Dramaturgy in an expanded field

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The validity of the performing arts as a medium is related to their resistance to be fixed. Contrary to what occurs with literature and cinema, performance practices cannot be converted into closed texts. Hence the impossibility of documenting them. Hence the frustration of semiotics in its approximation to the performance world. Hence too the interest in their study as an approach to new phenomena in communications and creation derived from the network and implementation of digital technology in an artistic environment.

When speaking about dramaturgy and not about text, we think of an intermediate space between the three factors that make up the theatrical phenomenon: theatre, acting and drama. Theatre is the place of the spectator (social or performance space); performance («actuación»), the place of the actors (expressive or dynamisation space); drama is the place of action, whether codifiable or not in a text (formal or construction space). And we can then discover how in different epochs and contexts, from each one of these places, the other two have been submitted to criticism and transformation. And we can also understand that dramaturgy is a place somewhere in the middle of these three places and therefore at the same time nowhere. It is a space of mediation.

This is dramaturgy: an interrogation on the relationship between the theatre (the spectacle/the public), the performance (which implies actor and spectator as individuals) and the drama (that is, the action which the discourse constructs). An interrogation that resolves itself momentarily in an ephemeral composition that cannot be fixed in a text; dramaturgy is

beyond or prior to the text; it resolves itself always in the unstable encounter of the elements that make up the theatrical experience.

By defining dramaturgy in this way it appears that we are reinventing something very ancient. And in a sense that is true. But redefinitions also serve to open up new spaces for action and reflection, without dispensing with a dense network of memories and mediations.

Theatre in an expanded field

From the end of the 18C to the beginning of the 20C, the history of Western theatre was intertwined with the history of dramatic literature, in some cases even concealed beneath the history of it. The *invention* of the «art of theatre» and the «art of dance», in the early years of the past century, began a new period in which parallel to the introduction of the concept of autonomy in painting, literature and music (which in many cases derived from abstraction), theatre defined itself as an autonomous art in relation to literary drama and dance an autonomous art in relation to music. It was then that new concepts of dramaturgy began to emerge such as scores, librettos, scripts, compositions, narrations, etc.

However, coinciding with this affirmation of autonomy from the point of view of language, various avant-garde artistic proposals in search of renewed political, social and religious effectiveness for art were experiencing serious heteronomous tension. In some cases this tension provoked the abandonment of the theatre building per se, but also of «the theatre» as an institution, in favour of new accommodation in circuses, churches, cabarets, sports pavilions, ancient ruins, or even the radio, the cinema or museums.

However, the most radical proposal was not that of taking the theatre to the street, but that of searching in the street for theatre. Some of the most groundbreaking proposals for the history of the contemporary stage derive from the search put forward by creators as diverse as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud. The former found in the street stage a model for his epic theatre. The latter found in police raids a model for his theatre of cruelty. We should add to say that both left the theatre in order to return to it, but the poison was already inoculated. And several decades later, some

of its creators in the era of radical theatre reaped all the consequences of those revolutionaries «taking to the street».

This «taking to the street» coincided with the discovery by sociologists and anthropologists of social spaces as theatres. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Erving Goffman analysed the social behaviour of individuals understood as «performance» and that of groups as a performance subject to certain implicit agreements. By «performance» Goffman meant «the total activity of a given participant on a given occasion that serves to somehow influence the other participants» (Goffman, 1959: 27). So in our daily lives we find ourselves faced with the acceptance of pre-established dramaturgies or constantly making dramaturgical decisions.

If society is a theatre and its citizens begin to be conscious of the pretence, if they themselves already feel like actors integrated in diverse interwoven social dramas criss-crossing with one another, then what is the sense in duplicating that same structure in the artistic environment?

Victor Turner, for his part, converted «cultural performance» in its distinct modalities (ritual, theatre, dance, television, etc) into a privileged place for the study of social change. One understands that in «cultural performance», the relationship between structure and transformation present in any human social organisation acquires a special visibility; not only that, but in many cases, cultural performance is the closed space in which social change becomes visible or staged.

Goffman's and Turner's proposals in a sense updated those of Artaud and Brecht in their respective street scenes.

