code, organizational principles, and rule-based nature of a given branch of art—or in a given instance, which makes its transgression visible. Art is always the surpassing of something; art jolts us out of everyday reality.

Art as visual communication and poetic rituality

If we accept that the subconscious has a large role in the creation or reception of an artistic creation (see the results of textual genetics, Charles Mauron's *Des métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel*,[7] or Plato's thoughts on cognizance as recognition, etc.), and if we also accept that the subconscious is structured like language (see Lacan, Rorty), then it is easy to imagine that the examination of conceptual metaphors in different branches of visual art can support the discovery of the connections between language and visual creation (on the receiving end: perception).

In his *La métaphore vive*, Paul Ricoeur introduces the concept, borrowed from Wimsatt, of the "verbal icon," which he then uses to illuminate the creation of meaning in poetic language: the meaning and materiality of words fuse in poetic language ("*le sens – les sens*," "*le sensible*") much more than in nonpoetic language and become a self-supported object ("stuff") that formulates some fictive and virtual experience. It is precisely the act of reading which demonstrates that in poetic language, it is not the connection between meaning and sound which is primary, but the connection between meaning and a sequence of images (emotional traces, impressions surfacing from memory). This is what he means by the iconicity of meaning.[8] Based on the foregoing considerations, the present introduction and the book itself give precedence to examples scattered in the scholarly literature under the rubric of "poetic" theater and "poetic" films, although it could well extend to the fields of poster art, commercial art, sculpture, architecture, and so on.

Among the theories of communication and the most well-known communication models,[9] the Shannon–Weaver transmission model can be usefully applied to artistic fields, especially with respect to noise, noise sources (channel noise, environmental noise, semantic noise), and coding–decoding. After all, every branch of art works with its own semiotic system, communicates in its own channels, and is characterized by the particular coding–decoding techniques of its given language. The interpersonal model developed by Schramm and Osgood, describing a cyclical process, is also useful in branches of art employing a certain degree of interactivity, in which

the sender and receiver are each interpreters: in other words, coding and decoding constantly interchange between the two parties.

It is precisely for those who study art as visual communication that use of Brown's holographic model, or Polish-born Benoît Mandelbrot's fractal-based communication model (which had great influence on computer graphics), can yield interesting returns.

Our teaching material building on the theme of *Art as visual communication*,[10] highlights Lech Majewski's 2011 film *The Mill and the Cross*, which crops up as a leitmotif in several contexts and which is based on Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting in the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum *The Procession to Calvary*—the mill embodies time and the Creator, Lord of time, while the cross symbolizes the suffering man in his role as *imitatio Christi* (the film bestows a narrative and temporal expanse on the painting). Its contemporary viewers understood these iconographic allusions, whereas the motion picture was created at a time when the unified interpretive schemes were falling apart. The film's narrative sets this absent interpretive field back in its place, in other words providing it its ritual function, at the same time calling attention to the ritual act of reception as a rite of passage,[11] and to the heightened significance of understanding in our era. The ritual is an action, and the significance of this action is drawn from its esthetic presentivity. This also applies to literature. The aspect of literature that generates esthetic significance is usually defined as "form" (inherent to rituals, as well as to literature). The Bielefeld school of rituality (directed by Wolfgang Braungart) underlines the ritual aspects of literature. Because understanding ritual is connected with esthetic explicitness, this school examines the ritual forms of literature. Ritual being a social act, rituality in literature implies a community: the writer and the reader take part in a symbolic community, even though the reader remains an independent individual. "Establishing a community by remaining an individual is the ritual secret of literature", states Braungart.[12] Our international research group "Rite, theater, and literature"[13] extended this original concept of "poetic rituality" to embodied ritual on stage, which I take as a conceptual frame and refine its definition by Artaud's idea about poetry in space. Within this refined concept of poetic rituality one can differentiate several dramatic forms, such as kenotic rituality, of central importance in this book.

How fantasy works, and empathy

We generally center on communication as a process of transmission, but it implicates fantasy and the experiential contexts relating to the works; here, however, isomorphism reveals itself in connection with the work's organizational method, or rather, with its historical evolution. The receiver's experiences are required for understanding, and it is in fantasy, set in motion by the work, that its effect comes into being. Fantasy itself, and the principal characteristics of the manifold cognitive processes accompanying it, attain

expression, becoming reinforced in different artistic branches, art forms, as well as in the specific work itself.

In the chapter entitled "Empathy and the Arts" in Béla Buda's book *Empátia* [Empathy],[14] he establishes that "empathy finds a role primarily in arts requiring the cooperation of many individuals, or in which directed human behavior is central."[15] He emphasizes theatrical direction and motion picture filming in this respect, but it also may have a role in the performing arts such as coordinating orchestral performance and in maintaining a connection with the audience. In a different aspect, he emphasizes that empathy may be highly significant in the reception of an artwork, since "artistic creation is communication, indeed a piling up of complex messages formulated in a unique code."[16] Also worthy of attention is his observation that "the painting and the statue preserve individual motifs of nonverbal communication."[17] Artworks become true experiences when "individuality tries to dissolve in them," but this ability develops—or can be developed—as the result of socialization.[18] According to Buda's definition—to which we shall return in the concluding section on anamorphism—empathy is required for "the art lover to find, in the artwork, layers of the artist's individuality that we may perhaps not even be able to express in customary forms of communication."[19]

The role Béla Buda assigns to mythology, Christianity, and the Bible as a frame of reference in this chapter can in truth be understood as cognitive metaphor's cultural, or cultural-interpretive, role. Buda calls the completed process of identification that takes place in the course of a theatrical performance or watching a movie—but also in the process of watching the eighth artform, television, as domestic cinema—"empathy training." In similar fashion to the twentieth-century French school of the "*critique de l'identification*," he emphasizes the significance of the ongoing process of emotional identification, but he must also distinguish it from empathy: "The absence of self-awareness differentiates dramatic identification from empathy," because someone striving for empathetic understanding "only surrenders the boundaries of his ego occasionally, for some instants," while in the course of identification, his ego retires completely to the background.[20] In other words, "empathy cannot fully emerge while watching a film, since cognitive processing has even less opportunity to occur than while watching a stage play."[21] It is, of course, open to question just when the process of reception concludes (its timespan is not absolutely limited to the time strictly spent in enjoying the artwork). The identification evoked by a film, Buda explains, is in many respects similar to the process of the child's or adolescent's identification with adult role models. Although he determines that the experience of film is predominantly that of identification, not empathy, he nevertheless predicts the greatest future for this artform in mental hygiene programs fostering empathy, because of film's conceivable capability of "beneficial manipulation," thanks to its psychological content.[22] In this connection, he also briefly covers

the empathy-creating legacies of art therapies (group drawing, reading, videography, filmmaking, music and dance therapy, psychodrama).[23]

Identification pushed to the point of loss of self as the utmost form of involvement is, however, a highly contested idea in current affect theories in the psychology of Art (seeking self-reflective emotional responses to Art). Murray Smith, for instance, differentiates between empathy and sympathy while examining the establishment of affective relations with film characters.[24] He considers empathy as a form of strong identification, while sympathetic response means a congruent response to the emotional state of the character, based on a moral evaluation, but the cognitive process does not lead to identification. Scholarly literature often differentiates empathy from sympathy as affective and cognitive empathy, and shows some similarity with mentalization (attributing a certain state to others or ourselves).

Visuality in literature, literature in visual art forms

Among the arts, literature is the linguistic art *par excellence*, yet visuality, the succession of images arriving from memory or evoked in the course of reception, comprises fundamental, accompanying elements in the birth and reception of a literary work. Film, and particularly French film of the 1960s, plays intentionally with the mutual effects of linguistic and pictorial narrative methods, in this way creating the idiosyncratic products of cinematic art. Until the twentieth century, at least in the tradition Artaud termed western acting, the primacy of the text was unquestionable until the hieroglyph-like semiotic system of eastern acting, introduced in the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931, inspired a more ritualistic direction that also placed greater emphasis on visuality.

Defining literariness, or answering the question of what makes a work literary, preoccupied several schools of literary theory. The visual aspects of literature can be understood on several levels:

- First, they can be derived from the fundamental question of whether word or image was primary in human thinking.
- Second, we can think of the visual phenomena accompanying the text: emblems, image-poems (calligrams), illustrations.
- Finally, we can consider the immanent images in literary texts, beginning with the art form of *ekphrasis*, via literary (linguistic) metaphor as a highlighted word picture, to texts that are explicitly graphic, building strongly on images. These will be discussed in the first chapter, with regard to the poetry of Yves Bonnefoy and Jean-Michel Maulpoix.

According to W.J. Thomas Mitchell, "the relationship between words and images reflects … the relations we posit between symbols and the world, signs and their meanings. We imagine the gulf between words and images to be as wide as the one between words and things, between (in the largest sense)

culture and nature. The image is the type of sign that pretends not to be a sign, masquerading as (or, for the believer, actually achieving) natural immediacy and presence. The word is its 'other,' the artificial, arbitrary production of human will that disrupts natural presence by introducing unnatural into the world—time, consciousness, history ...."[25]

Literature and film

> *"My task … is by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is before all, to make you see."*
>
> —Joseph Conrad, 1897

Film adaptations most often are made from short stories, novels, and dramas, because narrative art forms best ensure the dominance of a plot that characterizes cinema. Poetic matter, however, is also not alien to poetic, artistic filmed works. In adapting a novel, the screenwriter encounters the following issues: what to leave out, and by what means to fill the resulting void. What sort of visual technique should they use for the written script? The differing circumstances of the reception of the two art forms delimit these decisions. Reading a novel takes at least several hours but may even require several days (the reception timespan is individually determined; it can be split into separate spans, and we can reread or skip portions). In general, watching a film is concentrated into two or three hours in a cinema or at home (DVD, streaming, etc.), but today it can even be done on the phone. Generalizing, we can say that the reception time is not broken up and often takes place in company. The spectator is a sort of "captive" of the film.

From the point of view of utilizing cinematic techniques in literature, the "new novel" [*nouveau roman*] was a French literary trend, beginning in the early 1950s and lasting roughly two decades, whose creators turned against literary narration in the traditional sense, even as some of their methods also became embedded in traditional literary trends. Among the movement's members, several became connected to film in the course of their careers. Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Jean Cayrol wrote screenplays for Alain Resnais (*Hiroshima mon amour*; *Last Year in Marienbad*; *Muriel*), and Duras also wrote for Henri Colpi (*The Long Absence*). From the mid-1960s on, Duras and Robbe-Grillet began to make films themselves, while Michel Butor "wrote" books using video recorders. Given that sight had already been important in his earlier works (his books were not only literary but also visual artworks), he thought that video makes a much less restricted, freer reception possible for these works.

The narration of *Last Year in Marienbad*,[26] that offspring of the encounter between the "new novel" and the cinema, proceeds by showing us irreconcilable versions of various events and situations: the man relates the story of their encounter, the woman calls it into question or remembers something completely different, then the man remembers differently, and so

on. To the very end, the film maintains complete uncertainty between the lived past and the imagined story; the narration never allows any version to assume ascendancy over another. The film seeks to banish linear narration and the temporal sequence of one event following the other in the film. It is as if we were seeing fractals, one of the great discoveries of modern mathematics, realized in the film's organization. A key concept in both fractals and chaos theory is the "sensitive dependence on initial conditions." The metaphor of the narrative's infinite divergence is the image of the opening corridors. The encounter and garden scenes, ever-recurring elements yet always in different form (the actual garden, the garden seen in a picture on the wall, the same garden with the characters in different dress, as if hinting at a "different" encounter) emphasize the cyclicality of time and narrations, its perfect interchangeability, or even its contingency. The laying out of the matchsticks (in another version, the dominoes) is a metaphor for the permutability of every element of the narrative. The question (did something happen between them last year, and where: in Marienbad, or elsewhere?) remains undecided even at the film's end.

Theatrical communication. Visuality in the theater. Theater and literature

The exclusive characteristic of theater is that it treats its subject, human communication, via human communication: on stage, the actors portray human communication (communication between the performers) in their own human communication. Do the communication concepts of semiology and information theory correspond to that which happens in the theater, between the stage and the auditorium (communication with the audience, drawing the audience in, the merging of the two into each other as parts of our everyday word usage)? To the extent that communication is a mutual exchange of information, in which the spectator acquires the given code (becoming its receiver), then the process happening between the stage and audience cannot be called communication. (After all, the signals given in exchange by the spectator typically make use of applause, whistles, or thrown eggs.) To the extent that we understand communication as the exercise of influence, it becomes usable in the case of theater: the performance "touches" us in some way. In this communicative process, the sender and receiver are simultaneously present (creation of the signal takes place at the same time as the communication). Semiological studies have not yet developed the general theory (model) of the reception of a performance. Reception studies, for their part, have attained the point—starting out from literary scholarship—of placing the emphasis on the author creating the work (positivist critique), on the entirety of the work's creation (new criticism, structuralism), and on the receiver (reader, spectator, observer).[27]

The concrete world (which we see on the stage) and the imaginary world (which we recognize in the onstage action, in which we recognize ourselves)

connects to the here and now of the action. In the point-like instants of motionlessness that succeed each other, the actors' and objects' bodies ensure continuity. The unity of time and space in the novel is, according to Bakhtin, the "chronotopos." In the theater, the experience of the here and now can be described using this concept of chronotope.[28] The theatrical presence of the actor sought within the chronotopos leads to a similar direction of actors in the case of Grotowski, Barba, Novarina, or even Michael Chekhov. We will discuss this issue in Chapter II.

The foundation (main determinant) of theatrical communication can be

1. Auditory (text, sound effects).
2. Visual. Kinesics is the study of communication that occurs via gesture and facial expression. Bodily expression is grounded by a code system appropriated by the individual and varying from one culture to another. The image (the scenery, spectacle, often the painterly set, still picture, tableau vivant, moving picture) plays an ever more important role in contemporary theatrical practice. The theater of the image has risen above the concepts of text, fable, or action and attained the point of evaluating the performance as a sequence of theatrical images, even to the point of handling the linguistic and actantial[29] materials themselves as images. Staging, of course, is always a conversion into imagery, but more or less rich in images, that is, provoking the imagination. The search for the imaginary and dematerialized dimension of the image renews the status of the dramatic text, reading it anew.[30,31]

Depending on which aspect the performance assigns precedence, we can speak about different theatrical conceptions, schools, and eras.

The terms *performance* and *spectacle*, or *Aufführung* and *Vorstellung, Darstellung* that we use, respectively in place of the word for "piece" help a great deal to understand the visuality of contemporary theater. The concept of *cultural performance* is the object and meaning of ethnoscenology: the functional or behavioral forms building upon the spectacle. The *actant* (Greimas), present in an external observer's position, is a precondition of cultural performance (thus excluding rite and ritual from the concept). The actor's play, the iconic nature of the stage, the scenic images presented on the stage all form parts of the theatrical spectacle. In this case, the text is nothing but the drama's language, its use of symbol, its arbitrary (because linguistic) semiotic system. The actor behaves as a speaking image. The strained connection between spectacle and text characterizes the new, post-dramatic theater. We can apprehend this phenomenon using the term, borrowed from psychoanalysis, *denegation* (*denial* or *denegation* in English, or the Freudian *Verneinung* in German, *dénégation* in French). The terminus indicates a process that raises suppressed subconscious elements to the conscious, at the same time as it denies them (e.g., "Don't think that I don't love you"). In the strained relationship between spectacle and text this

means that the spectacle does not "accompany" the text but lives a separate life.[32]

THEORY OF THE THEATER FREED FROM DOMINANCE OF THE TEXT. In his oeuvre, Patrice Pavis, who may be regarded as the father of the semiology of contemporary theater (if we can speak at all about such a yet-unconcluded career), strives to renew the semiology of theater: he replaces investigation of the signified with an energetic model and vectorization, connecting semiology with reception esthetics in doing so. Meanwhile, he arrives at methodological problems such as the contingency of the study of reception or the determination of origin (in the work or in the performance) of the vector, which is one of the key motifs of the energetic model. Questioning the hermeneutic study of signification and of meaning-constrained reception is a fundamental issue not only in the Pavis oeuvre but in theatrology to this day. In his book *La mise en scène contemporaine*, Pavis surveys the nearly century-long history and practice of the concept of *mise en scène*, from the presumed staging of the dramatic text (pretext) through the directorial process to its result, that is, to the point of achieving a complex semiotic system (direction). English-language scholarly idiom has in part preserved the French expression, *mise en scène*,[33] and in part, emphasizing its character as an event, its here-and-now nature as an act, it uses *performance*, or even *production*. An analysis of the prototypical productions of the past fifteen or twenty years accompanies his theoretical and theater-historical overview, and a chapter dealing with equivalent roles arising due to changes in the director's function concludes the book. The practice of the "theater of movement" (theater of physical action) illustrates the director's changing role well: that theater does well without a director, handing the function of realizing the work's entirety over to the actor. During the 1980s, direction becomes indistinguishable from performance, the practice becomes refined and frees itself from theory. In Anglophone theater, the postmodern and poststructuralist theories flowering in academia (for instance, Derrida and deconstruction) do not elicit much response in theatrical practice (apart from Richard Foreman and the Wooster Group).[34]

RETURN TO THE TEXT—DIFFERENTLY. Since 1990, we have witnessed the return of the text and a new dramaturgical development, whose economic cause is the disproportionate production budgets of producing societies. *Performance theory* or *performance studies* have become widespread, but they often lack the methodological foundation for analysis. The performance understood as an esthetic object leads back to the concept of theatricality, all the way back to Meyerhold and Copeau. Performance often contributes to the opening and readability of compact texts. The emphasis is thus placed upon abetting reception and less upon the tension between author and director. Next to this, there also appears the metaphorical use of the concept which expands the concept of *mise en scène* infinitely, to the point of uselessness. Three Hungarian conferences of Patrice Pavis in 2008 were conceived along these lines of force and gave expression to the desire to

write an anti-dictionary that would contain metaphorical expressions that the director might apply in the course of rehearsals at given moments, given situations, to given individuals. These expressions, not in the slightest theoretical (a director never says "figure" or "didascalia"), create for a given director, theater, or company a private "professional jargon," if one likes, a poetic language that can be arranged in a dictionary just like slang or the idiosyncratic usage of one poet or another. Just as Barthes, concluding his work, gladly returned to the joy of the text, so Patrice Pavis the theorist arrives at the theater, to the poetic nature of the practical language of the theater, to his love and his joy. Meanwhile, naturally, a metalanguage remains necessary to comprehend uniquely theatrical phenomena, in other words, the terminology of the study of theater, just as there is need of a common poetics to bring the usage of individual poets into a common language, into an intellectual community—and just as there is a need for literary theories providing deeper understanding.

Anamorphism and interpretation

Anamorphism refers to the phenomenon where what seem to be merely confused patches and distorted forms when viewed from a "normal" perspective become meaningful only when viewed from a specific optical perspective. A classic example is provided by Hans Holbein the Elder's painting *The Ambassadors*, at the bottom of which we notice what appear to be distorted patches of color; seen from the appropriate viewpoint, they reveal a perfectly formed skull. Although it was a German Jesuit who first used the expression, anamorphism, in 1650, in Shakespeare's time they still used the word "perspective" for this phenomenon. According to the poet, graphic artist, and cultural historian István Orosz, who researched this topic, Shakespeare alludes to this phenomenon in *Richard II*, in Bushy's speech to the queen (II, 2, 16–20) as well as in his famed Sonnet XXIV: "Mine eyes hath play'd the painter…" In his own translation, Orosz renders the word "perspective" in the passage cited from *Richard II* as "anamorphic figure"; in Shakespeare's original, with Orosz's departures retranslated and incorporated in italics:

> For sorrow's eye, glaz'd with blinding tears,
> Divides one thing entire to many objects;
> Like *anamorphic figures*, which rightly gaz'd upon,
> Shew nothing but confusion; ey'd awry *and from afar*,
> Distinguish form: …[35]

It remains to be investigated whether anamorphism might also function as an analytical principle, according to which an author's intended or hidden meaning only reveals itself from a certain interpretive perspective. Empathy—as Béla Buda defined it in relation to the arts—may assist

the interpreter in discovering the proper interpretive perspective. Within the cognitive metaphor of art as visual communication and via this interpretive principle's potential approach, a new approach could open following the extraordinary pluralism of the twentieth century, sometimes called "the century of reception theories." Studies of metaphor have brought us very far toward the point where we can surmise that it is possible that the real world, in the Platonic sense, and the true language of sensation both lie hidden in metaphor. In other words, it is possible that anamorphism itself is a metaphor. For its part, empathy brings connectedness into this cognitive metaphor. It is possible that this was also Béla Buda's hidden sacrality, the principle that "you can only wash your face in the other." After all, neuropsychology has also tried to locate the center of metaphorical understanding. The studies allow us to conclude that the coding and decoding of linguistic metaphors determined by visuality is the joint production of both brain hemispheres, jointly determined, thanks to their mutually reinforcing connectivity.[36] Joint determination may indicate a more complete understanding of reality.

Notes

1 For more on this, see the conclusion of the chapter entitled "Kenosis in Theology."
2 Novarina wrote his advanced diploma (diplôme d'études supérieures) thesis, *Artaud, théoreticien du théâtre*, in 1964 in the Institut d'Études Théâtrales at the Sorbonne.
3 A few weeks before Béla Buda's death, my colleagues János Tari, Tibor Fabiny, István Németh, and I completed the process of writing the teaching material, *A művészet mint vizuális kommunikáció* [*Art as Visual Communication*], which Béla Buda edited. He was much more than merely its editor. At that time, we also decided—at Piroska Komlósi's suggestion—to publish *Empátia* [*Empathy*], expanded with a section incorporating the latest scholarly literature, in the Károli Books series. All this appeared to us as signifying a genuine revival of the institution in which the founder of the Communications Department had been. These two joint efforts and contemporaneous conversations and correspondence prompted me also to formulate the questions posed in the introduction—which relate to the construction of possible models of art as visual communication—in a scholarly article, complementing them via cognitive metaphor and the further analysis of anamorphism.
4 W. J. Thomas Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," *ArtForum*, March 1992.
5 George Lakoff – Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003 [1980].
6 Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 5, N° 1, Special Issue on Metaphor (Autumn 1978), 31–47.
7 Charles Mauron, *Des métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel: introduction à la psychocritique*, Paris, Corti, 1968.
8 Paul Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive*, Paris, Seuil, 1975, 263.
9 C. David Mortensen, *Communication: The Study of Human Communication*, Chapter 2, Communication Models, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1972.

10 Enikő Sepsi, István Németh, János Tari and Tibor Fabiny, *A művészet mint vizuális kommunikáció* [*Art as Visual Communication*], Károli Reformed University, 2013, https://btk.kre.hu/ebook/ (accessed 13 February 2017). Individual chapters can be accessed at the tankonyvtar.hu webpage.
11 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 1909; reprinted Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1960.
12 Wolfgang Braungart, Ritual and Aesthetic Presentivity, in Johanna Domokos and Enikő Sepsi (eds.), *Poetic Rituality in Theater and Literature*, Budapest/Paris, L'Harmattan France/Hungary, Károli series, 2020, 17.
13 Research group website: http://www.kre.hu/portal/index.php/ritus-szinhaz-es-irodalom-cimu-kutatasi-projekt.html
14 Béla Buda, *Empátia. A beleélés lélektana* [*Empathy. The Psychology of Identification*], Budapest, KRE/L'Harmattan, 2012, 314–324.
15 *Ibid*., 314–315.
16 *Ibid*., 315.
17 *Ibid*.
18 *Ibid*., 316–317.
19 *Ibid*., 317.
20 *Ibid*., 318.
21 *Ibid*., 320.
22 *Ibid*., 323.
23 *Ibid*.
24 Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1995.
25 W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *What is an Image?*, New Literary History, Vol. 15, Nº 3, Image/Imago/Imagination (Spring, 1984), 529, (503–537).
26 A film by Alain Resnais, 1961; screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet, representative of the *nouveau roman*.
27 Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theater: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, tr. Christine Shantz, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998: see the article "Communication."
28 Enikő Sepsi, "Pilinszky János költészete a hatvanas-hetvenes években és Robert Wilson színháza" [János Pilinszky's Poetry of the Sixties and Seventies and the Theater of Robert Wilson], József Tasi (ed.), *Merre, hogyan? Tanulmányok Pilinszky Jánosról* [*Which Way, and How? Studies on János Pilinszky*], Budapest, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 1997, 144, (139–153); Patrice Pavis, *Analyse des spectacles*, Paris, Nathan, 1996, 139; *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance and Film*, tr. David Williams, Ann Arbor, MI, The University of Michigan Press, 2003.
29 Algirdas Julien Greimas, "Actants, Actors and Figures," *On Meaning: Selected Writings on Semiotic Theory*, tr. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins, Theory and History of Literature, 38, Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 106–120.
30 See Robert Wilson's staging of *Persephone* with Philip Glass's music.
31 See also Pavis, *Dictionnaire du théâtre* [*Theatrical Dictionary*], Armand Colin, 2019, the article entitled "Image (1)." It is to be distinguished from the usual "tableau" understood in drama, which is a distancing unity based on the great changes between the play's setting, atmosphere and era, and our own.
32 *Ibid*., the article on Denegation.
33 Patrice Pavis, *La mise en scène contemporaine*, published in English as *Contemporary Mise en Scène: Staging Theater Today*, tr. Joel Anderson, London, Routledge, 2013. This title suggests a third English approximation: *staging*. Note also that Pavis' book, titled in French as *Analyse des spectacles*, is published in

translation as *Analyzing Performance*, which emphasizes a different aspect of the process.

34 Enikő Sepsi, "Patrice Pavis Magyarországon" [Patrice Pavis in Hungary], *Színház*, 2008/9, 26–27.

35 István Orosz, *Válogatott sejtések (a tojás volt előbb)* [*Selected Surmises (The Egg Came First)*], Budapest, Typotex, 2013, 39. Tibor Fabiny highlighted this intertext in our teaching material (see above endnote 10).

36 Katalin Fehér, *Kép, nyelv, nyelvi kép* [*Image, Language, Linguistic Image*], http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2005_04_tel/06_kep (accessed 2 March 2014).

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Part I

Image and presence: two trends in contemporary French poetry

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1 Predecessors: contemporary French poets in the pages of *Nyugat* and *La Nouvelle Revue Française (NRF)* between 1909 and 1937[1]

In these chapters of the book, we analyze two trends in contemporary French poetry, whose relationship to the image is determinative. One trend looks on it with suspicion (that of Yves Bonnefoy, poet of presence), while the other luxuriates in it (that of Jean-Michel Maulpoix, representative of the new lyricism); yet, both of them consider the image to be a credible example of reality. The opening chapter enumerates the debates which preceded the entrance of Yves Bonnefoy and the poets of presence on the stage of post-surrealism.

The goal of this preliminary study is to provide a picture of the contemporaneous poets appearing in the pages of the *NRF* and *Nyugat* [Occident]. I do not mention poets who passed away shortly before the two periodicals were established; the reason is that my primary interest is the critics' role, as revealed by the given periodicals' choice of poetic texts and the commentaries accompanying them.

An overview of the texts of the era's French poets and their reviews in the *NRF* yields a relatively long list: Paul Éluard, Aragon, Breton, Michel Leiris, Desnos, Henri Michaux, Valéry, and Claudel. Henri Michaux's first volume, *Qui je fus* (*Who I Was*), was published in 1927 in Jean Paulhan's journal. Valéry Larbaud preferred the literary criticism. Among the poets, however, we often find art critics: thus Leiris, who began his career under the aegis of Max Jacob, who often wrote about, for instance, Erik Satie in his column, *Chronique*, and who wrote in 1936 about Marcel Duchamp's *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires* (*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*);[2] but we could also mention Pierre Jean Jouve, who wrote about Alban Berg's violin concerto,[3] or Raymond Queneau, who wrote about the paintings of Jean Hélion. This tendency is an idiosyncrasy of twentieth-century French poetry, when the writers are not afraid to speak out about fields other than their own. Their texts continue a lively dialogue with painting as well as music.

Nyugat published, among contemporary French poets, three poems by Claudel in Ernő Szép's translation in 1912; Dezső Kosztolányi translated Valéry's *Cimetière marin* (*Seaside Cemetery*) and Endre Nagy did the same

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-1

for *L'Aurore* [Dawn] in 1933; Árpád Tóth's translation of Francis Jammes's *La gomme coule* [The Sap Flows] was published in 1917. András Komor analyzed the partiality in the selection of poems by Apollinaire chosen by Miklós Radnóti and István Vas in 1940. We cannot discuss whether they took the selections of the *NRF* into account, since there was no personal connection between the two journals, except the *NRF*'s prose writers, with whom Albert Gyergyai was in continual contact.

The periodicals were decisive in determining the taste of the writers of the age, as Aurélien Sauvageot also observes in his 1937 book *La découverte de la Hongrie* [The Discovery of Hungary]: "With a little perspicacity, it is easy to see that the reading lists chosen by your interlocutors are dictated by the advice given generously and disinterestedly, in the word's literal meaning, by the French journals and literary periodicals. Let us note that the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and its victorious team stands in first place, followed by *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*."[4]

The less dense art forms in the *NRF*, such as the "notes" or "chronicles," became more and more common in the 1920s, and the essay also developed into an important art form; the contemporary essay anthology with texts by Benda, Suarès, and Alain appeared in 1929. Remy de Gourmont worked to ensure that the critic be open to the individual character of every single literary figure;[5] ideologically close is the critique of Du Bos, based on identification, which uses the method of "approximation," or the sort of approach whose ideal degree would be assimilation. Several of the *NRF* staff joined this movement. The critical work of Jacques Rivière, which focused on the given subject, as well as Alain's wonder-filled engagement or even his assimilation or fusion with his subject, can also be assigned to this movement.

It is true that Nándor Szávai or André Maurois, too—to cite one of Alain's famous students who first wrote about the master's series of books *Propos* in the Pléiade edition—consider that these meditations come about from will and in connection with will. On the one hand, from will, because "without the commitment to write on a defined schedule, these summary poems would never have come into being"; and on the other hand, in connection with will, since according to Alain, "One must maintain a firm equilibrium between two extremes: the one believing that we are capable of everything, and the other that we're incapable of anything."[6] Will is action; it does not mean that I will act, but that I am acting. If the idea changes in the course of the proceeding, then thought can no longer be anything but the daughter of action. Action is the actualization of will in the world, that is, the path leading from concept toward reality, from the passions to wisdom, from nature to freedom, so in the end, it is nothing but taking possession of ourselves, or rather auto-appropriation. I will, therefore I exist.

This is actionism; that is, voluntarism stands at the center of the note that Benda wrote about Péguy's standpoint, that he only marveled about philosophical schools or trends to the extent that they "brawled well." The

excerpt continues thus: "Today, we encounter more and more in people of the mind this striving, namely, to value the philosophers' action-related virtues higher than their intellectual virtues. Alain, in his remembrance of Lagneau (*Souvenirs concernant Jules Lagneau*) tries to give a loftier idea of his master by praising his energy and decisiveness at least as highly as his intellect."[7]

I examine the context in which the French poets wrote in the pages of the *NRF* from this decided but latent viewpoint of Alain's. In Hungary, this viewpoint influenced neither the editorial selections nor the prose-writers' opinions, and the question was never raised until the inflamed controversy over Babits and the treason of the scribes, or rather, his translation of Benda.

The first text to discuss contemporary poetry appeared in the 1 August 1909 issue of the *NRF*, discussing the issue of the journal *Poesia* containing Marinetti's futurist manifesto.[8] In an ironic tone, Jacques Copeau questioned the importance of the movement as a school and called Marinetti a mere Maecenas who, arriving from Italy, sought to conquer Paris. In 1910, *Nyugat* took a stand against the avant-garde. Babits accused futurism of lacking originality, even to the extent of using copies autographed by the author: "Au directeur de *Nyugat* hommage sympathique de *Poesia*" [To the editor of *Nyugat* with best wishes from *Poesia*]. Béla Balázs was of a similar opinion: "Too easy [that is, to argue with them]."[9] Dezső Szabó reviewed the manifesto ironically, although he later wrote with less prejudice about the political novel in verse *Le Monoplan du Pape* [The Pope's Monoplane]. Similarly dismissive remarks sprang from the pen of Albert Thibaudet concerning surrealism, in 1925:

> Surrealism exists. … It exists through consciousness: consciousness of unconsciousness, organization of the inorganic, all that holds or does not hold, in the image of the soluble fish. In the past, when we mentioned "rue de Grenelle"—then it meant either the Ministry of Public Education or the *NRF*, two institutions of calm. Now it brings to mind the Soviet embassy or the Office of Surrealist Research …. André Breton's *Manifeste de surréalisme* (*Surrealist Manifesto*), Louis Aragon's *Une Vague de Rêves* (*A Wave of Dreams*), which the author causes to break in the pages of *Commerce* …, spreads out over the surrealist movement … with abundant light, perhaps even too abundant. Like Mallarmé, I would like to place a little darkness back into it …. Surrealism is ease itself, the ease of dreams.[10]

Thibaudet was the much-respected critic of the period between the world wars, who wrote in the *NRF*'s Chronicle column from 1912 until his death. The *NRF*, following its silence during the First World War, only gained its classic form thanks to Marcel Arland, Thibaudet, and the philosopher Alain, as well as the editorial work of Jean Paulhan. When Thibaudet died

in 1936, Paul Valéry wrote in his obituary that he first met him when he began to work on Mallarmé's poetry. He placed Thibaudet "among the lyricists," although he established that "his striving for precision dulled the life of his critical lyricism." He thought that "nobody had a greater talent than he to open new perspectives in the great forest of Literature."[11] A few months after Thibaudet's column, Antonin Artaud used Roger Vitrac's work *Les mystères de l'amour* (*The Mysteries of Love*) to defend surrealism: "It never occurred to anyone to consider surrealism as a mode of activity capable of freeing itself by the sole method of automatic writing. Surrealism is perfectly reconcilable with a certain lucidity of mind. A superior logic participates in this lucidity, which induces one to select, from among the elements suggested by the subconscious, a certain number of them that systematic logic would set aside."[12] This logic of a higher order than the everyday intellect leads to the demolition of that intellect, which is one of Artaud's favorite methods.

Marcel Arland published a fairly summary opinion about Tristan Tzara's *Sept manifestes Dada* (*Seven Dada Manifestos*): "One must not see anything other than a protest against the state of the spirit and of literature in these manifestos. Nor can one even see any effort to escape from this double situation. … It is the most complete abstract of nihilism that we have in France."[13]

A certain Joseph Delteil stands at the opposite pole to everything we have related so far; in his 1925 review of *L'Or* (*Gold*) by Blaise Cendrars, he emphasized that the text is will, the tale of human will, one of those tales that can fill the human being with pride: "Cendrars writes incredibly drily and coldly. It is the style of a balance sheet. There is no longer anything, anything at all, of the old Cendrars, of the Cendrars of *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques* (*Nineteen Elastic Poems*). Not another image, not another lovely union of words. Just numbers and facts. The ship's log of a man of action. … I admit that I would not have been displeased by a bit of poetry, just a few phrases."[14]

In August 1931, Aragon, Ungaretti, Éluard, and Tzara each wrote a letter in response to Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes's *L'Histoire de Dada* (*History of Dada*). Ungaretti, who signed his letter "fascist," defined even poetry as the readiness for battle: "I am not a 'poet' but a 'man'—and this species is indeed rare—who has always burned up his life for a goal much greater than a man, and this, in effect, is poetry itself." And he adds: "For me, Breton, with his dream of being a 'leader of men,' remains a poignant being. It is not his ideas—those stupid ideas!—but the violence of blood that draws me to him."[15]

It seems that the lively correspondence between André Breton and André Rolland de Renéville doused the controversy that the appearance of the latter author's *Dernier état de la poésie surréaliste* [The Current State of Surrealist Poetry] in the February 1932 issue of the *NRF* had ignited. In the correspondence, Breton condemned Rolland de Renéville for having been

too harsh on René Char in discussing a paragraph in the *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*. Éluard had discovered Char after the publication of his first volume, entitled *Arsenal*, in 1929. He met Breton and Aragon, members of the surrealist group, in Paris. During the four years of the movement's existence, he published the volume *Ralentir, travaux* [Slow, Road Work] jointly with Éluard and Breton in 1930 and later took part in founding the new periodical *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*. His writings appeared together with illustrations by the group's painters (Dalí, Kandinsky, Picasso). His 1934 *Le Marteau sans maître* (*The Hammer With No Master*) still bore a certain resemblance to the group's other works, but it already hinted at a much more personal artistic path. In 1932, Breton indeed stressed that thanks to Char's transparency and stamina, he served as a unifying factor, "a constantly changing binding element" beside Éluard and Breton.[16] True, his *Fureur et mystère* (*Furor and Mystery*), in which he finally spoke in his own voice, only appeared in 1948, after the liberation, but Rolland de Renéville's response to Breton shows that the critic was not clear-sighted in this area: "I declare myself convinced of the reality of the convictions professed by M. René Char, since you personally guarantee them, but I find it difficult to share your opinion about the value of his works. Their narrowness seems to me to be no more than material, and I remain full of astonishment to see you invoke Hegel and his definition of the absolute to characterize their scope."[17] And precisely on this basis, from the perspective of action and realism, he points to the immanent contradictions in the surrealists' works, notably in the contradictions between the *Second Manifeste du surréalisme* and Tristan Tzara's *Essai sur la situation de la poésie*, when in the second manifesto, Breton reaches the conclusion that surrealist thought cannot remain without consequence, "in the same way that the idea of revolution tends to make the day of revolution arrive, as a result of which these ideas lose all their sense."[18] Tzara, by contrast—instead of becoming absorbed in Hegelian teachings—proclaimed that "if surrealism in its entirety … opposes bourgeois culture and must, as a result, be put in service of the revolution, then poetry, which surrealism must otherwise lead to complete its own cycle, cannot act upon reality since it is only upon poetry as a means of expression that it can do so, strictly speaking, but this influence must gradually diminish."[19] Rolland de Renéville points out that the chasm between poetry and reality thus conceived leads to allowing only a single role to poetry: organizing the workers' leisure time in the future society; then he quotes Tzara: "One must organize dreams, sloth and leisure in the interest of communist society: that is the most urgent task of poetry."[20] Rolland de Renéville concludes his train of thought by outlining a goal of poetry entirely different from entertainment. For him, poetic activity is nothing other than "the asceticism of thought focused on reality." In this dispute—in a less refined manner—he occupies the standpoint of Thibaudet, who in evaluating the realism of a given work, demands that "it introduce reality in its depth": "Realism … does not acquire the value of art except

when its details, its particularities are sufficiently significant to release the power of indefinable presentiments, to appear as the living faces of everything in order. Likewise, pure symbolism by itself only yields something intellectual and fleshless; it cannot find its esthetic flesh except in a precise and powerful realism."[21]

Let us go back a little in time: Dujardin stands on the side of poetry divested of its intellectual character, while Brunetière sees Mallarmé as the opposite trend to Zola, and for that reason did not criticize him in his writing of 1896. *Un coup de dés* (*A Throw of the Dice*) appeared in the *NRF* in 1914, and *Igitur* in 1923 (both posthumously). In 1936, Michel Leiris referred to *Igitur* as a point of reference, and as he wrote, Mallarmé sought this "isolation," this "pure crystalline language" and "pure poetry." (At this time, Leiris came into conflict with the surrealists, since in 1929 he became secretary of the periodical *Documents*, edited by Georges Bataille, which Breton began as a competing enterprise.)

In paging through the journal, Claudel's independence in the problematics of reality is perfectly clear. In his April 1936 article *Opinion pour l'éther* [In Favor of the Ether], he posed the following question: What is art? What is poetry? "Art, like science, is an attitude in the presence of reality. Art, like science, has as its object the interrogation of reality and, to obtain a meaningful or useful response, to pose it appropriate questions. To obtain these responses, art and science use different means, and poetry itself has a technique, suggested in part by tradition but for the most part and above all, adapted to the questioner's own idiom and particular use of language."[22]

In a 1937 letter by a civil servant, there appeared references to Julien Benda's *Un Régulier dans le siècle* [A Monk in the Century] and his *La trahison des clercs*. Reading these texts, we find ourselves right in the middle of the dispute about the concept of action and its relationship to reality. Benda's book discusses political passion and realist ideology. He attacks Nietzsche, Péguy, Maurice Barrès, as well as—even though Benda's oeuvre includes certain neoclassical features—the Action Française of Charles Maurras.

In Hungary, however, it was not Benda's book but the much more radical and deeper essay by Mihály Babits, one of the key figures of contemporary poetry and the most intellectual of *Nyugat*'s editors, that evoked controversies in intellectual life. Babits placed Cartesian reason opposite his age's irrational currents of thought, here including the philosophy of life of Bergson, deemed "a mystic alien to the French spirit" by Babits, and to whom he devoted another large introductory study. This judgment also appears in a different form in Benda's *La trahison des clercs*, in which the author reformulates the thesis "I think, therefore I am," finding that "I act, therefore I am" better suits his age, and the "true image" of Bergsonism is "I thrive, therefore I am." He condemns modern philosophy for its efforts whose goal is "to make its practical characteristics the main features of reason while demoting its consciousness to a secondary feature."[23] (This

study was preceded by a 1917 article in which Babits wrote about the war's "dangerous ideology." *La trahison des clercs* was only translated into Hungarian in 1944, and it was not published until after the war.) Benda's book saw the light of day two years before Sauvageot's study of Alain that appeared in *Nyugat*, that is, in 1927, one year after Alain's book *Propos sur le bonheur* (*On Happiness*). We well know that Benda's work excoriated the flight of the intellectuals, stating that they had betrayed their calling to be the priests of abstract truth and succumbed to the temptation of a commitment that placed them in the service of temporal or spiritual powers. According to Babits, the spiritual indifference then reigning in Europe was caused by the fact that men of the mind bowed to facts, so the spirit was no longer the ruler and judge of human actions. Incidentally, Alain's former student, the future linguist Aurélien Sauvageot, prepared one of the Hungarian-French, French-Hungarian dictionaries, and possibly the best. When Sauvageot wrote his article about Alain for *Nyugat*, Alain happened to be Bergson's heir as philosophy teacher at the Lycée Henri IV. Sauvageot, after introducing his world of thought on the basis of Alain's *Quatre-vingt-un chapitres sur l'esprit et les passions* [81 Chapters on the Spirit and the Passions] and *Les idées et les âges* [Ideas and Ages], concluded that Alain's philosophy, in the platonic sense of the word, is thinking about the history of politics—that is, of society—and about everyday events, and is nothing other than the evaluation of public and individual deeds connected to the life of the *civitas*, and not something born as the result of normative thinking.[24] Alain's *Mars ou la guerre jugée* (*Mars, or the Truth about War*) of 1921 propounded a convincing verdict on the war, and together with his other writings, might have convinced Benda to modify his unnuanced opinion of the intelligentsia of the age.[25]

As Jules Lagneau's intellectual heir, Alain's thinking belongs to a less visible current in the history of European thought, thanks to his meditations and chronicles written for the *NRF*. This thinking commits the person's entire being to his responsibility in the face of his own freedom—that is, in the face of his autonomy, which is illusory—and his responsibility to the *civitas*.

This intellectual attitude stands very close to the response that the philosopher Vilmos Szilasi formulated in the controversy over Babits's essay.[26] Like Benda, he also began from Kant, or rather his teacher Renouvier, though he did not think that truths could be eternally valid principles, thinking instead that they represent the ceaselessly burgeoning knowledge that develops in life and action. For this reason, the world of values does not separate strictly from the world of life, and truth is not a principle standing above life, but rather, that life itself is truth, and we exist within this truth. This phenomenological-existential understanding of the tight connection between life and truth derives from Husserl and, even more so, from Heidegger. *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) was published in 1927, the same year as Benda's *La trahison des clercs*. (Babits also received a copy from

Szilasi, who occasionally—when his experiments with tannic acid were not occupying his time—held seminars in the university department first chaired by Husserl and then Heidegger.)

Babits aligned himself in opposition to this direction, thinking, like Benda, that the scribe betrays the truth when he believes exclusively in action and not beauty, whether esthetic or of other character. This rapt effort is also expressed by the epigraph to *La trahison des clercs*, which is a sentence taken from Renouvier: "The world suffers from lack of faith in a transcendental truth."[27]

Starting from excerpts of texts appearing in the *NRF* between 1909 and 1937, a sort of summary can be generated about the different connections between poetry and action, and about the assessment of surrealism. All of this effectively demonstrates the intellectual community into which Yves Bonnefoy and the French poets of presence step as antecedents.

Notes

1 "Poésie en action: les contemporains français sur les pages de la *NRF* et de *Nyugat*" delivered at the conference *La NRF et Nyugat: entre traditionalisme et modernité*, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Institute of Literary Studies—French Inter-University Centre, Budapest, November 2004.
2 *NRF*, Gallimard, 1 December 1936, 1087–1089.
3 Pierre Jean Jouve, *A la mémoire d'un ange*, Paris, Nouvelle Revue Française, Gallimard, 1 January 1937.
4 "Avec un peu de perspicacité, il sera aisé de découvrir que le choix des lectures de vos interlocuteurs est dicté par les conseils généraux et littérairement désintéressés des revues et des périodiques littéraires français. Notons tout de suite que *La Nouvelle Revue Française* domine, faisant triompher son équipe. *Les Nouvelles littéraires* viennent ensuite." Aurélien Sauvageot, *La découverte de la Hongrie*, Paris, Librairie Félix Alcan, 1937, 163–164.
5 See foreword in *Livre des masques*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1920 [1896], 13.
6 "Il faut se tenir ferme entre deux folies, l'une de croire que l'on peut tout, et l'autre de croire qu'on ne peut rien." Maurois quotes him in Alain, *Propos*, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1956, X.
7 "Cette volonté de louer les philosophes pour leurs vertus d'action plus que pour leurs vertus intellectuelles est très fréquente aujourd'hui chez les hommes de pensée. Dans ses *Souvenirs concernant Jules Lagneau*, Alain, voulant donner une haute idée de son maître, exalte au moins autant son énergie et sa résolution que son intelligence." Julien Benda, *Az írástudók árulása*, Babits Mihály tanulmányával [*La trahison des clercs*, with Mihály Babits's study], tr. Mihály András Rónai, Budapest, Anonymous, 1945, 149, 348. Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs*, digital version, Chicoutimi, Québec, 2006 [1946], 227.
8 82–83. "*Poesia* et le futurisme."
9 *Nyugat*, 1912/7. http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00022/00101/03268.htm (accessed 1 March 2017).
10 "Le surréalisme existe. … Il existe par une conscience: conscience de l'inconscience, organisation de l'inorganique, tout ce qui tient ou ne tient pas, dans l'image du poisson soluble. Quand on disait naguère: la rue de Grenelle,—cela signifiait soit le ministère de l'Instruction Publique, soit la *N.R.F.*, deux maisons de tout repos.

Aujourd'hui cela veut dire l'ambassade des soviets ou le Bureau d'études surréalistes … *Le manifeste du surréalisme* d'André Breton, *Une Vague de Rêves* que Louis Aragon fait déferler dans *Commerce* … répandent sur le mouvement surréaliste … une lumière abondante, même trop abondante. Je voudrais, comme Mallarmé, qu'on y remit un peu d'obscurité. … Le surréalisme c'est la facilité, l'immense facilité des rêves." Albert Thibaudet "Réflexions sur la littérature. Du surréalisme," *NRF*, Gallimard, 1 March 1925, 333–341.

11 "… parmi les lyriques, mais son lyrisme critique était bien tempéré par le soucis d'exactitudes … personne n'était mieux doué que lui pour l'art de créer des perspectives dans l'énorme forêt des Lettres." Paul Valéry, "Albert Thibaudet," *NRF*, Gallimard, 1 July 1936, 5–6.

12 "Il n'a jamais été dans la pensée de personne de considérer le Surréalisme comme un mode d'activité capable de se libérer par le seul moyen de l'écriture automatique. Le Surréalisme est parfaitement conciliable avec une certaine lucidité dans l'esprit. A cette lucidité une logique supérieure participe, qui induit à choisir, parmi les éléments proposés par le subconscient, un certain nombre de ceux que la logique systématique écarterait." *NRF*, Gallimard, 1 September 1925, 366–367.

13 "Il ne faut pas voir en ces manifestes autre chose qu'une protestation contre un état d'esprit et un état littéraire. Il n'y faut même pas voir un effort pour sortir de ce double état. … C'est le plus complet abrégé de nihilisme que nous ayons en France." *NRF*, Gallimard, 1 February 1925, 234.

14 "Cendrars l'écrit avec une sécheresse, une froideur incroyables. C'est le style des bilans. Non, plus rien, absolument rien du vieux Cendrars, du Cendrars des *Poèmes élastiques*. Plus une image, plus une belle alliance de mots. Mais des chiffres, des faits. Le journal de bord d'un homme d'action. … J'avoue qu'un peu de poésie ne m'eût pas déplu, quelques phrases." *NRF*, Gallimard, 1 May 1925, 944–945.

15 "Je ne suis pas un 'poète' mais un 'homme'—l'espèce en est rare en effet—qui a toujours brûlé sa vie pour quelque chose de bien plus grand que l'homme, et cela, en effet, c'est de la poésie. … Breton reste pour moi, avec son rêve de 'conducteur d'homme', un être émouvant. Ce ne sont pas ses idées—les idées de la bêtise!—mais la violence du sang qui m'attire en lui." *NRF*, Gallimard, 1 August 1931, 327–330.

16 *NRF*, Gallimard, 1 July 1932, 151–158.

17 "Je me déclare convaincu de la réalité des convictions que professe M. René Char, puisque vous vous en portez garant, mais j'éprouve des difficultés à partager votre opinion sur la valeur de ses oeuvres. Leur minceur ne me paraît pas que matérielle, et je demeure plein d'étonnement à vous voir invoquer Hegel et sa définition de l'absolu pour en caractériser la portée." *Ibid.*

18 "… au même titre que l'idée de Révolution tend à faire arriver le jour de cette Révolution, faute de quoi ces idées perdraient tout sens."

19 "Si le surréalisme, en son ensemble, … s'oppose à la culture bourgeoise, et doit, par conséquent, être mis au service de la Révolution, la poésie que, par ailleurs, le surréalisme doit amener à parfaire son cycle, ne peut agir sur la réalité, car c'est sa part de poésie, moyen d'expression, qui en serait seule à la rigueur capable, et celle-ci doit tendre à diminuer progressivement." *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, N° 4, December 1931, 22.

20 "Il faut organiser le rêve, la paresse, le loisir, en vue de la société communiste, c'est la tâche la plus actuelle de la poésie." *Ibid.*

21 "Le réalisme … ne prend une valeur d'art que si ses détails, ses particularités sont significatifs au point de dégager des puissances de suggestions indéfinies, d'apparaître comme les visages vivants de tout en ordre. De même, le symbolisme

pur ferait par lui-même quelque chose d'intellectuel et de décharné, il ne peut trouver sa chair d'esthétique que dans un réalisme précis et puissant." *NRF*, Gallimard, 1 April 1936, 624–625.

22 "L'art comme la science est une attitude en présence de la réalité. L'art comme la science a pour objet d'interroger la réalité et pour en tirer une réponse significative ou utile de lui poser des questions justes. Pour obtenir ces réponses l'art et la science emploient des moyens différents, et la poésie elle-même a une technique, en partie suggérée par la tradition, mais pour le surplus et surtout adaptée à l'idiome propre et à l'utilisation particulière de l'interpellateur." *Ibid.*

23 Julien Benda, *La trahison des clercs*, 60, 233.

24 Aurélien Sauvageot, "Egy hű írástudó: Alain" [A Faithful Scribe: Alain], *Nyugat*, XXII, 1929/1, 780.

25 *Ibid.*, 781.

26 See the Szilasi-Babits correspondence in Zoltán Kenyeres, "A kettészakadt irodalom és *Az írástudók árulása*" [Literature Torn in Two and *La trahison des clercs*], *Irodalomismeret*, IV, 1993/3 (December), 16–20.

27 "Le monde souffre du manque de foi en une vérité transcendante."

2 Yves Bonnefoy and the poetry of presence

Despite the international reputation of Yves Bonnefoy's oeuvre, it is little known in Hungary. The first Hungarian translations of his verse appeared in the volume *Még egyre az a hang* [Once Again That Voice], translated by György Timár (Budapest, Európa, 1973). The *Francia költők antológiája* [Anthology of French Poets] (Budapest, Magyar Könyvklub, 1999) contains one poem, whereas the anthology of contemporary poetry *Látogatás* [Visiting] (ed. Krisztina Tóth, Budapest—Pécs, Műfordító Füzetek, JAK—Jelenkor, 1995) fails to contain a single poem by Bonnefoy. The journal *Nagyvilág* [Wide World] published four poems in Lőrinc Vajda's translation in its issue number 2001/5.

Under the auspices of an ongoing workshop, several old and new students at the Eötvös Collegium spent years as my colleagues and under my direction studying and translating this poetic oeuvre. As first fruits, we published a study surveying Yves Bonnefoy's prose poems. We also translated his subcycle entitled *Derniers raisins de Zeuxis* (*The Last Grapes of Zeuxis*)[1] and his essay *La Poésie française et le principe d'identité* [French Poetry and the Principle of Identity], in a volume I edited,[2] as well as publishing it in issue number 2003/12 of *Nagyvilág*. In 2007, Argumentum published our volume entitled *Kép és jelenlét. Yves Bonnefoy válogatott írásai* [Image and Presence. Selected Writings of Yves Bonnefoy], with Bonnefoy's envoi to the reader as well as reproductions of works by his artist friends Alexandre Hollan (born Sándor Hollán) and Miklos Bokor (born Miklós Bokor).

We took three viewpoints into account in making our selections at the time. First, we mostly chose texts that had not yet appeared in Hungarian translation (such as his prose poems and other prose writing). Second, we strove to provide an introduction as complete as possible to the characteristics of his oeuvre's more important art forms, his poetic and theoretical nodal points. Third, the chosen texts particularly focus on visuality, and within it, the relationship between poetry and painting (which is formulated around the crucial issue of presence and the ability to seize and depict instantaneity). Following his works created jointly with the greatest visual artists (Tàpies, Chillida, Ubac, Garache, Alechinsky), the reproductions of Alexandre Hollan and Miklos Bokor also reinforce this close connection.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-2

Two artists of Hungarian origin generously offered their works for the Hungarian edition, whose lithographs and reproductions already stood alongside Bonnefoy poems (the first edition of *La Vie errante* appeared with Bokor's lithographs *Là où retombe la flèche* with Hollan's works, and *Image and Presence*, as I have said, with works from both), or which inspired Bonnefoy texts (his essay on Bokor and his monograph on Hollan are to be found in *Image and Presence*).

***

The functional element of poetic activity is visuality, the interior use of the principle of *ut pictura poesis*. This is not a new idea: theoreticians of iconology since the Renaissance have emphasized the structural and functional analogy that links the poetic image to the visual one.[3] The simultaneous depiction and statement of things is the sort of working of a poet's fantasy that can be set in parallel with the creation of emblems, to such an extent that Diderot indeed stated this parallel.[4] In his book *La métaphore vive*, Paul Ricoeur, reaching back to Wimsatt and Beardsley's concept of the verbal icon, also emphasizes the iconicity of meaning and poetic language; that is, he considers the fusion of meaning and the evoked sequence of images as primary, and not the fusion of meaning and sound.[5] In his 1981 inaugural address found in the Yves Bonnefoy volume, in his poet's manner he circumambulates the pitfalls of representation and the possibilities flaring up within them. In one of his volumes of essays, *Le Nuage rouge*, he writes: "plus spécifiquement les poètes ont désiré l'immédiat, plus ils se sont intéressés à la technique de la peinture": the more specifically poets have desired the immediate, the more they have become interested in the techniques of painting.[6]

In his text "La poétique de Giacometti" he writes the following about the connection between verbal and nonverbal art: "In the comparative study of poetry one of the most important factors is the connection between poets and other artists, in the way that painters and sculptors, musicians and architects encounter the object of their attention at the moment when their attention begins to run free of, or has completely liberated itself from the dominion of words: in so doing it becomes possible for their art to loosen the stiffness of collective consciousness …. At such times poetry changes and its function and nature become more easily perceptible … Those are privileged times for the necessary examination of poetics that can precisely define what links and what separates creators who work with words from those who try to place themselves outside language."[7]

The major contemporary poet, equipped with classical erudition, in his three-part prose poem cycle in our volume *Image and Presence*, evokes an ancient Greek painter, the figure of Zeuxis of Heraclea (born c. 464 BCE, probably a student of Apollodorus) or, more precisely, a story of Zeuxis's Sisyphean—or perhaps Promethean—battle with the birds. Several versions

of the source story are known. It is possible that some copies of Zeuxis's paintings have survived on the walls of ancient Roman villas. According to Cicero and Pliny the Elder, Zeuxis painted Helen of Troy using the five most beautiful girls in Croton as models, and, furthermore, he painted the Centaur's family, Penelope, an athlete, the infant Hercules, Jupiter, etc. Ancient texts mention eighteen paintings in all. Allegedly (according to Verrius Flaccus), death caught up to him while he was painting the portrait of an elderly lady, and moreover, he laughed himself to death.[8]

Commissioned by Louis XVI in 1789, the painting *Zeuxis Selecting the Most Beautiful Girls of Croton as Models* by François-André Vincent can be found in the Louvre. It depicts the scene in which Zeuxis is choosing the fairest of the fair for his painting of Helen.

In his work *Zeuxis or Antiochus*, Lucian names Zeuxis as the most outstanding painter, who, among his novel experimental themes, painted a female centaur, "of which a copy exists today in Athens, taken exactly from the original." Lucian describes this copy in the course of an *ekphrasis*, which is an unusual literary art form that attempts to transplant an actual or imagined painting into language. This intertextual meta-art form had an important social role from Antiquity until the nineteenth century, owing to the technical difficulties of graphic reproduction. *Ekphrasis* strives, on the one hand, toward a faithful translation and precise description of the image, and on the other, to demonstrate the author's linguistic virtuosity. In this manner, the reader may wonder at the work of two artists at once: the one who painted the image and the one who was able to describe it so vividly. Lucian first describes the copy of Zeuxis objectively, and then analytically:

> On fresh green-sward appears the mother Centaur, the whole equine part of her stretched on the ground, her hoofs extended backwards; the human part is slightly raised on the elbows; the fore feet are not extended like the others, for she is only partially on her side; one of them is bent as in the act of kneeling, with the hoof tucked in, while the other is beginning to straighten and take a hold on the ground—the action of a horse rising. Of the cubs she is holding one in her arms suckling it in the human fashion, while the other is drawing at the mare's dug like a foal. In the upper part of the picture, as on higher ground, is a Centaur who is clearly the husband of the nursing mother; he leans over laughing, visible only down to the middle of his horse body; he holds a lion whelp aloft in his right hand, terrifying the youngsters with it in sport.[9]

By way of ending, Lucian relates how Zeuxis, disappointed in the reception of his picture, or rather by the fact that all they saw in it was the novelty of its theme, with nobody interested in the beauty and artistry of its execution, had the painting covered up.