Actually, while anthropology was discovering the dramatic dimension of social life, numerous creators had launched into non-dramatic theatre and performance practices, in the form of events, anniversaries, happenings, situational theatre, living theatre, body arts, etc, etc, guided by the confirmation that we are all actors and by the utopia that we can all give up representing our role to be artists.

This new horizon opened the way for different forms of social theatre: theatre of intervention, documentary theatre, and also for practices of dance

or theatrical affiliation which arose in a context or in a strategy with objectives that were political, social, environmental, etc.

Does this mean that theatre was determined to take to the street, that is, to the 'social space' never to return? Or is it possible to continue to think of a mimetic function for theatre? In fact, many artists have opted to recover this mimetic way and reproduce on stage the complex plot of relationships between the individual and the collective, between fiction (drama) and reality (history), questioning in the interior of the theatre the artifice of a representation that is not primarily within the theatre, but outside it.

In doing so, the theatre becomes an accomplice of the reflections of some architects on the contemporary concept of home. In effect, for many, theatrical perfection is associated with naturalist theatre, which was based on the reproduction on stage of the domestic space (usually bourgeois, although also proletariat and even underprivileged in the work of some dramatists). The scenic avant-garde movements did away with the bourgeois home and Brecht conceived a substantial part of his theory from the idea of the abandonment of home, of the home as something moving, of the city as the only home.

If we wanted to return to this golden (but also agonising) age of dramatic art, what home would we find?

In «Architectonic landscape of a City encased in a film of transparent plastic», Toyo Ito reflected on the consequences of the multifaceted aspect of the city as a physical space but also as a phenomenon. In what Ito called «the city as a phenomenon», human beings maintain virtual relationships in fleeting spaces, spaces characterised by neutrality, fluidity, transparency. The home, on the other hand, is still conceived as a space that is fixed. The home tends to reproduce in its structure the relationships of a model family, articulated around the living-room/dining-room (public space), which the bedrooms lead onto and which is connected to the kitchen and other service rooms. But the contemporary family, which no longer lives in the physical city, but in the «city as a phenomenon», does not fit in with this structure:

Each of the members of the family, instead of being interrelated, has extended towards society various networks in multiple layers, through the

media [...] The individuals join together by means of innumerable ramified networks. The individual directs himself in a direct and complete way towards society, as he does in a secondary manner towards the family. There is a great gap between the layout of conventional residential space and present-day reality. One could say that residential plans putting every bedroom in direct contact with society, with the living-room and dining-room in the background as an arbitrary space, would be much closer to real life. Cafeterias, bars and restaurants replacing the living room, convenience stores open 24 hours a day, rather similar to a large fridge, *boutiques* replacing wardrobes, gyms replacing large gardens, chains of fast-food outlets and the *lunch box*, as an alternative to cooking, etc, etc. (Ito, 2000: 121-122).

The disintegration of the family home, the multiplication of models of family and home, the complex relationships between public and private, which virtual communications (as an expansion of urban communications) produce, leads us to consider possible new dramaturgies. If the bourgeois home engendered the bourgeois drama, what dramaturgies do the city phenomenon and the open or expanded home generate?

Theatricality and Performativity

Toyo Ito, whom theatre, and especially Noh theatre, served as an inspiration or starting block for the formulation of his architectural ideas, insists on the idea of fluidity and metamorphosis as key concepts of his architectural project. The inherent fixed nature of architecture would be in conflict with the fluidity typical of contemporary society's means of communication and experience. And therein architecture encounters the same problem facing institutional theatre. Theatre, as an institution, fixes certain limits in space and time, but also accepts a static social convention.

It is indeed interesting to note that the first artists who initiated this kind of practice that was later to become known as live art or performance art conceived their proposal as an approximation to theatre, and that some, such as John Cage himself, would explicitly speak of as «theatre». The same was true for the anthropologists, upon whose work authors such as Richard Schechner and Victor Turner were to base themselves as a foundation for their Performance Studies. In reality Erving Goffman and Victor Turner were interested in social performances, which in

many cases were called «social dramas». It is interesting too that Victor Turner recognised in these dramas not a fixed space, but a space of change, and furthermore was highly critical of those with their rationalist Western mentality, who contemplated rituals as fixed institutions. On the contrary, for him the most interesting aspect of the social drama is what he termed the threshold or limen phase, that same liminal dimension to social activity producing destabilisation, metamorphosis, or as Toyo Ito was later to say, fluidity.

The idea was to extract the liminal from the ritual in a movement parallel to the one that led Artaud and Brecht to take theatre to the street. The German theorist Fischer-Lichte also resorted to the concept of threshold to argue the bases of her *Aesthetics of Performance*[1] (Fischer-Lichte, 2004:305ss). Thus liminality can be considered one of the rhizomatic keys for the definition of a performative paradigm different to the theatrical paradigm (that Goffman was continuing to use in his research on social dramaturgy).

In his introduction to his last book *The Anthropology of Performance* (1987) Turner affirmed:

> *In anthropology there has been a noticeable shift in theoretical emphasis in recent years from structure to process, from competence to performance, from the logics of cultural and social Systems to the dialectics of socio-cultural processes. We are to think of changing sociosymbolic fields rather than static structures. (Turner, 1987: 21).*

1. See also Erika Fischer-Lichte «Theatrical Science in the Present-Day. The performative turn in cultural sciences», in *Indagación* nº 12-13 (December 06/June 07).

This change of emphasis could be discerned both in the social and the stage environment, as a transition from the theatrical to the performative. When we speak of theatricality vs. performativity we are not setting out on the futile quest of comparing dramatic theatre to performance art, but rather two paradigms of comprehension, behaviour and social performance that can be found in the medium of the stage, as well as that of the visual arts, in cinema, architecture or in general in the medium of communications and socialisation.

Theatricality is characterised by an accentuation on observation, on the consciousness of observation, and accordingly on representation and its construction. The extreme tension towards fixed space produced the allegory of the world as a theatre and the theatre as a world. In this model the changes are pre-established and in any case do not affect the actual structure of the closed universe. Change exists; it is the essence of the dramatic, but is also enclosed by the limits of theatricality. Social reality imposes itself on the individual dream (the eternal reality, in the baroque model, imposes itself on the biographical dream).

Performativity, on the other hand, emphasis action, dynamism, and thus flees from representation in search of the manifestation of a world permanently changing. The changes are not to occupy another place, but to remain socially alive. The life of the system depends on the life of the individuals that compose it. There is no closure, or at least there is no way of viewing that closure. The limits between reality and fiction are mobile and depend on permanent agreements and on the transformations that a situation experiences.

We could consider the expansion of the performative model as a symptom of a democratisation of subjectivity, as a condition of possibility of a definition of identities not submitted to closed models and a definition of situations of coexistence constantly exposed to negotiation. This democratisation of subjectivity could be the other side of the coin of what Paolo Virno called the governing of the multitudes, the recognition that the aggregation of individuals did not have to give rise to the masses, but that a balanced system could be acceptable, a closed circuit in which the collective identity would depend on individual identities and vice-versa (Virno, 2003).

From the time this performative turn became apparent, the idea also began to spread that the theatrical no longer served as a response to the fluidity of experience. The rupture of theatricality was associated with an allergy to representation and the acceptance of logic, both viewed as social/authoritarian impositions. On the contrary, people opted for self-representation and chance.

However things are somewhat less straight-forward: there is no black and white. Firstly, because the consciousness of observation and the construction of representation permeate social and daily behaviour today to a much greater extent as a result of the expansion of telematic communications media. And the great world theatre, which in Baroque Europe converted all beings into actors of the written drama contemplated by divinity, reappears transformed into a multiplicity of individual and collective representations for an infinity of interconnected observers. On the other hand, the emphasis on observation is also on the social dimension of artistic and non-artistic practices, and as such indicates a desire to be included within a space of moral and political debate. Alongside the model of «great theatre of the world» appears the other great model emerging in illustrations: the theatre as a forum (with its deviations towards the podium and the tribunal).

In certain contexts and in the interior of certain political and aesthetic options, the appeal to theatricality can be enormously effective. In his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance (1990)* James Scott showed how in the face of certain situations of domination, strongly conditioned by what he dubbed «theatrical demands», conscious performance, including histrionics, can constitute an efficient means of resistance. And this appeal to theatricality is especially prevalent when the oppressed or subalterns cannot find the necessary space for the development of a performative action and have to resort to acting their role while altering it within their own framework. Scott analyses some examples in the context of 18C regimes characterised by slavery, British colonialism in India in the 19C and 20C, or South African apartheid of the seventies and eighties (Scott, 1990).