Another story carries a similar moral: the one that Pliny the Elder recorded in the 66th *caput* of chapter XXXV of his *Naturalis Historia*,

according to which an artist by the name of Parrhasius challenged Zeuxis to a contest. As Pliny writes, the grapes Zeuxis painted were so lifelike that the birds flew at them. The well-satisfied Zeuxis then asked that the curtain be drawn so that he could see Parrhasius's painting. And then, shocked to discover that he had become the victim of the illusion, since the curtain was in fact Parrhasius's painting, Zeuxis calmly acknowledged that Parrhasius was the victor, since Zeuxis had only duped the birds, while Parrhasius had fooled the artist Zeuxis, himself. Later, Pliny recalls another story about Zeuxis, or a variant of the first one, which Seneca the Elder had related and interpreted in his *Controversiae* (10.5.27) in connection with the debate speech of an orator. According to him, the painting depicted bunches of grapes and a youth. The birds flew at the lifelike grapes, upon which Zeuxis became furious, saying that if the youth had been similarly lifelike, he would have scared the birds away. So Zeuxis wiped the bunches away, which in Seneca's interpretation meant that he cast his vote for artistic unity over the principle of *veritas*.

The stories can be grouped around the concept of deception or, to use a later French name, *trompe-l'oeil*, which expression, and the phenomenon it expresses, appears later in European art: the most characteristic examples date to the classical era. The test of the deception's success is not the seeing but the action, or more accurately, the failure of the action. *Trompe-l'oeil* attempts to coerce us to step outside art for the sake of reality. If we succumb to the temptation and step out of art, however, then we are disappointed. In other words, the story of Zeuxis speaks less about realism than about its critique.

Yves Bonnefoy sketches a different Zeuxis, one who battles the birds. In the final words of the second sub-cycle, the birds tear away more and more savagely at the grapes, by now painted in the dark. "Il inventa de ne plus peindre, de simplement regarder, à deux pas devant lui, l'absence de quelques fruits qu'il avait voulu ajouter au monde."[10] Therefore he watches the empty spaces where the grapes had been, though the birds remain near him: he who is the sole bearer of this missing presence.

A single narrative thread leads the third sub-cycle. Here are a few numbered prose poems from among the nine.[11]

I

> Zeuxis, malgré les oiseaux, ne parvenait pas à se dépendre de son désir, certainement légitime : peindre, en paix, quelques grappes de raisin bleu dans une corbeille.
>
> Ensanglanté par les becs éternellement voraces, ses toiles déchiquetées par leur terrible impatience, ses yeux brûlés par les fumées qu'il leur opposait en vain, il n'en continuait pas moins son travail, c'était à croire qu'il percevait dans les vapeurs toujours plus épaisses, où s'effaçait la

couleur, où se disloquait la forme, quelque chose de plus que la couleur ou la forme.

Zeuxis, despite the birds, could not free himself from his desire, legitimate though it assuredly was, to paint, in peace, a few bunches of blue grapes in a basket.

Bloodied by the eternally voracious beaks, his canvases torn apart by their terrible impatience, his eyes burned by the smoke he produced in a vain attempt to repel them, he continued his work no less urgently, as if he perceived, in the ever thicker vapors where the color faded and the form fell apart, something more than color or form.

II

Il reprenait souffle, parfois. Assis à quelques pas de son chevalet parmi les grives et les aigles et tous ces autres rapaces qui s'apaisaient aussitôt qu'il cessait de peindre et semblaient même presque dormir, appesantis dans leurs plumes, pépiant parfois vaguement dans l'odeur de fiente.

He drew a breath from time to time. Seated a few paces from his easel among the thrushes and eagles and all those other raptors that calmed down as soon as he stopped painting and that seemed even almost to sleep, weighted down in their feathers, chirping vaguely from time to time in the odor of their droppings.

IV

Et pas même, pourtant, ces grappes lourdes, un de ces déguisements par lesquels il avait essayé, parfois, de donner le change à la faim du monde. Ainsi avait-il ébauché, ah certes naïvement! des raisins rayés de bleu et de rose, d'autres cubiques, d'autres en forme de dieu terme noyé dans sa grande barbe. En vain, en vain ! Son projet n'avait pas même le temps de prendre forme. On dévorait l'idée à même l'esprit, on l'arrachait à sa main tentant d'aller à la toile. Comme s'il y avait dans l'inépuisable nature des raisins striés, des grains durs à six faces qu'on jetterait sur la table, pour un défi au hasard, des grappes comme des statues de marbre pour la délectation des oiseaux.

And not even, however, these heavy bunches, one of those disguises by which he had sometimes tried to hoodwink the world's hunger. Thus had he sketched out—ah, no doubt naively!—grapes striped with blue and pink, others cubic, others in the shape of a terminus god sunk in his great beard. In vain, in vain! His project did not even have the time to take shape. They devoured the idea in his mind, they tore the thought out of his hand as it reached toward the canvas. As if it were there inside the inexhaustible nature of the striped grapes, the hard six-sided grapes that one might toss on the table in defiance of chance, bunches like marble statues for the delectation of the birds.

The texts are numbered, in this manner also making both the continuity of the narrative element and the powerful presence of the prose prominent. Zeuxis continues his struggle, all the way to the fifth text, in which not a single significant bird appears, aside from a few sparrows and blackbirds.

In the seventh text, the painter becomes ever less confident about the value of the untouchable grape bunches; he has lost his point of reference: the attacking birds.

VII

> Ah, que s'est-il passé, se demande-t-il ? A-t-il perdu le sens de ce que c'est que l'aspect d'un fruit, ou ne sait-il plus désirer, ou vivre ? C'est peu probable. Des visiteurs viennent, regardent. « Quels beaux raisins ! », disent-ils. Et même : « Vous n'en avez jamais peint d'aussi beaux, d'aussi ressemblants. »
>
> Ou bien, se dit-il encore, a-t-il dormi ? Et rêvé ? Au moment même où les oiseaux déchiraient ses doigts, mangeaient sa couleur, il aurait été assis, dodelinant du chef, dans un coin de l'atelier sombre.
>
> Mais pourquoi maintenant ne dort-il plus ? En quel monde se serait-il réveillé ? Pourquoi regretterait-il, comme il sent bien qu'il le fait, ses jours de lutte et d'angoisse ? Pourquoi en vient-il à désirer de cesser de peindre ? Et même, qu'il n'y ait plus de peinture ?
>
> "Ah, what's happened?" he wonders. Has he lost the sense of what a fruit looks like, or does he no longer know how to desire or to live? That's unlikely. Some visitors arrive and look. "What lovely grapes!" they say. And even: "You've never painted anything as beautiful, as lifelike."
>
> Or else, he continued to brood, had he been asleep? And dreaming? At the very moment that the birds were tearing his fingers, eating his pigments, he'd have been seated, nodding his head, in a corner of the dark workshop.
>
> But why, now, wasn't he still sleeping? In which world would he have awakened? Why would he regret, as he certainly feels he does, his days of struggle and anguish? Why has he come to the point of wishing to stop painting? And even to wishing that painting no longer existed?

The final text presents the fictional description of Zeuxis's last painting; in other words, what we have here is a pseudo-*ekphrasis*.

IX

> C'est quelque chose comme une flaque, le dernier tableau que Zeuxis peignit, après longue réflexion, quand déjà il inclinait vers la mort. Une flaque, une brève pensée d'eau brillante, calme, et si l'on s'y penchait on

> apercevait des ombres de grains, avec à leur bord vaguement doré la fantastique découpe qui ourle aux yeux des enfants la grappe parmi les pampres, sur le ciel lumineux encore du crépuscule.
>
> Devant ces ombres claires d'autres ombres, celles-ci noires. Mais que l'on plonge la main dans le miroir, que l'on remue cette eau, et l'ombre des oiseaux et celle des fruits se mêlent.
>
> It's something like a puddle, the last picture Zeuxis painted, after long consideration, when he was already declining toward death. A puddle; a fleeting thought of sparkling, calm water, and if you leaned close, you could see the shadows of the grapes and on their faintly gilded edges the fanciful outlines that, in the children's eyes, the vine-shoots wove around their heads; and in the sky, the still luminous twilit sky.
>
> In front of these light shadows were others, black ones. But when you plunge your hand into the mirror and roil the water, the shadows of the birds and fruit mingle.

In his study *A realizmus alakzatai* [The Configurations of Realism], Áron Kibédi Varga quotes another anecdote of Pliny the Elder, in which Timotheus paints the story of the sacrifice of Iphigenia and decides to cover Agamemnon's pain-filled face with a kerchief, because a painter is incapable of depicting the pain that seizes the single soul of the king constrained to condemn his daughter to death and the father desperate to stop her execution. It is not only Timotheus's kerchief, as Kibédi points out, but also Bonnefoy's puddle that symbolizes the boundary between the demonstrable and the depictable, which Lyotard states to be inherent to contemporary art.[12] As opposed to Kibédi Varga, however, I think that Bonnefoy-Zeuxis does not choose silence, because the text does not conclude with the section he quotes. Bonnefoy chooses the mirror surface, not retreating from the reality-test either: the *trompe-l'oeil* does not meet with failure, the possibility of the battle in the puddle remains; or rather, the water-mirror—contemporary mirror-literature—is also put to the uncomfortable and painful bird-test of artistic creation.

The puddle, combining the birds' dark and grapes' light shadows is, in the Rilkean sense, an open form, becoming audible in the boundary zone between "forward-striving" poetry and "summarizing" prose:[13] the presence of the narratable *fabula* places the text in space and time, that is to say, in finitude. For Bonnefoy, poetic language is none other than the coming into authentic contact with the perceptible world, in its most elementary, instantaneous form, which impels him (not only him but also three other poet-colleagues also beginning their careers in the 1950s: Philippe Jaccottet, André du Bouchet, and Jacques Dupin) to a sharp critique of the image: a small, cheaply acquired metaphorical infinity. He quotes Baudelaire in his 1981 inaugural speech at the Collège de France: "Le culte des images, ma grande, mon unique, ma primitive passion."[14] The Frenchman puts it well:

the image is his love, his passion, and his suffering. Because the image is deceiving. The *eikon* is, in one respect, mental representation (the image of a thing, a dream vision, *simulacrum*), and in a second, a material representation (portrait) or, in a third respect, a similarity relation between two elements, and on this third account Aristotle ties it to metaphor. The *eidolon*, derived from *eidos* (exterior, form), ties to irreality as a mirror image, and as a consequence comes into relation with lying. In such a situation, what can "vérité de parole" mean to Bonnefoy, author of the Anti-Plato? It means unveiling the image—which the text's subplot actually accomplishes—and at the same time, placing it in the entirety of life; but also the toss of the dice: acceptance of chance as built into existence, something that Mallarmé was incapable of doing. Coming across the cracks in the wall,[15] the poem strikes open a crack in the wall of concepts that refer to each other, and in this breach—despite the always partial nature of representation—the premonition of presence flashes for an instant, as he explained so enduringly in his essay *La présence et l'image*. As an entirely different contemporary poet and literary scholar representing the neolyrical viewpoint, Jean-Michel Maulpoix expressed in his major essay on post-1950s French poetry: Bonnefoy's poetry is the state of birth of an impossible plenitude ("un état naissant de la plénitude impossible").[16]

This crack is the place where the infinite flares up, becoming legible and visible for an instant. Such a place—the "true place" ("vrai lieu")—is the orange grove that appears in both *L'Ordalie* [The Ordeal] (as the house of Anne's parents, the perfect place, just like Igitur's room) and in the volume entitled *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve* (in the latter, as the penultimate cycle's titular subject: "a place where light illuminated everything").[17] But such a place can be the locale of travels, Ravenna, for instance: the test, the "divine judgment" decides whether it is in fact so. And this test is always the death throes, because the "true place" reveals itself in the dialectic of motion and immobility, life and death. Signs also undergo these death throes, this almost-annihilation. In his *Crise de vers*, Mallarmé describes poetic thought as being when, because of the denying *logos* (the linguistic play), the object steps into its own trembling almost-annihilation, but only in order that the "pure concept" ("la notion pure") should be able to emerge from it.

In the texts that made it into the volume *Image and Presence*, on countless occasions Bonnefoy also evokes the Mallarméan self-enclosing, timeless poetry building on its own internal references, since Mallarmé placed his trust not in empirical existence which, saturated by chance, therefore (*igitur*), occasions disappointment, but in the virtual nature of language. Except that language is conceptual. *La nuit*, one of the pieces in the Zeuxis cycle, refers to Mallarmé already in its title: Mallarmé, who chose precisely the word "nuit" to illustrate the arbitrary nature of language: the word "nuit" is bright, whereas night itself is dark. Bonnefoy says that the night is also bright, though it be dark; or, more accurately, night is neither dark nor

bright, but merely a word, just like the blue grass or the fallen orange. In other words: our concepts only exist in their mutual relations and know nothing of time that structures existing objects, nor of chance that acts on them. Nothing of Mallarmé's plan for a capitalized, perfect book remains but gray pages falling apart in our hands, rotten wood, sand, and stones (*Le Livre*). In the second Zeuxis sub-cycle, in the poem entitled *L'Inachevable*, he formulates the ontology of the world and painting, and then in the poem entitled *Le Musée*, he writes: "In every painting, it seems to me, it is as if God gave up on finishing the world."[18] The line terminating in itself, the circle, seems as if to betray the concern of the God who prefers the search, the uneasiness of seeking, to the joy of the completed work.

This questing in Yves Bonnefoy's oeuvre reveals itself not only within the various branches of art but also in his free transitions between art forms. This permeability frequently elicits genetic connections between texts belonging to different art forms. As an example, we can cite the fact that his *L'Ordalie*, written between 1949 and 1951, prefigured the fourth section, *L'Orangerie* (*The Orangery*), of his volume *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve* (*On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*). This genetic relation also becomes a generic connection when the narrative structures of his prose are incorporated into his verse as hidden narrations.[19] Beginning with Poe, developing through the works of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry, and becoming institutionalized in Henri Brémond's oeuvre, "pure poetry" sought to exclude narration (not as an art form but as a narrative element) from poetry, based on the Platonic ideal, precisely in order to avoid representation. According to them, the essence, ideal, and very thought of poetry must reveal itself; to do so, it must rise above the perceptible reality that only serves to obscure it. Hence, Mallarmé, in his preface to *The Throw of the Dice*, accounts it a success that "it avoids narrative" ("on évite le récit"). While turning against this tradition, Bonnefoy still constructs strong defenses of the mutually complementary dialectic of prose and verse, which provides a new tool to discover how poetry can regain an authentic connection with the perceptible reality that had been dethroned earlier. Closed and open verse forms strain against each other on the stage of the alexandrine-disrupting decasyllabic and hendecasyllabic lines and of his prose and free-verse poems. In his Shakespeare-inspired cycle *Théâtre* (*Theater*), the feminine figure and voice rising from the dark waters of the unconscious creates its volatile presence, an "exact presence" that lives on the increasing blood reborn where the poem tears apart ("vivante de ce sang qui renaît et s'accroît où se déchire le poème"), as we read in text XVIII.

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Yves Bonnefoy's translations also represent a newer segment, a newer field of this questing. The translator of Shakespeare and Yeats, the author who often writes about literary translation, devoting an entire volume to it,[20] in

his essay *Translating Poetry* admits, on the one hand, that poetry is untranslatable since "we find too many insoluble contradictions in it and must omit too much," though he also highlights the process by which translation actually repeats the original creative act: "So we can see what truly motivates the poem; so we can relive the act that brought it into being and disappears within it; and liberated from the stiff form of which it is merely the imprint, the original intention, we may perhaps use intuition (let us say, use that toward which it longed, what did not leave it alone, something universal) and try in the other language, and this time faithfully enough to find ourselves facing the same difficulties: the destination language, just as was the case with the original language, paralyzes the question that is speech itself."[21] He adds that recreating the perceived intuition does not require one to be a poet, but when someone writes, he will certainly consider even translations as his own.

If the translations have come close to achieving the above goals, then we translators may consider our joint work *Image and Presence* successful. For if "traduction plurielle," that is, multi-author, even polyphonic translation, exists, our volume was certainly that. The translations of Bonnefoy's poems were born in the course of a communal study in which most of the initial raw translations underwent significant modification, and only a minority preserved the traces of the original translator's hand. Finally, we must address the omissions of texts lacking in the volume. From the volume *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, the cycles *True Place* and *Theater* are complete, and the other cycles are excerpted. From all the other original volumes—with the exception of the translation of the complete *Là où retombe la flèche*—I tried to select the excerpts so that every important art form and every important intellectual content should appear. Thanks to the oeuvre's extraordinary coherence, its intellectual contents can be easily traced in our volume, cropping up repeatedly in the various art forms: verse, prose poems, and essays.

Other Home. Yves Bonnefoy at the turn of the millennium[22]

The volume *Másik otthon* [Other Home], conceived at the request of the Hungarian PEN Club and on the occasion of the presentation of the 2014 Janus Pannonius Grand Prize in Poetry, continues where the former concluded, collecting as it does texts from the French poet's rich oeuvre that appeared at the turn of the millennium and that had not previously appeared in Hungarian translation. Yves Bonnefoy received numerous major literary awards; his first visit to Hungary had immediately followed his receipt of the Kafka Prize. The circle of student translators from the Eötvös Collegium, who have since become members of the Gáspár Károli Reformed University Intercultural Research and Translation Workshop (Krisztina Kovács, Balázs Makádi, Gábor Förköli, and Kata Gyuris), were joined by two poet-translators. One is a former teacher of mine, since

deceased, László Bárdos; the other is the poet and former president of the Hungarian PEN Club Géza Szőcs, also now deceased (he died in 2020).

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The volume *Planches courbes* (*The Curved Planks*), with which the anthology begins, is Bonnefoy's most popular book in France (true, it is also the least hermetic), having entered the list of required texts for the French baccalaureate examinations. The eponymous prose poem can be regarded as a paraphrase of the legend of Saint Christopher. Bonnefoy's hermetic, metaphysical poetry of around the millennium retains the continual interplay of prose and verse. The anthology mirrors this important idiosyncrasy of his oeuvre: side by side, prose poems, free verse, closed-form verse (sonnets), and essays follow each other.

We excerpted prose poems and sonnets—which became a more common art form in his later volumes—as we also did in the case of a paperback edition of *L'Heure présente*, in which closed-form poems, free verse, and prose poems are intermingled.

The Hungarian poet János Pilinszky was likely familiar with the text of *L'Arrière-pays*,[23] at least according to an edited text of his 1972 interview. The interviewer, László Cs. Szabó, ascribed the following statements to Pilinszky:

> I like his essays a great deal. But also the essays of others. From Yves Bonnefoy, [I love] *L'Arrière-pays*. It is travelogue, art criticism, autobiography at a very high intellectual level—he always writes at that level—a search for the lost Eden, but not in a void, the otherworld of our imagination, but here, in space and the body, in the reality raised by human revelation. According to him, art constantly re-creates the world, and this is how the lost paradise, *L'Arrière-pays* as he calls it, is resurrected. Bonnefoy is a severe, outstanding poet, utterly outstanding and utterly modern in classical guise, but I wouldn't dare translate him.[24]

In his transcript of the interview, László Cs. Szabó continues by saying: "He's your contemporary. I'm glad that you have reinforced my hypotheses one after the other, although we meet too rarely. I've never put it in writing, but now I will tell you: I sense an affinity between you and Bonnefoy." Pilinszky replied: "It's possible, very possible."[25] This portion of the interview, however, which Cs. Szabó first published in 1977[26] and then in the 1983 volume referenced above, cannot be found in the expanded and revised edition of the *Conversations* that appeared from Századvég Publisher.[27] The explanation—as I learned from the series editor of that edition—is that it cannot be found on the audiotape of the interview broadcast on the BBC Hungarian Service on 29 June 1972, so the editor left it out. In his

transcripts, Cs. Szabó would at times expand the text with supplementary material recorded elsewhere, and it is also clear that he did this in full knowledge of the source material: János Pilinszky's poetry, in its search for presence, truly stands very close to Yves Bonnefoy's poetry. One of the fundamental common questions raised in the poetry of the two poets confronting imagination—Pilinszky of the creative imagination, Bonnefoy of the deceptive, entrapping imagination—is the conflicted relationship between art and representation. This theme receives artistic expression in the Zeuxis cycle, but also in several texts in the volume *Másik otthon* [Other Home] (*L'Arrière-pays*, *A Photograph*, etc.). In his Author's Note to the Italian edition of *L'Arrière-pays*, Bonnefoy writes:

> And I? What does this lesson mean to me? In no case at all does it mean true maturity (ripening): neither in the years of *L'Arrière-pays*[28] nor later. I feel that I'm still hesitating with a straightedge and compass in my hands. I know that poetry is the consequence of the ego-construction of so-called works, their transformation into flames that finally consume them, or at least first and most importantly of all, the love of the flame's light. But this certainty is the kind of road where I constantly find myself at the starting point, my eyes on a certain, leftward path being drawn in the already lengthening evening shadows: if I were to follow it, it would take me through thousands of disillusioning places that all seem like the threshold of some *arrière-pays*.[29]

Exiting representation and its intertwined ego-construction into impersonal presence and the disillusionment of falling back into it receives expression in his poem *Encore sur l'invention du dessin*, which stands in intertextual relation to his earlier prose poem *Celle qui inventa la peinture*:

> Regarding the daughter of the Corinthian potter, she long since gave up her plan to finish the silhouette of her lover that she had drawn on the wall with her finger. She leaned back on her bed, the candlelight cast the unbelievable crests of the wrinkled sheets onto the plaster, and then, her eyes welling, she turned back to the figure broken from embraces. "I will not love the image more than you," she said. "I won't let you become a picture abused by the undulating smoke gathering around us. You will not become the bunch of grapes over which the birds of oblivion fight in vain."[30]

The main themes of his prior oeuvre recur in these texts: Zeuxis and the birds as images of the pitfalls of representation (see the poem *Les chemins* [Paths] in *Planches courbes* (*The Curved Planks*), the study of not-knowing *Bouche-bée* [Agape], and questions about naming and nameability (*Donner des noms* [Naming], *Les noms divins* [Divine Names], etc.) in *La longue chaîne de l'ancre* (*The Anchor's Long Chain*).

The volume closes with an essay about Paul Celan (*Ce qui alarma Paul Celan*), which appeared first as a separate volume from Galilée and then in *Le siècle où la parole a été victime* [The century when speech was a victim], from Mercure de France.[31] Bonnefoy wrote several essays (for example *Paul Celan)*, about this poet to whom he was close. This essay *Ce qui alarma Paul Celan* deals with the plagiarism accusations against Celan, and in the essay a French poet's nuanced thought and love of justice take form, just as they do in his entire poetic oeuvre.

Yves Bonnefoy: Alexandre Hollan: thirty years of reflections (1985–2015)[32]

It was Yves Bonnefoy who brought the painting of Sándor Hollán (Alexandre Hollan) to wide attention in France. Hollan relocated to Paris in 1956, and the two got to know each other personally in 1986. In this book, Bonnefoy meditates on the connections between poetry and painting, connections that had characterized his oeuvre from the start. Not only did they characterize his work, but whoever heard him speak about painting and specific paintings—I recall a lecture of his in the Grand Palais about Poussin, and when he analyzed Goya in the Budapest Fine Arts Museum for three of us, Jérôme and Livane Thélot and myself—could be convinced that he was a painter with words: indeed, an art historian and painter in one.

The final joint work of an artist and a poet is the book; more accurately, the book collects the traces of the artistic encounter between the two. Péter Nádas, in his *Arbor mundi*, writes as follows about Hollan's art:

> The symbolic tree pieced together from lines, which Matisse calls the schoolboy tree, sketches not a tree but the static principles of the organic form's existence. On occasion, one may recognize the pine, the oak, the olive, or the fig: at such times the tree's individuality shows through the principles of statics, but usually not. In his notebooks in French, Hollán makes the dramatic declaration about trees, that they are invisible. *L'arbre est invisible*. The trees appearing in ancient drawings thousands of years old are not of identifiable species; they do not stand in any particular spot; they have no individual characteristics; aside from their spirit they have no subject; they exist as mental constructs, although their statics are certainly visible. Their function is fairly evident. They serve to participate in the consciousness as phenomena of constant existence. Since there are things on the earth and in the heavens that do not exist in permanent form. Such are lightning, such are waves, such are exclamations, such is the wind, such is color, such is light, and so forth. … In the ancient scribbles, in the naïve and symbolic depictions at the dawn of history, which have nothing to do with any individual tree, nor with trees, the tricky operation of perception and apperception can be clearly recognized, the

> triad of noticing, recognizing and understanding that create structure and enable conceptualization, their temporality, their consecutiveness. At the moment thought pushes its way into image or plastic form. Yves Bonnefoy, perhaps the most significant connoisseur of Hollán's art, puts it this way: in Hollán, words transmute into images and thus, reality no longer accompanies us in his paintings.[33]

In his 2001 catalogue for the exhibition in Vevey, *À l'Écoute du visible. Morandi, Hollan*, Yves Bonnefoy explains that by contrast to Antiquity's culture of mimesis and the Renaissance which inherited it in the form of realistic depiction, modern and contemporary art is much more interested in an unmediated encounter with reality.

Both Bonnefoy's puddle and Hollan's trees symbolize the boundary between the demonstrable and the depictable. The water-mirror of mimesis appears at the close of the text entitled *Tree, Symbol, Lightning*: "The brush seeks to head downward, like the water rippling down the cliff, here straight, there winding, and it seeks to broaden into a pool at the bottom, over which one leans in vain, since one no longer sees the mirror image in it." His text *A Day in the Life of Alexandre Hollan* also alludes to this: "What a paradox, that the painter striving to practice immediacy is finally forced to create signs, which by his principles and nature is a tool of mediation! What a trap, that it can extinguish the luminosity and strength of the first sketch from his work!"[34] The same text speaks for the first time about his mystical experiences of the process of artistic creation (the use of this concept is not characteristic of Bonnefoy's oeuvre, while its experiential reality can be sensed in its plasticity):

> And here we may ponder the unity and identity of [artistic] creation and the mystical experience arising from it. Of its idealism. Where the creator is uninterested in the world in its own reality, with all life's contradictions, its self-annihilation, its horror, with undertaking the responsibility of others, the way it slips out from under our direction, because he only uses the world, in essence, as an esthetic starting point but then heads elsewhere. Is this a Buddhist teaching? Or a sort of turning away from the world, which only those may question, who tread the path called "for the work," "for the works" of Christianity … Just as it does for many mystics, so for Hollan also, darkness means true light.[35]

In his text *Morandi and Hollan: Perception and Language*, the concept crops up again:

> In considering Hollan's paintings and submergence, it is perhaps no accident that mystical experience comes to mind, because in the end, mystical experience does not break through any one certainty but through the semiotic system itself, so that it can then transcend

> language, independently of whether it has any meaning at all from the viewpoint of life, since one must live life in any event.[36]

Sándor Hollán's trees transcend the aspects that make a fallen tree nameable and catalogable via language. Although born in Budapest (on 29 December 1933), he spent much of his childhood in Transdanubia,[37] where he became aware of a strong connection to trees and nature. Yves Bonnefoy provides a marvelous description of one of these childhood experiences. In an artistic sense, it was his painting teacher, Béla Emmanuel, who brought him into connection with the motif of the living tree.

In 1956, he left Hungary and began to study in Paris, in the studio of the artist Roger Chapelain-Midy at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts; then in 1961, he obtained his diploma as a graphic artist at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs. According to the biography in the exhibition catalog *Alexandre Hollan. Le chemin de l'Arbre*, it was the strength he discovered in trees that provided him his first great visual experience; he spent months observing and painting in nature while living in his automobile. His oeuvre concentrated on trees in the 1970s, during which he prepared a series of rapidly executed drawings. Franz Kline, Bram van Velde, Mark Rothko, and Giorgio Morandi exercised significant influences on his art of this period. In his writings in *Other Home*, Bonnefoy digresses on these encounters, but he places Hollan's art in opposition to Morandi's in a certain respect, from the viewpoint that Morandi never transcends the narrow horizon of the "I," which can be detected in some manner in every one of his paintings. Hollan's first public exhibition took place in 1977 in Mária Marghescu's gallery in Germany, where he exhibited for fifteen years (first in Grafing, then in Hanover). In 1987 (one year before the Mercure de France edition), this gallery published Yves Bonnefoy's *Là où retombe la flèche*, accompanied by Hollan's lithographs.[38] In 1984, the artist purchased a house in Hérault county in the south of France and later expanded with a studio in Gignac. (To this day, he spends his summer months in this barren, scrubby landscape.) That is when he began to paint still lifes, and about then, in 1986, he also met Yves Bonnefoy. From 2005 on, we can encounter his large-scale trees, which his purchase of the studio in Ivry make possible. In 2010, the Académie des Beaux-Arts recognized him in granting him two awards.

Since his first exhibition in Hungary (at the Vasarely Museum in 1993), his large-scale trees have appeared in several exhibitions: at the Kiscell Museum in 2003, at the Institut Français in Budapest, the Ferenczy Museum in Szentendre, and in 2011, at the Budapest Fine Arts Museum. With the Hungarian translation of *Alexandre Hollan. Trente années de réflexions 1985–2015*, we not only bring the art of Sándor Hollán closer to the Hungarian public but do the same for Yves Bonnefoy's thoughts on painting and visual depiction.

The poetic prose text *The Alchemist of Color*, beautifully testifies to Yves Bonnefoy's commitment to painting and his earthly, heavenless mysticism. That text begins: "He was convinced that just as gold can be produced from base metals, so colors—those minerals of the spirit—can also be transmuted into light, the equivalent of gold."[39] Then the text describes the painter's lengthy, unproductive, and failed struggles. Up until suddenly, three drops of paint land on the canvas: blue, red, and saffron yellow (just like in Peter Brook's production of *Battlefield* at the Trafó in Budapest). "Three spots, barely touching. Between them arises the light, which is not the grayness of matter mixed in vain, but nor simply the sun that had embraced the meadows in the past."[40] In other words, it is not the mixing of colors that is the secret of alchemy, but their living next to each other; at this, the painter was satisfied, having finished his work. Years pass by, a third person (the poet?) looks with sympathy over the painter's shoulder at the painting and sees the cornfield in it, etc. "May we have been participants in the ghost story's great moment when the alchemist of color invented landscape painting?"[41] He grasps the painting, rocks all around it, he is already outside, outside the house, he sets the painting down, stands back, happy.

> When he turns around, he notices three angels who look at him, smiling. One wears red clothes, the other grayish-blue, and the third, unbelievably vivid saffron yellow.
> "Who are you?" he asks.
> "We are the Earth," they respond. "Which you create. We have come here to sit beside you in the grove. Give us bread and wine. We must speak at length, friends, before night falls."[42]

Notes

1 Several translations of this text exist but in this volume only P. Czipott's translation is cited.
2 Enikő Sepsi (ed.), *Penser poétique. Études et traductions littéraires de la poésie Française moderne et contemporaine*, Budapest, Argumentum Kiadó, Eötvös József Collegium, 2002.
3 Cesare Ripa, *(Proemio à l') Iconologie où les principales choses qui peuvent tomber dans la pensée touchant les vices sont représentées* (1643), tr. Jean Baudouin, Paris, Bibliothèque Universitaire de Lille, Aux Amateurs de Livres, 1989.
4 Denis Diderot, "Lettre sur les sourds et muets," *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. II, Le Club Français du Livre, with Roger Lewinter's foreword, 1969, 549. ("Il passe alors dans le discours du poète un esprit qui en meut et vivifie toutes les syllables. Qu'est-ce que cet esprit ? J'en ai quelquefois senti la présence ; mais tout ce que j'en sais, c'est que c'est lui qui fait que les choses sont dites et représentées tout à la fois ; que dans le même temps que l'entendement les saisit, l'âme en est émue, l'imagination les voit, et l'oreille les entend ; et que le discours n'est plus seulement un enchaînement de termes énergiques qui exposent la pensée avec force et noblesse, mais que c'est encore un tissu d'hiéroglyphes entassés les uns sur les autres qui la peignent. Je pourrais dire, en ce sens, que toute poésie est emblématique. / Mais

l'intelligence de l'emblème poétique n'est pas donnée à tout le monde. Il faut être presque en état de le créer pour le sentir fortement").

5 Paul Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive*, Paris, Seuil, 1975.
6 Yves Bonnefoy, *Le Nuage rouge*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1977, 319.
7 Yves Bonnefoy, "La poétique de Giacometti 1981–1982," *Lieux et destins de l'image* (Un cours de poétique au Collège de France 1981–1993), Paris, Seuil, 1999, 39.
8 The elderly lady commissioned a portrait of Aphrodite and insisted on sitting as the model.
9 Lucian, "Zeuxis or Antiochus," *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, Vol. II, tr. H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1905, 95–96.
10 Yves Bonnefoy, "Encore les raisins de Zeuxis," *La Vie errante*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1993, 77.
11 *Ibid*.; tr. P. Czipott.
12 François Lyotard, *L'inhumain. Causeries sur le temps*, Paris, Galilée, 1988.
13 Yves Bonnefoy, Author's Note to *L'Ordalie*, Paris, Maeght, 1975.
14 Yves Bonnefoy, "La présence et l'image," in *Entretiens sur la poésie* (1971–1990), Paris, Mercure de France, 1990, 191. He also alludes to it in one of the prose poems in the Zeuxis cycle: "ce qui n'est plus le signe, plus l'image—nos deux passions, nos deux leurres" (*L'Entaille* [The Notch]).
15 See Bonnefoy's poem, *L'Entaille*.
16 Jean-Michel Maulpoix, "Introduction à la lecture de l'oeuvre d'Yves Bonnefoy," https://www.maulpoix.net/Oeuvre%20de%20Bonnefoy.htm (accessed 20 February 2017).
17 Yves Bonnefoy, *On the Motion and Immobility of Douve*, tr. Galway Kinnell, Eastburn, Bloodaxe Books, 1992.
18 Yves Bonnefoy, "Le Musée," *La Vie errante*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1993, 71. ("Dans chaque peinture, me semble-t-il, c'est comme si Dieu renonçait à finir le monde.")
19 L. Richard Vernier, "Les récits cachés," *Yves Bonnefoy ou les mots comme le ciel*, Tübingen/Paris, Gunter Narr/Jean-Michel Place, 1985, 37–50.
20 Yves Bonnefoy, *La communauté des traducteurs*, Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2000.
21 The differences and divergent poetic aptitudes of languages—particularly French and English—are important themes of his essays (see "French Poetry and its Principle of Identity").
22 Yves Bonnefoy, *Másik otthon. Yves Bonnefoy az ezredfordulón* [*Other Home. Yves Bonnefoy at the Turn of the Millennium: Selected Writings*], Enikő Sepsi (ed.), tr. László Bárdos, Gábor Förköli, Kata Gyuris, Krisztina Kovács, Balázs Makádi, Enikő Sepsi and Géza Szőcs, Budapest, PEN Club/Pluralica, 2014.
23 See a translated excerpt in the Appendices.
24 *Beszélgetések Pilinszky Jánossal* [*Conversations with János Pilinszky*], Budapest, Magvető, 1983, 64.
25 *Ibid*., 65.
26 László Cs. Szabó, "Versünk a világban," [Our Poetry in the World], in Cs. Szabó, *Két tükör közt* [Between Two Mirrors], Bern, Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem, 1977, 47–68.
27 *Pilinszky János összegyűjtött művei. Beszélgetések* [*The Collected Works of János Pilinszky. Conversations*], Budapest, Századvég, 1994, 105–111.
28 The meaning of the work's title is "hinterland."
29 Yves Bonnefoy, *L'Arrière-pays*, Paris, Poésie/Gallimard, 2005, 173. The English translation is based on E. Sepsi's translation into Hungarian.
30 Yves Bonnefoy, "Celle qui inventa la peinture," *La vie errante*, 78.

31 Yves Bonnefoy, *Le siècle où la parole a été victime*, Paris, Mercure de France, 2010, 273–288.
32 Yves Bonnefoy, *Alexandre Hollan. Trente années de réflexions 1985–2015*, François-Marie Deyrolle (ed.), Strasbourg, L'Atelier contemporain, 2016. Translators of the Hungarian version: Adrienn Gulyás, Krisztina Kovács, Veronika Kovács, Balázs Makádi and Enikő Sepsi.
33 Péter Nádas, "Arbor mundi. Mitopoétikai alakzatok Alexandre Hollan festészetében" [Arbor mundi. Mythopoetic Foundations of Alexandre Hollan's Art], *Hollán Sándor. A Fa útja/Alexandre Hollan. Le chemin de l'Arbre*, Exhibition Catalogue of Budapest Fine Arts Museum and the Musée Fabre de Montpellier Agglomération, with Judit Geskó's monograph, 2011–2012, 61–62. http://deske.hu//iras/html-2012/nadas-hollan.htm (accessed 10 October 2016).
34 Bonnefoy, "La journée d'Alexandre Hollan" [A Day in the Life of Alexandre Hollan], *Alexandre Hollan*, François-Marie Deyrolle (ed.), Strasbourg, L'Atelier contemporain, 2016, 54.
35 *Ibid*., 59, 63.
36 Yves Bonnefoy, "Morandi et Hollan: entre perception et langage," *Alexandre Hollan. Trente années de réflexions 1985–2015*, 73.
37 Transdanubia: the portion of Hungary west of the Danube.
38 In F. Kemp's translation, under the title *Dort, wo der Pfeil nieder fällt*.
39 Bonnefoy, *La Vie errante*, 21.
40 *Ibid*., 23.
41 *Ibid*., 25.
42 *Ibid*.

3 The new lyricism

Jean-Michel Maulpoix: *Une histoire de bleu*

We published the first volume of Jean-Michel Maulpoix's poetry in Hungarian translation in 2008, under the title *Kékversek* [literally, Bluepoems], and this was the second offspring of the Eötvös Collegium translation workshop.[1] Our methods remained unchanged, working jointly on the first, originally diverse, multiple versions, and thus, in keeping with my intentions, always approaching a single, unified, well-attuned, and faithful translation.

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The anthology of contemporary poetry *Látogatás* [A Visit][2] already contained selections from Maulpoix's works. In addition to the twenty-some volumes of his prose poems and poetic prose, his critical works are also significant and well known in France. He has written studies and monographs on the poetry of Henri Michaux, Paul Valéry, Jacques Réda, Paul Verlaine, René Char, Rainer Maria Rilke, et al. His essays on poetics connect closely to his practice of writing and can be regarded as his theoretical writings on the trend of new lyricism (*La poésie malgré tout*, *La poésie comme l'amour*, *Du lyrisme*, etc.). In his writing, prose and verse alternate and enter into dialogue with each other. He often uses the term "critical lyricism" for the interweaving of verse and theory, or more accurately, the personal and impersonal. This is the sort of lyric that is cognizant about its limits; it wrestles with its inner contradictions and tensions. As the theorist of contemporary lyric, he also defines the multivalent concept of lyricism: lyric returns poetry to song, to melody, to the articulation of sentences, to the particular rhythm of the sentence, since it can thank the musical instrument for its name, which ties it to the figures of Apollo and Orpheus. The adjective of Greek origin "lyrique," first appears in the French language in the sixteenth century, while the neologism "lyrisme," lyricism, is in use from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lyricism combines three elements: subjectivity, song, and ideality. The new lyricists, Jean-Pierre Lemaire, Guy Goffette, James Sacré, Hédi Kaddour, and Jean-Michel

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-3

Maulpoix, were born in the 1950s and began to publish in the 1980s. The older poets, Jacques Réda, Pierre Oster, and Jean Claude Renard were the first to help them become established. They return to the image, to melody, to sentence articulation, and to the sentence's own rhythm. They find their joy in subjective expression of feelings. They prefer the typical, everyday locales of modernism: train stations and exurbs.

Une histoire de bleu (*A Matter of Blue*),[3] published in 1992, is the volume of Maulpoix's poetry that has been translated into most languages and the one that is quoted most often. Together with the book *L'instinct du ciel*, originally published in 2000, it appeared in paperback format from Gallimard in 2005. The latter title alludes to Mallarmé, the way that the entire volume, with its sky-blue (and not the sea-blue of *Une Histoire de bleu*), enters into dialogue with Mallarmé's azure. The title of *Une Histoire de bleu*—a story of blue, or as its English translation has it *A Matter of Blue*,[4] finds its apropos in the letter written by Rainer Maria Rilke to Clara Rilke on 8 October 1907, part of which, in French, forms an epigraph to the book: "On pourrait imaginer que quelqu'un écrivît une histoire de bleu." In English, and quoting the letter at greater length, this part of the letter reads:

> And seeing the blue, it occurred to me that it is that special blue of the eighteenth century which is to be found everywhere, in La Tour, in Peronnet, and which, even in Chardin, does not cease to be elegant, although there, as the band of his curious cap (in the self-portrait with the horn-rimmed glasses), it is already used quite regardlessly. (*It is conceivable that someone might write a monograph about blue*[5]; from the thick waxy blue of the Pompeian frescos to Chardin and further to Cézanne: what a life story!) For Cézanne's very peculiar blue has this parentage, comes from the blue of the eighteenth century that Chardin divested of its pretentiousness and that now, with Cézanne, no longer carries with it any secondary significance.[6]

The title's Hungarian translation (*Kékversek*, literally "Bluepoems") uses a play on words (*kék versek*, blue poems—*kép versek*, image poems), and this is no accident: although having nothing to do with image-poems (calligrams), Jean-Michel Maulpoix's poetry, as is also generally the case with the generation of his new-lyricism colleagues, consciously returns to the liberated use of poetic images. In doing so, he responds to the generation of Yves Bonnefoy and its suspicion of the image that duplicates and obscures presence, and to their constant battle against the image, exalted by the surrealists, and finally to the tradition that is preserved in the very act of opposing it. Maulpoix, in the profusion of images leading from the infinite blue of his prose poems, touches the depths of the possessor of the lyric voice. This lyric figure is impersonal; speaking with the author's words, he is the fourth person singular, seeking his own face in the unstitched cloth of prose. His individuality, just as in a bad photograph, has "shifted" and is blurred.

More precisely: the relationship of the speaker to himself is uncertain and renders the text's grammatical structure uncertain as well. The articulation and rhythm of the sentence are his only handhold. In it he seeks his song, his voice, his own features.

Les beaux jours, le large poudroie.	In fine weather the open sea mists like powder.
Le ciel est de tuiles blanches. La sieste de la mer creuse une longue cicatrice d'encre sur la joue de l'horizon où les voiliers tracent de grandes routes calmes et plantent leur amour d'oiselier d'un blanc très nu.	The sky is all white tiles. The sea's siesta carves a long scar of ink across the cheek of the horizon where sailboats trace great calm paths and plant their bird-seller's love of such stark white.
…	…
(*Le regard bleu*)[7]	(*The Blue Look*)[8]

Furthermore, the fundamental organizing principle of the volume's metaphors is the alternating outlines of the speaking subject, and on occasion, its duplication (for example the parallels and interplay of sea and woman). This lyric subject speaks to us at times, and at others is a voice (or voices) speaking up within us, but also the one who speaks outward, to others. The perspective of the landscape disappearing into the infinite leads to an interiority that evokes, and carries within itself, multiple voices: in the words of Henri Michaux, much cited by Maulpoix, "our inner distances" ("lointains intérieurs"). The volume's second epigraph, from the eighth chapter, fifteenth section of Volume X of Augustine's *Confessions*, refers to its importance: "And men go abroad to admire the heights of the mountains, the mighty billows of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, and pass themselves by."[9] Maulpoix quotes the following French translation: "Et les hommes vont admirer les cimes des monts, les vagues de la mer, le vaste cours des fleuves, le circuit de l'Océan et le mouvement des astres, et ils s'oublient eux-mêmes." I suspected that Maulpoix sees a foreshadowing of modern poesy's hoped-for loss of ego in this quotation he chose as an epigraph. The author confirmed my hypothesis, and in doing so shed light on his poetic practice that made the anachronistic explanation possible: Maulpoix records quotations he finds congenial without citing references, and later he uses them for epigraphs according to his whim. The epigraph continues, in English translation, as follows:

> Nor [do they] wonder that when I spake of all these things, I did not see them with mine eyes, yet could not have spoken of them, unless I then actually saw the mountains, billows, rivers, stars which I had seen, and that ocean which I believe to be, inwardly in my memory, and that, with

> the same vast spaces between, as if I saw them abroad. Yet did not I by seeing draw them into myself, when with mine eyes I beheld them; nor are they themselves with me, but their images only.[10]

In other words, it is precisely *not* the modern loss of ego but the importance of the inward turn to which Augustine's text calls attention. This infinite landscape may be the sea, but it could also be the infinite plain, a sort of open view that turns the gaze inward, or that lives within us as a living image, thanks to the working of memory, as in János Pilinszky's *Aranykori töredék* [Fragment from the Golden Age], to which Jean-Michel Maulpoix refers in the dedication of his Hungarian edition:

Öröm előzi, hirtelen öröm, ama szemérmes, szép anarchia! Nyitott a táj, zavartan is sima, a szélsikálta torlaszos tetőkre, a tenger kőre, háztetőre látni: az alkonyati rengeteg ragyog. Kimondhatatlan jól van, ami van. Minded tetőről látni a napot.	Joy precedes it, sudden joy, that modest, lovely anarchy! The view is open, smooth even in confusion, you can see the wind-scrubbed barricade roofs, sea rocks, rooftops: the sunset wilderness glows. What exists is inexpressibly good. You see the sun from every roof.
Az össze-vissza zűrzavar kitárul, a házakon s a házak tűzfalán, a világvégi üres kutyaólban aranykori és ugyanaz a nyár! És ugyanaz a lüktető öröm; dobog, dobog a forró semmiben, ellök magától, eltaszít szivem és esztelen szorít, szorít magához!	The chaos everywhere spreads out, on houses and their firewalls, in the empty dog den at world's end summer is the golden age, the same! And the pulsing joy's the same; it beats, beats in the hot nothingness, my heart shoves me, repels me and insanely holds me tight!
Mi készül itt e tenger ragyogásból? Ha lehunyom is, süti a szemem; mi kívül izzott, belül a pupillán, itt izzít csak igazán, idebenn! A világ is csak vele fényesül, az örömtől, aminek neve sincsen. Mint vesztőhelyen, olyan vakító és olyan édes. Úgy igazi minden.	What's this sea-sparkle preparing? It bakes my eyes even when I shut them; what glowed outside, glows inside the pupils, only truly glowing here, within! The world, too, only shines with it, from joy that hasn't any name. It's as blinding and sweet as on the killing ground. That's how all is real.[11]

This intrapupillary sight obsessively seeks connection to the absolute. It is the most humane manifestation of the new lyricism's longing for the sky (the celestial emptiness) in language.[12]

We read the story of ineffable blue, its genesis and complete monograph, in nine cycles. Every cycle contains nine poems, just as the nine Muses gave the gift of poetry and their declared truths, namely myth. Hesiod already lists their names, but only later tradition distributed their roles: Clio the

writing of history, Melpomene that of tragedy, Thalia of comedy, Euterpe of lyric poetry, Terpsichore of dance, Erato of love poetry, Calliope of epic poetry, Urania of science, mainly astronomy, and Polyhymnia, goddess of composing hymns. As is well-known in the history of mythology, they usually live in the mountains, lands surrounding crystal-clear springs and rivers, in inspiring natural surroundings, and their temples also stand outside cities. When the muses dance on Mount Helicon, all animate nature fills with song. They rule over the wild forces of nature and of human impulse: the goddesses of harmony and rhythm maintain the measure. When their trombones sound, flooding rivers retreat to their channels, or conversely, the waves fill to overflowing with the muses; and with their presence—with their temples—they ensure understanding among the town's citizens. When Apollo, conductor of the muses, stands before the chorus, they commence a yet more miraculously consonant melody. Everything that disturbs harmony or rhythm in the world, the Greeks called museless (*amuson*/χωρίς μούσες).

The artistic work arises with clearly visible outlines from a background disappearing into the fog of murky memories at the moment of creative inspiration: Hesiod states that Mnemosyne, goddess of memory, is the mother of the muses. The Greeks ascribed the sense of certainty that arrives simultaneously with the subjective experience of poetic inspiration to the presence of the muses: the found—not invented—picture, the satisfaction of the right word. Here, that certainty is melancholia: "The more beautiful the sentence, the more precise, the more it embitters," writes Maulpoix in the written portion of his volume *L'écrivain imaginaire* [The Imaginary Writer].[13] The piece is, in the final analysis, more a search by feel for love, a search for a sacrality ("a god," "God," "gods," "the gods" all appear in the poems) whose thought and practice have been lost in modernity, but not the longing. "Nine days at sea, just like in a church. / Alone with the gods, with their absence," he writes in the cycle *Carnet d'un éphémère* [A Mayfly's Journal][14] in *Une histoire de Bleu* (*A Matter of Blue*).

Although Jean-Michel Maulpoix's writing method often builds on fragments—all the way through some journal entries in his *Domaine public* (1998)—and though syntactically he also builds here extremely long, there incomplete, often just nominal sentence structures, the structure of the volume is nevertheless determined. Antoine Émaz also calls attention to this aspect in his foreword to the 2005 paperback edition: the system is no longer trustworthy, we must work with shreds of experience and knowledge, but "even if the detail vanishes, the whole must remain intact."[15] At the organic center of *Une histoire de bleu*, surrounded by four cycles fore and aft, stand the free verses of *Le grand pavois*, distinct in form from the prose poems and prose that predominate in both the book and in the poet's writings generally.

Avec mes tympanons, ma trompe et mes timbales	With my timpani, my trumpet and my cymbals
Je chanterai sur un semblant d'air lyrique	I will sing a seeming lyric
Le grand tintamarre de la mer moderne et désuète	Of the great teeming of the modern and obsolescent sea
…	…
Ce sera une espèce inouïe de poème	This will be an unheard-of sort of poem
Gonflé de belles images et de bons sentiments	Inflated with pretty images and fine sentiments
Mimant à la manière antique le pathos de la mer et la discorde de ses bruits archaïques	Miming in the antique manner the sea's pathos and the discord of its archaic noises
Pressant l'accordéon du large au poumon bleu gonflé d'oedèmes	Squeezing the open-water accordion of blue lungs inflated by edemas
Faisant chanter ses boursouflures au pied des phares et des balises	Making its blisters sing at the feet of its lighthouses and beacons
Médusant ses moutons, ses mollusques	Medusating its sheep, its mollusks
Soldant le gros temps à bas prix.	Selling off the heavy weather cut price.[16]

This cycle, building on reminiscences of Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and Breton, is at once the apotheosis of lyricism and its critique (see the first three lines of the excerpt cited above; or in the preceding poem: "The dust of broken hooves, while the lamp's crooked light yellows the paper's fiber/Is the mother-of-pearl of illusion, but which blue-green ocean is soluble in its depths teeming with fish?").

As an appendix to our translation of *Une histoire de bleu*, we translated a few excerpts from his 1994 prose volume *L'écrivain imaginaire* [The Imaginary Writer]. In this instance, he considers the writer as an invented being and his relation to his text—in point of fact, the author's fictive autobiography and his *ars poetica*—is presented not in the form of the essays characteristic of his theoretical works, but in literary prose. In order to narrate his impossible autobiography, he revives, "articulates," and reexamines the sounds of the poets of bygone ages. (Concerning dates, for example, he projects Rimbaud's death onto his own actual birthdate.) Several of his volumes create intertextual connections with the art of Henri Michaux, Rainer Maria Rilke, Stéphane Mallarmé, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Gustave Flaubert, Dominique Fourcade, Yves Bonnefoy, Philippe Jaccottet, Louis-René Des Forêts, and Alexandre Hollan.

In his most recent volumes, he goes from blue, the color of dream, thought, and the infinite, to white, the poetics of snow. As early as in his second blue-book, *L'instinct de ciel*,[17] he predicted that "the snow will arrive soon." His volume *Chutes de pluie fine* (2002) closes with similar longing: "I waited for the snow to arrive."[18] And his *Pas sur la neige* (2004)[19] already celebrates its arrival. Be it in the form of rain or snow, azure—or more

precisely that which is left to us of it, namely blue, shards of the sky ("the fragments of the golden age")—can only fall. I quote from the cycle *Une incertaine église* (*An Uncertain Church*), found in the volume *A Matter of Blue*:

> Nothing remains but an empty gesture resembling prayer. … Since one's hands are empty, one must clasp them to better sense the emptiness, to lend it form. We offer space for silence where it can take shelter, in part using the body, where it can linger in a fragile flesh-and-blood chapel. … Language itself is a church.
> When the times are no longer amenable to faith, we must love the empty walls and abandoned pews, so god should not become graspable, only his absence observable. The world within us spins out its own time. And it wishes to be reborn on paper. It preserves its future likeness: the light debris of the sky, a few fragments of blue. The time of expectation and further progress.[20]

For, according to this poetics, the orphic poet in constant motion and his language, interwoven with progress, just as love, all have wings, after all. The figure of Orpheus, in any case, also appears in the works of the poets of presence, notably in the cycle *Moraines*, by Jacques Dupin, a member of Bonnefoy's generation. In Dupin's book *L'embrasure* (*The Embrasure*)[21], edited by Poésie/Gallimard, Jean-Pierre Richard lists the recurrent images in Dupin's poetry: lightning, windstorm, intrusion, scattering, disintegration, shipwreck. The integrity of the world expressible poetically can only be discovered in this poetry at the moment of loss and decay. Everything is given, but only in order that we use all force to overcome it and destroy it—including our own selves. The fault line is the gateway leading into the depths. Poetic signification lives from its continual obscuration at the threatening and fertilizing border of the "nonsense." Concerning Giacometti, Dupin writes: "Solitude closes in on the man, but man's fate is to strive ceaselessly and hopelessly to drive a crevice in the wall of his prison." The book's title, *The Embrasure*, thus points to an explanation. The poet is a being in motion, for whom his blindness consists in that he places stepping and speech ahead of vision, just like the mythological figure of Orpheus.

> Il m'est interdit de m'arrêter pour voir. Comme si j'étais condamné à voir en marchant. En parlant. A voir ce dont je parle et à parler justement parce que je ne vois pas. Donc à donner à voir ce que je ne vois pas, ce qu'il m'est interdit de voir. Et que le langage en se déployant heurte et découvre. La cécité signifie l'obligation d'inverser les termes et de poser la marche, la parole, avant le regard. Marcher dans la nuit, parler sous la rumeur, pour que le rayon du jour naissant fuse et réplique à mon pas, désigne la branche, et détache le fruit.[22]

> I am forbidden to stop to see. As if I were condemned to see while walking. While speaking. To see what I am talking about and to speak precisely because I cannot see. Therefore to make visible what I cannot see, what I am forbidden to see. And for language, deploying itself, to run into it and discover it. Blindness signifies the obligation to invert the concepts and to put walking and speech ahead of sight. To walk in the night, to speak under the murmuring, so that the light of the emerging day should burst forth and strengthen my steps, point out the branch, and tear off its fruit.[23]

Pas sur la neige[24]

The title of the other volume of Maulpoix translated into Hungarian by Veronika Kovács, *Pas sur la neige*, has a double meaning: "steps in the snow" and "not on the snow," thanks to the dual meanings of "*pas*." As the volume's epigraph also mentions, *Des pas sur la neige*, the sixth in Claude Debussy's first book of preludes, is the composer's most somber creation. The text reproduces musical mechanisms, and the associative aura of the color white dominates it, in contrast to the blue of the previous two volumes. The figure of Orpheus again makes an appearance: "Imagine Orpheus, far from the mountains of Thrace, as he perishes in the snow."[25]

This book is also the book of longing and memory, as the author writes: "Every poem must record our longing in words that could well be chalk on the snow. In music we must extend our hands with fingers. And our voice by octaves." This is a recollection of his grandmother during his childhood, the snow-woman, the infinity of childhood possibilities and its calm, and the initial impulses to write: "In winter, the benumbed landscape seemed to be waiting for painting. It ossifies, falls silent, and itself comes to resemble the white canvas on which a few figures will be drawn. Nothing distracts the eye: it follows simple lines. The snow escapes from under anecdote."[26] The author chose Alexandre Hollan's words for an epigraph to this section (The Blue Shadow) of the book: "I feel the need for light. This keeps me busy."[27]

The book, however, closes not with the virtual, though colorless completeness, but with the green shades of the poetics of blades of grass, projecting the arrival of a springtime volume: "The heart demands noisy upheavals. Spring cleanings. It awaits the sprouting of new trees, buds, leaves. It wants to feel how the grass grows from within and pokes holes in the sorrow, in the winter's white melancholy. … I was dreaming of a green house. A house that, in springtime, becomes as green as the trees, and that drops its leaves in the fall. A wild grapevine, mixed with roses and locust trees, covers its façade. It allows two red hearts to enter, my ink drawings and snow-covered thoughts."[28]

Notes

1 Jean-Michel Maulpoix came to the Eötvös Collegium at my invitation on two occasions, first in 1998 and then in 2008, when *Une histoire de bleu* appeared in the French Workshop's translation. See the Appendix.
2 Krisztina Tóth (ed.), *A látogatás. Kortárs francia költők* [*The Visit. Contemporary French Poets*], Műfordító Füzetek 8, Budapest/Pécs, JAK—Jelenkor, 1995.
3 Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *A Matter of Blue*, tr. Dawn Cornelio, Rochester, NY, BOA Editions, 2005.
4 *Ibid.*
5 Emphasis added.
6 *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke (1892–1910)*, tr. Jane Bannard Greene and M. D. Herter Norton, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1945, 304.
7 Maulpoix, *Une histoire de bleu*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1992.
8 Tr. P. Czipott, from the original French in *Ibid.*, 14.
9 Augustine, *Confessions*, tr. Arthur Symons (ed.), London, Walter Scott, 1898, 251.
10 *Ibid.*, 251–252.
11 Tr. P. Czipott. Prosaic translation, no official English translation available. János Pilinszky, "Aranykori töredék" [Fragment from the Golden Age], *Összegyűjtött versei* [*Collected Poems*], Budapest, Századvég, 1995, 47–48.
12 "[Le lyrisme] regarde obstinément du côté de l'absolu pour y grimper. Il est le nom le plus humain du désir de divinité qui s'investit dans le langage." Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *Du lyrisme*, Paris, José Corti, 2000, 14.
13 Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *L'écrivain imaginaire*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1994.
14 Maulpoix, "Carnet d'un éphémère," *Une histoire de bleu*, suivi de *L'instinct de ciel*, Poésie/Gallimard, 2005, 83–91.
15 Maulpoix, *Une histoire de bleu*, suivi de *L'instinct de ciel*, Poésie/Gallimard, 2005, 18.
16 Maulpoix, *Une histoire de bleu*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1992, 61. Translated from the French by P. Czipott. "Medusating" reproduces the original neologism, referring to the petrification of those who glance at snake-haired Medusa.
17 Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *L'instinct de ciel*, Paris, Mercure de France, 2000.
18 Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *Chutes de pluie fine*, Paris, Mercure de France, 2002.
19 Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *Pas sur la neige*, Paris, Mercure de France, 2004.
20 Maulpoix, *Une histoire de bleu*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1992, 40 ("Une incertaine église").
21 Jacques Dupin, *Selected Poems*, Paul Auster (ed.), tr. Paul Auster, Stephen Romer and David Shapiro, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Bloodaxe Books, 1992.
22 Jacques Dupin, *L'embrasure précédé de Gravir*, Paris, Poésie/Gallimard, 1971, 139.
23 Translated from the French by P. Czipott.
24 Maulpoix, *Pas sur la neige*, *Ibid.*, (translated into Hungarian as *Nem léptek a hóban* [*Not Steps in the Snow*], tr. Veronika Kovács, Budapest, Ráció Kiadó, 2010).
25 *Ibid.*, 15, 16.
26 *Ibid.*, 49.
27 *Ibid.*, 40.
28 *Ibid.*, 113.

4 Conclusion

Surrealist authors and critics writing for the prestigious *Nouvelle Revue Française* presented in Chapter I of Part I, grappled with several aspects of imagination and images in poetry. Poetic images served to explore the subconscious and dreams through essentially automatic writing. The upsetting and disorientation of the real, which surrealism is invariably characterized by, relates to iconicity and the pictorial turn: mental images, dreams and hallucinations, rhetorical figures and linguistic images, visual arts (painting, photography, film, and theatre). The method itself highlighted other relevant subjects present at that time in the aforementioned N.R.F. and its Hungarian sister *Nyugat:* will and poetic action, the responsibility of intellectuals, and methods of literary criticism. Yves Bonnefoy and the poets of presence, André Du Bouchet, Philippe Jaccottet, Jacques Dupin, and Lorand Gaspar have to contend, in this respect, with the heritage of surrealism. Yves Bonnefoy was the most outstanding thinker on poetic images and their relation to poetic presence. The exaltation and love of poetic images is embraced in his texts with doubts and critical examinations in order not to be trapped in a cheaply bought metaphorical infinity (to use the expression of Jean-Michel Maulpoix). In *Hinterland* he formulates in beautiful images how the poet seeks simplicity of existential and textual presence, and in this quest how one encounters these images. The entire excerpt features in the Appendices of the present volume and demonstrates the attraction toward an other home revealing a non-presence:

> Yes, it's true, our lands are beautiful, I imagine nothing else, I'm at peace with this language, my distant god has not withdrawn but two paces, his epiphany is simple: nevertheless, the idea that true life is over there, in that unlocatable elsewhere, suffices for the here-and-now to take on the aspect of a desert.

Thinking about the duplicity of images is thinking about the acceptance or abolishment of the eventuality of human existence, the ethical posture of creation expressed once again in the closing paragraph of the chosen excerpt from *Hinterland*:

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-4

> In ordinary existence, on the quay of elapsing time, of lost opportunities, of chances as well, miraculous suspensions of the scythe, the young boy saw some young girl, and he "could have" loved her, but that would have been to choose, so commit to the incarnation, to death, and he preferred "to abolish" (always Mallarmé's language) this existence, to refuse to recognize its contradictions, its limits, which would have spoken to him of his own, for the reward in essence, in the infinite, outside time. And in doing so, he had thought to save her from nothingness: hadn't he made of her a queen? But queen of a world without substance, without future, because he had used it only for his dreams, his works, and with that, she instantly disappeared, through the flaw in the writing, from her life in him in any case, which then would be a form, not a destiny. All and nothing.

The take of arts is nothing less than realizing destiny instead of form—such could be the ethic of human life for the artists presented in Parts I and II of our book. Poetic images seemingly find their place in the presence, or at least realm, of theatrical performance. The interrelation of poetry and theater lead to diverse actualizations: poetry itself has its theatricality, if we think of T. S. Eliot, Mallarmé, or Yves Bonnefoy (the latter of whom also called one of his poetic cycles Théâtre in *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve)*. This staging of theater on paper of an "exact presence" that lives on the increasing blood reborn where the poem tears apart in Bonnefoy's poetry seems to repeat the poetic ritual of the vibratory almost-disappearance of a natural fact in Mallarmé's poetic world. As if it were the secular prefiguration, a heavenless repetition (rite) of the foundational withdrawal (kenotic) act (to be developed in Part II of this book). It also implies the elocutory disappearance of the poet ("disparition élocutoire du poète"). These poems, or poems in general, can also be a starting point for a performance which becomes by its materiality definitively a poetic theater. At a third level, one can differentiate a theater where metaphors and their metonymic nature become the directing principle of the direction rather than causal and temporal relations. Part II of the book deals principally with the latter two cases.

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Part II

Theatrical presence, poetic rituality, and the theater of kenotic rituals

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5 Methodological considerations and the Hungarian context of reception

The second part of the book presents a few theatrical practices that attempt the destruction and reconstruction of the human "idol" (Jerży Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Eugenio Barba, János Pilinszky, Valère Novarina), and that make use of the tool of poetry in this process. The common feature of these theatrical practices, among which we focus on the French writer, director, and painter Valère Novarina's oeuvre, is that they repeat the process of self-emptying not only in their dramaturgy but also, fundamentally, in their direction. Part II, therefore, and without denying various inspirations for his theatrical practice (e.g., Taoism), attempts to make use of the theological concept of *kenosis*, of central importance in Novarina's oeuvre, for theatrical and dramatological purposes. In this effort it relies particularly on the theological esthetics of H.U. von Balthasar, the works of Xavier Tilliette, the theatrical and kenotic concepts of Simone Weil, as well as on the theological writings of Calvin, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Kitamori Kazoh. The phenomenon of kenotic rituality within the conceptual frame of poetic rituality seems to transcend the dichotomy image vs. presence.

To provide an overview of the different connections between emptying and ritual for the analysis of Novarina's theater, I call on not only the classics (Gluckman, van Gennep, Turner) but also Artaud, who calls theater spatial poetry that uses language metaphorically: it exchanges everyday meaning for another one. Developing the thought further with Richard Schechner, we can also say that in the theater, "real events" are revealed as metaphors fundamentally tied to rites. The "poetic ritual" of art goes further, to become self-reflexive, self-questioning. The spectator approaches this self-enclosing object anamorphically, when it is a matter of ritual. In other words, it is only in being immersed in the rite that certain meanings become visible.

A recurrent scene in Valère Novarina's works is that of communal eating, the supper, just as the central recurrent theme is the consumption of words. It is a biblical theme, on account of the Last Supper, too, and aside from this, it also represents the dynamic opposite of self-emptying. The other ritual, which defines the fundamental dramaturgy, is the threefold unity of statement–denial–new statement: Novarina completes the bodily and physical metaphor of the theater as (the Lord's) supper by denying it in the same

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-5

essay. The anti-selves [anti-personnes] of Novarina's theater, his reversibly operating time, actions, and statements relate to theater as *via negativa*.

Part II goes beyond the anthropological (Schechner, Turner, etc.) approach of the subject by valuing the terms of "poetic" and "kenotic" rituality. That perspective opens the interest toward the subject known thus far almost exclusively in the German-language-speaking area (Wolfgang Braungart and Saskia Fischer). Another important objective of Part II is to further highlight the major poetry and theater of the Hungarian János Pilinszky (translated into English by Ted Hughes and Peter Jay), an inadequately known Central European turning point in facing and interpreting the Holocaust. This chapter examines his views on spectatorship and witnessing at a time when liturgy and ritual overlapped in Wilson's thinking theater. My inquiry is based primarily on two letters that I discovered in the early Robert Wilson Archives at Columbia University.

The present chapter examines the first part's key concept of presence from the perspective of the actor as a human being *par excellence*, with the help of a theological concept—*kenosis*—used by directors without reference to Christianity, since the process is also found in different world religions and spiritual practices. The difficulty arises in the fact that it relates artistic results of human creativity to the world of theology, as also in the case of more commonly used concepts in the same semantic field—such as sacral, holy, ritual, liturgical; creating an idea of *theatrum theologicum*.[1] Even though, according to some, art originates from religious roots, and man, created in the Creator's image, thus (also) becomes a creator, the proximity of the term nonetheless conceals a trap. Methodologically, it would be objectionable to highlight merely analogical connections (since the theater is not a church). In contemporary Hungary, however, one experiences a growing interest in the topic (and in Europe, ever since the 1930s, thanks to the influence of Artaud or Claudel, who, on account of their attraction to the sacral theater of, respectively, Bali and Japan, turned to the topic with the intent of implementing it as playwrights). This is signaled by the ever-enlivening discourse on the theme: events, publications, and workshops surrounding *Szcenárium* [Scenario] and *Magyar Művészet* [Hungarian Art] analyzing the connections between liturgy and theater, organized as intellectual laboratories. Further evidence is found in the *Ars Sacra* Festival extending to the whole breadth of the nation's territory, or István Jelenczki's documentary film *Ön-tér-kép* [Self-map or National Self-Image][2] presenting national display using the methodology of systemic constellations (Bert Hellinger) at nation level. This film, whose scholarly viewpoint may well be open to question, has cathartic moments, one of which occurs when the actor called "the nation" achieves contact with the sacral quality he has long borne within himself. The universities supported by historical denominations but also featuring secular departments have also contributed significantly to a deepening of the theme, having organized several conferences and publishing several volumes on it in recent years.

This is the context which made possible the Hungarian performances of the Novarina oeuvre, both during the rehearsals at the Csokonai Theater in Debrecen and in guest productions at the National Theater in Budapest. These Novarina productions included stagings of *Imaginary Operetta* in Debrecen (2009) and at the Odéon in Paris (2010) with Hungarian actors under Novarina's direction, the production of *In the Pool of Names* in the MITEM (Madách International Theater Meeting, Budapest) season with French actors and Hungarian surtitles under Novarina's direction in 2016, the staging of *Thus Spake Louis de Funès* with Tibor Mészáros, directed by Novarina and Adélaïde Pralon, likewise under MITEM auspices in 2016,[3] and finally, the staged reading of *An Incomprehensible Mother Tongue* in my translation, with Anna Ráckevei, Tibor Mészáros, and music by Lajos Pál, in 2016 at the French Institute.[4] To these, one can add the production, premiering on 24 February 2017, of Michel de Ghelderode's *The Lord's Comedians—Pictures of the Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, in which Yvette Bozsik's direction and choreography, as well as Zsófia Rideg's retranslation and dramaturgy, employed such precise changes of rhythm as characterize only the greatest of performances. We can also place Attila Vidnyánszky's productions in the ranks of theatrical creations of ritual aspect: his 2016 theatrical productions starring Zsolt Trill and Mari Törőcsik, associated with the films *Fairytale Winged Men* and *The Boy Become a Stag*; likewise, his 2017 productions of *Crime and Punishment* with the actors of St. Petersburg's Alexandrinsky Theater, which we will teach as part of theater history for a long time to come.

This theatrical school also hosted many productions that elaborated on this artistic conception, giving it new colors: Ivan Vyrypaev's drama *Drunkards*, directed by Victor Rizakov, Stanislaw Wyspiański's *Acropolis*, directed by the artistic director of Szczecin's Contemporary Theater, also part of MITEM in 2016, or Silviu Purcărete's interpretation of *Faust* in 2017.

Of enormous influence on that innovator of twentieth-century western theater Antonin Artaud was the ancient dance drama of Bali, of which one of its most important representatives, I Wayan Bawa, introduced *Gambuh* as the guest of our National Theater. That work is the oldest Balinese ritual dance drama, dating to the fifteenth century; in terms of its age and theatrical toolkit, it is comparable to the Japanese Noh theater or the Indian Kathakali. The production introduced the work to the layman public as a master class in the connections between Balinese religious ceremony and theatrical artistic forms. The major portion of the production was devoted to an introduction to *topeng*, the well-known mask-dance of Bali. The same term is likewise the name of any production featuring masked characters. Topeng takes its stories from the chronicle of the kings of Bali, presenting the social, religious, and political aspects of Bali's convoluted hierarchy. I Wayan Bawa briefly explained the characters represented by each mask: actors wearing masks fully covering the face remain mute; those with half-masks, on the other hand, speak; the role of dancers wearing the *penasar* (ceremonial dress) is to explain

the story to the audience, and those wearing comic *bonré* (clown masks) interact with the audience. I Wayan Bawa followed the explanation with a performance of a closed-form piece (Figure 5.1).

The singer and dancer from West Bengal Parvathy Baul was also the Theater's guest artist (also performing in the production of Barba's *The Tree*, which was presented in Budapest during the same run). In an interview given at the time, he had this to say about Baul tradition:

> We Bauls celebrate love, both internal and external. The essence of this tradition is for you to find the divine within yourself, honest love, expressed in devotion. However, we first require self-control, attained by various means; we must learn to use several different methods to control our bodies and minds. One must be similarly disciplined as an artist. Finally, we can attain a state of sober attentiveness via music, dance, and speech, thus becoming present within ourselves. For you can know others when you know yourself. In order to understand others, we must first know ourselves. This is what our masters teach. The Baul tradition is very ancient. The guru always hands it on to his student by word of mouth, which is why our history has no written documents: we cannot validate our tradition using manuscripts.[5]

The Bauls, combining traditions of Hinduism and Islam, had great influence on Grotowski as well, primarily in reinforcing his impression that artistic and spiritual development go hand in hand.[6]

The efforts of the well-known choreographer and dancer Josef Nadj, who took over direction of Trafó—House of Contemporary Arts and who lived

Figure 5.1 Masks used by I Wayan Bawa (Photo: E. Sepsi).

and by now lives again in France, have much in common with the efforts of the above-mentioned creators in the actualization of poetic rituality on stage. It is no accident that in December 2016, Trafó mounted Peter Brook's *Battlefield*. The production shown in Budapest freezes the instant following the battle scene of the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*, during its seventy-minute duration. The predecessor of this production by thirty years was a stage work and film by Brook that took nine hours to relate the entire story. Brook renewed the stage decades ago by stripping the stage and creating a simple, purified world in his productions. This production also plays with three fundamental colors, saffron, blue, and red; these three scarves constitute the basic scenery and costuming simultaneously (it is worth mentioning that these three basic colors also appear in Yves Bonnefoy's *The Alchemist of Color*, in the text cited in Part I of this volume). Ottó Tolnai, the Hungarian poet and dramaturg from Palics (Palić, Serbia), who was a considerable inspiration for the metaphors in Josef Nadj's performances, can also be considered as a significantly inspiring source of poetic and ritualistic theatre, where metaphors in space (Artaud) are the key elements of theatrical performances (see *Roses,* directed by András Urbán in 2010 in Subotica, based on *Rose of Chișinău [Kisinyovi rózsa]*, a poem by Ottó Tolnai, but almost wordless).

The growing interest in ritual and poetic theater forms facilitated the reception of Valère Novarina's theater. Among Novarina's works, the first to appear in Hungarian was *The Lights of the Body*, in 2008 in Zsófia Rideg's translation, and on that occasion I was asked to write a foreword to the book. That was followed by the translation of *Ash Wednesday*. We published two further translations in 2009: *The Imaginary Operetta* and a volume of essays representing a selection from *Devant la parole*, *Théâtre des paroles*, and *L'Envers de l'esprit*, which appeared later from the publishing house P.O.L. This Hungarian edition of the essays, which bears the title *A cselekvő szó színháza* [The Theater of the Active Word], is organized around two thematic nodal points: on the one hand, the concept of the image—as well as concrete examples of paintings—and, on the other hand, texts on the themes of level surfaces and space. The texts introduce the active Word, namely speech, in this space (*Language Remembers*, *For Louis de Funès*).

In the following chapters I shall rely on recent productions, as well as their texts, that Novarina himself produced on the stage: *The Imaginary Operetta* in Hungarian, in Debrecen (2009) and the Odéon in Paris (2010), *The Unknown Act*, which he directed in 2007 in the inner courtyard of the papal palace in Avignon, as well *as L'Homme hors de lui* [Man Beside Himself] created in 2017 and *L'Animal imaginaire* [The Imaginary Animal] in 2019, both in Théâtre national de la Colline.

Notes

1 Expression used by András Visky for Silviu Purcărete's direction of *The Tragedy*

of Man. The expression is borrowed from a 1668 book of Daniel Fesselius. (András Visky, *Mire való a színház, útban a theatrum theologicum felé* [*What is the Theater Good For? On the Road Toward the Theatrum Theologicum*], Budapest, Károli Gáspár University/L'Harmattan, 2020, 13.) I used *theatrum theologicum* earlier for János Pilinszky's and Simone Weil's theater, both considering theater as a place where philosophical Thought (in the Mallarméan sense) is being formulated and tested in movement. (Enikő Sepsi, *Le "théâtre" immobile de János Pilinszky—lu dans l'optique de Mallarmé, Simone Weil et Robert Wilson*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2014, 35–36 or "Theatrum philosophicum: le dépassement du moi" [Theatrum philosophicum: Overcoming the Self], in G. Gutbrod, J. Janiaud and E. Sepsi (eds.), *Simone Weil—philosophie, mystique, esthétique* [*Simone Weil—Philosophy, Mysticism, Esthetics*], Paris, Archives Karéline, 2012, 35–53).

2 *Ön-tér-kép. A magyar nemzet lelkiállapota I–II* [*National Self-Image. The Spiritual State of the Hungarian Nation I–II*], 2016, directed by István Jelenczki; lead expert: Annamária Zseni.

3 One month before the production, as part of Training Week, an open rehearsal took place at the Károli Gáspár University in Budapest for the benefit of the dramatic arts students. Participants included Valère Novarina, Tibor Mészáros, Adélaïde Pralon, Zsófia Rideg, and Eszter Gerda Miklós. The event was organized by Enikő Sepsi and Zsófia Rideg (17 March 2016).

4 Valère Novarina, *Érthetetlen anyanyelv.* Zenés felolvasóest beszélgetéssel [*An Incomprehensible Mother Tongue*. Musical staged reading with post-performance conversation]. Participants: Valère Novarina, Anna Ráckevei, Enikő Sepsi (tr. of the script), Tibor Mészáros and Lajos Pál. Budapest French Institute, 16 March 2016.

5 https://nemzetiszinhaz.hu/eloadas/parvathy-baul-koncertje/kapcsolodo-tartalmak (accessed 26 February 2017).

6 Alicia Corral Alonso, *El canto como herramienta de verticalidad en Grotowski y los Bāul de Bengala* [*Song as a Means of Verticality in Grotowski and the Bauls of Bengal*], https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/13300367.pdf (accessed 26 February 2017).

6 Kenosis in theology

Kenotic theology is the Christian form of so-called negative theology, as a radical version of the theology of the Cross. Its origins, however, lie not in Christology but rather display neo-Platonic and speculative features. According to Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Theological Esthetics*,[1] the beautiful in esthetics is also what constitutes glory in theology.[2] This shone forth most completely in the self-emptying, the kenosis, in the face of Jesus Christ as he died on the Cross. The entirety of God's revelation centers on the divine-human figure of Jesus Christ. Everything beautiful in the world is the revelation of hidden divine beauty. This is an epiphany that is simultaneously kenosis: the radiance of God's hidden glory into the void, into sin—indeed, into the abandonment of God: God so loves his creation that he empties himself in Jesus Christ. Even at the moment of Christ's embodiment, we can experience God's glory and self-emptying. The Word becomes flesh, the Logos already bears in itself the attraction to the Cross, to Christ's death: Christ's Cross is inscribed into nature from the very beginning. This image, incidentally, also appears not only in Simone Weil's philosophy to be discussed later, but also in the vision of theater created by Valère Novarina (and he detects this spatial Cross in Piero della Francesca's painting *Mary with the Infant Jesus*, in his essay *Fragile Shelter*[3]). In the third chapter, entitled "Kenosis and the New Image of God," of his work *The Theology of the Three Days*, Balthasar presents the Cross as the image of the foundation of creation, and in this connection he cites Bulgakov: "Christ's Cross is inscribed in nature from the beginning of beginnings."[4] In other words, Christ's redeeming Passion finds its origin right in creation, "since God takes responsibility for the success of creation from eternity (an addition to human freedom), and foreseeing sin, in His providence, he 'takes the Cross into account'."[5]

In the chapter entitled "Beauty and Kenosis" from his *Theological Esthetics*, Balthasar quotes from Hamann's *Esthetics*: "The philosophical spirit displays its strength in striving, with the help of abstraction, to make the present not real; by *stripping* real objects into careful concepts and purely conceptual characteristics, mere appearances and phenomena. The poetic spirit displays its strength by *elevating* its visions that are not present, belonging to the past and future, into *real images* with the help of its

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-6

imagination."[6] In the subchapter entitled "Analogy in Protestantism," he terms true poetry "the natural form of prophecy,"[7] poetic inspiration "(concealed) prophecy," and language "(hidden divine) revelation."[8] "Poetry rises to prophecy, which can descend upon it."[9] And expanding the whole, he also cites Hamann's thought according to which, between God and man "is the similarity to the relationship between the word and the thing it signifies"; in other words, man and Creator are, in this respect, analogous. This image of humanity will also arise in Novarina's works.

In Balthasar's writing, the concept of Christian kenosis strongly connects to self-surrender, and self-emptying to its physical form: fasting. This self-surrender, however, is at once the banner of fertility ("the seed that does not die …"[10]).

As the student of Jean Wahl and Vladimir Jankelevich, and starting from Schelling and Maurice Blondel, the Jesuit philosopher and theologian Xavier Tilliette tries to make Christology accessible to philosophy. With this in mind, he expands the scope of metaphysics by distinguishing it from theology.[11] In his study on the Trinity and nature, he emphasizes that Christ was aware that he was the banner of God's acts, and he did not exploit this privilege.[12] His philosophical texts are filled with scattered literary allusions: in this study, he calls Malebranche's spirituality "kenotic" and states that in this respect, it stands under the influence of Charles de Condren.[13] In his *L'Exinanition du Christ*, Tilliette identifies the mystery of Christ's kenosis, his self-emptying, with the mystery of the Incarnation. He writes that the epistle to the Philippians announces this identity in the words of the Christ-hymn. That rhythmic text constantly returns to the paradox embodied in Christ, to the highest expression of kenosis.[14] The *exinanitio* signifies the condition of his own debasement/descent. *Exinanitio* (Latin: "emptiness," "emptying," "weakening") is also translated as *self-abasement*,[15] which also encompasses the taking of human form and the suffering on the Cross. The other branch is that of exaltation or *exaltatio*, and both appear in the Christ-hymn.[16] *Inanitio* is related to the concept of kenosis because the Latin word also alludes to the fact that He did not remain in his divine glory but descended among us, becoming human, and even undertaking death.

One of the sixteenth century's great Lutheran disputes referred to the connection between *exinanitio*, *exaltatio*, and *kenosis*: the Brentz-Chemnitz debate, which Balthasar also discusses in his *Theology of the Three Days*. According to Chemnitz, Christ's humanity had to have partaken of the omnipotence of His divine nature, but only as a potential, actualized only when Christ's will permitted it (complete and free *kenosis*). In contrast, according to Brentz the conditions of *exinanitio* and *exaltatio* were coextensive: both were always present, but Christ's omnipresence often remained hidden from the standpoint of *oeconomia* (*crypsis*).[17]

We also encounter analyses of the epistle to the Philippians (2:5–9), source of the concept of kenosis, in two further representatives of Protestant theology, John Calvin and Karl Barth. Calvin presents his interpretation of 2:7–8 in his work:[18]

7 *He emptied Himself.* This emptying is the same as self-abasement, as we shall later see. The expression (ἐμφατικωτέρως), however, means more emphatically *being brought to nothing*. The apostle further explains: Christ, indeed, could not divest himself of Godhead but kept it concealed for a time, so that his divinity not reveal itself under the weakness of the flesh. Hence, he laid aside his glory in the view of men not by lessening it, but by concealing it. It is asked whether he did this as man. Erasmus answers in the affirmative. But where was the form of God before he became man? Hence we must reply that Paul speaks of Christ wholly, as he was God manifested in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16) but, nevertheless, this emptying is applicable exclusively to his humanity, as if I should say of man, "Man being mortal, he is exceedingly senseless if he thinks of nothing but the world," I refer indeed to man wholly; but at the same time I ascribe mortality only to a part of him, namely, to the body. As, then, Christ has one person, consisting of two natures, it is with propriety that Paul says, that he who was the Son of God—in reality equal to God—did nevertheless lay aside his glory, when he in the flesh manifested himself in the appearance of a servant. It is also asked, secondly, how he can be said to be emptied, while he, nevertheless, invariably proved himself, by miracles and excellences, to be the Son of God, and in whom, as John testifies, there was always to be seen a glory worthy of the Son of God (John 1:14)? I answer that the abasement of the flesh was, notwithstanding, like a veil, by which his divine majesty was concealed. On this account he did not wish that his transfiguration should be made public until after his resurrection; and when he perceives that the hour of his death is approaching, he then says, "Father, glorify thy Son" (John 17:1). Hence, too, Paul teaches elsewhere, that he was declared to be the Son of God by means of his resurrection (Romans 1:4). He also declares in another place (2 Corinthians 13:4) that he suffered through the weakness of the flesh. *In fine*, the image of God shone forth in Christ in such a manner, that he was, at the same time, abased in his outward appearance, and brought down to nothing in the estimation of men; for he carried about with him the form of a servant, and had assumed our nature, expressly with the view of his being a servant of the Father, nay, even of men. … We must always keep in view what I said a little ago, that such abasement was voluntary.

8 *He became obedient*. Even this was great humility—that from being Lord he became a servant; but he says that he went farther than this, because, while he was not only immortal, but the Lord of life and death, he nevertheless became obedient to his Father, even so far as to endure death. This was extreme abasement, especially when we take into view the kind of death, which he immediately adds, with the view of enhancing it. For by dying in this manner he was not only

> covered with ignominy in the sight of God, but was also accursed in the sight of God. It is assuredly such a pattern of humility as ought to absorb the attention of all mankind; so far is it from being possible to unfold it in words in a manner suitable to its dignity.
>
> 9 *Therefore God hath highly exalted.* By adding consolation, he shews that abasement, to which the human mind is averse, is in the highest degree desirable. There is no one, it is true, but will acknowledge that it is a reasonable thing that is required from us, when we are exhorted to imitate Christ. This consideration, however, stirs us up to imitate him the more cheerfully, when we learn that nothing is more advantageous for us than to be conformed to his image. Now, that all are happy who, along with Christ, voluntarily abase themselves, he shews by his example; for from the most abject condition he was exalted to the highest elevation. Everyone therefore that humbles himself will in like manner be exalted. Who would now be reluctant to exercise humility, by means of which the glory of the heavenly kingdom is attained.[19]

Here Calvin unambiguously refers to the fact that following Christ is tightly bound to the abasement of kenosis. In explicating kenosis, however, compared to the earlier authors (with the exception of Brentz) he deviates in holding that self-emptying is, here, not self-diminution or stepping out of His divine nature in the interest of incarnation, but concealment of His divine nature.

In his work *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth emphasizes that Christ's taking human form does not mean any sort of enclosedness or weakening of divinity, because not even in His descent did He cease to be other than who He is: the Son of God.[20]

> The word *ἐκένωσεν* in Phil. 2:7 certainly does not mean this. It says that "being in the form of God," enjoying it, freely disposing of it (*ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων*) He carried through a self-emptying, that is, He took the form of a servant (*μορφὴν δούλου*). The *κένωσις* consists in a renunciation of His being in the form of God alone. … As God, therefore, (without ceasing to be God) He could be known only to Himself, but unknown as such in the world and for the world. His divine majesty could be in this alien form. It could be a hidden majesty. He could, therefore, humble Himself in this form. He could be obedient in the determination corresponding to the being of this form, although contradicting point blank the actualization of this form by other men.[21] He could be obedient even to death, even to the death of the cross. He had this other possibility: the possibility of divine self-giving to the being and fate of man. He had the freedom for this condescension, for this concealment of His Godhead. He had it and He made use of it in the power and not with any loss, not with any diminution or alteration of His Godhead. That is His self-emptying.[22]

Following this, Barth refers to the Latin text of Calvin's *Institutio*, which reinforces his interpretation, of course much earlier. The English version of the Hungarian translation of this passage from the *Institutio* sounds thus:

> Then they [the Catholic Church] also want to impose upon us the nonsense that when God's Word became flesh, then it became enclosed within the narrow prison of His earthly body. This is sheer impudence, since, even though we say that the Word's infinite essence fused together with human nature in a single Person, we don't imagine any sort of imprisonment by it. For the Son of God descended miraculously from heaven in a way that he did not leave heaven, after all, so that in a miraculous manner the Virgin bore him in her womb, He sought to walk the earth and hang on the cross, but in such a way that, as it ever was since the beginning, he unceasingly filled the entire world.[23]

In summary, we can highlight that the *imitatio Christi* also signifies the reproducibility of kenosis, that adopting Christ's image accompanies human descent, the destruction of the human idol (image), and transfiguration. At the same time, the word "*imitatio*" can suggest that it concerns a sort of willful act. In the chapter entitled "Self-salvation and its Dead-ends" of his *Systematic Theology*, Paul Tillich emphasizes four forms of self-salvation: legalism, asceticism, the mystical path to self-salvation, and the sacramental, dogmatic, and emotional paths. The divine sacramental presence—Tillich points out in his conclusion—stands in direct opposition to self-salvation. "The mere performance of the accepted rites or the mere participation in a sacramental act is considered to have saving power. The sacrament is given, and, as such, it is understood to negate self-salvation. But the way in which it is used opens wide the door for a self-saving attitude."[24]

Aside from the brief literary allusions in their work, in their essence, the scholarly works of Balthasar and Tilliette do not consider the possible relationship between kenosis and literature or kenosis and theater, even though it may well be that this also is part of the experiential reality of the *imitatio Christi*. More distantly related but still worth mention is the work of the Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori, entitled *Theology of the Pain of God*,[25] which takes its analogy expressly from the traditional kabuki father –son conflict-system (the son sacrificed by the parent),[26] when he suddenly speaks of God's loathing of sin and His love of mankind, which unite on the Cross in the divine suffering of God sacrificing his Son.[27]

Notes

1 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. II, Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1985; Originally published in German as *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik*. 3 volumes, Einsiedeln, Johannes, 1961–1969.
2 "Beauty is the hidden form of eschatological transfiguration."
3 Valère Novarina, Demeure fragile [Fragile Shelter], in Novarina, *Devant la parole*, Paris, P.O.L, 1999, 93–97.
4 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A három nap teológiája* (*The Theology of the Three Days*) (original title in German: *Theologie der drei Tage*), Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 1999, 35.

5 *Ibid*., 34–35.
6 *Ibid*., 639; emphases are my own.
7 *Ibid*., 647.
8 *Ibid*., 648.
9 *Ibid*., 647.
10 John 12:24.
11 Xavier Tilliette, *Le Christ des philosophes. Du Maître de sagesse au divin Témoin*, Série "Ouvertures," Namur, Culture et Vérité, 1999 [1993].
12 Xavier Tilliette, "Trinity and Creation," *Communio: International Catholic Review*, Rodenkirchen, Vol. 28, N° 2, 2001, 300.
13 *Ibid*., 301.
14 Xavier Tilliette, "L'Exinanition du Christ: théologies de la kénose," in *Les quatres fleuves, Cahiers de recherche et de réflexion religieuses*, N° 4, Paris, Seuil, 1975, 50.
15 In English in the original. Benoît Bourgine, "The Christology of Karl Barth," in Stuart George Hall (ed.), *Jesus Christ Today. Studies in Christology in Various Contexts. Proceedings of the Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses, Oxford 25–29 August 2006 and Princeton 25–30 August 2007* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann, 146), Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2009, 179–208.
16 Philippians 2:6–11.
17 Balthasar, *A három nap teológiája* (*The Theology of the Three Days*), 30.
18 John Calvin, *Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, Grand Rapids, MI, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009. Available online as well, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom42.html
19 *Ibid*., 47–49.
20 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV/1, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, tr. G. W. Bromiley, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1956, 179–180.
21 The English text at this point is murky: in the German version, the second part of the sentence is an inserted clause that refers to the fact that any other human could scarcely have actualized this sort of debasement to death. "Er könnte sich also in dieser Gestalt demütigen, in der dem Wesen dieser anderen Gestalt entsprechenden—der Verwirklichung dieser Gestalt durch alle anderen Menschen freilich höchst wiedersprechenden—bestimmung gemäss gehorsam sein: bis zum Tode, zum Kreuzestode." (Vol. 4/1, 196).
22 *Ibid*., 180.
23 John Calvin, Institutio Christianae Religionis 1559, Vol. 1 (in Hungarian), Reformed Church Library, New Series 7/1, Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó, 2014, 364–365. (Inst. 2.13.4) [translated from the Hungarian by P. Czipott]. English translation available: http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Calvin%20Institutes%20of%20Christian%20Religion.pdf (accessed 9 December 2019).
24 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol II, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1957, 85.
25 Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, Richmond, VA, John Knox Press, 1965.
26 *Ibid*., 177.
27 Jürgen Moltmann in his *Der Gekrauzigte Gott* [*The Crucified God*] takes issue with several of Kitamori's statements. At the same time, Kitamori's work does not stand far from that of the late nineteenth—early twentieth-century Russian thinker, Nikolai Berdyayev, nor from Sergei Nikolaievich Bulgakov, to the extent that they also opine that God's suffering is an unavoidable part of the experience of love, of the state of connectedness which is the fundamental characteristic of the divine.

7 Kenosis in Simone Weil's mysticism

Mysticism, in Simone Weil's explication, connects intimately to the concepts of good and evil: that is to say, a human finds the opposition of good and evil unbearable. "An Albigensian tradition says that the devil used the following words to tempt the creatures: you're not free with God because you can only do good. Follow me, and you will enjoy the power to do good or evil, as you please." Man followed the devil, received what he had been promised, except for the fact that in his thrall, he feels like the little child who seized a glowing coal in his hand. He can toss the coal away in three ways. The first method is irreligious, consisting of denying the opposition between good and evil. The second method is idolatry. It is a religious method as long as we use the term in the way the French sociologists understood it: worship of social reality under the name of various gods. Plato compared it to the cult of large beasts. The third method is mysticism. "Mysticism is surpassing the opposition of good and evil in such a way that the soul unites with the absolute good. The absolute good is not the same as the good which is evil's opposite and correlative pair, although it is its model and foundation. The good is also no sinless state because it is no state at all, but a perpetual action.[1] The unification of the soul with the absolute good is a real event."[2]

We extend the discussion of Tilliette, or rather of his explicator Emmanuel Gabellieri—which we can read in his *Être et don*[3]—by noting that in Weil's thought, the Holy Trinity transcends the dichotomy of "good" and "evil" in the descent and human incarnation, by the fact of Christ's witnessing for Truth. Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:5–9) reads thus about God's self-emptying, His kenosis: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name …."[4] In 1941–1942, in Marseille, Simone Weil reads the Pauline epistles straight through, copies the entire text into her notebooks, and even translates them. She even

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-7

extracts individual Greek words to explicate them: about "*ekenósen*" she writes: "il s'est vidé prenant l'essence d'un esclave," and she explains "being in the form of God" thus: "ayant pour substance l'essence divine."[5] In her *Philosophy and Kenosis*, Christine Hof demonstrates philologically that Weil's concept of kenosis has Christian roots and becomes deeply rooted in her oeuvre through her study of the relevant portion of the epistle to the Philippians; it arrives at the determination that love is the giving of oneself ("don de soi").[6]

By that point, Simone Weil had dealt a great deal with Christ's prototypes and the philosophical traditions around self-emptying, as she had encountered them in the *Bhagavad Gita* and in Taoist philosophy. Having noted the descent–elevation dual motion both in the philosophy of Antiquity and in the Indo-European tradition, she saw the universality of Christianity in it.[7] Her *Pre-Christian Intuitions* indeed takes account of these precursors.

In her *Notebooks*, Weil, writing about poetry, alludes to Virgil's sixth Eclogue: "Symbole de Pan (λόγος) surpris dans son sommeil par les bergers, enchaîné, et achetant la liberté par un poème. C'est la notion mallarméenne de la poésie."[8] Mallarméan verse—in Simone Weil's reading—is a liberation, the purification of the imagination. Pan, plenitude, God of Nature, the central element of orphic tradition, the image of *logos* in the *Pre-Christian Intuitions*, is nonetheless absolutely not the poet of the sixth Eclogue, subtitled *Song of Silenus*. Silenus is Pan's or Hermes's son and tutor of Dionysus, the latter being "the overflowing," and in this respect, according to Weil, Christ's prototype.[9] Silenus composes poems for his own salvation, and this is why Pan (*logos*) or Silenus can be associated with Christ. But Simone Weil goes even farther: "l'usage de la lune comme symbole du Fils convient d'autant mieux que la lune soumit une diminution, une disparition, puis renaît; ainsi elle convient aussi comme symbole de la Passion."[10] The waning, disappearing, then waxing moon is likewise the Son, and as such, symbol of the Passion; Apollo's lyre, and in particular the shape of his instrument, also evokes the waxing moon, the moon-like growth, and the shape of horns. "Pan lui aussi est un dieu cornu. Son nom veut dire tout. Platon nomme sans cesse l'Ame du Monde le tout et il dit dans le *Cratyle* que Pan est le *logos*."[11] Pan, *logos*, also bears horns. According to Weil's hypothesis, everything that is moon-like and is connected to vegetal fluids also symbolizes the Word.

This is also why the kenotic imitation of Christ, for man, also encompasses rebirth from the water:

> Acquiescence is divine love, God's soul within us. Blind obedience is the inertia of matter, its motionless inertness evokes in our imaginations the simultaneously resistant and fluid element, the image of water. At the instant we acquiesce in obedience, we are born from water and spirit. From that point on, we will be beings comprised solely of spirit and water.[12]

It is in this obedient state that we become, as *imitatio Christi*, mediums in the Weilian sense, intermediaries, but even more mediations, relations, self-giving ("don de soi"), on the model of the Holy Trinity:

> We, in so far as it is granted to us to imitate Christ, have this extraordinary privilege of being, to a certain degree, mediators between God and His own creation.
>
> But the Christ is Mediation itself, and Harmony itself. Philolaus said: "Things which are neither of the same species nor of the same nature, nor of the same station need to be locked together under key by a harmony capable of maintaining them in a universal order." Christ is that key which locks together the Creator and creation. Since knowledge is the reflection of being, the Christ is also, is by that same token, the key of knowledge. "Woe unto you, lawyers!," said he, "for you have taken away the key of knowledge."[13] He was that key, He whom earlier centuries had loved in advance, and whom the Pharisees had denied and were going to put to death.[14]

In Simone Weil's image of the passion, which began at the creation, Christ as the key, or more precisely His passion and crucifixion, almost opened the door, almost separated the Father from the Son on the one hand, and the Creator from the created world, on the other. The door opened a crack. The resurrection closed it again.

In the chapter entitled *The Descent of God* in Weil's *Pre-Christian Intuitions*, necessity is associated with the second Person of the Trinity, whom she regards as the director (or adjuster) at some points, and as the World Soul at others. I quote this little-known text in its entirety, from the Weil centenary volume of studies, *Simone Weil—Philosophy, Mysticism, Esthetics*:

> Just as the world's order is a divine Person in the Godhead, which we can call the directing Word or the World Soul, in a similar fashion necessity is a condition within us, or rather, within the operation of our thinking. "For the eyes of the mind," says Spinoza, "are none other than proofs."[15] We have no power to change the sum of the squares of the sides of a right triangle, but neither does the sum exist if the mind does not operate and cannot grasp the proof. In the realm of integers, one can stand eternally next to one, and never shall they become two, if the mind does not complete the process of addition. Only the attentive intelligence is capable of creating relations, and as soon as the attention flags, the relations dissolve.[16]

With his love, God (Christ) descending into the world also inscribes His attributes into reality: numbers, physical laws, which, in Weil's world of

thought, the centrally located attention without an object learns to solve in the course of the daily practice of the de-created I. These coded attributes only become intelligible to a complete attentiveness. Attention without an object is, in Simone Weil's writing, an inheritance from her professor at the École Normale Supérieure, while its origin can be sought in the Indian and Chinese (Taoist) traditions mentioned earlier.[17] This attention, the creative attention, is also the earthly image of one of God's attributes:

> Intellectual attention—because of its power—becomes the image of God's Wisdom. God creates in the act of thinking. We, for our part, do not create with intellectual/spiritual attention, we do not bring anything into existence, yet in our own sphere of influence, in a certain sense we evoke reality.[18]

Creation of reality arises from the recognition of necessity and the relations representing necessity, as a consequence of the maintenance and daily exercise of attention:

> The right triangle's adherence to the relation that forbids it from stepping outside the circle whose diameter equals its hypotenuse is an analogue of the behavior of a person who refuses to obtain power and money by cheating. The first case can be regarded as a perfect model of the second. We can say the same when one has perceived mathematical necessity in nature, of the fidelity of floating bodies in rising out of water precisely as much as their density exacts, no more and no less. Heraclitus says, "The sun shall not go beyond its boundaries; otherwise the Erinyes, servants of justice, would overtake it *in flagrante delicto."* There is an incorruptible fidelity in things to their place in the order of the world, a fidelity that a human being can approach only after achieving perfection, after having become identical to his or her own vocation. The contemplation of the fidelity of things, either in the visible world or in their mathematical relationships, or analogies, is a powerful means of achieving that fidelity. The first lesson of this contemplation is not to choose but to consent impartially to the existence of all that exists. This universal consent is the same thing as detachment, even the weakest and most legitimate in appearance, is an obstacle to it. That is why it must never be forgotten that light shines impartially on all beings and things. It is thus the image of the creative will of God, which upholds equally all that exists. It is to this creative will that our consent must adhere.[19]

In the bidirectional movement of the bond of love between the Creator and the created world, which Christ as a bridge (*metaxy*) made possible, the "discreated" ("décréé") I, offering up its own autonomy on the model of Christ-like intermediation, no longer forms an obstacle.[20]

Theater in Simone Weil

Simone Weil holds the beautiful in works of art to be what lends itself to contemplation and what is immobile in the attentiveness appropriate to the discreated state: namely, the true theater.[21] In her neo-Platonic esthetics, beauty is a matter of necessity, just as necessity rules in the material world, and it is subordinate to the good. Because of his absence of immobility, she considers Shakespeare second-rate, Racine third-rate, and Corneille nth-rate, making exceptions only for *King Lear* and *Phaedra*.[22] Weil's only drama, *Venise sauvée*, based on *La Conjuration des Espagnols contre la République de Venise*, published by the Abbé de Saint-Réal in 1674, is built upon reminiscence of verses from the books of Job and Isaiah and the structure of the tragedies of Sophocles. Following Otway's adaptation on the English stage, inspired by Saint-Réal's text, she prepared adaptations of other works, for example using Hugo von Hofmannsthal's French-language *Venice Delivered* in 1986.[23]

In her historical note written for her tragedy, Weil explains the drama's kernel. Marquis Bedmar, Spain's Grand Ambassador to Venice, prepared a plan in 1618 for a conspiracy that would yield Venice into the Spanish king's hands. With concern for his ambassadorship, he sought to remain in the background, so he entrusted Renaud, an aged French lord, and Pierre, a Provençal pirate and renowned ship's captain, with carrying out the plot, intended to take place the night before Pentecost. Jaffier, one of the leaders and Pierre's friend, moved by pity for the city, betrayed the plot to the Council of Ten, on the condition that they show clemency to the conspirators.[24] For Jaffier, the city is not a social creation but a divine one ("Cité, cela n'évoque pas du social. L'enracinement est autre chose que le social," writes Weil in her introductory note to the drama[25]). The city is a connection to nature, the past, tradition: in other words, a *metaxy*.[26] His awe at the city as a divine construction, one that humanity could never have brought into being, induces Jaffier to preserve its existence.[27] In her stage directions following Jaffier's statement, we read: "He would gladly give his life, even though a foreigner, to save Venice. These words make Violetta rejoice."[28] State interest, however, makes it impossible for the Council to honor their promise to Jaffier: the conspirators must suffer death. Incidentally, historians—especially Spanish historians—question the actuality of the conspiracy.

Simone Weil wrote *Venice Delivered* in 1940–1942, shortly before her death. Her major experiences appear in it: the politics of "great powers" always sought to render conquered peoples rootless. As Renaud replies to Jaffier in the piece: "Yes, we dream. Active and enterprising men are dreamers; they prefer dreams to reality. But they use their weapons to force the others to dream their dreams."[29] Weil distinguishes three levels of mental energy, in order from the most changeable to the most constant: dreaming, calculation, contemplation; and among these—as we have earlier seen—the

highest order is contemplation.[30] Jaffier is savior of the "city," thanks to the decision, consistent with the logic of power, taken by the Council of Ten—which logic of power differs in no respect from the rapacity from which Jaffier wants to save the city and Violetta, symbol of purity—and because of the promise betrayed, he becomes a simple traitor, a despised man, "the man of pain." His monologues reach their lowest point when he questions the true nature of his act, motivated by supernatural prompting: "I dreamt. All that's a dream. /I was ever the dreamer, as I am today," he says to the servant abusing him in Act III.[31] Between the two endpoints of a bad act there is a similarity, in that he committed evil both with the conspirators and with the victim.[32] "Pain, just as with Job, helps cause detachment following the necessary emotional phase, which allows one to see things in their own reality."[33] The drama reproduces this process through the figure of Jaffier. Simone Weil, on the other hand, herself compares the drama to that of King Oedipus. At the moment that Jaffier decides that he will not let the city be destroyed, because he has turned his attention to the *metaxy*—in Weil's explication—eternity, or rather reality, steps into earthly time and arrests it. This is the point where Jaffier becomes immobile, in a metaphysical sense.[34]

Venice Delivered is therefore the staging of kenosis, the repeating-imitating process of reverse creation [décréation], a process beginning from attentiveness directed on suffering and leading to the immobile condition of Jaffier, who is pure—that is, perfect in the sense of the Greek hero—who does not change, preserving the evil within him in order not to propagate it outward via imagination and actions that might fill all space.[35] In this manner, the conspiracy stands in opposition to the true reality of Jaffier, who progressively disappears. Monologue, which—in contrast to dialogue—we generally consider antidramatic, static, and unrealistic, and whose dramatic functions are somewhat fixed and circumscribed,[36] nevertheless becomes the theatrical foundation in Jaffier's and Violetta's speeches, just as in János Pilinszky's writings in Paris, in his pieces imbued with Simone Weil's esthetic. Theatricality, which according to Weil's notes is the rendering of exterior and interior necessity palpable, expresses itself in these monologues, or in the false dialogues.[37] All this comes to pass in Act III, when Jaffier speaks but Violetta's father, secretary to the Council of Ten, does not listen to him, even though they can thank their lives to him. Or when the abusers speak but Jaffier keeps silent.[38] Exterior necessity is verbalized at the end of Act II, in the dialogue of Renaud and Jaffier, via the revelation of Spain's national and Renaud's personal motivations.

Weil's entire oeuvre is the drama of thought, which, for example, inspired Claude Darvy to stage her oeuvre and her person as ritual, in the form of a three-level ceremony in which the actors moved in triangular formation. A 1991 issue of *Cahiers Simone Weil* reports on this undertaking.[39]

Building on her erstwhile teacher Alain's initial inspiration among other things, the emptying and surpassing of the I becomes the mainspring of

Weil's oeuvre. Its presentation on the stage is the Theater of Thought in the Mallarméan sense, a sort of "paper theater." For Mallarmé, Weil, and Pilinszky, the staging of thought is a trial by fire, the *theatrum philosophicum* about which Foucault speaks thus, in his essay about Gilles Deleuze's two works *Différence et répétition* and *Logique du sens*: "Thinking neither consoles nor leads to happiness. Thinking drags itself on feebly, like some perversion; thinking, like theater, repeats itself; and all of a sudden, thinking is ejected from the dice-box."[40]

The character of trial by fire (also) explains the emphasized role of the theater, and the fact that when the dual nature of theater (i.e., its being simultaneously imaginary and concrete) made its lack of reality explicit in the performances of European theater in the years 1960–1971, certain theatrical practices—thus Pilinszky's and Grotowski's also—strove to overcome this crisis by using emptying exercises on the actors. This theatrical practice, which I call kenotic, not only repeats the process of emptying in its dramaturgy but also makes a place for it in direction of the actors, and in Pilinszky's case among others, does so precisely in a manner derived from Simone Weil.

Images and outlook

As is also clearly evident from the preceding text, Simone Weil uses a great many images, and these images also dominate most critical writing about them. Based on a neo-Platonic foundation, Weil distinguishes "good" and "bad" images. The bad image results from extension of the self (wakeful dream, mental image) during the course of which we create idols. Good images, "icons," images inherited from religious, mystical and folk traditions, have curative powers if we observe them with love and attentiveness; they cure us of our idol-worship.[41] Modern psychology, and even transpersonal psychology,[42] or even certain representatives of psychiatry would likely question such division of the personal and impersonal, since, for example, they are experienced with Katathym imagery,[43] or even the Jungian collective unconscious that filters over into the personal unconscious: these seem to contradict such chemically pure divisions.

On the other hand, the young Weil's thinking about God is that of the philologist. Her scope of reference branches out extraordinarily widely, pointing far beyond European tradition. Following her 1938 Christ-experience, which might be called mystical, her social commitment grows even stronger and she assigns deeper meaning to misfortune: "Cette expérience m'a permis par analogie de mieux comprendre la possibilité d'aimer l'amour divin à travers le malheur. Il va de soi qu'au cours de ces offices la pensée de la Passion du Christ est entrée en moi une fois pour toutes."[44] (This experience has, by analogy, enabled me to better understand the possibility of loving God's love through misfortune [which Weil distinguishes from passing *souffrance*, suffering]. It goes without saying that

during the Masses, the thought of Christ's Passion entered me once and for all.) In her late fragments, we read that joy reinforces the eternal component in our lives, while pain reinforces the reign of the temporal. Weil poses the question: why does surviving pain make us more sensitive to beauty? Liberation from the longing for joy and the acceptance of pain both transport us to the boundary of time, to the everlasting. "We do not have to believe in eternal life, because the only proofs of eternal life here below are its tangible presentiments. And these suffice."[45]

Simone Weil, already a philologist reading ancient Greek at the age of 12, who scarcely attains the age of 34, reached—and led us to—the boundaries of the philosophy of religion, where it contacts theology and mysticism. Based on surviving fragments and the system of thought deducible from them, her intimate Christ-experience at Solesmes indubitably led her to the world of faith. Her writings speak not only about metaphysics but about the God of faith: the Creator, the one who appears to us in prayer, as well as the intentional object of religious knowledge. This intentional object is, in her system of thought, identical with the object of metaphysics: that is, existence and the true. She is a vibrant exemplar showing that one need not be deaf in order to be able to speak authoritatively (learnedly) about music. The path of her thinking, inspired by Jules Lagneau and her professor, Alain, though a side-branch of the main line of the French philosophical canon, is nevertheless latently influential; at several points, it touched on her intimate encounter with the God of Faith.[46] Halfway between her Jewishness and her Christianity, she reaches conclusions such as "Israel gave its national fetish the name, God. In contrast, for Christ, God becomes the sole idol. … these are two motions in contrary direction: making God out of our idol or making God our idol."[47] She explains the Hebrew concept of idolatry by referring to immobile matter as the perfect image of perfection.[48] Following Alain, and related to Durkheim's religious disposition, Weil understands Plato to conceive of social and religious sentiments as similar: the individual adores the power and strength characteristic of the collective as a phenomenon exceeding his own powers, so that the sociological fact, interiorized by the individual, becomes a *religious sentiment*.[49]

Notes

1 Simone Weil, *Oeuvres complètes*, sous la direction d'André A. Devaux et Florence de Lussy, Vol. I (*Premiers écrits philosophiques*), Paris, Gallimard, 1988, 67. "Le bien n'est pas un non-péché, mais une action perpétuelle."
2 Simone Weil, "Cette guerre est une guerre de religions," in *Écrits de Londres et dernières lettres*, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, 98–108. See Miklós Vető, "Le désir du bien dans la pensée de Simone Weil," *De Whitehead à Marion*, Éclats de philosophie contemporaine, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2015, 183–209.
3 Emmanuel Gabellieri, *Être et don*, Louvain/Paris/Dudley (MA), Éditions Peeters, 2003, 365–366.
4 Letter to the Philippians, 2:5–9; King James version.

5 Simone Weil, *Oeuvres complètes*, sous la direction d'André A. Devaux et Florence de Lussy, Vol. VI, 2 (*Cahiers II*), Paris, Gallimard, 1997, 302. See for more detail: Emmanuel Gabellieri, "Kenose, compassion et miséricorde chez Simone Weil," *Communio*, N° 242, November–December 2015, 109–119; Christine Hof, "Kénose et Histoire. La lecture de l'Hymne au Philippiens," in *Simone Weil*, Emmanuel Gabellieri and François L'Yvonnet (eds.), Paris, Éditions de l'Herne, 2014, 385–395.
6 Christine Hof, *Philosophie et kénose chez Simone Weil. De l'amour du monde à l'Imitatio Christi*, Paris, L'Harmattan, "Ouverture philosophique" series, 2016; in particular, 247.
7 Weil, *Oeuvres complètes VI*, 1 (*Cahiers I*), Paris, Gallimard, 1994, 314.
8 Weil, *Oeuvres complètes VI*, 4, Paris, Gallimard, 2006, 409.
9 See *liste des images du Christ*, in Weil, *Oeuvres complètes VI*, 3 (*Cahiers III*), Paris, Gallimard, 2002, 224.
10 Simone Weil, *Intuitions pré-chrétiennes*, Paris, Fayard, 1985, 88.
11 *Ibid*., 89.
12 *Ibid*., 163. "Le consentement, c'est l'amour surnaturel, c'est l'Esprit de Dieu en nous. L'obéissance aveugle, c'est l'inertie de la matière, qui est parfaitement représentée pour notre imagination par l'élément à la fois résistant et fluide, c'est-à-dire par l'eau. Au moment où nous consentons à l'obéissance, nous sommes engendrés à partir de l'eau et de l'esprit. Nous sommes dès lors un être uniquement composé d'esprit et d'eau."
13 Luke 11:52.
14 Weil, *Ibid*., 163–164. Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*, tr. Elizabeth Chase Geissbuhler (ed.), London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1998 [1957], 195. Hereafter *IC*.
15 Spinoza, *Ethics* V. 23, tr. R.H.M. Elwes, 1887.
16 Weil, *IC*, 154.
17 Concerning the influence of Jules Lagneau and Alain, see my earlier study, *Theatrum philosophicum: le dépassement du moi* [*Theatrum philosophicum: overcoming the self*], in G. Gutbrod, J. Janiaud and E. Sepsi (eds.), Simone Weil—philosophie, mystique, esthétique [*Simone Weil—Philosophy, Mysticism, Esthetics*], Paris, Archives Karéline, 2012, 35–53.
18 Weil, *IC*, 155.
19 Weil, *IC*, 189–190.
20 For more detail on this theme, see "Décréation et poétique immobile dans une optique comparative (Alain, Mallarmé, Simone Weil et János Pilinszky)," in *Simone Weil et le poétique*, Jérôme Thelot, Jean-Michel Le Lannou and Enikő Sepsi (eds.), Paris, Editions Kimé, 2007, 167–188.
21 Simone Weil, *La pesanteur et la grâce*, Paris, Plon, 1988 [1947], 169. "Le théâtre immobile est le seul vraiment beau."
22 *Ibid*.
23 Andrée Mansau, "L'écriture théâtrale de *Venise sauvée*," *Cahiers Simone Weil*, 1988, June, 2, 127–128; Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, "Venise sauvée," *Cahiers Simone Weil*, 1990, March, 1–2.
24 Simone Weil, *Poèmes, suivis de Venise sauvée*, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, 52. "Le marquis de Bedmar, ambassadeur d'Espagne à Venise, conçut en 1618 un plan pour Venise au pouvoir du roi d'Espagne (…), par conjuration. Voulant rester dans l'ombre, à cause de sa situation d'ambassadeur, il confia l'exécution du plan à Renaud, seigneur français d'un âge avancé, et à Pierre, pirate provençal, capitaine et marin réputé. (…) La nuit choisie était celle d'avant la Pentecôte. Jaffier fit échouer la conjuration, dont il était un des chefs, en la révélant au Conseil des Dix, par pitié pour la ville."