We can also find contemporary stage exponents of theatricality of resistance in situations of oppression in the proposals, for example, of Jesusa Rodríguez in Mexico or Angélica Liddell in Spain.
This return of the theatrical in practices of resistance does not contradict

what I earlier termed «performative turn», but introduces instead greater complexity into the diagnosis of the present, diverse temporalities into the comprehension of our present (not distinct territories, but distinct temporalities in one and the same territory and experience). And in effect, the governing of the multitudes is a horizon and a struggle, but not an effective reality, because history has not ended, it has multiplied, it has become more complex.

However, this performative turn is not merely related to a definition of performativity in its dialogue or tension with theatricality. In recent years reflections on linguistic performativity and the consequences of the analysis of the performative function of language in stage practices have also come to the fore.

Before J.L. Austin began to theorise on the subject, Paul Valèry, as Virno also recalls, observed the following:

> *Even before* meaning something, *any emission of language,* indicates *that* someone is speaking. *This is decisive, and has not been revealed by the linguists. The voice is saying very little in itself, but acting as the bearer of particular messages. (Virno, 2005: 39).*

What do we understand by performativity? Virno replies as follows:

> […] there are occasions when what is said is of no importance, the decisive element being the actual fact of speaking, showing oneself before the gaze of others as a source of enunciations. That is why, when one communicates that one is communicating (that is, when what matters is the act of enunciating, not any given text of what is enunciated), then it is literally certain that the ultimate aim is the very exercise of the faculty». (Virno, 2005: 53).

By taking this to its extreme, by radicalising this function, we find the possibility of conceiving the practice of language simply as a definition of the situation, which in its development produces alterations and reconfigurations to relationships; giving visibility to some over others, permitting some to exist socially and others not, etc.

This linguistic practice is not exclusive to verbal communication, despite the fact that until relatively recently it was considered as the only form of language with social or political consequences, given that other forms of personal communication were deemed to be involuntary. This has changed drastically in recent years, and performative practice does not only take priority in verbal communication but also in gesture, appearance, etc.

Does this mean that we can now speak of body language, of images language and a language of rhythms, tones, etc. capable of developing the same functions as verbal language? We could discuss the terms. In any case, a clear consequence emerges: verbal social games have been or are being replaced by complex performative games. And this has given rise to the arrival of a series of practices in which the performative dimension of language can also be recognised in performances of all kinds.

The word and the body

Performativity approaches the body in a different manner to theatricality. Theatricality is the domain of the mask. Performativity is the act of masking, the constant transit from sincerity to the mask, and the mask to sincerity. This is despite the fact that we learnt many years ago that sincerity, like nakedness, matters little in itself: that nakedness no longer means liberty in the same way that sincerity does not mean truth, or even honesty.

Honesty is not in the body, but it is very difficult to be honest without recognising one's own body and that of others. Paul Valèry can assist by introducing a major shift in our understanding of the body both in relation to the performative turn and in relation to broadening the concept of dramaturgy.

Valery speaks of three bodies:

> –My Body. We speak of it to others as a thing that belongs to us; but for us it is not altogether a thing; and belongs to us less than we belong to it… […] This thing is formless: we know by sight only a few mobile parts that can be brought within range of the seeing vision of the space of this My-Body […]

–Our Second Body is the one others see and that is more or less revealed to us in the mirror or in portraits. It is the one which has a form and which the arts apprehend; the one on which we hang stuff, ornaments, and armour. It is the one Love sees or longs to see, anxious to touch it. It is ignorant of pain, knowing only the grimace of pain […]

–Third Body, that lacks unity only in our mind, since we only know it from having divided it and cut it into pieces (It is the body of anatomy or science). (Valèry, 1989: 399-400).

The second body is the body of ballet and contemporary dance conceived as image. It is also the body of dramatic theatre, of Brechtian theatre or conceptual actions.

The first body is the feeling body, the body of expressionist theatre and dance, the theatre of cruelty, modern dance.

Postmodern dance superposed the first and second body in its research. And corporal art explored the third body in relation to the first and the second.

Where does one situate the search of contemporary creators? Can we consider that they tend towards the utopian exploration of a fourth body, the real body, imagined by Valèry?

The Fourth Body, which I might indifferently call the Real Body or the Imaginary Body. «I call Fourth Body the unknowable object the knowledge of which would, at a single stroke, resolve all those problems, it being implicit in them. (Valèry, 1989: 401).

Perhaps it would be too ambitious to try to resolve the problem of the fourth body through dance or the stage. Or maybe not.

What does appear certain is that none of the three previous bodies responds on its own, not even in its superposition in pairs, to the contemporary experience of the body, such as Toyo Ito's house, criss-crossed by a multiplicity of transversal connections as well as connections with the outside.

By contrast with the body-image, the body-feeling and the organic body, the contemporary body is a linguistic body. And this experience of the linguistic body, such thoughts on the linguistic body, bring us right back to the central point of our seminar, to the problem of dramaturgy an that of the relationship between body and writing. Would the idea of a linguistic body end the traditional conflict between body and writing, the sometimes radical lack of understanding between these two dimensions of our identity and our communication? Experience shows us otherwise, that the conflict continues to exist. Perhaps because we are not posing the question in the right way, perhaps because we are determined that the conflict exists.

There is a notable difference in referring to a linguistic body, because language inherently implies collectivity (or rather, connectivity). And the concept of collectivity that derives from this idea of linguistic body is very different to other forms of collectivity of the body through race, constitution or the participation in massive or group corporal events. That is, it is not related to the organic, nor the physical, but to the incorporation of a language that is by definition collective and connective.

This implies that our perception of the body has modified, expanded and one might even say that it has shifted. Contrary to what occurs with the image of the body, it is not necessary to come out of the body to understand or reflect on our condition as linguistic animals. Nevertheless, this reflection implies a distance in immanence. It is what we can affirm as the experience of the detached body in contrast to the feeling body or the body image that traditionally functioned in dance and, by extension, on the stage.

In this same context it is very interesting to deal with the new oral practices in the contemporary stage and especially in the field of dance. Oral communication was the mediation point between corporality and abstraction, the lost mid-point in the shift from Socratic to Platonic dialogue, but also that abandoned sphere in the shift to writing that occurs in any a process of acquiring literacy.

Just as the body has been discovering its mediations and has detached itself, so too has the voice on stage undergone a similar process. In the shows of present-day choreographers we recognise an attention to orality, bringing the voice back to the stage, not, however, in the form of an organ-

ic voice, but in different treatments of a mediated voice, of a mediated orality.

When the voice became a focus of attention from the seventies onward, both in scenic practice and in aesthetic and mediation theory, there was a tendency to stress the material dimension of the voice, its pre-existence to words, its autonomy from words. The difference between voice and language was emphasised. The discovery of the voice was parallel to that of the body, hence the possibility of shows based on voice but liberated from the written word. Michel Chion's thoughts on the voice still bear witness to that discovery, the association of the voice with the organic, with the mother, her all-embracing, immediate, capacity (Chion, 1982).

Nevertheless, the return of orality is not so important in terms of the discovery of the organic, but rather for its recovery of a fluidity that (redefining Turner's term) we could also consider as liminal. This change of focus we can experience in reading the works of Joyce and Cortázar, in contrast with the texts of Samuel Beckett and Marguerite Duras. Joyce makes Molly Bloom soliloquize in an attempt to translate directly from the oral to the written, but he allows himself to be carried away by his materialist, materialising passion and his monologue remains an eminently literary exercise.

Something quite different occurs in the work of Beckett and Duras. Hand/eye tension permeates all of Beckett's work and almost becomes a theme in itself in his famous *Film*; nevertheless, it is in the voice that one encounters the poles of tension (writing-reading / body-language) to produce a revelation as ephemeral as an exclamation (Sanchez, 2007: 171-203). Duras resorts to the voice to write her so-called New Novels. And this exercise translates brilliantly over to her films, in which the disassociation of body images and voices create disconcerting dramatic landscapes: bodies converted into ghosts are given external out-of-sync voices that are frozen, or disjunctive, and remain in an off-screen space.

Ivana Müller took up some of these same strategies of representation in her recent choreographic pieces: *While we are holding it together* (2006) or *Playing Ensemble again and again* (2009). Movement is substituted by words in movement. The words create the images. The actors' only movement is that of their voices. But at a given moment the voices are trans-

ferred to other bodies, orality is no longer the dimension mediating between body and word, or if it is, it can occur in absentia or in total detachment from the organic.