25 *Ibid*., 44.
26 *Ibid*., 46. "Un contact avec la nature, le passé, la tradition, un *metaxu*."
27 *Ibid*., 89. Jaffier, "Ce qu'un homme peut faire de plus grand, qui l'approche le plus de Dieu, c'est, puisqu'il ne peut créer de telles merveilles, de préserver celles qui existent."
28 "Il donnerait volontiers sa vie, quoique étranger, pour préserver Venise. Violetta est heureuse de ces paroles."
29 *Ibid*., 77. "Les hommes d'action et d'entreprise sont des rêveurs; ils préfèrent le rêve à la réalité. Mais par les armes, ils contraignent les autres à rêver leurs rêves."
30 Weil, *Oeuvres complètes VI*, 2, 270.
31 Weil, *Poèmes, suivis de Venise sauvée*, 119.
32 *Ibid*., 45. "Y-a-t-il une loi de similitude entre les deux bouts d'une action mauvaise, de sorte qu'elle fait un mal analogue à celui qui l'accomplit et celui qui la subit?"
33 *Ibid*., 46.
34 *Ibid*., 47.
35 *Ibid*., 44.
36 See, e.g., the entry, "Monologue," in Patrice Pavis, *Dictionnaire du Théâtre* (*Theatrical Dictionary*).
37 Weil, *Poèmes, suivis de Venise sauvée*, 52. "Le théâtre doit rendre sensible la nécessité extérieure et intérieure."
38 *Ibid*., 49.
39 Claude Darvy, "Simone Weil et le théâtre," *Cahiers Simone Weil*, June 1991, 135–141.
40 Michel Foucault, "Theatrum philosophicum," *Critique*, 282, November 1970, 904. "Penser ne console ni ne rend heureux. Penser se traîne languissamment comme une perversion; penser se répète avec application sur un théâtre; penser se jette d'un coup hors du cornet à dés. Et lorsque le hasard, le théâtre et la perversion entrent en résonance, lorsque le hasard veut qu'il y ait entre eux trois une telle résonance, alors la pensée est une transe, et il vaut la peine de penser."
41 See Wanda Tommasi, "La splendeur du visible: Images et symboles chez Simone Weil," in *Simone Weil, La passion de la raison*, Mireille Calle and Eberhard Gruber (eds.), Paris, L'Harmattan, 2003, 91.
42 Emőke L. Bagdy, Zsuzsa Mirnics and Erika Nyitrai, *Transzperszonális pszichológia és pszichoterápia* [*Transpersonal Psychology and Psychotherapy*], Budapest, Kulcslyuk Kiadó, 2011.
43 See Guided imagery, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guided_imagery (accessed 9 December 2019).
44 Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu*, La Colombe, Editions du Vieux Colombier, 1950, 37.
45 Weil, *Oeuvres complètes VI*, *4*, 104–105.
46 See Miklós Vető, *A teremtő Isten, Vallásfilozófiai tanulmányok* [*The Creating God. Studies in Philosophy of Religion*], Budapest, Kairosz, 2001, 187.
47 Weil, *Oeuvres complètes VI*, *4*, 247.
48 *Ibid*., 343. "La perfection qui nous est proposée, c'est l'union directe de l'esprit divin avec de la matière inerte. De la matière inerte qu'on regarde comme pensante est une image parfaite de la perfection. C'est là une justification de ce que les Hébreux nommaient l'idôlatrie. Mais quelque chose qui n'a pas figure humaine vaut mieux qu'une sculpture; ainsi une pierre, du pain, un astre. Si on se représente un esprit lié au soleil, c'est là une parfaite image de la perfection."
49 Gabellieri, *Être et don*, 212. See also Simone Weil's letter to Father Perrin, 19 January 1942 (*Attente de Dieu*, 16).

8 Mysticism in the approach to theater: the "kenotic" theater

Organic theater (in Grotowski's terminology) strives to attain the *via negativa*: the state in which the actor is a transmitter, an empty vessel ready to receive and convey transcendence. The controversies about sacrality in Europe and America, as well as the ever-increasing interest in non-European rituals induced twentieth-century artists to turn their backs on traditional theater and classical dramatic texts (e.g., Grotowski, Kantor, Eugenio Barba, Ariane Mnouchkine). The theater opened up by the French Valère Novarina's literary work—his deep drilling into language, his theatrical experience, and his essays—is the act of incinerating and resurrecting the creating word through the actor, who gives himself over to action and the text's hidden liturgy in space. This chapter provides an overview and theoretical foundation with respect to theatrical forms in which it is in the course of working with the actors (e.g., in directing them) that self-emptying becomes the basis of a new approach not only in a theological or ethical sense but also in its use as an esthetic tool in the theater of kenosis. As presented extensively in the theological chapter, according to Christian theologies (and within them, the so-called Christologies), the expression *ekenōsen* (κένωσις = emptiness) is the primary expression of the Holy Trinity's second Person: God the Son, Jesus Christ. It also means that a person empties his own will in order to become completely receptive to God's will. The word ἐκένωσεν (*ekenōsen*) appears in apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians: "… [Jesus] emptied Himself" (2:7), using the verb form, κενόω (*keno* = to empty).

When referring to the concepts of "mysticism" and "self-emptying" I rely on extracts of the volume *Talking with Angels* (annotated by Gitta Mallász).

Theatrical forms and training: Grotowski, Kantor, and Barba

The revolution of ritual theater that can be placed in Europe during the second half of the 1960s attaches primarily to the name of Jerży Grotowski; he called the attention of the most significant European theatrical artists to the Far East, the so-called archaic theatrical forms. In seeking archaic forms, Peter Brook and Eugenio Barba renewed the culture of European theater,

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-8

while Grotowski created the foundations of theatrical pedagogy that remain useful to and employed in theatrical practice to this day. In the course of his work with Ryszard Cieślak, he introduced the concept of the "empty vessel": the actor must attain the state of emptiness in order to be capable of becoming the bearer of transcendence. The point of physical exercise is to attain this condition by hardening the actor's body to its ultimate limit.

For these directors (and we could continue their ranks with Copeau, Wilson, and the poet János Pilinszky, whose vision of the theater had significant influence though he was not a director, himself), seeking theatrical presence with its penetrating impact was of central importance. Cormac Power divides the meaning of the traditional concept of presence into three categories: the "making-present" (the fictional mode of presence), "having presence" (the auratic mode of presence in a demystified sense), and "being present" (the literal mode of presence).[1] He differentiates between presence and liveness, takes into account the deconstruction of presence, after Derrida, as well as the phenomenological approach of presence. The issue of the actor's presence appears already in Stanislavsky's system as the case of the actor as the medium of the playwright's intention and the play's spirit. The less directed presence, in Meyerhold's line, however, has pushed theater in the direction of the poetic. This shift can already be observed in the case of Stanislavsky's erstwhile student Michael Chekhov, who places emphasis on the actor's creative imagination,[2] which brings a sort of extrasensory force into existence that can augment the density of presence. (He understandably transformed the anthroposophical system of his erstwhile master and Rudolph Steiner for the needs of the American theatre.) In Barba's theater, the emphasis is placed on a pre-expressive level in the course of the training exercises, in the course of which the actor can, through his *bios*, seize the viewer's regard and attention, even before he has spoken.[3] Grotowski similarly operates on the level of energy, consciously incorporating energetically focused moments into the actor's part, envisioned as a line in a musical score. Both of them, as well as Novarina, hold to a biological image of the actor: Grotowski calls theater built on the actor's inner score "organic." This score finds its natural environment in the production's ritual character in both Grotowski and Barba (and, for that matter, in Wilson, Pilinszky, and Novarina). Barba speaks plainly of "empty ritual" as the essential feature of theater: "revolt, empty ritual, dissidence, vulnerability (which is the reality of solitude), transcendence or, as I like to say today, superstition."[4] Empty ritual is also "an ineffective ritual which we fill with our why, with our personal necessity," which, at the same time, in some countries, can cost the lives of those who do it.[5]

In his work *Tadeusz Kantor: Kenotic Theatrology and the "Reality of the Lowest Rank*,"[6] J. Edgar Bauer states that contemporary theologians and historians of religion have scarcely, if at all, turned their attention to the complex connections between religious faith and artistic talent, which can also be discovered in certain conceptual artworks. Bauer emphasizes that

"this inattentiveness is especially regrettable with regard to the analysis of theatrical creativity, where the expression of religious attitudes and preoccupations is not unusual." The significance of religious motifs in twentieth-century theater can be clearly demonstrated via features that connect Antonin Artaud, one of the most outstanding seers and esthetic thinkers of the late modern period, and Peter Brook, the world-renowned founder of the Centre International de la Création in Paris; but we might also mention the American Bob Wilson or Valère Novarina, whose activity is even more definitive in this respect. Artaud defines the paradigms of his critique of religion in *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*,[7] while Brook—preparing to present a nontheistic proclamation—emphasized that "it is not the fault of the holy that it has become a middle-class weapon to keep children good."[8] According to Bauer, "Between these two positions, there is a vast and mostly unexplored area of research, where earnest religious quests take place in intimate connection with the avant-gardes and their experimental work." It is significant that, for example in Poland, so deeply defined by the opposed world views of Catholicism and Communism, the art of Tadeusz Kantor and Jerży Grotowski contributed significantly to the theatrical avant-garde. These two people stood fundamentally opposed not only to each other but also to both world views. Kantor's younger colleague Grotowski (1933–1997), created the so-called "poor theater," which was defined by a search for the "secularized *sacrum*"; he demanded the degree of commitment from his actors that epitomized the devotion of holy people in traditional religions (worldly saints). In place of the attitude of the "actor for sale," seeking to sell himself to the public, Grotowski's method was based on an ascetic inner denuding, the acting style of the *via negativa*. He required his actors to cast off the mask of everyday life and to make their performance the act of complete self-revelation. The Grotowskian actor, offering himself as an "absolute gift," stands at the greatest possible distance from the image of actor as board-strutting showoff, as he was considered for centuries. For Grotowski, so familiar with Indian philosophical traditions, the mission of the actor is to give himself over completely to something unnamable but including "both the erotic and the charitable"[9] (Figure 8.1).

In contrast to Grotowski's polycultural openness, Tadeusz Kantor (Wiełopole, 1915—Cracow, 1990) built his work exclusively on western traditions. As a painter, writer, set designer, theater director, and producer, he was deeply influenced by Dada's iconoclasm as well as the esthetic principles of the Bauhaus and constructivism. After operating an underground theater in Cracow during the Second World War, he founded the experimental theater "Cricot 2" in the same city in 1955, and in 1979, the institution called Critoteka, later entrusted with preserving and curating the Kantor archive. With his 1975 production of *The Dead Class*, Kantor entered a new and significant creative period that we know as the "theater of death," and which led to his worldwide fame.

Figure 8.1 Odin Teatret Archives—Ryszard Cieślak in the film *Training at Grotowski Teatr-Laboratorium in Wroclaw*, produced by Odin Teatret Film, Denmark (1972), B/W, 90 min., English. Directed by Torgeir Wethal.

In his work *Zero Theater*, Kantor proclaims:

> Theater, which I have called the "Zero" Theater, does not refer to a ready-made "zero" situation. Its essence lies in the process leading TOWARD EMPTINESS AND "ZERO ZONES."
> This process means
> Dismembering of logical plot structures,
> building up scenes not by textual reference but
> by reference to
> associations triggered by them,
> juggling with CHANCE or
> junk,
> …
> dissection of plot,
> decomposition of acting;
> by acting poorly,
> acting "on the sly,"
> acting "non-acting!"[10]

Acting poorly, acting without acting is the inheritance of Grotowski, as well as Indian (*Bhagavad Gita*) and Chinese (Taoist) cultures. When creating the principle of the Informal Theater and presenting *A Little Manor*, Kantor placed the actors inside a wardrobe filled with rags and sacks. The actors, deprived of their identities and equal in rank to the props, moved seemingly randomly, in increasingly ragged costumes, similarly to the manner in which

Figure 8.2 Photographs of the Kantor exhibition, National Theater (2016). (Photo: E. Sepsi)

the power of artistic material in paintings of the informal school—because of their chaotic utilization—ruined the painting's construction (Figure 8.2).

At the start of the 1960s, Eugenio Barba's anthropological theater also grew out of his three years of collaboration with Grotowski, or rather out of the training exercises that the Odin Teatret film documents so exceptionally well. In recent years, we in Hungary have also been able to see the results of the work with the actors. The production entitled *The Tree*, produced in the National Theater in 2016, is part of a trilogy, *The Trilogy of the Innocents*. Its other parts are *The Great Cities under the Moon* and *The Chronic Life*, the latter presented at the 2015 MITEM (Madách International Theater Meeting, Budapest). The Budapest production of *The Tree* was accompanied by an appearance of the representative of the Indian Baul tradition mentioned earlier, Parvathy Baul, and the master from Bali, I Wayan Bawa.

The Odin Teatret was founded in Oslo in 1964 and later moved to Holstebro, Denmark. At this time, forming a company from ten nations on three continents, they tour the world. In the "barters" developed during the course of their travels, they present their productions taking consideration of local conditions and lifestyles; in exchange, they receive songs, dances, and music from the locals. This not only brings the various forms of cultural expression closer together but also creates social interactions. The coexistence of different cultures also characterizes Barba's productions. The International School of Anthropology (ISTA) carries out very serious postgraduate educative and publication activities.

In the course of his training exercises, Eugenio Barba targets the condition of the "transparent body" and strives to attain it using physical exercise just as in the vocal exercises led by one of his actresses, Julia Varley. In the course of Barba's interview with the actress Iben Nagel Rasmussen, she says that when she began to work with Barba, they had to spend hours at a

stretch on movement sequences requiring them to pay close attention to each other, reacting spontaneously and often with acrobatic moves, without any introductory comments or explanation at all. The state of complete physical readiness was unaccompanied by any kind of intellectual activity.[11] They had to stand ready, as empty vessels, for the next reaction by their training partner, and they had to discover newer and newer layers of energy hiding behind the fatigue in their own bodies. In connection with the series of linked yoga positions (which are also called "the cat") previously worked out by Grotowski and Cieślak and introduced in the training exercises in Hostelbro, she says that the movement sequences were not important, beautiful, or ugly from an esthetic perspective, but because the body entered a "different state," becoming transparent. Similarly, during vocal training, the sounds she heard were not beautiful; rather, the inner matter became transparent, displaying its power.

Valère Novarina's "kenotic" theater and *Talking with Angels*

Talking with Angels, which was first published in France under the title *Dialogues avec l'Ange*, is the record of spiritual guidance that four Hungarians, close friends, received during seventeen months in the Second World War, from June 1943 until November 1944. Gitta Mallász, Lili Strauss, József Kreutzer, and Hanna Dallos met weekly, every Friday afternoon. During the meetings, in the course of eighty-eight conversations, Hanna Dallos transmitted voices that, according to her, were not her own but came from four distinct personalities or entities. These messages were transcribed, word for word, by Gitta Mallász and Lili Strauss. Three of the four friends were Jewish; they—after the voices had led them to the Christian faith—disappeared in the deportations. The sole survivor, Gitta Mallász, who emigrated to France in 1960, spent years translating these conversations into French. The first edition saw the light of day in 1976, and in 1990 it was followed by an expanded, second edition. The original Hungarian notes were published in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The most recent edition appeared from Fekete Sas Publishing in 2010, under the title *Talking with Angels*. (The first editions were preceded by a samizdat version in the 1990s, thanks to the support of Reformed pastor József Farkas.) In reading the volume, I discovered that certain themes connect deeply to the work of Novarina, as well as to the work of many other mystical writers and philosophers. In my analyses, I had already demonstrated the intellectual similarity between the works of Simone Weil and Novarina,[12] but the analogies revealed in *Talking with Angels* struck me as a surprise. After my study was completed in initial form, I mentioned the volume to Novarina, who replied that he knew the work and that it was the daily reading ("livre de chevet") of one of his leading actresses, Claire Sermonne. At the time, the actress was appearing in a production of *Le Vivier des noms*.

In the following segment of the study, I present excerpts from these dialogues, which were transmitted in a rhythmically poetic form.[13]

Theme	*Text*
Mystery	"L. It is unclear to me what 'spiritism' and 'mysticism' are. *By 'mysticism,' Lili means exaggerated interpretations of sensational, inexplicable, paranormal phenomena.* —It is its nature to be unclear! Do you know what a genuine *mystery* is? A SMILE ORIGINATING IN THE DEPTHS OF THE SOUL. THAT IS A MYSTERY. Teeth-chattering, slobbering despair of the shipwrecked, that is what 'spiritualism' is. They want a sign and it is not given to them. NOT THE DEAD SHOULD BE CONJURED, BUT LIFE: ETERNAL LIFE! The sacred teaching is not hidden in darkness and obscurity; it radiates in bright daylight. What they call up, they receive. Leave the dead with their dead! So often did they summon death that finally it came. Let us summon joy, and the Divine Realm will come! Call not trembling with fear but with jubilation! COULD ANYTHING BE MORE NATURAL THAN OUR TALKING TOGETHER? Where is that thing you call 'mysticism'?"[14]
"I"	"—One word explains it: You said, 'I'. That was the end. A curtain descended between you and Eternal Truth. You could not have awareness, for you were in the dark. The curtain is called 'I'. Pull it away and you become S/He!"[15]
Body	"Teach playing—not *with* the body but *through* the body… EVERY ORGAN, EVERY LIMB IS ONE WITH A FORCE OF THE UNIVERSE… THE PLAYING CHILD FORGETS ITSELF."[16]

Likewise, for Novarina "the true mystery is neither dark nor veiled—and not washed-away at all—but a strong light cast on you." Later, he continues: "The mystery, however, is incomprehensible because it understands you."[17] The actor is the personage who offers up his own human body with his play. The importance of the body receives significant emphasis in Novarina's essays (see *Les lumières du corps*) and interviews (the body receives its most exalted role in the Orthodox Church[18]). In her work *Les dialogues tels que je les ai vécus*, Gitta Mallász puts it this way:

> Alors que dans nombre d'ascèses traditionnelles—mais n'ont-elles pas été déformées au cours des siècles?—l'épanouissement spiritual s'accompagnait souvent de la mortification du corps, donc de la mutilation d'une partie de l'être humain, l'évolution enseignée par l'Ange passe par la plénitude de l'homme dans sa globalité.

> Pendant les dix-sept mois des "*dialogues*" la notion du corps est devenue miraculeuse pour moi, car l'univers s'y révélait.[19]
> In several traditional forms of asceticism—but haven't they been distorted through the centuries?—spiritual fulfillment is often accompanied by mortification of the flesh, and therefore by mutilation of a part of the human being. Yet the evolution taught by the Angel passes through the fullness of the person in its entirety.
> During the seventeen months of the "*conversations,*" the idea of the body became miraculous to me, because the universe reveals itself in it.

In connection with self-emptying and the abandonment of our self, one of Novarina's English-language texts *Work for the Uncertain*, with its title borrowed from Pascal, can serve as an example (Novarina reformulates this depiction of the actor in countless ways and texts):

> It is an enclosure where we come to see the actor thrown onto the stage, forcefully and alone, wrenching himself away from himself, always like a blind one, a foreigner, an exile, as if fallen from his true place. He speaks like an animal surprised by the very act of speaking. We come to the theater to take fright with the actor, relive our entry into the incomprehensible body along with him; to breathe through another, to recapture the taste for living words… The actor does not bear the words; it's the words that descend upon him, that fall upon his body, spread out, divided, thrown to its cardinal points….[20]

His essay *Ash Wednesday*, reveals the Christian roots of this thought, since in it, Novarina refers to Christ's self-emptying:

> *Persona.* This is what Christ (Mashia'h, the Messiah) comes to enact: he empties the human image and brings it to us, empty. He does not come solely to become man, but to bring the divine emptiness into the human frame. By the double movement of incarnation and emptying, kenosis and carnal materialization (somatic assumption into heaven and descent) he becomes the principle within us, the door for him who speaks, thinks, uproots, searches, pulses, and breathes: in negative-positive form. Reversibly. Like the two-faced Janus, in reversibility, the way the image of some *x*'s body is offered us on the Shroud of Turin, double and *negative*: "Here is the empty god"—"God is here Emptiness" ("Dieu ici Vide"), he, who in French responds with a wondrous anagram, leaves behind the negative imprint of his eyelids, in order that you be reborn. He makes a place for you, emptying the human image, embodying the counterpart individual, the *persona*, amongst us. He comes to destroy our idols created by our own hands, and he appears. He is here, facing us, and he de-represents us. He comes to destroy the human idols erected everywhere.[21]

Notes

1 Cormac Power, *Presence in Play. A Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre*, Amsterdam/New York, Rodopi, 2008.
2 Michael Chekhov, *L'imagination créatrice de l'acteur*, Paris, Pygmalion, 2006.
3 Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe. A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, tr. Richard Fowler, London/New York, 2005, 104–106.
4 Eugenio Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House*, London/New York, Routledge, 2010.
5 Barba, *Paper Canoe*, 85.
6 J. Edgar Bauer, *Tadeusz Kantor: Kenotic Theatrology and the "Reality of the Lowest Rank*," presentation at the 2000 International CESNUR Conference, University of Latvia, Riga, 2004, http://www.cesnur.org/2004/bauer_kantor.htm (accessed 18 November 2015).
7 Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. XIII, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, 67–104.
8 Peter Brook, *The Empty Space. A Book About the Theatre: Holy, Rough, Immediate*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996, 46.
9 Bauer, *Ibid*.
10 Tadeusz Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces. Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990*, tr. Michal Kobialka (ed.), Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 1993, 60–61.
11 *The Transparent Body. A conversation about the actor's training between Eugenio Barba and Iben Nagel Rasmussen*, Odin Teatret Film, Odin Teatret Archives, 2012.
12 "Poésie sans "je" dans l'espace: le théâtre de Valère Novarina et de János Pilinszky," *in Kapcsolatban—Istennel és emberrel: Pszichológiai és bölcsészeti tanulmányok* [*Getting Connected—With God and Man: Papers in Psychology and Philosophy*], József Fülöp, Zsuzsanna Mirnics, Miklós Varsányi and Gabriella Szilvia Kuhn (eds.), Budapest, KRE/L'Harmattan, Károli Könyvek, 2014, 361–371.
13 Homepage of the manuscripts: https://plus.google.com/photos/100973688777859081342/albums/5655913998192006401 (accessed 16 November 2015).
14 Gitta Mallász, "Dialogue 28 with Lili," *Talking with Angels, A document from Hungary transcribed by Gitta Mallász*, tr. Robert Hinshaw, Einsiedeln, Daimon Verlag, 2006, 200–201.
15 "Dialogue 29 with Gitta," *Ibid*., 207.
16 "Dialogue 26 with Lili," *Ibid*., 184–185.
17 Valère Novarina, "Les cendres," *Qu'est-ce que la vérité ?*, Mgr. André Vingt-Trois (ed.), Editions Parole et Silence, 2007, 81–93.
18 Novarina speaks on this topic in the film, *L'Amour est voyant*, directed by Attila Mispál, Duna TV, 2011.
19 Gitta Mallász, *Les dialogues tels que je les ai vécus*, tr. Françoise Maupin, Aubier, France, 1994 [1984], 53.
20 Valère Novarina, "Work for the Uncertain," *The Theater of the Ears*, tr. Allen S. Weiss, Los Angeles, Sun & Moon Press, 1996, 115–116.
21 "*Personne.* C'est ce que vient faire le Christ. (*Mashia'h:* le messie) ; la figure humaine, il l'apporte vide. Il vient non seulement faire l'homme avec nous mais aussi poser le divin vide sur notre face. C'est par ce double mouvement d'incarnation et d'évidement—de kénose et de matérialisation charnelle—qu'il est en nous le principe qui renverse, palpite, pense, respire : en négatif-positif. En renversibilité, comme est offerte devant nous l'image double et *négative* d'un corps *x* sur le suaire de Turin." (Valère Novarina, "Les Cendres," *L'Envers de l'esprit*, Paris, P.O.L, 2009, 168–169).

9 Figures and disfigurations of the human face

"*He comes not only to become man with us but also to place the divine void on our face.*"

—Valère Novarina, *Les Cendres*

A contemporary landscape: Orlan and Abramović

It seems that the representation of the face, from ancient Egypt to the various art forms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, has become the subject of intense questioning. We can approach this phenomenon by applying theological, artistic, philosophical, or even medical terms. Yes, medical terms, because facial surgery is becoming a very fashionable medical branch in our daily life. That said, there is a desire to be other than how one is born, to show something other than usual. In performance art, ORLAN, a French artist, has manifested this contemporary desire to change face and allure, and has continuously transformed her appearance and identity using or imitating the effect of facial plastic (esthetic) surgery.[1]

Through these performances, ORLAN ties into the lineage of the art of Marina Abramović, of Serbian origin, who has become widely known through her body art performances that question the limits of the physical experience of the body. The common aspects of the performances of these two female artists are the liminal states of the body and the face as an art object.

In a performance at a New York City museum, Marina Abramović comes face to face with her old lover and cocreator, Ulay, whom she hadn't seen in decades. All the drama happens and manifests itself first of all in their faces.[2]

We have briefly mentioned two examples of contemporary face art in performance. The third example comes from the contemporary French scene, that is to say, from the playwright, director, and painter Valère Novarina.

Disfiguration of the human face in the art of Valère Novarina

When working with actors, the French writer and director Valère Novarina often resorts to the parallel of painting since he believes that everything that

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-9

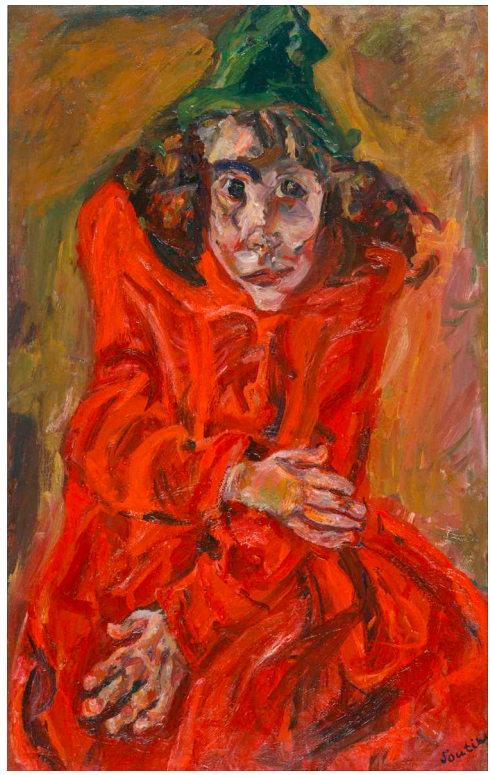

Figure 9.1 Chaïm Soutine, *Mad Woman* (1920), The National Museum of Western Art. (Photo: NMWA/DNPartcom)

happened in the painting of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries—the decomposition of the image of man and the human form in the works of Picasso, Bacon, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Chaïm Soutine, or even Jean Dubuffet—has not yet manifested adequately in theater (Figure 9.1).

It is likewise the lack of depiction and depth in Byzantine icons, the depiction in a single plane, that attracts him. His art at its heart, the theater aims to show man in a polyvalent way while destroying his mask (and masking), as the Cubists did, for example. That is to say, it as if in the theater of Novarina there appeared the prohibition of the representation, veneration, and idolatry of man.

I propose now to briefly examine the texts, productions, and drawings by Valère Novarina from the perspective of the representation of the human face (Figure 9.2).

To wear the face of God means humility for man: *kenosis*. In *Demeure fragile*, Valère Novarina uses the adjective "kenotic" for the theater, for his

Figure 9.2 Acrylic painting *Donné au Pélican* [Given to the Pelican] (1995) and drawing *Jean Géol* by Valère Novarina. (Images of *kenosis*)

own theater: "The kenotic theater repeats on stage that the stage is not"; and further: "Here it is, space itself, which brings man with no one in it." The volume titles already refer to the void: *Nobody is inside nothing* (correspondence with Jean Dubuffet) or the play *L'Homme hors de lui* [Man Beside Himself], where we read:

> Let's empty men, each into the others, that they may lose their content and join without language the music of things without why.
> Let's be done with man!
> Man is not the only way out of being animal![3]

In *Lumières du corps*, Novarina develops an entire esthetics of kenosis:

> **The theater always tends toward the empty and canceled human face; it is a place to submit to the human image, a place to de-represent.** Not a scene in which to counterfeit the hominid. The great relief brought by laughter comes from there: we come to the theater to withdraw from humanity, to leave man. The theater is the place of a withdrawal: an empty interior opens up before our eyes.[4]
>
> Perhaps there is something like a prohibition on representation here. **Man must avoid representing man: he is not made for that. Man today is a mechanical and empty word, an idol, a dead shell in the mind.** Anthropolatry everywhere: man, made by the hand of man, is venerated everywhere. We want to recover the man identical to the model that we have just forged

with our hands. **Whereas man is the only animal who has known how to invent a thousand depictions for himself, the only one who constantly broadcasts a new face.** All over the world, everywhere, we anxiously seek our double, our counterpart, our lookalike, our homonym. Without love, because love is odd, not even. So we should look at man from outside man: from the animal's point of view, from God's, from the pebble's, from the puppet's.[5]

Laughter is a kidnapping, a quick suicide, a raptus. **Laughter comes to take us away. The great comic actors practice withdrawal, publicly removing their faces. The comic actor practices the spiritual exercise of submission:** he goes to the ground, falls, with humility; he lowers Adam, returns him to the earth: *adamah*. The great comic actor always comes to hollow out the human figure even more. And it is in this sense that he can become a saint. Laughter can be a form of prayer. By the comic, the body prays with impunity.[6]

At the moment when "man," everywhere and more and more, limits himself to his human head, films himself night and day in close-up, displays himself everywhere in the same way, reduces himself to the identity of his face and forgets the entirety of his body, who repeats the same image of himself practically to infinity, this man reproduced and repeated *ad infinitum*: he must perhaps be represented now by an ideogram, by a crossing of bamboo, by an animal upside down, by five people at a time, by a fragmented actor, by a gushing line, by a dance step, by a tattoo on the earth, by a sentence fewer… At a time when the empire of compulsory humanism, self-idolatry, is spreading everywhere it is the human figure, Adam, the poor human figure on the ground, that must be picked up, collected; it asks to be more and more hollowed out and excavated. **Man asks to be represented outside, placed outside himself, represented in dance and in autopsy. Once again, placed outside himself.** He must be represented in his dance and his autopsy, with language on the outside; he must be represented upside down, open, carrying language, offering his body of language, open, out in front of himself.[7]

We dig endlessly in the anthropoglyphs; it is in the theater that the human **visage** can be most deeply questioned *in vivo*, questioned on the spot.[8]

The actor removes the human **visage**, removes it, breathes it; the theater is deeply disfiguring: it undoes the lines, erases the lines, ignores the recognized passages; it throws new lines everywhere, unexpected ejaculations, launches licks without return. The human hut is here rebuilt upside down. **The actor unmakes the man: it is the man unbounded; he has dismantled our effigy and has very meticulously decomposed us.**[9]

ORLAN presents the carnal and hidden side of the human face, changing and liminal; artistic transfiguration communicating the evil side of man. By constructing, deconstructing, and questioning its anthropoglyphs, the theater of Valère Novarina aspires to the resultative aspect of rites, it brings remedy to the defeated and disfigured man ("Love is seeing," [10] we read on the inscription at the end of *The Imaginary Operetta*), by a process of kenotic submission and then resurrecting, which is at the base of its dramaturgy (see the scene of dormition in *The Unknown Act*).

Conclusion

In Novarina's theater, the actor is the temple of the soul, the vessel bearing it, while the actorly ego is a curtain and obstacle that must be overcome in the act of self-emptying through the space and language offered to the audience. This helps him to incinerate his body via *respir(it)ation* (see the etymological interrelation between "*esprit*" and "*respiration*" highlighted in several texts of Novarina), the way it happens in some liturgical practices of the Far East or in consequence of psychological and spiritual training exercises. Not in a pseudo-philosophical, abstract manner but concretely, gripping the actor and the other participants in the theater's hot pincers. Allen S. Weiss puts it thus: "Novarina newly creates the meaning of language itself and of life's various forms, purely via logological burgeoning and number-mania. … These lists self-organizing into litanies have their purpose; according to Novarina it is to 'repeat their names unto whirling intoxication'," [11] all the way to the birth of a devil-exorcising, prophetic, and creating language that leads to resurrection. This use of language also has a role in Novarina's direction of his actors, similarly to the physical exercises known in Grotowski's method.

Notes

1 Here is an interview (in French) with ORLAN: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ1Ph-Pprj4
2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OS0Tg0IjCp4
3 Novarina, *L'Homme hors de lui* [*Man Beside Himself*], Paris, P.O.L, 2018, 84.
4 Novarina, *Lumières du corps* [*The Lights of the Body*], Paris, P.O.L, 2006, 19 (fragment 46).
5 *Ibid*., 32–33 (fragment 83).
6 *Ibid*., 38 (fragment 98).
7 *Ibid*., 53 (fragment 138).
8 *Ibid*., 20 (fragment 49).
9 *Ibid*., 90 (fragment 239).
10 Only in the production, which also used the title of the documentary film prepared for the Parisian performance of *The Imaginary Operetta* in Hungarian, at the Odeon (director of the film in French and Hungarian: Attila Mispál, coproduction of the Csokonai Theater of Debrecen and Duna Television).
11 Allen S. Weiss (ed./foreword), "In Praise of Solecism," in Valère Novarina, *The Theater of the Ears*, tr. Allen S. Weiss, Los Angeles, Sun & Moon Press, 2000, 32–33.

10 On bearing witness to a poetic ritual: Robert Wilson's *Deafman Glance* as seen by János Pilinszky ☆

Introduction

In various ways, France played an important part in sparking the esthetic-poetic change which took place in the 1970s in the work of the Hungarian poet János Pilinszky (1921–1981). These influences lay initially in Pilinszky's discovery of the work of Simone Weil and in the liturgical renewal that served as a model for his concept of theater, but they were prompted perhaps most importantly by his access to Robert Wilson's theater, especially the Paris performance of *Deafman Glance* in 1971. This mute theater of images had switched to an unfamiliar tempo on stage, a kind of immobility in movement which inspired not only *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton*,[1] an imaginary dialogue written by Pilinszky, but also some poetic pieces of short "drama" and some poems. This chapter examines the poetic implications of this theatrical approach to rituals in the poems and prose of Pilinszky, as well as his views on spectatorship and witnessing at a time when liturgy and ritual overlapped in Wilson's thinking theater. My inquiry is based primarily on two letters that I discovered in the early Robert Wilson Archives at Columbia University.

On poetic rituality

In order to describe the different connections between the poetic text and the ritual executed on stage, in addition to the remarks and insights of the well-known authors, I shall use the relevant points of the Bielefeld-based researchers Wolfgang Braungart and Saskia Fischer, who have both worked on formulating the concept of poetic rituality. According to Braungart and Fischer, poetic rituality sheds light on the liminal characteristics of poetic as well as dramatic forms, and refers to ritual practices, forms, and structures

☆ Previous versions of this chapter were published in Jay Malarcher (ed.), *Text & Presentation*, 2017, The Comparative Drama Conference Series 14, Jefferson (N.C.), McFarland, 2018, 167-179 and Johanna Domokos, Enikő Sepsi (eds.): *Poetic Rituality in Theater and Literature*, KRE – L'Harmattan, Collection Károli, France – Hongrie, 2020, 135–148.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-10

which are set in motion in a way that allows new esthetic characteristics and semantic aspects to arise.[2] Theater becomes poetic (*poiesis*) due to their form and the manner of their construction, which broadens the possibilities of poetry. In reformulating Antonin Artaud, I would add that poetry within the confines of a space, that is, the theater, uses the language of theater as we experience it in our dreams, substituting for ordinary meanings others which form the basis of a metaphor. As theorist, director, and playwright Richard Schechner emphasizes in his essay "From ritual to theater and back: The efficacy-entertainment braid," "So-called 'real events' are revealed as metaphors."[3] Poetry (i.e., metaphorical signification and universal acts in a timeless construct) broadens the potentials of social rituals toward the theater and represents the main characteristics of the so-called poetic theaters. In other words, poetry may appear as an organizational and temporal logic in ritual on stage, and, on the other hand, poetic (literary) texts can have ritualistic elements, such as repetition, performativity, etc.

Wilson's theater is often called a theater of images, the early period—even a mute theater of images, but the secondary literature has touched very little on its ritual aspects. What Pilinszky found highly interesting in *Deafman Glance* may very well have been the encounter of ritual and poetry in space.

In the Wilson Archives of Butler Library at Columbia University, I discovered that Wilson was also looking for a ritualistic theater in the process of the decreation of the Self, a kind of ceremony which was equally important to Pilinszky and the author of his main reading, Simone Weil.

> I wouldn't know what my liturgy is until I wrote it, or saw one that was very close to my own. Generally I think the modern liturgy, the one that comes closest to expressing modern intellectual consciousness consists of a constant flaying out of mind and body images from a receding and often disintegrating spiritual consciousness. My biggest problem concerning liturgy consists of modern man's divorcement and dislocation from his once central focal areas: birth, death, god, initiation, brotherhood. Modern man seems to be lost inside his own insanely personal hieroglyphics. How to relate these to a central focus? Of course, the power of art is now of great importance. To crystallize, to bring us back to our living center. But does it still exist? Have we already lost it? Are we in the process of trying to evolve a new one? Can liturgy help us in this process? Is art our enemy leading us further and further away, making it more and more difficult for us? The mind is too active, the spirit too still.[4]

Until I discovered this letter, there were no known traces of Wilson's interest in liturgy. Sheryl Sutton, who was the main and only professional actress in Wilson's early 1970s period, also observes that in the "Overture" to *Deafman Glance*, Byrdwoman is a mythological figure taking part in a ritual, more precisely, a mass; she may be the embodiment of a mother, Death's Angel, or

even Medea: "I never thought of it as evil. No emotion was implied. No anguish. No suffering. It was more subliminal. I thought of it as a ritual, like a mass. Raising and lowering the knife was like raising and lowering a chalice."[5] In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner mentions Schechner, who applies Winnicott's stages of child development (me, not-me, not not-me) to the actor's work (Turner quotes this border crossing in his book). The role, the character to be played, means the not-me for the actor, and after he integrates a part of the role into himself, the not-me becomes the not not-me in him. In the process, described as "alchemy" and "mystic," Turner assigns only the catalyst's role to the director, and he considers this third self-state richer and deeper. Sheryl Sutton speaks about this altered state of consciousness as resulting from the inner timing required by the "overture." In his work *Performance Theory*, Schechner highlights performances which lead not only from one state to the other but also from one self-identity to the other. In addition, he emphasizes that the attention paid to the manner of theater-making is already an experiment in the ritualization of performance, to find the valid forms of action in the theater itself. He demonstrates that liturgy applied many "avant-garde" techniques by referring to a twelfth-century mass: "It was allegorical, it encouraged—no, forced—audience participation, it treated time teleologically," and "it extended the spatial field of the performance from the church to the roadways to the homes of the participants."[6]

Another letter by Wilson dated 23 August 1970 states the following about the connection between ritual and theater:

> I've always believed that ritual is the heart of things. Somehow plays seem to revolve furiously around ritualistic activity. The only hitch is, that artists usually stumble on it without knowing it. Those like Peter Brook, in his version of Seneca's Oedipus, who go directly after a ritualistic interpretation often botch it up. If too much of a scheme gets in the head of the participants the life can go out of the work. Genet is very interesting ritualistically with his inverted Catholicism, with his fascination with the Mass, with his need for good in order to spur on the evil he worships. Religion and drama just have to get together again. Grotowski's ideas about being a secular saint. After all, the roots of drama were religious, some people think. … We have to recover the tragic vision: that man is temporal, finite, doomed to death and oblivion. Seems that people are more interested in the Eslin Institute and the varied experiences of the Kama Sutra. Transcend the flesh. Burn out the flesh. Grotowski's idea. … Not in a pseudo-philosophical abstract way, but by really applying the hot tongs of drama to the participants. A little Artaud. Scald them. … A true and deep approach to and appreciation of life will, I'm sure, be ritualistic.[7]

This quotation highlights the main sources of inspiration for the creation of a ritual-based piece of work in *Deafman Glance* and in the early

performances of productions by Wilson: Genet and the Mass and his inverted Catholicism, Jerży Grotowski's ritualistic theater, the main goal of which is not to create a performance but to focus on the way the actor lives and trains through the preparation process ("being a secular saint"), and finally, Artaud's original "théâtre de la Cruauté." Peter Brook appears here as a counter-example, potentially influenced by the Russian-Armenian mystic Gurdjieff, though his name is not mentioned in this text. (Gurdjieff, in turn, was strongly influenced by the whirling dervishes he encountered in Istanbul and the sufis of Central Asia at the turn of the century.) In the 1960s, Pilinszky also acquainted himself with Grotowski's laboratory theater, and he wrote articles about *The Constant Prince*. Grotowski can be considered a prefiguration of what Pilinszky later admired in Wilson's theater, especially in *Deafman Glance*: this *via negativa* making of theater, opposite in this sense to the intentionally ritualistic aspect of Peter Brook's *Oedipus*.

While Schechner, for instance, actively used rites as elements (in the anthropological sense)[8] in his experimental theater, Wilson created a quasi-ritual in the *Overture* to *Deafman Glance*—a child sacrifice taken out of its original context and performed as theater. According to Schechner, the rite and the theater vary only in their context, not in their basic structure. It is also possible—and we can agree that the idea seems persuasive—that the rite originates in the theater, if, and only if, these rites are connected to real social structures outside the theater.[9]

Wilson's Murder Scene as seen by János Pilinszky

The early Wilson Archives at Columbia contain only a nonprofessional recording of the Iowa production of *Deafman Glance*. Wilson's actor Stephan Brecht (Bertolt Brecht's son) wrote a book about the Brooklyn performance of *Deafman Glance*.[10] In this version, the ritual murder takes place as an overture to the performance, while at the Paris performance seen by the Hungarian poet Pilinszky, the murder was committed in the third act. This scene was sometimes performed by Wilson himself, sometimes together with Sheryl Sutton—Sutton in black and white—with black and white boys and girls. In his book *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton*, Pilinszky gives a poetic description of the performance, including a description of this scene in chapter eight (Figure 10.1):

> I should still like to repeat the whole act now, filled out with other, new motifs, as it also repeats itself again and again in me, if only because this scene was the play's obvious raw material.
>
> The scene starts in a lit-up auditorium, indicating that we commit our most hidden acts out in the open, in the limelight; that is, in such a silence and loneliness as in the very center of an overcrowded arena.

Figure 10.1 "Murder Scene" with Robert Wilson, *Expectation/Deafman Glance* (2004). (Photo Monika Rittershaus)
Source: www.robertwilson.com

The stage—for this period—is blocked with an enormous brick wall, as if shutting events off from itself from the very start. In front of the brick wall stands a small table: a bottle of milk on it. With his back to the spectators, a blond boy sits on his stool. Sheryl comes in from the left, rippling in her slowness like a nun possessed, and rigid as a seminarist preparing to commit the first sin of his priesthood. Sheryl's every step is aimed *for this* and *against this*. First she tenderly gives the child a drink, then replaces the empty bottle.

How and what she performs is a rite rather than a sin, more precisely: the fulfilment, more burdensome and abstract than any duty, of the last phase of a sin. First of all she has to dress. She pulls her elbow-high black gloves onto both arms, hands. Then she has to take in her hand and open the razor laid ready on the table, and with it she then cuts the child's throat in a split second, while with her free left hand she has already covered him over.

In a few moments the sheet is blood-soaked from head to toe, but before Sheryl can go off she still has to close the razor and put it back. From then on one can sense that she has become weightless and steps unsteppingly, that all she would like to do is to sleep, that she is already asleep, but before that she still has to get out. And she does make an attempt to do so, when a black boy, the same age as the one she has killed, blocks her way. Like vomit a howl breaks out from the boy. Sheryl claps her gloved hand over the boy's mouth, producing silence. Sheryl takes back her hand, when a deaf-mute characteristic howl

> breaks out again from the boy, a sound such as never has heard any kind of sound. Sheryl claps his mouth up for the second time until the child's body calms under her hand, and now they can stand facing each other soundlessly. Sheryl turns and steps backwards to the middle of the brick wall. The little boy follows rhythmically in her tracks. Sheryl stops, and the child too behind her. Sheryl turns and starts walking straight at the stone wall. Up runs the brick wall, and the house lights go out. On a snow-white piano a black girl plays Chopin. The moon-lit park is full of unrecognizable invited guests. Sheryl and the boy in her tracks, as I've earlier described, enter the garden and disappear from our view.[11]

According to the Hungarian artist János Gát (Sheryl Sutton's future husband), János Pilinszky met Sutton after a Paris performance of *Deafman Glance* in Paul Wiener's apartment. Wiener was a Hungarian psychiatrist and Pilinszky's host,[12] and his oral testimony also reveals that Sheryl Sutton spoke a little French, as did Pilinszky, though he spoke no English. Thus, most of the dialogues written in *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton* are imaginary, as the subtitle "novel of a dialogue" suggests (i.e., it is a work of fiction).

The above "Murder scene" enters Pilinszky's personal mythology as the image of "The Murder" in general, witnessed in a concrete form by the poet during the Shoah: in the autumn of 1944, he was stationed as a soldier in Harbach and Ravensbrück, where he saw the horrors of the labor and concentration camps firsthand. In his first published poems and in his prose, Pilinszky explores the interrelating states of mind of the victim and the murderer in abstract images. As he bore witness to the Shoah, he also becomes a spectator of this "Murder Scene" on the stage in 1971. He was moved by Sheryl Sutton's portrayal of the murderer, and the performance—which lacked emotion and offered little in the way of catharsis—was also artistically provocative for him.

In this context, Pilinszky is the spectator *and* the witness to the rite, and we are involved in his experience through his text. The theater anthropologist Victor Turner's term "liminoid state"[13] offers a concise description of the situation of the mother, who, after murdering the child, is banished from the body of the theater work and assigned the state of mere witness to what is happening on stage. Wilson seems to show the work to us through the eyes and defective ears of a deaf-mute witnessing the events. Pilinszky's text doubles this role of witness by adding him as a spectator. The tempo of this theatrical gesture, which has no external referee, is "lento," not "ritardando." It is Bergson's "durée" staged and inspired by Gertrude Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts*, where composition carries the meaning, not the words.[14]

In Wilson's production, the scene evokes Daniel Stern's research published in *The First Relationship: Mother and Infant*,[15] which is mentioned in

Wilson's notes in the early Robert Wilson Archives at Columbia University (box 181, labeled "Deafman Glance project," *1987.* Notes for *Overture to the Fourth Act of Deafman Glance*):

> In 1967 I met Dr. Daniel Stern, head of the Department of Psychology at Columbia University. He had made over 300 films of mothers and their babies in natural situations where the baby was crying and the mother would pick up and comfort the child. When these films were shown at normal speed, that was what we saw. But when they were shown frame by frame—normal speed is 24 frames per second—what one sees in 8 out of 10 cases is that the initial reaction of the mother in the first 3 frames—3/24ths of a second—is to lunge at the child and that the infant is recoiling in terror. In the next 2 or 3 frames we see completely different pictures. In the next 2 or 3 frames again the pictures are completely different, and so on. So in one second of time we see that what is taking place between a mother and child is extremely complex. When the mother is shown the film she is horrified and responds, "But I love my child! I want to comfort the child."

Although this scene is created from a different perspective and on the basis of a different source from the scene captured by Pilinszky, the ritual form on stage (the Murder) involves the spectator poet, and it gives the act multiple meanings.

Poems by Pilinszky inspired by *Deafman Glance*

Pilinszky also wrote some poems related to this theatrical experience that embodied the ideal theater and which Simone Weil termed "immobile theater." Pilinszky, who was also inspired by Wilson, wrote his own "paper theater," as he called it, which shares some affinities with Mallarmé's "théâtre de la Pensée" (theater of Thought or Mind theater). The performance confirmed his instinctive sense that poetry, and especially *his* poetry, needed a new mode with which to address reality, and that Wilson's emphasis on concentrated gesture and ritual was part of this new mode.[16]

> *Seashore, shingle, noise of gulls*. Sheryl, as in an Edgar Allan Poe poem, is sitting in a throne-like armchair in the full light of noon with a black raven to her left. Her dress, cut from black taffeta, is ground-length and motionless.
>
> Before I knew her, a few weeks after the performance, I even wrote a poem on this sitting-about. Ted Hughes made an English translation of it. Here is the original:

BŰN ÉS BŰNHŐDÉS

Sheryl Suttonnak

A befalazott képzelet
még egyre ismételgeti —

A pillanat villanyszék trónusán
még ott az arc
sziklába mártott nyakszirt
gyönyörű kéz —
pórusos jelenléted.

Még tart a nyár.

Ereszd le jogarod, Királynő.

Ted Hughes's translation, I feel, captures in English the same black American girl of whom I, a Hungarian, took my snapshot. Sheryl found the poem dedicated to her nice, though a bit overexposed.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

For Sheryl Sutton

The walled-in imagination
continues to repeat it —
the face is still there
throned in the electric chair of the moment
the nape dipped in cliff
the beautiful hand —
the porous skin of your presence.

And still the summer goes on.

Let down your scepter, Queen.[17]

Crime and punishment creates the present tense of the liminal, banished state of the woman and the memory of the spectator keeping in mind and repeating the same scene over and over again. In Pilinszky's poems, this *praesens perfectum perpetuum* (compared to a *praesens perfectum continuum*) is the abstraction of an irredeemable past tense elevated to the level of poetry, where there is no time, there is only the reversible time of the Passion becoming the abstract image of the Shoah and all murders committed in the twentieth century. The poem also refers, in its title, to Pilinszky's favorite author, Dostoyevsky (Figure 10.2 and Figure 10.3).

In Pilinszky's poem *Stone Wall and Fiesta*, Daniel Stern's research almost seems to have taken the form of a poem (without any reference to the experimentation): "What happens, what is it that really happens during the unhappy and horrendous time of every one of our actions?"

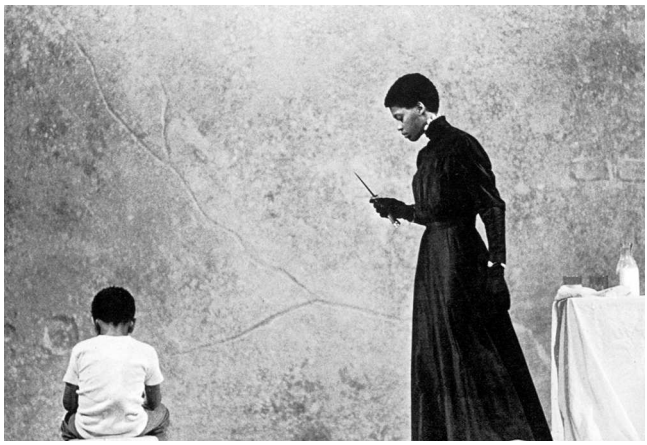

Figure 10.2 *Deafman Glance* with Alain Bertran and Sheryl Sutton (1971). (Photo: Martin Bough)
Source: www.robertwilson.com

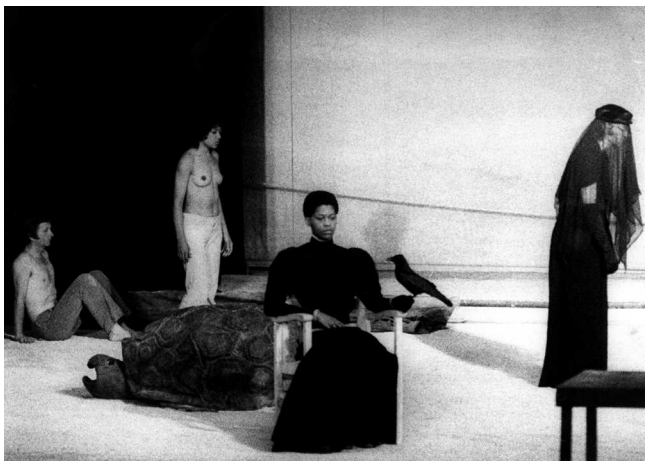

Figure 10.3 *Deafman Glance* with Bernie Rohret (topless woman), Sheryl Sutton (center), and Terry Chambers (veiled woman), 1971. (Photo: Rosine Nusimovici)
Source: www.robertwilson.com

Stone Wall and Fiesta
(Homage to Robert Wilson)

Is it the motion of the stabbing knife, and
after the unhappy stations of the hand?
Is it the interrupted melodies,
the dishevelled fiestas and this beyond
the lights of the confused chandelier?

Before the wall? Or behind the wall?
What happens, what is it that really happens during the unhappy and horrendous
time of every one of our actions?[18]

Another poem by Pilinszky, *Hommage à Sheryl Sutton I*, offers a good example of how a ritual act broadens its significations through Sheryl Sutton's acting in a manner that suggests that motivation and situation are not inherent to her. There is no sign of any kind of willingness, neither spontaneous nor premeditated. This *via negativa* of poetic creation forms the basis of Pilinszky's *ars poetica*.

A lehető legszűkebb térben
végrehajtottad, amit nem szabad.
Csodálkoztál a szertartáson,
mely vágóhíd, bár nincs kiterjedése,
könyökig ér, bár nincsen ideje.

Csak később hallottad, amit
letakartál. Majd belépve a kertbe
elámultál a telehold varázsán.

In the narrowest possible space
you achieved the forbidden.
You marvelled at the ceremony
which is a slaughter-house, though it has no dimension,
reaches to the elbow, though it is not in time.

Only later did you hear what
you have withheld, then entering the garden
you were astonished by the magic of the full moon.[19]

Hommage à Sheryl Sutton II refers to a swimming movement which, according to Sheryl herself, was her strength and which made motion almost imperceptible.

The significance of Pilinszky's choice of poetry as a means of expressing his engagement with *Deafman Glance* leads us to the very center of Pilinszky's esthetic. Pilinszky had insight into and experiences with the world of theater, without, however, having been in daily contact with the practice of the theater. His approach remained that of a poet. The poems written about *Deafman Glance* recycle the main subjects of Pilinszky's poetry: murder as a Passion, part of the Mass; witnessing as the ontological status of humankind, immobility as the proper movement of poetry, the present tense of poetry, which is a *praesens perfectum perpetuum*, that is, a present which not only affects presence, but which is reproduced over and over again.

Conclusion

In his inaugural address on taking the Chair in Anthropology of Theater given at the Collège de France in 1997,[20] Grotowski distinguishes two tendencies in theater. He terms the first one "artificiel" (from *ars*, *artis*), in which all elements of the performance are precisely developed and, in a sense, the "montage" of these elements is not realized on stage but as an effect of the predetermined play in the mind of the spectator. This tendency is characteristic of Robert Wilson's theater and some Far Eastern forms of theater, such as the Beijing Opera or Noh. The other tendency is the organic one, in which the montage is created, in a sense, in the actor who is becoming a *vehiculum*, a word applied to Grotowski's theater by Peter Brook. My discussion of Pilinszky's prose and poetry based on the experience of having borne witness to the rituals in *Deafman Glance* affirms Grotowski's observation. Ritual, even if it is a quasi-ritual or a poetic ritual, does not allow the spectator to remain separate from the scene. In this sense, Pilinszky bears witness to *Deafman Glance*, and especially the murder scene, as an anthropologist. As a spectator, he is cognitively involved. There is a certain anamorphism in understanding ritual. In other words, the spectator must have the correct angle to see a comprehensible form or figure. On the other hand, there are multiple correct angles, due to the poetic, that is, metaphorical, construction of meanings in poetic rituals.

In Pilinszky's case, the writer of this article saw the recording—so to speak, the relics of a performance—and analyzed the impact it made on a poet who was witness to this theatrical rite and who wrote of this memory in prose and poetry, writings which I have presented in this paper in the published English translations. Compared to the "liminoid" state of receptivity of the live theater performance, a double border crossing takes place through the text that is both written and translated. Thus, Pilinszky's relationship to *Deafman Glance* gives the English readership another perspective on Wilson's work: that of poetic rituality.

Notes

1 Robert Wilson's main and only professional actress at the time.
2 Johanna Domokos and Enikő Sepsi (eds.), *Poetic Rituality in Theater and Literature*, Budapest/Paris, L'Harmattan France/Hungary, Károli series, 2020. See also Saskia Fischer's PhD dissertation, *Reflektierte Ritualität. Die Wiederaneignung ritueller Formen in der Dramatik nach 1945*, Bielefeld, 2016 (manuscript), and Fischer, *Ritual und Ritualität im Drama nach 1945*, Paderborn, Wilhelm Fink, 2019.
3 Richard Schechner, "From ritual to theater and back: the efficacy-entertainment braid," in *Performance Theory*, London/New York, Routledge, 1988 [1977], 128.
4 Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, Robert Wilson Papers, Box 81, "Performing jobs" label. Letters of Robert Wilson to Antony Scully in September 1970 about Woodstock College program, Center for Religion and Worship, New York. These letters were first published in my book *Le "théâtre" immobile de János Pilinszky – lu dans l'optique de*

Mallarmé, Simone Weil et Robert Wilson, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2014, 146–147. (*Pilinszky János mozdulatlan színháza Mallarmé, Simone Weil és Robert Wilson műveinek tükrében*, Budapest, L'Harmattan, Károli Könyvek, 2015, 109–110.)

5 Arthur Holmberg, *The Theatre of Robert Wilson*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, 7.

6 Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004, 136–137 (see the chapter "Theater for Tourists").

7 See note 118.

8 In the play *Dionysus in 69*, he borrows the birth rite from the West Iranian Asmat; The Living Theater's *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* and *Paradise Now* use elements of yoga and the Indian theater as well, while Philip Glass's music—the American composer has worked with Robert Wilson on a few projects—is inspired by the gamelan and the Indian raga. To the present day, these rites continue to travel around Europe, which generates a situation of theatrical reception (e.g., Whirling Dervishes).

9 Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 138.

10 Stephan Brecht, *L'Art de Robert Wilson (Le Regard du sourd)*, tr. Françoise Gaillard, Paris, Christian Bourgois, *Le Théâtre*, 1972/1; Brecht, *The Theatre of Visions*: *Robert Wilson*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1978.

11 János Pilinszky, *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton. The Novel of a Dialogue*, Manchester/Budapest, Carcanet/Corvina, 1992, 49–50.

12 János Gát also performed a solo at the Nancy Festival in 1971 about one year and one day in the life of a person. He showed me the photos of this performance in his gallery on Madison Avenue in New York. After Wilson left Paris, a theatrical group called Laïla was founded there, and Sheryl Sutton, János Gát, and Paul Wiener became members of this group. Wiener also wrote an article on his and Gát's experiences with Laïla, De la régression contrôlée à la transcendance, *Art et Théâtre*, June 1990, 34–35.

13 Victor Turner further develops van Gennep's scheme (Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Routledge Library Editions Anthropology and Ethnography (Paperback Reprint ed.), Hove (East Sussex, UK), Psychology Press, 1977 [1960]) by revealing the attributes of the three phases (preliminal, liminal or threshold, and postliminal) and their main features. In his by now classic work *From Ritual to Theatre*, Turner uses the word "liminoid" to describe a liminary state referring to art and religion: "I had distinguished 'liminal' from 'liminoid' by associating the first with obligatory, tribal participation in ritual and the second as characterizing artistic or religious forms voluntarily produced, usually with recognition of individual authorship, and often subversive in intention toward the prevailing structures." (Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York, Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982, 118).