This idea of detachment, of the detached body that renounces choreographic movement in favour of the word, but which proposes an equally detached word, is also to be found in the work of Juan Domínguez. André Lepecki analysed *All Good Spies are My Age* (2002) retrieving some foundational 16C and 17C texts, as examples of choreography as scripts. This piece was in a sense to represent a return to the origins, a sort of implosion of choreography that was to situate us in another threshold, in another limen (Lepecki, 2006: 55-59 and 67-73).

Altogether simplified, the question would be how to conceive of choreography from the perspective of orality and not from a script or from a written code? How then is that dramaturgy of the dance that is not immediately conditioned by the image of the body, by the beat of the music, or the written code, but exclusively by a linguistic body which is also linguistic voice (collective- connective) and has the capacity to detach itself from itself as well as from its own voice?

We can detect this question of detachment not only in dance, but as it affects (or disaffects) performance artists and in particular those who have worked in the theatre.

From this standpoint we can consider, for example, Forced Entertainment's latest work, *Void Story* (2008). The actors, like Juan Domínguez, permanently seated at a table, like those of Ivana Muller, immobile at a point on the stage, giving voice to a crazy story that unfolds like a kind of illustrated novel in constantly changing images on a screen.

Narrative

And our consideration of this particular piece also presents us with the question of narration or the story. Indeed, *Void Story*, as its name suggests, tells a story, the story of a couple who get embroiled in a whole series of adventures and misadventures of the urban night, a rollercoaster of a tale of misfortunes, threats, monstrosities, that remind us of the pre-modern

narrative of Marquis de Sade. But this is an «empty» story. And whoever tries to find any sense to the work by summarising the tale is doomed to frustration. Because sense is not what one finds when telling the story. So what is the function of the tale? And at the same time why this return to «void» stories?

All the voices I referred to earlier tell us stories. Some are real and others imaginary. There are also stories of the imagination (the story of his own artistic process in the piece by Juan Dominguez). And imaginary stories that speak of real experiences (such as those in the piece by Tim Etchells).

The need to tell storis always existed, but right that need seems to prevail urgently. Of course, these stories do not have the same structure or the same aspirations as the tales of the past. The construction of these stories is not inspired by mimetic, much less mythical, aims, but by an intentionality of identity, in addition to the pure performative activity of the person standing up in front of others to tell a tale or a hundred interlinked stories.

A story is that fictional development which gives meaning to an accumulation of material or concrete deeds. Traditionally we invent fables to find a meaning to events experienced as chaotic or unconnected. Mankind has used narrative to overcome the level of materialism or not to give in, overwhelmed by its absurdity or silence. Tim Etchells in *Void Story* or Cuqui Jerez in *The croquis reloaded* reverse this function of story-telling, focussing rather on the absurdity of the story by emphasising the crazy succession or the casual superposition of events.

In his classic text on the subject, *Temps et Récit* (Time and Narrative), Paul Ricoeur claimed that narrative is what makes time human. What does «making time human mean» if it is not loading with fiction and *myth* the irreversible succession of instants? Narrative is the tool that allows us to be distinguished as living subjects. But at the same time it converts us into the characters of a fictional tale that we accept and in addition that we ourselves construct. The assumption of the fictional tale inherent in every plot, in every process of story-telling, of building plots or arguments, even in telling an effective story, will impede us forever from knowing a neutral reality. Even the reality that we are if someone from outside were to look in at us.

Paradoxically, this story-telling activity has been used not only to give sense to individual trajectories, to biographical trajectories or key experiences in our lives. It has been primarily used to give meaning to collective reality, and especially to give meaning to a historic reality that a given social reality both constructs and justifies.

The suppression of the transcendental bases of reality in modern times accentuated the protagonism of tales as the constructors, not only of identity, but also of reality. Nevertheless, building is not a matter of simply uniting elements, it also implies ruling out other elements, and every construction implies a process of selection, of arrangement and of rejection. So in the construction of a communitarian reality, the reality called city or the reality called State, numerous elements are rejected, pushed aside, silenced. For if all the elements were to be included it would become impossible to produce a coherent or legible narrative.