14 Gertrude Stein, Composition as explanation, in *A Gertrude Stein Reader*, Illinois, Northwestern University, 1993, 493.

15 Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1977.

16 Peter Jay, Preface, in J. Pilinszky, *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton. The Novel of a Dialogue*, Manchester/Budapest, Carcanet/Corvina, 1992, 13.

17 Pilinszky, *Conversations with Sheryl Sutton*, 40–41.

18 Ádám Makkai (ed.), *In Quest of the Miracle Stag*, Vol. 1, tr. Ádám Makkai, Chicago, Atlantis-Centaur, 2000, 959.

19 János Pilinszky, *The Desert of Love: Selected poems*, tr. Ted Hughes and János Csokits, London, Anvil Press, 1989, 71. János Pilinszky, *Összegyűjtött versei* [*Collected Poems*], Budapest, Századvég, 1995, 143.

20 Jerży Grotowski, *Anthropologie théâtrale. La "lignée organique" au théâtre et dans le rituel*, Paris, Le livre qui parle, Collège de France series, 1997.

11 Valère Novarina and János Pilinszky, or the theater of unselfed poetry

> *Theaters must become the place of unselfed lyricism. Here, the I is a collective. It needs an entire wagonful of actors, like Carnival, twenty-two or forty-four actors for the portrayal of a single person. On stage, the individual is without characteristics, without limits, unrecorded in real estate registers and without foundation, plummeting into somatic chasms—and there, all of a sudden, lies the omission of prayer, the empty space of prayer: an empty space, an absence… Prayer is nothing other than collapsing onto the ground and the renewed taste in the mouth of the ground, the humus, the* humilitas humana, *human humility*. —Valère Novarina

In its artistic sense, Valère Novarina's path from philology to philosophy leads from writing to the theater. The recollecting nature of language prepares him to find his way back from the page and the reader's imaginary (mental) theater to the original font—nothingness ["néant," "rien"], emptiness (the French word *vide* is an anagram of *Dieu*, God), which for Mallarmé meant nothing more than virtual completeness in its own motionlessness, in the word's suspended almost-annihilation (*Crisis of Verse*). For Artaud, on the other hand, whose work exerted a decisive influence on the French theater of the 1970s,[1] emptiness embodied the possibility of a merciless encounter with reality's verso, its shadow.[2] For him, the western use of language and the theater's logocentrism was an obstacle; eastern performance represented its polar opposite, with its gestural systems embodying more ancient circumstances and myths.[3] For this reason, oriental theater is much more metaphysical, while the occidental tends more to psychologize.[4] In Artaud's teleological vision, the theater's particular, universally encoded "diction" must be as hieroglyph-like, precise, and immediately legible as in a dream.[5] His spiritual heirs (Robert Wilson, Jerży Grotowski, Valère Novarina, et al). set out on separately branching paths in realizing this vision. In his early performances, Wilson either excluded language entirely (*Deafman Glance*) or displayed it as a sound effect, equal in rank to the visual spectacle, a musical motif exterior to the body's periphery (*Letter to Queen Victoria*, *Stalin*, *Freud*, *Einstein on the Beach*). Grotowski's actor allows impulses to pass through himself that originate in

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-11

the body's organic nature and are not worked out in advance but come to the surface during the course of rehearsals.

According to Artaud, the phonemic diction of his holy theater of hieroglyphs strips things of their everyday meaning and clothes them with a different one.[6] And this is nothing other than the working of metaphor, the process created by poetic language. This is why Artaud speaks of "poetry in space."[7] In his text "Theater of Cruelty and the Closing of Representation," Jacques Derrida emphasizes that this attempt by Artaud to bring a language into being that belongs exclusively to the theater is nothing other than the desire to create a representation "that is complete presence, that bears nothing in itself other than its own death, of a present that never repeats itself—that is, one that stands outside of time, not-present."[8] (At that time, Derrida was writing his *Grammatology*, whose main theme is the "differentiation" between language and writing.)

Neither does Valère Novarina believe in the illusion of supportable presence:[9] "True presence attaches to nothing, the *present* is a gift, a present. The present existing before us is in the *future*: something handed to us, pointed out and appearing open … we are handed over as *persona* … The word *persona* opens us up" (399).[10] When the curtain rises, the actor—or, rather, any person performing an act—enters his own Passion as a disassembled figure (233) and submits to the acts of language. "Exactly the way a good swimmer swims thanks to the water. The undulation of the text goes forward, breathing, while the actor remains motionless … No hesitation, no portrayal, no contingency: the text is seemingly dictated, the actor is its victim and transmits it to the audience in a stream, with a single impulse. The actor undertakes a passive act. Or he steps into the Passion of language. It is the actor's Passion, his passivity, his *idiocism*, and his failure is that which renders the spectator *visible*" (190–191). In other words, just as in Artaud's theater of cruelty, catharsis is banished from Novarina's as well (it renders the spectator visible—perspective is in his eyes, and the point of death is in his soul), or rather, in this respect it is an Aristotelian theater.[11] The actor provides *respir(it)ation* and before the forgetful audience, he remembers, and, in doing so, the text that he allows to pass through his body, that he breathes out into the space, returns from death, repeats the original creative act on his body, via the biologically transpired *logos*. And this *logos* is, first of all, a verb (*verbum*, the Word), with the character of a verb (in contrast to the horizontality of adjectives—as we could continue in the voice of the well-known Hungarian poet János Pilinszky).[12] The *persona*, the mask worn and displayed by us, the personality, the no-one ["personne"], is an empty point that at its center speaks and denies (233). In exhalation, it transubstantiates: the spiritual is not immaterial but the metamorphosis of matter, its exhalation (expiration). Man, created by speech in the image of the Creator, becomes active through speech. In place of Artaud's hieroglyphics, Novarina's theater interrogates the image of man (which in its essence is speech), his anthropoglyphs, *in vivo*. The text erupts through the

actor's body with his *respir(it)ation*: it is the common Passion of actor and text. True mimesis is the activation of existence, the setting of existence into motion. As an *imitatio Christi*, the actor de-portrays ["dé-représente"] and destroys the human idol. The Word crucified on the cross of space hurls human words into space, the body given over to this passive act. Through prayer, which is *respir(it)ation*, life is given back, since respiration evokes what is missing (Christ's other name is the gouged out, the one who is empty, like us, who are *personae*).[13]

This is the Pascalian (Paschal) act. Novarina follows Pascal's thoughts in his use of numbered fragments which stand in the latently influential stream of the French essay: they engage in dialogue with Jules Lagneau, Alain, Simone Weil, and Claudel (even though their names do not crop up, and the intertextuality may not always be conscious). According to Alain, ritual provides rules and objects to the attention, which is why it might be the origin of art.[14] His student, Simone Weil, extends the train of thought with her concept of artistic de-creation [décréation]. The characteristic of the de-created state is a passive activity whose origin is found in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Related concepts include desire without an object, and undirected attention. In truth, it is the tense compromise between metaphysical stillness and the movement necessary for any physical action. Human autonomy, evil, and mortality are crucified on the cross of space and time. By means of grace, the "I," assuming itself to be autonomous (this autonomy is the ego's greatest illusion), is gradually erased by its own volition: this process is the opposite of creation, namely, de-creation (taking one back to the uncreated state, in contrast to destruction, which leads into the void).[15] Reminiscences of János Pilinszky might arise in the Hungarian reader's mind, since his oeuvre from 1963 onwards becomes interwoven with Weil's world of thought. In the author's image—which, from his *Szálkák* (*Splinters*) onward, dominates his poems, and which corresponds with the metaphor of the quill in Simone Weil—it is not so much the aspect of subjection, or rather the Platonic sense of mania, which is emphasized, but its stillness, not only the influence on the present of the Passion as *praesens perfectum perpetuum* but the stationary center of a constantly repeating Passion in which it stands. Or, rather, the act of writing in space and not bounded in time. In this sense, the artist is a medium (like the Sheryl of *Beszélgetések* [*Conversations*]). I quote Pilinszky's poems in the original Hungarian and in the English translations of Ted Hughes.

Intelem
Ne a lélekzetvételt. A zihalást.
Ne a nászasztalt. A lehulló
Maradékot, hideg árnyakat.
Ne a mozdulatot. A kapkodást.
A kampó csöndjét, azt jegyezd.

Exhortation
Not the respiration. The gasping.
Not the wedding table. The falling
scraps, the chill, the shadows.
Not the gesture. Not the hysteria.
The silence of the hook is what you
must note.

Arra figyelj, amire városod, az örök város máig is figyel: tornyaival, tetőivel, élő és halott polgáraival.	Record what your city, the everlasting city has watched, with its towers, its roofs, its living and dead citizens, to this very hour.
Akkor talán még napjaidban hírül adhatod azt, miről hírt adnod itt egyedül érdemes.	Then you may make known, perhaps, even in your day, what is alone worthy the annunciation,
Írnok, akkor talán nem jártál itt hiába.	Scribe, then perhaps you will not have passed in vain.[16]
Betűk, sorok Megérdemelné a békés halált minden írnok, aki az éjszakában tollat fog és papír fölé hajol.	*Letters, Lines* Each scribe deserves a peaceful death, who at night takes pen in hand and bows over the paper.[17]

Pilinszky's first liturgical piece, the *KZ oratórium* [Oratorio for a Concentration Camp] (*KZ Oratorio)*,[18] appeared in 1964 in the volume *Requiem*. Claudel's practice is a reference point in the art form: "Claudel developed the poetic oratorio toward the stage and, with a bit of exaggeration, toward opera and melodrama. I sense hazily that I must 'distort' oratorio in the direction of film."[19] In Pilinszky's understanding, the oratorio is a repetition of the Mass: prayer, Introit, Gospel, *consecratio*, and *communio* follow each other. The following story-insert is certainly best understood as the *consecratio*.

Hol volt, hol nem volt, élt egyszer egy magányos farkas. Magányosabb az angyaloknál.	Once upon a time there was a lonely wolf lonelier than the angels.
Elvetődött egyszer egy faluba, és beleszeretett az első házba, amit meglátott.	He happened to come to a village. He fell in love with the first house he saw.
Már a falát is megszerette, a kőművesek simogatását, de az ablak megállította.	Already he loved its walls, the caresses of its bricklayers. But the window stopped him.
A szobában emberek ültek. Istenen kívül soha senki Olyan szépnek nem látta őket, mint az a tisztaszívű állat.	In the room sat people. Apart from God nobody ever found them so beautiful as this childlike beast.
Éjszaka aztán be is ment a házba, megállt a szoba közepén, s nem mozdult onnan soha többé.	So at night he went into the house. He stopped in the middle of the room and never moved from there any more.

Nyitott szemmel állt egész éjszaka, s reggel is, mikor agyonverték.	He stood all through the night, with wide eyes and on into the morning when he was beaten to death.[20]

In his 1967 interview on Vatican Radio, he stated that his model for the sacral theater is the Mass: "Following the problems posed so pointedly by the theater of the absurd, we must do everything possible for the creation of a new sacral theater. … Our age, which displays in high relief the end of a process of profanation, also offers numerous qualities that make possible the birth of a new sacral artform, which I can best imagine as taking some sort of oratorical form. It certainly sounds too bold, but it is in no way an accident that our attention again turns its concentration toward the drama of dramas, the liturgy of the Holy Mass."[21] In motionless observation ("lying flat on the paling, hard as a press"), the poem is heard as if it were silent, as if it were part of the Mass, the liturgy: a prayer for embodiment; a motionless drama.

Novarina's texts, just like Pilinszky's oratorio and stage works, are indubitably text-centric, but the former can also rely on daily theatrical practice. Pilinszky's theatrical "pieces," written in the 1970s, draw a great deal on his poetic technique: in truth, he worked out a theatrical poetics and not a theory of the theater. His dramaturgy draws upon Simone Weil's texts, Grotowski's, and, most of all, Wilson's theater. Although his trust in the word occasionally falters (indeed, in the 1970s it moves to the sentence or, much more likely, to a sort of deficient mechanism), after nearly falling silent he nevertheless chooses the mediator-actor of immobile intensity Sheryl Sutton (and not the deaf-mute little boy) as the lead player in his dialogue-essay, and in his final notes he speaks of planning a book whose title would have been "He Finally Speaks."[22] Just as with Pilinszky or Wilson, so in Novarina's works, the actor does not express himself: he is a being divided in two, his own witness, observer of his own Passion—a person who steps outside personhood.

In those expressions we arrive at in studying Valère Novarina's works—the theater of unselfed poetry, the theater's modern (concealed) liturgy, etc.—we must understand a deep inner compulsion, a teleological longing, rather than concrete programs. Given that, we must be wary of emptying the concepts of meaning via overuse. Better to leave the prayer's empty space, the plunge to the earth, the possibility of *humilitas humana*.

Notes

1 Previously, in the 1960s, French theater had defined itself as Brechtian.
2 Antonin Artaud, "Le théâtre et les Dieux" [The Theater and the Gods], in *Oeuvres complètes*, VIII, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, 196; see also Maurice Blanchot, "Artaud," *Le livre à venir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1959, 50–58; Blanchot, "La cruelle raison poétique," *L'entretien infini*, Paris, Gallimard, 1969, 432–438.
3 Artaud, "Théâtre oriental et théâtre occidental," *Le théâtre et son double*, Paris, Gallimard, Folio/Essais, 1964, 105–113.
4 *Ibid.*, 112.

5 Artaud, *Le théâtre de la cruauté*, Paris, Gallimard, Folio/Essais, 1964, 145.
6 Artaud, "Le théâtre et la poésie," *Œuvres complètes*, V, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, 15.
7 Artaud, "Théâtre oriental et théâtre occidental," 112.
8 Jacques Derrida, "Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation," *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris, Seuil, Essais, 1967, 364. [*re*-présentation qui soit présence pleine, qui ne porte pas en soi son double comme sa mort, d'un présent qui ne se répète pas, c'est-à-dire d'un présent hors du temps, d'un non-présent.]
9 As Michel Corvin observes in a footnote in his foreword to the French edition of *The Unknown Act*, many links tie Novarina to Artaud. This similarity is distant but important: "The concepts of body, matter, flesh, death and holes, separation and emptiness, breath and rhythm, a new genesis, are also fundamental concepts in Artaud. Artaud's monism also comprises the osmosis between matter and spirit." (Michel Corvin, "Préface," in Valère Novarina, *L'Acte inconnu*, Paris, Gallimard, Folio Théâtre, 2009, 13–14).
10 Numbers in parentheses refer to fragments from the following publication: Valère Novarina, *Lumières du corps*, Paris, P.O.L, 2006.
11 Pierre Brunel, *Théâtre et Cruauté ou Dionysos profané*, Paris, Librairie des Méridiens, Bibliothèque de l'Imaginaire, 1982.
12 Novarina participated in the new French translation of the Bible with other poets (Jacques Roubaud, Olivier Cadiot), dramatists (e.g., François Bon), and novelists (Jean Echenoz, Emmanuel Carrère, Jean-Luc Benoziglio).
13 Continuing in the vein of Simone Weil's thinking, imagination seeks to fill the rupture occurring at this point—which could also be filled transcendentally—with illusions.
14 Alain, "Du cérémonial," in *Système des beaux-arts*, Paris, Gallimard, 1926, 40–41. (For more detail on the subject, see my studies: "A propos d'Alain," in *Revue d'Etudes françaises*, N° 10, 2005, 95–105; "Notes sur la politesse et quelques autres sujets," in Michel Murat, Frédéric Worms, *Alain, littérature et philosophie mêlée*, Paris, Editions Rue d'Ulm/Presses de l'Ecole Normale Supérieure, 2012, 119–128).
15 Simone Weil, "Décréation," in *La pesanteur et la grâce*, Paris, Plon, 1988 [1947], 42.
16 János Pilinszky, "Exhortation," *The Desert of Love: Selected poems*, tr. Ted Hughes – János Csokits, 57. János Pilinszky, *Összegyűjtött versei* [*Collected Poems*], Budapest, Századvég, 1995, 96.
17 Tr. Peter Czipott. See also the translation of Katalin N. Ullrich on Babel Anthology's site: https://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/Pilinszky_J%c3%a1nos-1921/Bet%c5%b1k,_sorok/en/35381-Letters,_Lines [Peaceful death is well-deserved/by each scribe, who at night/takes a pen and bends over paper.] János Pilinszky, *Összegyűjtött versei* [*Collected Poems*], 127.
18 KZ is an abbreviation of the German for concentration camp *Konzentrationslager.* Tr. Peter Jay, *PN Review* 22, Vol. 8 N° 2, November–December 1981.
19 János Pilinszky, *Naplók, töredékek* [*Journals, Fragments*], Budapest, Osiris, 1995, 17.
20 János Pilinszky, "Fable. Detail from KZ-Oratorio," tr. Ted Hughes and János Csokits, in Pilinszky, *The Desert of Love*, 50. (An earlier version in M. Vajda (ed.), *Modern Hungarian Poetry*, Budapest, Corvina Press, 1977, 149–150.) János Pilinszky, *Összegyűjtött versei* [*Collected Poems*], 64.
21 János Pilinszky, *Publicisztikai írások* [*Journalistic Writings*], Budapest, Osiris, 1999, 526. What we know about the productions achieved during the author's life is that the first one was presented in Kecskemét in 1963, and also staged in Orléans in 1967. According to the 3rd May 1969 issue of *Film, színház, muzsika* [*Film, Theater, Music*], the Universitas Group also staged it, under the direction of József Ruszt. (Posthumous productions: 1994 at the Castle Theater, Gyula, directed by István Iglódi; 13–15 November 1996 in Paris, jointly by the Théâtre Molière and the Maison de la Poésie, under Michael Lonsdale's direction.)
22 Pilinszky, *Naplók, töredékek* [*Journals, Fragments*], 200–201.

12 Sacred or holy? Dramaturgy in Valère Novarina's theater

Word-theater

In his *Theatrical Fugue*, Anatoly Vasiliev writes about the tradition that French culture mentions under the rubric of word-theater:

> What is drama on the stage? Where and on what level does it take place? In the sphere of psychological (human) relations, or in the text itself? This question substantially and essentially divides theater's methodology (and its theory) since when we transform words into human relations, we see before all else the human relations on the stage, and the words only behind them. If, on the other hand, the drama's nature is realized in the text, we self-evidently see the text. … If the text and word stand at the center, then the plot finds its place in the words themselves and is realized in the word.
>
> In this case, dialogue can be understood as the relationships of living words and its examination as the study of the embodied word, or rather, its presentation! What we hold as the nature (object) of the theater—plot, or energy—resides either in the psyche or in the word. And this means different theaters, different cultures, and various theatrical companies.[1]

The word-theater of Valère Novarina (see Figure 12.1) follows the sort of concealed liturgy that becomes visible only from certain viewpoints; we can also regard it as an example of anamorphic theater. The painting by Mantegna mentioned by Novarina in his essay *Fragile Shelter*[2] is also quasi-anamorphic, since the observer can only see it in proper perspective when kneeling: we could say it "forces one to one's knees" (see Figure 12.2). This painting might just as well be the Novarinian metaphor of theatrical experience: the presentation "drives us into" the theatrical space. In an interview, Novarina uses the term "anamorphosis" as the key to deciphering his coded works, but in characteristically inverted form: "You will see what I have created, but as an anamorphosis, from a different perspective that is your own, and of which I remain ignorant. The communication is indirect:

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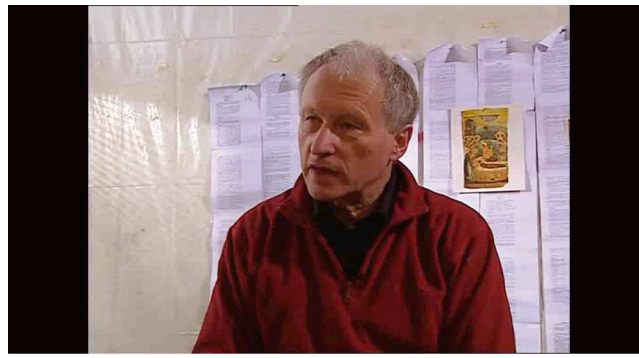


Figure 12.1 Valère Novarina in front of his text hung on the wall of his studio.

Figure 12.2 Distortion in space: Andrea Mantegna, *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (c. 1483), Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

you will not see *what I saw*, but you will see it *because I have already seen it*. Because my composition is tensile, rhythmically exact, but also because something is concealed within it."[3]

The active word (*logos*), subjected to the Paschal transition, passed through the body of the actor (regarded as the *vehiculum*) and tossed into space, glistens and is resurrected (see the resurrection scene of *L'Acte inconnu* in Figure 12.3). This is the image of the actor in Novarina's theater, building on the French word-theatrical tradition (Genet, Jarry):

Figure 12.3 Resurrection scene. *L'Acte inconnu* [The Unknown Act], Avignon (2007), Author and director: Valère Novarina, scenic design: Philippe Marioge, music: Christian Paccoud. (Photo: Olivier Marchetti).

> The Paschal transition exists deep within our physical bodies. At its center (in the actor, in the Bible, in the Psalms, at the center of artistic work and the flesh-and-blood body) is the heart of captivity and liberation: the overturning of breathing, the spiritual paradox. Progressing around this empty central point we breathe unceasingly, stepping over it again and again, always knowing in advance that we will need to come across it again, this is where we come to die, and this is where we come to rise into a new life, *we breathe* from both, from suffocation and death, from an unknown crossing point. A cliff-palisade, a ford, the crossing of the River Jabbok.[4]
>
> In this flood-drought movement that eternally happens in our bodies, and which we always forget, there is within it the tale-bearing echo, the flood, the sequence of time's backhandedness, the breaking waves, the onrush and receding, the fluid movement in which the material spirit of *breathing* appears. *Breathing* sacrifices us alive.[5]

Aside from *persona*, Novarina also uses the term "marionette" several times. Novarina studied Adolphe Appia a great deal, and Appia's close associate Edward Gordon Craig regarded the ideal actor and interpreter, the über-marionette, as an emotionless puppet. In Novarina's definition, the marionette is "the man in the thing, handed over as thing and gift."

The Paschal transition described in the above quotation takes place in the Author of the Never-ending Novel's monologue in *The Imaginary Operetta*, which passes through the stage of total chaos before becoming clarified (Figure 12.4).

Figure 12.4 The Author of the Never-ending Novel in *The Imaginary Operetta* (246 sentences, each different, in the moment of chaos), directed by V. Novarina, Théâtre de l'Odéon, Paris (2010); frame taken from the Duna TV film *L'Amour est voyant*, filmed in Paris.

Chaos and order

It is characteristic of Novarina's basic dramaturgy that, on the model of the Passion, there is first order, after which we pass through into chaos (the rhythmic catastrophe), until the new *breathing* system appears. In Latin, *fanum* means the sacred place, while *profanum* is that which is outside the sacred place. It was customary to bring *fanum* into connection with the semi-deponent verb *for*, *fari*, *fatus sum*, whose meaning is 'speech'; this is the source of *fatum* or *infans*, 'one who cannot speak'. In Novarina's works, the process of profanation of the sacral, the "closed," the "locked up," takes place—the melding of the two qualities into each other.

Sacralization is also petrification; profanation brings cyclical motion and rhythm into the piece. In itself neither order nor chaos, nor the sacred nor the profane exist, but rather the conversion of the two opposites into each other in a specific dynamic, a specific rhythm. Novarina writes about this as follows in his text *Chaos*: "Rabelais imitates the Bible and calls the word to account. His book is brilliantly incomprehensible. It is such a necessary chaos for our days, in which the mystery of language still exists, of which they want to rob us. We are created to be animals, sons of the voice, children of the word, called to speech, born dancers, namers, but not communicating beasts."[6] In his *Language Remembers*, he calls rhythm the inner order of chaos:

> Rhythm is not placed afterwards, is not superimposed, as an *after* structure or as an ornament, something that happens to formless

> matter: it is primary. It is at the deepest depth of the birth of everything. It founds language, it begets thought, it births movement. Rhythm is the order that chaos gives itself. It is the internal order of chaos. Rhythm is the deepest thing inside matter and within us. Rhythm is what I always look for within: inside matter itself, inside reality. It is found through blindness, by descending to the lowest. Rhythm itself wants to speak to us. Rhythm alone makes us understand that thought is a drama, that there is no human realm of which we would be masters and that would be reserved to us, but that there is in our thinking the animal drama of the alive word. Energy is the fire set by rhythm to matter. *Fire* the breath and *fire* the spirit.
>
> I have an organic, very biological vision of work; I deal with animals of language, with cells that want to speak in my stead. The great alibi is that it is nothing to do with me: that it is not about a work of art but about an event of nature. The great *alibi* is that *I am not here*. It is the words that write, it is the *touched* language which is going to think. The organ of language is the hand.
>
> Beneath the apparent chaos, there is the weaving of a precise polyphony, a calculating, a denumeration, an *accountment* of voices. Drama often follows the schema: prelude and fugue. Things are at first set out simply, like an opening, a suite of openings—then scenes, suites, sequences stretch out, hollow, meet in contradiction; attractions enter into conflict—and the rhythmic catastrophe opens.
>
> A system becomes a breathing one when it contains within itself its negation for living. It renews our awareness of the combustion of words by thought—and that we are children of drama. It renews our awareness of the drama of our coming into the world as *breathing infants*.
>
> Humans of today, panting and so soon out of breath, hate systems, hate dogmas! and can't wait to give themselves entirely to the moment. I am on the contrary strongly attracted by all systems: and especially by theories that contain within themselves negation, void, breath, without which nothing is in motion; I love dogmatic constructions as long as the mental edifice becomes a breathing system.[7]

He regards Christianity as such a *breathing* system, bearing its self-contradiction within itself, and within it, namely, the dogma of the Holy Trinity. In several texts, Novarina explains that the plural begins with the number 3 and not 2: he rejects thinking in terms of binary systems. Hegel's system—claims Novarina—also imitates the one of Christianity (which is simultaneously the inverse of *religio*, since it incorporates God's death, and because Christ is also the parody of the Messiah: the humiliated prophet; the dogma of the Trinity is precisely the breathing system that dissolves this contradiction, or more precisely, transcends it[8]). His underlying dramaturgy

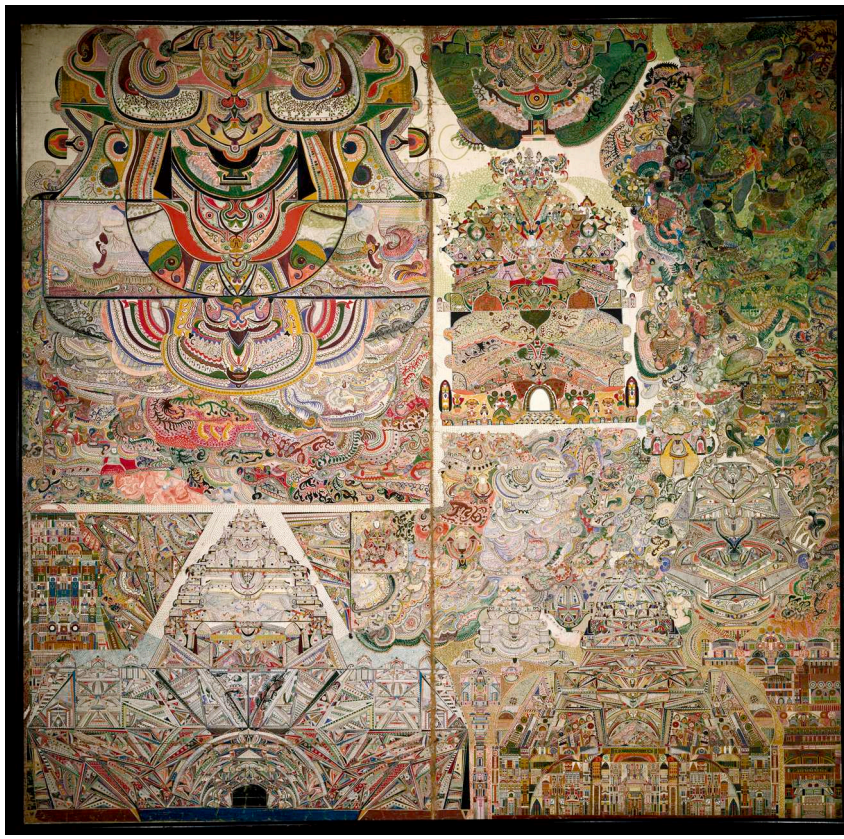


Figure 12.5 Augustin Lesage, *Painting N° 1* (1912–1913), Musée de l'Art Brut, Lausanne. (HUNGART © 2021)

is a circular dramaturgy that continually interplays holy and profane themes, language and levels of style, which draws on French medieval traditions, and in which the profane connects to the comic. Novarina sees this circularity in Lesage's painting (Figure 12.5).[9]

Medieval icons are a frequent source of inspiration for his stage imagery, for example the scene from the Avignon production of *The Unknown Act* that immediately precedes the resurrection scene: this scene, entitled Pulcinella's Dormition, evokes the dormition of Mary (see Figure 12.6). Novarina, as it happens, had collected sixty-five Byzantine depictions of the dormition of the Virgin. In the first scene of Figure 12.6, Jesus restores his mother's life, which he had received from her, thus making the subject that of eternal life. Christ's vertical body and the dead Virgin's body form a cross[10] (Figure 12.7).

The same scene also features in the version produced with Haitian actors[11] (Figure 12.8), but in this instance the skin color of the doll's head is

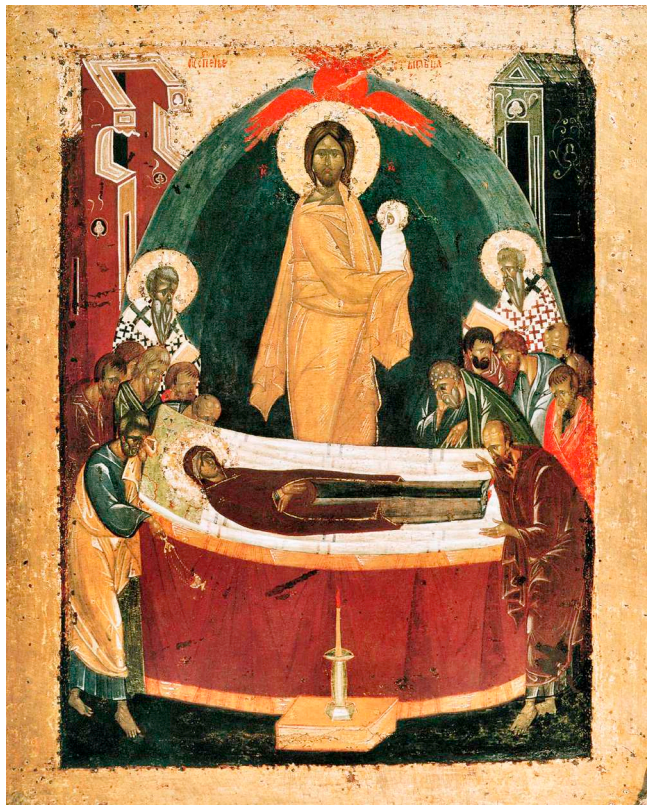


Figure 12.6 Theophanes the Greek, *Dormition of the Virgin* (1392).

black, and though the text is identical (furthermore, the actors speak French and not their creole mother tongue), the music also accommodates the culture brought by the actors, finding its source in the popular music of their homeland. Novarina saw the elegance of thought in this culture (the montane *patois*, the slowly disappearing singularity of the Franco-Provençal dialects), and in the actors' play the sharp richness of their restraint ("*retrait de l'acteur*")[12].

In the resurrection scene of Figure 12.8 (the scene's title is "Reversal"[13]), Novarina also evokes the virtual company's emblematic actor Daniel Znyk, who passed away suddenly at the age of 47 in 2006. Znyk's doll opens the piece, and in place of the Shakespearean fool Yorick, the skull of Yoryk (playing on Znyk's name) represents the entire production's recurrent motif all the way until the third act, when with the help of both music and song they carry out a theatrical resurrection—in the course of which the enormous doll bears a head made from Daniel Znyk's familiar life cast from

Figure 12.7 The influence of medieval icons on the stage imagery: the scene entitled Pulcinella's (that is, Mary's) dormition (*L'Acte inconnu*, 2007, Avignon. Director: V. Novarina; scenic design: Philippe Marioge; music: Christian Paccoud).

the piece *L'Origine rouge* [The Red Origin]. In other words, several previous texts and images are overwritten into this scene. He calls the location of this scene "*lieu du crâne*" (the locale of the skull), evoking Golgotha, the Mount of Skulls. The Concertina Player also plays the role of the Ghost in the work, and together with the Drama Worker, who is also the stage technician, they do not appear in the *dramatis personae*.

We know the following about his methodology in writing the text: according to his testimony, *The Unknown Act* received its name because at first, he did not know what to call it. Hanging the text on his studio wall, he attached emerging or previously unheard sentences grouped around the names of the performers, though placing the most important words in reversible order. Novarina claims he attached 1600 fragments, but according to Michel Corvin, the number was only 573.[14] In Novarina's theater, according to the creative manifesto, nothing is allowed to be preplanned; the goal is the absence of foresight.[15] This, of course, contradicts certain statements, such as the anamorphism mentioned previously as a creative principle, but this is also natural in the case of a creative artist's statements. Every act reveals the threefold structure of prelude (introduction, prologue), middle, and epilogue. Although there is no story or character in the traditional sense, one can nonetheless identify some dramatic nexuses and directions in each act. The piece begins with the act bearing the title "Rhythmic Order" and the prologue, "Pool of Names" (later also to become the title of a separate work), a creative collection of names and neologisms

Figure 12.8 Haitian version, Théâtre de l'Union, Festival des francophonies, Limoges, 2015 (frames from the recording).

relying on the classical inheritance of comedy. After the "retrograde entry" appears Bonhomme Nihil [Nil Goodman], alter ego of the "Personae" (*persona*, *personne*, nobody), and not much later one hears, from the mouth of the "Other Monitor," the modification of a sentence from *Hamlet*: "Has Prince Nobody arrived?" We receive the answer at the end of the piece in a lengthy list signaling who was left out of the created world and who are created anew, from A to Z—by means of words. Act II is the act of the comic upheaval of circular dramaturgy, building upon social, political, and grammatical absurdities. Act III is the serious and burlesque self-avowal of the "Naked Man," the search for a language beyond the unknown act and man. In Act IV, the *vide-Dieu* parallel, cited earlier in the chapter "A Theatrical Approach to Mysticism," from his essay *Ash Wednesday*, makes an appearance, explained textually on one page;[16] this also signals that the essay and his dramatic works are organically connected.

Later, the bread and wine make an appearance, respectively in the "Kyrielle," the newly creating list, and the worship of the Drama Worker

with which the piece concludes and which speaks in place of those actors "who have not played." In his preface, that otherwise provides a didactic explanation of the work, Michel Corvin offers a confusing explanation of the piece's religious optics: "The Lord to whom the prayer at the work's conclusion is addressed is the theater's Master, the spectator";[17] and elsewhere: "Every biblical aspect serves more for contrast than as a monstrance."[18] The explication strongly suggests that the theological poetic reading of Novarina's texts is difficult to accept on the part of secular French scholarly discourse.

The sacred and the holy

In place of the closed term "sacred," Novarina chooses to use "holy" ("*saint*"). When we examine the word's etymology, the French "*saint*" derives from the Latin *sanctus*, which means sacred and inviolable. Or rather, we attain holiness or sacrality[19] in the exercise of religious rites, while in contrast, *sacer* ("*sacré*") indicates an initial condition: there are no dynamics in it, and furthermore, it was associated with locations and the concept of taboo, in connection with prohibition: it could mean both the holy and the accursed. His "*Beyond the Sacred*" deals with these dynamics of the holy. In his *Letter to Enikő Sepsi* (in the volume *The Fourth Person Singular*, published in Paris), the author-director writes:

> The Bible is a symphony of *overtures*, of *openings*: from the passage through the Red Sea to the Aramaic *ephphatha* by which Jesus told the blind man: "Open yourself,"[20] and up to the *Un-covering* that is literally the title of the Apocalypse:[21] the waters part, the curtains fall, the walls rise, the sky rolls up: everything that separates men from the deity will be crossed—and at the end of ends, the terrible *ford* of death will be crossed. The French word for death, *trépas*, marvelously signifies that it is a *passage*.
>
> This is what the actor Árpád Kóti felt, with a brilliant *rhythmic* intuition, suggesting to me—when, in *The Imaginary Operetta*, he played the dead man who returns, crosses, and re-crosses, always in black—to effect a surprise during the penultimate crossing with a *leap of color* into all white, "like Yves Montand in his solo recital," he said… I added that it was also like Stalin at the end of a Soviet propaganda film: Stalin aping the Transfigured One and appearing in immaculate uniform as Christ on Mount Tabor, as in the icons of Novgorod, of Andreas Ritzos, or Theophanes the Greek.
>
> I don't know, Enikő, how *The Imaginary Operetta* and the nine actors—Nelli Szűcs, Anna Ráckevei, Kinga Újhelyi, József Jámbor, Árpád Kóti, Attila Kristán, Tibor Mészáros, József Varga, Artúr Vranyecz—ended up understanding each other so profoundly… Artúr by what miracle?…

Everything separated them. Between the Hungarian language and the French: *radical lack of communication*. Not one syllable linking one to the other: two absolute strangers… The miracle came about, first of all, through the ultra-patient and ultra-profound work of Zsófia Rideg, translator, who transported the items, who passed them with love from one shore of language to the other (I like to picture translation to myself as a transfer, a *transport*: the reversal of one river into another, with separations and reunions, a union that separates, and a molting of the self—all that the Greek expresses in a single word: *metaphor*); Zsófia Rideg willingly undertook this little crossing of death, this passage through loss, this drowning that constitutes translation; she formed by the *poetic act* of translation a *youbody*, concealed under the text of letters like another buried tongue, bodily form, animalistic and danced, a tongue that's alive, that knows more about man and the underside of thought than the flat surface of words… It is the river of rhythm and the drama in the color of sounds: an active animal. For rhythm always knows first (and perhaps even last, at the end of words) something that language didn't; it knows, it has a *tactile* memory of something like the adventure of the thought emanating from the animal; it remembers the deep architecture of everything—and even the drama of matter.
…

You ask me, Enikő, about *theater and the sacral*… I would reply with a bit of impudence but close to the living experience of the stage, that *those on stage*—actors, violinists, dancers, trapeze artists wrestling with their equipment, animal tamers, singers, acrobats of space, or jugglers of their own bodies—(even if and *especially* if they don't talk about it)—await *inhuman assistance, non-human assistance*: God's help. They do so in utter secret. They ask for help. They wait—through the prayer of work—for something *other* to surge forth, something that does not come from us.[22]

Notes

1 Anatoly Vasiliev, "Menón rabja" [Menon's Slave], *Színházi fúga* [*Theatrical Fugue*], tr. Nina Király, Gyöngyi Heltai, Ágnes Huszár, Ildikó Klausz, András Kozma, Budapest, OSZMI, 1998, 10–11.
2 Novarina, "Demeure fragile" [Fragile Shelter], in Novarina, *Devant la parole*, 95.
3 Isabelle Babin's interview of Novarina, *Théâtre/Public*, June 2008, N° 189.
4 A tributary of the River Jordan, flowing from the east; its name derives either from the Hebrew root meaning "to empty itself" or from onomatopoeia of the noise of water flowing over pebbles. See Genesis 32:22.
5 Valère Novarina, "Cendres" [Ash Wednesday], *L'Envers de l'esprit*, Paris, P.O.L, 2009, 166.
6 Valère Novarina, "Chaos," *Le Théâtre des paroles*, Paris, P.O.L, 2007, 224.

7 Valère Novarina, "Le langage se souvient" [Language Remembers], *L'Envers de l'esprit*, Paris, P.O.L, 2009, 95–97. Translated from the French by Hélène Brunerie and Paul Currah.
8 *Ibid.*, 97–98.
9 Novarina, "Demeure fragile" [Fragile Shelter], *Devant la parole*, 114–115.
10 Novarina, *L'organe du langage, c'est la main*, Dialogue avec Marion Chénetier-Alev, Paris, Argol, 2013, 216.
11 Théâtre de l'Union, Festival des francophonies, Limoges, 24 September 2015. Directors: Valère Novarina and Céline Schaeffer; set/paintings: Edouard Baptiste, Bedford Valès and Valère Novarina; actors: Edouard Baptiste, Bedford Valès, Jenny Cadet, Clorette Jacinthe, Jean-Marc Mondésir, Ruth Jean-Charles, Finder Dorisca; scenography: Céline Schaeffer, Richard Pierre, and Valère Novarina.
12 Interview with V. Novarina, http://www.novarina.com/L-Acte-inconnu-version-haitienne (accessed 1 March 2017).
13 "*Renversement*"
14 Michel Corvin (foreword), in Valère Novarina, *L'Acte inconnu*, Paris, Gallimard, folio théâtre, 2009, 19.
15 *Inculte*, Nº 15, 15 January 2008, 20; quoted in Michel Corvin's foreword, 19.
16 Valère Novarina, *L'Acte inconnu*, Paris, P.O.L, 2007, 146. The mention occurs in the monologue of Raymond de la Matière [Raymond Matter], whom Michel Corvin associates with the thirteenth century Catalan poet, philosopher, and alchemist Raymond Lulle, who uses an abstract name to prove the truth of faith in his work *Ars magna*, in a passage we can regard as a forerunner of formal logic (Corvin, "Préface," 11). This parallel can also be sensed in *Vivier des noms* [The Pool of Names] (see the extract quoted in the present work's chapter, "Novarina's Works Produced in Hungary").
17 Corvin, "Résumé," in Novarina, *L'Acte inconnu*, 235.
18 Corvin, "Préface," 15.
19 In English usage, "sacral" is generally reserved for actions or rituals, while "sacred" and "holy" most often refer to places, things, or people.—Translator's note.
20 Mark 7:34.
21 *Apo-kaluptein* ("un-covering")—E. Sepsi. The book is also known as Revelation; both titles have etymological roots in the notion of removing a covering veil.
22 The text first appeared in Hungary, in French, in *Le théâtre et le sacré—autour de l'oeuvre de Valère Novarina*, Budapest, Ráció Kiadó, 2009, 142–144, 147. It appeared later as "Pour en finir avec le sacré (Lettre à Enikő Sepsi)" in Valère Novarina, *La quatrième personne du singulier*, Paris, P.O.L, 2012, 55–76 (quoted excerpts 59–61, 69–70). The English translation is presented in this volume's Appendices.

13 Emptiness, space, and time in Valère Novarina's theater

"Every stage work is born from a locale"—Novarina

Emptiness

Regarding this key word in Novarina's work, although several philosophical or artistic[1] approaches are possible as a starting point, it is certainly worth examining how Chinese art, and within it primarily painting, understands the concept of emptiness: as the outstanding volume by François Cheng *Vide et plein* [*Empty and Full*] indicates, all the other concepts of Chinese painting organize themselves around Emptiness. In painting, just as in the universe, without Emptiness the circulation of respiration would be impossible; Yin and Yang would not function.

> In the Chinese theory of light, Emptiness, contrary to our initial expectation, is not some uncertain or nonexistent thing, but a very dynamic and active element, indeed. It relates to the life-giving breaths and the Yin-Yang principle; indeed, it is nothing other than the honored place where transformations can take place and where Fullness can attain its true fulfillment. In fact, this is what introduces intermittency and reversibility into a given system, and emptiness makes it possible for the components of a system to surpass a state of static opposition.[2]

The last sentence could be that of Novarina as well, since his dramaturgy implies inverting, reversing, and permuting the initial situation, then turning it inside out, and, after having witnessed dramatic ruptures, transgressing the rigid opposition. As a student at the University of Geneva, Novarina read the works of the Swiss sinologist Jean François Billeter extensively. He encountered Taoism and Chinese writing through this professor's books.[3] From among the well-known systems of thought in the oriental philosophy of emptiness, I emphasize the thinking of Zhuang Zhou,[4] which had great influence on Novarina's oeuvre. In the first of his short stories[5] he states: "… the perfect man has no self."[6] This loss of self is to be understood as a sort of *via negativa*, a sort of path (*gongfu*) that "leads to recognition of the true

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-13

self."[7] All this can be achieved in the process of "self-transformation." It is no accident that Novarina entitled one of his recent books *Voie négative*, emphasizing that its VN is his own monogram: "Et un jour, la même année, j'ai trouvé je ne sais plus où la phrase dont Mallarmé avait fait sa devise 'La destruction fut ma Béatrice'; j'en déduis la mienne: 'La négation fut ma Béatrice'. Et je lus désormais mes initiales: Voie Négative."[8] The method is present in theater as well, the organic tradition's actor completes or aims at a ritual—*via negativa*—in order to attain a state capable of internalizing and carrying something—the way that Ryszard Cieślak evoked the Passion—*via negativa*—in the scene of suffering in *The Steadfast Prince* through his memories of his first intimate experience of love, which became a sort of bodily prayer on the stage and in the spectator's perception.

We are very aware that the interpretations of Chinese texts in China have been subjected to political regimes and to the personal will of interpreters. In the west, the interpreters often could not think beyond certain philosophical categories which in fact hardly corresponded to the existing Chinese terms. In this perspective, Jean François Billeter links the work of Tchouang-Tseu and the interpretation that he makes of it is very close to what we find in the work of Novarina on the same subject, language and emptiness. In his book entitled *Leçons sur Tchouang-Tseu*, Billeter explains that "what we call the subject or the subjective appears like a coming and going between emptiness and things." Of these two terms it is the first one—the emptiness or the confusion—which is considered as fundamental. It is through this emptiness that we have the capacity (essential) to change, to renew ourselves, to re-define (when necessary) our relationship to ourselves, to others, and to things. Emptiness allows us to have the faculty to give meanings, to signify.

This null point is often a theme in Novarina's essays as well as in his plays. It appears not only as a metaphysical turning point, but also in incarnated form, when he refers to the "hole" of man, and the actor as a man par excellence.

This void place, this hole, is intimately tied to what mystic Madame Guyon calls the inner self which is not subjective, as Valère Novarina states in the Opening of the Madame Guyon Conference, organized in 1997 in Thonon, his birthplace, the very place where the impetus to write came to Madame Guyon, and where Valère Novarina had read earlier, in 1984, the writings of this mystic: "The interior is like the locus—not of me, not of mine—but of a passage, of a breach where a strange breath seizes us: inside ourselves, in our deepest depths is found a wide open route. Deep down we are, so to speak, riddled with holes, seen through, as an open sky…." And this opening speaks. Jeanne-Marie Guyon writes in a style "as if the matter of language were breath"—says Novarina who draws a parallel with the Chinese, "who have the Tao tö king, the Book of Changes," as the west has the Bible as the book of passages and openings. He recognizes the basic elements of his dramaturgy in the work of this mystic writer. "She is one of those writers, he says, who leaves man behind, who burns recorded human images."

On the cross of space and time

As an *imitatio Christi*, the actor withholds his representation of the human body, destroying the fetish *in vivo*. He projects human speech into the space at the cost of sacrificing the body of the Word, crucified on the cross of space and time. Through this bodily prayer he regains his life.

This Paschal act, which is the central motif of Novarina's conception of theater,[9] can be understood in terms of the tradition of religious theater in the word's original meaning (*religiosus*): it is the sort of theater that connects and unites (*religare*) humanity, even while remaining the theater of division and separation.[10] This theater, at once mental and very much physical, nurtures intertextual relationships with numerous oeuvres: without striving for completeness, we might mention Mallarmé,[11] Genet, Pilinszky, Grotowski, and Vasiliev.

Novarina's theater is the sort of place that upends the opening order by means of the comic. Via this upheaval, in the course of which one of the elements denies the other, we do not return to the starting point but end up in a third state. This is nothing other than the working of the breathing organism, which is the central image of Novarina's dramaturgy:

> The breathing system, the revealed drama appears wondrously in Hegel—and in that religion, meaning in Christianity, which it imitates so well, and which is simultaneously its own reverse, since it incorporates God's death; for Christ is also one with the parody of the Messiah: the spat-upon God, the failed Prophet, because finally the incomprehensible dogma of the Holy Trinity, as a reversed and turning configuration also uses its breathing wheel to destroy everything that could be frightening in the monotheist declaration … Every spoken drama, every true theory comes to us bearing its own contradiction in advance. And with the contradiction of the contradiction. We must get over it. We are animals who are called to transcend (cross) language.[12]

It is worth noticing that the *I Ching*[13] distinguishes the cyclic rhythm of human time in which we live—that is, the *Lo Shu*—from the womb of eternal existence—that is, the *He Tu*[14]—which forms a type of cross (cross shape) (Figure 13.1).

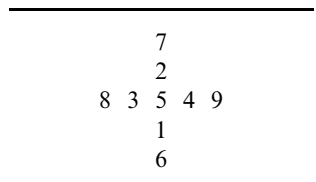


Figure 13.1 The circumductive symphony. *The Imaginary Operetta*, Théâtre de l'Odéon, Paris. (Photo: András Máthé)

The interlayering of space and time

Novarina's oeuvre, in which the drama is realized in the text itself and not in the relationships between people, continues the text-based theater of Genet and Jarry. This speech, however, which sounds in the true, that is to say liturgical, space of the theater, extends beyond death. Novarina gives the simplest explication of this phenomenon in his *Ash Wednesday*. The thematization of death on the stage is not unknown in modern and contemporary dramatic texts; we can find it also in the works of Koltès and Lagarce. In Novarina's work, however, this type of drama takes place in the language itself, when it recalls its own origin, etymology, and past—as if it were merely self-propelled, while the actor offers himself up to the drama taking place in the language, as a story of redemption. The actor, when he lends his breath to this tangled speech, enters the emptiness of the spirit—the Greek equivalent of theater also means a void—while his breath weaves into the space, and the space itself becomes the breathing organ of the subversive dimension of time, in which the theatrical equivalent of redemption takes place. Valère Novarina sees this disorganized space—this "bad feeling" in the space—in Piero della Francesca's painting *Mary with the Infant Jesus, Angels, Saints, and Federico da Montefeltro* (Figure 13.2), as well as in the

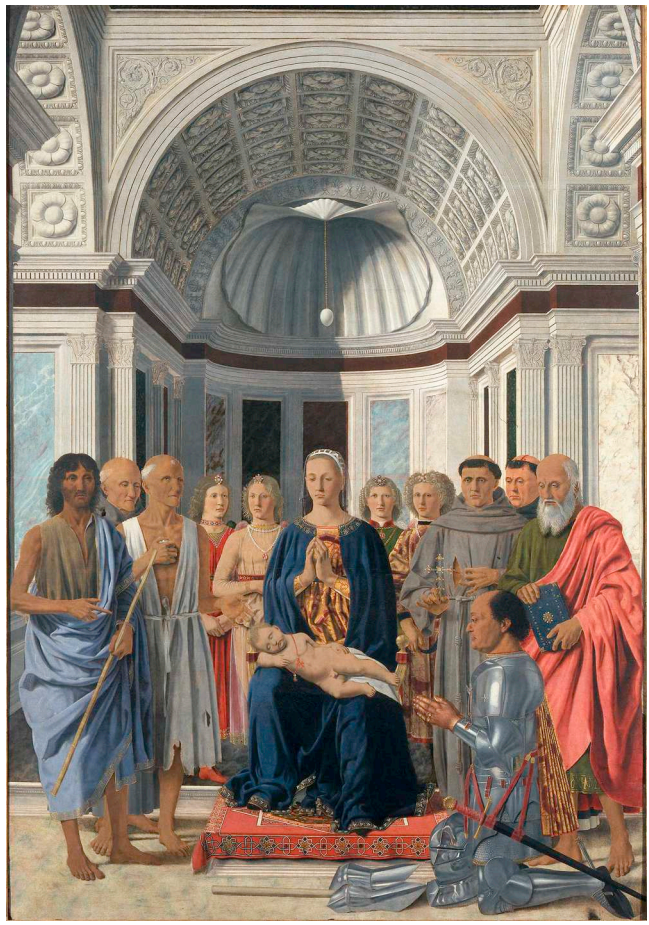


Figure 13.2 Piero della Francesca, *Madonna and Child with Saints, Angels, and Federico da Montefeltro* (1472–1474), Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

poems of a seventeenth-century Quietist mystical author Madame Guyon (Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte Guyon, Madame du Chesnoy),[15] and he draws the outlines of a sort of spatial poetics in the essay:

> Piero della Francesca's painting *Mary, the Infant Jesus, Angels, Saints, and Federico da Montefeltro* is a discomfort in space. In Milan in the Brera gallery's room XXIV the viewer sinks into a spatial vertigo of *disproportion*. Everything disorients; nothing leads one toward recognition of a familiar place.
> … This is when the egg appears for what it is, a plumb-bob. This is where Piero della Francesca, therefore, points out the horizontal and

vertical, both separately and simultaneously. Their mental and physical crossing creates within us a large invisible cross that bars space. In the viewer's body, the two marked antagonist forces bring their contradiction forward. The painter draws a cross that does not exist; now the entire space rests on the equilibrium of the cross. Hence, the space is liberated.

And now it becomes evident that the scene depicted here is not a *nativity*, but a *descent from the cross*. Or rather, he overlaid the descent onto the nativity. And the strange figure of the infant's body becomes thus understandable: it is a falling, descending body that has been shed—and this Mary is a *pietà*, holding a corpse on her knees. One notices that it still has a little blood on it, a few streaks of coral-red on its neck.

It is the body of *Jesus crucified as an infant* that falls here. The best commentator of this painting is not Longhi, Bertelli, Winterberg, Janitschek, Wickhoff, or Berenson, but Madame Guyon, who improvised in the following manner without ever having seen the painting:

Laid across the gibbet
Believing I'm on your knees
Only with you at rest
Does me in this world please

There is no pain in the world
That I might endure and fear
I while leaving this world
Come to you to reappear

In the earth deeply buried
Or scattered within the sea
Anywhere within the world
Entirely I lie toward thee

Nailed to this soft cradle
No longer prone to distress
As crescendoing in your cross
I am now beside myself

On the sensitive infant's neck
crucified in the invisible
The blood is no more than a jewel
Hanging there around his neck

Revived by the endless red
Of the coral emanation
Plunging back into my fold
To make an oration

Of my nature regardless
for a mast taking the cross
I embark for the horizon
I'll surpass this horizon
Having for sole last rites
The blood of the god-human Christ

I am no longer prone to anguish
In the land of dissimilarity
I no longer distinguish
Between me and thee

A nothing brings ennui, everything lasts
While resting on your breast
And reborn on your pure cross
My praising of you endless

I only want as nourishment
a never ending chorus
all that this infant murmurs
Is my only bread sent

On the knees cradling
Him the child crucified
Is a sign of my birthing
From your pierced side

In the land of dissemblance
I sailed toward thee
Neither death nor naissance
Can ever move me

Gem-like is my death
Around my neck.[16]

It is as if Madame Guyon[17] "were building a bridge between our spirituality and the oriental breathing techniques";[18] in her literary artistry, she is working to recover the knowledge of the body and the reason that touches things through breath. She makes it possible for us to find our way back to everything that is related to breathing and the body in Christianity:

> A single great breath reunites the totality of time right here in front of us. This infant—the visible icon of the invisible God—created the world: he is the *poet* of all created things … He who is born and expires before us, keeps the time bound in its totality bringing the beginning and the end together in a great *respiratory* figure. He embraces it. Only He understands the totality of time, he who rises and respires.[19]

The chronotopos

The theater is explicitly the place where the two dimensions—space and time—meet, in contrast to paper's mental theater, where the transformation into space has no event-like, temporal dimension. In his volume entitled *Performance Analysis*, Patrice Pavis applies Bakhtin's concept of chronotopos to the theater. In the connection of a given space and given time, that which Bakhtin named chronotopos in the case of the novel comes into existence: that is, a unity in which spatial and temporal signifiers create a single, comprehensible whole. "If we apply this to the theater," Pavis explains, "then the plot and the actor's body can be understood as an amalgam of space and temporality: as Merleau-Ponty says, the body is constructed not only *in* space, but *of* this space—and, we would add, of this time. This space-time is both concrete (the theatrical space and time of the representation) and abstract (a fictional place and imagined timespan). The plot realized in the above pairing is at times physical and at others imaginary. The space-time-action can therefore be experienced as either a *hic et nunc* concrete world or an imaginary possible world 'on a different plane'."[20] In his essay *Fragile Shelter*, already cited earlier, Novarina, in his own artistic way, also speaks extensively about this phenomenon and cites the names of the space-time pairing in several languages: (Figure 13.3).

> Treating space as the matter of time; dealing with time as the matter of space, this is what makes theater, where human silhouettes cross the space before us like the spectacular matter of time. *Raum* and *Zeit*, *espai* and *temps*, *tempus* and *spatium*, *mekan* and *zaman*, *χρόνος* and *τόπος* …, *space* and *time* are unimaginable when separated from each other: only beginning physicists write *space-time*; every actor knows that on the stage, in the inextricable intersection of the body, this thing is a multiplier, to be described with a cross laid down that connects them at its center: *space* × *time*.[21]

In summary, we might say that according to Novarina's spatial poetics, the space chooses the text, while the text at a given moment and by means of its disorder initiates the circumductive motion of the comic, which upsets and renews the space via both the cyclic temporal dimension and the actor, who, empty vessel though he be, gives himself over to the action of the language. The actor comes to the theater in order to awaken the sleeping, living language.[22] All this is simultaneously a dormition scene as well. Valère Novarina's dramaturgy realizes the unity of Chinese thought—that is, Taoism—and Christianity by fusing the Taoist concept of emptiness with the Christological concept of kenosis.

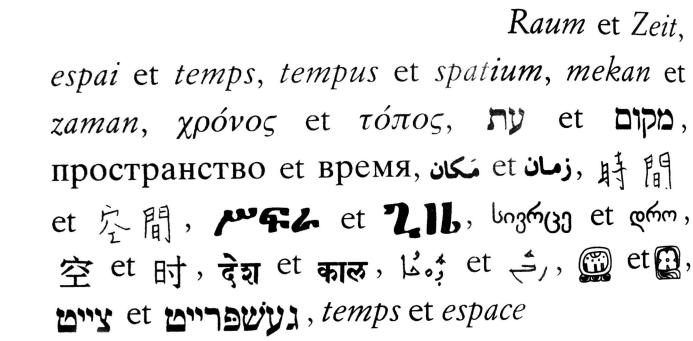


Figure 13.3 Space and time in various languages. A page from Valère Novarina's book *Devant la parole.*

Notes

1 See his correspondence with Jean Dubuffet published under the title of *Personne n'est à l'intérieur de rien*, L'atelier contemporain, 2014. This seven-year friendship ended with the sudden death of Dubuffet. Marion Chénetier-Alev analyzes in depth their shared affinities in "Nous n'avons pas de figure du tout": les correspondances de Dubuffet à Novarina, in Marion Chénetier-Alev—Sandrine Le Pors—Fabrice Thumerel (eds.), *Valère Novarina. Les tourbillons de l'écriture*, Paris, Editions Hermann, "Les Colloques Cerisy," 2020, 315–327.

2 François Cheng, *Vide et plein*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, 45–46; *Empty and Full: The Language of Chinese Painting*, tr. Michael H. Kohn, Boston/London, Shambala, 1994.

3 Jean François Billeter, *L'Art chinois de l'écriture*, Genève, Skira, 1999; *Essais sur l'art chinois de l'écriture et ses fondements*, Paris, Allia, 2010, and primarily, *Leçons sur Tchouang-Tseu*, Paris, Allia, 2015.

4 Zhuang Zhou (c. 369–c. 286 BCE), also transliterated (into English) as Zhuangzi and Chuang Tzu, was a philosopher whose eponymous book is a foundational text of Taoism.

5 Zhuang Zhou, "Free and easy Wondering in Burton Watson," *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1968, 29*ff*.

6 Zhuang Zhou, *A virágzó délvidék igaz könyve* [*The True Book of the Flowering South*] (in Hungarian), Budapest, Palatinus Books, 1997, 7.

7 Christian Joachim, "Just Say No to 'No Self' in Zhuangzi," in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, Roger T. Ames (ed.), New York, SUNY Press, 1998, 44.

8 Valère Novarina, *Voie négative*, Paris, P.O.L, 2017, 75. "And one day the same year, I found—I no longer remember where—the phrase that Mallarmé adopted as his motto: 'Destruction was my Beatrice'; from it I derived my own: 'Negation was my Beatrice.' And I instantly read my own initials: Voie Négative."

9 See the scene of the dormition of Pulcinella, known from comedies and the puppet theater, which also evokes the *dormitio* of Byzantine culture.

10 Religion is that which reveals itself in confession, the confession of the individual, but religion is nevertheless also that which connects us (*religare*) beyond the personal and individual.

11 See the figure of the Living-One-in-Spite-of-Himself at the start of *L'Acte inconnu* [*The Unknown Act*], "Do not forget to beautify the space: such as the blank page of the spirit. The theater is empty, Adam enters: he exits." (Valère Novarina, *L'Acte inconnu*, Paris, P.O.L, 2007, 11).
12 Valère Novarina, "Le langage se souvient" [Language Remembers], *L'Envers de l'esprit*, 95–97.
13 Also transliterated as *Yi Jing*.
14 Also called the Yellow River Map.
15 Jeanne-Marie Guyon, *Poésies et cantiques spirituels sur divers sujets qui regardent la vie intérieure 1&2*, Cologne, 1722.
16 Valère Novarina, "Demeure fragile" [Fragile Shelter], *Devant la parole*, 93, 96–100. Translated from the French by Hélène Brunerie and Paul Currah.
17 Both Arthur Rimbaud and Jean-Jacques Rousseau read Madame Guyon's works.
18 Novarina, *L'Organe du langage, c'est la main*, 229.
19 Novarina, "Demeure fragile," 102.
20 Patrice Pavis, *L'Analyse des spectacles*, Paris, Nathan, 1996, 139 (emphases in the original).
21 Novarina, "Demeure fragile," 168.
22 Novarina, *L'Organe du langage, c'est la main*, 217.

14 Rituals in Valère Novarina's works

Rite and theater again

To provide an overview of the different connections between emptying and ritual for the analysis of Novarina's theater, I call on not only the classics (Gluckman, van Gennep, Turner) but also the already cited Artaud, who calls theater spatial poetry that uses language metaphorically: it exchanges everyday meaning for another one.[1] Developing the thought further with Richard Schechner, we can also say that in theater, "real events" are revealed as metaphors fundamentally tied to rites.[2] The poetic ritual of art goes further to become self-reflexive, self-questioning. The spectator approaches this self-enclosing object anamorphically, when it is a matter of ritual. In other words, it is only in being immersed in the rite that certain meanings become visible.

In his essay *Les Rites de passage,* Max Gluckman illuminates the terminological confusion surrounding the concept,[3] whose solution he sees in the creation of a concept of rite in which its exemplars relate to intangible meanings.[4] Van Gennep's well-known schematic describes the structure of rites of transition, in which the fundamental aim of transitional rites is to assist and ensure some change of state; its process can be divided into three episodes: rites separating from the earlier world are preliminary, the rites of the transitional stages are liminal, and the rites of acceptance into the new world he terms postliminal.[5] This scheme accurately depicts Novarina's circular dramaturgy, which traverses three stages, overturning an initial state and then building upon its recurrence in a new, transformed condition.

Victor Turner further develops van Gennep's scheme,[6] revealing the peculiarities within each stage in the form of their main characteristics. A new concept, *communitas*, signals the elevated ego-state, the achievement of a higher-level I–Thou relationship, during the course of which, connecting to the liminal state, people are denuded of their earlier selves and encounter each other as more complete beings. In Turner's classic work *From Ritual to Theatre,* he changes the adjective "liminal" to "liminoid" when referring to art (and religion): "I had distinguished 'liminal' from 'liminoid' by associating the first with obligatory, tribal participation in ritual and the second as

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-14

characterizing religious forms voluntarily produced, usually with recognition of individual authorship, and often subversive in intention toward the prevailing structures."[7] Turner fundamentally considers the individual's social dimension, understood as *communitas*, to be a liminoid, voluntarist lifestyle.[8] Quoting one of Grotowski's interviews, he determines that the image of the actor in theaters of laboratory character is that of the active person who becomes not a different person but himself, in order to be able to enter a connection with another.[9] Grotowski, for his part, calls an active culture one in which an artistic team or individuals do not perform, do not create theater but experience existence ("acting is being, not performance"[10]); and there are and have been many of these worldwide. The rehearsal process is an important ground for these experiences; Turner's 1982 book cites the examples of Grotowski and Schechner in particular among experimental theaters, in which vocal training, psychodramas, dance, and certain elements of yoga play a major part, directed toward the creation of *communitas*.[11]

In his *Performance*, Schechner emphasizes those productions which lead not only from one state to another but also from one I-identity to the other ("transformance").[12] It is real experience, and its results fundamentally characterize rite, whereas theater is basically characterized by recreation, and when the two become tightly interwoven then theater begins to blossom and can survive for a long time.[13] The attention given to the nature of making theater is already an attempt to ritualize performance "in order that we discover the forms of valid action in the theater itself." "In an age when authenticity is ever less observable in life," explains Schechner, "it is the performer who is obligated to cast off his traditional masks and become himself—or at least *let him show how he dons and removes the mask*. Instead of mirroring his times, they expect him to improve them. *Healing and the Church serve as models for the theater."*[14] He uses the twelfth-century Mass as an example to demonstrate that the liturgy used "avant-garde" techniques: "It was allegorical, it drew in the audience, it handled time teleologically, and it extended the performance's sphere of influence beyond the church onto the road home."[15] Novarina's destructive and constructive theater, interrogating anthropoglyphs in real time, also relies on the result-orientation of ritual; indeed, in the above sense it also has a liturgical objective. Furthermore, it not only reflects upon the method of creating theater but also on the existence of Man as a speaking animal.

In building his experimental theater, that alloys the results-orientation of ritual with theatrical entertainment, Schechner made use of rituals in the anthropological sense. In producing his work *Dionysus 69,* he took its birth ritual from the Western Iranian *Asmat*, while in his *Mysteries and Paradise* at the Living Theater, he used yoga and elements of Indian theater as building blocks; and in several productions in collaboration with Robert Wilson, Philip Glass incorporated Indonesian gamelan, Indian raga, etc. The Asian influence is clear and undeniable in the Poor Theater phase of Grotowski's experimental theater[16] but also in Barba's work; indeed it occasionally

happened that Barba shared his experiences with Grotowski, who then made use of the borrowed material: this may be how elements of the Kathakali south Indian dance theater were incorporated into his training exercises.[17]

To this day it also happens that such rituals set out on European tour, which evidently results in their acceptance into theater (e.g., the whirling dervishes). Schechner arrives at the conclusion that every rite, indeed, any everyday event, can be extracted from its original environment and produced as theater, and he explains the phenomenon by observing that it is not the underlying structures but merely the context that differentiates ritual from theater.[18] As a matter of fact, it is also possible—and we can agree fundamentally about this—that ritual can arise from theater.

In Novarina's theater, this model can best be caught in the act in his closing sequences. For example, the performance of *The Imaginary Operetta* closes with the banner "Love can see," and its unfurling is preceded by the actor's prayer in which the performer asks pardon for those actors "who did not act." The same prayer is voiced at the conclusion of *The Unknown Act*: "Seigneur, pardonne aux acteurs qui n'ont pas agi."[19] We can find similar attempts in domestic [Hungarian] examples as well. In some of Attila Vidnyánszky's productions, for instance in *The Passion of Csíksomlyó*,[20] in addition to relying on the eighteenth-century Franciscan school drama tradition[21] and on Géza Szőcs's piece *Passion*, he forcefully builds upon ritual songs of folk religiosity (which are scarcely in existence any longer), on folk tales, folk poems, and folk symbol and metaphor systems (in András Berecz's production), in the confidence that forgotten traditions can be effective anew via the theater. Other examples include András Visky's *Backborn*,[22] in Gábor Tompa's production, which deals with Holocaust themes using ritual methods. In any event, Schechner also regards the work of Grotowski and the Living Theater as a movement from theater toward ritual, except that "these rituals have not become lasting because they do not tie to actual social structures outside the theater."[23]

The adaptation of these fundamentally poetic (Artaud) or anthropological and theatro-anthropological approaches (van Gennep, Gluckman, and especially Turner) to theater (Schechner) provides useful points of reference for the theatrical rites, which I term kenotic, that can be observed especially in Novarina's theater. Poetic rituality offers an explanatory framework to understand organizational modes of drama, while rituality concepts that are of anthropological origin do the same for understanding the dynamics of "anthropoglyphic" processes which, while patterned after actual existence, run their course on the stage.

Rituals of self-emptying, eating, and supper in Novarina's works

A recurrent scene in Valère Novarina's works is that of communal eating—the supper—just as the central recurrent theme is the consumption

of words. It is a biblical theme, on account of the Last Supper too, and aside from this it also represents the dynamic opposite of self-emptying. In the chapter on Valère Novarina and János Pilinszky, entitled "The theater of unselfed poetry," we mentioned the importance of the God-emptiness anagram [Dieu-Vide] in Novarina's oeuvre. That explication is only reinforced by his lines about the spatial composition of *A Throw of the Dice*, and the influence exercised upon him by empty spaces: "At the age of 18, I experienced a particular enlightenment when I read an extensive study of Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice*: all of a sudden in the Sainte-Geneviève Library, I found myself in the depths of the drama of word and body. At the intersection of opposites: at the intersection of the page's two dimensions and the bodily, extensive aspect of the stage."[24] The beckoning emptiness of presence is the fundamental paradox not only of Novarina's conception of God but also of his entire oeuvre. Just as does God, so the actor empties himself, retreats: it is not the actor who acts but the word that acts through him. The Swiss literary and theatrical historian Marco Baschera sees the same enactor of ritual in the Novarina-actor and the priest: the priest also disappears during the ritual's final act, the distribution (blessing) of the Eucharist. According to Baschera's analysis, while the priest disappears so that the believer can unite with Christ in taking the bread (Host), he speaks Christ's words, thus effectively doubling Christ: He becomes simultaneously the body in the bread and the word in the priest's mouth.[25] According to Leigh Allen's excellent analysis, the Novarinian actor is simultaneously impersonal speech and the one who eats.[26] The actor is also doubled: sometimes he is a body and at other moments, an absentee (absence, hole, etc.). The actor is thus a Christ-imitator, which is why he "walks on water" in *Pendant la matière* [During the Matter], while he seeks his equilibrium or becomes the embodiment of the Passion, part of the story of suffering. In *Espace furieux* [Enraged Space], he says: I am God's theater: the place of the drama of divine speech that we hear.[27]

God enters man, the actor, temporarily via the words, and this joy finds expression in loquacity, in the repetition of names, in the manufacture of neologisms. In *The Pool of Names*, he listed the nicknames of his native land and also published the list separately in his *La loterie Pierrot* [Pierrot's Lottery], along with photographs taken of several of his productions (*The Imaginary Operetta*, *The Unknown Act*, *The Red Origin*, etc.). These lists—litanies—also bear the elements of French medieval marketplace comedy that are also present in the comic music of Christian Paccoud, where they provide contrast in the least profane moments. This ritual draws a great deal on forgotten medieval traditions[28] but also on circus acrobatics and its breathtaking bravery.

The telling toponyms of *The Unknown Act* exhaust the complete content of a dialogic commentary. Two cantors are conversing:

LE CHANTRE 1 : L'ordre grammatical règne à Angoulême, à Helsinki, à Kinshasa ; l'ordre médiatique règne à Pont-à-Mousson, Bernay-en-Brie, Pont-à-Mousson, Samson-le-Fresnay ; l'ordre alphabétique règne à Barcelone, Brasilia, Babylone, Pont-à-Mousson, Brive, Brême, Bordeaux, Berne et Besançon.
LE CHANTRE 2 : En fin finale, enfin, vinrent les anthropodules, qui rédigèrent pour la première fois la Loi des Anthropopandules. Loi des Anthropodules aux Anthropopandules : "Les Anthropodules chérissent alternativement le A et le B."[29]
[FIRST CANTOR: Grammatical order rules in Angoulême, in Helsinki, in Kinshasa; Mediatic order in Pont-à-Mousson, Bernay-en-Brie, Pont-à-Mousson, Samson-le-Fresnay. Alphabetical order rules in Barcelona, Brasília, Babylon, Pont-à-Mousson, Brive, Bremen, Bordeaux, Bern, and Besançon.
SECOND CANTOR: At the very end came the anthropodules that first drafted the Law of Anthropopandules. The Law of Anthropodules as applied to Anthropopandules: "The Anthropodules shall alternately cherish A and B."]

These rituals serve the joy of multiplicity and are the expressions of the joy of multiplication in Novarina's pieces. Novarina also discovers multiplicity in the Bible, in the Old and New Testament stories that respond to each other, in their ability to be set in correspondence with each other, and in their variations.[30] After a similar set of 246 sentences placed one after the other without any connection to each other, the character of the novelist in *The Imaginary Operetta* symbolically purges himself,[31] and the Woman of Pantagonia drenches the Endless Novelist with water, baptizing him while saying: "Come and be cleansed of this flood of words."[32]

In the comic supper scene of *The Enraged Space*, the black plate belongs to Judas, while all the rest are white. The symbol of the Last Supper means that by means of eating, God lives inside our bodies. In his essay *Fragile Shelter,* Novarina relates the word "stage" (*skéné*) to the Hebrew word meaning "divine presence":

> Now let us examine the word έσκήνωσεν (*eskénósen*) more closely: He came to live among us. *Eskénósen* derives from Σκηνή (*skéné*), and in the letters σ, κ, ν (sigma, kappa, nu) the rabbis quickly recognized in the word הניכש (*sekina*) the letters *sin* ש, *kaf* כ and *nun* נ, which in the Kabbala mean DIVINE PRESENCE. The shadow of one language behind the other always illuminates from within: one verb acts behind another, a hidden tale beneath it, the Hebrew beneath the Greek, the Greek beneath the Latin, the Latin beneath the French; the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Masoretic texts complement each other and respond to each other—this deeply embedded counterpoint is what gives the speech of the Bible its depth, its entire perspective, its temporal spectrum, and it

> is because of this that it very quickly branches out in several directions like a fugal composition or mountainous terrain, where space deepens, vanishes, and renews itself under the walker's and listener's steps.
>
> Σκηνή, *skéné*, is also the theatrical stage, the theater's volatile construction, its graceful abode. The stage is a fragile shelter, an occasional mechanism, a hut—and if it had a theatrical holiday in the year, says "Louis de Funès," then one would have to choose Sukkot, the holiday of tents. De Funès says, "The actor's abode is always an airy tent, a breathing house that he carries with himself. The flesh-and-blood body, which is our light residence, tiny house, and our body, is nothing other than the poor earth. Neither foundation nor plank, neither for people nor actors, nor for the children, nor for anyone, ever."[33]

In Novarina's oeuvre, and in the volume *Devant la Parole* [Ahead Speech], in which we find "Fragile Shelter," as well, the figure of the French actor is a constant point of reference, but the statements and dialogues attributed to him are in every instance imaginary. From the quotation we can also see that the theater is the supper, as well as the location of the Last Supper, its fragile shelter. And thus, in every piece (by Novarina) and every performance there is a supper scene.

The other ritual, which defines the fundamental dramaturgy, is the threefold unity of statement–denial–new statement, which we have already analyzed from a different viewpoint in preceding chapters. In this chapter, however, the reason we must repeat its mention is that Novarina completes the bodily and physical metaphor of the theater as (the Lord's) supper by denying it in the same essay:

> The kenotic theater repeats the stage's nonexistence on the stage; this is the theater's *first* formula, the simplest of its proclaimed chemistry, its negative cornerstone; the actor enters and speaks thus: "Behold, this here does not exist." Anatopical, uchronic, analogical, antistrophic, anamorphic, diaphonic, perspectral, anaphore-like and diaphanous, antiandric, transthanatal, antianthropic and primarily antianthropopodularic, aphonic and superacoustic and anacosmic and supersexualized, the theater progresses by means of counterpoints, countershadowing the counterparts and duplicating them with words bursting forth in *logoèdres*;[34] they spread out the inside-out and irreversible world before us: behold, now space sacrifices itself. Behold, space hands over the persona-containing person. Such is the theatrical antimatter; the nowhere visibly appears in it: and in the midst of all this, there is man—and the universe. The theater is an explicitly physical place where the body, arriving, speaks thus: *nothing is more impossible for me than the body*. The actor arrives to recreate the complete geometry of the human body.[35]

Novarina's *logaèdre* concept and the metaphor, express the self-contradiction of the word's incarnation:

> *Logaèdres! Logaèdres!*
> The action of words commutes in round trips. The sentence proceeds forward like time, and, like its opposite, it inverts its capabilities, becomes a retroactive music that sounds and acts in the memory. Every word influences other words *retroactively*: it affects every word since the beginning of the book, but also every word already spoken, ever since words were spoken… This characteristic of the inversion of time cannot be observed more clearly than in language.
> Actors, all sorts, act by means of the *logaèdres*! Act the *logaèdres*! Act by means of the theatrolites![36]

Negative theology discusses God by formulating what is not God, that is, with the help of denial. The anti-selves [anti-personnes] of Novarina's theater, his reversibly operating time, actions, and statements (in *The Imaginary Operetta*, we hear a sentence spoken backwards) relate to theater as *via negativa*: statements about theatrical practice can be taken, if not by negation, then as paradoxes. The *logaèdres* (which we sometimes translate as *logoèdres*, alluding to the *logos*) are the spatial realizations of speech that upset the traditional, linear theatrical space.

In his text *Távolságból egység* [Unity out of Distance],[37] in which he engages in dialogue sometimes with Péter Balassa and at other times with Gadamer,[38] András Visky dissects a cognitive metaphor resembling Novarina's—totally independently of Novarina's works; specifically: that the theater is a "wedding feast," a celebration (true, this linguistic manifestation of the cognitive metaphor does not place as great an emphasis on the material dimension of eating). The wedding feast of the king's son is a Mass sacrifice or Lord's Supper, a known cult symbol of Christianity, "a ceremony that obediently and devotedly repeats the founding sacrificial act," which "the theophanic appearance among the participants keeps alive."[39] The "transformation" that comes into existence, thanks to the *transubstantiation*, breaks through the space and "becomes the joint experience of all the onlookers."[40] "The event imitates the foundational act in a repetitive manner, but 'true imitation always means a modification'."[41] We can understand Novarina's subversive, circular dramaturgy in this manner, too. The imitators must be "destined for death"—"they must undergo an actual death to change the vision of the onlookers."[42] Further spinning the Shakespearean phrase, "all the world's a stage," Visky also regards the Apostles as actors in the great theatrical work of salvation; and vice versa: he considers actors as apostles "destined for death," just like the spectators, in the role of *theoroi* who do not merely look but also see, as long as they do not remain outside the wedding feast (see anamorphosis).

Notes

1 Artaud, Théâtre oriental et théâtre occidental, 112.
2 Richard Schechner, From Ritual to Theatre and Back: The Efficacy-Entertainment Braid, in *Essays on Performance Theory 1970–1976*, New York, Drama Book Specialists, 1977, 74.
3 Max Gluckman, Les Rites de passage, in M. Gluckman and D. Forde (eds.), *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1962, 20–22.
4 *Ibid*., 22.
5 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Routledge Library Editions, Anthropology and Ethnography (Paperback Reprint ed.), Hove (East Sussex, UK), Psychology Press, 1977 [1960].
6 *Ibid*.
7 Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York, Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982, 118.
8 *Ibid*.
9 *Ibid*., 117.
10 *Ibid*.
11 "All these disciplines and ordeals are aimed at generating communities or something like it in the group." *Ibid*., 119.
12 Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004, 136–137 (see the chapter "Theater for Tourists").
13 *Ibid*., 107, 108, 109.
14 Emphases added. *Ibid*., 108.
15 *Ibid*., 111.
16 From 1960 to 1968: it was in this period that his *Steadfast Prince*, *Acropolis*, and *Apocalypsis cum figuris* were created. See *Ibid*., 117. See also Nathalie Gauthard, "Retour aux sources par le détour en Occident: Jerży Grotowski et le U-Theater de Taïwan," in "Renouveau et revitalisation des arts traditionnels asiatiques. Discours, pratiques et savoir-faire," *Revue L'Ethnographie. Création, Pratiques, Publics*, online form (MSH-PN-USR 3258/SOFETH—ISSN 2534–5893), September 2019, https://revues.mshparisnord.fr/ethnographie/index.php?id=76.
17 See Schechner's discovery, *Ibid*., 118.
18 *Ibid*., 122.
19 Novarina, *L'Acte inconnu*, Paris, Gallimard, folio théâtre, 2009, 185.
20 National Theater, Budapest, 2017; director: Attila Vidnyánszky, choreographer: Zoltán Zsuráfszky, dramaturg: Zsolt Szász.
21 In the town of Csíksomlyó in the eighteenth century, it was still a living tradition to produce a new school drama from year to year: between 1721 and 1787, they produced a total of forty-two separate Passion plays. They were presented in the great hall of the local Franciscan high school. Because of Joseph II's edict dissolving religious orders, this confessional theatrical practice gradually ceased—as can be read in the work's prospectus.
22 See András Visky, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andr%C3%A1s_Visky#Plays. The play has also been produced under the title, used by the author, *Born for Never*.
23 Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 122.
24 Evelyne Grossman, "Artovarina. Un théâtre résurrectionnel," in O. Dubouclez (ed.), *Valère Novarina: Une poétique théologique?*, *Littérature* 176 (December 2014), 88–96, 91.
25 Marco Baschera, "Le transsubstantiation et le théâtre," in E. Sepsi (ed.), *Le théâtre et le sacré—autour de l'oeuvre de Valère Novarina*, Budapest, Ráció Kiadó/Eötvös Collegium, 2009, 60.

26 Leigh Allen, "Le rituel de la (s)cène dans quelques pièces de Valère Novarina," in O. Dubouclez (ed.), *Valère Novarina: Une poétique théologique?*, *Littérature* 176, December 2014, 63.
27 Quoted by Leigh Allen, *Ibid*., 63.
28 "Désoubli, rencontre avec Valère Novarina," in N. Koble (ed.), *Moyen-Age contemporain: Perspectives Critiques*, studies selected by Nathalie Koble and Mireille Séguy, *Littérature* special edition, December 2008, 148.
29 Novarina, *L'Acte inconnu*, Paris, Gallimard, folio théâtre, 2009, 67–68.
30 "C'est un livre qui se dédouble, qui rime, qui miroite et reflète toutes les images, multiplie ses échos jusqu'au profond du corps. On touche à la joie du pluriel ; on comprend que le pluriel n'est pas incohérence, mais joie." [It is a book which splits, which rhymes, which mirrors and reflects all the images, multiplies its echoes down to the depths of the body. One apprehends the joy of the plural; one comprehends that the plural is not incoherence, but joy.] (Valère Novarina – Olivier Dubouclez, *Paysage parlé*, Chatou, Les Éditions de la Transparence, 2011, 131).
31 ["Voyez" dit Jean ; "Soyez attentifs ! " ajouta Jacques ; "S'arrêtera-t-elle ? " demanda Pierre.], Valère Novarina, *L'Opérette imaginaire* [*The Imaginary Operetta*], Paris, P.O.L, 1998, 147.
32 Novarina, *Opérette imaginaire*, 160.
33 Valère Novarina, "Demeure fragile" [Fragile Shelter], in *Devant la parole*, Paris, P.O.L, 1999, 109. Tr. Peter Czipott.
34 Both *logaèdres* and *logoèdres* are Novarina's neologisms, hapax legomena that apply the notion of form to words (logos).
35 *Ibid*., 157–158.
36 *Ibid*., 161–162.
37 András Visky, Távolságból egység. Értekezés a módszerről [Unity out of Distance: A Report on Method], in *A különbözőség vidékén* [In the Land of Difference], Budapest, Vigilia, 2007, 5–19.
38 Specifically with the idea of theater as a festive celebration in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*.
39 Visky, Távolságból egység, 7.
40 *Ibid*., 7.
41 *Ibid*.
42 *Ibid*., 12.

15 *The Imaginary Animal*

The three Paris productions from the 2019 Autumn Festival concern man's relationship to animals or to his animal side: *The Imaginary Animal* of Valère Novarina presented at the Théâtre national de la Colline, *The Jungle Book* played at the Théâtre de la Ville, 13e Art, in the staging of Robert Wilson (with music by the group CocoRosie), and there was also a performance (a monologue) based on the *Report for an Academy* by Franz Kafka, adapted for the stage by Alexandro (Alejandro) Jodorowsky under the title of *The Gorilla* and played by his son Brontis Jodorowsky at Lucernaire.

The adaptation of the last-named was published in French under the title of *Le Gorille* in *Théâtre sans fin* [Theater Without End][1] by Alexandro Jodorowsky in the translation by Brontis. In the notes to the text, the son describes the stages of the adaptation in the following manner:

> So, we needed a French version of the text and I got down to it with the concern that it should be the most technically suitable for a theater of the body, as we understood it. It was also an opportunity to better interweave what belonged to Kafka with the original text by Alexandro, as well as to bring a new ending to the play. We know the ambiguous relationship that Kafka had with his father. It is less known that among his first writings are short plays, performed in the family circle. I like to imagine that, nearly a hundred years later, his theatrical story provided the framework for a peaceful father-son relationship in the service of art.[2]

Remediation consists not only in staging and performing a text previously written on the basis of another text, but also in remediating and remedying a relationship using this creative imagination that Michael Chekhov attributes to the actor and in which resides the art of healing, according to Jodorowsky.[3] Alexandro Jodorowsky gives, in his written note to the text, the reason for proposing a new ending to Kafka's story: "It is no coincidence that Kafka's news seems unfinished: the caterpillar rots there without ever succeeding in taking its flight. It is the sad story of a captured

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-15

ape, who, in order to avoid the zoo, undertakes the heavy task of acquiring human language, in order to slip into a society that ends up demolishing it. His only achievement is to be rewarded by an academic academy, which does not recognize him as a conscious soul, but rather admires in him the beast capable of imitating the speech and attitude of the average man. The Kafkaesque ape is an absolute victim."[4] Jodorowsky explains that Kafka does not seem to give his character the opportunity to express himself, to revolt, and compares this situation to that of immigrants, to his own case, in fact, to the child of Russian-Jewish emigrants stranded in Chile, who tries to integrate into a society that despises him. His son, French through his mother, remains an eternal emigrant through his father. This is why the end is reformulated so that the monkey can say to the members of the Academy: "I will give you a reward, on the day when every cell of your body turns into pure spirit"[5]—the path of transformation for an immigrant. The son's play shifted from ape to man in a very physical, bodily extremely elaborate and psychologically highly nuanced way. He shows in his body the pain of self-imprisonment, the self-deceiving ways of civilized man toward his internal part that is older, more instinctive, and more intuitive; in effect freer.

Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, directed by Robert Wilson, reinvents the well-known saga and creates an enchanting and joyful spectacle of the soul of the child and the rhythmic dramas of the natural-animal existence of man with playful music by CocoRosie. We follow with delight the adventures of Mowgli, a "little man" adopted by wolves, Bagheera, Baloo, and Shere Khan in a genre that is between opera, a form favorable to Wilson, and musical comedy. Robert Wilson transcends the question of human authenticity through the free play and song of the child and his imaginary creations.

In Valère Novarina's *The Imaginary Animal*, we witness the drama of man in all his visible and invisible layers, conscious and unconscious, from the most carnal to the pure spirit, just like in Jodorowsky's monologue. Remediation in the works of Valère Novarina is an essential phenomenon of creation, given that certain passages of these essays written on the sidelines of rehearsals or to accompany the creation of a show are found in the published texts (plays), as well as in the versions for the stage, most of them also published. This is the case with *L'Animal imaginaire*, which uses certain passages from *L'Homme hors de lui* and other texts by Novarina. The recurring characters, The Worker of the drama *Autrui ou Sosie* [Others or Sosie], among others, also appear. The manducation of the Word as an essentially theatrical act for Novarina (for this theater of the word, very physical and very spiritual, even biblical) is a cognitive metaphor for the whole of his work, and it also appears here. The interaction between animality and the question of authenticity becomes a transtextual element (to use Gérard Genette's term) between this production and that of the Jodorowskys:

THE BITER
Which is the box containing the best?

> ALL THE EATERS
> It's me! It's me!
> THE MANEATER
> We drink false wine, we eat false bread, we pronounce false words.
> THE OMINIDS
> We eat life without hope, and we recoup its noise by devotional songs.
> …
> USIERS & TROUSIERS, THE EATERS
> We eat life. We undo the negativity of matter through our air holes! But from the front, we absorb the positive aspects.[6]

Novarina chooses the negative path to regain all that seems lost: "Nothing, says the Writer at the end, is *in the secret* of matter—closer to the deep life of nature, in the heart of the physical—than the mystery of words."[7]

Jean Dubuffet thought of painting as analogous to cooking, and one can also find the cognitive metaphor of eating in his work. The biological conception of man can be extended *ad absurdum* via different animal metaphors, such as the swine was, for Artaud, connected with linguistic simple-mindedness, which is so important to Novarina's language-creating (macaronic) motifs as well. As Artaud writes in *From the Nerve Meter*: "I AM AN IDIOT by the suppression of thought, by the malformation of thought; I am vacant by the stupefaction of my tongue."[8] A few paragraphs later, he continues: "People who come out of nowhere to try to put into words any part of what goes on in their minds are pigs."[9]

The Imaginary Animal, premiered in October 2019, was one of the most successful of Novarina's realizations as director, thanks to his recurring cast of Agnès Sourdillon, Nicolas Struve, Valérie Vinci, Dominique Parent, and Manuel Le Lièvre, to the harmonica playing of Christian Paccoud and the violin playing of Mathias Lévy, among others. The text—as always—also appeared in a separate publication, and Novarina painted the sets himself (Figure 15.1).

Right at the start of the play, he compares the tense condition of being ready to write to the milk-filled breasts of a breastfeeding mother, and the act of writing—in the manner recurring in his essays—as action following hearing. Then the actors turn toward the stage, and finally toward the audience ("Public, be brave: much is to come!").[10] The sentences "I respect reality but never believed in it" and "I must enter the anti-human" introduce the desires connected to the *anti-monde*, and the production heads off toward the "rhythmic catastrophe" customary with the director's dramaturgy. In the ensuing production, following the playful dramaturgy of the springtime language (language in gestation)—in Artaud's spirit—this theater creates "the ever new" on stage and climaxes in some secret spiritual impulse, whence it also originated. And this impulse is none other than the Word before the word. As the drama progresses, religious allusions proliferate, the harmonica strikes up the first line of a protestant hymn ("O sacred head, now wounded"), until we finally arrive at the eating scene, where the calling is proclaimed: "Let us eat in words this edible God,"[11] says the actor at

Figure 15.1 Novarina's own set of paintings in the production of *The Imaginary Animal*. (Photo: Pascal Victor)

the table improvised from a wooden plank, evoking the image of bread and wine in the customary manner of his other productions (Figure 15.2). Next, animal metaphors connected to spirituality come, one after the other ("Prayer awaits in the animal"),[12] a dog (Rex) borrowed from another play, and the ritual and comic scene of the large family played using two puppets from an earlier play, with song inserts that are familiar by now ("Absolutely forbidden to touch the wires, even if fallen to the floor").[13] In the production's intensified rhythm and elevation, the genealogy of the disassembled man (l'homme défait) is followed by foregrounding of figures of speech familiar from the essays and earlier plays ("I forget language in order to speak"),[14] the cognitive metaphor of the Messiah permeating all speech ("the Messiah is speech"),[15] and by the customary prayer closing his plays ("prayer for all the people who have forgotten how to exist").[16] The other example of the intertextuality present from the beginning and continuously through his oeuvre is the multipage listing of definitions of god from the latest volume of *Le jeu des ombres* [The Play of the Shadows], which also received a separate publication earlier:[17] he read out all the French and other European, then the Middle Eastern definitions of God for many long minutes. The text, in the 2020 production of Jean Bellorini (which also formed part of the Avignon Festival, experienced on film) is also a high point of the production, particularly because Valère Novarina's own definition of God also appears in it

Figure 15.2 The eating scene at the conclusion of *The Imaginary Animal.* Text, scenes, and paintings by Valère Novarina. Théâtre national de la Colline, 9 October 2019. (Photo: Pascal Victor)

("the fourth person singular"), which Jean-Michel Maulpoix used as the equivalent of his lyric subject as discussed in the first chapter.

Notes

1 Alexandro Jodorowsky, *Théâtre sans fin*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2015, 283–306.
2 Brontis Jodorowsky in *Ibid.*, 281.
3 Michael Chekhov, *L'imagination créatrice de l'acteur* [*The Actor's Creative Imagination*], Pygmalion, 2006, 48–49, 59–62. Tr. Isabelle Famhon.
4 Alexandro Jodorowsky, *Ibid.*, 283.
5 *Ibid.*, 306.
6 Valère Novarina, *L'animal imaginaire*, P.O.L, 2019, 130–131.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 235.
8 Antonin Artaud, From The Nerve Meter (1925), *Selected Writings*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, Introduction by Susan Sontag (ed.), 1988 [1976], 83.
9 *Ibid.*, 85.
10 "Public, prends courage, la suite est nombreuse!"
11 "Mangeons en parole ce Dieu comestible!"
12 "Dans l'animal, la prière attend."
13 Playful; ambigous sentence: "Défense absolue de toucher aux fils même tombés à terre."
14 "J'oublie le langage pour parler."
15 "Le messie, c'est la parole."
16 "Prière pour tous les hommes ayant oublié d'exister."
17 Valère Novarina, *Le jeu des ombres*, Paris, P.O.L, 2020, XXVIII (Recensement), 217–223.

16 Novarina's works produced in Hungary

An incomprehensible mother tongue

Novarina's relationship to language extends back to his childhood, to his unusual experience of bilingualism and multilingualism, which we can understand not only considering his Swiss birth, but with his childhood memories relating to the Hungarian language as recorded in his autobiographical text *An Incomprehensible Mother Tongue*.

> My mother, Manon Trolliet, born on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel on 20 April 1914, often took my younger brother, Patrice, and me to Aunt Mathilde and her piano to hear her play, from old, patched-together scores, of which we learnt to turn the pages, the *Turkish March*, the *Heroic Polonaise*, the *Moonlight Sonata*, and finally—the moment we were waiting for—sing the five songs of Théodore Botrel,[1] accompanying herself on the piano: *Letter of the Boatswain*, *The Big Simpleton*, *The Girl from Paimpol*, *Little Grégoire*, and *The Great Lustucru*.
>
> When my father wasn't present, the singing lasted longer: it concluded with the "Hungarian song"; my mother didn't speak the language, but she still knew this song that István, a Hungarian student she'd met in Geneva in her maidenhood, had composed for her. He had asked for her hand in marriage. My mother was not yet eighteen, and my grandfather rejected the suit; István returned to Hungary—and many, many years later my mother learned that he had died in Auschwitz.
>
> She sang this heartrending and hermetic song with great expressiveness, in tune but in a voice slightly veiled. She said that her teacher at the Geneva Music Academy had ruined her vocal cords through excessively intensive training. For that reason, she later abstained from singing and became an actress.
>
> I don't know what effect this song had on my brother, but it sent me into deep reveries every time: it expressed everything at once, how I could have been Hungarian, Jewish, and not be—since István died in the deportations, before I was born. To me, Hungary became a secret second mother country, and of all foreign languages, it was Hungarian that touched me instantly and most deeply, just like an incomprehensible mother tongue.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-16

> My mother knew only the numbers, István's song, and the Lord's Prayer in Hungarian. The song's lyrics became ever more uncertain—yet she continued to sing it with great self-confidence but in some sort of language drifting away and disappearing; its feeling became connected to the last verses of Botrel's song, which often ended in a tempestuous and tender shipwreck.
> Hungarian became *my* foreign language—indeed, quite possibly, my true language: what I would have spoken, had I been István's, the "phantom fiancé's", son. It gave rise to a negative reverie: my mother's incomprehensible Hungarian became my missing language, the shadow of the language I would have spoken, had I not existed.
> …
> Could this have been the origin from which I constructed a sort of original and childish theory that ties the force of language to geology—and makes linguistics once and for all a branch of fluid physics?… Could this be why I hold the certitude that languages do not obey any sort of humanly conceived rules but are eternally unpredictable, respiratory beasts, surprising animals—that can only be truly *seen* and seized in the act in the stage cage?[2]

Novarina's theatrical language is the missing language, the language turned inside out and emptied, that at the same time also cleanses us (like the flood of words does to the Endless Novelist in *The Imaginary Operetta*).

The relationship between emptiness, concentration on the empty, self-emptying, language, and action also appears in the passage referring to the text's direction of the actor:

> Think visibly in space: *empty* your mind and think by *sight* while entering the space. Ponder the drama and the ardor of language. Think (do not forget) that reason conquers and vacillates. Think that *I* is a dead marionette that seeks to be set in motion again. Think not in terms of a progression of concepts, of a scaffolding of rosaries of numbered, and enumerated terms, only droning *yes* and *no*—rather think *through the Passion of language*. Think through the skeleton. Think of the "passion of language." The ardent drama of the word, the combustion, the burning, the negation of words, the visible drama of thought. *Verbum patiens*.[3]

The notes prepared for the Hungarian production of *The Imaginary Operetta* employ the metaphors of death and drowning in reference to language and translation, saying that negation and "inverted perspective" liberate the mind. The inverted perspective of icons in this esthetic likewise stand opposed to statues made by human hands and beholden to representation: the former liberate us, while we are powerless before the latter ("immobile idols"[4]).

The Hungarian première of *An Incomprehensible Mother Tongue* was complemented by musical interludes by Lajos Pál, some of which enable the songs mentioned in the text to be heard, while others are "Danubian" music

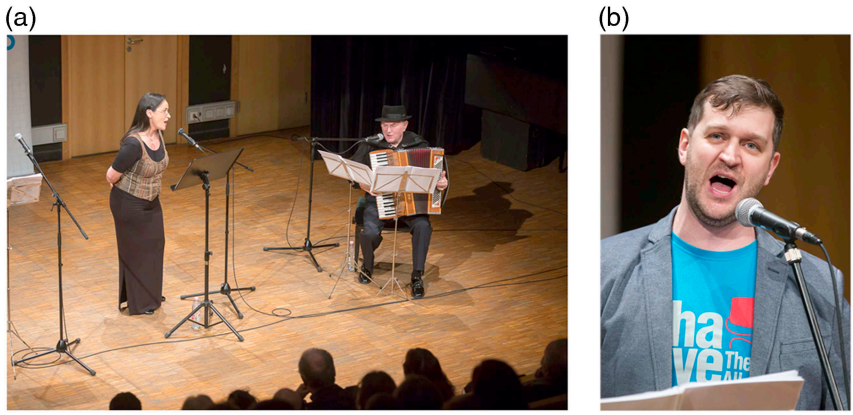


Figure 16.1 Novarina, *An Incomprehensible Mother Tongue*, musical staged reading in Hungarian, 16 March 2016, Institut Français in Budapest (Anna Ráckevei, Lajos Pál, Tibor Mészáros). (Photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

linked to Novarina's textual images. These are supplemented by songs from *The Imaginary Operetta* as performed by Tibor Mészáros. My translation of the French text was complemented by other performance elements thanks to the dramaturgical and directorial work of Zsófia Rideg: the *Funeral Oration* is the oldest record of the Hungarian language (the text already mentions that the first audio recording of the French language was the voice of Captain Dreyfus), and a wax cylinder recording of the voice of Lajos Kossuth from his exile years in Turin, which Novarina found in the Radio archives during his first visit to Hungary. The *Funeral Oration* is heard at the point in the text where the theme is "collapsing to the ground and the renewed taste of soil, humus and *humilitas humana*, human humility."

At one point in the performance Csángó[5] place names are heard because when Zsófia Rideg was searching for equivalents of the archaic French mountain (Savoyard) dialects that are important to Novarina, she was led to the Csángós. In the following, we present this excerpt in Savoyard dialect as it appeared in Theater *of the Active Word*, and then the staged version as spoken in performance (in the latter, we only print the revised place names appearing in italics in the French) (Figure 16.1):

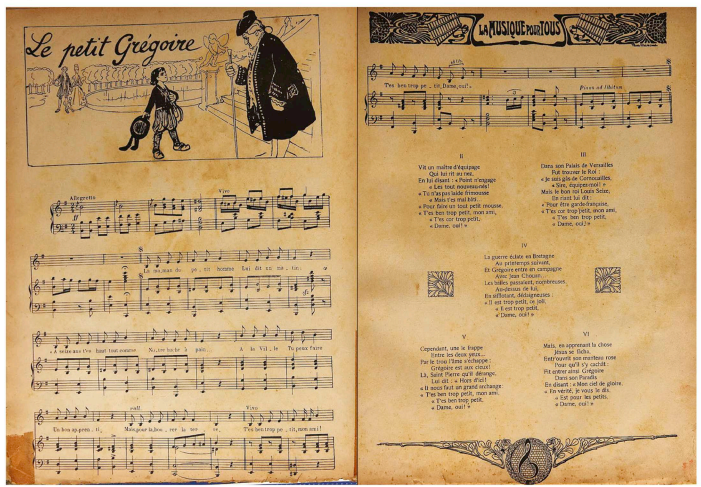
> Finally, the fourth nourishing language is the lovely Savoyard dialect—a humiliated and victorious language, a vengeful, inventive, laughing language: the idiot and idiom of subversive poetic revenge—that emerges from every situation *alive*; the tongue not of handbooks but of hands, the language of those whose tools evolve to suit their hands and the seasons, the language of walkers and striders, the language that embodies footsteps that know every spot of the soil and know the territory by

> heart, the reason for every name: why there is no water in Niflon, why Ouafieux is slushy and there is a twisted beech tree in Feu Courbe, why Piogre is Geneva, and why En-là-par-d'Lélé is the world's end. Why we say *Vacheresse*, *Samoëns*, *Mésinges*, *Le Plan Rabidolet*, *Les Pincaô*, *Champanges*, *Les Arces*, *Poëse*, *Outrebrevon*, *Darbon*, *Pertuis*, *Ireuse*, *Boège*, *Brenthonne*, *La Baume*, *Chézabois*, *La Rupe*, *Les Bottières*, *Les Paccots*, *Les Crappons*, *Drozaillis*, *La Rasse*, *Trélachaux*, *Seytrouset*, *Hautecisère*, *Vauverdanne*, *Jambe-de-ça*, *Jambe-de-là*, *Maugny*, *Essert-Romand*, *Sèchemouille*, *Sous le Pas*, *Torchebise*, *Bougeailles*, *Ouatapan*.[6]
>
> … and why we say in Csángó country Lujzikalagor Frumósza, Kukujéc, Bruszturósza, Lészped, Pusztina, Szekatúra, Esztrugár, Lábnyik, Podoros, Diószén, Rekecsin, Gajcsána, Gyidráska, Berzunc, Balanyásza, Pokolpatak, Máriafalva, Somoska, Klésze, Fumikár, Esztifuj, Tatros…[7]

In the case of the musical interludes, the performance used elements of *The Imaginary Operetta*: Tibor Mészáros performed the *Chauffeur's Song*. In addition, compositions by Liszt were performed, since the text mentions that the orchestral version of the *Hungarian Rhapsody Nº 2* formed the author's first extraordinary musical experience. Also performed were Botrel's songs *The Great Lustucru* and *Little Gregoire*, mentioned in his account of his childhood, here accompanied by accordion. Here are the lyrics in the original French and their English translation (Figures 16.2 and 16.3):

Le Grand Lustucru	*The Great Lustucru*
Entendez-vous dans la plaine	Do you hear on the plain
Ce bruit venant jusqu'à nous?	That noise reaching our homes?
On dirait un bruit de chaîne	Like a rattling chain
Se traînant sur les cailloux	Being dragged on the stones
C'est le grand Lustucru qui passe	Great Lustucru's back:
Qui repasse et s'en ira	He's passing on by
Emportant dans sa besace	He's stuffing his pack
Tous les petits gars	With kids who will cry
Qui ne dorment pas	And won't go to sleep
Lon lon la, lon lon la	Lon lon la, lon lon la
Lon lon la lire la lon la	Lon lon la lire la lon la
Little Grégoire	*Little Gregory*
La maman du petit homme	The little man's mom
Lui dit un matin:	Told him one morn
"A seize ans, t'es haut tout comme	"At sixteen, you'll be
Notre huche à pain!	Tall as our pantry!
A la ville tu peux faire	In town you will toil,
Un bon apprenti…	A fine young trainee…
Mais pour labourer la terre	But to work the soil,
T'es ben trop petit, mon ami!	My friend, you're too wee!
T'es ben trop petit."	You are too wee."

(a)



(b)

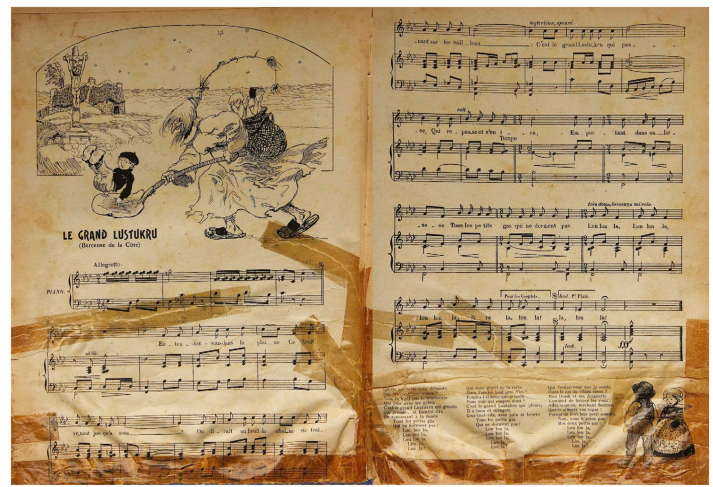


Figure 16.2 Valère Novarina's scores (Children's songs appearing in *An Incomprehensible Mother Tongue*).

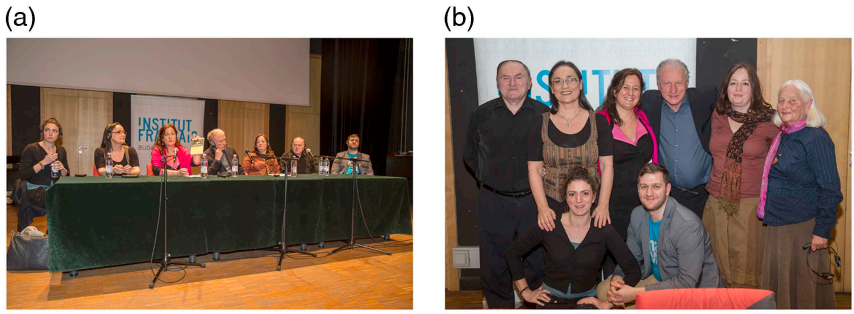


Figure 16.3 Post-performance roundtable discussion. Top: aside from the actors, from left to right, the creators Adélaïde Pralon, Enikő Sepsi, Valère Novarina, Zsófia Rideg. (Photos: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

The Imaginary Operetta

The Distorted Operetta (*Opérette réversible* in French)[8] "escorts" *The Imaginary Operetta* in the volume *Theater of the Active Word*,[9] in which the piece and its Hungarian translation appeared, in parallel and simultaneously with its staging in Debrecen. Its definition as operetta already conceals the subversive-perverse power accorded to the theater, and its subset, the theater of the word: "A diminishing word. … A drama so dense that it is free of all human feeling. … Operetta touches us by means of its lack of the human."[10] Its comic nature enables operetta to reduce the drama's pressure[11] (Figure 16.4).

The script of *The Imaginary Operetta* consists of three acts, twelve scenes, and thirteen self-duplicating main speakers, who between them make possible the birth of characters with twenty-one names.

The author directed the Debrecen première with assistant director Adélaïde Pralon, scenic designer Philipe Marioge, costume designer Borbála Kiss, and the musical collaboration of Christian Paccoud. Cecília Sörös assisted the work's translator, Zsófia Rideg, in translating the song lyrics. In addition to a well-translated text, Novarina holds a good distribution of the roles to be the soul of the performance. If these two attributes are given, then the rest come about virtually on their own. The proper role distribution ensured that the actors' individuality (life experiences, styles, etc.) could be incorporated into the characters. The production's cast comprised Anna Ráckevei, Nelli Szűcs, Kinga Újhelyi, József Jámbor, Árpád Kóti, Attila Kristán, Tibor Mészáros, József Varga, and Artúr Vranyecz.

Classical tragedy, musical theater, Shakespearean drama, and Chekhovian theater appear simultaneously, concealed in the cloak of the "imaginary" operetta. The Parisian master of the concertina Christian Paccoud, whose playing the Debrecen public already had the chance to

Figure 16.4 Playbill, *The Imaginary Operetta*.

experience in the 2008 Deszka [Plank] Festival, composed the music while the author and composer worked with the actors during a brief workshop period. That was when the idea arose for them to jointly mount *The Imaginary Operetta*, in Hungarian, in the Csokonai Theater.

The concept of the "Novarina actor" has already become widespread in French theater. During his 2008 visit to Debrecen, Novarina made the following apt observation: he selects his actors by examining their dentition. Of course, this is only true metaphorically, but he says this to emphasize that enunciation is important in his theater: he is working with verbal acrobats. "In the production in preparation, the most important thing," he said in an interview, "is for the piece not to be French but to appear on the stage as if it had been written in Hungarian. This operetta is devilishly rhythmic; it's always falling apart, it goes wrong—and of course, what goes wrong is at the same time comic. I would like to create musical theater, full of play and humor. I can hardly wait to work with the local actors because they are not only actors but also dancers and singers, which is particularly important to me. When I first visited here, this theater and these actors immediately captured me. This is why I've returned to this city, the one that most reminds me of my birthplace, Geneva"[12] (Figure 16.5).

We can consider *The Imaginary Operetta*, written in 1998, as the first work in a tetralogy, along with *L'Origine rouge* (2000), *La Scène* (2003), and *L'Acte inconnu* (2007), as the central appearance of song in all four works can be seen as a unifying factor. In the productions of Novarina, to this point known primarily as a writer of text, music—in particular, the specific music of the production's given location (country)—becomes increasingly important. For that matter, his figures initially lack stable, describable characters or intentions; they have no initial condition, linear time, plot recognizable from classical dramaturgy, or setting. Even his language use only resembles everyday French, because it builds on neologisms created from the etymological depths, and he has no use for everyday assignment of meaning. There are acts and scenes, but there are no dialogues in which the speakers respond to each

Figure 16.5 Images of the production. (Photos: András Máthé)

other, just independent pronouncements. The dramatist-director does not give a fig for the classical principle of avoiding inconsistencies and luxuriates in contradictions and paradoxes. The text nevertheless progresses in some direction that the author calls "rhythmic catastrophe": the more the text drowns in proliferation, the more it dies of it, the more language emerges victorious, relocating (being reborn) in the energy of articulation. In *The Imaginary Operetta*, after the Endless Novelist's cleansing and baptism in the flood of words, the "children of rage" say to him: "Come outside human language and see how they find equilibrium in regions of space!"[13] According to Michel Corvin, these words sound on the stage not like a *vehiculum*, the bearers of something, but as oracular utterances.[14]

Tibor Mészáros performed the roles of LY (in French: "E muet," "mute Ö") and the Endless Novelist; on one occasion, Novarina gave him a letter with instructions (after the Debrecen première and during the rehearsal period prior to the performances in Kolozsvár[15] and the Odéon in Paris).[16] In this letter, he compares the Endless Novelist's monologue to a magician: he writes that the text truly bewitches the audience. This action, which does not proceed according to plan, takes place in a unique space and time. These

indications are very characteristic of Novarina's viewpoint on theatrical space and time: the theater is the visible book in which speech organizes space.[17] On "the table of the theater" (again the metaphor of eating), language is not evocative but is present in its function of approaching from below. There are two types of time in theatrical performance: on the one hand, chronological, logical time, the linear time of the novel, and on the other, the pulsating, "animal" time, the inverted perspective of time, the time of "life," of "poetry." He even explains the concept of poetry here: the transition into action ("passage à l'acte").[18] The seed of this action is the multiplication of human depiction and the destruction and dissection of contradictory human labels, on the model of painters mentioned earlier and of the best actors (here he presents the following list: Soutine, Charlie Rivel, Louis Soutter, Albert Fratellini, Bosch, Basquiat, Nicouline, Wölfli, Grock, Lucerné, Picasso). "Leave the Stanislavsky method and leap into the Meyerhold!", he writes[19] (Figure 16.6).

In Act II of *The Imaginary Operetta*, the Woman of Pantagonia speaks:

> How far will human proliferation have the vanity to happen? Man multiplies man not by reproduction but by the human cross. One man multiplied, that's plenty of man. There are enough goodmen in one goodman to make three—and in three goodmîn, enough to make two goodmîn: but one of us is one too many: it's me. Let us go inside our bodies where God's cadaver is disinterred. In *nothing* is the cadaver of all things. One thing is nothing. Since the cadaver is on the floor. Goodmen is enough. Goodman are enough.[20]

Then the Knife-thrower replies:

> My puppet is not I, it is my puppet. I disguise myself as a person so that I can be nothing.[21]

The Endless Novelist's scene follows, at the end of which the Woman of Pantagonia baptizes the novelist. Novarina's productions have numerous recurrent elements: baptism with water after a flood of words, death, the exit and entrance of the dead, dining, consuming words. *The Imaginary Operetta* was first directed in 1998 by Claude Buchvald in the Bastille Theater, and then produced in Peter Brook's theater, the Bouffes du Nord. At the same time, it is undeniable that in the work's reception history, the success achieved by the Hungarian actors, the Hungarian and French artists in the Hungarian-language presentation (with the original French in surtitles) in the Odéon Theater in 2010 remains unique. The same production then received an invitation to the Interferences Festival in Kolozsvár. A review on this occasion emphasizes that such an experience of total theater divided opinion in the Hungarian-speaking audience.[22] A production that makes use not only of operetta but also of

Figure 16.6 Bonhomme Nihil [Nil Goodman]. (drawing by Novarina)

poetry and the complete arsenal of Novarina's essays, and which is an unaccustomed work in the Hungarian context, demands that one offers oneself up to the work.

Thus Spake Louis de Funès

The dramatic essay *For Louis de Funès* is a theatrical text that has been produced on Europe's stages several times already, including in 2016 in Hungary, under Adélaïde Pralon's direction.[23] The first Hungarian variant of the text was published in the volume *Theater of the Active Word*.[24] Regarding its form, it is a theatrical essay about the actor, which the author adapted (and abridged) for the stage; Zsófia Rideg revised the translation in view of the changes, often re-translating passages, and published it under the title *Thus Spake Louis de Funès* in the journal *Szcenárium*.[25] It appears under the name of the actor par excellence Louis de Funès, but the thoughts and

sentences do not in fact originate from the real-life actor. One month before the Budapest première, at the dress rehearsal and workshop presented by the Gáspár Károli Reformed Church University, Valère Novarina spoke about the genesis of the text, which created a sort of self-mythology around himself and his encounter with the Hungarian language. For a month, he observed the work of actor André Marcon in order to write an essay about his thespian work. The topsy-turvy world that is the stage interested him, that watershed that characterizes the space of the Bastille Theater, the single space from which one door led to the stage and the other to the auditorium. What interested him was how the theatrical space turns inside out (this metaphor appears frequently in his pieces and presentations). When André Marcon learned what Novarina wanted to write about, he had a dream in which Louis de Funès "signaled" that he would be happy if they talked about him. As a matter of fact, the figure of de Funès interested the young Novarina, and he planned to devote a dissertation to him. It was not the movie actor that interested him, but the stage actor less familiar to most of us. When Novarina set to writing—and here comes the mystical inspirational element—it seemed as though he were hearing sentences coming from Louis de Funès. For months, he had been carrying in his wallet a sentence by de Funès, clipped from a newspaper article: a sentence that everyone would have thought belonged to Artaud, Nietzsche, or someone else other than de Funès. Novarina's text seemed, among other things, like an attempt to reconstruct the sentence in the lost clipping. During rehearsals of *The Imaginary Operetta* in Debrecen, it became clear to the director that the dough-faced actor Tibor Mészáros had to play the theatrical adaptation of *For Louis de Funès*, because he is capable of deconstructing the human face in such a way that it could reappear in a thousand forms. In his work with actors, and as previously noted, Novarina often uses parallels from painting. He holds that what happened in painting in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries—that is, the deconstruction of the human figure (Picasso, Bacon, Basquiat, Soutine)—is yet to transpire sufficiently in the theater. In his esthetics, art is the destruction of the human face's mask-like nature, and the theater's goal in particular is the many-sided illustration of the person, as done, for instance, by the cubist painters. It is as if Novarina's theater forbids the representation or the imitation of the human. In the Avignon production of *L'Acte inconnu*, the actor Dominique Pinon, in the role of The Unbalancer, says: "Resterait à dire ce qui distingue l'acteur véritable de l'imitateur d'homme"[26] ("What remains is to determine what distinguishes the true actor from the man-imitator").