Thus arose postmodern criticism of major narrative and the preference for small narratives as put forward by Lyotard. However postmodern criticism of the major narrative works is focused mainly on scientific and political narrative, and on literary narrative to a much lesser extent. In fact the option for small narratives does no more than again dominate and bring to the fore a tension that has always been present in the culture of the last centuries. And so it was that modernism constructed the narrative of reason, of progress, of liberty and of solidarity, while at the same time constructing its anti-narrative. We can view the history of modern Western literature as a permanent construction and destruction of the narrative. Indeed, the greatest monuments of literary modernism are self-destructing tales: Chekhov's *The Cherry Garden*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Beckett's *Endgame* or Cortázar's *Rayuela*.

In all of these, the power of the fable appears to be counterbalanced by a meta-literary resistance, ideological in character that dissolves its constituent elements reducing them to words, rhythms, images or concepts. Obviously modernism produced great fables, but they are fables without a project: we think of the old fables of Kafka, the illustrated fables of Italo Calvino, or the bitter fables of Coetzee. When fables take on the aspirations of a project, they become almost intolerable: it is what happens with the theatre of Bertolt Brecht; probably the most important stage creator of the first half of the twentieth century, but also the author of the most unbearable didacticism.

Brecht has been used again and again to revindicate realism and the social cause as a reaction against narcissism and solipsism, derived from an anti-social radicalisation of the practice of the micro-narrative. However, Brecht was conscious in his most lucid phase that narrative *per se* does not construct reality, that reality is constructed upon agreement.

Actually, agreement is the other medium for the construction of reality, equally accentuated in the modern era. Agreement in the form of social contract, or agreement in the negative form of tolerance and respect for others. Traditionally narrative served to construct ideological reality. Agreement has served to construct a pragmatic reality. Both categories are very present in stage practice. However, what transformations result from the recognition of the inherent fiction in narrative in the construction of reality and at the same time of the provisional, unstable and transcendentally unfounded condition of any agreement between human beings?

The tension between those two elements of the construction of reality places us almost in a circular balance/equilibrium: the narrative creates an identity that permits the meeting point from which a potential agreement derives, and the agreement is the condition for the construction of a narrative. Narrative and agreement alternate, are added together and condition one another in the production of reality and in the production of fiction both in society and in contemporary culture.

The texts of Mario Bellatin constitute an answer in themselves. Another kind of answer is that provided by some recent experiences of collective writing, which have pinpointed in an almost implosive way this circularity in the relationship between narrative and agreement. The best known was initiated by a group of «artists, activists and jokers» who called themselves Luther Blisset, the germ which gave birth to Wu Ming after 2000, a collective or disperse author, a multiple-use name for a group which has since then produced numerous narrative works, easily accessed on the internet, but also translated and published in paper in several languages, including Spanish.

The way out from the paralysis that narrative has suffered in postmodern times comes at the hand of a cultural activism that finds in story-telling a form of resistance against the imposition of myths fabricated in hegemonic industries. In his reflection on the group project, Reinaldo Ladagga proposes:

> It's a question of continuing to tell stories: it's a question of preventing stories that have been told from being presented as terminal forms. It's a question of composing webs of stories that nevertheless are presented as «lines» or «traces» (Bruce Chatwin's expression). It's a question of telling stories that can maintain a community in movement and that cannot be let go of. (Laddaga 2006: 217).

In the world of cinema this recovery of stories is evident in Watkins's *La Commune* (1999), Jordà's *Monkeys like Becky* (1999) or Apichatpong Weerasetakul's *Mysterious object at noon* (2000). It is no mere whim the fact that in all three the theatre is used as a mechanism to produce community and to produce narrativity.

In the theatre realm, the tension between narrative and agreement can find its equivalent in the tension between action and situation. We could write *a history* of contemporary performing practices from the sixties from the perspective of this tension between action and situation. And we could also conceive dramaturgical action as a form of mediation between them, a reissue of that tension between body and writing, between impulse and code that characterised the activity of the dramaturge in ancient classicism. This would be a new way of addressing the dramaturgical question.

And indeed this reflection poses the question with regard to the relationship between the two spheres: action-narrative / situation-agreement, both at an aesthetic level and in the social and political sense. What are the dynamics that are set in motion if we think of dramaturgical activity not in the realm of closed fiction, but in the realm of open fiction, that is, in the social realm or in what has been described in the title as «an expanded field»?

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Bibliography: See page…