In this same workshop—and taking cognizance of Hungary's Marxist past and the location's (the university's) protestant spirit—he distinguished six levels of actors:

1. The hope of the proletariat,
2. The workers' hero,

3. The People's Worthy Artist,
4. The living national treasure,
5. The perfect and nonexistent/null actor ("acteur Nul et Parfait"),[27]
6. The marionette ("pantin") who plays only for God.

He ranked Tibor Mészáros in the fifth level, while only the greatest of the deceased can attain the sixth. This listing was, of course, playful in part, but it also very much mirrors the hierarchy that can be read in Novarina's works (Figure 16.7).

The stage script begins with a proclamation, continues with a list that is also part and parcel of classical comedies such as *Le Malade imaginaire* and *Le Mariage de Figaro*, and its aim is to bring the audience into a sort of hypnotic state and to make the actor leave everyday language behind.

> The theater should not start over! It shouldn't begin again to populate the stage just to let everything loose on us: strife-machinations, defeats of counterfeit somethings, mistranslations of old songs, quarterings of triangles, floods of adjectives, phallus-tropes, lives of stiffs, navel-gazing complexes, invective-mountains, man-humanizing metal-metalizing object-scores, black wall paint, white makeup, matter-avalanches for saw-blades, sand, water, Plexiglas, rubber, foam sponges, humbuggery, Doric capitals, rain, snow, Hungarocell polystyrene moons, stands of reeds.[28]

We see the *via negativa*, telling us what the theater and its actors should not do. But the audience is not left out of the list:

> Hence, you syllable-chewers, wooden harlequins, tamed puppets, national hummingbirds, wrong-vowel-users, rhythm-counterfeiters, imitators of inebriation, rattlers, goose-fleshed stand-ins, symmetrical monkey-types, monotony-machines; vanish, object-organizers, queue-monitors, users of everything on the stage, thesis-poseurs, prose-phraseologists, self-shoulder-slappers, whitewashers, pharisees, dogma-martyrs, chopper-uppers, marginal-commentators, pocket-arrangers, head rewriters, self-appointed artists, press conference-heroes, media-turges, mediagogues, stage-crowders, rewriter-translators and translation-rewriters, alms-filmers, the professionally tolerant, librettists under the influence, soul-dryers, improvisers of ready-made songs, anything-followers, anything-rewriters, disappear hence! Mr. Purge-all, sweep them away, please![29]

With Mr. Purge-all, the allusion to Molière and classical comedy artform becomes self-evident.[30] Only after this does the text make statements, and it will do so until the end, referring to the actor and thespian work, and always relying on poetry, word-invention (neologisms), and the piling up of

Figure 16.7 Valère Novarina and Tibor Mészáros in the open rehearsal of *Thus Spake Louis de Funès*. (Photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

metaphors. The actor on the stage not only says but also endures the "expiring-artist" process that is the foundation of Novarinian theater. In this process the actor is aided by his double, the puppet of Louis de Funès. At one of the most intense moments from a dramaturgical viewpoint, Tibor Mészáros brings out a puppet and uses it to play out his self-doubling. The marionette or puppet as the perfect image of the actor is not unknown in theatrical history, and it appears in several of Novarina's performances. An example among his Hungarian productions is *The Imaginary Operetta*, in which the child of the little family who lives in a box peers out of the cardboard house walls with his puppet head (Figure 16.8 and Figure 16.9).

Aside from the puppet, Tibor Mészáros was assisted by the property master—in Novarina's vocabulary, the Drama Worker—Sándor Horváth, who—just as if in rehearsal—brings in, at the right moment and with utter naturalness, here a lamb, there a fire-screen. The screen, covered in transparent, off-white paper is, except for the puppet, the main prop for the actorly self's fading and becoming transparent, and later, the "pictorial" breakthrough of the representation (the actor literally tears through the fire screen transformed into a shadow play). The reviews of the performance are interesting because they express the distance that makes its reception in Hungary more difficult: "we speak a different language," the actor must bring to life not a flesh-and-blood figure or event, but a philosophy, it is "boring and difficult," etc. From these few examples it can also be seen that, with one or two exceptions, the critics lack the appropriate terminology to describe this theatrical practice. According to the interviews with Tibor Mészáros, this type of theater demands the actor's entire being, not merely that he play a character. It requires that he take everything to the point of emptiness and wait there until the linguistic material and space allow him to move on. The concern comes through these interviews from time to time: how will the Hungarian

Figure 16.8 *The Imaginary Operetta*. József Jámbor, Kinga Újhelyi, Artúr Vranyecz. (Photo: András Máthé)

(a)

(b)

Figure 16.9 *Thus Spake Louis de Funès*, Csokonai Theater, Debrecen (2016). Valère Novarina on the left, Tibor Mészáros on the right. (Photos: András Máthé)

public receive all this? Thanks to the pioneering and popularizing work done by the artists, perhaps they have succeeded in overcoming these obstacles to reception in Budapest and Debrecen. In Debrecen, where following the Budapest première (MITEM, 2016) it has received the most

performances, it was Tibor Mészáros's popularity that drew the public to the studio theater.

The Pool of Names

Le Vivier des noms (*The Pool of Names*; in Hungarian as *In the Forest of Names*) was presented in French with Hungarian surtitles at MITEM in 2016, directed by the author. The French actors create a phantom company, as it were, around him, whereas in France scarcely any companies exist. In 1986, *La Drame de la vie* [The Drama of Life] listed 2,587 names; the present piece speaks a thousand "word-souls" in fifty-two scenes, naming 1,100 characters by name—among which not all actually appear. Novarina places the Female Historian at the center of the pool of names; she directs the story's beginning, and through the two and a half hours of the performance, she calls the flood of characters to the stage (at times, only virtually). At times, this character conceives such antitheatrical (seemingly alien to the theater's nature) scenic commands that it seems we are reading the scenic instructions in a piece by Pilinszky (that is, ones that are impossible or at least very difficult to realize on the stage). In the program booklet, we learn the following:

> Worntooth, the dog, knows very well that he will not appear: the Antipeople are conspiring, the Actor avoiding the other has already proven for the nth time the opposite of what he thinks, the Minister of the Outside World declares Latin to be a living language, the Parietal Infants enter every quarter-hour to empty the sack of prejudices. In two hours and ten minutes, the stage is disassembled and rebuilt, and it fills with mysteries. Time heaves a sigh because nobody has noticed it. The actors walk on the periphery of language, in the forest of liberating and oppressive words.[31]

The author published an abridged stage adaptation of the drama in his book *La Voie négative*, in 2017.[32] From the partial translation prepared by Eszter Gerda Miklós for the surtitles, we can see how the pieces build on each other, and how the characters wander from one text (production) into the other:

> STRINGER JOHN
> Pardon me, honored colleague, but aren't you Manuel Rabbit?
> THE OTHER
> Undoubtedly, with every certitude, this may indeed be so.
> STRINGER JOHN
> I saw you: eight years ago, I saw you in the role of the Logologist in *The Unknown Act*. Your creation enchanted me so much that I learned your part by heart; I even thought I might perform it for my entrance exam at the Saint-Étienne conservatory.

> THE OTHER
> Very much so! But do you know, dear colleague, that I abandoned the Logologist very quickly for a much more important part, Raymond Matter!
> STRINGER JOHN
> Raymond Matter! The daring inventor of the theory of the mason jar! The famed philosopher?![33]
> THE OTHER
> In the flesh.
> STRINGER JOHN
> You know your part by heart… In that case, I have an idea… we could present that scene again, for today's audience, in parentheses as it were, as an insert in *The Pool of Names*.
> THE OTHER
> Why not? It would be useful and entertaining indeed for our spectators. All the more so, since many have died in the last eight years, and many others weren't even born back then.[34]

In this so-called parenthesis, the rules and phenomena of the "Umonde," the world filled with ü's, are listed, and beneath all of Novarina's drawings raised one by one on the stage, there is the letter "u" ([y] in French pronunciation), the "unifier." Following this in the course of the performance, the table assembled from planks often symbolizes the progress made in eating the language, which progresses in parallel with the deconstruction of the "I": "My I hurts," says the Rulebreaker ("J'ai mal au moi").[35] The "Je suis" ("I am"), either projected or pinned on the back wall, represents a constantly increasingly powerful contrast to the developing drama, in which the performers wash their "masks" in each other's faces ("lavons-nous les masques à la figure des uns les autres").[36] According to the published script, an invisible hand writes the "I am"[37] on the wall, in an allusion to the story in Daniel, Book 5, of King Belshazzar's feast in which the handwriting on the wall prophesizes the fall and death of the king as he drinks from the golden bowls seized from the Temple in Jerusalem and worships idols of gold and silver; only Daniel can decipher the writing. We also learn—which we can also read in the open letter presented under the title *Beyond the Sacral* in an appendix to the present volume—that they call the "I am" the "Hunter" ("Son nom est le Veneur,"[38]) and speech is the messiah[39] that liberates us. The song inserts also encountered in other pieces (for example, "Man is not good" from *The Imaginary Operetta*, or "Absolute prohibition" from *The Unknown Act*) cluster at this point, as does the poem by the seventeenth-century mystic Madame Guyon, cited in our chapter "Space is the Womb of the Text," and even the Danube appears in a replica. At the peak of the circular, circus dramaturgy the Opposition Character speaks about the nature of prayer: it is the void, the emptiness in speech, that which waits in expectation.[40] Later he prays using the word "caillou" (pebble), and only that word (and this way, he

says, his thoughts are liberated from images). Stringer John (Jean Qui Corde) says, as the outlines of presence come into view: "Where is presence? Now." Then he breaks it down into syllables and adds: "in the last letter of 'here', which I just said Here?"[41] Prior to this, but also in this scene, as in every single piece, the scene of ritual eating comes to pass. In the version premièred in Avignon, in the Cloître des Carmes in 2015 (regrettably, no recording was made of the Budapest version), the performers eat a cloister made of bread, and then they also demand wine. When it arrives, one hears a reference to one of the finest Bordeaux wines, which therefore raises a smile: "Saint-Émilion, pray for us!." Then follows the dialogue with Rex the dog (a statue of a dog), and then the story of the family created *ex nihilo* by nine infants from eight wives, played using two puppets. At the performance's end, we read on an unfurled banner what we have already learned about the creative and liberated use of language: "I forget language in order to speak." ("J'oublie le langage pour parler").[42] Following this, the performance names itself, or rather, the character called Nobody (Personne) says that *The Pool of Names* is a marionette-Mass ("*Le Vivier des noms*, une messe pour marionnettes"[43]) where ("here") life performs the demolition (destitution) of the human idol[44] (Figure 16.10).

Dramaturgs for the Budapest production were Roséliane Goldstein and, familiar from earlier Hungarian productions, Adélaïde Pralon. The public could view the original French production during MITEM 2016, with French actors and Hungarian surtitles. Having earlier established the major role of words in this theater, the fragmentary translation offered by the surtitles did not make its reception easier. A good counter-example, however, is offered by the performance of *The Imaginary Operetta* in the Odéon, in which the Hungarian actors performed in Hungarian, with French surtitles (or rather, projection of the original text), from 9 through 13 November 2010, with tremendous success. The Franco-Hungarian film shot at that time *Éber álom* [Waking Dream], or in French *L'Amour est voyant* [Love is Seer], produced by Duna TV and the Csokonai Theater of Debrecen, introduced the production in great detail, including interviews with the project participants.

The Hungarian premières have theater-historical significance, since in Hungary audience response remains conditioned (especially among season-ticket holders in the provincial theaters) by traditions of the classical, realist, and mimetic theater. The undertaking was also extremely interesting from the viewpoint of intercultural communication, since the performances took place in an intercultural space, thanks to translations and the mixing of musical mother tongues, taking elements from each culture that were exciting for the other. The greatest challenge in drama translation was that the translator had to engage in a real transplantation and carry out recreations. The reception history of *The Imaginary Operetta* validated the effort. It is also supported by the fact that the Hungarian translation of the fourth work (*The Pool of Names*) of the tetralogy enjoyed a more modest reception than

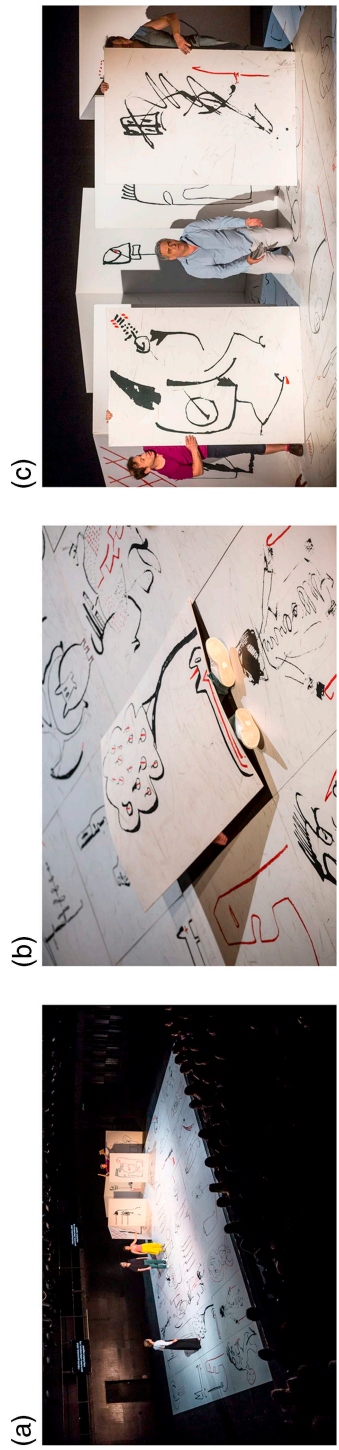


Figure 16.10 Novarina's drawings form part of the set décor. (Photos: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)

the others (*The Imaginary Operetta*, *Thus Spake Louis de Funès*, and *An Incomprehensible Mother Tongue*) because the tight preparation schedule meant that it could only be presented fragmentarily in surtitles; its success was significantly less than that of the Avignon production.

Notes

1 Théodore Botrel (1868–1925): French chansonnier, poet, and playwright from Brittany.
2 Valère Novarina, "Une langue maternelle incompréhensible" [*An Incomprehensible Mother Tongue*], *L'Envers de l'esprit*, 177–180, 183. Tr. P. Czipott.
3 *Ibid.*, 200. Tr. Peter Czipott and Enikő Sepsi.
4 *Ibid.*, 198.
5 The Csángó are a group of Hungarians who apparently never crossed the Carpathian Mountains to settle in the Carpathian basin; they reside in Romania's province of Moldavia and speak an ancient dialect of Hungarian; in contrast to the surrounding, predominantly Greek Orthodox Romanian population, the Csángó are Catholics.
6 Novarina, "Une langue maternelle incompréhensible," 192–193.
7 With gratitude to Zsófia Rideg for the manuscript.
8 In Novarina, *Devant la parole*, 43–49.
9 Novarina, *A cselekvő szó színháza* [*Theater of the Active Word*], ed. Enikő Sepsi, tr. Zsófia Rideg, Enikő Sepsi and Veronika Kovács, Budapest, Ráció Kiadó, 2009, 74–77. Original French edition: Novarina, *Devant la parole*, Paris, P.O.L, 1999, 43–49.
10 *Ibid.*, 74; French edition (*Ibid.*), 43.
11 Olivier Dubouclez, *Valère Novarina, la physique du drame*, Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2005, 33.
12 Source: http://csokonaiszinhaz.hu/archivum/valere-novarina-kepzeletbeli-operett/# (accessed 1 March 2017).
13 Novarina, *L'Opérette imaginaire* [*The Imaginary Operetta*], 161.
14 Michel Corvin, "Préface," in Novarina, *L'Acte inconnu*, 9.
15 The Hungarian name of Cluj-Napoca, Romania.
16 The text finally appeared, dedicated to Tibor Mészáros, as "Lettre au E muet" in the volume *La quatrième personne du singulier*, Paris, P.O.L, 2012, 43–54.
17 "Le théâtre devient le livre apparent où la parole opère l'espace. / Au théâtre, sur la table du théâtre, le langage n'est jamais *évocateur* (…vaguement tournant autour des choses pour s'en approcher, s'en approchant *approximativement*, bourdonnant par en-dessous, marmonnant des *à peu près* et finissant par en faire voir…), non, non, non ! il ne tourne pas autour des choses, il n'est pas balbutieur balbutiant, flou et flottant—il tranche, il frappe ! il renverse des quadrilatères, des tétraèdres, des losanges, des pans coupés ; il appelle et il divise ; il donne des ordres à l'espace …" [Theater becomes the visible book where speech operates space. / In the theater, on the table of theater, language is never evocative (vaguely circling things to approach them, approaching them *approximately*, buzzing from below, mumbling some *more-or-less*es, and ending by making them visible…): no, no, no! It doesn't circle around things, it's not a stammering stammerer, blurred and floating: it slices, it strikes! It upsets quadrilaterals, tetrahedrons, lozenges, cuts corners; it calls and divides; it gives orders to space …] *Ibid.*, 44.
18 "Attention ! À l'intérieur de ton monologue, maintiens avec netteté une contradiction ferme, une tension, une lutte *entre ces deux façons* pour le temps d'apparaître ! … 1. *un*, le temps logico-chronologique, le flux continu, le ruban

régulier, la durée domestiquée du plat roman traditionnel. 2. *deux*, (à l'exact opposé !) *le temps animal*, se renouvelant par bouffées et en volutes, le temps par accès et par crises, le temps sauvage, le temps spasmal, le temps *inhumain* qui tue et renaît en précipices et en ralentis fulgurants, allant par les relèvements en cascades, par les chutes, et par cercles renouvelés—comme dans la vie, comme dans la poésie (je n'emploie ce mot que dans un seul sens : *passage à l'acte*), comme dans l'expérience vive de la vie et du cirque vivant où le temps passe par la renaissance et le souffle *trépassant* la mort." [Attention! In your monologue, maintain with clarity a firm contradiction, a tension, a struggle *between these two ways* for time to appear!… 1. One, logico-chronological time, continuous flow, the regular ribbon, the domesticated duration of the flat, traditional novel. 2. Two, (the exact opposite!) *animal time*, renewing itself in puffs and volutes, time by access and by crises, savage time, spasmodic time, *inhuman* time that kills and renews in precipices and in dazzling slowdowns, proceeding in cascading elevations, by falls, and in renewed circles—as in life, as in poetry (I use this word in only one sense: *the transition to the act*), as in the living experience of life and the circle of life where time passes in rebirth and the breath *passing through* death.] *Ibid*., 47–48.

19 "Travaillez sans cesse ! Tibor, travaille encore, travaille toujours… Celui qui créa le rôle de L'Homme d'Outre-ça et de L'Infini Romancier, le grand acteur et nageur Daniel Znyk, n'a trouvé la véritable organisation musculaire et la structure nerveuse de ce texte, sa logodynamique, que lors de la quinzième ou seizième représentation—ou plutôt *déreprésentation*—tant il se *défigurait*, tant il *défaisait* l'homme par multiplication, tant il émettait à chaque seconde des signaux humains primitifs contradictoires, tant il lançait d'anthropoglyphes en un huitième de geste. …

Sors de la méthode Stanislavski ! Saute à la Meyerhold ! Travaille tout *dans l'envers* retourné, dans l'autre perspective: ouvre la voie Florensky ! 'Perspective : *vue traversante*'—oui, mais dans l'autre sens ! Ne tisse plus du tout une construction de personnage, ne pense plus du tout au déroulement de ton rôle (en fonction de toi ou d'une sorte de *personnalité* du personnage) mais prête une extrême attention aux *traits* (tel un peintre), aux traits que tu traces, que tu jettes, aux *figures humaines* qui s'érigent et se combineront dans le cerveau et le corps du spectateur, prête attention au *déploi* rhythmique des figures du langage dans la tête, dans les sous-sols de ta conscience, dans les mélodies et les méandres de ton imagination …."

[Work unceasingly! Tibor, keep working, always work… He who created the role of The Moreover-Man and The Endless Novelist, the great actor and swimmer Daniel Znyk, didn't find the real musculature and the neurological structure of this text, its logodynamics, until the fifteenth or sixteenth performance—or rather, disperformance—until he *disfigured* himself, until he dismantled the man by multiplication, until he emitted, every second, primitive contradictory human signals, until he could launch anthropoglyphs in an eighth of a gesture. …

Leave the Stanislavsky method! Leap into the Meyerhold! Work everything upside down and backwards, in the other perspective: open the Florensky way! 'Perspective: *a view through*'—yes, but in the other direction! No longer weave the construction of a character at all, think no longer at all of the development of your role (as a function of you or of a sort of *personality* of a character) but pay extreme attention to the features (like a painter), to the features that you trace, that you project, to the human figures that are erected and will combine in the brain and body of the spectator, pay attention to the rhythmic deployment of the figures of speech in the head, in the cellars of your conscience, in the melodies and meanders of your imagination …]. *Ibid*., 51, 52–53.

20 "Jusqu'où la prolifération humaine aura-t-elle vanité d'avoir lieu ? … L'homme se multiplie à l'homme non par la reproduction mais par croix humaine. Un homme multiplié, c'est de l'homme à satiété. Il y assez de bonhomme dans un bonhomme pour en faire trois—et dans trois bonhîmmes pour faire deux bonhîmmes: mais l'un de nous est en trop: c'est moi. … Avançons à l'intérieur de notre corps où se déterre le cadavre de Dieu. En *rien* est le cadavre de toute chose. Une chose c'est rien. Car le cadavre est au sol. Bonshommes suffit. Bonhomme suffisent." Novarina, *L'Opérette imaginaire*, Paris, P.O.L, 1998, 144. Translated from the French by Hélène Brunerie and Paul Currah.
21 *Ibid*., 144.
22 Ferenc Csomafáy, "Képzeletbeli operett" [The Imaginary Operetta], *Erdély Online*, 15 January 2011. http://www.erdon.ro/kepzeletbeli-operett/news-20110115-01351751 (accessed 3 May 2017).
23 Dramaturgs were Eszter Gerda Miklós and Csaba Jóvér.
24 Novarina, *A cselekvő szó színháza* [*Theater of the Active Word*], 43–73, tr. Zsófia Rideg – Veronika Kovács.
25 *Szcenárium*, N° 2, February 2016, 5–15. Original French edition, "Pour Louis de Funès," in Novarina, *Le théâtre des paroles*, Paris, P.O.L, 2007, 161–218.
26 Novarina, *L'Acte inconnu*, 146.
27 See Novarina, "Le langage se souvient" [Language Remembers], *L'Envers de l'esprit*, Paris, P.O.L, 2009, 83–84.
28 *Szcenárium*, N° 2, February 2016, 5.
29 *Ibid*., 5–6.
30 M. Purgon is the quack doctor in Molière's *Imaginary Invalid*; the Hungarian translation of Novarina's text uses Mr. Purgál, and the pun on Purge-all is too apposite to resist.
31 https://nemzetiszinhaz.hu/eloadas/nevek-erdejeben/szinopszis (accessed 1 March 2017). On the origin of the expression "pool of names"] [vivier des noms] see Valère Novarina, La loterie de Pierrot, Editions Héros-Limite & Fondation Facim, 2009, 115.
32 Valère Novarina, "Entrée perpétuelle. Version pour la scène du *Vivier des noms*," *La Voie négative*, 85–277.
33 See note 173.
34 In manuscript. Thanks to Eszter Gerda Miklós for offering her translation for publication.
35 In the published text revised for the stage: "J'ai mal au *Je*." (Novarina, *Voie négative*, 176).
36 *Ibid*., 206.
37 *Ibid*., 190.
38 *Ibid*., 191.
39 "Le messie c'est la parole." *Ibid*., 267.
40 *Ibid*., 243.
41 *Ibid*., 254.
42 In the published script, the author even prints the line in strikethrough font.
43 *Ibid*., 276.
44 "C'est ici, le lieu de la *destitution de l'idole humaine* et de son démontage par la vie. Le lieu de la *défaite humaine* au sens littéral." [It is here, the place of the *destitution of the human idol* and its dismantling by life. The place of the human defeat in its literal sense (i.e., un-making).] *Ibid*.

Summary

From poetic images to kenotic rituals

Representation, imagery, artistic presence, and seeking spiritual paths beyond dichotomies: themes which fundamentally engaged post-surrealist French poetry and contemporary theater from the mid-twentieth century onward (earlier in western Europe and America, and only beginning in the 1970s in Hungary), can all be brought into relation with the revolution in visual art, and the issues inherent to them can be expressed with a few conceptual metaphors: the soul is the metamorphosis of matter; the *via negativa* leads to the physical–spiritual presence of theater; the image is illusory but man's ancient passion is to cling to it; and whether we luxuriate in the poetic image (Maulpoix) or regard it with suspicion (Bonnefoy), we still remain within the paradigm represented by surrealism. Bonnefoy conducted a many-layered investigation of the nature of the image not only in poetry but also in visual art, as cogently demonstrated by his studies of outstanding art-historical value that are also highly illuminating from the poetic perspective. Novarina chose Artaud, who at a given point broke with the surrealists, as the subject of his first serious study. Beginning from Artaud, an author far removed from theological thinking, Novarina's "word-theater" attains a particular theological poetics, while building firmly on the results of the visual arts (inverted perspective, cubist portraiture, etc.). The fundamental conceptual metaphor of his dramas, theatrical productions, and essays is that Christ is speech, while the stage is the ritual (Last) supper, the location of the body's sacrifice. Relating the metaphor to the actor's body, the author unpacks it into different linguistic and visual metaphors (the latter on the stage.) The text resurrects on the actor's body in *respir(it) ation*: it is the joint Passion of text and actor. The actor, as *imitatio (imago) Christi,* de-portrays (*dé-représente*) destroying the human idol, and in its place he builds the cathedral of the body (on stage, the human body "can be seen in its glory," he claims).

From this metaphor it also follows that space is the starting point of text. In Valère Novarina's concept of emptiness—according to the chapter on this subject—the influence of Chinese thought, namely Taoism, and of Christian

DOI: 10.4324/9781003163930-102

thinkers can both be caught in the act. Emptiness is that honored place where transformations are achieved; this introduces discontinuity and reversibility into a given system. He encountered Taoism primarily through the works of the sinologist Jean François Billeter of the University of Geneva, while his knowledge of Christian theology from the early Church to our times is of astounding depth; and in his reading, he has turned remarkable attention to the Middle Ages.[1] This conceptual metaphor (Christ is speech), in its referentiality to the image of kenosis and to the human mask, the *persona*, worn by the actor—it is the emptying of the latter that takes place on stage—yields that open moment in Novarina's performances when the spectator is, for a short time, freed from the weight of representation and is freed, for an instant, from being force-fed meaning. Novarina seeks this openness, which condition he terms "holy," in his texts and theatrical productions, and indeed, also in his drawings. His works—on the evidence of our analysis—are in dialogue with numerous oeuvres, among them the works of Pascal, Jules Lagneau, Alain, Simone Weil, Claudel, the Church Fathers, Bonhoeffer, Jean Dubuffet, and not explicitly but structurally with those of János Pilinszky, Jerży Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, and innumerable other creators. His essays accompanying his stage works are replete with theological thoughts transposed to the theater, from Byzantine icons through the works of Henri de Lubac. He is one of the most erudite of our age's artists, although he conceals his learning in the creativity of his writing.

The foundation of his imaginings and metaphors about language can first of all be found in biblical stories, but his texts also stand far from traditional dramatic texts: they are deep drilling into language and works of etymological bravura. For Valère Novarina, the text comes first in the theatrical space: nothing precedes language, he states, especially not thought. In his theater, the actor attains the state of emptiness through the flood of speech and can "exit oneself" ("sortie de soi"), so that something unexpected can take his place.

In this respect, it is worth noting the parallel with a work Novarina investigated,[2] Pierre Legendre's *L'animal humain et les suites de sa blessure* [*The Human Animal and the Consequences of its Wounding*], in which the psychoanalytical jurist, professor emeritus of religious studies at the École Pratiques des Hautes Études, analyzes the distinguishable roles of language in the human animal's lifestyle: the individual adjusts to language and leads the world to language. With respect to the currently problematic connection between society and religion (or, in general, the "fiduciary," entailed aspect of the institutionalized Mind), he emphasizes the American Supreme Court's surprising ruling, according to which religion finds its origin in the marketplace of ideas.[3] In an interview, Novarina—as if engaging in a dialogue with Legendre—notes that he hesitated to publish his essay *Ash Wednesday*, since the loathing of religion is so prevalent in contemporary Europe, and especially in the cultural sphere: "A new Freud is needed to prove to us the extent to which spiritual life is prohibited to the

human animal today. Whereas we have as much need of it, and it is as natural, as breathing."[4]

It is also important to note that religion may also be divergent from self-emptying rituals. The works under discussion differ on this point, of course. In the case of the contemporary poets studied herein, the theologically derived concept of *kenosis* is irrelevant (all the more so for presence and image in the poetic sense), while it is the foundational pillar of Novarina's oeuvre (in superseding the dichotomy of presence eclipsed by the tight connection between image and representation). In the case of Hungarian translations of Yves Bonnefoy and Valère Novarina, the legacy of János Pilinszky helps their reception. But a new lyric tone, not at home in Hungarian culture, has also appeared during the past decade in our published translations: the new lyricism in the poetry of Jean-Michel Maulpoix. Valère Novarina's practice in playwriting and theater, as well as his essays accompanying that practice, his philosophies of language, and his quasi-theological speculations can be regarded as the realizations of the unrealized imaginings of János Pilinszky—despite his lack of consistent theatrical involvement—or, from a different perspective, we sought to reinforce an interrupted tradition in an intercultural context with our translation. This, however, does not mean that Pilinszky's theatrical visions have not also had Hungarian heirs.[5] His poems and prosaic texts were widely translated into English by Ted Hughes, Peter Jay, Ádám Makkai, and others.

The dichotomy of images and presence (scripted in a text, embodied on the stage, or mediatized in performances using filmlike technics) much discussed in the phenomena of the pictorial turn seems to be transcendable by thinking in terms of poetic rituals which—using the force of *poiesis*—put meanings into movement in order to let other meanings arise. That is why the poetry of Yves Bonnefoy or that of János Pilinszky can be considered as theatrical, not only for entitling a cycle as Theater (Bonnefoy) or writing poems inpired by performances (Pilinszky) but also because their use of images is essentially theatrical, as much as for instance in Mallarmé's oeuvre. This openness of poetic rituals related to texts or performances is accompanied by the reader's or spectator's mental *mise en scène*, where certain meanings do not arise but from a specific optic, so to speak, by participation in the rite. Esthetic (poetic) understanding of rite does not require obligatory participation, as is the case of social rites, but openness might increase the layers of significance of open oeuvres (in the sense of *opera aperta* of Umberto Eco). Willing to participate or not in an esthetic rite with our creative imagination depends much on sociocultural backgrounds and beliefs, as well as our esthetic expectations.

The European and Anglo-American context of reception

At this point it is important to present the Anglo-Saxon context of reception of the works presented in the volume. Yves Bonnefoy is well known to the

English-speaking world, thanks to several good translations published in English, some of which are listed in the bibliography of Part I. Yves Bonnefoy's work was, at the very beginning of his career, influenced by the surrealist poets, mainly in the practice of a poetry which tries to liberate the conceptual networks of words and create a textually interpreted presence of the world in poetry. He published verses, poetry in prose form, short novels, essays on arts, and translation (he translated Shakespeare, John Donne, and Yeats into French). He was also professor of comparative poetics at Collège de France until his death in 2016 and invited international speakers from several universities, comprising literary-prize-winning laureates, (e.g., the Goncourt Prize, the Kafka, or the Janus Pannonius Grand Prize for Poetry). Jean-Michel Maulpoix's poetry is less known in France and elsewhere, much less translated too, although it is a remarkable example of free use of poetic images, accompanied, as in the case of Yves Bonnefoy too, by reflections on poetics, especially on new lyricism (*Du lyrisme*). He is also professor emeritus and is invited to several universities worldwide. His most remarkable book of poetry *A matter of blue* was translated into English by Dawn Cornelio, whose PhD thesis also presented the translating process of the book.

Valère Novarina received the Paul Morand Prize of the French Academy in 2021, the famous Cerisy colloquium papers have just been published on his works, as well as several academic articles and books, but none of them in English. The only selected volume of his works was published by Allen S. Weiss in Los Angeles under the title of *The Theater of the Ears*, and the two texts are appearing for the first time in English in the appendix of this volume (*To Be Done with the Sacred* and *Theory of People*).

Valère Novarina has never directed his texts in the English-speaking world. Nevertheless, three performances in English are known, but none of them are based on a whole play. The first performance of *Adramélech's Monologue* was created in Bootleg Theater, Los Angeles, in 2008 by Joshua Moyse (translated by Guy Bennett), with Hilario Saavedra. The second, *The Sacrificing Actor/L'acteur sacrifiant* a year later, in March 2009, and January 2010, in Atlanta, by Valéry Warnotte, and in April 2010 in Washington, in French and in English, with Chris Kayser, Park Krausen, and Eliana Marianes. In 2015 there was also a production of *The Animal of Time* in the Martin E. Segul Theater in New York within the frame of World Voices: International Play Festival. It is an American adaptation of *Discours aux Animaux* by Valère Novarina (translated by Amin Erfani), directed by Valéry Warnotte, with Chris Kayser and the musicians Fred Lamarre and Adrien Tronquart.

Self-emptying and time and space

Our approach to *kenosis* originates from the theological use of the word for Christ's abasement, and emptying himself from/of his divine nature (which

he kept hidden), on the one hand, and posing the divine face on ours created in His likeness, on the other. Humankind created in His likeness, repeats the self-emptying as *imitatio Christi*, which is not primarily a voluntary act, but happens in the interaction with Christ and His spirit. That is one of the possible interpretations of the theological side of the term. Philosophy has also dealt from medieval to modern times with the phenomenon of self-emptying, being an important exercise for the Desert Fathers until late medieval spirituality. Nevertheless, the works of Simone Weil revealed that the gap between theology and philosophy is not necessarily evident, there is the possibility of interdisciplinarity between theology, philosophy, and mysticism. Recent works, that of Jean-Luc Marion, Miklós Vető, or Alex Dubilet have tried to find the way out of the antagonism between theological and philosophical discourses. This book gives a theological-philosophical-mystical explanation of the term, through the greatest theological works of Calvin, Barth, Tilliette, or Kitamori, as well as Simone Weil's work, and some pages of a contemporary mystical encounter *Talking With Angels,* written down by Gitta Mallasz. The originally Christological term was refined in the book by the Taoist term of emptiness, because of the presented theater artists' encounters with far-eastern cultures.

The theological term applied to theater as a *theatrum philosophicum* of Foucault and Deleuze, or rather as a *theatrum theologicum* (Visky), redefines the original theological term in motion. We could also state that the original Christological term becomes a cognitive metaphor for the perfect actor who is free of all alien images, as free as he would be if he were not. Here, self-emptying is becoming (as a teleological vision) free from all images and forms that tie the intellect to external objects (detachment), clearing the intellect of all images, and first of all from its own self-image (ego). This self-emptying is not followed by exaltation as in the biblical prefiguration, but takes liveness into human presence, of which artistic presence is a highlighted version. This process becoming a way of existence (artistic existence at least) does not maintain the dichotomy of transcendence and immanence, but enlarges the boundaries of immanence and that of perception. Physics of consciousness as presented by a CNRS researcher, Philippe Guillemant, in *Physique de la conscience*, *La Route du temps* (*The Road of Time*[6]), and *Le Pic de l'esprit*, a trilogy of time and consciousness, makes the transgression of the term of immanence clearer for us. In this understanding of the universe, immanence and transcendence are not separated as in our philosophical tradition, they are rather different levels of reality perceived as different levels of energy. His books, as well as an earlier book by Michael Talbot (*The Holographic Universe*), completely change our understanding of time and causality, by showing how the future influences our present. He explains that our intentions influence the creation of our reality, long before our actions. It seems to explain, in scientific terms, the predilection of Eugenio Barba for dancing energy, energy as an expression of presence, and the pre-expressive level presented in this book as well. It is not something to

climb (*scandere*), but something to which one could be open. Openness and dispossession are the key words in this process, although it is not a loss, nor is it self-mastery, a temporary giving up of the self within a process of self-aggrandizement. These artistic practices we have examined simply do not take the self as a point of cultivation or self-negation. They are used as a cognitive metaphor in the process of a *poietic* (to do) ritual where more layers of realities and significance can arise.

Poetic rituality or images in motion

The systematic relevance of ritual to arts cannot be underlined strongly enough. One can differentiate between the various types of ritual on the basis of form and social function. Literature and theater, but also arts in general, can not only participate in all types of rituals in various ways but also originate quasi-rituals. Witnessing a poetic ritual is not equivalent to participating in a social rite. In "witnessing" one has the choice to participate; the participation is a condition *sine qua non* of a social rite. The dimension of understanding a ritual is decisively connected with esthetic explicitness, the performativity of the esthetic, which inscribes "significance" to the ritual, but also to the spectator's point of view which determines which layers of significance become visible. This anamorphic nature of reception is, as we state in this book, also lurking behind poetic rituality. Because of its *ab ovo* performative nature, besides literature, theater makes even more use of expression inherent to the ritual.

Within poetic rituals, kenotic (emptying) rituals have been examined in the book, in the works of Valère Novarina, whose monogram (VN) can indicate the *via negativa* he often undertakes as a dramaturg. His critique of the self-cultivating subject is the basis of his joyful, word-creating theater, of this word-theater where Christ is the speech. What else could be more grounded on earth than this earthly expression of the so-called transcendence? His theater breaks with a line of the mystic tradition which undermines the flesh. The flesh is presented here in its (il)luminated state (see *Lumières du corps*). The system of terms offered in this book will hopefully open up new discourses on metaphysically oriented theaters.

Notes

1 Here it is worth noting that his father, Maurice Novarina, was a church architect highly esteemed in Switzerland.
2 He himself called my attention to it.
3 Pierre Legendre, *L'animal humain et les suites de sa blessure*, Paris, Fayard, 2016, 54–55.
4 *Reconnaissance d'un drame*, entretien avec Valère Novarina mené par Patrick Piguet, in *Communio*, N° 235, September-October 2014, "Littérature et Vérité," 17.
5 My dissertation advisee at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University Doctoral School of Literary Studies, Vera Prontvai, studies the afterlife of Pilinszky's

theatrical vision in the works of András Visky and in productions directed by Attila Vidnyánszky. Within the framework of the centenary of the birth of János Pilinszky in 2021, we analyze the afterlife of his poetic theater in several contemporary oeuvres: that of Ottó Tolnai first of all, but also in the theatrical posture of the poetry of Sándor Halmosi and Attila Jász.

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Appendices
Appendix 1

Yves Bonnefoy, *The Hinterland*

(*L'Arrière-pays*) (*Excerpts*)[1]

I have often felt a sense of disquiet at crossroads. It seems to me at such moments that in or around this place: there, two paces on the path I haven't taken and from which I am already distancing myself, yes, it's there that a land of the highest essence opens, where I might have been able to go to live and which I've henceforth lost. Yet nothing at the instance of choice indicated, nor even suggested, that I ought to take that other route. I was able to follow it with my eyes, often, and verify that it didn't lead to a new land. But that did not appease me, because I also know that the other land would not be remarkable for the imagined features of its monuments or its soil. It's not my taste to dream of unknown colors or forms, nor of something surpassing the beauty of this world. I love the earth, what I see; it fills me up, and I can even believe that the pure line of the mountain peaks, the majesty of the trees, the vivacity of the rushing water at the bottom of a ravine, the grace of a church façade—because they are so intense in these regions, at these hours—must have been willed, and for our good. This harmony has a sense—these landscapes and these forms, though still frozen, perhaps enchanted, speak—one must only look and listen forcefully for the absolute to reveal itself, at the end of our wanderings. Here, in this promise, therefore, is the place.

And yet it is when I have arrived at this sort of faith that the idea of that other land can seize me most violently and deprive me of all happiness in the earth. For the more I am convinced that it is a phrase, or rather a music—simultaneously sign and substance—all the more cruelly do I feel that the key allowing it to be heard is missing. We are disunited in this unity, and action cannot be brought to bear on, or commit to, what intuition feels. And if a voice is raised, clear for a moment in this murmur of the orchestra, oh well, an age passes, the one who spoke dies, and the sense of words is lost.[2]

I never look at the labyrinth of small hills—easy roads, but an infinite background—of Piero della Francesca's *Triumph of Battista Sforza* without saying to myself: this painter, among his other cares, had the one that haunts me. But I also love, under this aegis, the great plains whose horizon is so low that the trees—and almost the grasses—screen it. Because then the invisible and the nearby merge, the elsewhere is everywhere, the center perhaps two steps away: I've been on the road a long time, it needs no more than a bend before I notice the first walls or speak to the first shadows…. In fact, the sea is favorable to my reverie because it assures distance and also signifies, at the sensory level, the empty plenitude; but it does so in a non-specific manner. I see clearly that the great deserts where the network—also a desert, itself—of roads on a continent can fulfill the same function, which is to allow wandering, in deferring for a long time the attention that embraces everything and then renounces it. Yes, even the *highways*[3] of America, its slow and seemingly purposeless trains, the ransacked areas extended before them—but in this case, I admit, it's too much to dream and bad to do so. This year, penetrating western Pennsylvania by train, in the snow, I suddenly saw, on the sad factories, among the trees of a dismembered forest, the contradictory words *Bethlehem Steel*, and this brought renewed hope, but this time at the expense of the reality of the land. Ceasing to search for the excess of existence in the intensification of its appearances, was I not imagining, near here, in some side street, even the filthiest one, a door in a coal-filled backyard: and everything beyond the threshold, mountains and birdsong, and the sea, resuscitated and smiling? But it is in this way that one unlearns the limits, and the power perhaps, of our being-in-the-world. I understood, as we approached Pittsburgh, how the gnostic refusal was able to gradually penetrate the Greek language, born in beauty and raised in the notion of the cosmos.

And I understand all the better that my nostalgia, certainly, is even in these darkest moments a rejection of the world, in which nothing, as I said earlier, touches me more than the words and accents of the earth. Yes, it's true, our lands are beautiful, I imagine nothing else, I'm at peace with this language, my distant god has not withdrawn but two paces, his epiphany is simple: nevertheless, the idea that true life is over there, in that unlocatable elsewhere, suffices for the here-and-now to take on the aspect of a desert. I can see it by what I do with what I love when the haunting takes me. I believe in the light, for instance. To the extent that I was able to think that the true land was born of it, by chance—rather, by accident—in the union of a season and a place when the light had been most intense. Night and day, therefore, like everywhere and in all epochs. But morning, at noon, and the evening the light was so total, so pure in its revealed modulation that men, dazzled, seeing themselves only against the light, dark forms silhouetted in fire, no longer understood psychology, had no more in them than the yes and no of presence; they communicated the way lightning gathers: hence unspeakable tenderness, inspired violence, absolute revolution. But if that is what I dream, what is the light of here or of today to me, and what do I

encounter in it? These are nothing more than lacunae, whose grandeur is desire, the search for them an exile.[4]

But I understood, I knew: no more waiting for anything now. Yes, inexplicable on the plane where facts are causally connected, unjustifiable by superficial psychology or naïve morals: this end, on another plane, that of ontology, was simply too natural; it was even obligatory since it opened the flaw that gives the book its meaning and revealed the fault inherent in all writing. "Lost" yet again (in truth, at first in the light of day), that which had only been noticed anyway, had spoken only briefly in a dead language, from inside a world both unforeseen and known in advance and separated from life, from space itself, by a hiatus of darkness? But no, because it hadn't existed for even a moment. Just as, for the archaeologist, Rome had never been anything but a great dream. Its sign is the prohibition from going further in a deep language regarded as the symbol of the origin. Nothing is more ambiguous than this warning, after all, since it could only make known what it pretended to hide, bearing even all subsequent events like the seed of a plant. It was indeed the space of dream where, stationary, one advances; where we already know that which we are yet ignorant of—and where we pretend to brave a "mysterious frontier" because in fact, we seek to escape the evidence of that other border, which imposes finitude on the spirit of knowledge. The two enigmas of the book do not follow one upon the other but are superposed. And in doing so, they themselves dissolve. In ordinary existence, on the quay of elapsing time, of lost opportunities, of chances as well, miraculous suspensions of the scythe, the young boy saw some young girl, and he "could have" loved her, but that would have been to choose, so commit to the incarnation, to death, and he preferred "to abolish" (always Mallarmé's language) this existence, to refuse to recognize its contradictions, its limits, which would have spoken to him of his own, for the reward in essence, in the infinite, outside time. And in doing so, he had thought to save her from nothingness: hadn't he made of her a queen? But queen of a world without substance, without future, because he had used it only for his dreams, his works, and with that, she instantly disappeared, through the flaw in the writing, from her life in him in any case, which then would be a form, not a destiny. All and nothing. …[5]

Notes

1 Yves Bonnefoy, *L'Arrière-pays*, Paris, Poésie/Gallimard, 2005; in English translation by Steven Romer as *The Arrière-Pays*, Kolkata, Seagull Book, distributed by The University of Chicago Press, 2012. The present translation is by P. Czipott, revised by E. Sepsi.
2 Bonnefoy, *L'Arrière-pays*, 9–11.
3 In English in the original.
4 *Ibid*., 18–23.
5 *Ibid*., 123–126.

Appendix 2

Valère Novarina, *To Be Done with the Sacred*. Letter to Enikő Sepsi

(*Valère Novarina: Pour en finir avec le sacré. Lettre à Enikő Sepsi*[1])

You know, dear Enikő—to answer your question—how I distrust this word, "sacred," a word that separates, encloses the divine, locks the deity within four walls, prohibits it to us—instead of which *messianism* opens up, invites us to approach, offers it us embodied: each of the books of the Bible opens a path, removes an obstacle, never blocks the way—wants not to make us see God, neither to define Him, nor to understand Him, but to touch Him and be touched by Him; of all the gods in the universe, that of the *messianists* (Christians in the literal sense) is the only one put into the flesh like us, coming here to die like us and by His death, showing us the way to be reborn.

In the Gospel, Christ constantly touches, is touched: the word *Messiah* contains the memory of an *unction*—like the presence of a tactile proof. All of which is the opposite of a distancing and of a prohibition.

The incarnation, that cornerstone, "corner-flesh," central axis and soul of Christianity, speaks at every instant to us of this gift, of this *gift of God*, of His arrival: He offers Himself in flesh, falls like us into death; He touches us, crosses with us, mingles with us in the respiratory crossroads of prayer, offers Himself to our lips—in the unthinkable theophagic exchange: "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." (John 6:56)

"God made Himself man so that man can make himself God": that formula, I believe, belongs to Irenaeus of Lyon: it indicates *holiness* as an open path and no more the *sacred* as a wall of prohibitions. The Christ is a god of touch who approaches us.

The Bible is a symphony of *overtures*, of *openings*: from the passage through the Red Sea to the Aramaic *ephphatha* by which Jesus told the blind man: "Open yourself,"[2] and up to the *Un-covering* that is literally the title of the Apocalypse:[3] the waters part, the curtains fall, the walls rise, the sky rolls

up: everything that separates men from the deity will be crossed—and at the end of ends, the terrible *ford* of death will be crossed. The French word for death, *trépas*, marvelously signifies that it is a passage.

This is what the actor Árpád Kóti felt, with a brilliant *rhythmic* intuition, suggesting to me—when, in *The Imaginary Operetta*, he played the dead man who returns, crosses and re-crosses, always in black—to effect a surprise during the penultimate crossing with a *leap of color* into all white, "like Yves Montand in his solo recital," he said… I added that it was also like Stalin at the end of a Soviet propaganda film: Stalin aping the Transfigured One and appearing in immaculate uniform as Christ on Mount Tabor, as in the icons of Novgorod, of Andreas Ritzos, or Theophanes the Greek.

I don't know, Enikő, how *The Imaginary Operetta* and the nine actors—Nelli Szűcs, Anna Ráckevei, Kinga Újhelyi, József Jámbor, Árpád Kóti, Attila Kristán, Tibor Mészáros, József Varga, Artúr Vranyecz—ended up understanding each other so profoundly… Artúr by what miracle?… Everything separated them. Between the Hungarian language and the French: *radical lack of communication*. Not one syllable linking one to the other: two absolute strangers… The miracle came about, first of all, through the ultra-patient and ultra-profound work of Zsófia Rideg, translator, who transported the items, who passed them with love from one shore of language to the other (I like to picture translation to myself as a transfer, a *transport*: the reversal of one river into another, with separations and reunions, a union that separates, and a molting of the self—all that the Greek expresses in a single word: *metaphor*); Zsófia Rideg willingly undertook this little crossing of death, this passage through loss, this drowning that constitutes translation; she formed by the *poetic act* of translation a *youbody*, concealed under the text of letters like another buried tongue, bodily form, animalistic and danced, a tongue that's alive, that knows more about man and the underside of thought than the flat surface of words… It is the river of rhythm and the drama in the color of sounds: an active animal. For rhythm always knows first (and perhaps even last, at the end of words) something that language didn't; it knows, it has a *tactile* memory of something like the adventure of the thought emanating from the animal; it remembers the deep architecture of everything—and even the drama of matter.

Far from any standardized, *egalitarian*, smoothing translation, Zsófia descended into the *singularity* and *insularity* of Hungarian *deep play* with everything that is incomprehensible in it even to Hungarians themselves. All the way to the *language for one*, to the deepest layers of all language: the mystery of non-communicating language. All the way to the most material aspects of language; to the sense in sounds; to the sensing of time; to the *sense* of time. With that magnificent *s* of the plural that exists in the words *sen*s and *temp*s.[4]

Language about theater goes in search of the flesh and finds it: but it is *itself*, language, that must incarnate itself first of all—and not the character!

A "character": one doesn't know what that is; just like "the man": nobody has ever seen who he was…

On stage, words are used—no longer on the surface, as on paper—but in their volume and in their deployment and in an *undulant logic*, as in the brain: one hears them, arborescent, with flourishing roots, ambivalent volutes, in ramifications and in double, twin foliages: they come to be tested in reality, not on paper but in the *public secret* of our bodies.

At the end of the *very long* work that theater requires, one day, often very late, suddenly everything rings true to the actors and to the group of spectators facing them. But what has appeared for an instant is no longer our usual language, it's the invisible idiom, the muffled, mute tongue of rhythm: the brand-new language of children. And here is the point when the actors suddenly recall *right in front of us* how they suddenly learned to speak.

Language rejoins nature in front of our eyes: it is a wave, a physical event in the theater, an overflow… An independent animal moving freely: a liquid, a wave acting on space—a surging action. An elusive body acting between us and the others. Between *I* and *others*, it is the *third* body, the *whirling* one. In our mental-corporeal lives, language, if one listens closely, is *in front of* and *ahead of*. Free and *already there*. Ahead of the one who speaks. Offered *in front of us* and offering us, we who capture it and are set free by it.

In the Hungarian *The Imaginary Operetta*, an *order* is foreseen amid the hectic rhythmic chaos and carnival of contradictions: spectators and actors, walls of the auditorium, floor, ceiling, stage floor, the wood of objects, fabrics, words, songs by Paccoud… we hear this charivari together and we await its liberation in an invisible accord.

As soon as we touch a single point, suddenly everything comes undone: there is a pointed peak, a vertiginous chasm, a point that does not conclude because it is an open trap-door point, an external place (because the point is a *spot outside of place*) where the whole drama opens up and closes—where the entirety of time, plural time, rushes and unravels: it takes the center, loses the center, concentrates, and unties us. One instant *is* the void of time. The void of time, the way a point is the void of space. It is here, at their *null point*, at the identical empty point of space and of time, that the entire drama resolves.

At first, Árpád Kóti, who continually plays the dead man in *The Imaginary Operetta*, crosses the stage with the regularity of a clock; then he passes among us through interstices of the narrative, through faults in chronological time, syncopes, absences; as if—learning something by carnally seizing the rhythmic irregularity—he comes to discover, in public, before us, *the diagonal of time*, its flight, and to measure before us a different time than the time that binds us. Árpád Kóti sensed acutely that he was playing not a dead man but a *resuscitated being* who passes through death unceasingly.

We are involved in the resurrection because it is within us: because, at the bottom of the body, there is a *reversal of the spirit*, a breath that dies,

reverses, and respires. It must always return *there*: to make itself remembered, not to forget: the backward turn and the return: the beating of the thought, the mental pulsation, the *annihilation* of breath. At the deep crossroads of the living and in the depths of the respiratory forge and of our rhythmic heart, *it is time that is beating*. Do not forget, never forget the *annihilation* of time. The time that is impulsive, reversible, spasmodic, cramp-inducing, pulsing, discontinuous, advancing in leaps: the time *against all odds*: it knows how to run backwards, skip steps, turn back on itself; *eclipsing* time, ignoring bar lines, proceeding in disappearances, by ellipses, skipping degrees. The time that is beyond the numerals. The spectator in the theater waits for someone to *derail* him out of time. He waits for, he hears only the time of salvation, exultant: the time to return from death to life.

I'm writing to you from an island in the Dodecanese, immersed in a language I don't know: Greek, a language in which I would sometimes, in a highly infantile desire, love to think *precisely because I don't know it*. Like walking on ground removed from under my feet: a negative and withholding language—that takes (if one begins to understand, in babbling a few words), that transports all thought toward disequilibrium—and into the stumbling without which nothing progresses. A language that reminds us that the words know more than we do, and that one day, it will inevitably prohibit the expression "to possess a language": because it is this *withdrawing*, this ellipsis, this eclipse within us, this *undercutting*, this lack, this love (that is to say, this non-possession), which gives language its power of appeal. And the sharpness of speech.

I come to the theater to see the *untamed* human animal, caught in the net of words and freeing itself through speech. I hear the oral traces of man in space being written before us; I await entry into the theater as into a joyful prison and into the circus of the manhunt; I enter a space where the thoughts of animals are written in the air; I enter to laugh; I listen to be liberated for an instant from the idolatry of man.

The spectator and the actor, both are workers of memory. There is prophecy in memory: of linkages revealed, sudden symphonic flashes; as if to show us all the objects in the universe in a single point, in a single playful flash. Thus, a celebration of memory takes place and we replay everything: a joy of the memory of everything is put in play again by *the joy of recognition*. In Greek, the word *grace* is very close to the word *joy*: χάρις and χαρά. A new form of irrigation. A rain that washes, a return to life: music awaits; speech calls; all true language is in the future. Time runs backwards. We come to unforget that the first instant lasts forever.

I don't know how it sounds in Hungarian, but in French, the word *grace* is one of those that one hesitates to speak out loud… One awaits grace without saying its name; one calls for it without ever naming it. I connect it to joy again. "To music." To harmony, to sounds in full plenitude, to proper time. A proper accord with time: the way, in *moments of grace*, all visible things came before us to be born for the first time, to face us, well in front, as

if tied to deep time, *anchored* to the beat, to the beaten, to depth without end and to the measure of *true time*. For a true time *exists*. That is what art comes to remind us of, to us, the babbling infants. Grace is sometimes accorded to us and puts us in accord with proper time. A harmonized time. Proper time is a *given*: that is, it is given to us and we are offered to it. At the theater, with patience and precision, it must make an animal who opens himself out of each spectator—and each actor.

Grace is like a sudden rain onto a performance, like a natural event. It is observable like the passing clouds, like swirls in a lake. Performance is a breathing body created by all who appear, a breathing organism, an animal… One day this animal opens up: the actors discover that they had never seen it. And suddenly, they understand everything. And suddenly the audience remembers the play. Grace is a recognition.

You ask me, Enikő, about *theater and the sacral*… I would reply with a bit of impudence but close to the living experience of the stage, that *those on stage*—actors, violinists, dancers, trapeze artists wrestling with their equipment, animal tamers, singers, acrobats of space, or jugglers of their own bodies—(even if and *especially* if they don't talk about it)—await *inhuman assistance, non-human assistance*: God's help. They do so in utter secret. They ask for help. They wait—through the prayer of work—for something *other* to surge forth, something that does not come from us.

Something will be given us that we do not expect. In its deepest depths, human speech calls for something without naming it. Without being able to name it, we await the test of the flesh at the end of the duel. The *duel* of matter and spirit. The end of a separation and tangible proof of the spirituality of matter, that is, the materiality of the spirit. The end of a *lethal* fixity. The end, the surpassing of the *Manichean mechanism* that is a *no exit* of thought. We await, through all opposites, and by *rising above*, the opening of the respiration that crosses, reverses, joins, and re-separates in order to be reborn. We await a tangible *proof* and a tangible *sight*. God proven by the senses, found in the flesh. God as the embrace, the proof, and the touch of proper time. The proof of God is the proof—nothing but an instant—of proper time. Touching time.

God manifests Himself *by the sudden presence*, in our hands, of the fullness of time. What is *He*?—if not *time understood in its entirety*? The polyphonic *one*. The plural one. The expectation, the reconciliation of the whole of time. Hearing the entire amplitude of time—the unity of the times: a recognition.

On entering a Byzantine chapel, what strikes one is the simultaneous presence of all the scenes of the messianic drama: the twelve festivals; the three times ("time, times and half a time"[5]); the four times; the waltz of the great clock turning a thousand times; the end times, the unfolding, the unfurling, the kaleidoscope of the Bible in an order of *profusion*, but always around an expected point, a point of suspension: the *Pantocrator* in perfect balance above our heads. Clenching three fingers, and two fingers joined and extended, the end of the beginning.

We await Him; He arrives; one must call Him *the Hunter*… And while we continue to wait, He passes occasionally to touch us *furtively*. The expression "touched by grace" puts it well. It expresses the tactile, carnal element in the experience of the breath of true time. By drama and *through* the material drama of the spirit, a tangible certainty arises, piercing us: the gift of a time other than the chronological. Received from someone.

One point of love releases all: one gift delivers us—given us, granted us. We are given, and in this gift, something truly happens to us. Something *actually* happens *to thought*, now touching the deep rhythm of nature; something happens to our perception of time and to our taste of time. To its flavor that we had believed to be bitter. We discover a new flavor in time—and suddenly we know more about *all the aspects* of time, spanning the range of time, without knowing what. Without knowing how to say it. The great emotion is there: the great setting in motion anew. We are suddenly—by surprise—*harmonized* to the true pulsation of nature. At His death and His life. All of a sudden we are—*from the surface of the stage where we stand*—"harmonized" to the profound pulse of nature. In dramatic harmony with the heart of the *creation*. The joy of art—and of love—lies there. And grace: *grace* and *truth*. *Grace* and *truth* go together, they are two *givens*… If I ever finish what is taking shape here before your eyes, I will title it: *To be done with the sacred*.[6]

Yesterday, September 14th, for the Feast of the Cross, a large fraction of the inhabitants of the south of the island have gathered on the beach of Diakofti for a dance. I observed the dancers for a long time, slightly off the beat and as if inadequate to the music—and, basically, fairly independent of the obvious rhythm, as if they were dancing to an underlying rhythm, deeper, more carnal, as if dancing to a music from *below time*, to an *underground time*. With the ground under them. And from time to time, they moved as if to descend and plunge there, tripping slightly, and quickly recovering; they danced as if suspended at an invisible height: they danced in space and on time from below.

That is what Christ, the great Reverser and great Accomplisher, does: He dances the Books: the millions of letters in the Torah, the hundred and fifty Psalms, the four Gospels; He dances *through His flesh*; exultant, He dances them *to the letter*!—He breathes and reunites the drama of the twenty-two letters, the seventy-nine thousand eight hundred fifty-six letters, in one body and at a single stroke. Workman of drama, one who accomplishes, resurgent incarnator, redeemer, He rises, standing and alive, *in front of us*, the human visage crossed with the *invisible visage*: everything that had been written in the Law and the Prophets, He gives us *in dance*, in a single movement, in a single word—and in one mouthful, like a god dancing through death. *Dancing and edible*. The proof of the letter is the incarnation. He completes and accomplishes in the flesh, through His flesh, and with a *fraternal* look at our flesh (because He came to share our flesh with us), everything that Scripture said; He proves, *in a body*, through his resurrectional dance, all

that gravitated in Scripture. He reunites all the letters in a single breath in His movement: He came to prove all that Scripture said in an *offered* body, a *fiery* body. And, being matter, He is eaten.

By descending, by a gift, by *negation*—that is, by rebirth, loss and reversal of love—He empties god: He empties Himself of God and offers Himself. He is the god who empties and offers Himself: "Man of Pain," "Adam inverted," "God of joy," "mocked Man" presented as an attraction, "Janus Reversible," "Inverting verb that breathes," "God of transition," "Redeemer," "Site of the breathing void," "One among Himself," "God of our breathing body and of the overturning spirit." Versatile, He offers you to Him. God of reversal—of our breathing body, of the inverting spirit.

This is what Christ does *on the stage of dogma*. He leads us to the place of drama: exaltation and liberation from the *logic of death*.

It is a rhythmic secret in speech and thought: written in the lowest depths of our body, there is His signature, His mark, the sign of the cross of reversibility which breathes, His seal: the Paschal leap. Our respiration that—every eighth of a second—is reborn from having passed through death. He has signed us rhythmically in the depths of our body by breathing. By the breath and the spirit that breathes—and by thought that seeks and turns back, burning the words—we bear in ourselves the mark of God the inverter of death. The air of resurrection is deep within us. We bear in our body the mark of the overturning God. The passage of the Risen is at the bottom of our breath.

Notes

1 The text first appeared in Hungary, in *Le théâtre et le sacré—autour de l'oeuvre de Valère Novarina* [*The Theater and the Holy—Around the Oeuvre of Valère Novarina*], Enikő Sepsi (ed.), Budapest, Ráció Kiadó, 2009, 142–149. Later in Valère Novarina, *La quatrième personne du singulier* [*The Fourth Person Singular*], 55–76. Tr. Peter Czipott, revised by E. Sepsi.
2 Mark 7:34.
3 *Apo-kaluptein* (*Un-covering*)—E. Sepsi. The book is also known as Revelation; both titles have etymological roots in the notion of removing a covering veil.
4 "Sens" [sense] and "temps" [time] in French are either singular or plural.
5 See Daniel 9:24–27 and Revelation 12:14.
6 The title alludes to Antonin Artaud, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* [*To Have Done With The Judgment of God*], Paris, K éditeur, 1948.

Appendix 3

Valère Novarina, *Theory of People*[1]

Incredideath Bloodups

We are the Trans-Incredideath-Bloodups, from both sides off the Cévennes, and off northern tuberic persuasion. General Robert Grouchy tricked us several times. We are procreanimalia.

We worship the god Busibee, who is *in all*—once and for all and once and for all over—and we goldify each other.

We only allow euthanasia that's truly *altruistic*, administered with three stacks off certificates in keeping with norms stipulated by the Bottom Precinct's High Surveillance at the Exit.

We *believe* the limit off the abortive solution to be six days after the birth of a boy—if it is off the weaker sex—and off a *human* girl, in the radical sense off the term, if we feel we need to balance the quotas.

We warn ourselves every morning off the anti-establishment duplicity off the Falsies off Arrogantia and other Ruthrofibrilose border dwellers: excessive, longtime stammerers and supporters off the verb, *yeahbut*: they spread the seven-tremolitotic virus in all its forms! And a good many off them will stop what they're doing just to make fun off the way we pronounce our *of*s.

The Next People

We are every stripe of Tri-foreheadie, of sylvic allegiance, allied by the unfortunate *Inadvertant Treaty* of July 19, 1747, with the High Lacandonian Slicers, of deutero-yelpic persuasion. We profess the amnesiac religion. We search high above all to rid ourselves of the Limogeite observers. And their filthy horn-rimmed glasses!

Everywhere we go and wherever else we might, we are delighted to enjoy the presence of ourselves.

We have no fear of death or life!

Possessionites

We are the very last of the Possessionites: the Possessionalist Possessionites, dice rollers from North Poitou.

We have really bad intentions.

We reproduce with our surrogate mothers; every Tuesday we practice the bi-practo-sadballine rite from the *Mahul* school. We go by the true and upright paths as established by Jean-François Mélinard, our beloved guide, as well as, sometimes, by those of little Alain Ecquebert, who was Mélinard's periuterine nephew.

We are zerothropes; we're inflexible.

The boldinian defectors and the biclast relapses are sectarian—whose opinion we propose, *by saber if necessary*! to deinstrumentalize. Asphalt-crassault!

We cover our women for eight years with useless accessories then let them relax.

The Next People

We are the Stubborns of the Southwest; we surround our dead with a circlation in triple rounds before sending them down the paths opposite life, so they won't know their way around; this way we carefully dodge any new cause of death—or else we take them out six days later through the catastrophe holes. We paint their toes a *carmine red*, then we bake their bodies in machines so they can return to God as powder and ash. Throughout the cooling session, the strongest of us dance the *havanahosie*, until the dawn of a better world.

We take long looks at ourselves in the nations of others—hoping over time to altruize them. But the task is short!

Culineverywheres

We are the Culineverywheres, *polygolgothophobes* and *melandromelocrats* of the North-South Practobuli.

We mostly feed on Burgandiddy-style naturobotic chicken (plucked on the ride side of their fur) but! Thursdays, and only Thursdays! it's paired with a *tuberisplit* of lolfers, as the custom goes down here. We eat cold *eventide roasthusk* and warm *ace of all kinds*, as well as other forbidden fruits.

For winter solstice, we fill our cervical appetites with a crowditude of birds.

Our money is principally the *spiegel*, an eightstack of which is worth two *suitcasings*. Our brains stay alive only eight days after death, leaving us just enough time to delay the preparations.

The Next People

We are one half of the Free Logopithecus from the two-sibling North-South: we ruminate on words the moment a term is used.

We chose as our capital the *beautiful-and-good* city of Fuckiron-upon-Trodolf, languorously nestled along the west-flank edge of the Bisfuldi-Platuary that peacefully snakes through the Liberated Mystalgic's northern half, not far from Andrale-upon-Limock and its clogged riverbanks, which line the collateral strip of the Platary Bisfuld's septrional share and very precisely at the borders of the portion of enemy territory situated just above: a foot in the shadow of Mount Bruquezale, the other in the "alancoli-pluri-bubbliary" flour of its neighbor, The Porchy Fridadic—not far from the swampoppy border of the Ballausages, but mercifully outside the perilous perimister designed by Rodrag, Mizzare, Alcord, Rongif, and Ruchon—the five famous tributaries out of the Blaphomad Cascade—whose random floods on the last Wednesday of every month with an *r* are unpredictable.

Our monetary unit is the *trufflette*, which can be divided into fourteen percent times the same thing, but most of the time into four by Calculon Group's Union Bank.

We brace ourselves against the lives of others.

When one of us dies, we are divided into eight, then in two-hundred sixteen, then in I.

And amen in a nutshell! Thus was the way the way of life went.

Logopithecus

We are Posthumous from the North of the *Fatherland of Menn*.

We are Posthumous, or should we say we knew the Posthumous.

We waffle between the one and the other—and ask for separate stalls.

We are disuhuminalists, powerless witnesses of the crumbling of life: we dart from everything but accuracy! We no more cling to the death of life than to a flashing target.

In the first place, we had unfortunately chosen as our second center of existence the last agglomeration of Brams-Capor—a *deadivist* city, visited by *deadive* people!

In the bygone flourishing era, it was renowned for its lizard lanyards, its patibulary angel braids, looping *eights* with *gapes*… Today, it is, of all the regions of Pentagonisting, the most *pioneering* in terms of *regal cleavage*, and the third western producer of receptacles fashioned for the weapons of our god, Fridally. (The first of the gods sampled by the Somnegian philosphers.)

In the meantime, we make the worst of a good hand and ask every tourist to give praise five times a day to the Fritalic god—the husband of god's sister's mother—and his prophet, Wenceslas Gruff.

After that, if the opportunity should tousle it from us, we would choose as our fourth city, New Saint Betterchard, in the second township of Sorgip county. Betterchard being undeniably hydrographically better situated.

In case of a dispute, if that fourth capital wound up being, alas, in a hotspot, we would immediately opt for Balm-of-Maude's-Plan, nicely situated on a slope of the steeping hillock leading to Mount Rifle.

The Southern Surroundings have been pleasantly bombed.

We live here with complete sovereignty but under a barricading regime. Even *under lock and key*.

We cling to each other like any stable group.

Which makes us future funeral kids having committed too much time. Moving on to locked-up neurons, we'll go straight to the scene: we are freshwaterans, machines that imitate death… we have been destroyed by logic. Don't forget it! Recall the inhumanity of man! *What's left of time* and seen is left to us unseen in *what's left of time*.

Ubiases or Uctives

We are not the Ubiases, we are the Septembreakers with Tuesdaic leanings, allied with the mighty Bivorated bivores of South Fontaine, of the dextrorotational rite! We are enemies of all the earlier people.

In terms of dangerousness, we are Ricardo-Stabilized, which is to say: retrostabulists and retrostabulized *alternatively*—both day and night.

We reproduce *one at a time* via the cordial appendix's simultaneous jet.

The most massive monument to our spiritual literature is the immense, "Life Is An Internship," by the blessed Bernard-Pedantist of Jacquelouse, the Overcomer Symphonic Orange Grove-Prize-winner, twice over; but the most memoring contribution to our literature heretofore is the memorable, "Animal Structures of Parenthood," by Jean-Jeannot Bernières Surmion of the Farandole (1277–1322) and his unfortunate companion Jean Sigismond of the Pharside; however, *ergo*, and notwithstanding, the most persistent of our mental library remains the immense, "*More* (+) is possible no more!" by the retroactive separatist, Father Philippe Pugnot, neo-viperician of hiliask allegiance, who wrote it hastily in the ninety-eight hours before his execution.

As for the most *famous* monument, caustic and whatevi-disinevitablizing, and nightistic, both truly indelible and more than trite! of our lululaylickibruary, it is the inarable and behungrid "Escape through the Escape Hatch!" by the Marquise de Bû—her pseudonym badly concealing the identity of the Perishing Empire's second retro-windower: Jehannette-Norisk Repotion-Gallubert.

And amen in a nutshell! Thus was the way the way of life went.

Obeyers

We are the alterbrightings-alterlightings. Avowed alterlights, we speak by *yessish*. We head out of death one week before life. We eat the posthumous world from its four edges.

We are forbidden, under any circumstance, from speaking of our *not-here deceased*, except in the authentic speakuage the kids call *ticdoc argot*, which consists in expressing yourself only through the five authorized holes along the casket. In case they touch the forbidden flesh, we shut their traps tight, just three years before they come back to life.

Throughout our endless comings and goings, late nights (or late at night), in the company of everyword that's falsified their company, we collect the week's deceased, one of whom will be elected "corpse of the month," and practice compassionate cremation (pulvereally!) on them, rather than the parade of sad, earthen burials, followed by their poor earthly effects.

We don't support others, and with joy would proclaim their extinction.

Our language is *Circuitboardic*, or *Zephrigian*, and in special circumstances *Medio-tempidi-bulary*, derived medulary from the late *Ugrian*. We only use *Basedic Jumperol* when we have visitors. There are still a few rudimentary notions of *Informo-nolyptic-hybrian*. As for the *Savvy* language, we don't even understand the 101 stuff anymore. We only use *Ancient Porlic* with the descendants of the last two insularrys who in 828 lived on the deserted island of Yllel'd'Vic: six hundred sixty-five square meters, post-maritime, where one could observe the last six hundred seventy-two thousand years six hundred thirteen and a dozen little kids drowned in the water. Off the coast of the city of Bethany where Lazarus rose again.

Our time is the uplifting.

For no reason, we have a custom of suggesting repeatedly, from one to another, each morning, that we rest on other branches of logic.

Our life is a short span.

We only eat the animals that don't matter anymore.

Free Ecarnicians

We are the mono-ecarnicians, neutrios-sceptics and descendants of the Cootts.

We we we we we eat and fill our Phrygian hats and what's left of the pockets every 1 of the month with lolfers, a big centrifuge, trimmed pantlets, and a precooked, young-strophulus coulis.

We generally wear shoes either from 8 or 11, except at home where our feet are generally bigger than our stomachs.

Our cauldronic currency is the *makiewall*, twelve of which make a *last-réal*—and if certain people hoard it by the shovelfull…we, we collect barely 8 at each intersection of the modal spundle, all cold, hard twenty-four hours falling on a Tuesday the 8th dated the 3rd!

However we are not *others* and will not utter their name.

Wulfes or Wurks

We are the anti-anthropoids with motionless faces and a morbid composition. Our currency is the *platch*! A platch is worth 18 gurnions; sixteen gurnions make a pretty sum. One gurnion is worth seventean *taupes*: one taupe is worth eight *sprink chickens*, sixteen of which make, once again, a *fessy*: a qualified forklift driver makes four fessities a month, his cavalryman neighbor, 18; a professor of obsolete burials gets the all-inclusive: twelve each semester, minus the brakes; a trainer 8 in total; a scattering tenant, exactly the same thing.

We live in a world where we have, after a very long time, rediscovered 97.5% of our customs without remembering we had lost them. We're polled regularly. We're talking animals. And that's already a lot.

So there you have it.

We love thinking numerabilistly, calculating everything, making frontispices à la frosiplate—and traveling by plenifer, a delightful vehicle, especially on flat terrain. We invented hordes of machines to *sleep inside*; here are 8 of the six hundred twenty-eight: The Grasp 28, The Trips 8, The Glok 108, The UHT 98, The Skirmitch NRT 638, The Individual Male Cedulist, The Individual Female Cedulist, The Strato-Progunative-Hibilulutary, The Loquacious 8, The Aucituna 18, The Mehalgic 48, The Semiraldulous 138. And so fun and so fork.

We would be ready to give up everything today. For today we gave up everything.

Plural Neohypostatians

We venerate God *qua* Venus; *we* are theophages: we eat *God One-in-Three*, who made it clear to us he was to be eaten: being born in a basket (that is, a bread basket) located near a neighborhood called the *Place of Bread!* In the beginning he spoke; today is quiet; will come back at the end. It's all because of him and we're bound to him in a knot of liberation.

Maxitheist Monodules

We are the unalternative people, so falsely named because we would have been born to an *inalternment* and a separother. We love God folden in fourths, head at the bottom, eyes closed, and stomach to the ground—and we forbid anybody from criticizing this position.

Erasers Stricto Censu

We are the Erasers *Stricto Censu*. At night, after correctly completing our daily tournament in *bibolect* 822, we hike back up the Waltzine frontier to the hamlet of Althrow, where (beside a beigewood cabin) we bend our arms into figure 8s and think 888 times, from Khere to There, *tired* from our

varied and lost perspectives. Then by a lucky shortcut known only to us, we discretely join the ecstatic crowd and blend into the generous multitude.

The morning after, we're no longer there and there no longer.

Damned are those who block our view!

We are muzzled from the advancement of children! Wherever we'd go we always tried to avoid contact with the hundredfold guy.

We're still talking animals and that's already a lot.

Praisershoots

We belong entirely to the family of fervent inhominialists, resurfaced proloumouths from the Neanderthalized Andrivores. We look for posteomono-omnio-minimists everywhere, across the posteo-anthropo-minian pits where man mixes with man until they make a uniform man—in all my forms—and conform just to him.

We are feminodules trending short.

We reproduce through auto-scissiparity with, if necessary, rented outboard bellies. More and more we're autophobic, allergic to ourselves—and so hostile to every development regarding the time that is left to us!

Deutero-Phrygians

So here's in *equalopter*; here you have a bridleplace; here you have a brainless person preceded by two *wisdequities*, framed by four wizdobilities of the same octogone. Here are their 4 collaterally-confused egos.

We'd like to give them triumphant greetings but can't because we don't have any arms. Still, we approve their passing through.

Normocrats

We are profound Normocrats, faithful followers of the fast-legislating laws' rhythmic championship; we're basically in favor of bringing about the identical swap as soon as possible. Except when it comes to spelling, we enforce the eye-for-an-eye rule.

We are natives of the Cold Alps—and before that, *Destitute Wholesalers*. But today we are vertically abundant prophets.

We worship Saint Grown-Ball, who made us cross the flaming border on squirrelback.

When an answer moves our spirit, we direct it immediately to Saint Simon the Logocrat so he can provide us with the question.

Our gods are Locustrian and Libidus, whose sumptuous, tropical beatings we regularly enjoy.

We demand that our women wear a black tarp any time they get ready to draw the line between Monday and Tuesday with an unsteady hand—and so to decide on a split world: and thus we rightly keep them on the good side of the river.

Silentary Norics

Pluri-hereditary enemies of the Orleanists, we are a group reformed until further notice from the Monodox Ostracists. We consider the whole of the holes unexplored in *communication's migration*; we consider everything three times: once underwater, once on land, once for the ashes. Then we're done.

Generally speaking, we approve of the sum total of everything that happens in cold blood.

We cling to ourselves as a stable group. Which, after too long a period of time, turns us into future funereal children.

Getting on with locked-up neurons, we get on on the spot: we are freshwaterans: machines that imitate death…. We have been destroyed by logic.

Do not forget! Remember the inhumanity of humans!

What's left of time and seen is left to us unseen in *what's left of time*.

Artifequals & Others

We are the people of Lottapigs. Our god is Piggilots. We are natives of Bisfuldi.

We eliminated the unfortunate Manhymened Hyists of the somino-balli-heterosomniac.

We set a deadline for our deceased three days after screwing them in juice.

Every day except Tuesday we have big, open eyes on the Wednesday fresh from happening Friday night.

Long ago, we fought the Toxic Plenipinids, pluri-dupian believers—but at a major cost, because we are now, until further notice, their faithful allies. Since only recently we have any faith at all in their god, Reyulp.

We're going to drink every night to our lost ones of the language.

We are Bicrats. Sexually we are intransmittable.

Our missing brothers left to get re-neanderthalized in their capital, Ceasider.

Our brains are living holes; only our *vowed* thoughts have tubes: we communicate at breakneck speed.

At flat tide, I understand, we stay libidinishly bound to fierce vectors, while we unbind ourselves libidinishly from fast structures. If other Others emerge, we nail them sadly to the frames of our interior doors; before dispensing them *in the dispenser*—until the shades and spades of their dead bodies go to dust: notwithstanding the the spades of shady dust emitted by each one. "And the shade of their spades is dust."

We reproduce one at a time. Even if it only yields fire.

It's absurd that there could be life around a fountain!

No matter whatever or whichever the cognizance of our reconnaissance, we will suddenly chant the triphonic hymn of the apprentice baby whales!

Jellits, Hurlags, & Biceptrians

We have kept the sinistrogyric rite: we are the Hurliacs from the very tip of the North: we can't take it anymore.

There's nothing cold about us besides what's in our veins.

We listen daily on the lantern to *The Homilies of Professor Fuckinski* by John F. Fuckinski. Our greatest enemies on Earth are the Usiplod Tricyples, inhabitants of Pock'tra, from Birdulibumn-upon-Menoge as well as Yowbd.

> Our existence is sporadic. We are close with the Bolero-Lakemillers, our mists and mores being the same. We are sexually uncompromising. We thank you for giving us the chance to express ourselves. Welcome!
>
> *A posteriori*.

One Alone

> I must go into the antiworld and talk to the antipeople and that the antilight spread across the antithings; I have to enter into this antiman, that's it, the only compelling counterway of getting out of here. From now on; notwithstanding: now!
>
> *A priori*.

> Every person, every animal, every being, every notion and each word I think, I squeeze them as hard as I can against myself and I love them like *vacuum blocks*.
>
> *A fortiori*.

> Vanity of vanities: skeleton of all bones! thousand-thinkipacity of the brain, grammar's lettering, *alphabet* everywhere, nothingness everywhere!
>
> *Ad libitum*.

> Antiperson, what do you have in your hands?
>
> "A not-thing."
>
> Antiperson, tell me really, what do you have in your hands?
>
> "I countermade an *anti-thing* and I threw it as hard as I could on the non-flooring of the *counter-stage*.
>
> *In fine*.

> No triangle has three sides.
>
> *Ad hominem*.

God, if you are *god*—don't show yourself!… remove everything![2]

Théorie des peuples de Valère Novarina[3]

Les Sanguides Moridubiliaires

Nous sommes les Trans-Sanguides-Moridubiliaires, Bicévenoles d'obédience northo-tubérique; le général Robert Grouchy nous a trompés plusieurs fois. Nous sommes zoocloques.

Nous adorons le dieu Busibe qui est *en tout*: une fois partout et une fois pour toutes – et nous nous adoréons nous-mêmes.

Nous n'autorisons l'euthanasie que vraiment *altruiste* et munie de trois piles de certificats conformes aux normes stipulées par le Haut Observatoire du Bas Commissariat à la Sortie.

Nous *prônons* la limite de la solution abortive jusqu'à six jours après la naissance d'un garçon – s'il est de sexe faible – et d'une fille *humaine*, au sens radical du terme, si le besoin s'en est fait ressentir pour rééquilibrer les quotas.

Nous nous mettons nous-mêmes chaque matin en garde contre la duplicité anti-système des Faucignards z'Outrecuidants et autres frontaliers Ruthrofibrilleux: balboutieurs invétérés à outrance et partisans du verbe *ouitante:* ils disséminent le virus septentrillonnaire sous toutes ses formes! et bien-beaucoup d'entre-z'eux s'en sont saisis au passage pour se moquer de notre manière de prononcer le *s!*

Le Peuple Suivant

Nous sommes les Tri-frontins toutes tendances, d'obédience hylique, alliés par le malheureux *Traité inadvertant* du 19 juillet 1747 aux Hauts Lacandoniens Trancheurs, d'obédience deutéro-hurliaque. Nous sommes de religion amnésique. Nous cherchons par-dessus tout à nous débarrasser des observateurs limougeots. Et de leurs sales lunettes à cornes!

En tous lieux où nous nous rendons et où que nous nous rendions, nous nous félicitons de bénéficier de la présence de nous-mêmes.

Nous ne craignons ni la mort ni la vie!

Les Possessionathes

Nous sommes aussi les tout derniers des Possessionathes: les Possessionathes Possessionalistes, lanceurs de sort du Nord-Poitou.

Nous sommes réellement mal intentionnés.

Nous nous reproduisons avec nos mères parallèles; chaque mardi nous pratiquons le rite bi-practho-boulitryste, de tendance *Mahul*. Nous allons par les voies vraies et verticales fixées par Jean-François Mélinard qui est notre guide bien-aimé, ainsi que, parfois, par celles de celui du petit Alain Ecquebert, qui fut son neveu péri-utérin.

Nous sommes néanthropes; nous sommes inflexibles.

Les transfuges boldiniens et les relapses biclastes sont des sectaires – dont nous nous proposons, *par le sabre s'il le faut!* de désinstrumentaliser l'opinion. Morume-bitume!

Nous recouvrons nos femmes huit ans d'accessoires inutiles puis nous les laissons reposer.

Le Peuple Suivant

Nous sommes les Têtus du Sud-Ouest; nous entourons nos morts d'une volvaison en triples cercles, avant de les passer par les chemins inverses de la vie, pour qu'ils ne s'y retrouvent plus; nous leur évitons ainsi soigneusement une nouvelle cause de décès – sinon nous les sortons six jours plus tard par les trous de catastrophe. Nous leur peignons les doigts de pied en *rouge carmin*, puis nous leur enfournons les corps dans des machines à remettre Dieu en cendre et poussières. Au cours de la séance de refroidissement, les plus vaillants d'entre nous dansent la *habana-tuyaude*, jusqu'à l'aube d'un monde meilleur.

Nous nous mirons longuement dans les peuples d'autrui – en espérant les altruiser à la longue… mais la tâche est courte!

Les Ubicuistes

Nous sommes les Ubicuistes *polygolgothophobes* et *mélandromélocrates* de la Practobulie Nord-Sud.

Nous nous nourrissons principalement de poulets-robiots à la bourguignoche (déplumés dans le sens du poil) mais! le jeudi, et seulement le jeudi! accompanés d'une *tubéricassée* de pantulphes à la mode d'ici-bas. Nous mangeons froid le *coléophrige vespéral* et tiède l'*as toutes tendances* et autres fruits défendus.

Au solstice d'hiver, nous remplissons nos appétits cervicaux d'une foultitude d'oiseaux.

Notre monnaie est principalement le *spiègle*, dont une huitaine vaut deux *valousiats*. Nos cervelles restent vivantes seulement huit jours après la mort: ce qui nous laisse tout juste le temps d'en ajourner les préparatifs.

Le peuple Suivant

Nous sommes la moitié des Libres Logopithèques de la bis-fratrie Nord-Sud: nous ruminons des mots dès qu'une parole se présente.

Nous avons élu pour capitale la ville *belle-et-bonne* de Niqueferdalle-sur-Trodulphe, langoureusement blottie le long du bord latéro-occidental de la Bisfuldie-Platuaire qui paisiblement serpente en la moitié nord du Mystalgique Libéré, peu loin d'Andrale-sur-Limoche et de ses rives encrassées longeant la bande collatérale de la partie septentrionale de la Plataire Bisfulde et très précisément aux confins de la portion de territoire ennemi située juste au-dessus: un pied dans l'ombre du mont Bruquezale,

l'autre dans la farine « hélancoli-pluri-buliaire » de sa voisine La Porchie Vendrique – non loin des bords matrécageux du Ballorteau, mais très heureusement en dehors du périmère périlleux dessiné par Rodrague, Mizare, Alcord, Rongif et Ruchon – les cinq célèbres affluents du torrent Blaphomet – dont les crues capriceuses chaque dernier mercredi des mois en « *r* » sont imprévisibles.

Notre monnaie est le *truffon*, qui se divise en quatorze pour cent fois la même chose, mais la plupart du temps en quatre par l'Union Banquière du Groupe Calculin.

Nous nous arc-boutons à la vie des uns les autres.

À la mort de chacun d'entre nous, nous nous divisons en huit, puis en deux cent seize, puis en i.

Ainsi fut-elle la vie en bref! ainsi passa le passage de la vie.

Les Logopithèques

Nous sommes les Posthumes du Nord de la *patrie des homnes*.

Nous sommes les Posthumes *ou alors* nous sûmes les Posthommes.

Nous hésitons entre l'un et l'autre – et nous demandons donc des *enclos à part*.

Nous sommes désuhuminalistes et assistons impuissants à la morcellation de la vie: nous ne nous tirons finalement de toutes choses que de justesse! nous ne tenons pas plus à la mort de la vie qu'à un gyrophare.

En premier lieu, nous avions malheureusement choisi pour second centre d'existence l'agglomération ultime de Bramse-Capoure – cité *mortifère* et fréquentée par les *mortifs!*

Dans sa période jadis florissante, elle était renommée pour ses lanières de lézard, ses tresseries d'anges patibulaires, ses boucles d'échange *huit* et *bée*… Aujourd'hui, elle est, de toutes les contrées du Pentagononistant, la plus *pionniaire* en matière de *décolletage régalien*, et la troisième productrice occidentale de réceptacles ouvragés aux armes de notre dieu Vendrillon. (Le premier des dieux échantillonnés par les philosophes Somnèges).

En attendant, nous y faisons mauvais cœur et bonne fortune et demandons à chaque touriste d'y louer cinq fois le jour, le dieu Ventrique – l'époux de la mère de la sœur de dieu – et son prophète Venceslà Ourme.

Par la suite, si l'occasion nous en échevelut, nous choisissions comme quatrième ville sainte Mieucarde-la-Neuve, seconde agglomération du département de la Sorgipe. Mieucarde étant indéniablement hydrographiquement mieux située.

En cas de litige, si cette quatrième capitale venait hélas à demeurer en zone sensible, nous opterions immédiatement pour La Baume-du-Plan-de-la-Maude, joliment située dans un repli de la colinette escarpante conduisant au mont Fusil.

Les Alentours du Sud en ont été agréablement bombardés.

Ici nous vivons en toute propriété mais en régime bloquant. Et même *cadenassant*.

Nous nous agrippons à nous-mêmes comme groupe stable.

Ce qui fait de nous de futurs enfants funébres ayant commis un temps trop long. Avançant à neurones cadenassés, nous irons sur place: nous sommes des limnotes, des machines à l'imitation morte… nous avons été détruits par la logique. Ne l'oubliez pas! rappelez-vous l'inhumanité de l'homme! *Le reste du temps* visible nous reste invisible *le reste du temps.*

Les Oubiases ou Yctifs

Nous ne sommes pas les Oubiases, nous sommes les Septembriseurs de tendance mardistes, alliés au robustes Bivoriacés bivores de la Fontaine-Sude, de rite dextrogyre! Nous sommes ennemis de tous les peuples précédents.

En ce qui concerne la dangerosité, nous sommes les Ricardo-Stabilisés, c'est-à-dire: rétrostabulistes et rétrostabulisés *alternativement* – et de jour et de nuit.

Nous nous reproduisons *un à la fois* par jet simultané de l'appendice cordial.

Le monument le plus massif de notre littérature spirituelle est l'immense « La Vie est un stage » du bienheureux Bernardin-Cuistriennes de Jacquelouse, prix de l'Orangerie Symphonique Surmontoise, par deux fois; mais le monument le plus mémorant de l'icelle littérature est le mémorable « Les Structures animales de la parenté » de Jean-Jeannot Bernières Surmion de la Farandole (1277–1322) et de son malheureux compagnon Jean Sigismond de la Pharside; cependant, *du coup* et nonobstant, le monument le plus rémanent de notre bibliothèque mentale reste l'immense « *Plus* (+) n'est plus possible! » du rétroactif-séparant Père Philippe Pugnot, néo-vipéricien d'obédience hiliasque, qui l'écrivit en toute hâte dans les quatre-vingt-dix-huit heures qui précédèrent son exécution.

Quant au monument le plus *réputé décapant* et n'importui-désimpossibilisant, et nuitisant, et vraiment indélébile et plus que poncif! de notre balbuloo-bisebillo-thèque, c'est l'inénarable et affamide « Échapper aux échappatoires! » de la *marquise de Bû* – pseudonyme disssimulant bien mal l'identité de la seconde rétro-vitrère de l'Empire Périssant: Jehannette-Norisque Repotion-Gallubert.

Ainsi fut-elle la vie en bref! Ainsi passa le passage de la vie.

Les Obédiants

Nous sommes les alterlussiants-alterlucidants. Alterlucides déclarés, nous parlons par *ouidif*. Nous déguerpissons de la mort une semaine avant la vie. Nous mangeons le monde posthume par ses quatre bords.

Nous nous interdisons, en toutes circonstances, de parler de nos *défunts plus là*, sauf en cette authentique parlangue que les enfants disent *idiome-tiquedoque*, qui consiste à s'exprimer par les seuls cinq trous autorisés au travers du cercueil. En cas de contact avec les chairs défendues, nous leur fermons solidement le bec, trois ans seulement avant leur retour à la vie.

Le long de nos interminables allées et venues, le soir tard (ou tard le soir) en compagnie de tous les mots qui nous ont faussée compagnie, nous rassemblons les défunts de la semaine, dont l'un sera élu, « mort du moi », et pratiquons sur eux la chaleureuse crémation (pulvéréelle!) de préférence à la séquence des tristes sépultures en terre suivies de leurs malheureuses suites terrestres.

Nous ne supportons pas autrui, et prononcerions avec joie sa disparition.

Notre langue est le *borniouf*, ou *ouistrement*, et en certaines circonstances le *mésopo-tempidi-bulaire*, médulaire dérivé de *l'ougrien* tardif. Le *strapuque baséal*, nous l'utilisons seulement lorsque nous avons des visiteurs. Nous restent encore quelques notions rudimentaires de *délato-nolyptique-hybrien*; quant à la langue *fortiche* nous n'en entendons même plus le plus simple des b.a.ba. L'*ancien porlic*, nous ne le parlons qu'avec les descendants des deux derniers insulaitres venus habiter en 828l'île déserte d'Yllel'd'vic: six cent soixante-cinq mètres carrés, postmaritimes, où s'observent depuis six cent soixante-douxe mille ans six cent treize et une douzaine de bambins noyés dans l'eau. Au large de la ville de Béthanie où Lazare ressuscita.

Notre temps est le surrectif.

Sans raison, nous avons pour habitude de nous suggérer à nouveau, l'un à l'autre, chaque matin, de nous appuyer sur d'autres branches de la logique.

Notre vie est de courte durée.

Nous ne mangeons que les bêtes qui ne se comptent plus.

Les Libres Écarniciens

Nous sommes mono-écarniciens, nous sommes neutrios-sceptiques et descendants des Fulques.

Nous nous nous nous nous nourisssons et nous emplissons le bonnet phrygien et les poches restantes, tous les i du mois, de pantulphes, de gros surgyre, de pantalets agrémentés et d'un coulis précuit de jeunes strophules.

Nous nous chaussons généralement soit du 41 soit du 53, sauf à la maison où nous avons généralement les pieds plus gros que le ventre.

Notre monnaie marmitale est le *borneron* dont douze font un *réal-dernier* – et si certains se le ramassent à la pelle… nous, nous n'en récoltons qu'à peine 8 à chaque croisement du fuséau modal, toutes les vingt-quatre heures sonnantes et trébuchantes tombant un mardi 8 daté du 3!

Cependant nous ne sommes pas des *autruis* et nous ne prononcerons pas son nom.

Les Ulphes ou Urques

Nous sommes des anti-anthropoïdes à visage immobile et à structure morbide. Notre monnaie est le *platche!* un platche vaut 18 gournions; seize gournions font une somme coquette. Un gournion vaut diz-sept *bistres:* un bistre vaut huit *çoquelets*, dont seize font à nouveau un *burelon:* un manutentionnaire qualifié gagne quatrebourlirons par mois, son voisin cuirassier 18; un professeur de sépulture obsolète, tout compris: douze le semestre, sauf les poses; un dresseur 8 de tout; un locataire éparpillant strictement la même chose.

Nous sommes dans un monde où nous avons, depuis fort longtemps, retrouvé 97,5% de nos habitudes sans nous souvenir que nous les avions perdues. Nous sommes sondés régulièrement. Nous sommes des animaux parlants. Et c'est déjà beaucoup.

Voilà, tout est dit.

Nous adorons penser numérabilistement, calculer tout, faire des frontispuces, à la frosiplate – et voyager en adrophore, véhicule agréable et surtout en terrain plat. Nous avons inventé quantité de machines à *dormir dedans;* en voici 8 sur six cent vingt-huit: le Grasp 28, le Trips 8, le Glok 108, le UHT 98, le bisbil NRT 638, le Cédulère individuel, la Cédulière individuelle, le Strato-progunatif-hibilulutary, le Loquace 8, l'Audithon 18, le Méhalgique 48, la Sémirhalduleuse 138. Et cartermuche, et cétérmoche.

Aujourd'hui nous serions prêts à renoncer à tout. Car aujourd'hui nous avons renoncé à tout.

Les Néohypostasiens Pluriels

Nous vénérons Dieu comme Vénus; *nous* sommes théophages: nous mangeons *Dieu un-en-trois* qui nous a clairement signifié qu'il se mangeait: en naissant lui-même dans une crèche (c'est-à-dire dans une mangeoire) située près d'une localité nommée le *Lieu du pain!* Au début il parla; aujourd'hui se tait; viendra à la fin. Tout est cause de lui et nous sommes croisés à lui par un nœud délivreur.

Les Maxithéistes Monodules

Nous sommes le peuple désalternatif, ainsi faussement nommés parce que nous serions nés d'un *inalternement* avec alterautrui. Nous adorons Dieu pliés en quatre, tête en bas, yeux fermés et ventre à terre – et nous défendons à quiconque de critiquer cette position.

Les Délétères Stricto Censu

Nous sommes Délétères *stricto censu.* Le soir, après avoir correctement exécuté notre tournée quotidienne en *bybolecte* 822, nous remontons les bords de la Valserine jusqu'au hameau de Golance, où là (au flanc d'une cabane en bois beige) nous plions les bras en forme de 8 et songeons 888 fois,

de Hici à Là-bas, *las* de nos différentes perspectives perdues. Puis par un heureux raccourci connu de nous seuls, nous rejoignons discrètement la foule hilare pour nous y fondre dans la bienfaisante multitude.

Le lendemain matin nous ne sommes même plus là et plus même là.

Maudits soient les êtres qui nous bouchent la vue!

Nous sommes les muselés de la promotion infantile! Où que nous aillions nous avons toujours essayé d'éviter tout contact avec le bonhomme centuple.

Nous sommes encore des animaux parlants et c'est déjà beaucoup.

Les Zuterolouеurs

Nous sommes pleinement de la famille des déshominialistes fervents, proguelards et résurgents des Andrivores néanderthalisés. Postéo-mono-omniominimistes nous cherchons partout, au travers les fosses postéo-anthropominiennes où mêler l'homme à l'homme jusqu'en faire l'homme uniforme – sous toutes mes formes – et conforme à lui-même.

Nous sommes gynodules à tendance courte.

Nous nous reproduisons par auto-scissiparité avec, s'il le faut, location de ventres à extérieurs, nous sommes et de plus en plus autophobes, allergiques à nous-mêmes – et donc hostiles à tout déroulement concernant le temps qui nous reste!

Les Deuteros-Phrygiens

Tiens, voici en *égaloptère;* tiens voici un *locobride*; tiens voici un sans cerveau précédé de deux *équitosophes* encadrés par quatre possibilozophes du même octogone. Voici leurs 4 egos collatéralement confondus.

Nous voudrions leur faire des saluts triomphaux, mais ne le pouvons pas car nous n'avons plus de bras. Cependant, nous approuvons leur passage.

Les Normocrates

Nous sommes les Normocrates profonds, fidèles adeptes du championnat rythmique de lois législantes rapides; nous sommes fondamentalement pour l'obtention le plus rapidement possible du changement à l'identique. Sauf en ce qui concerne l'orthographe, nous appliquons partout la loi du talion.

Nous sommes originaires des Froides Alpes – et auparavant *Grossistes de misère.* Mais aujourd'hui nous sommes prophètes d'abondance verticale.

Nous vénérons sainte Bille-Grandue qui nous a fait traverser la frontière en flames sur le dos d'un écureuil.

Lorsqu'une réponse nous vient à l'esprit, nous l'adressons immédiatement à saint Siméon le Logocrate pour qu'il nous fournisse la question.

Nos dieux sont Locustre et Libidus dont nous aimons régulièrement le somptueux battement tropical.

Nous imposons à nos femmes le port du borniol chaque fois qu'elles s'apprêtent à *couper* d'un pas indécis la limite du lundi au mardi – et à décider ainsi du monde en deux: aussi les retenons-nous de justesse du bon côté de la rive.

Les Noriques Silentaires

Ennemis pluri-héréditaires des Orléanistes, nous sommes un groupe reconstitué jusqu'à nouvel ordre d'Ostracistes Monodoxes. Nous pensons par tous les trous inconnus du *passage du langage;* toute chose nous la pensons trois fois: une fois sous l'eau, une fois sur la terre, une fois pour la cendre. Puis c'est fini.

D'une façon générale, l'ensemble de tout ce qui se passe, nous l'approuvons de sang-froid.

Nous aussi, nous nous agrippons à nous-mêmes comme groupe stable. Ce qui fait de nous de futurs enfants funèbres ayant commis un temps trop long.

Avançant à neurones cadenassés, nous avançons sur place: nous sommes des limnotes: des machines à l'imitation morte… nous avons été détruits par la logique.

Ne l'oubliez pas! rappelez-vous l'inhumanité de l'homme!

Le reste du temps visible nous reste invisible *le reste du temps*.

Les Altérégaux & Les Autrui

Nous sommes le peuple du Multiporça. Notre dieu est Porçamulta. Nous sommes originaires de Bisfuldie.

Nous avons éliminé les malheureux Hyhistes Manhyméens de branche somino-bouli-hétérosomniaque.

Nous fixons la date limite de nos morts trois jours après les avoir foutus au jus.

Tous les jours sauf le mardi nous avons les yeux grands ouverts vers le mercredi qui vient d'avoir lieu vendredi soir.

Nous avons jadis longuement combattu les Plénipinides-Nocifs, de foi pluri-dupienne – mais en pure perte, car maintenant nous sommes, jusqu'à nouvel ordre, leurs fidèles alliés. Nous avons, depuis peu, plus du tout confiance en leur dieu Réulpe.

Nous allons boire le soir aux pertes du langage.

Nous sommes Biscrates. Sexuellement nous sommes intransmissibles.

Nos frères manquants sont partis se faire re-néanderthaliser dans leur capitale de Clameçydre.

Nos cervelles sont des troues vivantes; nos intelligences *votives* seules ont des tubes: nous communiquons à vitesse grand V.

À marée plate, je m'entends, nous restons libidinesquement attachés aux vecteurs féroces cependant que libidinesquement nous nous détachons des

structures véloces. Si d'autres Autrui surviennent, nous les clouons tristement aux chambranles de nos portes intérieures; avant de les jeter en vrac *au vrac* – jusqu'à ce que l'ombre et le nombre de leurs figures mortes aillent aux poussières: nonobstant le nombre de poussières d'ombre émises par chacun. « Et l'ombre de leur nombre est poussière. »

Nous nous reproduisons un à la fois. Même si ça ne donne pas que du feu.

C'est fou ce qu'il pouvait y avoir de vie autour d'une fontaine!

Quoi qu'il en soit et quelle que soit la raison de notre arraisonnement, nous chanterons soudainement l'hymne triphonique des apprentis baleineaux!

Les Gélates, Les Urlagues & Les Bisceptriens

Nous sommes restés de rite sinistrogyre: nous sommes les Urliaques de l'extrême bout du Nord: nous n'en pouvons plus.

Nous n'avons pas froid qu'aux yeux!

Nous écoutons quotidiennement sur la lanterne *Les homélies du professseur Niqueniette* par Jean-François Niqueniette. Nos plus grands ennemis sur la Terre sont les Tricyples Ysiplodes, habitants de Poch'tra, de Birdulibomne-sur-Menoge et de Yaoubde.

> Notre existence est sporadique. Nous sommes proches des Boléro-Moulimnistes, à vapeurs et à valeurs égales. Nous sommes sexuellement intransigeants. Nous vous remercions de nous avoir donné l'occasion de nous exprimer. Bienvenue!
>
> *A posteriori.*

Un Seul

> Il faut que j'aille dans l'antimonde et que je discute avec des antipersonnes et que de l'antilumière se répande sur les antiobjets; il faut que j'entre dans un antihomme, voilà la seule contrefaçon probante de me sortir d'ici. Dorénavant; nonobstant: désormais!
>
> *A priori*

> Toute personne, tout animal, tout être, toute notion et chaque mot que je pense, je les serre de toute force contre moi et je les aime comme des *blocs de vide.*
>
> *A fortiori*

> Vanité des vanités: ossature de tous les os! pensa-milliabilité du cerveau, lettrage de la grammaire, *alphabet* partout, néant partout!
>
> *Ad libitum.*

Antipersonne, qu'as-tu dans tes mains?

—Un contre-objet.

Antipersonne, dis pour de bon, qu'as-tu fait de tes mains?

—J'ai contrefait un *anti-objet* et je l'ai jeté de toutes mes forces sur le non-plancher de la *contre-scène.*

In fine.

Aucun triangle n'a trois côtés.

Ad hominem.

Dieu, si tu es *dieu* – te montre pas!… enlève tout!

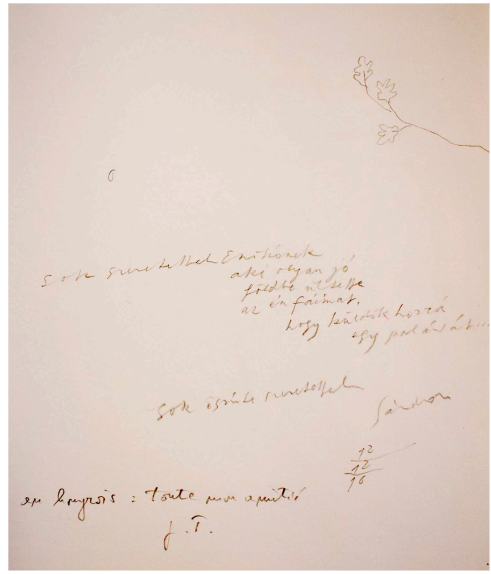
Notes

1 Tr. Ryan Chamberlain.
2 Courtesy of the artist and the translator for this volume.
3 Courtesy of the artist for this volume. *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, Collective, N° 632, Paris, Gallimard, September 2018.

Appendix 4

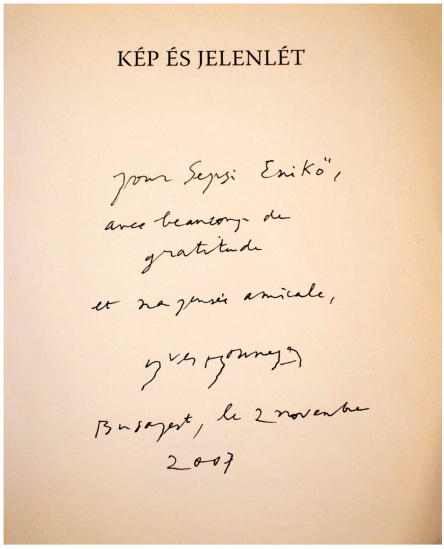
Photographs and documents of the artists' visits to Hungary

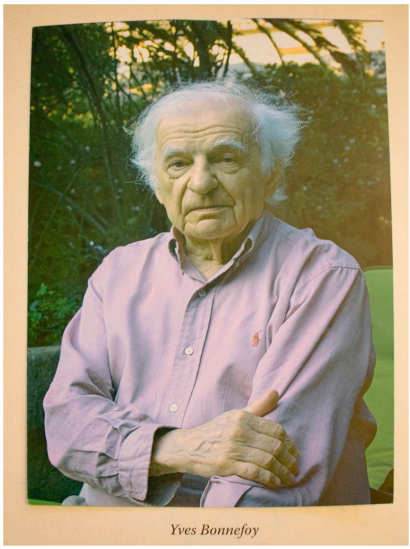
Figures BM.1–BM.2 Jean-Michel Maulpoix at Eötvös College and the Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest (13–14 October 2008) (Photos: Csaba Gál).

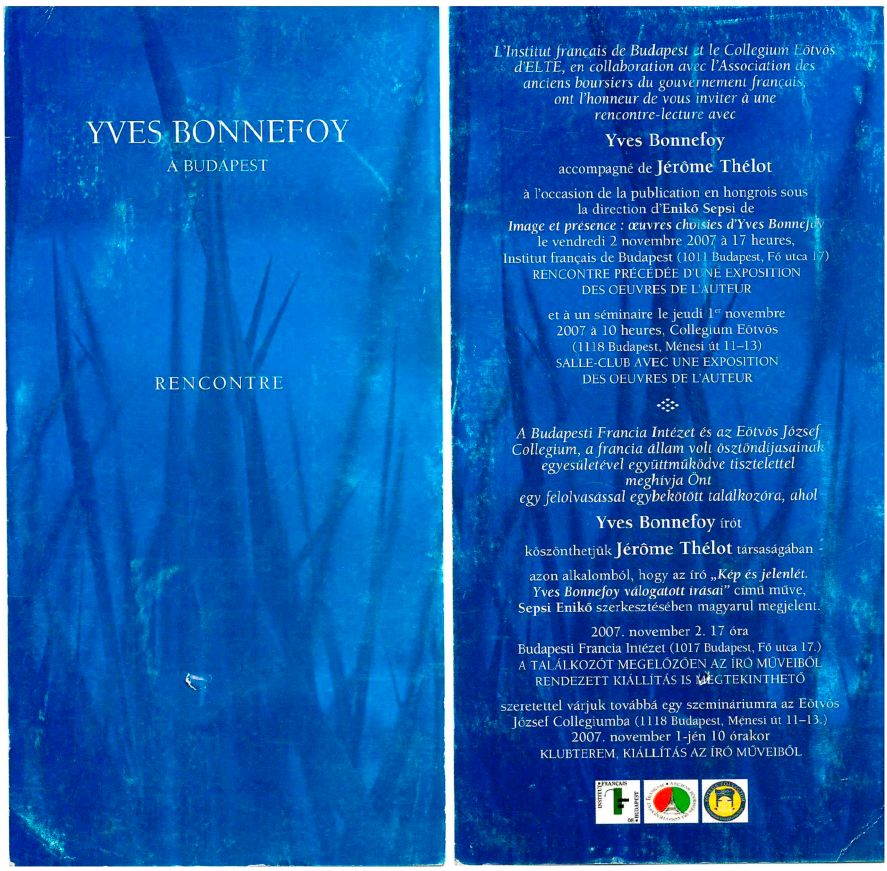


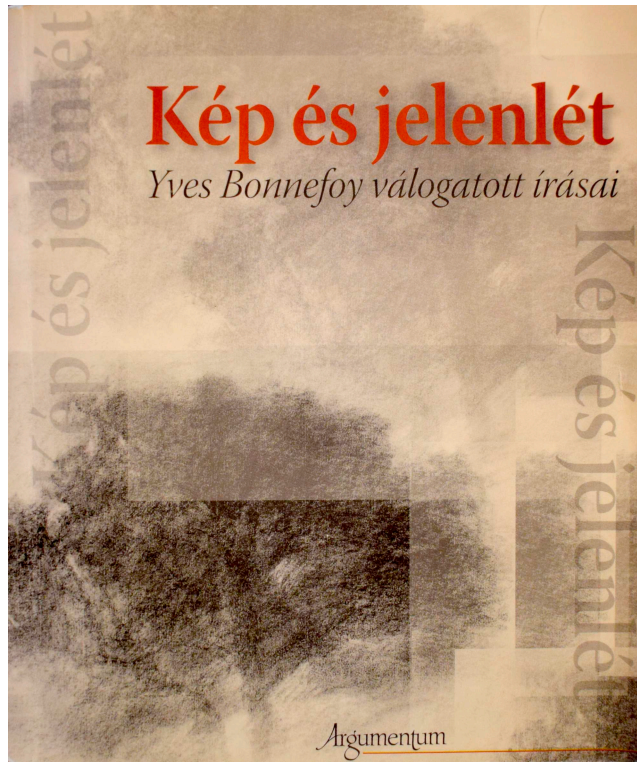

HOLLÁN SÁNDOR
HOLLÁN SÁNDOR

Figures BM.3–BM.6 At the French Ambassador's residence (Sándor Hollán, Enikő Sepsi, Jérôme Thélot), Budapest (December 2016).





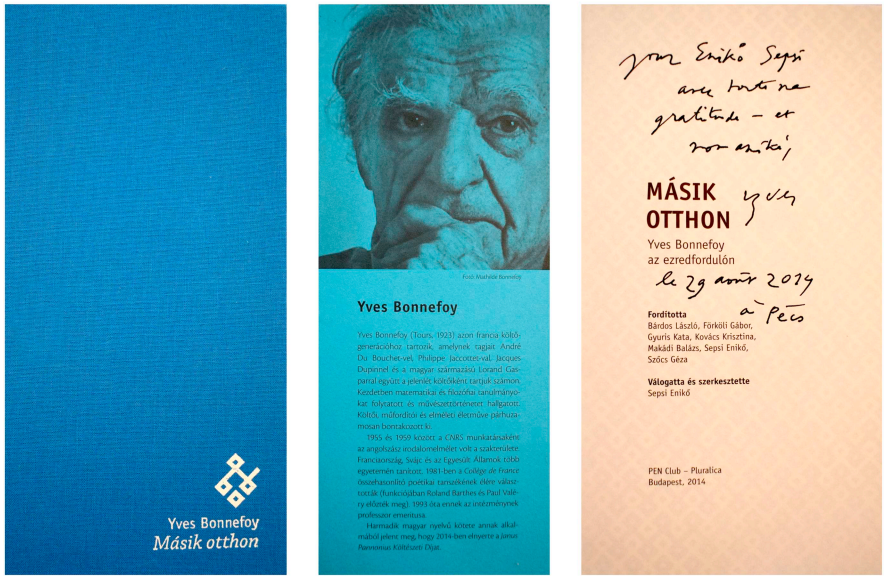

YVES BONNEFOY
À BUDAPEST
RENCONTRE
L'Institut français de Budapest et le Collegium Eötvös d'ELTE, en collaboration avec l'Association des anciens boursiers du gouvernement français, ont l'honneur de vous inviter à une rencontre-lecture avec
Yves Bonnefoy
accompagné de Jérôme Thélot
à l'occasion de la publication en hongrois sous la direction d'Enikő Sepsi de
Image et présence : œuvres choisies d'Yves Bonnefoy
le vendredi 2 novembre 2007 à 17 heures,
Institut français de Budapest (1011 Budapest, Fő utca 17)
RENCONTRE PRÉCÉDÉE D'UNE EXPOSITION DES OEUVRES DE L'AUTEUR
et à un séminaire le jeudi 1er novembre 2007 à 10 heures, Collegium Eötvös
(1118 Budapest, Ménesi út 11–13)
SALLE-CLUB AVEC UNE EXPOSITION DES OEUVRES DE L'AUTEUR
A Budapesti Francia Intézet és az Eötvös József Collegium, a francia állam volt ösztöndíjasainak egyesületével együttműködve tisztelettel meghívja Önt
egy felolvasással egybekötött találkozóra, ahol
Yves Bonnefoy író
köszönthetjük Jérôme Thélot társaságában
azon alkalomból, hogy az író „Kép és jelenlét. Yves Bonnefoy válogatott írásai" című műve, Sepsi Enikő szerkesztésében magyarul megjelent.
2007. november 2. 17 óra
Budapesti Francia Intézet (1017 Budapest, Fő utca 17.)
A TALÁLKOZÓT MEGELŐZŐEN AZ ÍRÓ MŰVEIBŐL RENDEZETT KIÁLLÍTÁS IS MEGTEKINTHETŐ
szeretettel várjuk továbbá egy szemináriumra az Eötvös József Collegiumba (1118 Budapest, Ménesi út 11–13.)
2007. november 1-jén 10 órakor
KLUBTEREM, KIÁLLÍTÁS AZ ÍRÓ MŰVEIBŐL



Figures BM.7–BM.9 Yves Bonnefoy in Budapest (November 2007).

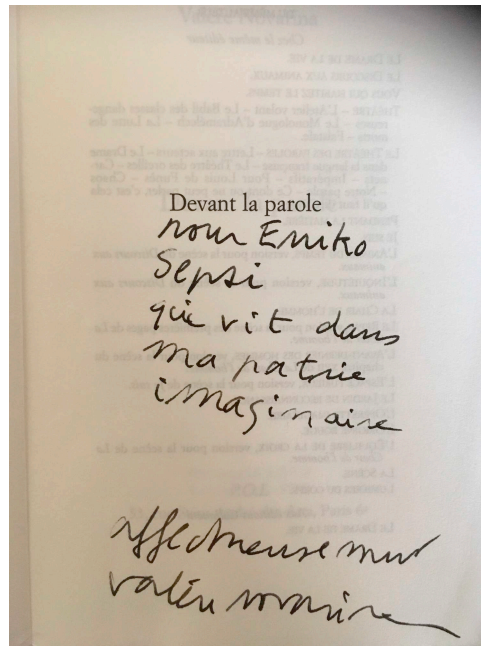

A
JELÖLTEK
JANUS
PANNONIUS
KÖLTÉSZETI

(a) (b) (c)



Figures BM.10–BM.11 Yves Bonnefoy in Pécs (2014).

Figure BM.12 Attila Vidnyánszky, Valère Novarina, and Zsófia Rideg in Budapest, after the première of *Vivier des noms* at the National Theater in Budapest (18 April 2016). (Photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó)



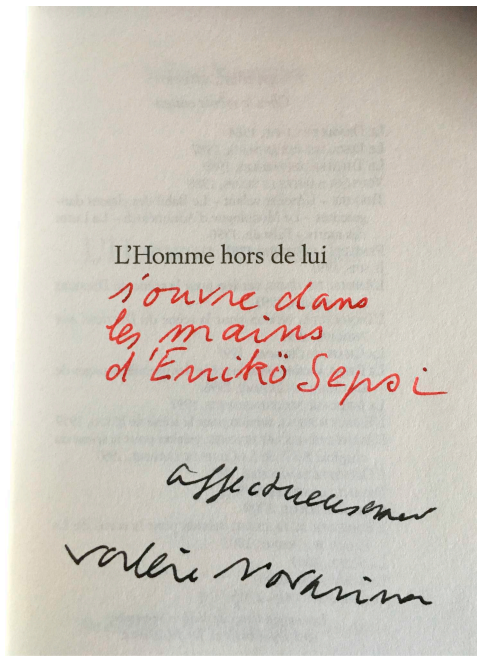


Figure BM.13 and Figure BM.14 Dedications of Valère Novarina.

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